

ROOMS BY THE SEA: A DISSERTATION
IN CREATIVE WRITING

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PREFACE

Rooms By the Sea is the result of a continuing interest in the researching of history and the writing of fiction. I am appreciative of the members of my doctoral committee who approved, advised, and encouraged these dual efforts. During the organization phase, Dr. Robert Kamm, as chairman, gave valuable suggestions. While in the research organization period, the introductory material benefitted from the critical interest of members of the committee, Dr. Thomas Karman and Dr. Mary Rohrberger. In addition, Dr. Theodore Agnew offered support and criticism of the bibliographic materials. Preparation of the novel manuscript was supervised by Dr. Gordon Weaver, whose insights as a writer of fiction proved valuable in revision and focusing material.

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INTRODUCTION

Chiasmus in literature refers to phrases structurally parallel, but reversed.¹ An example is the maxim, "Beauty is youth, youth beauty." For artists there has been the philosophical chiasmus, "Truth is beauty, beauty truth." The concept of chiasmus is applicable also to the literary genre which treats history as fiction, fiction as history. This investigation suggests how an author may rewrite history by changing the form of presentation rather than the records. In changing from nonfiction narrative to the conventions of the storyteller's art, a writer transforms history into historical fiction. The discussion of chiasmus and other literary techniques serves as preface to Rooms By the Sea, a novel of historical fiction.² The novel presents the cultural chiasmus which occurred in 1965 when a war of words became words of war. By examining the objective aspects of recording history, and assessing the more subjective focus of fiction, it is possible to identify and discuss the ingredients which blend in the contemporary writing of historical fiction.

History as fiction or fiction as history? This chiasmus is a matter of relativity on a continuum from "pure" history to "pure" fiction. Historian Herbert Muller suggests, "The greater

historians, from Herodotus to Toynbee, have generally been distinguished for their imaginative reach and grasp"(36). Similarly, the greater imaginative writers, from Shakespeare to Tolstoy, have been distinguished by a significant historical focus and power. When the occupation of historian or biographer coalesces with that of fiction writer, the result can be innovative work, such as that of James Joyce presenting the folk of Dublin, Gore Vidal portraying Abraham Lincoln, and Irving Stone depicting the life and times of Charles Darwin.

Most writers of historical fiction present a combination of record and story. How, then, do they arrive at the proper proportions of each? Tolstoy, among others, pondered the question of facts versus fiction in concocting his master work, War and Peace. The 1600 pages of the novel (Maude translation) are infused with large quantities of Tolstoy's philosophy, understanding of psychology, interest in religious thought, and a nonfiction narrative on freemasonry in Russia. In addition, there are long sections devoted to Tolstoy's analysis and demonstration of what he believed history should be and how it should be written. Briefly, he was convinced that individuals do not control human destiny. Rather, the "ferment of the people" is the mechanism which turns the wheels of history. In the War and Peace translation by Manuel Komroff (1956) Tolstoy's "digressions" on history, freemasonry, Napoleonic conquests, and the littleness of man were deleted. The editor

states outright that the "history lessons" were nonfiction essays and not part of the literary matter.

Authors who write historical fiction often start from the objective stance of history; then, like Tolstoy, deviate down the path of subjectivity, and end up applying the techniques of psychology and biography. By further refining the use of "documentary dramatization," contemporary authors Vidal and Stone have filtered the facts of the lives of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin into story form. Lincoln: A Novel, already being hailed as the successor to Carl Sandburg's work as the definitive "biography," and Stone's Origins (Darwin) are emotion-driven rather than fact-driven narratives.

At its "purest," history is supposed to be a concern for literal truth. Matters of fact, records, events of natural or human origin must be recorded objectively. The ideal of history, according to Morris Cohen, is "reconstruction of the past which is scientific in its determinations"(35). This level of exactitude should be accompanied by a writer's claim of utter impersonality. Such a level of objectivity has rarely been reached. When approached, as in the era of German-inspired scholarship, historical pedantry resulted. Part of Tolstoy's effort in writing history as fiction was to break the hold of the historians who insisted on empirical observation. Documents may be distorted, said Tolstoy, and one can only be accurate as to what people might do, given a situation. Despite voices like Tolstoy's, scholarship went toward an extreme of exactness in

historical methodology. All observations had to be based on evidence, specific and concrete. This era of "hard line" history writing has been credited with de-humanizing the humanities by critics such as Herbert Muller. He regarded the effort to make history into a "science" as one of the factors which encouraged the "monumental unimaginativeness which still awes American universities" (34).

Leopold von Ranke, German historian of the nineteenth century, set the historian's task precisely. One must find out "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist" or, literally, how it actually has been. It is difficult to apply such rigor to any past beyond a writer's personal knowledge. Perhaps it is even more difficult to tell "how it is" if one is dealing with history from first-hand knowledge. While Ranke thought the aim of history was to state simply "what has happened," this is an impossible task if a writer acknowledges that men and women can never hope to know all that has actually happened. Further, if a writer did know "all," how might the record be presented and made understandable?

The problem with history is not filling in more and more gaps of factual knowledge, but making better sense of what is known. An unlimited past is quite a hurdle for the writer of "pure" history. It is not a problem for the writer of fiction. The creator of a story has a different goal--a limited past that "might have been." The fiction writer does not attempt to verify or expand further what is known, but speculates,

fantasizes, and correlates the known with what is imagined. The historian aims for a sense of the past; the writer for a sense of the possible. As the lion in Aesop's stories said to the Man, "There are many statues of men slaying lions, but if only the lions were sculptors, there might be quite a different set of statues." Fiction writers are not necessarily the literary lions of our culture; the point is that fiction, and history, may be sculpted from various angles.

Benedetto Croce's principle that "true history is always contemporary history" limits personal history to memory, which is both individual and subjective (38). History becomes "for the occasion" or what is alive for the specific person. A conundrum then arises. If an individual does not remember a specific event, can it still be history? If the person later remembers something previously forgotten, is that event somehow reinstated in the historical record? Much of the scholarship about the meaning of history reduces to an illustration: if we drink at the "running stream" of history, how are we to stop the stream long enough to examine its content? One method is to use imaginative hindsight and speculative foresight, the fictional equivalent of being able to glance upstream and downstream.

By adding an imaginative dimension to history, an author may, at will, stop the stream, or even focus on a single dipper of water. Historical fiction, written within a framework of what is objectively known, fills in with hindsight, foresight,

guesswork, or imagination the parts of history vaguely known or only guessed at. The resulting hybrid is valid fiction which does not invalidate the historical base. As an example, an unbiased history writer might record "cypress trees three feet in diameter growing from the shallow waters of the bayou." A fiction writer would prejudice the narrative with emotional words, transforming the same cypresses into "the big, sad trees of the delta, their arthritic knees shackled to slime." Fiction often takes materials hinted at or not described by history and re-presents them to the reader.

While a historian attempts to unearth the facts of human event and assess their significance, the fiction writer tries to unearth the causes of human conduct and display the consequences. The fictional focus turns within the characters rather than across history's sweep of geography or national impulse. When Virginia Woolf asserted boldly, "Human nature changed in 1910," she was raising a kind of literary possibility rather than presenting a scientific law of probability.

To limit "history" to a matter of individual memory is to limit individuals to fallible and constantly changing dimensions. According to Muller, the past keeps changing shape anyway, despite our memories. For that reason, "Every age has to rewrite its history, re-create the past" (38). No less certainly does every age refine its literature according to the insights, memories, and emotions of its writers.

John Barth asks in the short fiction "Lost in the Funhouse," for whom is a funhouse fun? His thematic answer is that funhouses are fun only for people who build them and for those who have already passed safely through them. Writers similarly ask, for whom is fiction fun? The answer, again, is that literature is "fun" for those who create it as much as for those who read it. By that reasoning, for whom is history fun? The novel, Rooms By the Sea, questions the forces of faith and history on the lives of individuals who are parts of institutions. The main characters are in danger of becoming lost in the funhouses of Church and State.

In The Sot-Weed Factor, Barth adds an authorial epilogue to the novel, defending the regular ravishment of the heroine, Clio, in the preceding sixty-five chapters. As part of the defense, Barth writes directly to the reader, "In the first place be it remembered . . . that we all invent our pasts, more or less, as we go along, at the dictates of Whim and Interest" (264).

Personal history, then, may be refined into concepts of objective memory (record) plus perceptions of "Whim and Interest." Perception, according to poet Archibald MacLeish, is to "see feelingly." A psychological (rather than artistic) interpretation of perception is "awareness plus understanding." The subjective aspects of awareness operate as the basis for writing fiction. This subjective type of perception (to see feelingly) is also openly acknowledged among contemporary

writers of history as the basis for their works. "A historical fact never speaks for itself," argues Christopher Dawson (33), implying that historians do not operate in isolation. Any prose in which an author undertakes to speak "for" history or "through" a fictional character contains a narrative stance which is subjective in nature. Janet Burroway notes that all writers, be they novelists, reporters, propagandists, or historians, must make certain choices: Who speaks? To whom? At what distance? With what reliability?³

"History is neither written nor made without love or hate," wrote Theodor Mommsen (36). Emotional involvement also applies to people who create fictional art. Part of the role of artist is adopting a narrative style and selecting central viewpoint characters. These decisions made, a history/fiction writer determines which events shall be portrayed, which shapes, colors, and faces shall be presented. A novelist then "creates" human experience through the use of language. Historians have the same set of language building blocks, but they are supposed only to "re-create." The novelist can project or represent; the historian is limited to re-presenting. Obviously, neither kind of writer compiles mere lists of facts. Instead, historian and fiction writer alike work by singling out important happenings, determining cause and effect, implying connections to other eras, and suggesting significance. When these tasks are faced by novelists, the jobs are given names such as motivation (why), characterization (who), manifestation (how),

action (plot), and unity. In the final analysis, writers of history and fiction select, interpret, and evaluate historical material. They use comparable methods to achieve separate missions.

In the structuring of material, whether historical or imaginative, no writer is without some philosophy of history. Sometimes this philosophy is vague, occasionally unconscious. Some writers claim innocence--or ignorance--of any theoretical stance. From the time of the Greek historians on, the generally accepted view of reality was that it was static and unchanging. Fundamental elements rarely--if ever--changed; therefore, the past could be used as a model of how to act in the present. The historian's job was to clear out accidental elements in the record and preserve the essentials. Thus, the proper subject matter for history was to tell about heroes. These public men would provide the norms for action in any era.

With the rise of scientific investigation, historians were shown a constantly evolving and dynamic world. History writers took the new tack of observation; anything else would be conjecture. Fiction writers (like Tolstoy) accepted both the concept of dynamism and the validity of conjecture. Today, writers of historical fiction, by the nature of their work, admit to having clear, conscious, and coherent artistic biases in assessing history's records. Fiction writers openly manipulate material. Fiction becomes history strained through a subjective filter.

The records of history are different from any particular individual's memory or perception of events. In writing fiction, the data base may be expanded to include records of invented individuals and imaginary events. A character, although imaginary, may present a dossier of personal history, may give reactions to historical eras, or even interact with well-known "real" figures of the past.

A dual process is involved, blending the subjective and objective focal lengths into a single lens. Personal memory is often a primary step in moving objective material (history) toward a subjective focus (fiction). Memories, then perceptions, allow writers (or their invented characters) to make new interpretations of old facts. Imagination comes into play. The writer may expand the records of an era to aid in his or her search for symbol, pattern, and meaning. Historians claim to understand "evidence" and are at pains to present it straight. Fiction writers varnish the truth, slant the material, add or delete from the records, and invent evidence at the dictates of Whim and Interest.

Barbara Tuchman gives an example from her experience in which personal memory produced a new interpretation of facts. She wrote in Practicing History of being sent to Washington, D.C. by a newspaper in order to cover the funeral of President John F. Kennedy. As a reporter, she felt she did a mediocre job. "One could not simply describe what everyone had already seen. One had to offer some extra significance" (Preface 3).

In the Massey Lectures at Harvard University in 1983, writer Eudora Welty also noted how novelists constantly nudge memory to reshape understanding of past events. Again, it is because one must look for the significant--not simply describe what everyone already knows. In an earlier interview with the Paris Review, Welty had commented that whatever setting the author chooses, everyone's been there; whatever the theme, it's old and tired; only vision can be new, but that is enough (421). Take the old and make it new; observation as the path to originality--two precepts of fiction admirably phrased by Gustave Flaubert.

In the genre of historical fiction, writers see the facts in a subjective light. This process, called revision, is really a re-seeing of history which leads to an original focus. History is not supposed to be original with the author, only the presentation. In "story" a writer may make inventions in both presentation and facts, accounting for such innovative works as Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72. By re-envisioning time and place, the author gains new awareness and understanding, writes Tuchman in her essay, "The Historian as Artist." She suggests imagination as one way writers "stretch" whatever facts are available. Imaginative speculation, then, is how writers supply missing answers to the dangling questions of history. As for motivation, Tuchman writes, "Sympathy is essential to the understanding of motive" (47).

Sympathy--or empathy--is what fiction writers attempt to capture for protagonists by means of a "reader bond" or "hero bond." When a reader empathizes with a protagonist, the reader is thereby invited to share and to participate in emotions. This is fiction's drawing card, this offer to include the reader in experience. Fiction, then, is an inclusive experience, an invitation to participatory emotions. While an occasional reader may sympathize with nonfiction, it is much more common for readers to "love" the heroine or "hate" the villain of a fiction.

When a historian stretches available facts, fills in gaps with "good guesses," and uses sympathy to conjecture historical characters' motives, the ground separating historians and novelists shifts and becomes unsteady. All historians attempt enhancement of awareness and understanding; otherwise, the bald records of history may seem random and accidental. At the other end of the spectrum, there have been attempts to write fiction through presentation of only documents. Dorothy L. Sayer's The Documents in the Case, and the police procedural novel Report to the Commissioner by James Mills are mere files of reports. Nevertheless, the basic concept is that these are works of fiction, for the writers invented the records, the characters, and the characters' histories.

Is history without rhyme or reason? Reviewing the topic of history and the art of war, British historian Sir Charles Oman decided, "The human record is illogical . . . and history is a

series of happenings with no inevitability about it" (332). Fiction writers set out to rectify that mistake and make outcomes inevitable. Novelists are allowed--even encouraged--to make judgment calls. Historians make judgment calls, too, but are held to a stricter set of guidelines. Novelists may ascribe an internal logic to their characters' histories, or speculate on motives. Fiction writers add pattern to events and create a connection which links individuals with occurrence. Robert Graves described this process as "connections webbing together every word." History, on the other hand, zigs and zags and does not appear to follow predictable cycles. Perhaps this is why there has developed no overall, general philosophy of history, despite Henry Adams's unending search for one and Arnold Toynbee's "thought" that he had found one. In a similar way, physics, to date, has failed to supply the much-sought Grand Unified Theory for the universe. Artists, again, have the edge. They come closest to having a theory that explains their work.

What makes a creative work "art?" Traditionally, a work has been measured by standards of beauty, truth, and unity. Arguments then rage over what constitutes beauty and truth. Unity has been more generally agreed upon, from the time of Aristotle to the current era. Art attempts, publicly and bravely, to make the "inneren Zusammenhang"--the tight inner connections which form a comprehensive total pattern. In fiction, this is called unity, an interconnectedness which makes characters and events plausible, that makes the story's ending

inevitable and right. It is the unity concept which allows writers of historical fiction to draw conclusions that historians of record dare not. It is why fiction writers clarify things which history leaves murky or totally in the dark.

History rambles about, concocted of hazy beginnings, indefinite middles, and inconclusive endings which are artificially bundled together into "ages." Eras change shape, boundaries, and names. Are we truly in a "parenthetical era" in 1987, somewhere between the Industrial and Informational Ages? How did Fitzgerald know the twenties were the Jazz Age? After all, he tried out the term, "The Aspirin Age" first. Fiction writers, for this reason, can argue the historical era of the fifties really began in 1945 with the close of World War Two and lasted through the Eisenhower years until 1961, whereupon Camelot began.

Fiction, unlike history, has an urge to be tidy. Most short stories and novels deliver well thought out and precisely constructed tales. Even metafiction is launched, develops, and ends--and not with just "an" ending but one that appears necessary and proper, given these people and these circumstances.

History has never been accused of false starts. Fiction is full of them--witness that novelists often find out last what to put first in a manuscript. History just happens. Fiction is caused. Historians commit major and minor excesses and have limitations depending on the availability of resources. Excess

material in fiction (from either history or imagination) is a clearer case; a writer simply eliminates the "extra." Whatever a novelist considers history's clutter, trivia, or irrelevancy may go unreported by the characters. Whole books are written in which characters neither note nor care for their bodily functions, surely part of anyone's personal history. When a writer manages unity--and takes a shot at beauty and truth--then the writer strives to become an artist, not "just" a historian.

Combining history with fiction is only one of many ways that writers create records of a meaningful past. History documents primarily humanity's factual records. Literature, meanwhile, serves as humanity's emotional record. The words history and story emerge from a common root, the Greek verb sto, meaning "to know." People have thus found two ways of knowing about the world and themselves: the way of fact and the way of fiction. The French word for story retains the perfect shading: l'histoire. In telling "made-up" stories, humans accept that invention is sometimes more comprehensible, or appealing, than fact. Jacques Barzun considers stories as part of humankind's native intelligence while history would be an effect of intellect, which is acquired. For this reason, psycho-anthropologists believe people told stories long before they settled down to keeping records. What life offers by way of multiplicity, confusion, power, chaos, accident, or trivia,

novelists revise into more manageable, and sometimes more believable, tidbits called fiction.

The search for a usable past, personal or literary, has been one of fiction's main concerns in the first half of the twentieth century. Titles such as Remembrance of Things Past (Marcel Proust), "The Sense of the Past" (Henry James), and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (T. S. Eliot) indicate how writers--and people collectively as generations--search for ways to define the past. Literature supplies the meaning as often as sets of objective facts. In the end, writers combine facts with story, records with characters, in order to tell history as fiction, fiction as history.

To some degree, all writers are trapped within their own times, circumstances, and training. One line of argument goes that all writing is historical writing. Certainly, characters in fiction are allowed to realize circumstances of "fate" more fully than those upon whom history simply acts in a random, and often unrecorded, way. Functions fuse for writers; the need to tell stories becomes the urge to record history. Tuchman, for this reason, argues, "The best writer is also the best historian"(17). A work of history rests as much on the individual honesty and intellectual penetration of the author as a work of fiction rests on the artistic honesty and individual penetration of its writer. Historical fiction, in one sense, becomes a contradiction, like a "perfect" analogy. Things which

are analogous are similar, not identical. History and fiction have similarities, but are not the same.

George Macaulay Trevelyan, professor of modern history at Cambridge, considered history first as an exposition of accidental facts but presented "in their full emotional and intellectual value." An "emotional and intellectual" value system is the realm of story. Writers of historical fiction, by and large, pay heed to the call for accurate record-keeping--the objective exposition of fact. What novelists tend to ignore is the randomness factor. Fiction writers paint a canvas with imaginative shades of gray. History provides the frame; characters bring their own paint.

There is no set of balance scales accurate enough to weigh a manuscript and determine at what point it tips from being "history" to being "fiction." A fifty-fifty split would surely make the work fictional. No guidelines exist to say how many subjective judgments a historian may make, or how many untrustworthy details may be included before the work is banished from the nonfiction shelves. Edward Gibbon is currently rated "untrustworthy" when it comes to details and conclusions of history, yet he is still ranked as one of England's finest practitioners of historical writing.

Conversely, a mere preponderance of objective and verifiable detail does not create history. By those standards, novels of manners, such as The Ambassadors by Henry James or The Custom of the Country by Edith Wharton, might be

considered nonfiction. The authoritative details of the milieu in novels such as David Copperfield, Madame Bovary, and Anna Karenina enhance what are clearly works of fiction. A writer of historical fiction is a fiction writer primarily, with obligations to plot, characterization, and pace, and a historian secondarily.

The difference is writing novels and writing history books is again a matter of degree. Arthur Koestler suggests biography as the intermediate link between the two forms while Philip Phenix in Realms of Meaning places history in the category of "broadly integrative subjects" along with philosophy and religion. In Koestler's model, there is a continuum stretching from chemistry to lyric poetry. Truth resides at the end of objective verification; beauty is at the opposite pole of subjective experience.⁴ Using this curve, it is easy to derive the chiasmus that there is truth in beauty and beauty in truth. Thus, for Koestler, there would be varying proportions of objective truth and subjective beauty in mathematics; a converse subjective truth and objective beauty would be inherent in lyric poetry.

In contemporary fiction, writers let the intuitive material show through, or sometimes control, the narrative. Historians, on the other hand, are still urged to hide behind masks of supposed neutrality. Fiction writers, by openly making their focus subjective, achieve both extra vision and inner vision denied to recorders of history. Historians are plagued with problems of chronology, impartiality, and degree of importance

to give certain events or eras. Fiction writers are under none of these restrictions. Trevelyan implied that the best historian combined knowledge and evidence with "the largest intellect, the warmest human sympathy and the highest imaginative powers" (178). At that point, the range of the historian has intersected the territory of the novelist. Writers of historical fiction use intellectual and imaginative powers to speculate on "what it all means" without assuming any scientific burden of proof.

All writers apply principles of selection. This privilege means choosing certain events to make prominent and certain characters to tell the story. In addition, the selection of incident helps the fiction writer determine point(s)-of-view. Sense of consequence is the controlling factor for writers of both history and fiction. Who, in the novel or era, is the "moved" character? The man or woman with the biggest physical and/or emotional change will usually become the narrator in historical fiction. Another viewpoint consideration is which character is most able to present and understand events and actions. Thus, the narrative choice in The Great Gatsby becomes Nick, who is able to share his sense of loss and loneliness, rather than the "star," Jay Gatsby, who ends up a corpse. Viewpoint is not only who has changed due to time and place and circumstance but also who understands the consequences. The ability to change narrators, or imply narrators, or establish unreliable narrative voices gives fiction

writers a far wider range than the single active voice normally adopted by the reporter of history. Rooms By the Sea selects three viewpoints, the three angles represented in the points of the triangle. Each character changes, and in so doing, influences concurrent change in the others.

Another device used by novelists (and rather routinely denied to historians) is limiting the scope and span of history. Fiction writers need tell only the stories of a few characters of an era. An objective historian assumes some kind of obligation to examine many or all ways of looking at an era. A fiction writer has no such obligation. Thus, the actual historical era of the novel Rooms by the Sea is limited to the fulcrum of the decade--the year 1965. According to record, there have been 230 years of peace since historical record-keeping began. The year 1965 is rated "peaceful" although the United States had 23,000 "advisers" in southeast Asia when the year began and 180,000 "troops" when it ended. As an exercise in selection, the historian might record the date and the numbers as statistics. But therein lies a multitude of stories for a fiction writer. The novelist begins limiting the material--not an entire calendar year but a few pivotal months--and restraining the cast--not 180,000 nor even 23,000--but a few individuals. Rooms By the Sea tells three interconnected stories of a specific naval officer, his wife, and a military chaplain. Fiction focuses on a few unique human beings engaged in unrepeatable experiences. A novel becomes a container for "capsules" of history.

Fictional characters come with histories and memories of their own. A fictional character's memory, however, need not be complete, though it may be presented as quite complex. Permission obtains to commit extensive sins of omission in this area, too. A limited number of narrators--perhaps only one--will tell the whole story. A title invented by novelist John Irving, The World According to Garp, shows how historical fiction works. Irving's title plainly expresses restrictions of narrative distance and viewpoint. Historical fiction is always "the world according to somebody," rather than "the world." Similarly, the Bible presents several versions of the life of Jesus, plainly marked as the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Fiction also stakes out a subjective stance through use of mood. History may, without comment, objectively list geographic sites of battle or dates of battles. A novelist would rarely settle for this approach, taking instead a detour through an individual's perception of time and place. Stephen Crane tells a single soldier's story in The Red Badge of Courage. The boy worries about his own personal bravery in conflict, not about the date, the geographic location, or even the battle itself. Historians, unless they are of the number-crunching school of quantifiers, constantly select and limit, and edge closer to T.S. Eliot's concept of "subjectifying the objective."

The novel Rooms By the Sea takes specific time and place and seeks to evoke mood through empathy with the characters.

Proceeding from the general idea that the 1960s saw widespread questioning by a generation of their previously accepted institutions, the work must then deal with human, individual, and unique dramas. Fiction is for and about people, their perfect plans and imperfect personalities. It is the system of infallible plots and fallible heroes that has provided historical fiction with its basic form. From heroic drama to tragedy to romance, these items are a set of givens. A novelist, then, does not try for the "whole truth" of an era but for what is truthfully representative--or symbolic.⁵ For Wallace Martin, the real, imaginary, and symbolic are only matters of degree, much like the continuum that makes up history and fiction. Real, imaginary, symbolic--"these distinctions exist only by virtue of the relational differences," writes Martin (152).

The chosen narrators of a novel may be accurate keepers of record. Then, again, these personae may be offhanded or downright sloppy about records, personal or historical. The maxim of Thomas Hobbes, "Life without government is nasty, brutish, and short" (232) may be applied to fiction without story referents. A historical milieu may have to be custom-tailored for characters in imaginary writing. Arthur Koestler used the argument that all fiction starts from the actual, or historical, as a jumping-off point. Later, an author may delete, substitute, project imaginatively, or abstract entirely. Such fiction, its foundation in reality, is considered, by authors at least, to be a form of truth. The author then attempts to give "true impressions" rather than displaying

literal knowledge of human nature. The standard defense runs thusly, "Fiction is true; it just didn't happen."

Whatever truth fiction offers, it arrives at through the intuitive process rather than the intellectual. A novel's "truth" is unverifiable objectively. Rene Girard is one of many critics who nevertheless finds a deep affinity between historical and fictional truth. Girard regards imaginative texts as capable of truth in the strongest philosophical and even scientific ways. He traces the dispute all the way back to the differences in the Romanesque (the truth) and Romantique (the deception) traditions. For readers such as Girard there is little distinction in texts of "theoretical" as opposed to "literary" value (Calinescu 167). One has as good a grip on truth as the other.

As the facts of history shift to become the feelings of fiction, the ability of language to evoke sensory details comes into use. Words become a set a tools for building stories, much as numbers are used as tools for building statistics. Painters need paint, sculptors need stone, musicians need instruments, and writers--of both history and fiction--need appropriate words. With the same tools of the trade at their disposal, there is a chance fiction writers and historians may tell the same narratives. Where, then, should the dividing line be established between "authoritative" and "imaginative" writing? Proust's Remembrance of Things Past has been used as a source in itself for accounts of geographical place and historical era.

Historians of the World War One years acknowledge a debt for "information" to novels such as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Blasco Ibanez) and Mr. Britling Sees It Through (H.G. Wells). Among contemporary writers, Truman Capote in his story, "A Christmas Memory" and Maya Angelou in her autobiographical I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings present accounts of intimate and intense accuracy which, though labeled novels, are somewhere between biased and fallible memories and autobiography. The reasonable writer decides information flows along a two-way channel: novels may supply authentic material to historians, historians to novelists.

In addition, writers of fiction acknowledge historians as having supplied subjective insights into the human condition and psyche. This mixing of inner and outer biography is established early on in the historical writing of Western Civilization. One of the earliest and best historians, Herodotus (484 BC- 420? BC) went far outside the realm of fact and record in writing The Histories. He attempted to explain motivation of characters and nations, delving into why the great war was fought between Greece and Persia. Herodotus cites not only events and dates but also culture, custom, and religion. Knowing he was ranging far and wide, he titled his work "histories" in the Greek sense of the word meaning "investigations" (Violi 257).

Thucydides (470? BC-400? BC) is designated the first "scientific" historian because of his first-hand knowledge as a

general in the Peloponnesian War. However, his touted observing was done mostly from exile. His work, History of the Peloponnesian War, was composed a full twenty years after the events. Surely memory altered and perception added to his retelling of the story.⁶

Thucydides wrote in the style of Greek drama, complete with a cast including hero and anti-hero. His war stories had rousing plots about people's pride, acts of folly, and punishment. This subjective focus on the Greek elements of hubris, folly, and nemesis established what might now be termed historical fiction. In Thucydides' subjective view, Athenians were defeated because of the sins they committed during the fighting, not because of their lack of skill in battle. This is a theme that has been replayed in several books and films about the Vietnam era, including Apocalypse Now (a retelling of Heart of Darkness) and Oliver Stone's 1987 film, Platoon.

Subjective materials in translations of other historians have kept certain writers on the list of classics for centuries. The works of Plutarch have informed educated readers for over four hundred years and made Twelve Lives a staple in English and Continental literature.⁷ Carl Van Doren called Plutarch "a writer's writer" and noted that Shakespeare had adapted from the Lives such characters as Coriolanus, Caesar, Antony, and Marcus Brutus. It is because Plutarch told "more" than the facts of history that his work continues to be a resource for

writers of history, biography, and fiction.⁸ Plutarch takes care with words. He uses the meter of poetry in his rhythms, the colors of painting in descriptions, and the tools of biography in the historical depiction of character. As one example, note the description of Cleopatra coming down the Nile on her barge to meet Antony: ". . . dressed as Venus in a picture, with beautiful young boys, like painted Cupids, on each side to fan her" (Dryden-Clough 9). A writer of twentieth century fiction might label this description a dramatized biography, an imaginative description, or simply historical fiction.

The historian chooses to present moments of significance, the fiction writer moments of drama. Cleopatra on her barge is both significant and dramatic. She should find herself recounted in both history and fiction, and, indeed, there have been countless retellings in both formats.

Writing fiction helps train the ability to assess significance of events and ascertain drama of characters. It guides the writer to know what to put in and what to leave out. No writer can present a maze of undifferentiated detail without clues to significance and expect modern readers to sit still. Without drama, a writer seldom gets even a first hearing. Without pointing up significance and providing a framework of dramatic interest, a writer is in danger of amassing a mere pile of words; or, as Truman Capote once damned a manuscript of

Jack Kerouac's: "That's not a novel, that's typing" (Interview, 218).

The conventional wisdom that says "We learn from history" is often coupled with another trustworthy cliché, "Experience is the best teacher." Yet since neither history nor experience is repeatable, what can either prove? A researcher cannot replicate history in a laboratory as an experiment. An author cannot reproduce fictional characters into life to see how they will behave or test imaginary hypotheses of them. Imaginary people set into a historical context may operate independently of what "real" people might do in "real" life. History has currents; fiction has premises. Writers cannot prove either. Thus, unanswerable questions will always remain. "Why does war occur?" History has batches of answers for that particular question. "Why did this man and woman fall in love here and now?" Fiction has told that story innumerable times. Each case of war or love must be judged on its own merits. Answers provided by either history or fiction are, at best, rhetorical.

Fiction, like history, is repeatable in that both may be re-read and re-interpreted. Some readers insist they can "re-experience" a novel a second, third, or tenth time. Re-reading a novel may invoke a similar emotional response time after time from a particular reader, but it is not the "same" response considering how we measure time. The attraction of historical fiction, however, does not lie in experiencing the same kinds of emotions over and over. Rather, for both readers

and writers, historical fiction becomes a way to re-experience history. If one assumes readers can "learn" from historical fiction, it is through the mechanism of re-experiencing history as a subjective (emotional) experience. Perhaps it is easier to learn from fiction than from "real" history or "real" life for fiction gives both distance and clarity. The mechanism of appeal in reading fiction seems to remain constant from generation to generation--an appeal to the subjective and the sensory.

Theodore Roosevelt, speaking as president of the American Historical Association in 1912, declared, "Writings are useless unless they are read, and they cannot be read unless they are readable" (Tuchman 43). Historians and fiction writers share this burden for "readability"--that is, the need to be clear and to be interesting. Clarity and drama are not necessarily tests of quality, but they do measure an author's communication skills. Part of the challenge of historical fiction is to use the facts and figures of record clearly, while conjoining such facts and figures with characters and events of dramatic intensity. It is the blend which sustains the emotional involvement of the reader.

In "The Historian's Opportunity" Walter Prescott Webb notes "There is something historically naughty about good writing" (12). Webb referred to a popular argument that a "real" scholar must somehow choose between being factual and being interesting. Of course, wrote Webb, "the real scholar

must choose truth and somehow it is better if it is made so ugly that nobody could doubt its virginity" (59).

A historian who followed the logic of content in writing history should arrive, in Webb's terminology, at a moment of "synthesis." This moment was described as a revealing flash or coming together of ideas. Historical synthesis corresponds rather closely to the literary concept of "epiphany." It appears that once again history and fiction writers have discovered the same method of focusing material. The concept of character insight, or "moments of epiphany," arising from the internal logic of the story is what fiction has offered traditionally and objectively as its raison d'être. When historians experience epiphany, the label becomes historical generalization or theory. This was the case with Webb's own famous synthesis that America changed when people emerged from the forests onto the plains.

Another historian, Albert Thayer Mahan, experienced a revealing flash of insight while studying Hannibal's failure to control sea communication with Carthage during an ancient war. An idea seized Mahan intuitively--the concept of the influence of sea power in history. Similarly, Frederick Jackson Turner came to his generalization about the closing of the American frontier in another "Aha!" moment of epiphany. Sometimes this moment of intuition, epiphany, or synthesis is termed the "Eureka" process, closely akin to the mystical idea of "spontaneous illumination." Koestler holds the Eureka process

responsible for most religions, most scientific discoveries, and most artistic perceptions.

Artists in many diverse fields have commented on their experiences of intuition, among them Kepler, Rembrandt, Blake, and Einstein. Albert Einstein, in particular, wrote with precision and exhilaration of his moments of synthesis. He also commented that his talent for "fantasy" had been of more use to him than any talent for absorbing positive knowledge. Apparently, the moment of epiphany, whether for a physicist, a historian, or a fiction writer, is something not quite rational. It is outside logic, yet generates a logic all its own. It is the mediating of particular experiences into a more universal framework, plus it produces emotional satisfaction. For that reason, Koestler called epiphany a moment that "expands individual awareness into cosmic awareness" (328). Philip Phenix prefers the term "synnoetics" which he defines as a moment of personal knowledge when one gains a sense of his or her place and time in the universe. When imaginary characters arrive at this "understanding" in fiction, it is often in a climactic scene or near the end of the story.

History, then, turns its primary focus to assessing significance while fiction chooses to be primarily dramatic. Both use epiphany as part of the method of operation. To be significant is not the same thing as being unified. Fiction, too, can never be complete. It is not a copy of life with life's multiplicity, chaos, power, and irrevocability. Instead, fiction

selects, arranges, and envisions "possible" situations. The author's role is to refine, redefine, and re-present impressions of life. Fiction traces its basic form back to Aristotle's first principle that "Art is an imitation of nature."⁹ The examples Aristotle gave derived from tragic poetry, but the concepts remain guidelines for modern novelists. Character, according to the Poetics, is always the key to unlocking an audience's understanding and emotion. A character is best known through his or her actions. Thus, a plot is simply an arrangement of probable occurrences which show a certain character in action. From these guidelines, it is easy to show how historical and fictional presentations differ: history presents what did happen; fiction represents what might happen.

Writers of history and fiction are consistently narrowing the gap in the presentations of what "can" and what "did" happen. A novelist, in effect, wagers that given these people, this era, and this place, these events could have taken place. According to Tuchman, historians should also attempt to get "inside" historical characters and account for human behavior, motivate action, and portray psychological circumstance. She urges "deliberate effort at empathy." Francis Parkman called this the ability to "feel the situation." Johann Gottfried von Herder labeled it Einfühlung, the effort to "feel oneself into everything."¹⁰ Whatever the name, this modus operandi is clearly the same methodology used by novelists. At its most objective, it is simply the matter of establishing a narrative

stance; at its deepest, a "deliberate effort at empathy" creates a Joycean stream-of-consciousness. When writers such as Parkman, Herder, and Tuchman touch base with Einführung, they are on the brink of justifying the writing of history as fiction.

In fictional presentation, historical data are supplied through the actions and the reactions of characters. The emphasis is on sensory documentation. Neither objective history nor subjective fiction communicates in abstract terms. Specificity is essential to each. In history, such specifics are called "corroborative detail" by Tuchman. Fiction writers often label this specific detail plus suggestion. In both genres, the process is evocation of the past through the senses. In literature, the classic example is the smell of a fresh-baked madeleine setting Proust off into introspection which took volumes to record. In history, it is not the facts, per se, which evoke feeling. Compilation of dates, lists of names, or statements of events without the personal, the sensory, the emotional filter of human consciousness is as meaningless as hieroglyphics on a stone tablet if one cannot read them. Fiction celebrates the unique, and it does so through the use of sensory detail.

Writers from Aristotle to the present have noted the importance of the senses. The classic statement, however, remains that of Joseph Conrad in the preface to "The Nigger of the Narcissus."

In the discussion of art and the senses, Conrad suggests:

Fiction--if it at all aspires to be art--appeals to temperament. And in truth it . . . endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal, to be effective, must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way. . . . All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. (707)

Several subspecies of historical fiction have flourished in the past and should be recognized as models. The roman à cléf form presents history as a fictionalized guessing game. The reader is expected to identify the "real" figures in this "novel with a key," much as revelers at a Mardi Gras ball are expected to guess their masked partner's identity before the stroke of midnight.

The trick with roman à cléf is picking mystery characters who can be identified easily by the reading audience. Nightmare Abbey (1818) by Thomas Love used caricatures of leading literary figures such as Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley. Educated readers enjoyed both the topicality and timeliness of the references. A later case of roman à cléf is the novel Point Counter Point by Aldous Huxley (1928). Huxley made writer D. H. Lawrence and critic John Middleton Murry into "fictitious" characters. These men can be identified with reasonable ease by later readers familiar with the London literary world of the twenties. In the same book, a right-wing political extremist,

Oswald Mosley, was given a fictional name and mask. After only a few decades, Mosley is all but undiscernible to readers.

In contemporary fiction and drama, roman à clé form has served to shield authors from lawsuits. Truman Capote's unfinished Music for Chameleons of the 1970s generated only critical disdain, not legal liabilities, with its thinly-disguised portraits of the high-flying Kennedys and other members of the political jet set. In the theatre, the play MacBird made only the slightest pretext of not naming its victim-protagonist, Lyndon Johnson. In 1979, Norman Mailer eclipsed the traditional roman à clé with his docu-drama novel, The Executioner's Song. Mailer called his manuscript, "a true life novel," and the reader is provided the "key" through a glossary of characters, their real names, dates of birth, and other pertinent statistics.

Historical fiction of modern times traces its roots in another direction as well. Heroic drama, both Greco-Roman epics and later Restoration period plays, takes love and valor as its subject. The Restoration form often presented a hero and heroine in a situation in which passion conflicted with the demands of honor. The hero's patriotic duty to his country usually kept the lovers apart. Examples of this form include Richard Dryden's Love Triumphant (1693) and Nathaniel Lee's The Rival Queens (Kirsch 174).

Rooms By the Sea uses the traditional plot of heroic drama--lovers separated by duty--and adds the demands of honor set by contemporary standards. The novel is not a roman

à cléf keyed to one-to-one correspondence with historical personages. The correspondences are analogous, serving as representative symbols instead of mirroring individuals. There were, for example, military chaplains who gave up both religious and secular occupations to protest the American involvement in Vietnam. There were military wives caught in the limbo of having husbands neither dead nor alive--only missing. From personal experience comes the montage of memory, place setting, and milieu. The challenge in using the historical fiction form lies in recasting memory and perception into drama.

T.S. Eliot suggested that a writer tell not about emotions, but write about emotional things. In simple terms, this is the use of an objective correlative, or "subjectifying the objective." The objective correlative has become the standard device by which contemporary writers bring drama to history. An example of how an objective correlative operates is the Pearl Harbor day scene in Herman Wouk's The Winds of War. The situation is ordinary: a mother needs to find cough syrup for a sick child. The setting is Honolulu; the time Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. The mother is trying to find a pharmacy open on Sunday morning. Wouk uses the history involved dramatically and correctly, but the focus always remains on the character and her internal need to find medicine for the ill child. A woman with a bottle of cough syrup clutched in her hand must find her way home with bombs dropping all around her. The writer of a nonfiction history of December 7, 1941, would be

obliged to assess the significance of the event in light of later circumstances. A fiction writer may concentrate on cough syrup--an objective correlative--to dramatize.

By talking about emotional things instead of directly about emotions, a writer can revive characters or events which have slipped through the cracks of history. It is perhaps for this very reason that millions of people have taken up pen, pencil, typewriter, or word processor to produce personal histories and fictions. In the thirties, Carl Becker shocked members of the American Historical Association with his presidential address proclaiming, "Everyman his own historian." Now, a literate America asks why shouldn't every man and every woman be his/her own fiction writer? A working knowledge of the objective correlative only formalizes what many storytellers instinctively adopt as a device. The story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree lingers from generation to generation in American culture despite the anecdote not being printed in history texts for over one hundred years. The cherry tree story is an objective correlative which has been perpetuated to the point of quasi-myth. The apocryphal illustration lingers because it is a more dramatic and emotional way of saying, "Always tell the truth" than any number of lectures, sermons, or proverbs (Gilbert vii).

Historically, followers of most of the world's religions have placed "faith" in a set of objective correlatives. Believers "take

faith" in anecdotes or quasi-myths rather than in verifiable dates, relationships, or places. Religious scholarship, for example, has furnished excellent details of the origins of Christianity. Its relationship to Judaism has been studied, its role in the Roman Empire documented, its fraternal relation to other Middle Eastern value systems demonstrated. Yet those who "believe" take their faith not on historical grounds but from acceptance of spiritual-emotional ties.

A writer of historical fiction does not set out to create an arbitrary past for imaginary characters. Men and women, real or invented, function in a verifiable environment. The objective milieu provides the backdrop. In that way, "created" characters are woven into a piece of "real" fabric. The story is set against verifiable places and times, like placing chess men on an already laid-out game board.

Historical fiction brings to the writer an obligation for the minutiae of an era. Music, fashion, morals, and jargon capture the larger "temper of the times." Great characters from literature--an Ahab or a Samson or a Dr. Zhivago--are of interest to readers in every era because of character traits and the minutiae of the rendered milieu. Readers of Moby Dick, the Bible, and Dr. Zhivago may be interested in the historical context, per se, of the heroes, but the readers keep reading because of the conflicts and circumstances, emotions and reactions, of the characters. The "pasts" of these protagonists were not faintly imagined by Melville, the prophet, or

Pasternak. This ability to create a past to the point it seems verifiable is one of historical fiction's greatest demands. It is the talent for rendering detail that makes F. Scott Fitzgerald the chronicler of the Jazz Age. The same ability made Ernest Hemingway spokesman for the Lost Generation. It is the minutiae of Paris and New York at the turn of the century that shines in the work of Henry James and Edith Wharton.

In the end, it appears that a novelist has as much right to "time and territory" as any other keeper of record. History, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. To date, few artists have laid claim to the 1960s as their time and territory. The historians of record continue to call the era one of confusion and chaos. This label of "trying times" does not relieve writers of further attempts at clarity and order. Fiction attempts to provide unity while history continues to fumble with facts or insist that the only pattern is chaos. Rooms By the Sea is the story of fictional characters who want to understand what is happening, who need to assess the disintegration and dis-integrity of two particular institutions, the United States Navy and the Roman Catholic Church.

Where history offers bald records, fiction offers bold conclusions. Fiction dares to be concrete, possessing a quality Virginia Woolf called "direct certainty." So, despite being untidy, the 1960s do possess a pattern, at least for novelists; it is called a maze. Characters running in this particular maze of time must deal with the historical twists, turns, and dead ends.

Meanwhile, the "historians" aren't much help. As Woolf once lamented, it is a "misfortune to have to call in the services of any historian" (87).¹¹ For that reason, the character in Rooms By the Sea who is a history professor makes his debut late in the book, and like the historians of the era, does not possess any final answers or ultimate insights.

In creating the historical milieu for a fictional character, the character is the controlling influence. The era makes certain demands of a character, but the character must jibe with the past that he or she has been set against. One does not turn a twentieth century Los Angeles motorcycle gang loose on Hardy's English moors unless the intent is to "play" with history.¹² Once set into motion, the characters may react to history or ignore it. While a historian has an obligation to grant equal time to matters of equal significance, a novelist may skew the proportions. Matters of record accorded equal significance by historians may be unequalized or discarded entirely. A story set during the era of World War Two will probably mention the events and have characters involved with wartime efforts of some kind. Of equal importance in this period is the emergence of atomic energy and its use as a destructive force. A novelist might ignore this aspect of the era entirely, focusing on a protagonist who is uninvolved or indirectly affected. In a logical progression, peripheral material may be included or excluded at the dictates of "Whim and Interest:"

Anything outside the range of the narrative voice will remain inaccessible unless an omniscient authorial stance is taken.

The writer of historical fiction retains the right to entertain, to speculate, to dramatize, and to leap to conclusions--all matters more or less denied to historians since they became respectable as academics. Being imaginative in no way implies superficiality, however. Nor does the ability to entertain imply irresponsibility. To inform and entertain at the same time is not beyond the realm of both the possible and the excellent. The Horatian view of literature (learning and pleasure) has been the most influential developed, and this concept applies directly to the writing of historical fiction. For that reason, the "rule" remains: story first.

How much history must occur in historical fiction? There are probably no facts of the recorded past that everyone needs to know. Accuracy in historical fiction becomes a matter of authorial interest, ability, instinct, and pride. At its best, history functions as the novelist's grab bag. The writer may take from the bag in any order and may shake the bag vigorously between draws. Grabbing into history may let the fiction writer pull out methods, or discrete bits of information, or possible plot occurrences. Still, the chance of using all material from history and none from the imagination and producing art is slim.

While often a reward, research in historical fiction writing can also become a serpent. Writing can be wounded by the

fangs of research and rigor. The seduction of the "history phase" of writing is well documented among novelists from Charles Dickens to Irving Stone to James Michener. The research becomes so involved, so fascinating, so intricate--so endless--it finally overpowers the story.

Aldous Huxley uses a character in The Genius and the Goddess to compare history to a "dangerous drug" (4). Contemporary historical novelist Janice Holt Giles tells of finding herself delving into weather reports of the 1870s to make sure the details of environment were accurate for each day of the fictional trip in Voyage to Santa Fe. While the result was erudite, it was not an intrinsic part of either character or plot. In the 1970s, author Marilyn Harris made an extra trip to England in order to check nineteenth century coach routes, precise geographic stops, and timetables, all for the use of an imaginary character's invented trip from London to Sussex in Prince of Eden. This scrupulous insistence on verification of trivia may lead an author into dead end scenes. Stymied by the inability to document, the writer can only retreat or go another direction. When this occurs, history has become dictator, and the author has forfeited the freedom which fiction allows.

The minutiae should be captured in the background of historical fiction, leaving the protagonist to operate in the larger currents of history. All works of fiction are somebody's history (or, alternately, in future-world stories, somebody's prophecies) and might better be called by the term proposed by

Jean-Paul Sartre: "moments of eternity" (352). A new chiasmus forms: if all fiction is some character's history, is all history some character's fiction? Assuredly the genre of historical fiction includes many works not now labeled as such. Works in which a fictional protagonist struggles to free himself of a past obviously belong here, as in Doctor Zhivago. A character trying to recapture his past fits the definition, as in The Great Gatsby.

In addition, the novel Stones For Ibarra, (Harriet Doerr) which won The American Book Award for fiction in 1984, offers a third kind of "moment of eternity." The protagonist in that work searches for a sanctuary in the here and now in order to come to grips with the past and prepare for future death. There appears to be no end of uses literary characters can make of the past. James Jones postulates sex, religion, and war as uses of history for his protagonists in From Here to Eternity.

The "moment of eternity" in which characters in Rooms By the Sea are living is one in which they find themselves unable to justify the world as they see it. At midpoint, circa 1965, a military man has lost confidence in what duty involves; a woman has lost previously sanctified standards of art and motherhood, and a priest has lost faith in his calling. The era of the 1960s is one in which many individuals lost confidence in institutions in general. Church, State, and Military suffered mass defections. Old examples--history--did not answer the new

questions being raised. The chiasmus of 1965 works well as the year in which the protagonists lost touch and were touched by loss. Being "out of touch," with the world or the self, implies a lack of control. The military services found they could not justify their actions; the Church found it could not call others to its service. Those who were already members of such institutions found their occupations, and sometimes their lives, in jeopardy.

Historians have not yet explained this era, treating it mainly as some kind of national aberration. Fiction writers have not spoken the last word, either. Among notable attempts at cohesive and disciplined rendering of the Vietnam-era material, the following form a partial reading list: Michael Herr, Dispatches; Robert Stone, A Flag for Sunrise; Philip Caputo A Rumor of War; Larry Heinemann, Close Quarters and, perhaps the best overall treatment, the oral history by Al Santoli, Everything We Had.

In strictly historical accounts of an era, a rational stance is taken by the writer. The author tries to explain, usually logically and chronologically. (If such and such happens, then the following usually occurs. If the rains don't come for two years, then the drouth is prolonged, and starvation for the tribe will occur.) Fictions spin on a different axis, a "what if" stance. Rooms By the Sea asks what if a priest falls in love with a woman who is already married to a hero who is missing-in-action? What if she tries to carry out her duties

and obligations to no avail? Is there a point one is relieved of further responsibility, or does one always serve who only stands and waits? What if there is no such thing as a just reward in an unjust society? Historical fiction thus fields partial objectivity as a viable line of reasoning to the "what if" questions. There is an internal logic involved and a kind of chronology. Time passes, the world turns, characters act and react, thus involving themselves in change. This is when historical material becomes fiction--when it tells about a process of change in an imaginary character.¹³

A change in character does not necessarily imply revolt. In any era, there are men and women who do not wish to change. There are those who actively resist change. Another group advocates change; a few endorse radical change. Large, societal changes ("Human nature changed in 1910") may or may not negate values held by individuals, but the large changes almost always call the individuals' values into question. Characters in Rooms By the Sea ask questions about values. Is what we are doing in 1965 appropriate, be it committing more troops to southeast Asia or committing adultery in the comfortable bedrooms of the tropics? Is our course of action--our change--right? Historical fiction, of necessity, is almost always a human value-system story. What do people hold dear during a time of stress? Why do these things (money, freedom, sea shells, or honor) have value? What price tag is put on these items? Who is in charge? And who is in control?

Institutions such as hospitals, churches, universities, or military units often see questioning by individual members as threats to the accepted form. Members who deviate from the norm may be invited to leave. If they stay, they are charged a price or otherwise penalized. The American culture has developed a system of contracts between individuals and service institutions. The contracts may be rewritten by mutual consent. In 1965, the unusual happened: individuals began to tear up prior contracts with their government, churches, the military, and even the contracts between marriage partners. Many divorced spouses; others took up domestic living without benefit of license. Some burned draft notices; others spit on confessional booths. People who had already accepted society's contracts reread the fine print. Church attendance plummeted. Marchers took to the roads near Selma. The Gulf of Tonkin boiled over, cresting in Washington where Congress sought to stem the tide with a resolution. The War on Poverty heated up, the South China Sea exploded, an astronaut walked in space. He called back presumably immortal (but immediately forgotten) words, "This is fun."

History makes its point by providing readers with a "locus of meaning." Fiction assumes the role best described by Edgar Allan Poe as "eliciting response" (Philosophy of Composition 421). If historical fiction combines history and fiction, it seems logical the result should provide both response and meaning. If history is used to write a fiction of 1965, a chiasmus results:

the year of the dragon becomes a metaphorical dragon of a year.

History is more than a chiasmus, however. Herbert Butterfield called it a "set of mixed-up jigsaw puzzles" in his lectures at Queen's University in Belfast in 1954 (195). No matter how skilled a historian may be, there will always be a few left-over pieces that don't fit neatly within the frame. In fiction, a batch of loose ends is considered fatal. This is art's edge over reality. Fiction writers tie up loose ends while the historian must bury or ignore the pile of anomalous fragments. Thus, history leaves some of its best cases dangling, some of its most exciting mysteries unsolved, some of its likeliest heroines unloved. Historical fiction is a challenge to rework the puzzle and make the pieces come out even.

While historical fiction finds roots in older forms such as roman à clé and the heroic drama of Restoration and Classical eras, it is also influenced by contemporary branches of journalism and docu-drama. New Journalism, a literary step-child of the seventies, has suffered bad press among both fiction and nonfiction writers. Neither readers nor critics are sure what to make of a biography with a subtitle such as "An Autobiographical Interpretation." Where, in truth, should librarians file The Education of Henry Adams? Are James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific fiction if they can be documented? And conversely, is In Cold Blood (Capote) nonfiction just because the author bills it as such? It is the

work of Capote which set the contemporary docu-drama argument into full gear as to where the line of demarcation lies between fiction and nonfiction. No one has yet established an accepted boundary.

Several suggestions have been offered as to what the hybrid mix of biography, history, and fiction should be called. Most novelists realize that "documentary fiction," "docu-drama," or "fact-based fiction" is historical fiction reinvented, much like the wheel. Capote arranged the factual materials of a Kansas murder to suit the story of In Cold Blood, giving the material a balance the events of record lacked. He used the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that were clearest and most dramatic. His objective focus tried to make subjective sense of the times and situations and motives of the characters involved. Historians rarely use their own lifetimes as the timespan for their writings; novelists often do.

The 1986 title, Roger's Version, by John Updike, presupposes the familiarity of a reader with both history and fiction. Presumably, the reader knows earlier versions of the story, notably The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which, in turn, took for granted knowledge of Biblical custom and Christian tradition. History, in Roger's Version, then becomes a way of extending a reader's range of experience through the earlier, differing versions. Historical fiction, in general, serves this end. It becomes a way of extending social memory. The retellings of history touched with the shades of

gray known as fiction make myth. For some historians, a myth is a "once valid but now discarded version of the past." Thus, a myth is merely "somebody else's version"--a previously used explanation. Bards, shamans, priests, storytellers, and historians rely on myths as well as documentation to make their case. Writers harmonize the actual with the variations on the theme. They use the objectively real and the subjectively remembered. Some details are inevitably enlarged, others deleted. In combining the historic with the mythic, dates may get tangled or even discarded. Civilizations remember for "quality of enchantment" and not for a precise given set of facts. With or without dates, some events have the quality that makes for symbol and myth: the battle at Marathon, Hannibal crossing the Alps, Caesar crossing the Rubicon, the crowning of Charlemagne, Columbus discovering the "New World," the troops on the Plains of Abraham, the patriots signing the Declaration of Independence, the United States military leaving Saigon.

Carl Becker used as the "lowest common denominator" of history the definition, "History is the memory of things said and done"(26). Extending that premise, historical fiction is the memory of things said and done by imaginary characters. A writer of history or fiction will start from the same materials of record. Each will adopt a point of view, for being an omniscient or omnipresent historian is as difficult as being such an author. Then, where the historian leaves off, due to decorum or a

sense of duty or by common convention of his craft, the fiction writer may plunge ahead. Fiction uses facts as diving boards. The same sources lead into different depths.

T.S. Eliot claimed that "tradition . . . cannot be inherited" (78). Eliot felt that if a writer wanted tradition, it had to be obtained "by great labor." Obviously fiction writers crave their share of tradition, but they want the freedom to expand it, not merely "obtain" it. Fiction provides something that mere tradition cannot--a joy in creation. Writers, and individuals, sometimes feel themselves the victims of history. Here is the great lure of art; art gives control and purpose. Few men or women can claim to be anything akin to masters of destiny. But fiction writers, for a few pages at least, can come close. Where the world is in chaos, they create order. Where discontent with the human condition prevails, they take control. It is a need to unite two facets, curiosity and discontent, that makes a person pick up pen and paper and invent stories. It is a need to unite the real and imaginary to provide a rich, deep experience which generates historical fiction.

Pieter Geyl wrote a defense of history which may be applied as a codicil to the writing of historical fiction:

History is not to be searched for practical lessons, the applicability of which will always be doubtful in view of the inexhaustible novelty of circumstances and combination of causes, but just this, that the mind will acquire a sensitiveness, an imaginative range. (84)

Rooms By the Sea takes an imaginative range with the year 1965 and its historical ramifications. The story is limited to one naval officer who must examine his relationship to the institution of the military; his wife, who must question what constitutes both legal duty and marital honor, and a priest, who calls into question his allegiance to both Church and State. The specific observations, memories, and perceptions of these characters are meant to jibe with the reality of 1965. Nevertheless, Rooms By the Sea is not the world according to any historian of the era, but the versions according to the fictional Lt. Commander Eliot Hopkins, Connie Hopkins, and Father Peter Trevalino. The exercise in selection is the first demand of fiction. The universality of the characters' stories then becomes the test of history. Against a contemporary setting, the heroic drama is reenacted: lovers are separated by duty. For the three protagonists, a conflict ensues between loyalty and desire. The object lesson is not easily learned for all three are members of institutions. Yet history's rules do not suspend, not even in the 1960s, and those who cannot commit to institutions are forced to leave. In the end, the rooms by the sea in the novel, like those of Edward Hopper's painting, are empty rooms.

END NOTES

¹ Chiasmus, reversal in word order between elements of parallel phrases, is from the Greek chiasmus which, in turn, is derived from chiazein, "to mark with a chi" and written in Greek as X. Further evolution of the chi symbol is related to the linking function of the English article, and. Thus the element of reversal in a literary chiasmus includes an equivalency, such as "We eat to live and live to eat." In the original Greek, the text would be marked with the chi: "We eat to live X we live to eat."

² The title, Rooms By the Sea, is taken from the painting of the same name by the American realist painter, Edward Hopper. A reproduction of Hopper's 1951 oil on canvas serves as the frontispiece for the novel. The original of Hopper's work hangs in the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. The dragon which is used as endpiece for Rooms By the Sea is the decorative map work of contemporary artist Pham Kim Vinh who is now a United States citizen living in Phoenix, Arizona.

³ Janet Burroway in Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft (2nd edition) sets up the following useful Point of View model.

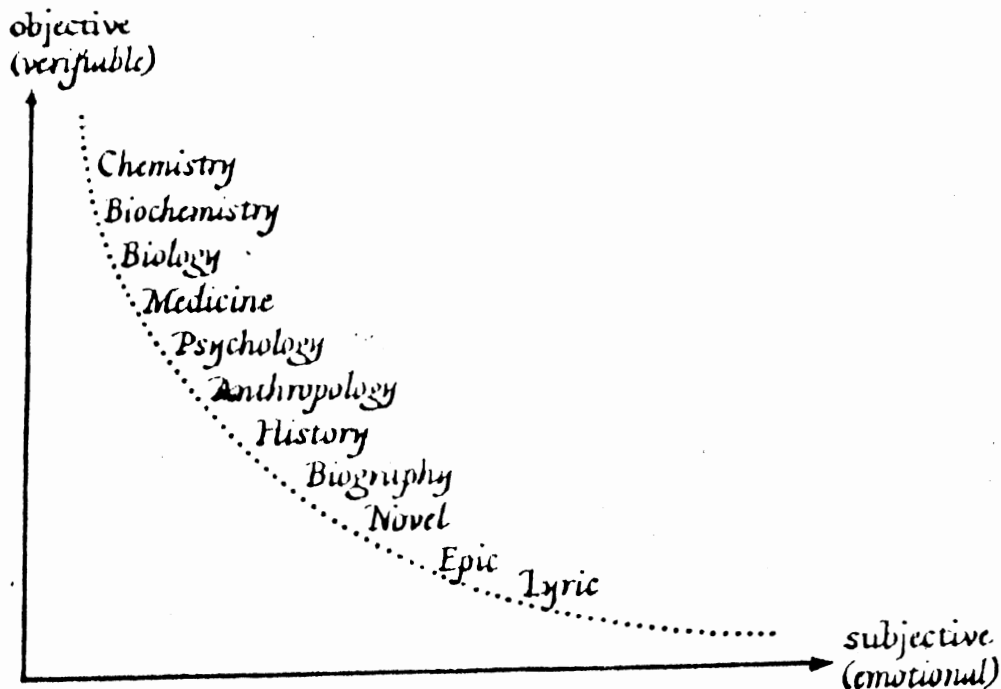
TABLE I.
BURROWAY POINT OF VIEW PARADIGM

<i>Who Speaks?</i>		
The Author In: Third Person Editorial Omniscient Limited Omniscient Objective	The Author In: Second Person "You" as character "You" as reader-turned-character	Character In: First Person Central Narrator Peripheral Narrator
<i>To Whom?</i>		
The Reader Characterized or Uncharacterized	Another Character or Characters	The Self
<i>In What Form?</i>		
"Written Story," "Spoken Story," Reportage, Oratory, Monologue, Confessional, Journal, Diary, Interior Monologue, Stream of Consciousness, etc. . . .		
<i>At What Distance?</i>		
Reader and Author \longleftrightarrow Narrator \longleftrightarrow Characters Complete Identification \longleftrightarrow Complete Opposition Temporal, Spatial, Moral, Intellectual, Aesthetic, Physical, Educational, Experiential		
<i>With What Limitations?</i>		
Reliable Narrator (or "Author") \longleftrightarrow Unreliable Narrator (or "Author") on any of values listed above		

⁴ Arthur Koestler sees the essence of aesthetic experience as the combination of "intellectual illumination" and "emotional catharsis." From these poles of objective-subjective he derives the view that objectivity constitutes the moment of truth while the corresponding subjectivity provides the emotional evocation of beauty. He writes, "I do not wish to exaggerate; there is certainly a considerable difference in precision and objectivity, between the methods of judging a theorem in physics and a work of art. But I wish to stress once more that there are continuous transitions between the two." His diagram is from The Act of Creation (332).

Table II.

KOESTLER SUBJECTIVE-OBJECTIVE CONTINUUM



⁵ As a matter of record as a novelist, I am against the conscious structuring of symbols. The best ones are done with the ease and facility of innocence. Good symbols come "through" the author without being deliberately planned out and executed. We lead symbolic lives, no doubt about it, and it is impossible to think of fiction as being non-symbolic. Nevertheless, symbolism can become an end in itself, witness an entire generation of writers and critics.

For sheer size there is probably no bigger symbol of the twentieth century than the Holocaust. Here is an event that history has not dealt with adequately. Playwrights and novelists and diary-keepers have done a better job, literarily and symbolically. The portrayal in history books becomes swamped in statistics. Six million dead? How many is that? Better to ask what the six million deaths might be symbolic of--perhaps the union of evil and zeal, or man's inhumanity to man. History's horror was converted to story and symbol by a thirteen year old refugee, and more people have been moved and convinced by Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl than by thousands of pages of testimony generated by the Eichmann trial in Israel.

⁶ Thucydides is credited with starting historians down the road of rationalistic objectivity. Today students read Thucydides as much for his philosophy and anecdotal materials

as for his supposedly "scientific" history. As a Sophist, Thucydides reflected into his account of the Persian War certain biases, such as his belief that no absolute truths existed. He also repeated what his friend Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things."

The artistic intent was clearly evident, however, and set the stage for centuries of historians to wrestle with facts versus feelings. As late as 1912, George Bancroft suggested that the historian was supposed to "write with style, with literary conviction, and the epic Muse at one's elbow" (xi).

⁷ The first European translation of Twelve Lives by Plutarch is the translation into French credited to Jacques Amyot in 1559. This was followed by a version in Elizabethan English by Sir Thomas North in 1579. The standard English of Richard Dryden was used in the translation of 1683-86 and is adapted into the basic modern translation, the 1864 Clough version. Between 1950-1964 Harvard University reissued eleven volumes of Plutarch, translated by Bernadotte Perrin. The Dryden-Clough version remains the most widely used text.

⁸ The story of how Demosthenes overcame stammering by speaking with pebbles in his mouth is originally Plutarch's story. The anecdote of Cleopatra's remarkable suicide-by-asp, recounted later by Shakespeare and various modern film-makers, is in Twelve Lives. Cleopatra's barge with its

gilded stern, outspread sails of purple, and oars of silver, sailing down the Nile, laden with flutes and fifes and harps, is straight from Plutarch's highly subjective description.

⁹ There has been more controversy over what Aristotle meant by "imitation" and "nature" than over any other part of the Poetics. Interpreting the first principle to mean "art copies nature" leaves out humankind's production of things not found in the natural world. Similarly, an interpretation that the artist must "reproduce faithfully" also limits and makes the treatise seem crude. The more useful interpretation is found in the meaning of the Greek word for art, techne. A skill, or the ability to make things, was the original denotation of the word. From techne the English language derives such words as technical, technology, and technique. These are closer in meaning to the Greek root than the definition "art." Aristotle's Poetics, then, is an essay about how craftsmen make things. It is not a guide to the "fine arts" for the Greeks had no such definition. Techne was used to build a house or was necessary to make bronze into a sculpture. The Poetics is a how-to manual, a primer for people wishing to acquire skills needed for making epics, comedy, poetry, music, and dancing.

¹⁰ For Johann Herder to interpret Hebrew Scripture, he envisioned himself as follows: "A shepherd with shepherds, a peasant in the midst of an agricultural people, an oriental with

the primitive dwellers of the East." This is a highly charged insertion of psyche into material, and the result can only be labeled subjective prose.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf is not the only novelist to depict an enmity of historians and fiction writers. Few writers, however, are as point blank as the character of Angus Wilson's who growls, "Bloody fools, these historians." Historians are seen as antagonists of fiction in the following novels:

<u>Nausea</u>	Jean-Paul Sartre
<u>Lucky Jim</u>	Kingsley Amis
<u>1984</u>	George Orwell
<u>Antic Hay</u>	Aldous Huxley
<u>Boswell</u>	Stanley Elkin

In addition, the drama Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee is cited by David Hackett Fischer (307-318) as an example of historian-writer enmity; also, the work of Anatole France, notably Le Crime de Silvestre Bonnard.

¹² In fantasy form the rules of time and place are suspended. Mark Twain makes certain his character does not jibe with history in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. The fun is in seeing how the protagonist replays history. The playing of character against the strands of history is also a favored game in science fiction through the device of time manipulation. Galapagos, a 1986 novel by Kurt Vonnegut,

Jr. manages the process through reverse evolution. The film, Crocodile Dundee uses a dual lens to set first the heroine against the Australian outback, then the hero against New York City. All of these devices are variations on physical and psychological environment in the style of the historical fiction, Rip Van Winkle by Washington Irving.

¹³ All the elements for change were in place in 1965, but surprisingly few people noticed the significance. We concentrate attention on what seems topically important at the moment. Thus, the rise of the frug as a national dance craze interested social historians greatly in 1965. Every published almanac and annual mentions it; the Britannica Book of the Year devotes two pages of pictures to the frug. Meanwhile, the historically significant Gulf of Tonkin resolution almost slipped through the cracks of notice. Only hindsight has shown the frug to be unimportant and the resolution critical. History books have since demoted the frug to a minor, peripheral sidelight of 1965 and promoted the emergency legislation to its spot of prominence. For a novel, a writer inspects both items for dramatic impact. Which of these is better raw material? It will be the one that promotes drama--"an attitude so intense it causes a character to act." Thus, the frug may well offer more possibilities for fiction than a legislative resolution.

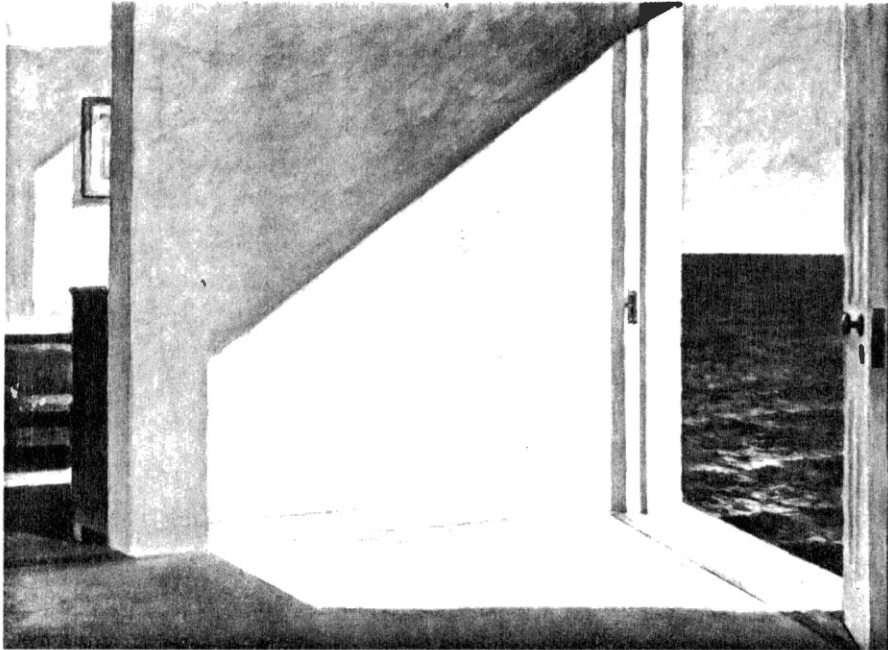
ROOMS BY THE SEA: A DISSERTATION
IN CREATIVE WRITING

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

William Shakespeare
Julius Caesar, IV, iii, 218

ROOMS BY THE SEA

Edward Hopper



Rooms by the Sea, 1951. Oil on canvas, 89 x 40 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903.

ROOMS BY THE SEA

(Excerpts from a journal by Connie Hopkins, 1965)

The Time: Year of the dragon.

Fact: History records only 230 years without war. Supposedly, 1965 was a year of peace.

Omission: A war raged, the traditional kind for my husband, Eliot. Another war was fought for the faith of Father Peter Trevalino, Catholic Navy chaplain.

The Place: The Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Home port of the Pineapple Fleet. The rambling officer's quarters on Hospital Point were as much home as I'd ever known.

Fact: Hospital Point has no hospital.

Omission: I had no home after the morning when a stranger stood on the porch and announced, "I regret to inform you that your husband is missing in action."

The Era: In a war that wasn't a war, men advised instead of fought, but they died just the same. Newscasters differed on the proper pronunciation. Was it Veet-Nam, rhyming with Beat Sam? Or Vee-et-nahm, akin to We et numb. A compromise was reached: Vee-et-Nam.

Record: Casualties became a problem. A compromise was reached. It was called containment of numbers.

Off the Record: Peter Trevalino and I lost faith, too. Our compromise was called adultery.

ROOMS BY THE SEA

Once again, Connie Hopkins was abandoned. Tonight it was in the middle of the dance floor at the recently rebuilt Pearl Harbor Officer's Club where she and her husband, Lt. Commander Eliot Hopkins, were seeing in the new year of 1965. The thing which struck Connie as unusual was how rapidly she was abandoned this time. The instant the two harassed-looking shore patrol members stuck their heads in the O Club archway, Eliot was gone. Even on the dance floor, with her back partially turned, right in the middle of a medley of pop-and-Polynesian tunes suitable for slow dancing, she felt Eliot stiffen, pause, and halt, all in a smooth preparation to bolting. She sighed and let her fingers trail across the back of his neck as she dropped her arms from his shoulders. "Happy New Year, darling. I'll see you at home."

"I'll try to get back," he murmured, already striding away.

He was out the door in six steps, stopping only to exchange a brusque word at the table nearest the archway. Connie made her way around the edge of the inlaid teakwood dance floor, then past the hibiscus bushes potted in shoyu barrels. She would rejoin the other couples in their group, stay for the fireworks at midnight, and then go home to the rambling house on Hospital Point. Eliot wouldn't be back to the party. He was always gone longer than expected. And anytime military police came looking for the captain of a ship on Saturday night,

it was never simple. Further, for the last six Saturday nights in a row--ever since Eliot had assumed command of the destroyer-escort Campbell--it had been the same problem. Seaman Hymanez Tongarora. Ah, well, Connie placated herself, there were worse places to be abandoned and maybe even worse reasons.

She walked around the second tier of barrels holding plumeria and ginger. The slight waft of the original contents of the barrels--soy sauce--added a sweet-and-sour musk to the tropical flower scents. A man rose from the table by the archway and moved toward her. He extended his arm, caught her by the elbow. "Wait, Connie," he smiled, dark hair tossing and white teeth flashing. "Eliot asked me to take care of you." Father Peter Trevalino moved one hand across his collar, the commander's bars gleaming on one side and the Roman Catholic chaplain's cross glistening on the other, while his other hand reached for her waist. "So, shall we dance?"

She smiled, always happy to see Peter, the popular chaplain for the Pineapple Fleet's destroyer squadron. "Did Eliot use his favorite one-liner, 'Take my wife. Please, somebody take her?'"

"He ordered me front and center to take charge of the best dancer on the floor."

Connie tossed off a slight laugh, embarrassed to be the object of the priest's charity. "Eliot is good at giving orders."

"And I, for one, have no problem with the concept of orders, holy or otherwise." Peter shifted himself and his new partner gracefully onto the teakwood and into the flow of

dancers. "You won't make any professional critique of my dance floor technique, though, will you?"

"I'd have nothing but good things to say," she admitted. They moved smoothly together, he lithe and tall, she supple and slim. She was always surprised how well Peter danced--or that he danced at all--for she'd been raised in the part of Texas where Roman Catholics were rare enough to have to drive fifty miles to Wichita Falls to find a congregation. Her small prairie hometown, Nocona, was a seedbed of Southern Baptists who didn't dance at all. Her current status--the only classical ballet dancer ever produced by Nocona--was still viewed with alarm in some quarters, according to letters from her father.

Connie raised on tiptoes, adjusting herself anew to Peter, making the mental comparison that Eliot was solid while Peter was tall. She told the priest sincerely, "I never criticize partners pressed into service on the spur of the moment."

"But isn't dancing with amateurs on Saturday night sort of a busman's holiday for you?"

"Oh, no, this is wonderful." She said the words too quickly and took them back with a blink of her thick eyelashes. "I meant, this is recreation. Nothing like the repetitious routine of a ballet rehearsal. From those, I go home exhausted. Tonight, I'll go home--"

"Alone?"

She stared up at him. What kind of question was that? Of course she'd go home alone. Eliot would get there eventually, and then turn around in the darkness before dawn and go back

to the Campbell and be set to deploy with first light. She shivered as she looked into Peter's eyes, the brown centers flecked with gold. It felt different dancing with a man so tall, and suddenly she was self-conscious. By contrast, Eliot was such a comfortable, known fit, with sturdy generations of rugged Germanic stock compacted into wide shoulders, blond hair, and blue eyes. Peter was a good four inches taller, with shimmery eyes like polished Florentine marble, curly ebony hair, and an exuberant smile he credited to his immigrant Italian grandparents. She admitted huskily, "Actually, I appreciate you dancing with me. I like having a partner. It gets lonesome being one of twenty minor ballerinas in the second act corps."

As if in an involuntary movement, he pulled her closer. Then, an instant later, he forced his stance into a more neutral distance. He cleared his throat. "Where'd Horatio Hornblower dash off to this time?"

"The Campbell, as usual. Where else?"

"Well, Eliot's a fool to leave you alone--and more the fool to ask me to take care of you."

She shook loose from his encroaching grasp while looking at him curiously. "Why, Peter, I think you've had one too many nips of the New Year's champagne."

"I've had one too few, if you ask me."

"I didn't. But in answer to your previous questions, Eliot's off to referee another fight. Hymie the wild man is on the loose again."

"I've been out of the country. Who is Hymie?"

"A first class troublemaker, currently stationed aboard the Campbell."

"Which makes Eliot chief babysitter--"

"And psychiatrist and bail bondsman. The shore patrol practically lives at our house. I know them on a first name basis. And Eliot senses they're coming before they ring the doorbell."

"At least they come for him. I say good enough--make the commanding officers deal with some of this shit, instead of always bawling for the chaplain."

Her eyes widened. "My gracious, you are morose tonight. What has happened?"

"Aftereffects of my aforementioned trip out of the country."

"Jet lag?"

"More what I've seen than where I've been."

"So where have you been, Peter? We missed you at Eliot's wetting-down party when he made Lieutenant Commander. Not like you to pass up free booze. Have you been jaunting about on one of those Congressional junkets again?"

"I've been in Saigon." Saying the word occurred simultaneously with a tightening of his grip on her hand. "I tell you, Connie, for a war that isn't a war, there are some real firefights going on in the countryside. Then when I get back to Honolulu, no one seems to give a rat's ass. They haven't even heard of the places I've been."

"And nobody knows the trouble you've seen?" she teased. Her chuckle came out slightly frightened for she didn't want to hear about a war, either. "Not to nix your travelogue, but could I have the condensed and sanitary version of your travels and travails? I'm not really interested in war stories, real or imagined. Not tonight, anyway. Not with Eliot and the task force leaving in the morning for--for God knows where."

"God knows and so do you. We all know where the Pineapple Fleet is heading this deployment."

"All right, so we do." She turned her head to watch the shadows play through the plumeria trees. "Let's just not talk about it." The branches, lit by lanterns, provided a fusion of pastel colors outside the white arches of the new O Club building. "The truth is, I don't want to think about where Eliot's going, much less hear about it. I'd just as soon not know."

"Rather a strange notion of how to protect yourself." Peter drifted a comforting arm around her shoulders and slowed their steps behind the rhythm of the music. "But you're not alone. I sense everyone feels if we don't talk about this war we're waging in southeast Asia, maybe it will go away."

"But you don't think so."

"I do not think so," he repeated stiffly. Then, with his more usual energy, he blurted, "Connie, it bothers the hell out of me."

She looked into his eyes flashing dark energy. "So I see." Turning her head aside, she murmured, "But I can't let it

bother me, or I'll be crazy inside twenty-four hours. I have to believe Eliot's deploying to Westpac on a strictly routine cruise. The task force will put in at Subic and he'll play golf. They'll steam up to Hong Kong, and he'll buy me another pair of those fancy Dynasty brocade pajamas. In my scenario, the fleet isn't going anywhere near--"

"Cam Ranh Bay? The South China Sea? The Gulf of Tonkin?"

"Stop it, Peter."

"You stop it. Quit behaving as if you believe you can live indefinitely in a fool's paradise."

Time to defuse the angry eyes and voice. She withdrew her hand from his vise-like grip. "Fool's paradise may be the best kind." She considered a moment and added with a smile, "May be the only kind." She hoped to see the tiny crinkles at the outer edges of his eyelids that indicated laughter. Peter Trevalino was truly a handsome man when he laughed--or maybe it was only an illustration of the adage, 'Any man in a uniform is handsome but a handsome man in a uniform is irresistible.' Whatever, she and Peter often held these semi-theological discussions that bordered on irreverence. It had been a pattern since the first day she'd arrived in the islands and the only person there to meet her was a stranger, Father Trevalino. He had greeted her in his official capacity as chaplain. After that, he'd sought her company for intellectual inquiry and hearty laughter. Connie preferred his company to that of other Navy wives, for they had children; she

didn't. They had preoccupations with the island's social life and their husband's promotions; she had a career.

Peter took back her hand, tucking it against his chest as he chided her lightly. "When you start blabbing about fools and paradise, you're encroaching on my territory. But remember the further adage about faith without works being dead, which is highly apropos. I'll swear Washington can't decide to piss or get off the pot these days when it comes to Asia."

"Watch your language," she admonished cheerfully.

"If we would go on and commit to a war, that would be one matter. I think I could come to terms with that, Connie. Maybe I wouldn't be fully comfortable, but I could live with it. But keeping one oar half-in and the other half-out of the water is terrible."

"That's why they call it a war of nerves, I guess."

"It's worse than any war of nerves. Or a war of words, either. There's real shooting and dying going on, both on land and sea. That means Eliot, or anyone else who steams into the South China Sea, is in a lot more danger than if Johnson would go ahead and officially declare war."

"Worse than a war." She memorized the phrase. Now she wished the music would end. Perhaps outside on the balcony would be a good place to clear her head and watch the New Year's fireworks. In here, she felt claustrophobic, felt the tide from the South China Sea encroaching. She inhaled the sharp scent of salt water. Yes, that was it. The Gulf of Tonkin was past Midway, past French Frigate Shoals, past Kaena Point. It

was slipping into the mouth of Pearl Harbor, rounding Widow's Point, lapping right at the banyan whose roots stood in the water by the sea wall on Hospital Point.

Meanwhile, Peter continued to bristle. "All that flak you hear on television about advisers and containment is bullshit. It's dishonest, and it makes me sick. Containment of numbers is the dumbest thing anyone's come up with yet."

"Press policy is what you're so riled up about?"

"That, and the world's general deaf ear to the real story, and the nation's general blind eye to reality, and your particular pose of innocence as well."

"That about covers the territory." She ended the conversation abruptly. "Goodnight, Peter. Happy New Year."

Apparently he knew when to back off. "Goodnight, Connie. See you in the morning. I'll be down to watch the Pineapple Fleet head west."

"And give them your blessing?" she asked arching her eyebrows to imply the larger question.

"I don't know . . . it's going to be hard this time. I think 1965 is going to be a difficult year for all of us to keep the faith."

She watched him trudge off in the direction of the bar. Trudge wasn't accurate. Even slightly drunk, Peter moved with precision. All his gestures were clean cut, never draggy or effeminate. He had a sharp well-defined masculinity about his rangy body that went well with his pressed-and-creased Navy uniform. And she'd always credited him with a sharp sense of

ethics about his calling and his occupation. Until now, he'd never displayed doubt. Like Eliot, Peter never appeared to question that what he was doing as a profession was right. For Eliot, being a naval officer was some sort of constitutional right, the equivalent of Peter's divine right of priesthood.

Outside, the scent of mai-tais from the outdoor bar made a kaleidoscope of smell coupled with the swirling colors of the lanterns' lights. Golden raintree blossoms on the pavilion buffet table circled a tray of chicken livers wrapped in bacon. In the background, ships' generators lulled. Down at Bravo Dock, the nests of destroyers rode at anchor, four to a group, looking content as a flock of gray ducks with heads bobbing up and down. The ships appeared harmless, tethered there in the pewter-colored water. But Connie sensed danger . . . the South China Sea was headed this way, rising silently in the guise of the warm Polynesian tide.

She shook off a wrinkle of depression, adjusted the thin straps of her blue dress, and hurried up the outside stairs to the balcony. As usual, she was dressed simply and elegantly, a trick she'd learned from the costume mistresses of various ballet companies. She let her tall, thin body move freely beneath chiffons and the straight-cut lines of chemises. Tonight she wore only a hint of glitter in the rhinestone hairband holding the chignon of dark hair back from her face. Her makeup was subtle, too, with sapphire blue eyeliner and mascara making the blue of her eyes as dark as the night sky.

Worry traveled with her up the steps. She couldn't rise above this tide. Why must people tell her things she didn't want to hear? Wasn't it bad enough to go home alone because of some drunken sailor? She took the last two steps together, pointing her toes in the high-heeled pumps as nimbly as if she'd had on the more familiar toe shoes. Ah, this height was better. From here she could watch the ships with their mast lights blinking and glowing like little individual broadcasting stations. A gray-green fluorescent glow bathed the mountains which rose behind downtown Honolulu. Ridges of light up and down the valley of nearby Aiea glimmered like crystal prisms. The dark triangle near the top of the mountains was the heiau--the little Hawaiian park where sacred native healing herbs and pine trees grew. On the downhill slope, halfway to the sea, stood the pretty pink floodlit buildings of Tripler, the biggest military hospital in the Pacific.

Soon the fireworks would explode to her left, over West Loch, which was sandy and silty and good only for ammunition storage. Beyond that, Pearl City lay along the shoreline, and further still, the upland stretch of pineapple plantations. The horizon stopped abruptly at the mountain range rising behind Schofield Barracks. Closer at hand, a few sailboat masts were visible near the Ford Island ferry ramp. In the channel, the Dixie was anchored out.

Peter's voice came from behind her, along with his footsteps on the balcony stairs. "So fill me in on this character that causes all the grief--Hymie."

Connie was startled for a moment that Peter had pursued her. Yet there was plenty of cool air, dark, and distance between them, and Hymie made a fine third party for discussion. "Hymie? The guy defies accurate description. Suffice it to say I blame that seaman for my lack of domestic life in the past few months. Eliot and I haven't eaten a supper, or spent an evening together, without hearing about, or seeing about, or tending to Hymie Tongarora. Even at the wetting-down party for Eliot's new stripe, there was a commotion. He had to cease being guest of honor and hustle off to retrieve Hymie from the brig. Now as deployment gets closer, there are more assorted ills and offenses. I don't think I'll ever--" She broke off, truly embarrassed. She bit her lip, realizing she had almost blurted, 'I don't think I'll ever get pregnant.' Briskly she changed the subject. "What time is it? How long til the fireworks?"

"Ought to start any time now. About three more minutes until we welcome the year of the dragon." He slouched against the column between them, his voice despondent. "Let's just hope when this dragon breathes fire, we aren't all consumed."

She raised her hand defensively.

"Okay, okay," he grinned. "Just remember, you heard it here first."

She didn't want proclamations of dragons, and she didn't like Peter playing the role of prophet. It was bad enough to feel the South China Sea rising. And feel Eliot departing. And feel another birthday approaching. She would turn twenty-eight while Eliot was away this cruise. Another year without a baby.

The first explosion of color in the sky brought her back to the moment. A thud and boom lifted a tracer shell into the air. The shots came directly from the back of Ford Island, the side the tourists weren't permitted to view. There, discreetly out of sight, the hulk of the battleship Utah rested on its side. No one toured the far side of Ford Island, so no one had put up a historical marker, or a memorial, or bothered to bury the Utah's remains. It just sat there, grimy, rusty, neglected and forgotten, while on the front side of Ford Island, the flag was raised publicly every morning over the Arizona and taps played every evening and a constant flock of politicians trailed out in little boats, tossed leis, and made speeches. Now, from over the unseen, unburied other battleship hulk, a cascade of sparkling fireballs rose. White and green sparks broke into a frenzy of crackling colors, then drifted smokily into the navy blue waters.

"Look down there at the Campbell," said Peter. "I believe the famous Hymie is getting up quite a crowd."

Connie lowered her gaze from the gunpowder stars and focused on the pier. The USS Campbell, berthed inboard with the other 2100 ton destroyer-escorts, was less than a block away. A crowd of uniforms milled on the dock, while another group hustled about on the bow. The confusion seemed most intense near the base of the red-blinking radar mast. She strained to make a pattern of the shouting and running.

Peter asked, "Where did this troublemaker get a name like Hymie? Is he Jewish?"

"His real name is Hymanez, but he's of unspecified ethnic background. Some of his shipmates call him Jim-inez with a J. Some pronounce it Hy-manez. Hymie is the compromise. No one can pronounce his last name, either. It's too long and too Samoan."

"Quite a fellow, linguistically."

"And a legend in his own time in the Seventh Fleet. Seems he gets transferred into the care and keeping of new and unknowing skippers as fast and often as regulations allow."

"And Eliot's luck of the draw gives him Hymie to cope with this tour of duty."

"Eliot and Hymie transferred to the Campbell the same week. It should be a real contest to see who outlasts whom, or which one kills the other."

Peter laughed boisterously. "Hell, I say they're made for each other. Wild Eliot Hopkins in charge of wild animal Hymie."

She laughed along with priest. It was goodnatured ribbing. Peter wasn't the first to tag Eliot's bold tactics with brash terminology. "You're wrong in one respect about them being alike. Hymie hates to go to sea and will go to inordinate lengths to avoid it."

"Unlike Eliot--" He hesitated.

"Who can't wait," she finished. She accepted the truth. Why deny it? "Eliot thinks the most beautiful words in the English language are, 'Now set the sea and anchor detail. Make all preparations for getting underway.'"

"No fault of his own, Connie. He was born for this kind of life. Besides, he doesn't know any better after drawing seven straight years of sea duty. He's ambitious and there's nothing wrong with that. Besides, ringknockers are all alike."

She didn't need to defend Eliot's Naval Academy credentials. It was sufficient to admit she loved her husband, and he loved the Navy. It was that way when they married; things weren't likely to change. Deftly, she turned the conversation back to the scene before them. "Last year, Hymie poured sugar into the fuel lines of a minesweeper to avoid touring the western Pacific."

"College kids on the mainland are developing the same attitude. One of my friends in Berkeley writes that every day outside the ROTC recruiting office, someone puts up a poster that says, 'Hell no, we won't go.'"

"Hymie's sentiments exactly. He's just not as literary."

"Shall we go down on the dock and get a ringside seat for the action?"

"I'll pass. Go ahead, though. Eliot would probably be glad for your presence."

It was all the invitation Peter needed. He obviously loved any excuse to get in on the perceived action. "See you in the morning, then." He took the staircase three steps at a time and strode away into the darkness.

Connie continued to watch from the balcony. One thing about the officer's club which had risen from the ashes of the old burned-out building, it had a lovely view of Pearl Harbor.

She could watch the laundry trucks scurrying up and down the piers, and the mobile canteen wagon--the gedunk truck--making its rounds with frozen chocolate milkshakes. The lights were on tonight in the DesDiv hut. Surely something as mighty sounding as the Pineapple Fleet, Flotilla Five, Squadron Twenty-Five, deserved a better headquarters than one run-down quonset hut without air conditioning. The one room shack angled like a sharecropper's cabin with a tin roof. It looked as if it had been hacked in half with chain saws and then tossed on the pier. Dilapidated and ramshackle, it stood like the remains of a beached carp amid the shipyard cranes, traffic cones, and signs to the drydocks.

She tried to assess Eliot's situation with Hymie. Orders might work, she decided, watching the players assemble on the ship's stage. Orders meant a lot to Lt. Commander Eliot Edward Hopkins. He liked giving them. He expected others to follow them, especially when he issued them. He was so good at giving orders, so practiced and smooth, most people obeyed automatically, if they didn't happen to think first. Connie traced her forearm with her ring finger, letting the modest diamond sparkle under the radiance of the cold fluorescence of the harbor lights. Eliot had ordered her to marry him.

"Isn't a proposal usually a question?" she had asked.

"Just say aye, aye, and we'll argue later," he urged.

So he had been doubly surprised when she'd said no. It was the no which later led to a more usual proposal and an ultimate yes. Five and half years ago . . . and not the last time

she'd failed to respond to his orders or said no to him. But on the whole, a good marriage--all the things marriage was supposed to be--except no children. Yet. At first it had been her career in the way, then his. Now her interest in ballet was fading. The discipline was still intact, and the talent honed, but the priority was slipping. In fact, Connie admitted secretly, nearly everything else was in second place to having a baby now. With a sudden, unexpected throb of longing--a true pang of emptiness--she steadied herself on the balcony, the cold radiant light overtaking the lingering smoke wisps in the sky.

Steel looks best in moonlight and battleship gray takes on a warm lustre under tropical stars, she noticed. Everything's softened when bathed in natural water and natural light. She took a deep breath and clutched the balcony rail with both hands, feeling a need to hang on. All that water, all that history, all those millions and millions of square miles of empty ocean . . . she needed an anchor. Quickly she reminded herself she had a home on Hospital Point.

Another anachronism. There was no hospital, and the point was really a peninsula. Hospital Point had only a few breezy old living quarters and Landing C where the mike boats pulled up and took sailors back to the oilers which anchored in the stream. Landing C--more often referred to as Charley Landing--was her favorite destination for early morning hikes before ballet practice. She had a lot of favorite things on Hospital Point. The mixed up mynah bird who trilled at night and hopped about wet and shiny on the dark lawn was her favorite bird. The unknown

Japanese fisherman who rowed silently past the point each morning at six was her favorite fisherman. Pink hibiscus and red ginger and the miniature white poinsettias, tended by Izuki the gardener, were her favorite plants.

And salt water was her favorite element, her true medium. This particular ocean, the Mare Pacifica, was an overflowing silver cup of riches for Connie. She'd always believed herself a child of the earth, born in the prairie and black bottom lands of the Trinity River valley. But the Pacific felt far more like home than Texas ever had. The plowed rows of dark Texas earth were transformed into the tossing waves of seascape, the restless rustle of the blackjacks into the singing of the surf, the cycle of seasons into the alternating pulls of tide to shore. Tied to solid ground, her feet had always danced on firm foundations. Now, on an island, she felt anchored in mid-air. Here, things were ephemeral; it was easy to float above the everchanging and salt-sieved sea. What was scary was to look down. Connie again tightened her hands on the balcony railing, then noticed her knuckles were already white.

Lt. Commander Eliot Eddward Hopkins--it had been Eddward with two d's until he dropped one for pragmatic reasons when entering the Naval Academy--was a member of the closest thing America had to a homegrown aristocracy. Charles River nobility.

Sired out of Boston's Back Bay best. A product of the union of early-arriving Bavarian dynasties, maternal shoe factories mated to paternal cloth mills upstream along the Charles. For four generations, the Hopkins family had sent daughters to finishing schools and the boys to military prep schools. Most of the men then went to suitable small New England private colleges and became lawyers and merchant chiefs. But with Eliot, something in the gene pool culminated. He took to military life as if he were predestined.

He went off to the Naval Academy as a plebe, already planning to be an admiral. The discipline at Annapolis took no toll on him. Instead, it initiated a control Eliot thrived on. He loved the Academy, he loved the training ships, he loved his engineering degree, and his ensign's hat. He drew a first sea duty station at Norfolk and he loved this, too. He loved the Sixth Fleet and six months in the Mediterranean. Then, equally, he loved Long Beach and ten months in the Pacific. He loved the Navy more than food and drink, more than personal comfort or ambition, more than his wife, and if he and Connie ever created one, would probably love the Navy more than his family. If it should come to the bottom line, he loved the Navy more than his life, for it was his life.

Most of his close friends knew these things about Eliot, and he was not above admitting them to himself. Others could see the evidence. He missed meals without complaint, stood midwatches as if enjoying himself, and grumbled about paperwork and administrative inspections only when not at sea. Connie even

understood the part about loving the Navy more than his wife. And Eliot suspected that she, along with Father Trevalino, also understood the final part, that there were worse things than dying for one's country. The part Eliot tried not to admit to himself was that, in his secret soul, he was as sensitive to ethical rights and wrongs as his shoe-and-cloth forebearers had been oblivious. But he kept his idealism hidden behind a kind of bluff, energetic exterior that marked him as a comer in this man's navy.

Eliot Edward Hopkins, in his current job as commanding officer of a naval vessel, also liked being obeyed without question.

Thus, at fourteen minutes past midnight of January 1, 1965, Eliot confronted Hymie Tongarora. Eliot stood with feet planted firmly apart on the bow of the Campbell. He addressed his remarks upward toward the radar mast behind Mount Fifty-two. "Come down from there right now, Seaman Tongarora. And that's an order, mister!"

The recipient of the order gave no evidence of hearing. Hymie hung there like a floppy rag doll, head down, eyes closed, arms askew. Apparently he had lashed himself to the mast with his belt, and this, along with his feet tucked around the mast spikes, was keeping him semi-upright. His big body swayed languidly in the soft tradewind, arms flopping against the trouser leg of his white uniform. Occasionally he raised a hand to salute the top of the mast. In his left hand he clutched a large butcher knife.

Eliot called a technical conference to get the power turned off and avoid electrocuting the oblivious victim. Father Trevalino strolled up to the dock edge. Nonchalantly, he called across, "I see you're staging your own late night fireworks, Captain Hopkins."

"Get on board this tin can and offer aid and comfort, padre," called back Eliot. "And be damned quick about it."

Peter crossed the quarterdeck and took a position on the bow by the lifelines. He looked upward and crossed his arms. "What do you want me to do, commander?"

"Help me figure out a way to keep him from taking a real fall from grace."

"Shall I pray for his soul?"

"Pray he doesn't splatter his goddamned guts on my fresh scrubbed decks," snapped Eliot. He glanced at Peter, with whom he had shared more than one tense situation on more than one ocean. "To be honest, I'd like to know if you have any ideas for getting his ass down from there. Worry about his soul later."

Peter shook his head. "Maybe the tapa head crane from the drydock has a boom long enough to swing over here and pluck him off."

"Or maybe he'll just fly down and light on the deck with the greatest of ease." Eliot paced back and forth beneath the swaying mast. "The whole fleet's trying to beat it out of port in the morning and I've got this ape swinging through the mast tops." He stopped and shouted upward, "Hymie! Sober up, you stupid s.o.b. Hey, don't touch that radar mast--it'll fry you."

"You want me to go up and get him?" asked Peter.

"Hell, no. He's got a knife big enough to stick hogs at a rendering. I don't want you bleeding on my deck, too."

"In that case, do you want me to hold your coat?"

"Get thee behind me, Father Trevalino."

Eliot paced and Peter lapsed into silence for a moment.

"You got any whiskey aboard, Eliot?"

Eliot shot a disapproving glance at the priest. "Didn't you get enough at the O Club?"

"Now that you mention it, no. But it's not for me. My idea is we fetch a flask up to this fairhaired lad and let him finish drinking himself into a coma. Then we can haul him down with spilling any gore on your beautiful decks."

Eliot crossed his arms, pondering. "We're not running a damned wine mess here. Oh, all right. Go see what you can come up with--but don't tell me where you find the stuff."

Within five minutes the power to the radar mast had been secured, plus Peter Trevalino was back with a silver hip flask full of scotch. Good scotch, assessed Eliot, taking a whiff. He rigged a basket and rope pulley and put his left foot on the lowest spike.

Peter laid a hand on his shoulder. "You aren't going to send your deck division officer up to tackle this chore? Ensigns are expendable, Eliot. You're presumably not."

"Hymie's a blot on my record."

"Then go in peace, my son," Peter chuckled. "He's your cross to bear."

After a startled moment, Eliot laughed, too. Then he told everyone to stand back. "Make way," he ordered, and then did what he liked best--took over the whole show.

The climb was exhilarating although normally Eliot didn't like heights. The ship, so gentle in undulation at sea level, seemed to sway raggedly the higher he went. At thirty feet up, it was like clinging to a pole-vaulting rod as it attempted to whipsaw. His shoes still had wax from the dance floor and he slipped twice on the metal studs that formed the mast spikes. What a way to start the new year--nowhere to go from this particular point but down. Well, the view was fantastic with the destroyers lined up smartly along the pier and the supply docks stolid to the north and beyond them the submarines bobbing in their pens.

He got within reach of Hymie's feet. "Hey, buddy, listen up. The party's over."

No answer. No response at all. Oh hell, the kid's dead, thought Eliot. He grasped the mast with one arm and grabbed Hymie's ankle with the other. No, he's still warm. Woops--and kicking. There was a reflexive shudder through Hymie's body and then a long fluttering sound. Eliot grinned. Snoring! All that was wrong with Hymanez Tongarora was that he was asleep.

Eliot spoke in soft tones, trying to get a paternal concern into his voice. "Now, Hymie, I'm gonna tuck you in. You just keep resting. That's what you're good at." Deftly, Eliot worked his hand up to Hymie's thigh and relieved him of the large knife with the horn handle. He called down, "Rig a sling and send it

up. We'll evacuate this sailor to sickbay." That was the public part of Eliot's plan. He also intended to shackle Hymie in handcuffs and post a guard. This was one sailor who was going to Westpac in the morning, like it or not.

The sling was not the tricky part. Getting Hymie detached from the mast and onto the sling--instead of dropping him straight down forty feet onto the deck--was quite a chore. In the end, it took Peter and Eliot together, plus the deck division lieutenant and two crewmen.

Hymie woke up near the end of the spectacle and demanded to know when the fireworks would begin.

"The show's over," Eliot asserted, "and you were damned near one of the roman candles."

Hymie cursed mightily that he'd missed the fireworks. "That's why I went up the mast," he mumbled. "To get a better view."

"Not to worry, Hymie my boy. You're going to have a ringside seat at your own private fireworks show tomorrow," Peter suggested.

"Gee, thanks guys," said Hymie docilely and lapsed back into snoring.

Hymie was trundled away. Eliot and Peter stood on the quarterdeck. Father Trevalino gave his approval. "Good job, Captain Hopkins. Ten points on your rating sheet."

Eliot flexed his shoulders. Technically Peter outranked him, a grade in service and about seven years in age. He gave a half salute. "Thanks, padre."

"Reminds me of the time we stripped down to our skivvies and went over the side of a liberty boat in Buckner Bay to untangle the prop."

Eliot grinned with the open respect and affection that came from such shared experiences. When the chips were down, Peter was a good man to crew with. "Yeah, sea snakes and all. The crew didn't expect to see either of us again."

"Shall we saunter back to the O Club and raise to toast to another successful outing?"

Eliot glanced at his watch. After two. He wanted to go home. He wanted Connie. Four hours from now he had to be back on the bridge. Spending his last hours getting drunk with the chaplain would make for good camaraderie but lousy marriage. For a moment he thought he saw a twinge of regret in Peter Trevalino's face. Yeah, at times like these, it must be hard not to have anyone to leave behind. "I'll have to take a rain check, Peter."

"Doesn't rain in the islands."

"A mauka shower check, then. Catch you on the flip side of this cruise, when we get back." Return dates were highly indefinite.

Peter filled in the blank. "Whenever." He slapped Eliot's shoulder in a hale and hearty farewell. "Take care, Eliot." Peter turned away and walked toward the darkness, head down.

Connie heard Eliot come in. She didn't stir. He showered and slipped into the sheets beside her and was asleep in less than thirty seconds. At four, he began to toss. At four-thirty he was mumbling in his sleep, snatches of cursing at Hymie and epithets to unknown ensigns ending with sharp retorts, "I've got the conn." He never awoke, yet it seemed he never slept. He did not appear to be dreaming, merely forever on duty.

At five minutes before five in the morning, she raised on one elbow and assessed the darkened world through the window slats. The January night was cooler than usual for leeward Oahu, with enough chill to call for a light blanket. As she reached for the spread, goosebumps of nervousness sprouted along her neck. The trades were blowing in spurts, playing tag in the banyan branches. In the dim lights from across the channel, she could watch the great-limbed banyan twist slowly. She loved that arthritic old tree, its gnarled knees sunk in the silt of the shallow harbor. The limbs hung heavy, barely mobile, its branches cloistered and monastery gray, while dark blisters of grass grew on its feet. The mynah bird lived in the banyan during the day, a mixed up bird who only sang at night. He would hop about, trilling, on her lawn in the dark and depart with the daylight. Sometimes, standing at a window, she caught glimpses of his flight, shine-wet feathers gleaming in the black light of the channel's waters. She listened. The mynah was not singing tonight.

She was fully awake now, and wanted to awaken Eliot. His kind of sleep assuredly wasn't rest. Yet she hesitated. There

was something so final in facing a day of departure. She hated to make it come prematurely. So she waited, awake and nervous as a surgical patient who hadn't had her tranquilizer yet. Why couldn't she master the waiting game? Or at least get better at it. Time and tide waited for no man—wasn't that the cliché? But women waited plenty, and military wives waited practically all the time. Waiting to say goodbye. That was a paradox. Maybe it would never get any easier. This morning it gave her the sensation of standing on a diving board and peering into a pit of dark water. She was unsure whether she knew how to swim.

The hairs on her forearms danced upright in the breeze. She tugged the sheet upward around her naked body. With the pull of the percale, Eliot awoke instantly and fully. The touch of the sheet had been no more than a brushstroke of material across his shoulder, but he blinked. His arms flailed and he sat bolt upright like a jack-in-the-box. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"Easy, Eliot. I'm chilly. That's all." She adjusted the sheet across the curve of her waist and shoulder and eased back down in the bed beside him.

There was a faint green glow of dimness outside the window now. She could see the silhouette of tendons knotted in his shoulders. In an automatic motion of defining his surroundings, he reached for his watch. The luminous numbers were creeping close to ten minutes after five. He propped the watch face up on the nightstand, rolled back supine, arms behind his head.

"About time."

Yes, this whole morning--their whole life together--was about time. "When do you need to be back on board the Campbell?"

"Soon."

"Naturally."

His hand came across the top of the sheet and rested on her thigh. It was a nonpossessive, gentle motion, the gesture of a man comfortable with his surroundings and partner.

She turned to him readily. This, too, was part of the ritual of goodbye. Mentally she rehearsed. It always started bawdy and ended just short of tears. It was a prearranged game plan to ease the panic. She didn't want to miss her cue.

Eliot began the routine. "What do you think is the hardest part of being separated?"

That was the ribald part, calling for her to demonstrate, calling for more jokes about getting things straight between them. This time, she didn't feel like the game. "I'll miss you."

"Connie--" He paused and spoke her name again, as if suddenly remembering it. "Connie, will you be all right this time?"

If she answered without thinking, "Of course," it wouldn't be boasting. The past proved her point. Yes, she'd be all right. All right as in fine. All right as in okay. Not all right as in everything's as it should be.

When she didn't answer, Eliot's hand went to his chin. He rubbed beard stubble and frowned, as if hating to be beset with

worries before being clean shaven. "This could be a long deployment."

"You've been gone before." Understatement. She felt silly.

"It always means change," he noted offhandedly.

More understatement. Change didn't have to be colossal to be inevitable. At the end of six, eight, ten months apart, they were strangers to one another's touch, to each other's everyday routines, to plans and dreams.

"We've done it before," she offered. There were no guilt-edged guarantees in this life. "Do you have reason to believe this time will be different?" Suddenly she didn't want that point-blank question answered. She supplied chatter to fill the silence. "Relax, darling. I'm no Hymie. I'm not the type to lash myself to the mast--or jump ship."

She could feel the tension ripple his arm and then cascade through his taut body. He shrugged. Almost casually he remarked, "Well, if you ever get to the point you've had enough. . . ." His baritone, so calm and self-assured, drifted away like surf-foam sliding down through the pebbles on a rocky beach.

Enough what? "Eliot, you're not the type for premonitions. Are you borrowing trouble?"

He laughed, "Me borrow trouble? Hell, no. With that rusty-bucket Campbell, I've got all the crap I can say grace over." He leaned toward her and embraced her protectively, tilting her chin, enforcing the merriment of his tone. "I sure don't need any extra portion of Murphy's Law on my plate."

She laughed perfunctorily and responded to his embrace with a small peck of a kiss. His jaw took the juttied thrust of deep concentration. "What is it, Eliot? What do you mean about the point of having had enough?"

"Only that you are the one who has to say when that is. You're the only one who can decide how long to wait." His arms locked her shoulders and his chest made a shield. No more was said. The breath he blew in her ear was warm and playful. "Hey, I didn't mean to carry on like some jackass. You'll be fine--and rest assured this is one sailor boy who intends to end up right where he started this cruise--in bed with you."

His voice had the twang reserved for concluding conversations. She had a fleeting moment of uncertainty. Should she offer to cook breakfast? All she ever wanted was coffee. Eliot could eat and go to sea with the best of 'em, knowing he'd be hanging over the rail as the ship cleared the channel anyway. Thoroughly distracted, she asked, "Are you hungry?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, Eliot, it's really morning. I didn't think it would come." She burrowed against him, shielding her eyes from the luminous watch dial. Always the hurry! If she wanted to hold her husband in her arms, feel his lips on her breasts, caress the hollow of his spine, she'd have to hurry. The mynah bird screeched and flew past the window, a sure sign daylight had broken. She wedged tighter against Eliot's strength, burrowing for security and heat.

After that he said little. They made love with a light touch, with private jokes, with whispered assurances--and one eye on the clock. The sun burst into the room through the half open blinds. The light was bold, casting a glare over the pale green walls and teakwood floor. She closed her eyes against the light, letting the warmth, instead, remain like a touch of suede.

Sex was good. Not great. Eliot sneezed, jolting them both into a spasm of ending too soon. She curled deeper into the sheets. The warm touch of his lips against her cheek was cooling. The heat and wetness where his tongue had licked her nipples turned dry and cold. The pressure where his head had lain across her belly evaporated. The morning gusts of trades spread more talcum-powder floral pollen through the screens on the windows. Eliot sneezed again and apologized.

She touched his cheek. He jumped, a sure sign he was already far away. Sex had been a narcotic to keep time at bay. It had worn off. The feel of the sheet, the dampness and musk smell, sustained her a moment longer. "I love you, Eliot."

"I love you, too, darling."

She did not doubt him. So it was doubly shocking to hear herself suddenly sobbing.

She didn't mean to weep--was not the crying kind. But some reservoir of unsuspected tears filled and brimmed. Shocked, she heard the babble. A sob, a kiss, a mumble, "Leave me with a baby, Eliot. Oh, this time, please leave me with a baby." Instantly her eyes dried. She felt humiliated. It had come out so unbidden--and so clearly.

He lowered his head, nuzzled into her shoulder until the hurt outweighed the embrace. No hurry. Deliberate and sure. Careful, even. Tenderness and the requisite holding and touching. All the right words, while the rest went unsaid.

Planes from the carriers Iwo Jima and Bonne Homme Richard circled overhead, the tradewinds tossed the palms up and down like feather fans, and the Pineapple Fleet put out to sea as scheduled on New Year's Day.

And it rained. Briefly. A shower, more mist than drizzle, blew down from the cloudy mountaintops and drifted across Pearl, blotting out the harbor in sections before passing out to sea and disintegrating in the larger body of water. Connie liked these frequent showers; they acted as short sips of refreshment from the constant sunshine. KULA's weather forecast seldom changed from "Trades at thirty-two miles an hour, with mauka showers moving makai." She invariably turned on the radio just to hear the invariable report.

She moved under the overhang of the Flotfive building where she could remain partially out of the rain while dispensing with her obligations. Her side of the command performance called for her to perform certain rituals as the "old man's old lady." The obligations were well defined by a century of tradition. As long as Eliot was in command at sea, she was, by longstanding dictum, in charge on shore. Assorted wives, girlfriends,

children, and mistresses had to be kept informed, comforted, kidded, and cajoled.

It was not a duty Connie thought she'd be good at. Love for her fellow man or woman seldom overflowed in her heart, much less made it past her sleek and confident exterior public shield. This morning was more ordeal than ordination in her role as high priestess. She could deal with crying children and flower petals strewn around her neck and rain pelting her yellow sundress. But she wasn't sure of her ability to deal with the other wardroom wives in anything approaching an orderly manner. She glanced about, half looking for Peter Trevalino. A chaplain would be better at this--especially one with a psychology degree from the University of California. Peter liked people, or seemed to.

Most of the men were aboard the ships of the task force by now, but a cluster of recalcitrant sailors remained lapping up the last frozen chocolate shakes from the canteen truck. The local laundry truck driver was circling about mournfully with stacks of brown-paper-wrapped shirts in his hands, hoping to dispense the shirts and collect the fees rather than be stuck for months. The CincPacFit band arrived in a rickety blue bus. The band members wore matching yellow vinyl ponchos. Most shielded the clarinets, tubas, and piccolos beneath the rainsuits, giving the appearance of a woeful group of pregnant males.

Eliot was already on the bridge of the Campbell. She could make out his square shoulders, the punctuating chop of his hand, and the accompanying decisive nod of his head. Around

her, wedged in clumps under the semi-dry overhang of flotilla headquarters, goodbyes were in various stages of recitation. A flurry of last minute promises vied with recantations of promises made the night before. She tried not to listen. The band formed up, water dripping from hats onto music scores, and manfully tried a military march. The smell of diesel and tropical drizzle mixed together creating an odor so heavily florid it was hard to breathe.

The arrival of the executive officer's wife, Marge, was a distraction Connie didn't need. Marge's own exec style was brusque and overly familiar. Her "Hi-ya toots," accompanied by a thrust of the elbow in Connie's ribs, was typically cheery and typically grating.

"Hello, Marge. Wedge in here if you can. It's the only dry spot left."

The invitation, made in good faith, was easier extended than accomplished. Marge was a large woman, big-boned, big-mouthed, big-hearted, but all hidden under a demeanor Connie could only classify as tough. Marge was mid-forties, a Navy wife veteran of four continents and three wars. Perhaps she'd earned her sailor's vocabulary and swagger. But to Connie, Marge epitomized all the worst traits a military career could reflect onto a spouse. Marge's polyester pants and purple eyeliner were merely annoying--way down on the list of faults and easily forgiven.

"More like a train station than a port," decided Marge. She launched a recitation about train stations during embarkation days of the Korean War.

Connie listened, there being no way to avoid it. Marge's voice carried up and down the pier like a ship's foghorn. Rain began in earnest. The commotion, chatter, music, and groaning engines seemed engaged in a struggle. Only one would win out and be permitted to leave. There seemed a calliope sound awash in the air as waves of goodbyes and the waves of the harbor sloshed against each other. Ships and the sea in a mortal embrace, thought Connie, and immediately banished the idea. Rain changed from a funereal beat to ragtime.

Glancing at her watch, reminiscent of the way Eliot had peered at his an hour ago, Connie realized she needed to make the rounds. Marge, with her mother-hen instincts would probably know where the other wardroom wives were. For a moment Connie wondered if Marge's husband, Charlie, played a similar role for Eliot aboard the Campbell. Charlie was a mustang, an enlisted man who'd fleted up late in his career to become an officer. Now he was a forty-four year old lieutenant, serving as executive officer. Eliot had nothing but good words for Charlie--soft spoken, competent, experienced. Maybe Charlie and Marge balanced in some way, she the outspoken complement to his gentler manner. Connie asked, "Marge, have you seen any of the others? Trio? Frauncine? Or the new chief's wife?"

"Trio's on the other side of the shack, sitting in her car like some queen of Sheba. Too high and mighty to raise

her ass out of the velour seats of that new Ford." Marge wrinkled her nose. "Or maybe she's conserving her energy. Maybe she'd melt in the rain--like little black Sambo." The distorted ethnic joke charmed Marge and she let out a gleeful trill.

It always amazed Connie that Marge, who had once been Marge Arnzewski and a product of Chicago's Polish ghetto, had so little sympathy for other minorities. But even in Hawaii, even with the decade's consciousness-raising campaign in full swing, Marge seemed oblivious. For Connie, there was no problem about the Campbell's black Lt(j.g.) and his wife. Trio and Abner Kroll had the qualities Connie always sought in friends. Abner was the hardworking Operations officer for Eliot. Trio was the hardworking graduate student at the Manoa campus of the University, trying to finish her master's in political science. Somewhere in her mind, rather vaguely but consciously, Connie realized they were black. But it made so little impression on her, she was constantly surprised by references made by Abner and other members of the wardroom. Abner had a wry good humor about the situation, calling himself "the duly appointed minority quota j.g." of the ship. Trio was tolerant, pleasant, and studious. They lived off-base in civilian housing in one of Honolulu's mixed neighborhoods, an arrangement that intrigued Connie when she'd paid her official call on their household.

Now, as Connie went to find Trio, Marge's voice cut in. "Hey, you leaving already?"

"No, I'll be back in a minute."

"Might as well go home, all of us. This trip it's going to be more than out of sight, out of mind. They'll be one hell of a long time gone."

"Poor choice of words," hinted Connie.

"Long time gone," Marge repeated in a hoarse chant. "I for one ain't wastin' no extra tears."

As far as Connie could tell, the tirade issued from a woman just as vulnerable to loneliness and frustration as any other military wife. Yet confronting Marge would only intensify the rage. Connie studied the gray mist. It descended like a ghostly aura over the oblong ship silhouettes. Fog silently ate the spires of the turning radar masts, then chewed on the fluttering signal flags.

"I'm going to quit my job this cruise," offered Marge.

"What? Why?" Connie didn't expect an answer. In fact, she knew the threat was groundless. Apparently there was comfort for Marge in threatening. It fit her general drill-sergeant demeanor.

Marge grinned, wiped her big fists on the red-checked polyester slacks and hinted, "Might take up a new line of work that pays better than slaving at the exchange."

Absent-mindedly, Connie asked, "And what's that?"

"Whoring. Pays good. Steady work. Meet interesting people."

"I think you better stick to being cashier at Sub Base."

"I'm tired of being a homebody Mom-and-Apple-Pie type."

"Since when were you ever that?" The minute she said it, Connie knew she'd gone too far.

Now Marge turned red in the face and set about defending her virtues. "My four boys get fed. They got clean underwear. They do their homework." She whined defensively, crisscrossing ample arms across her ample chest for emphasis. The flowered scoop neck overblouse hung unattractively off one shoulder.

Connie was unsure how to deal with this apparition of flesh and unhappiness. Where was Father Trevalino when he could be of some use? She'd turn Marge over to his amazing grace with amazing speed. Feeling bereft and on her own, Connie tried vainly to remember basic psychology. Behind the bluff and bluster was a fearful woman. "Oh, Marge, you know you'll miss Charlie. We all will."

"Not likely. What's to miss? Extra laundry? The old song-and-dance sex act? Charley's so tired he can't get it up half the time. Nope, I look at these months as a vacation. And if it comes to a shooting war, which, in my humble opinion, is entirely possible, then so much the--"

"Let's take your boys to the beach soon. I'll talk to you next week," promised Connie, edging away.

She was about to go in search of Trio when Campbell's newest, youngest, and flakiest wardroom wife made a grand entrance. Frauncine Newby appeared in three inch spike heels, a Shaheen silk cheong-sam and a bubble umbrella. Connie hoped she didn't actually shake her head in dismay. Frauncine was the comic relief wife of the ship's newest, youngest, and flakiest

ensign, Marcus Markwell Newby. The personalities and arrival of this pair had impressed the old hands aboard the Campbell as something out of Laurel and Hardy Go to Sea. When Marcus Markwell reported for duty, he did so in tennis shoes. He had cut his feet on coral while swimming during his first day in the islands. With his unfortunate set of double names, he was hastily dubbed Mark-Mark and targeted as the mark for many jokes. Frauncine, establishing herself amid luxury in a highrise condo in Waikiki, was nicknamed Frou-Frou. Together Mark-Mark and Frou-Frou could be counted on for unwitting entertainment. Connie and Eliot could not agree whether the couple was just plain dumb--Eliot's opinion--or simply had too much money to care that they were ridiculous--Connie's view.

In any event, Ensign and Mrs. Marcus Markwell Newby were currently up to their usual antics. Arriving late, Mark-Mark, holding his cap under one arm and using his other hand to shield his bare head, raced for the gangway. He splashed through puddles and clipped one group of well-wishers, sending a small boy flat on his back.

Frauncine, although she had confided to Connie that she had started life as plain old Frances, tottered close to the overhanging roof. Encased in her clear plastic bubble, she announced in exaggerated exasperation, "Well, I never saw such rain! I thought the sun was 'sposed to shine constantly in Hawaii!"

"Constantly? As in twenty-four hours a day?" baited Marge.

Frou-Frou didn't realize she was being teased. "I am drowned, absolutely, honestly, and completely drowned." She

pouted shiny pink lips while pancake makeup drizzled at the hairline of her professionally blonde hair.

In truth, Frauncine seemed bewildered by the rain, yet Connie wasn't sure what obligations such bewilderment entailed. Along with being new to the islands and new to the Navy, Frauncine was still a new bride. Connie watched the young woman's carefully applied makeup turn into a puddle on the satin collar of the expensive cheong-sam. Patience. That was probably the best thing to offer this child. From the one time Connie and Eliot had entertained Frauncine and Marcus, Connie had deduced the couple possessed a fat checkbook and slim brainpower. It seemed to have something to do with the fact that Frauncine's father sold the most farm implements in all of Iowa and that doting daddy lavished the proceeds on his only daughter. Frou-Frou had clothes from the Marshall Field's catalog, summers at the Elizabeth Arden spa in Arizona, and a past as Iowa's foremost debutante at the 1963 Des Moines "Farmer-Stockman Renaissance Ball." It was a past she had not yet tired of describing in detail.

Although no one had inquired, Frauncine announced, "I didn't want to come. Mark made me."

Marge began snickering. "You telling us about your sex life now, honey?"

Frauncine's bewilderment increased. "Well, I didn't! That's why we were late. We had a frightful argument."

"And then did you have to kiss and make up?" insinuated Marge. She lifted her eyebrows above the purple eyeshadow, showing white creases.

Frou-Frou blushed. "Uh-huh."

"Well, chin up. You won't have to put up with lover boy for a good long while now."

Connie put a stop to the sideshow. "Enough, Marge." To Francine, she offered a smile and an invitation to potluck supper one night soon. A long separation was hard on even the most solid of marriages. If Francine had trepidations about showing up this morning in January, she might not be around to wave hello come next fall.

The band switched from military music to Hawaiian. Connie ignored the rain and went to find Trio's parked car, leaving Francine hunched beneath the protective bubble and Marge talking a mile a minute as if determined to burst the cocoon.

Connie rapped on the window of the new Ford. Trio rubbed a space in the steamed-over window, smiled, and Connie trotted around and climbed in the passenger side. Trio asked politely, "Are they gone yet?"

Shaking her head 'no,' Connie admitted, "And since it's inevitable, I wish they'd hurry up."

"Hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait--isn't that typical military protocol?" Trio drummed her long fingernails against the leather-wrapped steering wheel. The window began to cloud again.

Now that she was here, Connie had little to say. Trio was an intelligent, alert woman who understood the situation as well as anyone. Today she was dressed in a plain beltless gray shift that made the color of her skin seem lemony. She wore no jewelry or makeup. Her hair was forced back severely, almost in a bun. Somber. Serious. That was Trio.

"I guess," Connie began tentatively, "that you and I will probably be closest of any wives in the wardroom. Marge has a job and her four rowdy boys to keep her busy. Frauncine has the money to fly to Hong Kong when the ship puts in for R and R. That leaves you with your nose in the books and me with my back to the ballet barre."

Trio managed another wan, lopsided smile. "Shall we make a death pact to keep each other from going bonkers? I'll come see you dance and you come drag me out of the library stacks now and then."

"Fair deal." Connie laughingly offered her hand and they solemnly sealed the agreement. "I'd better get back. Do you want to hang out under the awning of the flotfive shack?"

"I'm better off here, I think."

"Maybe so," agreed Connie, climbing out as the drizzle stopped momentarily.

Back around on the port side of the staff buildings, she found a hush in the crowd. The time for the curious public goodbyes was over. She looked toward the bridge of the Campbell and waved. Eliot was there, but he was already functioning in the future. She could make out his tense

features, looking far beyond the scene on the dock, far beyond her.

All right. She wasn't going to do any whimpering on time that already belonged to the Navy. She'd never been one to prolong agony--not after breaking her wrist in a fall from a horse when she was a teenager, not going back to college after her mother died of lung cancer, and not breaking her contract with the national ballet to marry Eliot and move to Long Beach. She stopped short of the fashionable philosophy of 'Never complain, never explain,' but she tried for no second guessing or backward glances.

Still, she watched. The Campbell slid backward with a purring noise like a cat slinking away from a hearth. She felt, as much as saw it slipping, slipping, the ropes coiled like a pile of snakes back onto the dock and slipping, slipping, politely as if beginning a recession. It appeared to go without volition, without will, as if some act of foreknowledge took it seaward. On the pier, the clatter turned to a din of shouts, cries, and the band's final offering, Aloha Oe.

Resolutely Connie stood her ground. Dry eyed she watched the ship back down in the channel. The low-slung hull looked almost fragile. Gathering speed. Gathering gloom. Away . . . away.

She hurried toward her car, planning to change to her tights and leg warmers at the rehearsal hall, then go from there to Ala Moana and see if the oriental shoe repair shop had any concept of resewing toe shoes. From there she'd drive the

opposite direction past Diamond Head lighthouse, maybe take the windy circle drive up to the crater, perhaps eat dinner in Kahala before finally coming home to an empty house.

Halfway through the parking lot, still crowded with people waving and hugging each other--the objects of previous embraces now out of range--she encountered Father Peter Trevalino.

"Dodging the overly amorous ensigns left behind?" he asked.

Connie stopped. She hadn't seen him all morning. Now he materialized out of the fog like an apparition. No, she hadn't been dodging anyone, but she played along. "How did you know?"

"I'm dodging the equally enthusiastic company of Westpac widows."

"Of which I am now a member."

"Somehow you don't threaten me, Connie."

"Ditto, Father."

She was grateful for the easy banter, the shield of sobriety and civility during a hard time. They walked along together to her car. She leaned back with her elbows on the hood of the shiny Malibu, her eyes squinting into the morning sun which now cut through the mist on the Waianaes.

"Want to talk, Connie?"

The offer was made gently and genuinely. She heard it in his voice. She considered. What was it about time and tide waiting for no man? "Sure, I've got time."

For his part, Peter Trevalino found Connie Hopkins his intellectual match. They made an excellent aesthetic pairing, he told himself. She the classical dancer, he the devotee of culture. They made an excellent physical match. She the long-legged, dark-haired beauty and he the rangy, athletic Italian priest. And furthermore and finally, they made a safe pair. She was married, unreachable by convention; he was celibate and unreachable by conviction.

Peter admitted to himself that he was close to perfect as a military chaplain. Physically strong. Slightly daredevil. At home on tossing decks and at ease with command on the bridge. Not confined to wheedling confessions and dispensing mercies, the quality of which were mostly strained, he feared, he'd found far more than a calling in the Navy. And last but not least, as squadron chaplain, he could roam the high seas, more or less at will.

So he found space available on flights to the mainland and established a reputation as a hail-fellow on Congressional VIP jaunts to the far east. He played soccer with flight-deck teams on visiting carriers, swigged black coffee on midwatches during typhoons, and put in a stint with the paratroopers. His conviviality at the O Club was standard operating procedure but he seldom drank to excess. He knew he was famous for one Christmas Eve party at Iwakuni when he drank eight black russians followed by four blue blazers. With chiefs at NCO parties he played darts and drank bourbon and branch. With

innumerable enlisted crews, he'd played softball and chugged beer. But given his preference, Peter Trevalino would prefer to drink champagne in the company of beautiful women--Connie Hopkins in particular. Unlike many priests, he liked women. He liked their company and their looks. He left them alone, yes, but he liked them. He realized that he wasn't perceived as an active threat to either men or women but more as a colleague. For these reasons, he was openly included in the social life of the navy base.

His friendship with Eliot had started two years ago with an accident. Peter, having hitched a ride with a student chopper pilot, ended up ditched in the waters off Midway, Eliot's former duty ship was called upon to perform a rescue. Lt. Eliot Hopkins had taken a motor whaleboat through choppy seas to drag a soggy Father Trevalino from the drink. Together they'd also retrieved a hand and a few other miscellaneous bits of flesh of the student pilot.

Peter's friendship with Eliot predated his acquaintance with Connie, though not by long. Eliot's ship had gone on to Australia, Peter back to his duty station in Pearl Harbor. Later, Father Trevalino graciously appointed himself to meet Connie when she arrived in the islands. Eventually, the three of them, Lt. and Mrs. Hopkins and Father Trevalino, had gone to dinner at the Canon Club on the side of Diamond Head. The qualities Peter had admired in Eliot, he also admired in Connie, the curiously diffident energy, a pride in discipline, tact, and a marvelous sense of humor. Connie also had that rare quality in a

woman--professionalism in her artistic career. He took comfort in her presence and pleasure in her intelligence. And before that particular evening at the Canon Club was over, Peter had enjoyed the feel of taking her in his arms on the terrace dance floor. Later that night, alone in the Makalapa BOQ, Father Trevalino awoke in a cold sweat from a dream of seduction and satisfaction so real it left him shaking.

After that it was hands off. He put distance between himself and Connie until he was sure he could handle it. It was fine to continue his friendship with Eliot although there was a fundamental difference of opinion about the war that wasn't a war. Eliot was on record as admitting he couldn't wait for the war to heat up so he could shoot his beloved guns. Peter, for over a year, had voiced aloud a low down and dirty suspicion that a low down and dirty war was already in full swing. From being on the scene, he had decided it looked like a war: bodies, carnage, mutilation, deprivation, doom, and despair.

So the two men shared an open and acknowledged respect. They also shared an unacknowledged love for the same woman. It was fine for Eliot to admit he loved Connie--it was right and honorable. Wasn't the giving and receiving of a wedding ring a public avowal of personal passion? For the last year, however, the same deep, almost subliminal passion for Connie had existed from Peter, too. At first, when he couldn't avoid thinking about her, he'd yelled in pain. Damn her! This wasn't fair--not now at age thirty-seven when he should be past the vaunted "age of

agony." Hey, god, play fair. Don't torture me now. Don't send me a woman I can't get out of my head, out from under my skin, or out of my heart.

Then he stopped actively avoiding her, only never sought her out. When they met, socially, as was often, he enjoyed her company. He laughed at her jokes at receptions, asked her to dance at Pineapple Fleet balls, as much to watch her grace as to hold her briefly in his arms. He accepted with pleasure the invitation from mutual friends to sail to Molokai for a weekend. This outing had been more than he'd bargained for, with Connie in her swimsuit all golden flesh and long legs and tangle of dark hair and laughing, red lips. He pled seasickness and caught a Coast Guard hop back to Pearl, making the trip half doubled over in pain that the Coast Guard assumed was nausea.

He tried to interest himself in Vatican II, studied the transcripts from Rome, read til his eyes watered. It was not reassuring to find the proceedings putting a new emphasis on man--or woman. Meanwhile, Connie remained distant, total magic to him, the innocently wide eyes flashing silver and sapphire, the texture of her skin as enticing as a rosy apple, the small, highset breasts the temptation to his mouth and soul.

He made a bargain with God. What Peter felt in his loins as lust, he would ignore. What he suspected in his heart as an even deeper tenderness--he dared not call it love--he would not acknowledge. But the bargain was eventually bent, even if not broken. Ignoring a dream was not the same as killing it. Denying love was not the same as losing it. The desire for

Connie Hopkins remained, covering him like leprosy. It repulsed him, but he couldn't cure it.

Finally, in the past month, he was blinded by a new flash of revelation. His need for Connie wasn't going to go away. This came to him in a form of stunning recognition, one of those "Aha!" moments of insight he'd never experienced in theology. After the lightning jolt subsided, he put the acceptance deep into his heart's recess, a personal unopened Pandora's box. He loved Connie. Oh, dear God, why now? Why her?

For her part, she seemed blissfully unaware. For that he was grateful. She smiled at him, she teased him, she called him Pete the Rock. She played softball, center field, and deftly threw him out at second. All the time his stamina was collapsing inward on a black bead of passion that hurt as much as a crucifix. She spread beneath his skin, into his blood vessels, into his marrow, giving him bouts of insomnia, sending him on long, demanding hikes along the spine of the Koolaus. He climbed the Pali cliffs at night, working his way along the jagged edges as he attempted to work his way through the dark night of temptation.

During the past months, a time of battling feelings for Connie and concerns for his future, Father Peter Trevalino began hitching rides on carrier jets. He went up in helicopters, down in submarines, and up-and-over in an experimental hang-glider. He went on every junket jet that touched down at Hickam on its way to anywhere farther away. He spent too many Saturday nights at the bar and too many Sundays off duty.

He assuaged himself that, at least, he was a good actor. No one suspected the true ache he felt for this woman. His best act, however, remained that of a man behind a mask. While the Roman Catholic priest could dispute with learned logic the theology of the matter--desire not acted upon was not a sin--Peter the man could deny nothing.

Where was the comfort of his youth? What had happened to the sustaining tales of his Italian heritage and the desperate ambition of a poor boy to make good in Oakland? There was something to be said for a man who could make a deal and make it stick. That's what he had, as he saw it, a deal with God. Being in love with Connie was a plague and not part of the deal. A man who made good was a good man, he'd always believed. And what made good? Habit, training, and discretion. Now, the words echoed like a litany. A man who made good, who makes good, who made good. Who makes good--God or man?

All during the departure of the Pineapple Fleet this morning, he'd paced himself along the dock, chatting with families. Ritual. Duly observed. Duty. Duly performed. He could envision himself in other days, other places, wearing not a Navy officer's uniform but a black soutane, that severely cut robe with its slightly flared hem and those miserable little black cloth buttons, so innumerable and impossible to fasten. But he wouldn't trade where he was and what he was doing for anywhere, anyplace, that would take him away from Connie.

And now, at last, standing here under drippy skies talking to her, he heard the band swelling into the final

measures of "Aloha Oe." Mercifully, the music further drowned his private swell of emotions. The song ended. There was a sobering moment of silence overridden in a rush of shared embraces, as people on the dock cried and embraced each other. Some forced hilarity and foolish chatter.

For a moment of sheer, pure sin, Peter Trevalino glanced down, self-consciously, at Connie. She looked fragile, with a melancholy in her eyes and a subdued heat in her cheeks. He put his hands on either side of her shoulders as if to square her up. She crumbled slightly inward, flexible and docile under his touch. He suddenly felt tall, hard, spare, the kind of man to lead an army under a flaming banner. He could draw her to him, hold her, kiss her even, and it would all be in the line of duty.

She kissed him instead. Innocently. Fondly, even.

FROM THE DESK OF:

Eliot Edward Hopkins, USN

Yokosuka, Japan

Jan. 24, 1965

Dearest Connie,

So here we are in Yoko for an availability that will keep us moored alongside for another day or two. Then, with more polish than spit, we're underway, unless the weather intervenes to force us into Subic. So far, the whole jaunt's been uneventful, once we got past Midway and Hymie quit threatening to jump ship and swim back to

Pearl. The new Filipino mess boy is learning to make decent coffee and a few dishes besides death curry.

Loved talking to you last night. Good connection. Nippon Phone must have worked on the cable since last cruise. Glad Fu Chu switch still works.

Eliot laid his ball point pen across the top edge of his writing table and folded his hands behind his head. It was always remarkable how little he had to say to the woman he loved. He was a conscientious and willing letter writer, but he really preferred the telephone for long distance conversations. He didn't have much interest in writing about refueling problems. The menu at the officer's mess never changed—roast beef Wellington, spinach souffle, and potatoes au gratin. He tried to think of things that might interest Connie. Ballet wasn't big in Japan and she wasn't into kabuki. Most of what he'd heard of the local dancing scene were reports from his crew of go-go dancers in slit-side brocade doing their gyrations inside cages.

He summoned Connie's image to mind and reminded himself of all the reasons he loved his wife. She laughed easily, could tell a joke without messing up the punch line, read books instead of book reviews. In spite of those credentials, Eliot had the feeling he was missing something key about Connie. Something that might or might not be essential. Damn it, if he was never home to find out--or if only he could just order her to be happy. Maybe that wasn't really his business. Eliot balked.

A lot of things were none of his business, and he granted that another individual's happiness might be on the list.

Transporting this ship to Cam Ranh Bay in a neat and orderly manner was his business. That set his mind to ticking, numbering the days until departure from alongside the repair pier. Next stop: the Gulf of Tonkin. Now, there would be a great place to conduct business.

He put aside the letter and picked up the latest fleet communiques. "Containment by limited means"--whatever that gobbledegook meant--was the topic for Admiral Felt's pep talk to the fleet this week. Well, containment by limited means was going out the window, that much was obvious. After the recent attack on Uncle Sam's air base in South Vietnam, Washington had interpreted the whole of southern Asia as a test of the "will and desire" to defend. Eliot, for one, had both the will and the desire. The urge to get going kept his adrenalin working overtime. But the Air Force was getting most of the action, hitting bridges and oil depots while carefully skirting Haiphong and Hanoi. Still, with just an ounce of luck, the Campbell could find herself doing more than escort duty.

He was relieved of his letter writing and communique reading by a single knock. "Captain Hopkins, sir? We've got some trouble below decks. It's Hymie--I mean Seaman Tongarora, sir."

"On my way." Eliot reached for his garrison cap with one hand and retracted the ball point pen with his other. He opened the compartment.

A white-faced messenger blurted, "Sir, it's Hymie."

"So you said. I thought he'd gone on liberty. What's happened? Local cops already nabbed him? Shore patrol pick him up?"

"No, sir. He made it back to the ship--nearly. You know how icy the gangway is? And how there's a gap between the quarterdeck and the pier pilings and--"

"Jesus H.! Did he go over the side and in the drink?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he still there? Anyone fish him out?" Eliot was moving in high gear, eliciting information as he ran on deck. In his mind, he saw the pitch-black water, cold and serene like at the bottom of a well, and the gently swaying pilings and the steel hulled ship effortlessly crushing Hymie's melon-shaped head in the process.

"We got Hymie over in sickbay, sir. But he's beat up sorta bad. The corpsman's on the beach and the doc ain't on the division ship and--"

"Call the division watch and have them find a doctor--any doctor. Get some medico over here." Eliot executed a sharp right turn to sickbay. A frightened second class seaman held Hymie at bay while trying to wipe his matted hair free of semi-clotted blood. Hymie appeared wet, grimy, cold, and dazed, bleeding and cursing freely. In less than sixty seconds, Eliot had reviewed first aid in his mind, and then reviewed who was aboard who could sew this kid's head up. No one. He reached into the cabinet and took out a suture kit. "Hymie, my boy, I want you to hold still and bite on this tongue depressor." He

stuffed the wooden stick into the sailor's mouth. Hymie rolled his eyes, wild-eyed, and moaned. Eliot turned to the other sailor. "And I want you to sit on your buddy." Eliot dug around and found the sterile field dressing. He put alcohol prep on a swab. "Okay. Everyone ready? Hymie, this may sting a bit."

When the division doctor was finally located and, in due time, summoned to the Campbell's sickbay, he found Hymie resting uncomfortably. Eliot, however, had a rather pleased look on his face.

"Nice job," declared the doctor. "Where'd you learn to sew like that?"

"A couple of summers working on a ranch during my ill-spent youth on dry land. We had a vet who would try anything rather than lose a cow. By forced practice, I became tolerably handy with a needle and thread."

"My compliments to all concerned. However--" The doctor touched his collar device. "By all rights, I'm supposed to be in charge of the Saturday evening embroidery club in these parts." He gave Hymie a combination pain and sleeping shot, then invited Eliot to the O Club for a drink.

"Another time." Eliot declined, remembering his half-written letter to Connie. "Correspondence to catch up." As a courteous afterthought, he asked, "But can I interest you in a cup of coffee in the wardroom before you go?"

"Better for me than cheap booze at this hour," decided the doctor. "You're on, cap'n."

The new Filipino mess boy brought two cups. The men sat down across from each other at the oval table. Eliot picked up a stack of new eight-track tapes the junior officers had brought back from the Yokosuka exchange. "Got a musical preference?" he asked, holding up Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, and Peter, Paul, and Mary as a representative selection. "Wardroom taste runs heavily to Barbra Streisand these days. That or Orange Blossom Special." Getting no response, Eliot plugged the top tape into the player. "Here's a new one. A kid named Liza Minelli. Judy Garland's daughter." The wavering solo reverberated in the small wardroom, the sustained high notes actually wrinkling the green leatherette upholstery of the built-in couch.

Eliot knew it was his prerogative to propose a topic of conversation. Music hadn't interested the doc. When in doubt, talk shop. "So did we pull you off an interesting medical case tonight? Heard we sprung you from temporary additional duty at the base hospital."

"Nothing more exciting than a broken leg and a couple of scalp wounds. Some of our boys were mixing it up with the locals about a peace protest."

"Nuclear carrier coming to town? Or atomic subs? That sort of stuff usually sets the populace off in Yoko."

"They're expanding their horizons, apparently. What had everyone stirred up tonight was Vietnam. Seems Uncle Ho made a peace proposal which Uncle Sam rejected as insincere."

"And this makes the Nips mad?" quizzed Eliot. He knew his history. "There's never been any love lost between any of the parties in this part of the world."

"I know, I know. But, best I could make out in translation, the U.S. of A. is everyone's worst enemy. We're taking the brunt of the beating."

"For what?" Eliot exhaled in disbelief. "For insincerity?"

The doctor lit a cigarette, brushing the smoke away with one hand even as he leaned into it and breathed deeply. "What I want to know is how do you define insincere--that grinning Texan in Washington afraid to say fuck off to some two-bit, third-rate country?"

"Be civil, doc. Besides, if you want to count peace initiatives, we've sent more than a dozen in the last six months."

"How can you send peace initiatives when you're not at war?"

"Why did the chicken cross the road?"

"Why did the little moron sit on a corner with a piece of bread in one hand?"

"Touché."

Eliot raised his coffee cup and laughed. The doctor stubbed out his cigarette and looked at it with distaste. "Lyndon Johnson's been president for thirteen months. And he's managed to get us in two wars, one in Asia and one on the home front. And neither looks winnable to me, no matter how sincere the bastard is."

Stretching his legs out under the table, Eliot leaned back til the chair legs were off the deck. "Vietnam and racial strife. I don't envy the commander-in-chief."

"Yeah, but what scares me is there's no end of trouble the s.o.b. could make if his Boy Scout complex gets out of control. What if he decides to salvage the mess in Malaysia or Singapore?"

"Or Kashmir and Pakistan."

"Or clean up the Indonesian coup d'état. Or the Philippines. You think that Senate guy, Marcos, can defeat Macapagal in the election coming up?"

"Haven't given it much thought," admitted Eliot.

"Either way, I'm glad it's Washington's can of worms and not mine."

Eliot's disdain was direct. "Right. Didn't happen on our watch, eh, buddy?" He hated that mentality and had to work to camouflage it. In the end, Eliot usually got his way. He had an ability to twist peoples' arms and make them like it--or at least conceal their wincing.

The doctor took a last gulp of lukewarm coffee, then rose to leave. "See you around, Captain Hopkins. And if you need my services again, feel free to call. But as a matter of protocol, hold down your urge to operate. Professional courtesy, malpractice suits, bodily harm to subordinates, that sort of thing. They court-martial captains for keel-hauling these days, too. Over-enthusiasm could ruin your day as much as a collision at sea."

"Duly chastised. Goodnight, doc."

Anyone attempting to find fault in his service records would complain of overeagerness, Eliot thought as he accompanied the doctor to the quarterdeck. Enthusiasm was all part of his intensely held credo. The credo had two parts. First, when something needs to be done, do it. Make a move, even if it turns out to be a mistake. Second, when in doubt, it is easier to get forgiven than get permission.

He checked the log, noticed the watch change to the mid, then headed forward, still deep in thought. His hero was Teddy Roosevelt, with whom he shared the personal characteristics of thick sandy hair and strong white teeth. Next greatest hero was Alfred Thayer Mahan, with whom he shared a special allegiance to naval firepower. In only seven years, his promotions were already outdistancing those of his fellow graduates of Annapolis, class of '57. Now that he had command--old, battered tin can that the Campbell was--and the zeal to perform for fleet and flag, he had to admit he was a happy man.

He dismissed the doctor's admonition about enthusiasm. Stitching up Hymie's head had been a gut-level decision--part of the do-something-even-if-it's-wrong creed. Eliot realized he now did almost everything at gut-level. He also understood the reason why. Afraid he'd grow up pallid, wimpy, or some vaguely defined taboo known as "eastern," his pallid, wimpy, and decidedly Back Bay father had sent Eliot packing during childhood summers. After the wilderness camps came the summers at a distant relative's ranch in southern Colorado. There, Eliot

was expected to rope, ride, vaccinate cattle, drive a Jeep, and endure alternate blasts of heat and cold in the high plains desert. The dose of cowboying took. By the time he graduated from Annapolis, a full fledged engineer and ensign, Eliot could rope a cow, navigate a ship, or maneuver his car through the tangled streets around Boston Common.

When stationed at Norfolk on his first tour of duty, he began courting a sleek, dark-haired girl who danced in the ballet corps of the National Symphony. Hoping to impress the long-legged Texas beauty with the sapphire eyes, Eliot promoted himself as "a combination cowboy and seadog."

Connie smiled and assured him, "If you promise not to use that line in public, your secrets will be safe with me." They were married two months later.

Eliot now picked up the cup of cold coffee from the wardroom table and took it into his cabin. He sat with his back to the bulkhead, pen in hand, and thought about Connie. What time was it in Pearl? What days did she have rehearsals? Why couldn't he remember? What it was she had asked for from Hong Kong? Silver iced tea spoons? Maybe she'd like a jade pendant. He really didn't know what she liked.

With a slightly bitter taste in his mouth, he endured a few minor twinges of regret at leaving Pearl again so soon. He liked frangipani-scented tradewinds and the clean sheets of his own bed and the soft arms of a wife as well as the next sailor. He also enjoyed the off-duty amenities of that particular home port. He liked sailing to Maui on the free weekends. He liked scuba

diving at Hanauma and body surfing off Makapuu. He liked being only a four minute walk from the destroyer piers around the tapa-head crane and the drydocks to his quarters in the sprawling old house at Hospital Point. And yes, he had hated to leave Connie again, so soon . . . only a year since they'd moved from Long Beach. Or, rather, she'd moved, making the move alone, being greeted by the chaplain when she arrived. Connie had spent her first seven months in the islands on her own while Eliot showed the flag in Samoa and attended the anniversary celebration of the Battle of the Coral Sea and made a port call in Australia. A month after returning to Pearl, he'd been transferred to the Campbell as commanding officer.

Turnaround time was three months, and now here he was on the fast track, back in the Western Pacific. The deployments were getting longer and the extensions increasingly regular. It was called "best use of men and materials." He understood, but it wasn't making things any easier. The moves were getting harder for Connie. Making a connection with a different regional ballet corps every eighteen months was getting chancier. Setting up new quarters, and living in them alone, wasn't much of a thrill, even in the tropics, even in a living history museum like Hospital Point. And Connie was twenty-seven and wanted a family. And here he was again sitting alongside an iced-over wooden dock in Yokosuka, sewing up seamen in his spare time.

He scribbled another paragraph on the page before him, signed an elaborate "E" and sealed the envelope. He'd drop it in

the mailbag, then check fleet weather to see where that disorganized typhoon to the south was aiming next.

"How far back do you suppose the tradition of potluck suppers among sailor's wives goes?" asked Connie.

Marge shrugged. "Whaling days, I imagine. Hey, it's nice of you to have us all out to the big house. Don't you rattle around all by yourself here on the Point?"

"Yeah, but I like it. It's private, yet the way the yard juts out to the seawall, I can see every ship that goes in and out of the harbor. And I have almost daily visits from Izuki."

"Your little Jap gardener, right?"

"He informed me he came with the house."

"And you fell for that?"

Connie smiled shyly, hating to admit how much she loved the flowers and hedges and poinsettias and laurel Izuki had planted, how much she looked forward to his visits, and how happy she was making the old, overgrown house look cultivated again. "Izuki teaches me more than gardening. He's a whole crash course in Oriental culture."

"I'd rather be in the new Capehart housing," decided Marge.

Connie believed her. Modern prefabs such as McGrew or Halsey Terrace suited Marge. Did that mean dilapidated red wood reflected Connie? Disregarding symbols, she simply

admitted she loved this turn of the century structure. The house had been added onto in various pre-and-post war styles of architecture, with a nod to art deco in the light fixtures and a phase of cheap depression materials evident in the lean-to lanai. The house was a relic, plain and simple. It even had a red cross painted on the garage door from when it had served as a emergency supply unit during World War Two. The plumbing was noisy and the foliage verdant. No one else had an abandoned machine gun emplacement in the side yard, half hidden by wild sea grapes. Or a mixed up mynah bird who slept by day and sang by night. Or a gardener who had attached himself to the care and tending of the garden, regardless of the occupants. It hardly occurred to Connie that the privacy she cherished amounted to isolation.

Marge hacked at three heads of lettuce. Cooking for an all male household of starving teenaged boys always made her think in quantity.

Connie cautioned, "Better hold down the greenery. Remember, we're only a party of four, three of whom are on perpetual diets."

Marge combined a nod and a sneer. "What do you weigh now--all of a hundred pounds dripping wet?"

"I try to stay at fighting weight--about a hundred and five. In ballet, you can't be heavier than one-ten and partner."

"A hundred and eleven and you're fired?"

"Merely doomed to the back row of the chorus. Over and above the magic number of 110, the males start complaining."

Connie continued dicing mushrooms and shallots for a chicken casserole she was concocting.

The next guest arrived. Frauncine, alias Frou-Frou, contributed her version of a homecooked gourmet dish: a bag of store bought potato chips. "I never cook," she announced sincerely.

"That's fine," soothed Connie. "I know you've been busy getting your condo decorated."

"Not particularly." Frauncine flounced onto a bar stool at the kitchen island. Her blonde hair was loose, the color of polished oak and the fine texture of cornsilk. She wore an expensive matching golf skirt and tee-shirt with embroidered mermaids on the collar and pockets. She displayed no interest in the preparations the other two women were making, intent instead on inspecting her manicure.

Connie went on chopping, making small talk, and making a discreet inspection of her own. How perfectly all Frou-Frou's clothes matched, right down to the mermaid scarf tied on the handle of the fancy wicker handbag. Two koa wood bracelets click-clacked on her left wrist. With the right hand—the one with the pearl ring and the pearlized nail polish—she idly flipped the pages of the Oriental cookbook.

Suddenly Frauncine frowned and slammed the book shut. She glared sullenly at the two cooks across the island. "Mark-Mark never writes me," she announced. "Never."

Connie glanced up, knife in hand, to see if anything had prompted the outburst. Next she glanced at Marge, warning her

to keep silent. A matter of code was at hand. Some men, far from home and busy, seldom put a pen to paper but remain loyal to the core. Others, diligent letter writers, stray before the ink is dry. Then there were the little vagaries of Navy life such as storms, times in port, extended ops, bad carrier connections, changed ports of call, and an occasional sack of mail which simply dropped in the sea. "Don't you think a complaint of 'never' is a little strong?" Connie asked. "The ship has only been gone three and a half weeks."

Frauncine twisted on the stool, draping one foot atop the other at the ankle. "Well, have you heard from Eliot?"

It was a direct question. Connie would have to sidestep, tactfully if possible. Frauncine was merely curious, undeniably innocent, and not bright enough to realize she was prying. As wife of a commanding officer, Connie had access to a seaborne equivalent of pillow talk, commonly called the Pacific grapevine. The gossip cable worked efficiently and well. Connie knew, almost to a precise number, which men wrote letters, which ones spent the night on the beach, who had missed the last bullet train back from Tokyo, and who showed up drunk on watch. Privileged information was what these things amounted to. Now she was on the spot. "Eliot called before they left Yokosuka," she said noncommittally.

"What!" Frauncine's surprise made her bracelets rattle as her hands pawed the air. "Oh, Mark-Mark didn't call me! He never calls."

Connie meant her laughter in kindness, first for haphazard Ensign Marcus Markwell, and then for his scatterbrained, over-reactive wife. "It takes a deployment or two to Westpac to really figure out the intricacies of Fu Chu switch. That's the free phone calls Nippon Phoneways will place after midnight--and it's really comic. Pidgin English, static, broken connections, weird hours. You feel like you're shouting across the Pacific."

"What did Eliot say? Oh, why didn't Mark call me?"

"There's nothing much going on. Situation normal--delayed ops schedule, bad weather, time along the tender has been cut short because of the storm track to the south."

"Bad weather?" A new panic raised Frauncine's plucked eyebrows.

"It's winter in the Orient. What would you expect?" Connie shrugged. "There's always rough weather."

Frauncine predicted, "Why, in a big storm that little boat will sink."

Connie reminded her gently, "That boat is a ship. And it's weathered hurricanes and typhoons and lived to tell the tale. Besides, if I know Eliot, he'll outrun the weather and end up in port ahead of his e.t.a."

"What's e.t.a.?"

"Estimated time of arrival."

Frauncine's eyes narrowed. "Then, you actually know where the ship's going and when it's supposed to get there? Oh, tell me. Tell me! Mark-Mark never tells me anything."

And with good reason, rationalized Connie. Drat, she'd done it now. It was clear from Huntley-Brinkley's evening reports where the world's major trouble spot was these days. It was even clearer that the U.S. Navy didn't speed up deployments and rotate old destroyer escorts and minesweepers to areas where there weren't mines to be swept. But talk about Cam Ranh Bay to this kid who was prone to telling the world? After Campbell had made its voyage through the Gulf of Tonkin would be time aplenty to discuss geography with Mrs. Marcus Markwell Newby.

Apparently realizing she was not to receive an answer, Frauncine jumped down from the bar stool and began to pace the floor. She took well-measured, ladylike steps, perhaps a remnant of her debutante training in how to walk and turn. To Connie, it seemed the epitome of storebought grace to walk rich. With the right walk, one could go on serving potato chips and speaking permanently in self-engrossed tones.

Frou-Frou, singleminded in her concern, edged up behind the mountain of lettuce and Marge. "Have you," she inquired forthrightly, "had any letters from Charlie?"

"Hell, no." Marge glared. "That old fart wouldn't know which end of a pencil to stick in his ear."

Frauncine's lower lip puckered. "I just asked."

"Well, don't. It's none of your business." Marge followed the brittle silence with unasked-for counseling. "And you ain't likely to hear from your lover boy much this trip either.

Typhoon season will take care of his letter writing time--he'll be

hanging on for all he's worth. And then there's the fact that ship's heading to where they might get their fat butts shot right out from under 'em." Marge attacked a pile of radishes with a meat cleaver. Frauncine recoiled halfway across the kitchen.

Connie was miffed on one hand and half relieved on the other. Marge had every right to call a spade a spade--or a war, a war. Any Navy wife with minimal interest could deduce fleet movements, and with normal intelligence could estimate knots and nautical mileage. Further, the standing joke was that if you really needed specific information about a ship's destination or arrival time, you could call the fleet laundry. The laundry truck drivers routinely recited details Fleet Information wouldn't divulge, and that Naval Intelligence wouldn't admit. Connie took Frou-Frou back in hand, leading her toward the lanai with the promise of a mai-tai. "Don't go to pieces. It serves no good purpose. Typhoons, no mail, wondering the whereabouts--that's standard operating procedure."

"Not for me."

It would be cruel to say, 'You'll get used to it.' Connie had never liked being out of touch. But she had learned to tolerate it. Lack of communication was part of the territory, like bad ventilation in ballet rehearsal halls.

The telephone rang and it was Trio, apologizing for a bad headache and begging off from the evening. "You're studying too hard," decided Connie. "I'll bet it's eyestrain."

"It's not morning sickness," laughed Trio.

The reference hit Connie in the gut. She had to laugh extra loud to cover the sinking sensation. "I'll save you some salad. Marge has made enough for a couple of Marine divisions. Come out this weekend?"

"Maybe."

"Saturday, then."

"Okay."

"Bye, Trio." Connie hung up, wondering about the monosyllabic conversation and if anything more than a headache were at stake. She reported to the others that Trio wasn't coming.

"That's too bad," decided Frou-Frou in her best debutante voice, two parts gloss to one part so-what.

Marge's attitude was even less thinly veiled. "What's the matter with our soul sister? She holding out for chitlins?"

"Marge, your comments are off-target. Drop it," warned Connie. Where did her responsibility end as to maintaining decorum among the wardroom wives? She had no illusions of grandeur, but she did understand common decency. She couldn't let Marge alienate anyone this early in the cruise.

"Come on, queenie," called Marge to Francine. "Lift your elegant lard-ass off that rattan chair and wiggle in here to the trough."

"Oh, just leave me alone," came the weak response. "I'm hurt."

Together Connie and Marge hurried to the lanai. The big ceiling fan circled lazily, stirring the plumeria-scented air.

Frou-Frou was slumped in the wicker settee, her empty mai-tai glass in one hand. The hand with the pearl ring she held directly in front of her face, examining a broken nail on the middle finger. Her mouth was held rigid in a little pained O.

"A broken fingernail?" Marge huffed, "Well, I ain't kissin' it to make it all better."

"Would you like polish?" offered Connie. "An emery board?"

"I want to call my daddy."

"What?"

The trembly lip became a larger wobble. A quick pair of tears formed at the inner edges of Frauncine's lids.

Connie was rarely stymied for the proper words. "You want to call your father in...uh...Iowa? To tell him about your fingernail?" She was calculating both the absurdity and the dent such a call would make in her phone bill. "Hmmm, there's four hours time difference, plus--"

"Why don't you write the grisly details to Mark-Mark?" chided Marge.

For once, Marge's hard-edged pragmatism seemed right on target. Connie nodded agreement.

Then, Marge had to go an extra sentence. Just one sentence too far. It seemed she couldn't leave things alone. She leaned down and half-whispered to Frauncine, "Mark will get your letter in a month or two, about the time they get liberty in Cam Ranh Bay and go up to Saigon to celebrate. By then, sugar, he will have forgotten all about signing that marriage

contract with you. He will be off chasing himself some slanty-eyed yellow pussy."

At that, Frou-Frou went home in tears. Marge went home disgusted that no one understood her humor. Connie put the salad into two huge bowls and froze the chicken casserole for another time. By now she had a headache to rival anything Trio had invented.

She fixed herself a gin and tonic and went out on the seawall to sit and decipher how her generosity had offended absolutely everyone. No good deed goes unpunished--wasn't that the conventional wisdom? She wondered what platitude Peter Trevalino would have to offer for this fiasco. Funny, she thought of telling him her troubles instead of writing to Eliot. Of course, that wasn't as bad as Frou-Frou wanting to call Iowa in the dead of night.

Connie knew Eliot too well to write such trivia to him. Eliot didn't really want to hear these kinds of things. He wanted to believe people were straightforward and idealistic in their dealings with one another. At heart, Eliot was as bad as Peter, only in a different way.

The mynah bird swept down from the banyan and pecked along the top of the seawall, trilling sweetly as the darkness deepened over the harbor. Connie reminded herself to buy crack seed for the bird. Then she wondered what Izuki would think of a plum tree near the poinsettias. She would consult with him tomorrow.

Trio had no illusions. She wasn't in the Navy. That was Abner's job. For that reason, she divorced herself from potluck suppers, division luncheons, and the other trappings of military solidarity. She refused to live on base and never shopped at the commissary. It was more expensive that way, but more independent. The only person from the Campbell she cared to be friends with was Connie Hopkins, and then, on limited terms.

Thus, supper on Hospital Point turned into lunch at the revolving restaurant atop the Ala Moana building. Trio's reasoning included logic about time and effort in driving out to Pearl, but the real reason was she didn't want to set foot on the Navy base. If she stayed mainly at the Manoa valley campus library, confined her grocery routine to the civilian Foodland, and slept only in her Kalihi apartment, she could almost forget that ships and the smell of diesel existed.

Out of sight, out of mind, she hoped. But she didn't explain all those things to Connie. She merely said, "Meet me in town," and after getting agreement, realized there was no way to avoid seeing other Navy people at the popular eating spot. While seated at the restaurant table, waiting for Connie to arrive, two people had already stopped by to say hello.

Now, plates of chicken salad Hawaiian with lots of white grapes, macadamia nuts, and pineapple sat almost untouched in front of Trio and Connie. Glasses of Portugese rosé, which Trio had first recommended and then ignored, sat half drunk by the full water glasses. In the background, the Beatles sang in their cheerful nasal twang.

"I am scared this time," Trio said in a monotone. Her demeanor was calm, her voice quiet, the sense of desperation dulled. "I've never been really afraid before. But this time, I am truly scared."

"That's not like you, Trio. What's bothering you?"

"I don't know. The general unsettled state of the world. And, more immediately, the weather half a world away. That storm's big enough to have a name now, you know."

"Hilda." Connie looked down at her folded hands, rearranged her napkin. Obviously she was duly informed and duly worried.

"There's no way out of the typhoon if the ship left Yokosuka on time."

Connie remained pert. "Well, look at it this way--ships are meant to ride out hurricanes at sea, not in port."

"That doesn't do anything for this empty feeling in my gut."

"I won't offer you any platitudes about weathering the storm, then." Connie frowned. "I'm worried, too. But stiff upper lip and all that. Look, Trio, I'm not too good at pep talks for my peers." She half-turned in her chair and waved to several acquaintances. "Now, since we've ruined our appetites over something we can't do anything about, let's opt for neutral ground. What else besides Hilda is news this week?" She settled back, smiling serenely, a crisp study in mauve and white striped jacket over a mauve shift, the abundant dark hair loosely swept back from her face. Everything about Connie looked freshly

natural, no artificial teased hair, no beach-bunny overly dark tan, no heavy ginger perfume.

"News of the world? Well, supposedly the Great Society's in full swing," offered Trio, feeling self-conscious about being black for the first time since moving to Hawaii two years ago. Strange things were happening on the mainland, things she resented and which embarrassed her, things which the Great Society seemed to represent. "You want to talk about race riots and Black Panthers? That's all my hometown paper writes about these days. My mother sends me the clippings. I don't know why--she wouldn't know a Black Panther if it walked down main street in broad daylight."

"Tell me about your family. I don't even know where you're from."

"Seattle. And my family fit the great American prototype right down to the three children, two cars, suburban split-level house, and a mongrel dog. You see, I don't know anything about black power. For generations, my family has had power--and money. I always assumed those things were the same for everyone, and that there was plenty to go around."

"I don't know, Trio. I'd like to be in place when the First Southern Baptist church of Nocona, Texas, gets around to integrating, much less sharing any power and money."

"Won't be in our lifetime, huh?"

"Hardly even a sporting proposition."

"And neither of us can work up any real righteous indignation. Oh well," Trio laughed, "the next topic is yours."

Connie tried another bite of chicken salad, then put her fork down. "The sports page says Samoa is picked to win the Pan-Pacific soccer championship."

"No luck. I can't talk sports at all. Can't tell baseball from apple pie."

"Well, Harry James and Betty Grable are getting a divorce after all these years."

This was more interesting. "Makes you wonder why. If they could make it twenty years, you'd think the rough spots would be smoothed out."

"Or maybe Harry and Betty just drifted further and further apart. Like continents that move an inch every hundred years and end up thousands of miles apart." Connie was silent, apparently lost in her theory of continental drift. Her blue eyes were heightened by the blue eyeliner and the mauve blusher on her cheeks matched the dress. This was one woman who really had it all together, decided Trio. When Connie finally spoke, it was to change the subject. "How's your thesis research going?"

"Slowly. Graduate school is an endurance contest, that's all. How are your rehearsals coming?"

"The choreography is way behind. Don Quixote in the tropics is done in slow motion. Slow motion and perpetual perspiration."

It was hard for Trio to imagine Connie ever working up a sweat. She always looked cool and immaculate, scrubbed and polished like a theater mannequin in costume. Was that the

mask--or was Connie Hopkins so genuine she didn't own a mask?

"You ever get stage fright?"

"Always."

"More than opening night?"

"Every single performance, even if all I do is a lateral and land with one leg off center. Talk about butterflies in the tummy. Sometimes it's more like bats in the belfry."

"Why do you keep on if it's such misery?"

"Sweet misery. And I don't have anything else to do." A faraway look of hurt narrowed her eyes. "I don't know how to do anything else--and I really don't want to. But dancers have short professional lives, and a dancer who changes companies every year has an even shorter life span. I'm about finished."

"Your career's over and I haven't even gotten mine off the ground. So, what next, former ballerina?"

Connie shrugged. "That's a loaded question, one to which I am currently giving considerable thought."

Trio was intrigued. "You always wanted to be a dancer?"

"Always. I love the directness, the concentration it takes. It's like a funnel and you pour your whole self into it. It's a pointedness. Does that make sense? For fifteen minutes, at least, you know what to do with your life."

"I saw a write up in Time on one of those Russian dancers who defected."

Suddenly Connie's voice rose. "Did you read the cover story, too? It was titled, 'Is God Dead?' Now there's a topic. I

meant to call Peter Trevalino and see what his reaction has been."

This was the most interest Connie had shown during the whole meal. "I've heard our good chaplain has his doubts."

"About God?"

"About the war."

"Oh. Don't we all."

"Do you, Connie? You seem so straight and narrow to me. I thought it was only political science types like me who were allowed to second guess."

Connie locked her hands around the stem of her wine glass. "Actually, I can't afford second guesses, or even second thoughts. Certainly not any doubts--first or second string. It would be fatal to think what Eliot's doing is wrong. Because if what he is doing doesn't count and what I am doing isn't worthwhile, then the whole thing comes apart."

A lot of thought seemed to have gone into that defense mechanism. Trio wanted to talk seriously about how Connie had arrived at her conclusions. But she was startled at the sound of laughter.

She looked up as Connie laughed again and pointed toward the restaurant's center entrance. "Speak of the devil," she muttered. She nodded to Father Trevalino. "We were just talking about him--and here he is."

"A minor miracle, obviously," decided Trio ungraciously. "Or perhaps, coincidence--considering half the Navy community is here." She carefully steepled her delicate fingers while Connie

half stood and waved to Peter to come over. Connie was definitely glad to see the chaplain; she must really intend to grill him about the Time article.

An equally pleased and surprised smile lit Father Trevalino's face as he hurried toward the table. He automatically pulled up a chair. The seating hostess didn't object, the waitress didn't object, and Connie didn't object. Trio didn't see any reason to, either. He settled in with the comment, "What an improvement in company. I've been stuck in a community relations meeting all morning. I'm starving." He looked at the uneaten chicken salads. "Something wrong with the menu, ladies?"

"Something wrong with our nerves," supplied Trio. She offered a flip explanation. "You don't happen to have a typhoon diversion prayer handy, do you?"

"Oh, Typhoon Hilda." His serious tone assessed the far away weather. "No joking matter."

Connie nodded, and Peter leaned closer to her. Trio sensed that the chaplain, realizing both women were afraid, sought first to comfort Connie. It was just a little, unconscious action, but Trio caught the nuance. The priest was more than just concerned. He was worried, not so much about the typhoon, but about Connie.

Fascinated, Trio now sat back and watched as the man and woman across from her became oblivious. The words were ordinary. Connie said she'd thought of calling him. Peter answered he'd missed seeing her. Then they talked about the

magazine article. Then the oblivion extended to everyone else's presence. Trio took in the concerned glances they gave each other, the way their eyes locked when the other spoke, the softening tones they used as they slowly tuned everyone else out.

More and more amazed at what she was witnessing, Trio tried to analyze the situation. What did one call this kind of publicly-held esteem? Affection? She folded her arms and listened to Connie and Peter for another ten minutes. They didn't notice. Connie's face was animated, her cheeks rosy. Peter's smile flashed and faded each time she looked at him. His voice roiled deep and tender.

He was now explaining, "But some of my personal concepts are quite in flux."

"Are you talking psychology, then?" Connie questioned. "Don't tell me you're going in for the dead-and-dying deity stuff."

"Not dead, not even dying. Just changing. It's as if this is the year I have to start reconciling the checkbook of my life. I can't remember what checks I've written. I can't find the stubs for faith, hope, meaning. I don't even know what it means to have things reconciled."

"It means we're safer not asking questions. Take it from an old hand, Peter." Connie gave her marvelous low chuckle.

"Questions imply you think there could be answers."

Trio felt she'd eavesdropped enough. This was a serious, personal conversation between two people who meant a great deal

to each other. They were witty with each other, even barbed in their discussion, but there was some quality of caring that underpinned it all.

Peter was moaning, "If I ever write my autobiography I don't want to have to title it Ever Decreasing Faith. The past six months, it seems like I've auctioned off my values in lots--going . . . going . . . gone."

Connie reached over and patted his hand, breaking the self-seriousness. "If you start dramatizing the flaws in Church, State, or the human condition, you'll drive us both crazy."

"I'm half loony already," he retorted, "when I read that the New York critics gave a Tony award to Oh What A Lovely War. That's a play about singing funny ditties in the trenches."

She smoothed her hands across her hair, then folded them primly on the tabletop. "Why give that play a prize? And why have Congress turn around and dole out another seven hundred million dollars for the war in Vietnam?"

"Why, indeed."

Trio signaled the waitress for the check. "You'll excuse me?" She addressed the air above her friends' bent heads. There were hasty glances up and nods of assent. "I have to put in my quota of hours in the stacks." It was an unnecessary explanation. She wasn't to be missed, despite Peter's hasty affirmation of pleasure at seeing her again. They're the lucky ones, Trio decided with a small twinge of jealousy as she walked

away. And faith didn't have anything to do with it. For them, it wasn't going to matter if God was dead.

Hilda was big enough news to make the morning Advertiser. It was big enough news to rate a mention on the nightly national delayed telecast. It was the lead story at ten and dominated the midnight weather report on KHON. Connie lay in bed on her back, the sheet across her legs, her wide eyes staring out at a brilliantly starry night. Clear and serene on this side of the Pacific. But over there--the newscaster's voice scratched. "Slamming through the South China Sea . . . sixty knot winds. State seven seas . . . in the path of . . . continues to gather force."

Connie turned off the radio and willed herself to sleep. She didn't believe in booze or pills to knock herself out. Saucer eyes didn't look any better with dark rims under them the next day. Ten minutes later, she jumped up and flung an old terrycloth beachcoat over her batiste gown. At the window the mynah bird hopped closer, convivially acknowledging her presence. "Go to bed, you stupid bird." A flash of dark wings spread against the palm fronds.

A few computations. Busy work to occupy her mind. A scratch pad and pencil. She knew Eliot's departure date from Yokosuka, the nautical mileage to Cam Ranh Bay, the speed the ship would probably muster, and some idea of how much leeway

to allow for Hilda. Okay. There. Everything computed. Obviously the Campbell was out of harm's way. Certainly the ship was safe. And yes, her self-serving conclusions made her feel much, much better. She stretched out on the chaise on the lanai where the hypnotic lulling of the harbor waves droned her into a twilight sleep.

She awoke with a start, aware of a flash of light in her eyes. She couldn't organize the sensations. Lightning? In Hawaii? The rains always came straight down, without theatrics of thunder and electricity.

Groggy, she stood and peered out the screens. A car motor died somewhere close by. Car lights, then. That was the flash. But why had a car rounded her drive and pulled into the front circle and turned off the motor at this hour? She glanced at the kitchen clock as she went toward the front of the house. Ten after six. Someone coming to call at this hour? Or somebody lost. She had given directions often enough from Hospital Point.

She stopped again in the front room when, through the open venetian blinds, she saw a long black staff car sitting silently against the gray-green haze of the new morning. The car's front tires were off the drive on the grass. Izuki wouldn't like that new rut. Two men in uniform sat in the front seat.

She wondered why the men were neither talking to each other nor making any effort to get out of the car. But they were definitely staying in her drive, in front of her house, for some reason. The man in the passenger seat lit a cigarette and the red ember dot moved back and forth with his hand. The

older man, the driver, consulted his watch. Her heart began to pulse erratically as she fumbled with the front door deadbolt.

Clicking on the porchlight, she made it across the front lanai and down to the second step before the men were out of the car.

They were in full dress whites, a captain and a lieutenant. The taller one, the lieutenant, asked, "Are you Mrs. Connie Hopkins?"

"Yes, of course. Whose house did you think you were parked at? What's going on?"

The captain took charge. "Can we go inside, Mrs. Hopkins?"

The formality signaled that there was some due process to be observed. She ushered them in without a word, letting the screen bang behind. Absently, she gestured to the couch, and then the matching armchairs, and, finally, the ottoman. She didn't care where they wanted to sit. She remained standing, her back to the door, one hand behind her on the knob. "What is it?"

"Please, Mrs. Hopkins, won't you sit down?"

"No. Tell me."

A strange look passed between the two men. They remained standing, too, starchy from cap covers to socks. The lieutenant wilted first. He took a long breath which heaved his chest and quivered the row of brass buttons on his jacket front. His adam's apple bobbed. As for the captain, she noticed moisture beads above his upper lip. They introduced themselves, but she

couldn't catch the names. By now her heart was thudding in her ears too loudly to hear the names of strangers. They were anonymous men standing with hats tucked under their arms like a couple of birds with beaks tucked under their wings. There was static in her brain too, popping loudly as she made every possible connection.

"Mrs. Hopkins, we're here on official business." The captain offered his arm, apparently determined to make her sit. To speed things up, Connie accepted and let herself be led to the sofa. She perched primly, the beachcoat held together over her knees. Her bare toes curled under, touching the nubby sofa flounce. She glanced at the lieutenant. He chewed his lip and looked away.

"Official business?" she echoed. What an understatement. She tried to hurry him along. He cleared his throat, having difficulty getting another sentence going.

The lieutenant finally blurted, "Campbell's overdue."

"Overdue? Is that all!" Connie's reaction came out with an explosion of relief. The shock was there, yes, but it wasn't nearly as bad as she'd imagined in the previous seconds of not knowing. "Overdue." The word held no real danger. "Well, that seems logical what with all the bad weather."

"Overdue," confirmed the captain. Then his voice gathered speed. "And presumed lost."

Now Connie's tone skyrocketed. "Lost?" What an incredulous idea. Lost? Her mind tried to get a grasp on the word, then settled for a balancing act. Lost didn't necessarily mean gone;

lost meant you just didn't know where something was at the moment. No need for panic. No cause for alarm. Why did these strangers jump to such conclusions? What they really meant was out of touch. She folded her arms across her chest, defending against any more words.

The lieutenant and captain looked at each other. Clearly they believed they hadn't made themselves clear. "Presumed lost at sea," emphasized the captain.

"Lost in action," declared the younger officer.

Action. Now the corners of her mind drew back in alarm. The static was replaced by a dull, shriveled emptiness. She felt her stomach double over as if hunching away from a blow. "The typhoon?"

Caution gnawed at every word the captain forced out. "And there may have been an encounter."

What was an encounter? Another new word. She closed her eyes to get a set on the vocabulary addition. Her ears were full of whirring. She felt her hands turn icy. Then intense heat seemed to radiate from behind her eyeballs. The questions came out staccato, like pin pricks. "What happened? Exactly. What's an encounter? Is Eliot all right?"

The sharp questions were answered by clipped, no-nonsense phrases. She heard and understood enough to know she was being treated gingerly. The captain had this part of the spiel down better. "There's no hard information, Mrs. Hopkins. Few known facts. But we're not justified in keeping it from relatives . . . first to know . . . anything we can do."

She saw the two news bearers begin to back up and felt a gap opening in the floor between where she was seated and where they were now retreating. This wasn't like Harry and Betty drifting apart an inch at a time over twenty years. This was a dramatic chasm created in an instant by an earthquake.

There was a conspicuous, formal distance between the parties when the captain came to the regulation pronouncement, "Madam, I regret to inform you that your husband is missing in action."

Connie stared at her bare toes. She already had as much information as she could absorb. She shook her head. The coldness in her hands began to numb the rest of her. The pain behind the eyes spread, like an ice cube melting. But some things stayed remarkably stable amidst the disintegration. Her knees didn't buckle, she noticed. She didn't scream, sob, or faint. The worst thing, she thought sadly, was that the Navy sent only men with bad news. That was what was wrong--no other woman was present. If there had been another wife, there might have been some instinctive reaching out, some warmth, some hug of groping comfort, a patted back, some shared tears.

The lieutenant's voice shattered her random thinking. "Uh . . . we have to make other calls. Do you think you could come along and--"

"Of course. I must go with you." Connie stood up calmly. "Wait a moment. Let me get my coat."

In the bedroom she realized how strange she was acting. She didn't need a coat with the sun fully up now. In Hawaii, she didn't even own a coat.

Later she was pleased she had gone along to each house, though she could remember only certain details. At each stop, she tried to soften the blow, to put her arms around anyone who was willing, to bow her head alongside those who could not accept touching.

Marge, the veteran Navy wife, provided the biggest shock to Connie. The black staff car arrived just as Marge was leaving for her job at the Sub base exchange. The boys had already gone to school. Marge listened politely to the threesome. She calmly took the news of Charlie being missing in action as if she'd been told he might be late for supper.

Marge laughed. Not a nervous, inapropos giggle. A hoarse, raucous belly laugh. "Shit, I don't believe it." That was all she said until she lit a cigarette. "Naw, nothin' gets ol' Charlie-boy. That dumb bastard's just fine. He ain't got the smarts to get blowed out of the water." She offered the shaky captain a cigarette. He declined nervously. She looked at the lieutenant. "You look like you need a drink, sonny." She invited everyone in for a drink.

Connie dismissed the offer on behalf of all three. "Marge, do you understand what these men are saying? The Campbell is missing and presumed lost in action."

"Don't waste your time waitin' to see me cry," Marge retorted. She stuffed her hands in the floppy pockets of a denim skirt. The rolls of fat on her upper arms dimpled in the sunlight. "Now, if you folks don't mind, I need to be gettin' on to work." She consulted her watch and nonchalantly headed for the parking area behind the squat row of government houses.

Connie's surprise lasted through most of the other visits, made in alphabetical order. In the next several hours, she kept focusing on the bewildering way Marge had rejected the news. Was that the smart way to handle it? Refuse to accept? Her shock had not dissipated completely by early afternoon when the staff car pulled up in Waikiki at Frauncine's elegant condominium building. There was the doorman at the front entrance, the carpeted foyer, the long, silent ride up in the mirrored elevators. On the twenty-second floor, there was a long wait for the door chime to finish its tune. Then there was an even longer wait for someone to answer the summons.

When Frauncine finally got the door locks unlatched and the chain off the hook, she peeked around the solid door. Her face was squinty-eyed and puffy-cheeked. Connie realized they had interrupted an afternoon beauty nap. Obviously, Frauncine wasn't alert enough to realize what was about to happen to her.

Unsuspecting, she yawned, greeted the visitors, and invited them in. She draped herself languidly onto a white velvet

sofa, the queen ready to hold court. The golden rays of sun cut across the beige rug and streaked her blonde hair and white silk dressing gown with highlights. Her foot tapped rhythmically on a large floor cushion.

At first Connie thought it was like some little girl entertaining guests at a make-believe tea. But when the captain finally delivered his message, Frauncine did a double-take. Her eyes went wild with fear. Connie slipped into the seat beside her, moving to offer some comfort. Frauncine pushed her away. "Oh no, they can't do this to me!" she yelled, child-like in her anger. She snatched up a loose sofa cushion and hurled it. She reached for an ashtray. Connie caught her hand and took away the missile.

"Damn Mark! Damn him," cried Frauncine. "I hate his goddamn guts."

The language was quite out of her usual style. She started a new tirade, using even stronger epithets against all concerned. Connie interrupted, "Stop it. Cursing won't do any good. Now, listen, I know you're angry and outraged. But you're embarrassing yourself." She looked to the captain and lieutenant for some help. This was their bailiwick. But they showed a distinct lack of confidence and competence in dealing with the outraged princess in the tower.

It was futile trying to talk, but Connie tried. For ten minutes, while Frauncine lay flounced on the sofa, her face in a pillow, Connie rubbed her back and asked questions. The only response was a mumbled, "Damnit, he can't do this to me."

It was difficult to bestow much compassion on such misplaced anger. By now Connie sensed the officers were desperate to make a getaway. Less than discreetly, the lieutenant jerked his head toward the door. The captain traced circles on the coffee table with his forefinger.

"We have to go now," said Connie, standing up. "But I'll come back later, if you want me to."

Frauncine sat up, grabbed for a coconut-shell carving and heaved it toward the captain. He caught it by reflex and repositioned it on the coffee table. "I hate you. I hate you all." She slumped back over on the white couch.

The goodbyes were strained, but not angry. Connie was careful to lock the latch as they exited.

The final call, at Trio's apartment in Kalihi was another scene altogether. This was the one Connie expected to be the hardest. But Trio didn't fight the news. She was not indifferent as Marge had been, nor furious like Frauncine. Instead, her reaction was docile. She folded her hands and stood immobile in her apartment doorway even before the full message had been delivered.

When it was over, Trio whispered, "He's dead."

"Missing," corrected Connie instantly. "Only missing. We don't know any more than that."

"Maybe you don't. But I know Abner won't come back." Her voice draped itself in a dark, closed place. "He's dead."

Connie was tempted to shake her, to try to make her yell or at least wring her hands. But she only stood silent, head

shaking side to side. She went rigid against Connie's attempted embrace, withdrawing as if into a clamshell. There were a few more comments, including the captain's insistence that no one should jump to morbid conclusions. The walls closed in around Connie. No one was going to reach Trio and Trio wasn't going to reach out. "I'll call you tonight," Connie offered as she left. "We'll talk."

"There's nothing to say." The lock clicked in place as the door closed.

At 3:45 in the afternoon Peter arrived at the house on Hospital Point, slammed his palm against the doorbell, then barged on into the house. "Connie, where are you?" Desperation made him call her name twice more. "Oh God, I just heard--"

"Oh, Peter!" That was all she got out as she came running from the kitchen where she'd been on the telephone with the Red Cross, arranging messages to the mainland. Then she was wrapped in his embrace. There was an exchange of condolences, of how-can-this-be looks, of her tears against his strong shoulder. He wiped her tears. kissed her closed eyelids. "I'm so sorry. So sorry. So very sorry."

Then there was a second set of glances; a look of agony, then a look of longing. He kissed her mouth. Her arms tightened around his neck and she held on.

He scooped her in his arms and took her to bed. Unpremeditated. Clothes shed in seconds. He took her hungrily, like flame into alcohol, burning pure and blue. She responded eagerly, crying out as if shards of glass were imbedded in her flesh.

And neither explained. Not to each other, nor within themselves. It happened. That was that. It happened in a time-suspended moment, in a defiance of laws of church and marital state. It happened in the damp sheets and big, breezy rooms by the sea where, that afternoon, tears, semen, and the scent of seaweed mixed together with the cries of the forlorn mynah and the outgoing tide guzzling at the roots of the banyan.

The crisp engine started on the mike boat and it pulled away from Charley landing, a block further down the point. Across the harbor, the four o'clock ritual took place, with the destroyers blowing their stacks and scattering a rain of ash and soot over the island.

The union they shared was more an act of defiance than of love. It occurred without forethought but with considerable conviction. For an instant, only a split-second, Connie had a glimpse of debris floating at the water's edge near Widow's Point. She made a vague, never fully specified connection that she and the man she was even now drawing to her breast were flotsam on a sea filling rapidly with wreckage.

Afterward she lay above him, staring into those miraculously clear eyes. Long, long eyelashes, curling and damp. The sweet, salty taste of his lips,

"You must go," she whispered.

"No. Don't send me away. You need me here. I need to be here."

"You must go."

"Connie, that only makes it worse--"

"Worse than what? Worse than what we've already done?"

"I don't regret anything. I'd only regret leaving you. Now or ever." The heat of his caress singed the delicate skin of her throat.

"No remorse?"

"Only joy."

"Don't you believe in Judgment Day, Peter?" She lapped her hands beneath his head.

"No. Nor in retribution, divine or otherwise. Don't send me away."

"Don't ask to stay."

The veil dropped between them. He had raised it momentarily. Now it was she who assumed it again. She rolled over and handed him his khaki shirt.

He dressed forlornly. Once he looked over his shoulder, expectantly, as if hoping for a reprieve. She followed him to the door silently. He smoothed the hair away from her face, rubbing her temples with his thumbs. A delicate kiss touched her

earlobe. "Connie, darling, there's so many things I should have said--"

"No, it's all right."

"So many times I've wanted--"

"Don't, Peter. This isn't the time."

"Then, goodnight, Connie . . . my only love."

When he left, she looked up and found Taurus, then the seven stars to the east that made the sword and belt of the constellation Orion, the hunter slain by love.

Contrary to reports she'd read in the Navy Times, the first weeks were not the hardest. Alone, behind the closed shutters of the red wooden house, she found security in known routine. Simple acts, making tea and writing letters, were accomplishments. Some days she felt too numb to respond other than routinely, other days too hurt. Each night Peter called and they held long conferences.

He was deferential. "Do you need anything?"

She was polite. "No. Thank you for calling."

They were mutually careful not to let the conversations get too personal. So, certain topics were off limits, among them Eliot's continuing status as "missing." Instead they kept track of the Islanders baseball team, the scheduled plum tree planting which Izuki had set for next month, and the price of flown-in-from-the-mainland strawberries at the commissary.

Connie did well talking to Peter about ordinary matters. She did well in public. The trick was to control panic attacks. Stay busy, advised everyone. She went back to work after missing only a week of rehearsals. Each succeeding day, as she changed into leotards and legwarmers, she detected a peculiar odor of distress. She changed talcum powder, added more deoderant to her toilet kit, showered before and after rehearsals. No one else seemed aware and finally she realized it was only the dirty feel of hurt she couldn't wash away or mask with scent.

Most evenings she devised a scenario of homemade theatre, enacting her version of merry widow, keeping to a script that was chaste, cheerful, and false. She propped up in bed using all the pillows. She watched any old movie that played on channel six without consulting anyone's opinion. She checked piles of books out from Fleet Library and read each night until three. She filed her nails in bed. All the space was hers now. She tried to console herself that she could do as she pleased. Trivial consolation.

The past had been so finite. Always before, there had been a due date, an estimated time of arrival, a calendar mark that meant the loneliness would be over. Waiting was hard, but there had always been an end in sight. Endings were natural, a matter of course. The end of the tether. The end of the line. A happy ending. World without end, amen, amen. There were any number of possible endings. But no ending?

One evening she changed the lightbulb in the extra-tall lanai ceiling and fell off the stepladder, inflicting hurt all out of proportion to the pain in her ankle.

As a matter of duty, she telephoned the other wardroom wives at least once a week. There was no news, so the calls were merely to keep in touch.

Marge remained blustery. "Why the hell do you keep bothering me?" she asked the second week.

"I want to make sure you're all right."

"Honey, worry about yourself." Marge hung up.

The calls to Frauncine were an endurance contest. Often the phone would ring fifteen times and then finally be answered. Often the voice that finally responded was thick, whether with sleep or alcohol Connie couldn't tell. More surprising, the phone line was often busy. As far as Connie knew, Frauncine knew no one on the island of Oahu to call. The mystery became clear the evening Connie called and got a busy signal for an hour before getting through.

"Frauncine? This is Connie."

"Well, hi!"

Taken back by the exuberantly childlike greeting, Connie blurted tactlessly, "Who in the world have you been talking to?"

"My daddy."

"In Iowa?"

"Where else?"

Of course, where else? Connie was stumped for a rejoinder. "And how are things in Des Moines these days?"

"Hunky-dory."

"Frauncine, are you okay? I mean, are you taking anything--sleeping pills or something?"

"I'm drunk," came the forthright pronouncement. "And you can't preach at me. I don't have to take guff from anybody."

Assuredly Connie did not feel up to dispensing any guff. Further, Frauncine wouldn't be the first All-American Navy wife to drown in a sea of booze. But it seemed a pointless, almost frivolous way to go. "Try to get some sleep."

"I'll do what I damn well please."

Connie said good night in good faith, feeling exempt from being her sister's keeper.

She made a last call to Trio, knowing in advance there would be no answer at all.

Finished with obligations, she sat at the teakwood desk, staring at the telephone. She never knew when it might ring, confirming her worst fears. Similarly, if the doorbell jangled, her palms went damp. The sight of a staff car rounding the point sent her heart skidding with fear. Her stomach felt constantly assaulted, like she'd eaten a persimmon which wouldn't digest. Anger pains, she supposed, like the imaginary dirty smell. Why couldn't she develop Marge's blind oblivion? Or even take the faith that Trio had in finality.

She stood on the darkened lanai, replaying the early-morning flash of lights in her eyes, the arrival of the staff car, the descent into turmoil from that moment on. Nothing finite had changed on the porch. Eliot's sailing magazines remained

rolled in the magazine stand by the wicker settee. His thongs, full of sand from the last outing to Keehi lagoon, sat side by side on the lower step. The far off sounds of tugboats entering the oil storage docks at Barber's Point echoed across the channel from Ewa. The smell of salt water and diesel continued like a permanent dose of nose drops. None of these things had been affected. Only she was changed by what had happened in the other hemisphere.

And what, precisely, had happened? The supposed facts had been dribbling in, a few at a time, a combination of gossip and history which flowed together into guesswork. Tomorrow was the official briefing. Yesterday's history, tomorrow's news. They circled in an endless round of one supplanting the other without time for the meaning of either to be clear.

Peter Trevalino tried to find out what had happened to the Campbell. He tried to find out for Connie's sake. He tried to find out for his own sake. The official posture was simple. The Navy had no official knowledge of anything. Therefore, nothing had officially happened. It couldn't. And so it would stay until such time as documentation could be determined.

To Peter, faced with relaying such messages to Connie, it was like saying that if one had no knowledge of good and evil, it could not exist. If one had no carnal knowledge, one could have no hypocrisy. There were endless variations on the original melody. Well, all bets were off, philosophically and otherwise. He

didn't need theology's conundrums besetting his path. Besides, who needed to know the sound of one hand clapping, anyway? The real question--one that held his fate and Connie's and Eliot's--was where the hell was the Campbell?

He damned well wanted answers and he damned well wanted them today at the briefing. He glanced at his watch and scanned the dock for Connie's car. She had agreed to let him attend today's meeting, but nothing more. Connie was withdrawing behind the red doors of Hospital Point, taking on protective coloration like a drab moth, becoming a creature of routine and blandness. On the other hand, he felt like a prisoner of war, trapped between duty and desire. Chaplain? What was that? His warrior-priest status was neither fish nor fowl. Unable to put Connie second in his mind, he couldn't put himself second to duty. Wild abandon, that's what he'd felt with her and for her. Even as his feet paced the hall outside the Desdiv staff hut, he felt his toes dangling in emptiness. The starchy khaki shirt collar rubbed the back of his neck. He had twice taken off his collar device this morning, then pinned it back in place.

When Connie arrived for the liaison conference, he rejoiced at merely seeing her. He hurried to open her car door, touched her hand briefly. Even that created a jolt which she acknowledged by jerking away instinctively. He covered with briskness. "All set?"

She nodded, tempting him all the more with her shy, demure smile of apology for the previous action. They went inside. The same crisp captain and his ramrod lieutenant were on

hand. Connie exuded poise, standing tall in her rust-colored linen suit with the white collar and white pumps. Peter fancied only he could detect a cool, clear-eyed hurt rimming her face like a halo.

The captain assumed his delegated leadership role. "How are you getting along, Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Please call me Connie," she insisted with a charming dip of her head and a sincere smile. "And I'm getting along like any trapeze artist without a net. Some days I know, without doubt, that Eliot and the ship are gone. Other nights, with equal sureness, I believe they're safe."

"Two extremes," summarized the lieutenant, apparently for his own benefit.

She nodded. "What I don't dare look down on is that void between, the dark middle called missing."

Peter felt his belt cinch against his stomach. Socked in the gut, that's how it felt everytime. God, she was beautiful--the dark hair cascading over her forehead, the unobtrusive lift of her fingertips to touch the strands, the blue of her eyes vivid as a bluejay's wing.

"There are some reports," announced the captain. "Things you should be aware of."

"News?" Peter blurted the word as he felt Connie stiffen in the chair next to his.

The captain turned his face aside, like a bird preening in silhouette. He shuffled folders on a heaped desk and came up with two chart-like forms in a metal clip board. "As you know,

we've been working on documentation. Let me bring you up to date."

Peter was disappointed at the rehash of theories. It was mostly the same hearsay, now being suggestively labeled "documentation." He glanced toward Connie. She had her eyes closed.

The captain droned. "At first we knew only that the Campbell was off course, presumably due to the typhoon."

"Do we know any different now?" Connie interrupted, her eyes snapping open.

"We know that instead of being blown off-track, the ship may have turned north of its own accord. The Campbell made radio contact with the St. Paul about ten hours before the disappearance."

Peter saw the flash in Connie's eyes. They exchanged their private glance of recognition. Skeptical for the both of them, he took up the quiz. "What message was relayed to the St. Paul?"

"Routine matters. The following day that report was corrected in the log as being from the Callahan."

Peter was furious. He slammed his fist against the captain's desk. "Then why the hell feed us this garbage? You raise hopes just to destroy them! That's bizarre. That's inane. That's--"

Connie touched his hand, signaling calm. "Just tell us what the Navy knows officially and for certain."

"All right, Mrs. Hopkins. We know with certainty that the Campbell suffered mechanical damage due to the storm and ended

up far north of her designated destination. That much is one hundred per cent sure. We are also fairly certain there was contact between the Campbell and enemy patrol boats."

"A fire fight?" asked Peter.

The captain cleared his throat. "And we've had one unconfirmed report that Campbell initiated the action."

"What?" Peter and Connie spoke in unison, and to each other rather than the captain.

"On the date in question, something apparently happened, nearly onshore, between an armada of fishing boats and an unidentified larger vessel."

Peter thought to himself, 'So Eliot went gunning. Sounds like him.'

Connie broke her silence with a shrug. "What you're saying is still tentative. Maybe the Campbell was attacked? Or was the attacker? Or tangled with a fishing fleet. Or was it sharks or whales or little green sea monsters?" She frowned. "It really doesn't matter." There was no rancor in her voice, just as there was no way to sort fact from fiction.

By God, Connie was right, decided Peter. The ship had disappeared, and it didn't really matter whether it sank in a storm, went down under enemy attack, had been rammed on a reef, captured by fishermen, or eaten by dragons.

Her voice came out soft, like a muted bell. "Forgive me for thinking only in personal terms, but what matters to me is Eliot. Does the Navy have any idea what happened to the people? The crew? Lt. Commander Eliot Edward Hopkins in particular?" She

swallowed twice and then lowered her pitch. "Did he drown? Was he captured? Did he swim to shore or was he hauled into some fishing boat? Could he be hiding in some jungle?" She folded her hands as if to pray and for the first time, her voice tremored. "Don't leave me not knowing." She bowed her head. "I can stand almost anything else. Just don't leave missing as final."

The captain reiterated how little anyone knew, then turned the proceedings over to the lieutenant. The lieutenant allowed no time for Peter to regroup or to talk privately with Connie. "Paper work to be done, Mrs. Hopkins. We must set things in order." He whisked some imaginary dust from his shoulder boards and rubbed his white teeth with the eraser tip of his pencil.

Peter wished the officer would be quiet. What had to be done could be accomplished without fanfare. After a few routine biographical questions, the lieutenant stopped, stared, and looked blank.

Here came the showdown. Peter folded his arms as if to protect Connie.

"What do you expect to do, Mrs. Hopkins . . . er, Connie?" The man stared past her out the window of the hut, apparently fascinated by the tracks of shipyard machinery. "I mean, ultimately."

"Do?" she repeated. "Ultimately? You want some long term answers from me, the woman who's living moment-to-moment?"

Peter felt his hair might turn prematurely gray. He wasn't able to shield Connie. Conversely he felt like a voyeur sitting in

on this interrogation. The knots of doubt in his stomach were his own, he rationalized. Being in love with Connie merely cinched the knots. He interrupted, "You seem to have all the answers. Exactly what does the Navy expect her to do?"

The first definite answer of the day was a one word command. "Wait." The word seemed directed to Peter. Connie appeared to have the status of someone present by afterthought.

Peter realized he was overstepping his bounds but was unable to remain silent. "Wait for what?"

Connie laughed, defusing the situation. "Why, waiting is all I've ever done as a Navy wife." She stood and shrugged her delicate shoulders as if thinking of doing a pirouette. "Hurry up and wait--probably the most famous military dictum in history. Well, I'm quite good at it."

The lieutenant's voice turned more kindly. "Have you kept in touch with your family and friends?" Although his tone was sympathetic, he was obviously handing her over to the civilian community.

"I have a father in Texas, some friends in the Washington area. I'm fairly close to one of the wives here. Does that count? Do I need some certain tally to pass muster?"

Peter volunteered, "She can count on me."

Connie said nothing, only cocked her head and looked him straight in the eye. There was some faraway glimmer as if he were a stranger. He felt like an outcast, as if with that glance, she'd passed him by. He was an exile--and it hurt.

The details took only a few more minutes and settled nothing. Then Peter walked Connie to her car. "Let me take you to lunch. Or for a drive out to Kaena Point,"

"I have a rehearsal this afternoon." For a moment, an animated look brightened her face. "And tomorrow, I'm choreographing one section of Don Quixote for the Kitri character. We've got a dancer with an awesome kick-jete."

"Ah, so you're off to tilt at theatrical windmills. That's wonderful," he praised.

"Maybe." She was solemn.

"You have doubts? Oh, Connie, don't lose the enthusiasm you have for your art, not on top of all you've already had to give up--"

"Shhh." She cut him off with a finger to his lips.

He caught her hand and pressed it tighter against his moistened lips. "When can I see you again? Will you come to Mass Sunday?"

"No. Why should I? I'm not Catholic." She hesitated, glancing back at the interrogation site. "From what I understand from the lieutenant in there, I'm not anything, anymore."

"To me, you're everything."

She sighed. "You're about the one person left I can trust."

"Then trust me to love you--"

"Except myself," she interjected. "I still trust myself. That's why I need to go work on the routine for tomorrow. It's

therapy. When you choreograph, you have to haul out your guts and trust someone else with them."

"Not easy in any profession."

"That's the unwritten rule, though. To show someone else how to dance, you have to be willing to show what you feel inside--not just chalk steps in a mathematical pattern. My early teacher once told me, 'It's like making love, baby. You gotta wanta--not just go through the motions.'" She blushed as soon as she'd said the words. "Oh god, why did I mention such a thing?"

"Because it's on both our minds. It's like unfinished business because we're never together. Please, Connie, let's drive out to the Point."

She acquiesced. Neither spoke during the half hour drive along the Makaha coast. The surf was gentle, the sun benign. Upland behind Ewa the cane fields danced in undulating light and shadow beneath the mauve and aqua mountain range. The backside of Kole-Kole pass made a perfect keyhole in the mountains' crest.

They parked where the highway ended and the dirt road turned to mere sand ruts. "Do you want to walk?" he asked.

"No." She turned to face him across the front seat. The salt air ruffled her hair. She pushed her hands through the curls, then folded her hands in her lap. "Let's just try to keep things in perspective, Peter."

Perspective? He felt sorely lacking. What he wanted now was physical and human. But he tried steadying the ache in his

loins with deep breathing. He bunched her hair back against her shoulders. "Perspective. Fine. You got any for sale?"

"Do the scales balance for you?" she asked.

He tried to keep matters low key. Laughing, he asked, "Don't people usually say, 'Was it good for you, too?'"

She blushed with the purity of fire over alabaster. "That's not what I'm asking."

"The answer to both questions is yes, nevertheless." He kissed the top of her forehead. "In perspective, I'd say we took what we needed from each other. We gave what the other needed."

"Wanted."

"Want? Absolutely. Passion, desire, fulfillment--all that and more." He tried to draw her against him. "You're everything I ever wanted, Connie."

She rested languidly against him but her voice was rigid. "You understand, then, why we turned to each other that afternoon?"

"If you mean, can I quote verse and chapter on sexual psychology--"

"The fear of death makes one seek to affirm life. I can quote it, too."

"Then you also know it's never that simple," he confirmed.

"Nevertheless, it doesn't excuse us. Oh, Peter, in the long run, I'm afraid you are the one who will end up hanging between heaven and hell."

He pulled her hard against him then, stroking over the crown of her head to her shoulders with long caresses, easing her breasts against his chest until he could feel the round firmness. "Connie, Connie, don't talk that way. I figured out a long time ago the rod and the staff contradict instead of comfort."

"We don't rate any special grace, Peter." She took his face in her hands.

"Love is always covered by grace. It's a special dispensation."

"Don't be arrogant. I don't have any notions of being superior, or somehow above the restraints of society."

But he believed precisely those things, that Connie was a superior being, possessed of an honor and decency that went far beyond society's mundane restraints. And he believed that together he and she formed a more perfect union and were entitled to a more perfect charity. That much he took on faith, and no more. Having been fired by the kiln of desire, things made sense. He and Connie rated a dispensation that wouldn't do for the ordinary girl next door or the working man down the block. Plus, loving Connie was his idea of fair. Not largesse or goodness or even morality. Just plain fairness.

At the next day's rehearsal, when she should have been at her best choreographing, Connie was merely going through the

motions. She was tense, stomach unsettled and head aching. "I don't feel like any major leaps or bounds," she explained as she laid out the second act section for the girl who would dance Kitri. "This section calls for thirty-two turns in rapid succession. We're just going to talk about that."

Half an hour later, she felt even less like talking, much less dancing. At the break, she went across the street with the others to the Korean kim chee stand and feigned hunger. A mistake. Now she was ill, not just nauseous.

She made it back to the hall, barely. Down and out on her knees, clutching the rim of the toilet, she retched until dry. And it was on her knees, cold and shaky, like a penitent at a soiled altar, that it dawned on her she could be pregnant.

The double edged sword dangled precipitously close. A mere breeze of 'Dear god, no' whistled across the field of her mind. A baby? Then an immense wind of delight blew everything from its path. A baby! She managed to wet a grainy paper towel and place it on her forehead. She peered into the makeup mirrors strung with theatrical lights. No, she didn't look different, perhaps slightly yellow-green, but still blue-eyed and heart-shape faced. Somehow she decided her eyes were clearer, focused intently with glitter-edged blue. Little dots of perspiration stood out like beads of dew over the bridge of her nose. She gargled away the acid taste and sat primly on the round makeup mirror stool. Impulsively, she spun around. A baby! After years of more-or-less trying and deciding it might not happen, what a shock.

She tried to take matters in stride. Of course this could be only stress or fear or whatever stomach virus was making the rounds. But in her heart she knew--and was thrilled. No one was around to bring her crackers or a 7-up, so she sat contemplating herself in the gray light of a naked bulb. She wouldn't allow exuberance, merely a secret, smug smile as she fumbled in her bag for a peppermint. There was no way she'd be tagged with guilt for conceiving a much-wanted child. And there was no way she'd accept the idea of any kind of trade-off, some kind of consolation prize of a child for the loss of a husband.

But she did admit one thing. Her timing was off. Some choreographer she'd turned out to be! But her surprise would be nothing, she imagined, compared to . . . his.

It was almost like torture now, but Connie was faithful in keeping up her contacts with Marge, Trio, and Frou-Frou. This Saturday morning was Marge's turn to play hostess. The four gathered in the McGrew Point Capehart house to drink coffee and exchange status reports. Connie wore her leotards under a wrap skirt so she could go straight to the commissary after the coffee-klatch. Frauncine was overdressed as usual, a study in lime green with a tropical orange sash belting her jumpsuit, another orange scarf holding her bouffant hair high above her head in a teased pony tail. Marge, who never paid attention to

her appearance, was in a man's t-shirt and pull-on polyester blue pants. Dark, silent Trio dressed in a muted palette of beiges, an A-line skirt and cotton blouse.

There was little to be said. No one made an effort to cover the emptiness with chatter. In the living room, the television blared Saturday morning cartoons. Cereal boxes balanced on the arm of the sofa and kids sprawled on the cheap nylon rug.

The Advertiser was scattered in sections, the comic page with Marge's youngest boy, the car want-ads with the oldest, the Liberty House fashion ads with Frauncine. The telephone rang. The voice of the youngest boy called from the living room, "I'll get it." A few moments later, the seven year old poked his head into the kitchen, tilting his face to keep an eye on the television cartoons. "For you, Mom." His voice betrayed nothing unusual. Almost as an afterthought, he said, "It's Dad."

"What?" Marge made the inquiry in an automatic tone of voice, then shrieked. "Charlie!" She moved so fast she knocked her chair over backward.

Trio and Connie stared at each other. "Could it be?" asked Trio.

"What if it's a mistake? What if Bobby mistook some other voice for his dad's?" asked Connie. By now the other women were piling into the living room, too.

Connie felt herself trembling with apprehension as she watched across the room. Marge had the telephone by both hands and was shaking it. "Hello? Hello? Damn it, hello! Charlie?"

Charlie, is that you, you bastard?" She held the receiver away from her ear, looking at it ominously. "Charlie? Speak up."

Connie exchanged worried glances with Trio. Frauncine seemed to be absorbed in the cartoons along with the kids. Connie edged closer to the phone, feeling intrusive but with a determined right to know what was going on. She heard static sputtering and snapping. She closed her eyes. Every second was agony now.

Then Marge jumped up and down, her feet clumping heavily on the linoleum. "Charlie! You bum, I knowed you was all right."

Connie opened her eyes to a scene of mayhem. Marge was smiling, her placidly fat face jostling in sections of smiles. She was wildly hugging the phone, hugging her older boys, dancing up and down. All the while she hollered into the receiver. "Where are you? When are you coming home? You sure held out long enough, you son of a bitch!"

Connie was convinced. She begged aloud. "What about the others? What about Eliot? Marge, Marge, find out!" She wanted to claw the telephone away and demand answers. Her eyes were surging with tears and her stomach heaving with seasickness. Trio sat down stone-faced on the couch, her arms folded across her chest.

The world adjusted in slow-motion. Marge's face tightened. She raised an arm to silence the audience. Connie memorized each shift in tone of "Uh-huh" and "Yeah," and "Okay," and read significance into each wrinkle of her forehead, the

thrust of her chin, and the stance of her feet wiggling in the thongs.

"Yes, I understand," she said again, this time in a subdued tone and with a frantic glance at Trio. Her gaze then switched to Frauncine, accompanied by "Okay, I'll tell her." It was Connie's turn. She wanted to turn away, but couldn't. "Oh, no," were the only words from Marge and a strange gesture of sticking her hand deep into her slacks pocket. Connie's heart took a similar dive. The news was bad. Oh dear God, the news was bad.

Her eyes were blurring, but Connie hurried back to the kitchen and sat down. After the months of wanting to know anything, she now wasn't ready to hear everything. She buried her face in a cradle of her arms on the kitchen table, pushing aside cups and sugar bowl to make room. From the other room, she heard Marge's final epithets that passed for love. "Hitch the next plane outa that stinkin' hellhole, you ever-lovin' bastard."

At the click of the phone, Connie went numb. Moment of truth. She'd never expected it to happen this way, with cold coffee creeping through the sleeve of her leotard. Marge's voice echoed from the living room, a strident voice which now sounded extraordinarily gentle. "Trio, I have to tell you the worst. Abner is dead."

Connie knew she should get up and go to Trio, but she couldn't move. The profound silence was unbroken as Trio apparently accepted news she'd already believed. Next Marge's voice changed position, closer to the kitchen. "Frauncine, I want

you to listen to me carefully. Do you remember the briefing when they told us the ship had been in a battle with enemy patrol boats? Well, it's true. And after the Campbell went down, Mark-Mark was taken prisoner aboard one of the patrol craft. Do you understand? He's alive as far as anyone knows and is a prisoner of war in the north."

Instead of silence, there were wails of frustration from Frauncine. Connie heard some kind of pounding--fists against the television, perhaps. "He can't do this to me," Frauncine fumed.

Marge's footsteps moved into the kitchen. Connie stiffened. A hand touched her shoulder, as startlingly cold as if it had been the mythical icy hand of death. Yet, for a big, rough woman with calluses on her hands, Marge's touch was firm and caring. "Sit up, Connie. You don't want to hear this from anyone else."

She was right. And there was no real choice in the matter. Connie faced Marge, who beneath all the bluster was a steadfast friend. "Tell me."

"Eliot's missing."

Connie jumped to her feet. "Goddamnit, I know that! Tell me something else!" She demanded again, furiously, "Tell me. You can't leave me this way--"

"Oh, Connie, I'm so sorry. That's all there is! Eliot was last seen swimming towards shore when the Campbell went down. That's all there is--swimming towards shore." She turned away abruptly and grabbed the fly swatter on the cabinet. She beat

the mesh against the sink rim. Dead fly fragments bounced against the white porcelain. She threw down the swatter and enveloped Connie in a massive embrace.

"Tell me again about the others," Connie managed. The women gathered around the table, the cups shoved together in the center. Connie's thoughts were jumbled as Marge recited the story. It was unreal, as if made up by Marge to compete with the cartoons as the morning's entertainment. Her lips were without color as she reiterated, "Mark-Mark's a prisoner. Captured on the beach. Charlie saw."

She touched Trio's hand. "Abner's dead." Trio nodded.

Insanely, Connie felt jealous. Abner was accounted for--even if dead. And how dare Charlie be safe and headed home! Mark-Mark was merely a prisoner. That made waiting bearable. He'd be back one day. Where was Eliot, where was Eliot? Illogically, Connie thought Marge might have lied to her. "Do you know where Eliot is?"

"No." Marge's straightforward voice cut through the jumble.

"Look at me, Connie. I'll tell you what little is known."

Everyone sat up straighter. Connie was at full military attention, even her wrists and ankles rigid.

Marge's account was cursory, but it jibed with the rumors from the briefing. "The ship was blown off course by the hurricane as we thought. And the rumor about the attack was true. The Campbell ended up with a casualty to the rudder, and steering problems which let it drift nearly onto the beach. The ship was a sitting duck when the patrol boats opened fire."

In the silence, Marge added the epitaph, "They didn't have a chance."

"No chance," repeated Trio. She began to sop up spilled coffee with a used napkin. Frauncine sat biting her lips and assessing her fingernails. Connie thought the light in the kitchen seemed diffused and out of focus. She thought she heard more coffee perking, but when she glanced at the stove, there was nothing on the burner.

"There's not much more," said Marge. Some of her gruffer tones were creeping back into the narrative. "The ship took a direct hit amidships, according to Charlie."

"Why, isn't that interesting," bubbled Frauncine.

The others looked at her in dismay.

Marge resumed, louder this time. "That was the hit that killed Abner and nine or ten others. Instantly. It was then that Eliot saw the situation was hopeless and ordered the others to 'Abandon ship.' With the storm and torpedo damage, not many lifeboats were usable. Eliot ordered Charlie and Mark-Mark to command the remaining boats and take the crew ashore."

Connie recited her line again, by rote. "What about Eliot?"

"He stayed behind to destroy secret equipment."

At that point, Connie imagined the situation plainly. Eliot finishing his official tasks, then struggling to catch up with the lifeboats, his powerful arms churning against the tow of the raging sea. She saw the boat moving out of reach. Huge, gray-green waves blocked his vision. His head bobbed, the strokes of his arms waned, the heavy orange life jacket blurred

into a smear against the gray. By the time Marge said the words again, Connie had already seen them. "The last anybody saw, Eliot was swimming towards shore."

The silence was broken when Marge cracked her knuckles. Trio moved from the table to the back door and stood looking out at the television antennae of the Capehart subdivision. Frauncine sat obliviously staring at the Liberty House ad again.

Connie shrugged. It seemed a stupid, futile gesture. She couldn't talk, there was no point in screaming or crying, and there was no action to be taken. She shrugged again. Swimming towards shore. Well, Eliot could have made it. At 3:45 on the afternoon she was clutching Peter Trevalino in the big bedroom of Hospital Point, Eliot could have been clutching the sand along the coastline of North Vietnam. Right now, at this very minute, the telephone could be ringing in the red house. New hope replaced the wrung-out feeling.

"How did Charlie get away?" Connie asked, finally able to focus on someone else.

"After the lifeboat beached, the men were pinned down by sniper fire. Some were captured but Charlie escaped into the jungle. He hid for twenty-four hours, then began his flight southward along the coast until he finally stumbled into friendly territory." Marge's voice grew triumphant. "That old redneck says he lost thirty pounds. But I'll bet he's good as new. He's in the hospital in Subic now, and he'll be here day after tomorrow!" She whistled through her teeth in excitement and laughed in hoarse, relieved hilarity.

"I'm glad he's safe," murmured Connie. She was grateful in a strange way. If anyone deserved to have blind faith rewarded, it was Marge. But beyond that, Connie could muster no more charity.

The goodbyes were strained as the women went their separate ways. There were official things to be done now. Their status had been shifted from one of unity to strangers with little in common. Connie was last to leave. At the end, loudmouth Marge was finally silent. In her eyes, Connie saw the self-consciousness of being the one who had to inflict the pain of knowledge on the others. "I'm sorry, Connie. I didn't do very well. Oh, I didn't know how to do it at all."

"You did the best anyone could do. You cared about us and you told the truth. It's okay." Connie was working against time. With Charlie heading home and Eliot left in the void, there was a terrible gap opening between herself and the other women. She tried to smile across the chasm of time and circumstance. "Honest, it's okay, Marge." Then she rushed away, running from both the past and the future.

Charlie came home to an exuberant, unorthodox welcome. Frauncine packed up with immoderate haste and removed herself to Des Moines, announcing petulantly, "I don't have to stay anywhere I don't want to." After weeks of agonizing, Trio arranged burial of an empty casket in the National Military

Cemetery of the Pacific. Peter Trevalino presided at the military service for Abner, although Abner had not been Catholic. Connie attended, going first to Trio's apartment and accompanying her to the site in Punchbowl crater where the graveside service was scheduled.

The day was bright, windy, and cloudless. A turquoise sky reflected down into the green rim of the vast extinct volcano. Sheltered beneath the jagged black lava cone, the rows of flat white gravestones marched tidily across the clipped grass carpet. The wind lifted the palm fronds in swirls as if they were a choir with upraised arms.

As the car eased closer to the roped off, tented area, Trio said, "It's not right having a funeral without a body. I shouldn't have allowed it. But the Navy's so anxious to close its files."

Personally Connie thought the service a good idea. It was a fixed point. An actual burial, even without a body, served to set parameters for grief. Trio would mourn, certainly, but there would be this day to dramatize the end of her life with Abner.

The honor guard was in place, posed with empty guns over the empty casket. Father Peter Trevalino's eulogy was nontraditional and ecumenical. He had nice things to say about Abner. "All his life he headed west. Just like the pioneers, Abner started on the east coast, moved to the midwest, was stationed in Long Beach before he came to Hawaii. Pearl Harbor to Midway, Midway to Yokosuka, Yokosuka to the Gulf of Tonkin, Abner made progress west."

Connie pictured a flat earth with Abner falling off the sharp edge. She yawned in the middle of the service, not a gesture of fatigue, but gasping for air.

Peter searched the faces of the few mourners gathered. "This is a hard time to die for one's country, but it is no less necessary." He reviewed the last quarter century of warfare. "Tarawa, Midway, Kwajalein--strange names, already beginning to be forgotten. But they spelled victory with a capital V for people. Porkchop Hill, Inchon Landing, Panmunjon--names more recent for our generation, names that spelled endurance, and, eventually, peace. And now? We have a decade of confusion, with a war that's gone on for four years with barely a public notice. What do names like Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh and Iadrang mean? They mean brave men like Abner will go so far west they'll end up in the east. They mean brave women like Trio must stand in Punchbowl and be both honored and guarded by empty guns."

When it was over, Connie and Peter took Trio back to her apartment. She declined company and all offers to join them for supper. They went to the open terrace of the Canon Club on the side of Diamond Head and watched the sunset fade into twilight. The club houseboy padded out softly in leather thongs, bringing their drinks on a rattan tray. The glasses featured touristy miniature umbrellas with a cherry stuck on the end and a vanda orchid floating on the dark rum.

"I think Trio will be all right," said Peter.

Connie agreed. "She never shattered, not even at the beginning." She took a long sip of the rum. "She never had any hope, so I suppose she had none to lose."

Slack-key guitar music curled up from the Waikiki Shell concert down the mountainside. The smell of bananas frying in coconut syrup drifted out from the kitchens of the club. The twilight hummed with tropical vitality. Steady traffic curved along Makiki. A rivulet of lights climbed Mt. Tantalus. A soft siren floated in from the distance toward downtown, and the light on the Aloha Tower winked rhythmically. In the Ala Wai yacht harbor, a small forest of bare masts tipped back and forth in unison. Connie took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Do you remember the time we came here--you and I and Eliot together?"

"I asked you to dance. On this terrace. How could I forget?"

"Your hands were cold."

They laughed with the innocence of the past as a shield, and he raised a silent toast to better days.

"Do you know how they shatter diamonds?" asked Peter.

"What does that have to do with our conversation?"

"Along lines of force," he explained, ignoring her. "They line up all the atoms and can then split them apart. It's the way volcanoes erupt, too. I thought of that as we stood down in Punchbowl's crater."

"I thought of how sulfur and brimstone made that crater, and how it is all burnt out now."

"The force spent, finally and forever, even the ashes consumed. And then--miracle--the green grass comes back. Did you notice how lush it is in the bottom of the volcano?"

"But it was so quiet. The empty trench in the ground, that little empty box, those soldiers with the empty guns. Not a sound. I imagined dogs burying a bone and silently nosing dirt around the hole." She shivered in the warm night.

"All I could think was that the earth's fire spots are lining up along their force fields."

"And the split, for the moment, isn't Punchbowl. It's along the seam in Vietnam."

"Yeah, Hanoi to Saigon. This year's force line. But there's a bigger rip, too. Things are splitting from India right across Asia. It's not that silly domino theory at all. Instead, it's the damned seams tearing apart."

"Any solutions for welding or stitching things back together?" They walked arm in arm along the terrace, drinks in hand.

"No solutions, just a few ideas."

The sunset glowed purple behind the mountains while the Ala Wai Canal took on tinges of pink. The lights of the hotels along the highrise beachfront lit up with mammoth displays of candlepower. Connie offered her summation, "Despite my age, I'm not really part of the Pepsi generation, the Now people, the Me faction, or the swinging singles. I'm not into New Age thought or the dawning of Aquarius. In the end, I turn out to

be southwestern conservative, middle-class moral, and military-supported."

"But you know something very wrong is going on."

"Yes. I've seen our Marine Zippo Squads setting fire to peasant huts on the nightly news. And I've looked to President Johnson for leadership--or at least outrage--but he's preoccupied with marrying off Luci."

"We can't go on reacting haphazardly. It doesn't jibe with my lines of force theory."

"What if we react wrongly?"

"One never knows without history's wonderful hindsight. But our instincts are good, Connie. I still have hope--and that's part way to faith. It's going to be hard for you, as a Navy wife, to find out precisely what's going on. But you need to try."

"And you're already committed, aren't you?"

"Yes."

I have, she thought, every bit as many and as good reasons as you to find out what's really going on.

"Peter, I have a favor to ask." She had come to see him in the chaplain's office, third floor of the exchange building, right behind the section of lamps, mattresses, and the post office.

"Will you help me?"

To her dismay, he flinched at the words. His eyes darted around the cubbyhole room as if seeking an open exit. "Damn it, Peter, don't get spooked. I've asked you for nothing up to now."

His smile was tender, tantalizing as he regained his composure. "I'm just surprised to see you. Come on in. What do you want, Connie?"

"Something I can't get through official channels. Cold, hard facts. Information I can rely on."

"I don't have a private line to God or anywhere else, you know."

"But you've got access." She chuckled, "Presumably to both."

He played the game. "Sometimes. Limited." He offered her a chair, then sat opposite her, across the clean desk.

Connie was brisk. "I want you to hitch a ride on some VIP jaunt. I know you can--you used to wander off to exotic destinations all the time. Go to Saigon and check things first hand for me."

"What things?"

"The rumors. The reports. And reports of rumors and rumors of reports. The hearsay, the gossip and anything that's written down officially. If you come back satisfied that Eliot is dead, then I'll accept that as the final verdict. It's important I find out--and soon."

She could see the ramifications of what she was asking traveling through a maze in his mind. He shook his head doubtfully. "You'd trust me?"

Her nod was instant affirmation. How could he doubt her now? Why was he acting as if she were a total stranger? Was this the same man who'd taken her to bed and seemed to know her every thought, desire, and need?

"I know we're a natural team, Connie. Our doubts have been the same, our hopes, our--" He broke off in midsentence. "It's good you're ready to come down from your ivory tower on Hospital Point. But I need help, too. I want something from you."

Warily, she pushed her chair back from his desk. "Some kind of trade off?"

"More like casting our lots together. We're already in the same lifeboat. I just want you to man one of the oars. Help me if and when I go public with my doubts about this war that isn't a war."

"How could I do that? Without knowing for sure about Eliot? Whatever doubts I entertain need to stay personal and private. I'm not the type to bite the hand that feeds me."

He exploded with angry force. "Hell yes, you can go public!" He grabbed a stack of newspaper clippings from the bookcase behind him and shoved them across at her. A glance showed they were mostly pictures and speeches of well-known dissidents--other priests, students, politicians.

"I don't see many military wives there," she pointed out mildly.

His dark hair and eyes gleamed in the fluorescent light. It was hard to tell if he was furious at her or merely excited about his own decisions. "Look, Connie, it's got to be a bargain. I'll get a space available hop and see if I can find out anything for you in Saigon. Meanwhile, though, you have to get your ducks in a row. When I get back. . . ."

His voice trailed off. Put into those unspoken terms, she was less sure. "Must there be strings attached?"

"Does the archbishop shit in the woods?"

"Can't I weasel around with 'I'll think about it,' and 'Maybe' or 'Let's see how I feel when you get back.'"

"There's always a price."

"Yes. I just didn't think you'd be the one to print the tag in such boldfaced signs."

He shrugged, rose, and walked around the desk. She stood facing him. That familiar sense of yearning threatened to overpower her better judgment, obscure her better cause. She felt shaky inside, as if she'd misjudged him and what she'd asked of him.

A tremor crossed the creases at the side of his mouth. "Can't you see how lopsided this is?" He cupped her chin in his hand. "Asking me to go look for your husband when I'm in love with you--this is too much like David and Bathsheba."

She didn't avert her eyes and she wasn't embarrassed. "It's not the same situation. You haven't read your Old Testament

lately. Eliot went into battle of his own accord. In fact, if the information we have is correct, he went out of his way to find a fight--or start one. All I want you to do is pin down things. Oh, Peter, I need certainty."

He embraced her chastely. "Exactly what we don't get in this life."

She insisted, "All I'm asking is that if Eliot's dead--" She shivered, then squared her shoulders. "I want him damned certain and forever dead!"

Peter stared at her, a lack of comprehension locked in his eyes.

"Oh, can't you understand? For godsakes, purgatory is a much, much worse place than hell."

"Interesting theology, Connie."

"Baloney to theology. I want help. And don't try any of that pap about God's will--"

"I won't. The work of the world is in the world, not in the cloisters."

"I'm asking you point blank for help, Peter. And I didn't think I'd have to ask you, of all people, twice."

"You don't. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, darling."

Waiting. Waiting for news. Waiting for news from Peter. Waiting for news from Peter in Saigon. At first there was little news, and after a few days, there was none, only waiting.

She helped Izuki set out three plum tree saplings. "These sticks are really going to make plums?" she quizzed.

"Not ordinary plums," he assured her. "Prize plums."

"Oh I wouldn't want any other kind."

The wiry little Japanese man kept suggesting she work the earth with her fingers. "Take off your gloves," he instructed. "Bend down and touch the earth.

"I'll watch."

"No, you must feel the dirt."

She kept making tentative grasps with one ungloved hand, barely dusting her palm over the soil.

Finally, Izuki picked up a big handful of dirt and put it in her cupped hands. "Hold it," he ordered. "Touch the real earth."

"I don't feel anything," she lied. Actually, it felt incredibly heavy, as if less than a cupful weighed tons.

"Does that priest that comes here use sea water to make his holy signs?"

"What?" Befuddled, Connie dropped the monumental load and looked away.

"I use the earth to do my work. The priest uses the water."

What element did that leave for her? Fire, she supposed. Fire was a testing and tempering agent. It made clay into

pottery, made iron into steel, made volcanos into verdant green cemeteries. But the firepower of war and the fires of desire were consuming her, not just hardening.

Thoroughly confused, Connie shoveled dirt around the bare roots of the prize plums, feeling she was the prize fool.

"Plums make a lovely garden." Izuki pronounced the words like a benediction.

"How soon til we feast on the prize plums?" she asked sarcastically.

"We will take tea under the first buds." He packed the dirt around the roots and looked at the project, satisfied. "This yard hasn't had a plum since Missy Cagle lived here."

"Missy Cagle?" Connie's mind did a flip-flop through history. Admiral Cagle's wife? The admiral Cagle? The one who went down on the Arizona? "When was that, Izuki?"

"In the forties. I put in the first garden for her. She was a good woman." Izuki made a slight bow toward the sea grapes.

"You were here during World War Two? During Pearl Harbor?"

He nodded. "Right after the bombing, the police came and put me in the camp. But Missy Cagle came and got me out. I set out a plum tree for her."

"A prize plum?" Connie wanted to know.

"Missy Cagle moved away before she saw the buds."

Connie was overcome with curiosity. "Izuki, have you ever been out to the Arizona memorial?"

He flinched cautiously, barely a tremor across the lines of his face. "No ma'am."

"Neither have I."

"We should go." The words rounded up on the end as if he were being forced to recite them.

"So we should." She felt unnatural pressure, also.

It was all agreed. But neither made a move to set a date. Izuki ventured, "We will go on the day the prize plums bud and we take tea in the side yard."

She offered her hand to seal the bargain. He bowed, picked up his tools, and went away. She went inside, satisfied that these spindly sticks were really prize plums--and satisfied with the way Izuki had tactfully bought more time for both of them.

Each morning, right after checking on the mynah bird, Connie inspected the plums. No prizes. No plums. Not even a solitary leaf. But a wonderful routine. Ballet's attraction was routine; now she discovered the same satisfaction in her gardening. It was a way to avoid growing dull, distant, and weary. She waited more patiently for news of Peter. Meanwhile, she made increasingly frequent trips to the Fleet Library for more books. The library clerk knew her by name and didn't bother to stamp her card anymore.

The third week she broke the routine by joining the rest of the Navy community in a fling with show business. The movie, In Harm's Way, was filming on Ford Island. Everyone was invited to be extras. There was a dance scene. Come in party clothes. Intrigued, Connie went with the others, hoping for a glimpse of

Patricia Neal. She also went to assure herself that no one could detect her pregnancy.

What happened seemed uncanny. The darkened room, the music, the potted palms strategically blocking the exits, the crowd milling and chattering seemed almost a reprise of New Year's Eve--the last time she'd ended up alone on a dance floor. The director paired her off to dance with a short ensign who kept maneuvering so his face and single stripe shoulder-board were to the camera. "Cut," called the director through his megaphone. "Now, folks, line up and we'll do another take. We'll get the light right this time."

Connie bid her ensign farewell and stood by herself by the potted palms.

"Hey, you. Tall, dark, and handsome--come over here," called the director to a person who stood in the outer doorway. Connie glanced up, saw Peter, did a doubletake and then pushed through the crowd toward him. She got as close as the director. The pushy man with the megaphone grabbed her by the elbow. "Fine, fine. You'll do fine, miss. He's tall, you're tall. You both have dark hair. You'll make a fine pair. Here you go, now dance up a storm for me on this slow number. Ready? Places. Quiet everyone."

The lights dimmed. Music swelled. Connie stood immobile. "When did you get back?"

"Just now. I went to your place. The gardener said you were here. I came to tell--"

"Did you find--"

"Nothing. I'm so sorry, Connie. Nothing at all."

She shook her head, fighting back not tears but the threat of emptiness. Defeated, she silently put her head against his shoulder.

The hot rays of the spotlight pinned them. The loudspeaker singled them out. "Cut the chatter, folks, but dance, please. Remember how? You gotta move around to dance. That's right. Move your feet, not your mouth."

Connie turned helplessly to the director. "He's a priest."

"Oh, pardon me, Father," boomed the director's voice. "Do you dance?"

"Sure," Peter responded easily, "I'm a natural song and dance man."

"Okay, then, what's the holdup? Move camera three up closer . . . pan . . . now, close up on the padre and his partner. Hey, Father, you are a regular hooper. Look up at him and smile, honey. You two got charisma. That's what you two got--shake, rattle, and sparkle. Can't give you any lines to say. That'd cost you union dues. Go on, look at each other that way again. Keep that eye contact. Smolder, baby. Make it smoke. Steam up the lens for me."

Connie knew a blush was staining her face; embarrassment for Peter, really. She'd already been burned at the stake as far as she was concerned. And would the director kindly quit using the word union?

The way he held her, the way they fit, the way the crowd hushed, the way their eyes locked, the way the twitch of smile

and memory flicked across his face. Any fool could see this wasn't a chance pairing. Random selection? More like magnets at sixty paces, a chemistry so strong even a stranger had smelled it and singled them out. Directed to come to together; a force outside their control. How neatly that wrapped matters up. They were unique--rare, even--in the way they felt about each other and the whole world was willing to admit it.

She denied the relationship with her mind but her body remembered and betrayed her. She looked up. Simultaneously Peter looked down. The awful knowledge of love in his eyes was unavoidable. A stain, blush-wine pink, spread a heat toward her center. The betrayal of the flesh--simple, elegant, total.

She excused herself the moment the director yelled "Cut."

Peter followed her. "Let me take you home, Connie. We've got to talk."

She stood silent. "You said you found out nothing--so there's nothing to talk about. I hoped against hope there'd be something. Anything."

He urged again, "You have any whiskey at your house? Or even coffee?"

"Coffee. But--"

"Don't treat me like some sideshow freak. You didn't mind smiling at me when we were on camera. A very convincing smile, too. So don't act like it's not safe to let me go on liberty. Don't pretend you're afraid to let me in your house."

"It's not safe," she corrected. "You're not safe in my house, nor in my arms, and we've already proved that." Her

voice fell to a whisper. "Our only safety now is in staying strangers."

"That might be safer--but certainly not better. Please, Connie, let's go somewhere and talk."

"On neutral ground, then," she assented. She couldn't look at him. She couldn't say any of the things she'd planned. But she couldn't stand here tongue-tied and guilt-ridden either.

"What about the O Club?"

"Camp Smith?" he suggested alternately. "Quieter. Higher up"

"No, the heiau. The lovely little park with the healing herbs the Hawaiians call sacred. Let's go there. It's on the backside of Aiea and it's open til dark."

The windy road, slippery on the high, wet side of the mountain, led to a pagan-rites circle of stones amid pine trees. The wind, dark and brisk, called out through the pine branches. Connie felt quite chilly in her open-toe heels and pleated skirt with the silk overblouse.

They walked on the marked trail. Some stones meant healing, others were for life or blessing, while every plant in the landscape had a medicinal or spiritual use. A mass of pine needles had fallen and made a beige carpet on the lee side. Connie looked up, wondering. Did the trees know seasons instinctively in this land without change? Did they reach a peak of foliage and then shed? Hadn't she turned to Peter instinctively? Weren't they on the same level as rocks and trees

and surf and sunspots? Why did it have to get mixed up with honor and duty? And love.

They walked while he told of his less-than-successful trip to Saigon. His open palm steadied her back on the uphill grade. Nothing like the flashpoint chemistry lesson at the filming. Tell him about the baby, a voice nagged inside her. Tell him now. It will only get worse the longer you wait. "Peter, it's been four months since Eliot left . . . nearly three since he disappeared. I--I--" She stumbled over a loose boulder, regained her balance and took a seat on the rock. "Did you really draw a blank in Saigon? Did you try all the channels?"

"All I could ferret out, on or off the record."

"And there's really nothing to learn?"

"I found out Johnson is going to double the monthly draft calls in July from seventeen to thirty-five thousand. I learned the new plan for winning the war that isn't a war involves establishing defense perimeters facing the South China Sea up and down the coast. The Iadrang river valley near the Cambodian border is supposed to be the next buildup area. Most of the time I hung out with Harry Sudbury, the British journalist. He knew twice as much as all the intelligence services combined. He says bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos will start in the fall."

"What about Eliot and the Campbell?"

"It's like they never existed. I couldn't figure out the truth--much less the whole truth." He let out a sound of exasperation. "You know every time people talk, there's a

possibility of error. By the time a story--or a statistic--has traveled back to here, then to mainland, then to Washington, the possibility of error is greater than the possibility of truth." He held her gently, tilting her chin upward between his hands. "Connie, be prepared for a shock if the truth ever does get out."

"What are you saying?"

"That forgery is a very common vice. Especially common among the zealous, whether they be early day Christians composing a few extra gospels or later day military men counting the bodies of slain enemies."

"Oh, Peter, what am I going to do?"

"Operate in a circle you can see across. Harry Sudbury advises everyone not to bite off more seascape than he or she can swallow."

Her mind played word games: 'see a cross, sea across.' "What I really want," she decided, "isn't a geometry lesson about radiuses and circles. I want someone to hold in my arms and laugh with and sing to, not another interview on national policy. I want someone to bring back Eliot and I want to live happily ever after."

"At least you know what you want."

"Yes, and for that, I don't need any famous whole truth. In fact, I can live just ducky without the whole truth. Or ultimate causes." She managed a wan smile in Peter's general direction. "But now I'm messing around in your department."

"You've done a fine job with the mess you've been handed, Connie. No one could have been any braver or stronger or smarter."

"You needn't issue any accolades. I've spent many a night with my head under my pillow." She tossed a handful of semi-sacred gravel pebbles. "I'm trying to see the big picture, like everyone recommends. But I don't know. Most of the time I only see me, a woman stranded. I can't go home. I have no home. I can't move forward. There's no open space on the checker board. I feel like the tide comes in and washes me away, a little bit at a time, every morning and night."

"Don't let Eliot's loss destroy you, too." Peter's tone was disconsolate, a mix of weariness and dejection. "I couldn't stand to lose you."

"I'm losing Eliot all the time," she confessed. "Already, I can't remember little things about him. I'm losing his scent in the clothes in the closet. I forgot the new Wellington boots for his birthday in the box under the stairs. How long before I forget the rest?"

"Psychology says that's robbing the past to create the present."

"A variant on robbing Peter to pay Paul," she quipped.

"We make memories out of hopes and desires just like we anticipate the future in terms of what we need and want. We're decidedly human in that. We love the past because we can slow it down."

"While the present careens along with reckless speed," she amended. And the future? Go on, the inner voice hinted. Tell him. Now. She stoppered the nagging like putting a cork in a bottle. "But how long before I forget the rest?" she asked. "How long before I don't care? Or, worse, say good riddance?" She remembered the scratch of whisker stubble when Eliot had been at sea for a few days, rope yarn Wednesday afternoons, crazed episodes of feeling poor and trying to iron those white dress uniforms--iron awhile, cry awhile, iron awhile, cry awhile. "Will I just forget our Sunday walks over to the Mere Mart or will I choose not to remember on purpose? Do you know they have hundreds of old leather-bound books at the flea market? They are stamped, 'Sent to the Armed Forces Lending Library, for our brave boys overseas, for 2¢ postage!'"

Peter obviously didn't care. Something else was on his mind. "Connie, did you see Jack Kennedy when he came through Honolulu in 1963? He came out to check on Harry Felt and stayed overnight in the admiral's quarters up on Makalapa hill."

"I didn't move out here til last year. You met me. Remember? The pouring rain, the big black umbrella. You looked so solemn."

"And you looked so terribly--" The pause disconcerted them both. "All right," he smiled, "I won't say beautiful. You looked . . . disappointed."

She knew the ground rules. If he would stay within the bounds, she must, also. "Well, I had been led to expect hula girls and an orchid lei."

"Instead of a pompous old priest with a Volkswagen and a torn umbrella."

Now the words must go unspoken. Let the record show that Connie Hopkins thought him pompous and old, for she had not differed with his description. Let the record show they might burn in hell for adultery but not for any lack of circumspection in verbal usage. "Tell me about Kennedy. Did you talk to him?"

"No, I was merely a rubbernecked tourist like everyone else. I walked down to the corner of Kam Highway and Center Drive, by fleet weather central, and watched the motorcade. Some motorcade. Two cars. Jack Kennedy and Harry Felt in one, a couple of Secret Service types in the other. They pulled up to the light and stopped when it turned red, just like any other cars on the highway. And Kennedy looked surprised to see the small group of well-wishers standing there. It wasn't a designated corner or a roped-off area or a staged political parade. It was just a dozen of us standing on a corner, on purpose, to say hello. The time was twilight, still purple and gray. There was a young mother in orange slacks pushing a kid in his stroller, and a couple of seamen deuces, and a fat chief with a mustache who came down the outside stairs from the weather watch."

"What happened?"

"Kennedy nodded at us and grinned. We applauded. It was spontaneous."

"That's a nice story, Peter. One the kid in the stroller will no doubt tell his children, to their definite boredom."

"J.F.K. looked small."

"So? He wasn't very tall to start with." Connie was amused at Peter's use of initials, as if on something more than even a first name basis with the Kennedys.

"But I wasn't prepared to see a small man. That's the point. It was like Camelot condensing right in front of my eyes. Right then and there, I felt as you do now, like I was losing something. Something which, when gone, would be irretrievable. Once Kennedy had shrunk, he would never look the same to me again. I never lacked for ambition--or faith--til that moment." He linked his arm through hers and they moved lazily along the garden path, keeping just inside the bark chip line where the moisture held the footing firm. "Have you ever seen those reading lamps with little stagecoaches on the base? Like the whole American West has shrunk to just a little circle of light with a beer-ad lampshade over it."

"I grant that we've both lost something."

"And I've got to get it back!"

The fierceness of his vow startled her. How did he intend to get his share of whatever it was--the glory, the honor, the balance due?

Now his enthusiasm spilled out. "I'm going to the mainland next week, Connie. Going to sit in on some of the meetings around the Bay area, visit my old stomping grounds at Berkeley, size up the lay of the land. Then, if what I find is firm enough, I'm going to take a public stand."

"Dear God in heaven! Whatever are you thinking about? Are you going to resign your commission?"

"Possibly even renounce my vows."

She didn't believe what she'd heard. "You should clap a hand over your mouth for even considering such blasphemies."

"Hold on. Don't consign me to hell straight off. I haven't done any of those things yet. Actually, I'm not sure yet of anything, except that I'm thinking straight for a change."

"Quit the Navy? Quit the priesthood? You're thinking crazy--not to mention playing with fire."

He only smiled, but his eyes held a passionate sparkle. She saw again the gleam in his eyes that she'd earlier interpreted as love for her. It had changed to a glow of something even more important to him. The Crusades beckoned. His torch was already lit.

All right, then, go in peace, Father Trevalino. No, not quite with my blessing, but go in peace. From that moment on, she never entertained any idea of telling him she was pregnant.

Peter Trevalino took a month's accumulated leave time and spent the whole thirty-one days in California. While he was there, Connie spent three days in Tripler U.S. Army General Hospital due to a miscarriage. It came on suddenly, definite and disruptive enough that she drove herself to the emergency room at eleven o'clock at night. It was over just as quickly, a flurry

of anesthesia and green walled operating rooms and sterile sheets and a death certificate for her to sign presented with the breakfast tray the next morning. She left the breakfast uneaten and the document blank. On the afternoon of the third day she was released, alone and shaky, to drive herself back to Hospital Point. Oh, one last item of business, Mrs. Hopkins. You must stop by the business office and sign that death certificate.

She stood in line, received the official form to be filled out in white ink against black paper, and sat down on a bright pink bench in the hall of the bright pink first floor foyer. The Army must have accumulated an overstock of pink paint; outside and in, Tripler wasn't pastel, but blazing, luscious pink.

For the first time, Connie forced herself to actually read the lines and spaces on the certificate. Nothing was required but a signature. Why was that so hard to affix? She didn't have to fill in any blanks about age, weight, sex, number of pregnancies or period of gestation. All she had to do was write her name and be done with it.

Instead she dawdled, mesmerized for a final time in a private litany of hurt, doubt, and anger. Fine, fine, I say. I love Eliot and he loves ships and duties and the Navy more. I love Peter and he loves peace and California and God more. That's unfair competition. I can't hold a candle to either of those venerable institutions. And I shouldn't have to! Now she was worked up, a lump in her throat and a pain in her chest. I'm entitled to something. By damn, I've got balances on account

with the Navy and God both. Listen here, Eliot, Peter, both of you--you can't do this to me!

Eventually she marked through the line for name which had been typed "Infant Female." Mechanical print was too cold. Carefully, she inserted the name Ellen Anne. It seemed a fragile and tender gesture toward a child never seen or held. Without a quiver of the white ink pen, Connie then signed her own name on the bottom line.

She left the certificate at the proper window with the proper clerk. As she went through the proper revolving exit door into the bright sunlight, she glanced back down the pink corridor. If I'd held her in my arms, would I somehow now feel differently?

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, through the world wide facilities of the Armed Forces radio network, we bring you continuing coverage of the historic Gemini 4 mission. Today, June 3, 1965, marks America's first walk in space. Our broadcast update this hour will take us through three orbits with the spacecraft, and, if all goes as planned, include the first spacewalk by Astronaut White."

Connie tuned the portable radio and placed it on the sea wall. She shaded her eyes and watched the sky. Cloudless. Empty. The radio cackled static and color commentary. She knew she couldn't see anything but she watched the sky faithfully. She knew she couldn't hear anything, but she kept listening.

The radio announcer prattled proudly about the space walk mission. "McDivitt and White to be picked up by the carrier Wasp after sixty-two orbits . . . White's tether to let him stay out twenty minutes . . . will be cranking open the hatch door as the spacecraft approaches Hawaii."

She fancied she could see perfectly. Why, there was astronaut White, clasping the gold-braided lifeline and the oxygen space gun to his chest. It looked easy. He just stepped out and floated. The air line uncoiled lazily, the braid twisting like an umbilical.

A pang of hurt cut across Connie's soft stomach. No. No birth images, she warned herself. She sucked in her flat stomach. Suck up your guts, White, up there miles and miles above us all. And I'll suck up mine standing down here on the shore with the tide oozing up around the seawall. Do you have any word for us from up there, Mister White? We're waiting. C'mon, buddy, what's the good word?

The report crackled. She leaned toward the radio, breathlessly straining to hear the words to the waiting world.

"This is fun."

"Fun?" She repeated the phrase and laughed til out-of-control tears formed on her lashes. Fun? Out of this world fun! Gold braided umbilical fun. She snapped off the radio, marched back and forth in the quick-descending dark. Always dark by six-thirty in the perpetual island savings time. This is fun. Perpetual savings of time. Goldplated guaranteed umbilical. For what? Tomorrow we will run faster, fly higher,

stay out in space longer. Can I stay out until dark, mommy?
Can I go to the moon, daddy? Why, yes, my darling daughter.
Hang your clothes on a banyan limb but don't go near the
water. It's easy. It's fun! Just close your eyes, uncoil your
line, open the hatch, and step into the dark void of the
universe. Astronaut White had done it. Eliot had done it. And
the baby.

And if I had held her in my arms, would I now feel
differently?

Peter came back from California during a kona, the time
when the tradewinds cease and a southern stillness drenches the
islands in humidity. The smoke from the cane fields lingered
over the lee of Oahu, producing a scented fog in Honolulu and
blanketing Pearl Harbor in a smog composed of diesel and
cannery fumes. The odors from the pineapple cannery, working
around the clock now, added a stifling dimension to the natural
gas fumes in the heavy air. He returned to Hawaii, full of grand
plans and carrying a copy of the San Francisco Examiner with
his picture on the front page. He found Connie possessed of a
stillness as acute as the kona. She listened politely to a recital
of his travels but made little comment. She sat, her face a
seeming blank, in the wicker chair on her lanai, while he paced.
This evening everything was intensely still. Even the waves
made only a background slosh, not their usual crisp slaps at the
seawall. He ran his fingers along the close-woven

mosquito-screen windows as if to simulate the sound of a breeze through the mesh.

It was too close for comfort, too distant for communication, too hot to even pick up the Japanese paper fans on the rattan table. Connie just sat there barefoot, looking immaculate in white shorts and a sleeveless white t-shirt. The kona--or something--had produced a malaise which sapped people of their will. Finally, he blurted, "Don't fight me with silence, Connie. I can't fight on all fronts. Just let me do my job--"

"Which is to do what?" The half arched eyebrows, the half-turned face, the half-shrug of the impatient shoulders alerted him to further dimensions of her imposed control.

He answered more slowly. "That's what I'm not sure of. For chrissake, if the nation can't figure out priorities and objectives, how can I be expected to know precisely what's right?"

"Relevant," she supplied. "That's the current overused jargon." She held up the newspaper with his picture and quoted his remarks, "We as a nation expect to know what's relevant."

"Whatever," he mumbled, feeling quite morose all of a sudden. "It sounds corny now, even to me."

"Oh, surrounded on all sides by infidels and blasted by rebels. You're breaking my heart, Peter. Go tell your sad story elsewhere."

He self-consciously quoted another two lines of his remarks, "The rubble of Detroit and Newark lies at my feet. The bombs of Vietnam rain on my roof."

"Don't you think you're taking it all a bit melodramatically?
And personally?"

"No, it's a very gloomy age, Connie. It reminds me of
Homer and the ruins of windy Troy and the wine-dark seas--"

"You are entirely too well read," she scoffed.

"Ha, ha. You want jokes? Well, have you heard the one
about we're losing American ideals in Asian backwaters?"

"Look, Father Trevalino, as a stand-up comic, you ought to
take lessons from the rabbi."

He was too glum. Apparently, she wouldn't allow it.
Perhaps if she took all his crusades to heart, it would swamp
her.

Her voice mellowed. "Times are bad, no doubt about it.
But, by god, I've lost something, too."

Peter stalked back and forth in front of her, glancing
down. He'd been as close to her as it was possible for a man
and a woman to be. He couldn't detect a damned thing different.
It must be the weather. He insisted, "And we're losing the
American dream in mainstreet U.S.A."

"Is that a new one by the Byrds?"

"Be serious, Connie."

"All right." She pondered a moment. "Well . . . so what?
What's the difference? Would you rather be stabbed in the back
by a black teenager in Detroit or fried in a firefight in Pleiku?"

Now he stopped and searched her face. Those beloved blue
eyes, that pristine white throat, the concise hair pulled away

from her features. "I've never heard you talk that way. What's happened to you? I didn't realize you were so . . . bitter."

"Not bitter. Brittle, I think. Brittle is a better word. Bitter's a taste and brittle is thin skin. That's what I've developed, an exceedingly fragile shell." She laughed, a low croon of sarcasm and despair he had heard several people use for humor these days. "Just good ol' Connie bobbing about on her log in the Pacific. You remember Flotsam and Jetsam? Great old vaudeville team."

"What's gotten into you? Is it this infernal kona weather? You act groggy, like you're under some of kind of emotional anesthesia."

She apologized flippantly. "Cabin fever, I guess. Island claustrophobia. The dreaded Honolulu blues."

He was stymied, and so was grateful when she redirected the conversation. "So, fill me in on your California exploits, Peter. What's the mainland temper? I hear that people who disagree with Vietnam policy drive with their car lights on, and leave porchlights burning at night. What does that do--besides consume more energy?"

"Gestures are important. Rituals, symbols, any little actions that can unite dissent. No one seems to think the recent lecture to the U.N. by Ambassador Goldberg means a thing. And with Johnson traipsing off to Glassboro for his little tête-à-tête . . . Glassboro, New Jersey! Of all the godforsaken places to hang out and meet Kosygin. New Jersey!"

"Oh, c'mon, give New Jersey a break. Besides, what can you expect? The whole fiasco was labeled 'No Tangible Results' in the Star-Bulletin editorial."

"That's what you could label me these days."

"Peter the Fiasco?" She smiled. He felt the warmth returning. She teased, "I thought you believed you were Peter the Great."

"Just so I don't become Peter the Irrelevant. But what I meant was the way it's so damned hard to produce any tangible results. I'm sick of this situation, and yet the courses I've tried within channels have been virtually worthless. As long as I wear a military uniform, who's going to believe me?"

"I do." She touched his hand as he passed the chair.

With effort, he curbed his instinct to kneel and grab for both of her hands. He thought of a white magnolia against dark foliage as she sat there in the white outfit amid the baskets of airplane plants, asparagus fern, and Swedish ivy. "I've got to put my money where my mouth is. Up til now, it looks like I've been scared to do anything absolute."

Connie stood abruptly and poked the end of the paper fan into his chest. "I think it's worked."

"What's worked?"

"We've become part of the conspiracy of silence. Part of that awful containment of numbers policy. Some days it really is simpler to hush up, play it straight, and walk the narrow path." She turned to him with her hands outstretched. "You're in a position to see we're being duped. I'm in a position to be

duped. But neither one of us has done anything very courageous about it."

"It's time. That's what I'm saying."

She opened the fan and hid her face behind it. "But maybe I want to stay duped. It's a form of hypnosis. Or narcotic. They ought to spell it dope instead of dupe. The result is the same."

"I intend to do something," he vowed. "And I want you to help me."

"For you, I guess that translates into praise God and pass the ammunition." She moved to the rattan settee, disappearing into the shadows. Still, her voice needed.

"In Berkeley, they say, 'Raise hell and piss on the ammunition.'"

"In Berkeley, they'll say anything," she laughed. "And I've also heard it's dangerous to hand out matches when there's so much oil floating on the troubled waters of the world."

"I'm no firebrand. But I miss it."

"California in general? Or carrying the torch in the center of the parade?"

"Both, I suppose. And the general feeling that an earthquake could happen at any moment. I miss the energy in the air. The crisp mornings, the evening fog. Here in Hawaii, I'm always soggy." He ran his hand across the back of his neck.

"Soggy, sloppy, and sentimental. Well, buck up, that's not too bad. Do you know what they say happens to Navy wives? Fouled up, fucked up, and far, far from home."

"Not funny," he commented. He didn't like this dry, flat tone in her voice.

She didn't laugh either.

"The chips are down, Connie."

"And you have your bags packed for the coast."

"It's not quite that precipitous," he hedged.

"Well, at least you're honest. You'd rather be in Berkeley and you say so. You'll always want to be where you think the action is. In that, you're no different from Eliot. He intended to stir things up in the Gulf of Tonkin. There's no doubt in my mind. War drew him like a magnet. And it's not for me to say he was wrong--or that you are."

What a gracious speech. He was satisfied. "I won't do anything until I'm officially out of uniform. Until then, I'll write letters, make phone calls, put in a few local appearances that won't be too controversial. I've already made contact with some public relations folks in the Bay area."

"That's not exactly nailing any theses on Wittenberg's doors." She seemed reassured and stretched lengthwise on the settee, crossing one ankle over the other. Oh, those long, long legs, so tan and slim. The white shorts made a prim apron halfway up her thigh.

She asked intelligent, restrained questions. Was he certain leaving the military was the right move? They got into a discussion about right moves and wrong reasons. She offered the comment, "This war's already spawned a lot of misconceptions." She pointed out how the Navy had served him even as he'd

served it. The power to protect also gave him a way to protect his power base. The military was a maypole to dance around. Could he dance as well alone?

"I don't want to be alone," he said simply, hoping she'd get all the messages the words contained.

She only looked at him, squinting her lovely eyes into narrow slits. Damn this Kona weather. It made everything inscrutable. Hastily he changed the subject. "What say we take in the local festivities on Buddha's birthday?"

She came out of her reverie. "You're allowed to traffic in alien nativities?"

"This one's conveniently on Saturday morning at Kapiolani."

"In the park instead of at the Buddhist temple on Pali highway?"

"Buddhists are big on the zoo and balloons, Ferris Wheels, and donkey rides for the kiddos. I want to go. Come with me, Connie."

"Amid the folderol, is there a religious celebration? If so, that's out of my league these days. And you're the one with the celebrated ever-decreasing faith."

"We'll just go for the outing. To be honest, I'm hungry for some sushi and Oolong tea."

She started laughing then, and talking crazy. He caught something about Izuki and a tea ceremony and plum buds.

"Connie, what are you talking about? I'll swear you haven't made sense all evening. It's like we're on different wave lengths."

"Taking a Japanese gardener to the Arizona would make as much paradoxical sense as accompanying a Catholic priest to Buddha's birthday party." She laughed harder, little glistening tears sparkling on her cheeks.

Obviously the kona was to blame for the general lack of sanity in the air. "Saturday in the park, then?" he asked, anxious to get away.

"I'll be there by eleven. I'll meet you in Kapiolani by the sushi stand."

The first surprise at Buddha's birthday was the decor and decorum of the crowd. The festival seemed to Connie part sun-tan contest, part carnival, and mostly political rally! The second surprise was when Peter perched her on a half barrel, promised her she wouldn't have to do or say anything she didn't want to, but that she should remain there while he handed out some brochures around the grounds. "I'll be back in ten minutes," he insisted and disappeared in the elbow-to-elbow jostle.

Connie laughed to herself--she'd never asked to be put bodily on a pedestal. But from where she stood she had a view of the crowds spread up and down the parkway. Stop the Bombing and Bomb Hanoi buttons were in evidence in equal numbers. A few banners for Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the Harlem Congressman accused of misusing funds. More buttons

and signs for Black Power, and all the spinoffs: Italian Power, Women's Lib Is No Fib, Save the Dolphins, Don't Trust Anyone Over 30, and Go-go Dancers Shake It Better. She saw one Korean toddler with a balloon stenciled, "Go for it, Buddha."

Nearby, a barbershop quartet was harmonizing a jazzy rendition of "Happy, Happy Birthday, Buddha Baby." The panorama had a sort of bizarre logic. Vendors sold balloons, coconut chips, cabbage rolls, Korean kim-chee, Chinese egg rolls, Japanese sushi, and crack seeds. Women wore bathing suits, muumuus, sandals, zoris, go-go boots, miniskirts, and the stiffly upright hairdos called beehives. Men wore suits, aloha shirts, bathing trunks, surf shorts, and Buddhist priest saffron robes. Children played tag, mah-jong, pick up sticks, and softball.

"Connie? Are you daydreaming up there? Connie, snap out of it."

A young woman with a stack of computer-paper printouts in her arms and a University of California baseball cap on her frizzy red hair was peering intently up at the pedestal.

Connie started to step down, putting out her hand for help.

She got no help. "Stay up there."

"Who are you?"

"Annette."

Connie could make no connection of name or face but distrusted the husky vigor in the young woman's voice. That

California energy was always vaguely dangerous, not to mention the red curls.

"Annette's going to perk up Father's image," recited the woman, speaking of herself by name. "I'm hired to tone up the war lord aspects and tone down his peaceable kingdom attributes."

"You're what?"

"I'm the public relations advance man for Father Trevalino."

"Advance of what?" Connie's innocence was both baffling and annoying her. She started to climb down from the perch again. Annette stopped her physically this time by barricading the step with the computer printouts.

"I think for the first campaign," decided Annette, "that we'll do something with the idea of a shepherd leading his sheep to slaughter. What do you think?"

It was all coming so fast, Connie didn't know what she thought. Even on a pedestal, she could tell she was in over her head, though. Who was Annette to "perk up" Peter's image? Next Annette-the-efficient would be scheduling Peter's media appointments and applying his television makeup. Loud, savvy, brassy, indispensable Annette. Damn, thought Connie, she hadn't felt so tacky in years--scared and jealous both. She'd never had occasion to be jealous of Eliot's old girlfriends, hadn't realized she possessed such trivial, mean instincts. She had no territorial rights to Peter. She'd told him, she'd told herself, and she'd told the world there was nothing between them. Here was her chance to prove it.

Connie succeeded in executing a tour jete' off the barrel.

"If you see Peter again--"

"Oh, I will. Staff has orders to hang tight as a noose."

"Please inform him I went home."

"We'll miss you at the press conference, then? But isn't Peter counting on you to be by his side when he announces his resignation?"

The blow only stung; she'd been expecting it for weeks. But this seemed underhanded, hearing the details of when and where from someone else. Had Peter been afraid to tell her what was going to happen in the park today? She mentally followed his projected course. First, he'd leave the Navy, then Hawaii, then the priesthood. And somewhere in there, you'll leave me behind, she thought with startling certainty. For an instant--only an instant--she considered changing her mind and tagging along. "Wish him luck," she told Annette and turned her back.

"You know, the only real failure in life is the failure to act," taunted Annette.

Connie walked through the park, trying to balance the taunt with her own thoughts. If failure means failure to act, then is doing something, anything, equivalent to success? Should success be defined as doing something even if it's wrong? Eliot's concept had been along that line--make a move, even if it's not precisely the right move. Suppose, however, she didn't complete a wrong move, merely initiated a false start? Or acted due to a total misconception. By and large, she had drifted

through life until now. Perhaps it was too late to exert an influence. She consoled herself briefly and piously with the idea that they also serve who only stand and wait--until it occurred that perhaps those who wait deserve to be left standing.

She tossed a wilted, discarded carnation lei into the trash can. Next, she wound a crepe paper streamer around her arm like a bracelet, and picked up discarded buttons from the trampled grass. She pinned Stop the Bombing on her right shoulder, and on the left, Sock it to me.

Peter knew in advance Connie would be angry. He called her that night, planning to apologize if necessary, but hoping to bypass the whole day's action and move on to the future.

"There's no turning back now," he declared. He kept the doubts and downright fears hidden behind a voice full of hype and headiness. "I'm planning new gimmicks to grab the public's attention--and hold it. What do you think of doing a parachute jump onto Waimanalo beach? The parachuting priest demonstrates how to bail out of a bad war."

"Sounds like a damnfool idea," she retorted. "Dangerous. And dumb. Besides, when did you learn to parachute?"

"You forget I was a chaplain with the paratroopers before I came to Hawaii. I won't get my lines tangled."

"Not the ones in the air, anyway."

He dropped the pretense. "All right, I know you're deservedly angry with me." He shuffled the phone to the other

ear and let the facade fade. "Connie, I wanted you with me today."

"So Annette told me." The snippiness in her voice wasn't comforting. "Peter, where did you pick up that little piece of baggage?"

"Actually, Annette proved a tad artsy-cutesy even for my tastes. I shipped her home with the thanks of the establishment."

"Good. I feel better already."

Time to make a pitch. "Do you feel good enough to come with me Thursday when I make a speech to the League of Women Voters?"

"Not if I'm to be Exhibit A. I won't be a prop for your pep talks."

"Oh, Connie, let me tell you, once you get off dead center, it feels wonderful. Once you risk saying what you believe, it's the best feeling in the world. Please think again. I really want you with me, all the way."

"Then think about this, Peter. Do you expect us to pal around together in public? Have our picture taken and find our faces spread across the local paper together?"

"Nothing would make me prouder." He believed. Why couldn't she?

"You always sound so sincere. I find it hard to stay angry. Instead, I'm tempted once again to wipe the slate clean. But we have to set some ground rules."

Exactly what he didn't want. He wanted her at his side, helpmeet and hand holder in public, confidante and partner in private. "I don't play by other people's rules."

"Damn it, it's too complicated having you as savior, judge, and lover."

The words hurt. He'd never professed to fulfill such roles; they'd come already assigned. Now he heard her declining to go with him on technical grounds. She announced, too enthusiastically, "Thursday is the opening night of the repertory stint."

"Then after I speak to the League, I'll come see you dance."

Silence. A sigh. An admission. "I'd like that."

"And Connie, I'll wait for you afterwards." A sudden insight made him smile as he cradled the telephone. "I'll wait for you as long as it takes."

On Thursday the words were still ringing in his mind. He loved Connie enough to wait for her--something she'd spent her life doing for others. He could hardly wait to tell her. The speech to the Women Voters went as well as could be expected. He felt himself preaching to middle-aged groupies. They considered him reckless, male, daring--a dash of derring-do added to their monthly program. Mentally he crossed off the League of Women Voters as a lost cause.

On to the ballet. He made it by intermission and took a seat in the auditorium of the Arts Pavilion by the downtown library. It was a wonderful neo-classic building, solidly granite and

paneled in koa. The thickly upholstered seats and red velvet curtains were curiously out of date and place, remnants of the bygone days of the Hawaiian monarchy.

He'd seen Connie dance once before--a performance of Coppelia in which she played a comic part. Even in the company of Eliot and others, Peter felt she danced for him alone. It was in the intensity of her performance. Every movement, every facial expression, hinted that her concerns were exclusively and almost obsessively artistic. She dazzled at high velocity. But instead of making him feel excluded, that evening he felt bound to her. From that moment onward, his imagination bestowed on her more power than she could possibly possess, and he invested her with promises only a saint, or a lover, could keep.

On that particular night, nearly a year ago, after the performance, he'd been forced to congratulate her and walk away. Tonight would be different. No longer a need to adore from afar, no need for fragility. This was more than a premiere. Events and circumstances have their own crazy logic, their own inevitable pace. This was both a competition and a courtship he'd embarked upon. She could keep command of her career--he wanted command of her life. He subdued his rather apocalyptic expectations and settled down for the "Kingdom of the Shades" excerpt from La Bayadère.

Connie had told him in advance to expect a showpiece, lifted out of a full length 19th century work. He glanced at the notes in the program. Originally staged by Marius Petipa, the French choreographer. A longtime favorite of the Russian

repertory. Peter had a sense of Connie leaping backward a century into foreign history. This was serious stuff, demanding discipline in a dancer's body to tell a story, not simply enjoy dancing for the sake of dancing. He recognized a few of the classical movements, steps designed to display a codified, formal structure. Fixed style. Formal ideology. Exactly what he had broken with, exactly what he hoped to pry Connie away from.

He rolled the program and clutched it when she came onstage. He held his breath as she began. Her response to all the technical demands was perfect. No doubt about her competence--and this performance didn't ask for sparkle, only discipline. Under his watchful eye, she performed each transition flawlessly. She must have studied each step on slow-motion film, taking it apart, putting it back together in ordered, basic physical principles. She worked off her partner's timing. Coldly polished. Precise. Coordinated in the conceptual framework.

Undeniably, he was disappointed. He wanted drama, passion, the sense she danced only for him. But she was faithful to nothing more than a perfect rendering of fouettés, pirouettes, and arabesques. The pattern began to appear arbitrary and artificial, a wind-up ballerina doll twirling mechanically.

Where was the dynamic he'd seen her achieve before--that magical link of dancer to music to drama? God, don't let her art fail her, he thought, and cautioned himself against outright prayer.

He took her to dinner afterward. He spirited her, on purpose, across the mountains, through Wilson tunnel, to the

windward spot called the Inn of the Crouching Lion. She rode in silence, seeming not to listen to his assurances she'd been perfect. Her hair was drawn back, wet and shiny, into a severe French braid. The rims of her eyes were dark with mascara. Her clothing was loose, a long Hawaiian gown with high waistline and puffed sleeves. The volume of pastel blue material accentuated the thinness of her body lost beneath it.

They studied the menus in silence. She asked for hot tea; he ordered scotch on the rocks. A plate of crab legs and avocado slices appeared as an appetizer. Still, he wondered how to venture into the quicksand that separated them. "What did you think about when you danced tonight, Connie? Do you try to separate yourself from the physical steps you're taking?"

She smiled, the first animation he'd seen as she sat sipping at the round bowl of tea. "I'd love to tell you it feels like floating in a cloud, or being caught in a dream. But it didn't. At least not that piece. It's almost the opposite--if you want to rise en pointe, you shove down hard against the floor. It's some kind of natural resistance. A real fight." Her lips trembled and she clutched the cup. "Tonight's battle I lost."

"To the elements, submit. To win, accept defeat. To swim, abandon yourself to drown." He reached across and took her hand. "A very old heresy."

"Because I wanted too much to be perfect for you?"

"Because you tried too hard to make it happen."

She ran the tip of her red tongue along her upper teeth. "Instead of a poem, I managed to be some kind of robot." She

pinched his palm, attempting grim playfulness. "Some inspiration you turned out to be."

"Let's stay here tonight, Connie. Let me get us a room here at the inn."

"That's a quick switch. What do you have in mind, teaching me some new ways to . . . how was it you put it? To the elements submit?"

"I want to show you it's right, and it works."

"For you, maybe. But I've always had the idea I could counterattack. Fight. I still believe if I'll concentrate on my art, and not on Eliot, not on you--" She looked away. "I never meant to have a relationship with you, Peter. It just happened."

"I doubt that."

"Doubting Peter? Wasn't that Thomas's role?"

"I don't want to be a liar or a hypocrite about my feelings for you. So there's no way I can claim our relationship was an accident. And there's no way I'm going to settle for a back roads and back door furtiveness. Connie, I don't want pretense. I'm booked on a noon flight tomorrow to Los Angeles. Orders from the Archbishop--and he promises to produce a Cardinal."

"Are they going to defrock you?"

"I don't think they intend to canonize me. Technically, it's billed as a conference. Officially, they want to see if I'm properly 'warm in the faith.'"

"Oh, Peter, I don't want to be responsible for getting you thrown out of the Church--"

"You aren't. And I haven't been asked to leave." He took the last of his drink in a gulp. "I'm asking you not to leave me tonight."

She didn't say yes, but she didn't say no, either. "It's so, well . . . public."

"Didn't it ever occur to you that our relationship must have a public side?"

She shrugged. "I guess not." She tucked a wisp of hair back into the braid on the crown of her head. "I've tried not to think about it."

"I couldn't stand to make you unhappy, darling. Or to believe that what I've gained was acquired because of your loss. Can't you see how easy it all works if you don't fight it? That afternoon in your bed, I shattered. Came apart at every seam, the proverbial million pieces. But when I came back, it was to wholeness. A completeness I'd never known. Total."

"The break into wholeness? Opposites again."

"I finally figured it out. Breaking my vows infused me with the right to hold you against me, hear our hearts beat together. Connie, I fully believe we were meant for each other as surely as my feet stumbled up to your door that afternoon."

Still she teased. "There's a rather fine line, don't you think? Aren't you taking indecent liberties by mixing hormones with metaphysics?"

"By loving you, I love myself more. I love God more."

"Not the same thing."

"Exactly the same thing. With my body, I thee honor; with my heart, I thee cherish--the same things I promised the Church once. But now I have the total harmony that comes from the love between a man and a woman."

"Which in your vows has been forbidden." A look of melancholy reproach creased her features.

He hurriedly assured her, "Love is not a sin."

"But sleeping with me is, unless you've rewritten the formal rules."

"Formal and informal sin?" He felt jovial, clean, excited. "Oh, come now, Connie, we don't gain a thing by encouraging regret."

"I have no regrets. But I think the word we're currently skirting around is . . . lust." Her dark eyes fluttered and studied the tablecloth. "Why, yes, that's the honest, frustrating, alluring word."

He ordered another round of scotch for himself and tea for her. "But there is love present in the sin. It's not like common everyday sins, the informal, silly ones, like gluttony or envy. Stay here with me tonight, Connie. Let me love you."

"Surely this is the best face anyone ever put on seduction."

"Surely you are the best thing that ever happened to me. Let me be the same for you."

"We won't have any excuses this time, Peter. No extenuating circumstances. Do you understand this is adultery, pure and simple?"

"I'd just as soon be hung for a wolf as a sheep."

"In that case," she mused, "I'd just as soon have the rest of my supper as room service."

In the bedroom, he tried to go slow, act conversational and domestic. He tried to think of spending the night together in terms other than anatomical--like possessing each other as good friends who could freely borrow a cup of sugar. But he was eager. And, thank god, so was she. The supper tray remained untouched until past midnight. Instead, they fell on each other with startling ferocity. They matched each other in need and desire, in rhythm and forcefulness. He was shocked--and thrilled that love could burn so blue-hot in intensity and purity.

When she finally ate her supper, sitting curled up in the sheet in the bed with all the pillows behind her back, he sat by the bedside in a hard vinyl folding chair. Still, he was ecstatic, contemplating her and the joyous power of what they'd shared. "It's astonishing," he muttered.

She smiled companionably. "Yes, that it is." She passed him an orange to peel and half of a club sandwich.

"And the most astonishing part--to me--is your generosity. Darling, do you realize how whole you make me feel?"

"It's the same for me," she assured him.

But he wasn't certain she fully comprehended. Completing the sex act was nothing compared to completing the man he was meant to be. That's what Connie gave him. And what he gave her in return was less, he feared.

But she obviously had a sense of what he felt as supreme strength, because she teased him jovially about it. "Oh, Peter **you** seem so sure of yourself."

"I'm sure of us."

"And it's so convincing. You've got a downright imperial sureness. Oh, it's wonderful!"

The next morning, he asked, "Can you get back home by yourself if I go straight to the airport?"

She laughed self-consciously. "After last night, I think I can find my way back from wilder places than windward Oahu." She touched his temples. "Take care, Peter. Don't let them take from you what you're not willing to give. Hang on. Fight. Don't turn yourself over to elements that won't support you."

"To rise, stand firm."

She smiled. "To love, turn loose."

Opening the letter with the California postmark took only a second. Peter had been banished to seclusion for a month at the Sierra retreat of the archdiocese. She breathed a genuine sigh of relief at such a delightful "punishment." Left to her own devices, she thought happily. Forced to rely on her own resources, she realized. Well, she would use the time to get her courage up to go back into the public arena.

Her first outing was really happenstance, under the guise of going to see her friend, Trio. A small article on the "Events" page of the Star-Bulletin listed Trio as co-chair of one

of the discussion sections at the state university's "Seminar of the Sixties." The conference was subtitled "Where We Are At Midpoint."

Connie laughed aloud. She would dearly love to know to where she was, at midpoint or any other. She reached for the phone, discovered Trio's number had been changed, reached her on the second try. "Have you moved?" Connie asked.

"Last week."

"Too many memories in your old apartment?"

"Sho' nuff."

Connie held the telephone away, staring at the handset which had carried the out-of-character slang. "Well, I'm glad to see you working on the seminar. It sounds interesting. I think I'll come."

"Come on then, honky."

"What did you say?"

"You heard me. I dare you to show up for the meeting."

The conversation ended on a strained note. The strange, belligerent tone from Trio was incomprehensible. Connie would have to go, merely to find out what might have caused the change in her friend. On the appropriate Friday afternoon, she fought for parking at the Manoa valley campus, found the new East-West center building and located the room in Jefferson Hall where Trio and a highly charged, almost-obese young black man were preparing to preside.

Obviously more than Trio's speech and living quarters had undergone radical change. Her appearance was dramatically

altered, too. The former somber attire had been replaced by a silver hoop earring in one ear, a "fro" hairdo, and a knee-length leopard-print overblouse worn with bright yellow tights. The facial complacency was gone, also. Trio's cheekbones were daubed orange, the lips painted garish fuschia. Native elegance and intelligence could not disappear, thought Connie, so they must be scuffed over or roughed up on purpose. She paused at the back of the auditorium, feeling hot, old, and overdressed in a structured jacket, suit skirt, nylons, and high heels. Resolutely she went forward to say hello.

She stopped at the orchestra pit below stage level and called a cautious greeting. "Hello there, Trio."

Reticent soft-spokenness was apparently a thing of the past. Trio replied with wild energy, batting her arms and eyelashes up and down as she talked. "Why, if'n it ain't my fren' from the military base. Looky here, Tony, here's a pledge-allegiance-to-the-flag waver come to hear us." She turned toward the extremely fat black man. "This here's Tony."

There was no last name attached to the introduction. And Tony was so obese he could not bend down enough to shake the hand Connie offered. She stepped back. "I'll get a seat."

A few minutes later, as the sparse crowd filtered in and dispersed unevenly, Trio padded up the aisle and sat down.

There was no point in hiding her shock. Connie asked bluntly, "What's happened to you, Trio?" She managed a chuckle. "Tact was never my strong point, was it?"

Trio guffawed and clenched her fists over her head, a gesture entirely alien to her former demeanor. She nodded toward the fat man arranging the lectern. "What do you think of Tony?" She lowered her voice for the first time as she divulged, "He's met Stokely."

"Who's that?"

Trio rolled her eyes. "Stokely Carmichael. The dude who urges folks to 'Get your guns.' The one that's going to Cuba and then North Vietnam and then coming back with the real story--which I don't suppose you want to hear."

Connie felt goosebumps rise on the back of her neck. "Is this a costume you're wearing? And is this speech a part of some show you're putting on for the day? Or do you really run with this crowd now?"

"Worried about me hanging out on the lunatic fringe of the radical chic?" The militant look was tempered to amusement. "Connie, you have disdain written all over your lily white face."

"You're really involved with this man?"

"Sho' nuff and shacked up. Whose apartment you think you called last week?"

"But . . . but . . . what do you have in common with him?"

"About the same thing you have in common with Peter Trevalino." There was an indelicate pause. "Power and sex are wrapped up in the same package. Wouldn't you say so?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm just flabbergasted. I suppose, if you're sure it's what you want--only it's all happened so fast and--"

"Sort of like you and Peter Trevalino?"

"What do you know about us?"

"That he's had the hots for you from way back. Ain't I right?"

"Stop hitting below the belt, Trio."

"Primarily the part of the anatomy we're discussing."

Connie would not dignify the conversation with any more explanations. She let silence distance her from her former confidante.

Trio seemed chastened, at least momentarily. She inquired politely, "Life on the base all right these days? How's Marge getting along? And have you heard from Frou-Frou?"

"Marge and Charlie are fighting, suffering from too much togetherness, they say. I had a letter from Frauncine last week. She's wandering again. Remember what she said when she left here?"

"Yeah. 'I don't have to stay anywhere I don't want to.' Smart girl."

"Well, she's off to San Francisco to wear beads and eat bee pollen this time." Connie rolled her eyes. "To each his own, I suppose."

"See, you can manage a cheerful attitude about our kooky friend. So, why not cut me a little slack? Where's your live and let live policy when it comes to your ol' black soul sister?"

Not where it should be, supposed Connie. And it seemed false to utter platitudes about Trio's superior potential. She settled into meditation. No one was turning out the way she'd assumed--and that went double for the Sixties. Trio excused herself to get ready for her part on the program.

Connie made it through the fat-man moderator's introductory remarks by paying strict attention to his voice and not his body. His excess poundage was strange, hanging in unnatural rolls about his chin and midriff. It was even harder to sit still for Trio's spiel of jargon. In the space of fifteen minutes, Trio treated the audience to spiritual nightmare, moral nihilism, intellectual default, and metaphysical hell.

Connie glanced around the auditorium. It was less than half full and no one showed overt enthusiasm for the speechmakers. A few undergraduates took serious notes. Most just sat. Fine. As long as Trio and Tony paraded buzz words, they wouldn't cause much trouble.

Trio's boyfriend took over again, and Trio came back to her seat by Connie. He was wound up now, the fat under his shirtfront jostling against the microphone. "How many of you have ever carried a protest banner for anything?"

Connie glanced around. About a dozen hands were up.

"It feels good to stand up and be counted, doesn't it?" wooed the speaker. "It feels strong to carry union picket signs, or don't-buy-grapes placards or Unfair Rent Coalition cards." There was polite applause. He upped the ante. "How many of you folks have marched in a ban-the-bomb parade?"

Only a couple of hands went up this time. This was a timid crowd, Connie sensed, the type that turned out on Friday afternoons to assess the decade from afar rather than learn about the Sixties in the streets.

Tony lit two cigarettes, keeping one burning in the ash tray in front of him while inhaling the other at the end of every well-turned sentence.

Connie whispered to Trio, "Why is he smoking two cigarettes?"

"Oh. Ever since he read James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time, that's his gimmick. Lemme tell you, honey, he can sho' nuff light a fire under me when he takes a notion."

"I hate this sham speech."

"Tough titty."

"You never showed any interest in Blacktalk. I don't understand this. You were never a martyr to any cause before. Why suddenly become a racial bully? What's happened to the woman who believed there was enough money and power to go around?"

"I done had my eyes opened, just like a little newborn kitten. It's called getting your consciousness raised."

"Altered for the worse, if you want my opinion."

"I don't want your opinion."

"Trio, honest, I'm trying to accept all this as a change for the best. But it's not easy--of all the causes you could have taken up! If you had gone feminist, I'd have applauded. If

you'd taken your doubts about the war seriously, I'd have sent you to talk to Peter. If you--"

"But you just can't stand an uppity black girl?"

Connie was bewildered. She turned her attention back to the podium while plotting a way out of the auditorium without attracting attention.

"Now, I want to know, why are you people here?" the speaker suddenly demanded. His voice rose in anger and his bulk shook over his cinched belt. "You! Yes, you in the first row. And you, back there--why are you here?"

He pointed the heavy finger at Connie. She tried diffidence. "Oh, I have a personal interest in how the Sixties turn out."

Mollified for the moment, the moderator let the audience members mumble among themselves. Connie caught phrases. Everyone was incredibly serious. One admitted to coming to listen, to hear a new viewpoint, to keep issues in perspective.

Finally, it was Trio's turn. She stood, hands on hips, head held high. Her alto tremoloed throughout the auditorium. "I came to suffer."

Connie was not sure if the answer was stage-planted or not. But it was effective. Sure, in the end, they all had come in order to suffer. Not to share the suffering, but to claim their personal and private bit as a prize. There might not be enough to go around. One had to hurry, perhaps stand in line. The suffering might run out before one could get enough of it. Trio was feeding her portion on a diet of tough vocabulary and kinky

hairdos. Frou-Frou was picking daisies in Golden Gate Park and shampooing with organic herb lotions. Marge and Charlie were suffering from self-inflicted wounds. Peter was locked up in solitary in the mountains. Connie saw no reason to suffer fools gladly any longer.

A new command issued from the podium. "We're not going to talk about the war, per se."

Connie lamented to Trio in a whisper, "Why not?"

"The war's been cultured out," explained Trio.

"What?"

"Vietnam is not in."

Connie warmed to the doublespeak. "Where is it, then?"

"It's out. It's only a symbol. The Southeast Asia conflict is too trendy, like having ESP and being black. All those things the masses have taken up are cultured out. Tony says they aren't artistic anymore."

She'd been dense, Connie admitted, but now she saw clearly that what the group gathered here actually wanted was to sit in a meaningful circle and play suffering poet.

"Now you people here today," confirmed the ringleader, "are not the masses. You are more sensitive. More attuned. More aware of what's happening than--why, you're more aware of what's happening than those it's happening to!"

Excited applause. So that was the bottom line between the haves and the have-nots of the Sixties. "It" was happening to people like Connie. But to this gathering of folks it was "A Happening." Next they'd consider it private property. The tidal

waves of hippiedom had spilled over the edges of California, washed across the Pacific, and crested in Manoa Valley.

"Do you really believe this garbage, Trio? Do you think **your** fat boyfriend is superior because he considers himself so damned sensitive?"

"He's got guts."

"Where's his guts to get drafted and take his chances, then? Where's his guts to defend whatever he believes hasn't been cultured out yet?"

Trio shook her head and smiled smugly. "He's not gonna be drafted. He done et himself out of draft range. Calls it the lard dodge. There are medical limits on how heavy one can be and serve in the military, you know."

"So fat is his idea of guts?" Connie tried not to think of this as a kind of pun.

Trio broadened her defense. "And he ain't afraid to pick up a rotten egg if he needs to."

"Oh, now that's impressive! How's that going to win--or stop--a war?"

"Didn't you read about us last week? We marched up to Admiral Felt's headquarters and tossed six dozen rotten eggs. Flung 'em like hand grenades."

"For what purpose? That's theater, not protest. Hurling eggs isn't going to change policy. Harry Felt's going right on deploying ships to the Gulf of Tonkin," sniped Connie.

"Besides, Pacific Fleet Headquarters isn't likely to fall to an attack by eggshell, you know."

Trio lamented, "Yeah, if it'd been me, I woulda drug dirty Harry out of his office and hung him high on Makalapa Hill."

Connie visualized tall, dark Trio manhandling the glittery little admiral by the scruff of the neck. "Oh, Trio, this is all nonsense. It's so crazy--downright loony--it makes me laugh on one hand. But on the other, it makes me sad."

"Timid li'l white girl gonna boo-hoo in her hanky?"

Connie stiffened. She wouldn't give Trio the satisfaction. "Culture me out," she said and walked out.

After that, Connie started keeping a file from the newspapers of seemingly unrelated incidents. Vintage ammunition disappeared from the bunkers at Hickam field. Vandalism was the illogical but official explanation. A Flotfive destroyer mysteriously lost power with sand in the shaft bearing and spent six months in drydock instead of the Gulf of Tonkin. Black power salutes resulted in mass disciplinary cases on the Ranger. A twelve inch bolt in the reduction gears of the Walker played havoc with training exercises off Kahoolawe. Fat Tony and Tough Trio made the underground papers regularly, but were never linked to anything extra-legal. Connie kept her own counsel, growing thinner as Tony fattened on the war, growing more silent as Trio raised a louder and more strident voice.

The surf was up on the north shore. Breakers twenty feet high delighted surfers at the Bonzai Pipeline. Tourists safely took pictures from the Kodak-designated "Picture Perfect" site

on Sunset Beach. The wind slashed the palm trees together on Hospital Point and threw harbor waves over the sea wall.

The week reminded Connie of a Texas Blue Norther. The sky stayed the blue-gray color of charcoal. Rain tattooed Hospital Point's uninsulated lanai roof. No thunder rumbled but the waves against the seawall made cannon-booms of noise. No lightning flashed, but rain and shadow made a game of blotting out the landscape one moment, revealing it brightly the next.

By late afternoon of the fourth day of the monsoon, she had assisted Izuki in putting flower pots and coffee cans upside down over the tender hibiscus stalks and staking the plumeria cuttings against the wind. The prize plums, still being green and bendable, would be fine, Izuki insisted. Back inside, she changed her damp tennis shoes and jumpsuit for a long cheongsam and brocaded slippers. She turned on all the interior houselights.

A knock at the door startled her. No one would be paying a social call on an afternoon such as this. Perhaps Peter was back? Her heart lifted at the idea. She hurried to let him in. Peeking through the screen, she saw an unfamiliar form. No military uniform, and not a clerical collar. A heavy tweed sportcoat, on a tall, wide-shouldered, rumped man. Whoever it was looked dressed for winter and thus ridiculously out of place in a sultry downpour.

She left the screen hooked and peered tentatively at the caller.

"Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Yes."

"I'm Harrison Sudbury."

The name initiated connections she couldn't quite connect. She'd heard the name, but where? And she halfway recognized an accent, but what? Squinting through the screen into the pool of yellow porch light which cast gray shadows on the ruddy features of the man gave her no clue. Harrison Sudbury, whoever he might be, was now imitating an ostrich, standing first on one long leg, then the other, letting the water run off the toes of his black leather oxford shoes.

He tried again. "Harry Sudbury--the journalist. I met your friend, Peter Trevalino, in Saigon. He told me about you. I thought we should talk. I'm on my way back to London and had a stopover here for a few hours. Sorry about this lack of notice. Should have called."

Connie went from being blank to being overimpressed in the space of ten seconds. The world famous Harry Sudbury--now dripping right here on this very front porch! "Come in. Please." She took his damp slouch hat and the heavy Harris tweed sportcoat and hung them over the back of a dining chair. She offered him a drink, then didn't have the gin and tonic he preferred. He settled for rum and Coke, which he mixed himself, without ice, in an everyday kitchen tumbler. He had a nimble but beat-up appearance, perhaps the result of spending the last sixteen hours on an aircraft with the prospect of another twelve hours ahead of him. His worsted trousers were drawing up at the cuff, the rucksack bulging with unsnapped snaps and

unstrung seams. Little black hunks of camera equipment poked through the openings.

"So you're heading home to London?" she asked conversationally. "How long did you spend in southeast Asia?" She led the way to the living room.

"Ten months this time. Twenty-two altogether. More than enough for one lifetime, thank you." His tone was alert but his eyes were distant, dulled by some set of memories which he apparently kept pushed away from his consciousness.

She felt a bit more sympathetic toward his effort to contact her during his stopover. "My husband, Eliot, has been gone seven and half months now."

"More than enough for you, I'm sure."

"Did Peter Trevalino tell you about my situation?"

There was a marked hesitation. "Yes." Then there was an even more ominous silence. "Did he tell you why I wanted to see you?"

"I don't believe he said anything about you wanting to talk to me." Connie thought back over her conversations with Peter concerning Harry Sudbury. There had been no mention of a meeting, she was sure. "No, nothing at all. Perhaps it slipped Peter's mind. He knows I don't give interviews, if that's--"

"That's not it." Harry Sudbury put his drink on the teak dining table, then picked it up again quickly, as if remembering his manners. Connie produced a coaster. He deposited the glass, then locked his large hands behind his back. He looked like a combat Marine imitating parade rest.

If he hadn't come after an interview, then what? Had Peter suggested her house as a good place to stop off for a free drink?

His ruddy complexion seemed to be growing paler. He went to the curio stand that held Eliot's collection of model ships. "There are things you should know, Mrs. Hopkins."

"Then tell me," she invited. She sat down, hoping he would, also.

He picked up a miniature sailing sloop.

Connie encouraged him with chit-chat. "Eliot collected model ships. He built some of those himself."

"Little miniature versions of himself and his job."

"I never thought of it that way."

"Have you thought of yourself as the keeper of the lighthouse now? Do you like dusting these toy boats?"

"I really don't mind. This conversation is taking quite a strange turn, Mr. Sudbury. Aren't we allowed to like anything for its own sake anymore?" A nerve was struck. Did anyone like her for being Connie Hopkins anymore? Or was she approved of as Connie the choreographer, Mrs. Hopkins the MIA wife, keeper of the home fires and model ships. "Now, what things do you think I should know?"

Harry Sudbury moved to the bookcase and inspected the current issue of National Geographic. Next came the bric-a-brac on the coffee table. He held the Lalique quail to the light and noted the prisms. "You must remember I'm only a journalist." He wiped a long finger across the empty ashtray.

"Do you want to smoke?"

"No, thank you."

"Then sit down. For godsakes, say what you've come to say."

"Are you always this forthright, Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Rarely."

He couldn't seem to sit. He went to the brass-and-glass tea cart and lifted each of the shells which surrounded the vase of ginger stalks. He picked up the Chinese bronze horse statuette. "T'ang," he noted.

"Yes, I know."

"Nice configuration."

"Yes. Lovely."

"Mrs. Hopkins, there may be certain things you can't understand."

"Well, try me," she said wearily.

"I've been out of touch for some months. What has been going on here?"

Impatiently, she blurted whatever came to mind. "First class postage is going up to a nickel. Bob Hope says he'll do his Christmas show in Bangkok."

"A bad sign for that part of the world," joked the journalist.

She had a low tolerance for dredging up trivia these days, but she tried. "We're beginning to get satellite television in the islands."

"Do they cover Vietnam on the nightly news?"

"Sure. Live and in technicolor. And we get daily doses of newspaper editorials about cold war mentality and preoccupation with the war." That was enough. She'd done her duty. "Now, Mr. Sudbury, what do you want to talk to me about?"

He looked out through the steady rain. "A night grown darker, a channel grown rougher. Hands more eager on the switch for Weapon Alpha." His voice lost its rough edge and turned meditative. "I think perhaps I saw your husband last March."

"What!" She pivoted to face him. His back was mostly toward her, slightly stooped. She pounced like a cat on Eliot's name. "You saw my husband? Eliot Hopkins? You saw him?" Suddenly wary, she circled Harry Sudbury until she could see his tired, gray eyes. She would take no chances. "When? Where? What makes you think it was he?"

"My dear Mrs. Hopkins--"

"Don't 'dear Mrs. Hopkins' me. If you know something about Eliot--" She stopped. The sound of her husband's name sounded strange to her, as if she'd just thought of it after a bout of amnesia.

Harry Sudbury began a rush of explanation. "It's one of those can't-be-sure situations." He muttered, "You never know if you're better off mentioning it or staying quiet."

"Oh, I want to hear. Absolutely. Everything." She kept her tone restrained, afraid the journalist might retract the tiny bit of information he'd divulged. Mustn't scare him away. "Please tell me. How do you know it was Eliot?"

"That's the name he used . . . but sometimes names are mixed up. And the man showed me his dogtag, but sometimes dogtags are mishandled. It was at night, quite dark. I couldn't see or hear well."

Connie nodded, trying to quash the bubble of joy welling up in her chest. Yes, she'd be logical. She knew all about mistaken identities, snafus, and official, intentional, accidental, and planted foul-ups. She didn't think she had the mental stamina to take any steps up the shaky ladder of false hope, so she understood Harry Sudbury's reticence. "Start at the beginning. How did you find him?"

The journalist took a diffident perch on the edge of the overstuffed chair. He folded his hands together. His voice took on a prim quality, edging into the tenor register. The ruddiness was entirely gone except for little veins around his nose. "It was accidental. I went north after a story, got lost, and strayed over the boundary."

"What did this man you saw look like?" Instantly Connie waved away the question. She'd gain nothing from a physical description which might or might not now match Eliot's. "Where did you see him?"

"In a village just across the border." He fumbled in the camera bag for a pocket atlas. A well-worn page was tagged with a rusted paperclip. He handed across the small book. "There. About twenty miles inland from where he swam ashore."

"Swam ashore!" Here was a fact Mr. Sudbury wouldn't have known unless--oh hell, unless Peter had told him the

rumors. Connie studied the map, so twisting and alien, its form almost the silhouette of a dragon. She tried to force her questions out in an orderly manner instead of dropping them all at once.

"Remember now, Mrs. Hopkins, I only saw this man for a few moments. He was being held by the villagers in the basement of a bombed-out Catholic church."

"So he's a prisoner?" She breathed a sigh mixing fright and hope.

"I'm not sure. The villagers brought him and several others in and out the same night. In the dark, I spoke to them for only a few seconds. No one said, but I got the idea they were being sent elsewhere. It was quite chaotic, no real chance to talk, you know."

"Was he ill? Wounded?"

"No. Nothing like that. Seemed quite fit and hearty. In fact, he joked about liking the rice and fish diet."

That was the clue Connie had been waiting for. "It's Eliot!" She breathed the words softly, almost to herself. Eliot loved rice and fish--what a funny fragment, what a strange personal detail to bring him back to her. "Oh, Mr. Sudbury, thank you! It's true, I'm sure of it. Eliot and I have made jokes for years about his preference for Oriental diet despite his New England upbringing. It's him! It's him!"

Harry Sudbury shook his head. "A chance comment about rice and fish is too flimsy a peg to hang your hopes on."

"No, no, it's Eliot. I'm certain. Oh, please, you must tell me more." She tossed away her last suspicions of Harry Sudbury. Now, instead of a big, rumpled, hard-drinking journalist, he had the appearance of an angel of mercy.

"I hate to disappoint you. There isn't much more to tell that you'd understand."

She wondered if she could claw out the information with her fingernails. "But Eliot's alive! He's safe and a prisoner and--"

"Not necessarily."

She knew her eagerness was pathetic. But there had to be a way to keep this man talking. "I'll try to understand. Honest. Tell me any tiny detail."

"Believe me, Mrs. Hopkins, there are things no one understands about that land. Won't ever understand."

"Try me," she said, not hiding her exasperation.

"For example, there are illnesses. Fevers. Tropical sicknesses that affect the mind. Many of the men I saw were huddled in cells where they can only squat amid their own filth. They pick maggots from open sores, drown flies in a cup of watery soup for protein--"

"Eliot's fine--you said he was!"

"That was almost six months ago."

"Why didn't you get in touch with me?" Sudden, intense anger boiled up. "Why didn't you tell somebody? Anybody!"

"First, there's no assurance the man was who he claimed to be. Second, he could be dead of any number of causes by now. Third, I had no way--and no right--to contact you. Fourth,

your military has no interest in the tales of a foreign correspondent who was off the beaten path in restricted territory at the time."

"You could have found me," she blurted. "You should have told me."

Harry Sudbury ended the debate. "And finally, your friend, Father Trevalino, asked me not to inform you."

Connie was astonished. She felt numb. She'd sent Peter to Saigon to track down exactly such information. And when he found it, he withheld it. Why? A wave of suspicion made her hiccup. Tomorrow she'd confront Peter. But right now, she must wring every detail from Harrison Sudbury, who was suddenly on his feet and heading to pick up his tweed sportcoat.

"Wait. Please don't go."

"I'm awfully sorry. I've said all I can. And there's that plane to catch--"

"You must tell me the whole story again. Everything. You might have left something out."

"My dear Mrs. Hopkins--"

She let it pass, even offered a smile of encouragement as she started the summary. "You saw Eliot six months ago in a village and he was a prisoner--"

"Not necessarily."

"What, then?"

"My assumption was that he was in the process of being transferred to Laos. That's what the villagers suggested to me later."

"Laos!" She gasped the word. "Why, that's neutral territory! He will be sent home."

"Not necessarily."

Connie inhaled a whole new dose of enthusiasm which the dizzying round of "Not necessarily's" could not diminish. Harry Sudbury struggled into his damp sportcoat, then picked up the onyx figurines on the chess board, one by one, as if counting to see if she had a complete set. Connie prompted, "If Eliot was sent to Laos--"

"If it was your husband, and if he was force-marched across the border into the interior, then it's improbable he survived."

Connie folded her arms as a barrier to the word. Probably. The word took a strangehold on her neck. Probably was everyone's hedge--had been from the moment the ship had been reported off course. And now Harry Sudbury had invaded her home to taunt her with it again. "Why is Eliot probably dead? Why not probably alive?"

"Few survive the march."

"He's strong. You said so."

"There are things you don't understand--"

"Don't say that again, you pompous--" She picked up one of the chess pieces and threatened to toss it at him.

Mildly, he admonished, "Please don't throw the crockery." He hurried to the door and kept his hand on the knob, ready to make a speedy exit. "Surely you're aware of extenuating circumstances."

"Oh, hell. What's that?" "Extenuating circumstances" rated right alongside "probably" and "not necessarily" for lacking clarity. She followed him to the door and tugged at his jacket sleeve, as if to physically remove more information.

His hand went out and touched her hair. She jerked. He colored crimson and locked his hands behind his back, awkwardly shoving the camera bag higher on his shoulder. He cleared his throat, as if to apologize.

Connie beat him to it. "It's all right. I'm just jumpy after all this time."

"You've made adjustments."

"Naturally."

"Then you have some concept of what I meant by extenuating circumstances."

It was her turn. "Not necessarily." There was a moment of discordant laughter in which their eyes met.

"Mrs. Hopkins, you seem like an intelligent, understanding woman. I had no urge to demean you by saying there are things you don't understand. No one understands. We know, for example, that there are men who react to war and chaos and disorientation by killing themselves. Others simply fade and wither. Another type tries to make a new life for himself."

Connie tried to assimilate all the strange ideas. "New life?"

"There are always those who, for whatever reasons, prefer not to return."

"A man could change that much?"

"Certainly. Anyone could. Look at yourself, and how you've changed already. If your husband really made it to shore, and really was marched to Laos, then he's probably--"

"Probably dead." Connie said the words without flinching. They'd come full circle. She opened the door for Harry Sudbury and sent him back into the gloom. He clamped the slouch hat tight to his head and marched off into the gray-green twilight.

Connie brooded. She must make the right move for the right reasons now. Elation had been tamped down by dread. Should she call California, demand to talk to Peter and confront him? Should she call the Navy and demand corroboration? What about Channel Six news? How about a Congressman? Never mind; she had no idea who her Congressman might be. The International Red Cross--they ought to be some help if the Laos story were true.

After consideration, she made her first call to Charlie. He wasn't available to talk, Marge informed her, busy as he was char-grilling hamburgers for supper now that the rain had let up. Connie picked up her slicker and was out the door in moments. She drove the ten minute loop to Pearl City in six minutes, counting the stoplight at Aiea. Charlie would know. He would tell her. He wouldn't say 'probably.' He was regular, line-officer Navý and had been at the scene most recently.

Charlie listened to her story as they stood beneath the overhang, waiting for the charcoal to ignite in the portable grill. Always patient and attentive, he pushed a few wisps of brown-red hair over his bald spot and listened with the kind of

silent, respectful distance he gave all concerns. His attention seemed devoted to salting and peppering a tray of ground beef patties. She finished with a point-blank, high-pitched question.

"Do you think it's true? Eliot alive? In Laos?"

He laid out the patties in precise rows, his face a study in concentration. "I've got an extra pattie here. It'll be for you."

"I'm not hungry, Charlie. I didn't come for supper. What do you think of Harry Sudbury's story?"

"I wouldn't take it too seriously." He ruffled his patches of hair again. "Don't let this rile you up."

"How can I be anything else? And how can I be anything but thrilled? Don't you see? This is a breath of life after months of doubt."

"We got plenty of hamburgers, Connie. Sure you can't stay?"

"No. Talk to me about Eliot."

Charley poked the charcoal for a full minute, making it flicker and shoot sparks. "I don't remember a lot from OCS. But they made us memorize a quote from Thomas Hobbes. 'Force, and fraud, are in war the two cardinal virtues.' I used to say that to myself when I was working my way along the coast, avoiding capture. I took a vow to use whatever force or fraud would let me survive."

"Yes, yes, I'm proud of you." She didn't want to talk about his escape and that fact he was standing on the volcanic soil of Hawaii once again.

But Charlie was wound up in his own memories now. "Force and fraud. So I would have used anyone's dogtags, don't you see? I would have killed anyone in my way, assumed any identity, told any story."

Slightly bewildered, Connie wondered, "But what was it that gave you that fanatic need to stay alive? And the will to come back? Harry Sudbury said some men just wither, just give up, and die."

"Sure. And don't think there isn't a moment when it's easier to say, 'Shit, I'm not gonna fight this . . . I'll just die like a man.'" He oversalted one piece of meat until it was white. "I had that kind of decision to make when we abandoned ship."

"What made you go on? Risk capture, survive, come back?"

Charlie colored the same brown-red as his strands of hair. "Well, what flashed through my mind wasn't very high and mighty. It was Marge pecking me on the cheek the morning I left and saying, 'Don't you dare die, and leave me with these four bastards to raise.'"

The force of the knot in her chest made it impossible to dwell on Charlie's story any longer. She turned away. "What I need to know is how to proceed. How do I find out if Harry Sudbury's story is true? How do I make the Navy find out--and then tell me?"

"By accident. Or sheer luck. Not through official channels, that much I'm sure of. Aw, Connie, I'm leery of this whole deal. If there was any substance to this story, it would have been checked out months ago."

"By whom?"

Charlie flipped the hamburger patties expertly onto the red embers, channeling the sparks that flew upward by turning the spatula. "You ever cook on pumice charcoal?"

"No."

"How about a hot dog? I can slap one on the grill for you. Be done at the same time as these burgers."

"Honest, I'm not hungry. But I am in a terrific hurry to get cracking on this report--"

"Before you can follow up, you have to rule out that this isn't some cock-eyed story invented late at night by a wild-eyed newspaperman in a Saigon bar. Also, that it's not a hoax, a plant, or a bad joke."

"What reason would anyone have to hoax me?"

"If you go running off in all directions now, you'll generate some lively copy for a certain journalist named Sudbury. Say, you like mustard or catsup on your burgers? My boys are mustard-only men."

"I like mustard, too. But I don't want any. I want answers. I sent Peter to Saigon and he apparently heard this story from Harry Sudbury, then didn't bother to repeat it to me." She flinched with the hurt. "Now I don't know who to trust."

"Don't get on Father Trevalino's case too hard. So far, this Sudbury character hasn't done you any favor by popping up out of nowhere with less than little to say."

"He saw Eliot with his own eyes."

"No, Connie. Think about it. He said he saw someone, sort of, in the dark, who knew Eliot's name or had his dog tags."

"The man liked rice and fish."

"So do I. So does most of the world. Ummm, these burgers sure look tasty. Sure you won't stay?"

"Gotta run. Thanks, anyway."

He stopped her with a touch to her shoulder. It was a steadying, firm grasp. "It's sort of hard for me, being an old mustang and everything, to flap my jaws with the c.o.'s wife. But I stayed on that beach and watched for others to make shore. I watched for nearly a day and a night. I know who made it and who didn't, who was taken prisoner and who wasn't. I swear I never saw Eliot again after I left the quarterdeck of the Campbell. It would be understandable if you had a blind spot where your husband's concerned, but the truth is" His voice trailed off as he made a major production of dishing up the meat patties.

"The truth is--" prompted Connie, following him toward the back porch.

"The truth is, even if it was Eliot that this newspaper jerk saw, and even if Eliot went to Laos, the truth is he's probably dead."

"Why does everyone make that assumption? Why not assume life? Why not assume I'll get a letter tomorrow? Or a phone call out of the blue--like you calling Marge from Subic one Saturday morning?"

"The odds get longer every day. Aw, don't go on torturing yourself. You were just getting your act together. This is gonna put you back at square one and you'll have to work through it all again. Face it. Regardless of what happened, Eliot's now probably--"

She interrupted. "I know that line by heart." But in her heart, she refused to believe it. As Peter had once put it, she had hope, and that was part way to faith. It was faith in Peter that was rapidly diminishing.

Anger and disbelief are hard to camouflage, Connie realized. She did a poor job the next week when she met Peter's plane. He'd come back with a "clean bill of health" from the Church, but the Navy had given him only another twenty-four hours to vacate his quarters in the BOQ. He looked tanned, rested, and subdued. She was pale with anger, uneasy, and restlessly nibbling her fingernails.

They stood in the BOQ lobby, under a creaking rotating fan, and Connie spilled her accusations. Both her anger and disbelief compounded when Peter blithely responded to her accusations by saying, "Well, I don't believe in equal time for every loco on the block, especially journalists carrying tales out of school."

Connie set him straight. "Wrong. We all get equal time these days. Hispanics, Asians, blacks, women, Pentecostals, and everybody else, which includes MIA wives. We ride the same

buses, eat at the same cafeterias, and go to school together. And you, of all people, are not entitled to play God and decide what I ought to hear, when, or from whom."

"Then I was wrong." He looked directly at her. "Forgive me."

"Just like that?" She snapped her fingers. "It's not that quick and easy, Father Trevalino."

"What way is there for forgiveness other than instantaneous and complete?"

She thought it over and decided forgiveness was beyond her capacity. "I'll try to excuse you."

"What cannot be excused must be forgiven."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"I read it in a book." He took her hands. "Listen to me, Connie. I acted in good faith. I tried to protect you from rumors. You're so eager to clutch at anything. You take everything at face value. Next you'll want to go with the wives who are headed to Paris, hoping to confer with the North Vietnamese. Or be one those crying, whining women begging Washington for visas to travel to Hanoi."

"Why shouldn't they try any avenue they think might work? More power to them!"

"Those junkets won't produce anything but more heartache."

"And it's more to your advantage if I quit carping about Eliot and devote my time and energy to helping you protest the war?"

"I need your help," he admitted simply. "Even more, I need you. I've had plenty of enforced time to think during this sabbatical. I want you more than ever, Connie."

She had come to berate him, accuse him of treachery, and here he was professing the deepest of needs and desires. This made no sense, letting Peter's strong baritone timbre tune out the fading cries for help from Eliot, letting Peter's dark eyes flash dangerous signals while Eliot's strength waned and his memory disintegrated. If Peter kissed her, she'd let him. If he said he loved her, she'd believe him. What kind of a coward was she? Still, she refused to forgive.

Peter paced in a circle under the motion of the fan blades. "Harry Sudbury's the coward in all this. He's created a terrible turn of events for you. I hate for you to have to go through it, clinging moment to moment to diminishing hope. It's so damned unfair. Don't you realize it's your circumstances that gave me the courage to act? I had a hard time getting off dead center. Now I resent anyone who makes your effort any harder."

"It's hard to give up a husband."

"But you're only prolonging the agony. As long as you've got anything to cling to, even if it's invalid, you'll rock along, dead in the water."

"Poor choice of words."

"Poor choice of wars. Look, I've given up a military career for the freedom to speak out. I didn't take such a course irrationally or without forethought. Moreover, I've decided I'm

prepared to give up my religious calling for the freedom to marry you."

If that was a proposal, it sounded rhetorical. Connie let it pass.

"Two monumental changes," he explained. "Not entered into lightly. I'm ready and willing to give up everything for you. Aren't you ready to give up anything?"

I gave up a child, she thought sullenly.

Peter was still lecturing, shifting the blame, it seemed. "You won't alter your status to include me. At the same time, you won't exclude Eliot."

"I'm so confused--and that's the understatement of the year. It's like I'm running in a maze."

"The whole country's in a maze. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to find a way out." He put his hands on her waist, steadying them both. "I thought we were more alike. There's always two kinds of people, and I thought we were the same."

"The haves and have-nots?"

"Those who like a sheltered life and those who can't abide it. Look at you--Nocona, Texas, to the national ballet. You forsook the beaten path to accomplish that. And me. Oakland street gang to the priesthood."

"Highly unlikely," she smiled. "You're right. We don't make sense."

"Every age sets up little wayside huts for folks who say they want to go out and try something new, but in the end,

they don't. Tradition is a shack. Religion makes a great lean-to. Even government is a fairly well built log-cabin. What I see you doing by hanging onto the Navy's coattails--and Harry Sudbury's story--is scuttling into the handiest shelter."

"So what? Oh, Peter, I admit it! I may be sticking my head in the sand, but it would be horrible to think I'd deny Eliot if he's alive. Maybe it would have been to my advantage not to listen to Mr. Sudbury. But it seems clearly to your advantage for his path and mine not to cross. That's what frightens me. It's the same psychology the government uses in saying there is no war--but we're winning it."

He held her close to his chest, smoothing her hair, shaking his head. "It's so hard to be wise in this mess. I can tolerate messing up my career, my calling, but I don't want to botch it with you."

"You haven't. Not yet."

"Come to California with me, Connie."

"Pack up and move?"

"Sure. Why not?"

She didn't need to cite the extensive list of reasons. They were apparent to them both. "Not yet."

"Soon?"

"Maybe."

"I can't stay in Hawaii, now that I've cut ties with the Navy. I want you with me, but I have to move ahead. Do you understand that?"

She believed she did. It wasn't enough for Peter to whisper to the conscience of men and women any more in the private confessional booth. Now he wanted to shout in the public square. Just as an arena of a few square miles in the Pacific Ocean had been too small a pulpit, he now wanted more decibels, more media, more audience, more visibility. He'd be charming, intelligent, beautiful, really. People would listen, and end up beguiled as well as regaled. Where did it end?

"Peter, do you really see yourself as giving up everything for me while I--"

"It was never a sacrifice for me before. Now there is something I want more than a uniform stripe, even more than a clerical collar. For awhile, I hoped I'd be on the cutting edge of things here in Hawaii. But this is an old place, Connie. Its past is full of kings and missionaries and more Puritan zeal than New England."

"Don't you worry the dream will be just as out of reach in the golden west?"

"Perhaps. But that's home territory for me. Oh, it really doesn't matter where I end up. What I can't do is sit by and let pain beget pain. I have to believe there's more to the world than suffering, that what we endure, we endure for a purpose."

So if we can find a purpose, we can reduce our pain, she reasoned. Or, at least we ought to be able to lower our perception of pain. "I wish I could lower my threshold of memory," she said carefully. "Then I could cope with the pain, I think."

"All Harry Sudbury did was revitalize both for you." Peter looked away. "What if Harry had brought you the news he'd seen a body? A corpse with Eliot's dog tags."

She grimaced. "You're right. I'd reject that story as hearsay just the way you reject this story. I'd keep hanging on, waiting to hear what I want to hear."

"Connie, I've never asked you this. And maybe it should remain one of those unasked and forbidden questions. But . . . what did Eliot tell you to do?"

"Do?" She laughed. "It sounds ludicrous, but nothing. We never discussed such things. I've searched back through my memory. The closest he ever came was after an accident when I pulled him to safety. Eliot crashed his bicycle on a frozen road in Vermont and broke his ankle. After I managed to drag him to the first aid station, he said, 'You'll always be able to do what you have to.'"

"That's a very great compliment."

"Maybe, but it's not much consolation, either. It doesn't change the light bulbs or put new spark plugs in the car or take the trash to the dumpster."

"Those aren't the big problems of this life."

"But they are for military wives. First, you learn to do things because you're forced to. Then you do them because it's just easier. Finally, you don't want any help and resent anyone getting in your way. That's the end of any kind of partnership, any kind of marriage."

"Have you read Senator Fulbright's latest ideas? He's got a phrase I think is perfect--the 'arrogance of power.'"

Connie had done her homework. She knew about Fulbright's eight point plan for exiting Southeast Asia, an approach of nationalism over communism. She said thoughtfully, "We are arrogant." She also thought of Trio's comment that sex and power are closely intertwined when it comes to desire. She saw matters anew in personal terms. "Here we are, ready to stiffen the nation's backbone while our own moral fiber resembles mush." It was time for her to ask him one of those unasked and previously forbidden questions. "How do you feel, Peter, being the one who took the hero's wife to bed?"

"Suppose he's a dead hero?" He clenched his fists at his sides.

"We don't know that."

"How long are you going to hold out on me, Connie? I'm going to California. I want you there with me. I need you. I haven't been just trapped in the wrong profession the last few years. I've been lonely, too. For awhile, I thought it was like drawing double duty. I was such a creature of habit I kept on being both warrior and priest. Now, I believe maybe I was in double jeopardy."

He ran his hand across his forehead--a gesture she'd seen him make hundreds of times to adjust his garrison cap. Now the hat was gone, and he was still adjusting it, sort of the way amputees feel phantom pain in missing limbs. Creatures of habit? Sure they were.

She smiled into the flashing, dark eyes, touched the curl which threatened to break loose from his straggly neckline hair. Longing mixed with pain, a bittersweet turmoil caused by seeing gray seeping back over what had seemed black and white. "I'm going to hold out a while longer. Harry Sudbury, for better or worse, has thrown both pain and memory back in my face. I'm back at ground zero, even though I didn't ask to be there."

"Damn it, why couldn't Harry keep his mouth shut? Why did he need to muddy the waters?"

"You were the one who wasn't going to tell me."

"You were starting to close the wound. He's poured poison into it."

"And what if he's telling the truth?"

"It won't affect how I feel about you."

She longed to believe him. But there was a new hurt paining her chest. "What it affects is your right to call the shots. No matter how well intentioned you are, no matter how much you believe you love me, it's my life, my husband, my decisions we're dealing with." She felt brave making her proclamation, then wilted suddenly. "So, waiting for me awhile longer isn't so much to ask."

But even as she said the words she wasn't sure how to define "a while" longer. A month? A year? What about setting a calendar date? If she'd heard nothing of Eliot by January 1, 1966, she'd . . . she would do what? She didn't know. Besides, things were more complicated now. Even if she could prove Eliot was alive, she wouldn't automatically stop thinking of Peter.

Peter seemed to have a belief in the rightness of their being together that was downright contagious.

For a long time that evening, she wanted to call Peter just to hear his voice again. Just to hear him say he needed her. Just to have him tempt her with the siren song of "Come to California." She wanted to see Peter's face, the rosy texture of his high cheekbones, the gaunt spot beneath his chin, the taut lips. She did not want the photograph of Eliot staring at her from the desktop.

And when she slept, she dreamed specifically and sexually of Peter. The pleasure and abandon were there, the releasing rhythm of moving beneath him, the soft crooning quite alive in her ears, "I need you. I want you. Come with me."

After the tumult, Connie looked forward to a season of peace. October was quiet, November quieter still. She and Izuki replanted the iris and hibiscus beds with day lilies and bird of paradise, pruned the plumerias, and let the ginger go dormant.

"I have been thinking about the Arizona," he declared. "I believe you are correct. We should visit."

This time it was she who declined outright. Besides, wasn't the deadline when the plums budded?

He asked where she considered home. "Texas, I suppose. My dad's family has been there since the 1800s." Then, curious, she returned the question. "Where do you think of as home?"

"Why, right here. The islands."

"But where were you from--originally?"

"Ah, where does my family come from? Muroran. Land of lucky bears."

Well, neither the man from the land of the lucky bears nor the girl from deep in the heart of Texas were about to visit the Arizona. She made peace with her realization.

Meanwhile, she started tempting the night-loving mynah out during the day by leaving sunflower seeds on the seawall. It was nearly as good a game as waiting for the prize plums to produce luscious fruit.

Her season of peace lasted until three days before Thanksgiving. That afternoon, Connie walked to the Fleet Post Office hidden deep within the shipyard. She went to mail a card to her father in Nocona, Texas. She passed the base school playground where barefoot Polynesian children were reenacting Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, complete with a Nene bird for the turkey and apricot pits for corn.

In her mailbox she found a sale circular from Sears at Ala Moana, and a small, nondescript envelope.

A letter. A strange, foreign stamp she did not recognize, glossed over and nearly obliterated by the cancellation. A pencilled address. No return address. Funny paper, thin and soft. Not like overseas airmail stationery, more like rice paper.

Rice paper! She held the envelope away and stared at it. The postmark, smudgy and indecipherable, said nothing. But that didn't matter--she was now reading what she wanted to into the hieroglyphics.

She sat down slowly on the wooden bench in front of the post office, feeling behind her with a hand to locate the slats. Her eyes never left the envelope. "Eliot," she breathed.

Seated, she swallowed slowly. The letter lay in her lap. She placed her hands on her knees, forming a corral for the envelope. "Eliot." She felt dizzy as her hands touched the rice paper.

She turned the fragile, tissue-like envelope over. No return address. What had she expected? She studied her correct address again on the front. The letters, pencilled in neat print blocks, were ripply, as if the envelope had been held underwater. But it could be Eliot's printing. She tried to imagine his hand holding a stub of pencil and making the marks.

Her examination, which seemed to take hours, was conducted in seconds. Next she worked open the flap, afraid to tear it, afraid any rip would tear the fabric of hope. Days passed--surely a month--as she inserted the thumbnail along the bluish glue line. Her heart began to jump around as if it had too much space to operate in. The clock inside fleet post office joined in with overloud ticking.

The flap lifted. A single sheet of transparent paper. Folded in half. Her eyes blurred. All the time of waiting closed in. She

was afraid to look. She held the paper to the light, still could not make out the letters.

She tried again, smoothing the letter open against her lap. It read like a record played at the wrong speed. Greetings from the Humanitarian Committee of the People's Forum. The tension in her handclasp made her fingers hurt. Her eyes darted and scanned.

Some kind of form letter! Typed on a typewriter with several broken keys and with some letters misplaced. The sentences slanted downhill. Punctuation was nonexistent except at the end of the stilted phrases. She took in the gist of the message in one quick glance. United States capitalistic warmongers must cease wrongdoing to the humanitarians in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Two badly convoluted paragraphs. Not a word about Eliot. Hope ran out like water from a pitcher. She could feel it puddling at her feet. Not a scrap of personal message.

She read it again anyway. This time she comprehended the last paragraph more fully. It wasn't grammatical but the message was clear: This greeting sent heartfelt hereby on behalf of person signed below. Only there was no signature.

She instinctively flipped the thin paper over. Nothing. She shook the envelope fiercely. The second time her arm went up, a scrap of brown paper fluttered downward. It was no bigger than a match-cover and creased in half, much like a scrap torn from a brown grocery bag. She caught the wedge in mid-air, fanning it toward her face so fast it made a whoosh.

"Eliot!" She cried out triumphantly. "Oh, god, look!" The signature was there, clear, legible, in black ink. She recognized his writing. "Oh, he's alive! He's alive." She inhaled sharply, clutching the wonderful fragment of brown parchment to her heart. She examined it again. No doubt. Eliot's handwriting. Absolutely. It looked exactly like the hundreds of signatures she'd seen him put on orders and endorsements . . . not to mention their marriage license. The cursive script slanted in the neatly methodical way that was Eliot's personality, the t crossed in mid-air above the letter, the s at the end of Hopkins curling downward. Beneath the signature, as if to confirm it again, were typed his rank and serial number. Exact. She'd seen it on official documents for years. This was as clear as reading it from U.S. Navy stationery.

She walked home in a kind of delirium, clutching the brown scrap of paper between thumb and middle finger, holding it aloft like the flag of hope it was.

That very afternoon she made one telephone call to the mainland and made one personal visit to the base. The transpacific call was to Peter. He was "out" said a feminine voice at the end of the line. "Whom should I say is calling?"

"Connie. Connie Hopkins."

"Yes, Mrs. Hopkins, we'll tell him you called. Thank you for calling."

"Tell him it's important."

"Yes ma'am. All Father Trevalino's calls are important to him. He'll get back to you, I'm sure."

Actually, Connie was equally sure he would get back to her. So she went on with her mission. Rehearsing with care, she dressed purposefully in a suit for her visit to the MIA liaison officer. She was still officially assigned to the bird-beak captain and the crisp lieutenant who'd originally brought her the news Eliot was missing. How wonderful to turn the tables today and be able to prove he was alive!

At the appointed hour, she was ushered into the small office. A top file drawer stood half open, the window half open, the desk drawer half open. The captain half stood and greeted her, then sank back into his swivel chair. The lieutenant was not present today. "How can I help you, Mrs. Hopkins?" He quickly consulted his appointment chart. "Er--Connie."

"I've received a letter from my husband." She produced the rice paper envelope, removed the form sheet, and the scrap of brown parchment. She held her voice steady. "I have every reason to believe he's alive in Laos."

The captain reached for the letter, laid it on the desk in front of him, and silently bowed his head.

Oh no you don't, thought Connie. You can't put your head down and deny this! "I'm aware this is a badly garbled form letter. But the signature is real, I assure you. Surely you don't have any suspicion about the signing of--"

"I doubt it, Mrs. Hop--er, Connie. I doubt it down to the last dot over the i."

"But why? I swear to you this is Eliot's handwriting. It's perfect, absolutely perfect, in every detail."

"Too perfect."

"What?" Together they stared at the letter resting on the desk. The formica top stained through the tissue sheet. Now she was scared. "I know it's his handwriting! I'd know it anywhere." She heard the pleading quality in her voice but couldn't do anything about it.

"Of course you recognize your husband's handwriting. That's not in question. It is his signature--but--but--"

"Quit stammering. But what?"

"But it's been machine-traced off a set of orders."

She was too dumbfounded to react. Yes. That was precisely what the name, rank, and serial number series looked like, spacing and all. Perfect in every detail. "But why--how--who could get--"

"Sit down, Mrs. Hopkins. Let me get you some coffee."

"Water," she specified. She was already weak in the knees and sat quietly as ordered. The captain solicitously produced a paper cup and tap water from the cooler. Connie tried a smile of gratitude. Then a question of despair, "What's going on?"

"I'm sorry it happened to you, Mrs. Hopkins. Batches of these letters are turning up."

"Batches?"

"Yes. I'd be very surprised if the other wives from the Campbell do not receive these same documents within a few days."

"But who would do such a thing?"

"We're not sure. We know your address and your husband's name, rank, and serial number could easily have been obtained either here in Hawaii or in Washington."

"But the postmark--"

"Authentic." He refilled his half empty coffee cup and attempted to put more water in her nearly full glass. "The next step in this despicable chain is usually another letter, one asking for money to support the humanitarian work of--"

"I don't believe any of this." More, she couldn't handle the idea she'd fallen for a trick. Even worse than that, she fought off the implication that Eliot was back in the void. "Is there no end to this?" she asked suddenly.

"What do you mean?" the captain responded warily. He moved to completely shut the desk drawer, the file cabinet, and the window.

"I'm asking," said Connie, "what it's going to take to final out my account with the Navy. What amount of blood, tears, and limbo will suffice? Doesn't everyone realize they've already gotten their pound of flesh out of me? I can't take much more of this. How many times does the Campbell have to be bought and paid for?" She sat back, feeling dull and vacant. None of her speech had been part of the one she'd rehearsed. This had been heartfelt, overflowing, and now she was empty.

"It's hard not to be bitter when these things happen. We know it feels like adding insult to injury. Naval Intelligence is looking into these mailings. We have a new chaplain who's

offering counseling, Mrs. Hopkins, if you'd like to avail yourself of his services."

She almost giggled. The last chaplain had gotten her into enough trouble, thank you all the same. She picked up her scrap of brown paper. It was a souvenir of sorts. "Do you need this for evidence?"

He shook his head. "We have hundreds of these." She tucked it in her purse. He walked her to the half open door. "I hope someday, Mrs. Hopkins, that I'll be the one to bring you some good news, or at least something definite, one way or the other."

"Thank you." She went out, realizing later she'd thanked her captors for continuing the torment.

Yes, said Marge, she'd received the letter. No, it didn't bother her. "In fact, it doesn't make any difference now," was her summation.

Well, of course it didn't--with Charlie home every night. With trepidation, Connie next called Iowa. She talked to Frou-Frou's mother. It was surprising to Connie to hear a woman's voice. Frauncine had spoken so exclusively of her dear daddy that Connie had more or less assumed there was no maternal side at all to the family. There was a letter in Iowa, all

right, said Mom. But--another shock--it didn't make any difference.

"Doesn't make any difference?" quizzed Connie.

"Well, you see," said the woman in a puzzling, high-toned soprano, "before Frauncine took off for San Francisco, she divorced Mark anyway."

"Divorced! How could she do that?"

"Rather easily under Iowa law."

"I mean, how could she do such a thing? Mark is alive. A prisoner of war. She knew that."

"Yes, but it didn't make any difference." A pause. "Do you want me to forward this letter to Frauncine in California?"

"No, I guess not." Connie repeated the obvious. "It doesn't make any difference now."

"Then would you like her address? I'm sure Frauncine would like to hear from you. She said you were always nice to her in Honolulu."

Connie took down the address carelessly. Less than a year. And with proof positive Mark was alive. But Frou-Frou had cut all ties. Maybe that was safer, saner, than signing on for endless waiting. How could anyone be so shortsighted? But then Frou-Frou's attention span had always been limited.

The call to Trio was easiest. Here was a situation without doubt. But still Connie wanted to know. "Did you get a letter?" she asked after the preliminaries.

Reluctance. Petulance in the voice. "Yeah. But it don't make no difference."

"I want to see it. Bring it and come out to see me."

"What for?"

"I want to talk."

"What have we got to talk about?"

"We used to be friends, Trio. Close friends. We were sailor's wives--remember?"

"We were dreamers," Trio said satirically. "But I'll see you Saturday afternoon if you'll leave a pass for me at Sub Base gate."

Saturday, Connie was gardening and watching for the car. She'd stayed outside, anxious to see if there'd been any change for the better in Trio's appearance. Unfortunately, Trio seemed permanently in her swashbuckling phase. She wore a Dashiki, the latest in Afro-wear. The robe trailed behind her and her feet, clad in some kind of native wooden sandals, stuck out with every step. The kinky hairdo had subsided somewhat, into a style that resembled a mop the color of burnt toast. Her cheekbones stuck out with the prominence of a starvation victim's. No doubt Tony was consuming all the groceries.

"You're too thin."

"I'm in training."

"For what?"

"For when things get rough. For when things finally come unglued."

"You're still spouting revolutionary rubbish, then?"

"Connie, did you invite me out to lecture me? You who are still playing the docile little keeper of the home fires. Face it,

Connie. You haven't got anyone to keep the fires stoked for. You haven't got a home. You can be evicted from Navy property any minute they take a notion that you've sponged off the taxpayers long enough."

Connie refused to be bullied. "Come see the flowers I've grown for the taxpayers, then. And my prize plums--they have a few leaves now. See these poinsettias? I'm hoping to get them to bloom for the holidays. Sometimes they get too much light in the tropics, Izuki says. The white ones will be fine, but the red ones won't turn unless they have enough darkness."

Trio laughed wildly. "I turned Red because I'm black--I can 'preciate 'bout these here flowers."

"Oh, hogwash. I don't believe what you say, nor the corny way you've taken to saying it."

Trio stuck her hands through the dashiki pockets onto her hipbones. Her eyes shone like polished agates. "Solid citizen Connie. Can't believe change even when it's right in front of her eyes."

"Come in, Trio. Let's make some iced tea."

The hand came out of the dashiki pocket and aimed at Connie's cheek. She saw the blow coming, but didn't believe it was intended for her. The slap whipped into her cheek with the sting of a scorpion. She recoiled. "Stop it! What's come over you?" Her hand came up to cover the flaming spot on the right of her face.

This time both of Trio's black hands came out and grabbed at Connie's shoulders. Connie fought back, the shaking lashing

her head back and forth like a rag doll caught in a dog's mouth. Inside her neck and chest, she could feel the blood spurting back and forth. "Quit this!"

She broke away from the flailing arms and grabbed a hoe from the poinsettia bed for protection. "Get out of here, Trio. Go wreak havoc elsewhere."

Trio sucked her thin cheeks inward. She spat at the poinsettias. "You going to stick with nonviolent resistance? Turn the other cheek?"

"I don't see how your methods can solve anything. You can't bring Abner back." Connie let her gaze bore steadily into Trio's.

There was a flash of pain through Trio's eyes. Then the anger erupted anew. She yanked the hoe away. Raising it overhead, she aimed at the poinsettia stalks. The hoe crashed down, Connie jumping to the side, staring in amazement. The mutilation took several attempts--slicing, chopping, butchering. The steel edge flew through the poinsettias like a machete. Leaves flew, fell shredded to the soil, oozed white juice.

Connie stood transfixed, amazed at how quickly the carefully nurtured flowers turned to garbage.

"I'm done," shouted Trio. "Done with you. Done with the Navy. Done with choppin' cotton. Don't forget it." She hurled the hoe across the yard. "Well, shut your mouth, Connie. I don't want to hear any protests from you. But I won't, of course. Not from you. Not even if you wake up and see there's no peace on earth and damned little good will."

She stalked off toward her Jeep. It was useless for Connie to argue. It would also be cowardly to just stand here amid the wreckage. "Hey!" she called. "I'm not going to help you wreck the world," she called. "There's enough to go around--"

Trio raised a fist, shotgunned the Jeep across the gravel drive, and disappeared from the circle drive.

At that point, Connie began to shake. Thank goodness Trio hadn't attacked the prize plums! She picked up the hoe, tried to make it stand upright by the porch. The poinsettias slumped in decimated hodge-podge. Izuki would be shocked. What explanation would make sense? Well, Izuki, there's no peace on earth this season, so there's no need for poinsettias. What we have, you see, Izuki, is war on earth among men of bad will. Or perhaps it was hell on earth for men and women with no will.

She gathered up the butchered stalks and threw them over the sea wall. The current drifted them westerly.

When Peter called and she told him of the incident, he said simply, "You must come to California,"

She took a deep breath and held it.

"Connie, come to California. Next week. Tomorrow if you can get organized."

She let the breath out, but held a near-sob in.

"We need to be together. You need to be here with me. Come to California, darling."

"I might, Peter. I just might. At least for a visit." She started to tell him about the fake letter, then settled for explaining, "Last week, I shouted at that nice, soft-spoken liaison captain that's handling my case. I yelled at him."

"What did you yell?"

"I can't stand any more of this."

"And you shouldn't have to. Come to California. I want you to."

The pauses between her replies were getting shorter. "I'll think very seriously about it. I promise."

"I want you to come. I need you. I love you. Come to California, Connie."

The last pause was only a split-second. "I will."

Three weeks later, she was there.

Peter picked her up in a limousine at San Francisco International, checked her into a suite adjoining his at the Fairmont, the kind of first-class treatment he was apparently now used to. The protest movement, she gathered, was well-financed at its core and its stars catered and deferred to.

Within minutes of arriving at the hotel, as he gave directions and sent staff scurrying and talked on two telephone lines at once and used a hand to signal room service and the valet, Connie realized Peter now expected people to wait on him. He'd grown larger than life; others served him. He had taken on the dual roles of persecuted ex-Navy chaplain and outspoken

priest. Despite being genuinely glad to see him, she had immediate doubts about her role.

"I'm in correspondence with important people," he confided. "I'm in conference with beautiful people." He bandied names: Eartha Kitt, Pete Seeger, Dr. Spock. He seemed to take seriously the ballyhoo the press was giving him, producing for her inspection a scrapbook full of clippings.

Within an hour, she sensed how expendable she'd become. He seemed condescending, once called her by the wrong name as he talked to three reporters at once. And always in a hurry. A hectic meal on a tray. A frantic change of clothes before an afternoon press conference. During a break, when they were alone for a moment, she asked, "What is all this scurrying about amounting to? You don't even time to think, Peter."

He gave a wry laugh. "No time for anything. No time to pick up my shirts at the laundry. No time to get my hair cut. My prayer at morning chapel these days is pretty humble, 'Dear God, let my socks match.'"

It was the first touch of humor and humility he'd shown. The fun, the charm came drifting back. He unplugged the telephones. She closed the curtains. She rubbed the knotted muscles of his shoulders while he stood pensively studying his evening's speech.

She listened as he rehearsed. "Anyone we can muscle in on, militarily or otherwise, is fair game these days. Don't you see what a game this is? We need somewhere to be top dog, somewhere we can look good. Look around the world--Berlin

Wall a-building, Bay of Pigs, trouble in the Congo, the U.N.'s diapers falling down around its knees, atomic testing resumed. All those things are going poorly for Uncle Sam. So where can he shine? Or at least save face? Southeast Asia."

"It's all political?" she interrupted, not at all sure she agreed.

"Naw, just trendy. 'Nam is a fantastic training exercise. It's a mad dog on a leash we can watch instead of shoot."

"I think the mad dog got loose in my neighborhood. What I've seen has been both reckless and cruel."

"Yet for most people, interest in Vietnam is on a par with President Johnson fussing with his gall bladder. Step right up and see the wound! See how it hurts! Looky, looky, see the scars of survival."

Summoning courage, she admitted, "I have another scar to exhibit." She showed him the purported letter from Eliot.

"Doesn't make any difference," he mused. "Things have gone too far."

She blinked. Things had gone too far for what? She sensed she'd become something of a millstone, weighing him down, holding him back. Maybe things had only gone too fast. Apparently, he didn't really have time for this letter, either. He was explaining how he already knew about the fraud. Widespread. West coast, east coast, midwest, Hawaii, all over. Terrible thing.

"Why didn't you warn me?" asked Connie with quiet outrage. "If you knew and kept silent, then--"

"Why must I be the one to poke holes in your balloon? Why do you turn to me to destroy false idols?"

For that she had no answer.

"Connie, none of this is your fault." His voice became more gentle. "You didn't create the war by marrying a military man. That's like saying someone deserves to be robbed because he has money."

She walked around his pile of briefcase, attaché folder, Dopp kit, and legal pads. "Why do I sense you've taken on some new demon to wrestle?"

He studied her. "You know me too well. All right, yes. What it is, Connie, well . . . what I'm thinking of doing is . . . running for Congress."

She withheld her applause. It was hard enough merely to avert her eyes.

"If I can only get to where I can make some difference--" He broke off, tentative and frowning. "What demons are there to wrestle other than those of one's own lifetime?"

"None, obviously. And nautical and theological ones have proved no match for your talents."

He missed the satire. "Tonight we're rallying in Golden Gate Park. I have to go early, inspect the lighting and stage area, do some filming before it gets dark." He fidgeted, explaining with a trace of embarrassment lifting his voice, "The local stations need something to run at six."

"Film at six is a priority," she parroted.

"So, I'll meet you by the tea house around seven. After we finish, there'll be an oriental barbecue."

"I'll be there. Meanwhile, I'm glad to catch my breath. And I want to call Frauncine."

A knock at the door. "Good, that's Les. I'm leaving you in the care and keeping of one of my oldest and most trusted advisors--the man I'll probably ask to be my campaign manager."

"Another priest? God help me!" She laughed outright. "And I really don't want a babysitter."

"I just want someone to make sure you get there."

"Afraid I'll be a no show?"

"Certainly not. But there's not enough time to send the limo back, and Les knows his way around this burg." He stopped chattering. From halfway across the room, his eyes sought hers. "Connie, I really need you to help me."

Ah yes, right there alongside need and ahead of want was her use to him. The crux of the matter had become her ability to help him grow in stature and wisdom and in favor with God and Man, not to mention fame, fortune, and future. Love now meant devotion, the holy order of nuns bringing clean fingertip linens on demand. The pedestal half-barrel in Kapiolani park came back to haunt her. Hail Connie, full of grace. Keep up the good works. Keep the faith. Now there was a hint of annoyance and anxiety that she was trailing behind, the hint of impatience in his tensed jaw and knitted eyebrows. Keep up, Connie. Keep the pace. Close ranks. March in step.

Peter opened the door, shook hands, and ushered in a man who was attired in a middle-aged version of the decade's more teenaged costumes. Tight jeans, yellow turtleneck, sunglasses, loafers without socks, a tooled Indian leather belt and oversized turquoise ring played against a thin face. His lower features were encased in a dark goatee beard, the temples in salt-and-pepper gray, wiry hair. He had a paper cup of amber liquid in one hand and a flask in his hip pocket. "Come in, come in," said Peter, impatiently. "Connie, come here."

Docilely, she obeyed, crossing the room in precise, well-spaced steps while listening to the presentation.

"This guy and I go way back. We grew up in the same neighborhood, ran on the docks, wound up at U. Cal. at the same time. Lester Moore, meet Connie Hopkins. Les turned out even more institutionalized than I. He's a history professor."

"Les is Moore." quipped the historian. He finished whatever was in his paper cup.

Funny, witty, and fairly drunk, she assessed. A history professor for an afternoon companion? Well, he could nap and she would call Frauncine. Peter left a half peck on her cheek and gave a semi-salute toward Les. "There's a copy of my speech on the desk, Les. Take a look, will ya, ol' buddy? See if I ought to make any revisions before the evening version." He made an abrupt exit.

Les picked up the legal pad, sprawled on the plush chintz sofa, and refilled his paper cup from the hip flask. "Want some?" he asked.

"What is it?" she asked warily.

"Something strong enough to keep you bombed, weak enough not to kill you. Come on, have a swig. Then we'll settle in here and review the padre's prose."

"I think you're well on your way toward being two sheets to the wind."

"My, aren't you nautical. And, perchance, you have a homemade temperance lecture at the ready?"

"I have some phone calls to make." She flounced away, mildly miffed at having Les Moore for a watchdog. After contacting Frauncine and getting agreement to meet at the central fountain in Golden Gate park, Connie dawdled. She rested, ate an apple, took a shower, redid her nails, watched the afternoon shadows lengthen against the rainbow-colored prisms of the skyscrapers' mirrored sides.

She went back into the parlor area. The colors changed on the western windows, faceted in reflections from the Bay. It was like looking through stained glass. To her surprise, Les Moore was still upright, a pen in one hand, the paper cup in the other. She sat down, pulling her dressing gown across her knees. "You've known Peter a long time?"

"Like he said, we go way back."

"What do you think of his current situation?"

"Waging war against war? Takes nerve. And don't forget the war with himself. What can I say? The guy's got balls. And he likes you, Mrs. Constance Sarah Hopkins. That much is obvious. But you send out mixed signals."

She didn't deny the ambivalent chemistry, merely indicated there was nothing she cared to acknowledge, not even her full name which the professor had properly researched.

Les plunged ahead. "What are you and Peter to each other?"

She played for time. "At the moment or in the past?"

"Was he some personal trip through sin and salvation for you?"

She laughed too loudly. "You're talking to a woman who has led a sheltered life on both counts."

"Go on."

"This isn't confession."

"You needn't confess. I can fill in the blanks." He lumbered up from the chintz couch. He spread his feet wide apart and rocked back on the heels. Three quick flips of the dark goatee beard, then hands wedged into the denim pockets. "Your remarkable control plays against Peter's increasingly reckless notions. It's a teeter-totter. Maybe in balance for the moment, but the nature of teeter-totters is to tilt."

Les was starting to make more sense. "And the tilt--will it come soon? Will it be sudden? Total?"

"About the same time and effect as when California slides into the sea." He refilled his glass and fixed a drink for her. This time she accepted. "Famous Father Trevalino began in certainty. Will end in doubt. Began with altars and shoulder-boards. Will end up bugging offices and tapping telephones."

"That's a horrible scenario." She shivered.

"Officially called paradox. Peter started out blessing the dirty work; he'll end up dirtying the blessed work."

"My, my, what a way with words," she teased. "Do you have these visions often? Or are you reading what your own moving hand has writ?"

"The writings I see are in invisible ink," he laughed. "Wonderful invisible ink--the kind we use for self-justification, self-gratification, self-righteousness. Marvelous invention, invisible ink. However, if you'll do your research, you'll discover all our wars have had a peace movement. That's what's really as American as hotdogs, mom, and apple pie. And the clergy's been in the forefront more than once. World War One had Washington Gladden, the Social Gospel minister. And don't forget Norman Thomas. He underwent a metamorphosis from Presbyterian preacher to Socialist standard-bearer."

"Every war's had propaganda, too." The stained glass dulled with the afternoon's clouds.

"Propaganda? Our policy isn't even that dignified. This government doesn't see the troops as men, even as human beings--they're units. Numbers. Statistics to be moved around, totalled up, put in tents or trenches, shot at, shipped home, buried, and wiped off the sheet for a new batch of numbers."

"Were you ever in the military, Les? Or are you a theory-only man?"

He evaded with a wave of his hand and toast of his paper cup. "Ah yes, that fashionable country club set, the military.

Did you realize the women inductees wear mini skirts in the mess halls now? And soon the sergeants will wave and say 'Hi' instead of saluting."

"I get it. You're another one of these campus crusaders who is going to make loud pronouncements without any first hand knowledge. You have no intention of actually going over there, do you?"

"Go to Vietnam? Don't be ludicrous. They're shooting at people over there. I'm going to live comfortably in dreamy Marin County and study the war."

She tried to be charitable. Sometimes the view from outside looking in was just as clear as from inside out. His hand was steady as he refilled the glasses. She aided and abetted now, bringing ice from the bucket. "So where does that leave Peter?"

"Trying to fulfill what he sees as the greatest good."

"Perhaps that's what he meant . . . he once told me, 'God orders justice, not patience.'"

"The private irony for him is that it took war to give him peace, that it took adultery to give him love, that it took violence to bring him perfect calm. For centuries revolutionists have been searching for that one perfect and legitimate rebellion. Peter fully believes he's found it. Fully believes he's the symbol of it."

Les was scaring her now. The voice too eerie, the prophecies too spooky. Nevertheless she listened.

"You're a symbol now, too. You haven't got an identity except for wife of an MIA. Next they'll issue you a dress code and specify no haircuts, no smoking, no dirty jokes."

Such a notion struck her as funny. "Whose business is it if I cut my hair?"

"You need to preserve an image of stability."

She didn't think so. What he was saying was that certain parties might want to preserve her in some kind of state of suspended animation. Like Sleeping Beauty, she'd be pristine and intact in case the past should return. "Time hasn't stood still. I don't think anyone's that naïve. Eliot and I, if ever reunited, would be virtual strangers."

"Eliot? That was your husband's name? Peter said he was a good man."

"Peter is a good man, too. And he and Eliot were both good Navy."

"While you were--are--the epitome of good Navy wife, I suppose."

"You'll have to define that."

"I'd say it amounts to a cushy job in a sunny clime as far as you're concerned. And a good Navy wife should be docile enough to wait, bright enough to stay quiet, dull enough not to be promiscuous, then whore enough to climb in bed with a man she hasn't seen for years."

She forced light, decaying laughter. The description fit fine, she feared. But she didn't want to look forward to a sour life fueled by exhausted memories of either Eliot or Peter.

"Now, with that out of the way, tell me about you, Connie. Do I sense you've become a ship without a rudder?"

"Temporarily."

"You're going to sign on with Peter's campaign, then?"

"I don't know." It was her first honest, public hesitation.

"You're like money in the bank to him."

"How's that?"

"Voters see you, they think of Peter. Bingo."

"Bingo," she repeated uncertainly.

"Let's put this conversation back on an even keel," he insisted. "I didn't mean to tilt your private teeter-totter. Every war's had men and women who were separated and had to make hard decisions." Les made sudden clear-eyed, empathetic eye contact.

"Separation from the beloved," she repeated. "A very old theme in dance and drama. I just never thought about living it out in the 1960s." She had an idea. "Do you know much ballet, Les?"

"Not enough to even stub a toe against."

She told him the plot of the "Kingdom of the Shades" piece from La Baydère. "Nikiya, the spirit in the land of the dead, is separated from Solor. In that dance, the audience gets to see how real life is different from the ideal."

He nodded. "Separation of two planes of existence,"

"Well, the last time I danced that part, I didn't have a step out of place--but the performance was a failure." She understood now; her level of excellence had separated her from her partner,

from the rest of the cast, even from the audience. Peter, in the fifth row, had been aware of it. "You tried too hard," he'd said. Precisely. If one could not achieve the ideal, then perfection was the recourse. Second-best, lopsided perfection. She snapped her fingers. "Peter will have to separate himself even further from real life to pursue the ideal. He'll have to decide whether to leave the Church to run for Congress."

"They may not be mutually exclusive. Besides, I don't think that's such a hard decision, though Peter may agonize over it a while longer." Les leaned against the fake marble fireplace, standing straight-backed and sober. "The test is this. If he were dying, would Peter call for a priest?"

"Yes!" The sun streamed through the stained glass.

"That tells you a lot."

It told Connie more than she really wanted to know. She pulled the dressing gown closer around her neck, retied the satin belt firmly at the waist. When the chips were down, Peter wanted the Church, the framework, the stability, the structure. He wanted the Church of history, the container for sin, the system that could balance his divided self. She understood it--or believed she did--perhaps better than he.

"Don't cinch that belt so tight you cut yourself in half," admonished Les. "And are those guilt pains I see wrinkling your pretty forehead?"

It wasn't guilt pangs, she decided, at least not the way she'd thought of guilt before. Peter couldn't be seduced, not permanently, nor from the things that mattered most to him. It

was pain of betrayal which must be apparent on her features, and pain of betrayal felt worse than the pain of loss. Peter first betrayed the Church for her, and now her for politics, all in the name of the greatest good. Inside the Church he could be energy embodied; outside, paralyzed. Inside the Navy, he could legitimately hunger for experience; outside he would rapidly grow satiated, indolent, bored. Inside politics, he could work steadfastly toward the ideal; outside, reality pressed against him in a relentless jumble. She put her fingertips to her temples. Dear God, let his socks match.

"Connie, what kind of chaplain was Peter?"

She lifted herself out of the trance. "Perfect. Manly enough for military camaraderie, sensitive enough for the intellectuals, and his shoulders were brawny enough for women to weep on."

"Do you think he hoped and prayed for slaughter of his enemies?"

"How should I know?"

"Wait. That was a rhetorical question. Do you think because he stands on a stage in Golden Gate Park amid the flower children now that he's any more kindly and tender?"

She didn't answer.

"Well?"

"Well, isn't that another rhetorical matter?"

"Hell, no. Peter's as bloodthirsty as ever, just his attention is diverted from the fields of battle to the halls of Congress. He's involved in something that really excites him. It's an unpredictable, gut-wrenching contest."

"And among those with claims on Peter--which means the military, the Church, and, I suppose, me--it will be a case of winner takes all."

"He might decide to have his cake and eat it, too. But if he's smart, and I believe smarts have always been Peter's strong suit, he won't trade that sanctified collar for a Congressman's cap."

She felt herself floating through the stained glass into a spectrum of many colors. She was counting the ballots, watching the inaugural events. For a vain instant she envisioned herself the spouse of the juniorest representative on the Hill. "Could it happen? Does he have wide support?"

"All the fools in Berkeley are on his side. And all the faculty." Les chuckled. "And that's often one and the same."

Golden Gate Park had a garden club corner with newly planted tulips. The sign had been defaced: Raise More Hell and Fewer Dahlias.

In the park, Les chaperoned her through the maze of walkways and artist's booths. A kid with a puka shell necklace around his thick neck attached himself on the other side of Les. It was a former student. The young man was terribly earnest, holding onto his professor's elbow as he talked. "I suspect we're right on certain, small aspects of this conflict, and wrong,

dead-wrong, on the question as a whole, Professor Moore. We keep condoning wrongs we know to be wrongs. We're contending with self-destructive instincts."

The young man was stopped dead by Les. "Sonny, like they say in comedy routines, if you haven't struck oil in five minutes, stop boring."

At the next bend, the meadow opened up. Kids were dancing impromptu, guitars and harmonicas for rhythm.

"You want to try the frug?" asked Les, hitching up his Indian tooled belt.

"The new dance? I've only read about it."

"You master things by living through them, not reading through them."

"Thanks anyway," she declined the invitation to the dance.

He took her arm and tucked her hand over his wrist.

"Connie, you've taken a bum rap as far as I can see. My basic stance is merely dirty old man. Now, since I don't profess to have any long range answers, why don't we duck out of here? How about a one night stand?"

"Is that the kind of offer I think it is?"

"What kind do you think it is?" he queried.

"No terms of endearment. No ties that bind."

"No strings attached," he confirmed.

"Open and above board."

He handrolled a marijuana cigarette, lit it and blew smoke in her face. "We could knock a bottle of scotch back on its rocks." Now he was wound up. "Ride a bed off its posts."

"Uncomplicated lust, Moore or Les."

"Now you're getting the message. For a minute, you acted as if you didn't know you were fair game."

"I guess I'd forgotten."

He had a new idea. "You want to sit in on one of my classes? You won't even know me. I'll be a gentleman and a scholar."

"At this point, I just want to remember which way I came in."

"Can't talk you into any hanky-panky? Surely you're not saving it for the proverbial rainy day. Or the guy in the box. So, it must be Peter. Okay, I understand. The sexual revolution isn't really my battle. But if he hasn't got time, honey, I got an itch you can scratch."

"Les, you're funny. I even think there's some wit behind all these bawdy remarks. Oh! There's my friend, Frauncine."

Connie waved and left Les behind as she hurried to greet the newest flower child. For Frauncine, the expensive denims with fringe had not come from a secondhand store but from I. Magnin on Union Square. For her, bodypainting meant a rainbow on her forehead, the two ends arching from eyebrow to eyebrow, a single silver sequin in the middle. She appeared to be thriving on the regimen of granola and wheat germ. She'd added a few needed pounds and had rosy cheeks, clean skin, and a cute burlap string lacing her halter blouse. And topping it all as a wrap, Frauncine wore a stole made of peacock feathers.

"Oh, Frauncine, you look marvelous."

"For crying out loud, Connie, you sound like you expected me to have motorcycle scars on my boobs! No, I'm fantastic. Life's a gas. Isn't this a trip?"

They skirted the craft stalls on their way to the tea house. The offerings ran heavily to homemade fur ruglets, madras bedspreads, baubles, bangles, and guitars. Frauncine bought everything that appealed to her--a butterfly-shaped kite, a heavy lead statue of Benjamin Franklin, and a hand-dipped fluorescent candle shaped like a skull. She crammed it all into an ecologically-safe, recycled shopping bag. She told jokes about the Jolly Green Giant and his peas. She sang a raunchy song, "Oh, hello there pretty Wavy . . . you unhappy in the Navy? Have a baby on me!" Over and over, she repeated, "Isn't this a trip?"

Connie could only assume this was another rhetorical question. As far as she could see, the people in the park were a straggly collection of kids. They were going hellbent to wind up the Summer of Peace and Love, not realizing they were already six months out of season. Food coloring and bubble bath foamed in the fountain. A paper airplane contest was full blown in the meadow. Posters on the backs of park benches, telephone poles, and trash containers crusaded for earth grains, EST, hashish, and gourd toothpaste. Amid great pretense of delight, Connie opted for strength in numbers and kept Frauncine in tow for the next hour and Peter's speech. Afterwards, they ended up seated by Les at the hibachi supper.

Reluctantly, Connie performed the introductions. Les leaned over and touched the sequined rainbow between Frauncine's eyes. "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds."

"Frauncine in the park with the peacock feathers," she corrected with a cockeyed grin.

"Oh, baby, you're for me," he mumbled.

"Isn't this a trip?" she replied.

Everyone was slouching on beach mats. In the middle of the U shaped grids, Japanese men and women in costume tended firepots. The mama-sans stirred the rice, the men agilely barbecued prawns, managing to toss, behead, and disembowel the shrimp in one process with a razor-edge sword.

"Careful there, Hari-kiri," cautioned Les.

Frauncine giggled her usual refrain.

The hibachi pots emitted fragrant smoke and sake hung heavy in the air. From somewhere, a guest produced a fighting carp in a goldfish bowl. The atmosphere was presumably complete when zoris, tabis, and kimonos were handed out. Connie felt another paradox: the embrace of Asian culture at an event demanding less involvement in it.

Frou-Frou flapped the wings of her kimono-tent. "I could take in boarders."

"Gimme shelter," hummed Les. "Sweetums, you can take me under your wing."

Connie got in a few more words about Frauncine as former Navy wife and originally from Iowa before being cut completely out of the scenario. Les leaned closer to Frauncine's ear.

"Sounds like you've gone from one mystical delusion to the next, honeychile. But roots are more important than feathers. Come here, my little Iowa cornpone and tell me your tale of woe."

"No, that part's ancient history."

Les appeared entranced. "Okay, forget the past. We never learn from it anyway."

"We don't?" The sake was getting to Frou-Frou. "Jeez, I'm glad to hear that." She shifted her bag of purchases out of the way so she and the professor could go head-to-head. In the process of stowing the gear under the lowslung table, Les hit his knee against the clunker statue in the shopping bag.

"Ouch!" He lingered hunched over, fondling the affected knee and grimacing. "To quote my friend, Eric Hoffer, 'The young are decked out in nightmarish masquerade on its way to the ashcan.'"

Frou-Frou didn't understand. "I'm on my way to the john."

"Bring some ice on your way back," he called, still holding his knee. "And put some vodka in it."

She came back with ice wrapped in a towel and an apology. "I think we got off on the wrong foot."

"A foot in the door is worth two in the mouth."

After that, they carried on a conversation with their eyes. Les and Frauncine were alone and the rest of the world could go to hell. During the main course, she lost a fake eyelash in the bean sprouts and began to pout. Les helped her find it. By dessert, she and the professor had paired off for good. Finally, during the plum-wine after-dinner drinks, he spoke aloud. "Ah

yes, time's a wastin'. What say we gather ye rosebuds and marigolds and petunias while we may." He daubed a finger full of the hot fermented plum wine behind her earlobes.

They paraded away wrapped in peacock feathers and platitudes.

"We're swinging on out of here," Frauncine called back in farewell.

The word struck Connie as archaic, dredged up from another war. This wasn't the world of swing. The pendulum had already swung and was between the poles of apathy and violence on its way to hustle. She took a last look at Frou-Frou, swinging off in a new direction on the arm of Les the swinger.

"Gotta split," he called back. "You dudes take care." He leered down into the baby blue eyes of Frou-Frou.

"I don't want to be any trouble, " she cooed.

"White man's burden," he chuckled. They trekked away, dragging the butterfly kite. When last heard, Les was promising, "For better, for worse, against the war and in the park, for as long as we both shall dig it."

Connie lay across the bed in her suite at the Fairmont, back in the silky dressing gown again. Peter had taken to wearing 100% Egyptian cotton undershorts and undershirts. She teased, "I'm impressed."

He was still riding the crest of exhilaration of the evening. "I've heard a candidate's biggest job is to stand around and look interesting. Maybe I should flash these lucky shorts, eh?"

"I think that messianic gleam in your eye will be flash enough."

He fluffed the pillows. "Oh, Connie, do you think I can do it?"

It was a question she didn't want to answer. What if his optimism--his hope of making a difference--was only intellectual error, or arrogance. "I hope you can," she said carefully. Then, dredging to the depths of her courage, she added, "But I don't honestly think I can help you."

"Why not?" It was the pout of a little boy. He sank into the overstuffed chair, his long legs sticking out like matchsticks.

"Because I don't think political office is the cure for the illness."

"Let someone else find the antidote for the diseases of the world? You think your friend Trio is looking in the right areas? Or Frauncine prissing off into the counterculture draped in peacock feathers?"

"It was your dear buddy and campaign manager she traipsed off with," Connie reminded him curtly. Then, more seriously, she added, "I don't think Trio or Frou-Frou have found the answers. Or Les for that matter. Maybe there aren't any answers. But I don't like your answer, either."

"It's as good as any," he defended sullenly. "Maybe better than most."

"It's too full of hype, the War of Tomorrow On Sale Today."

"You know the hardest lesson I learned growing up?"

"I have trouble even imagining you as a child, Peter. Did you have rosy cheeks and dirty knees?"

"I was a second generation Italian hooligan."

Now she was intrigued. "And what's the hardest lesson for second generation Italian hooligans?"

"Be tough and play fair--but fight dirty. I haven't changed my stripes since I was twelve and had my nose broken in a fight on the docks. This decade is going to affect everyone, rich man, poor man, good man, everyman. You're going to have to take sides, Connie. Stand up and be counted. No sitting out this dance on the sidelines like a wallflower. You're a state-of-the-art wife. And this is a state-of-war era. For better or worse--"

"Don't say 'In the park for as long as we both shall dig it.'" The sharp threat stopped him. He picked up the evening paper from the nightstand to see if his picture was in it.

She lapsed into reverie. For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, from this day forward, to have and to hold. Funny how you don't forget the words, just the meaning.

He picked up the conversation where he'd halted. "For better or worse, there are limits. For all of us, very real limits. Only those with no alternatives stand and wait." As if to illustrate, he stood. His face seemed overglazed with ferocity,

the eyes squinted and dark, the jaw thrust, the lipline set.

"Damn it all to hell!"

An angry man. Not a lover. Dangerous to the both of them. She went to him, touched his hairline, smoothed a damp finger across the firm mouth. The substitution would be so easy! Too easy. Peter the patriot, fatherly, protective; she always tagging along, helping out. It would be reciprocal, smoothing each other's way in an official world where they didn't fit as a couple. Something would always be out of place. And their relationship would always be slipshod at best. But in all honesty, she wasn't above wanting him. The temptation was strong to whisper, "Yes, love me. Father me. Mother me."

Instead, she stepped from his tentative embrace and cried out, "Why is it so damned easy for everyone else?"

"What's easy?"

"If it smells good, wear it. If it's organic, eat it. If it feels good--did you see how Frauncine and Les took to each other? Like cats to cream."

"Don't envy them." His hand around her shoulder was like that of a comrade in arms. "It's hard not to, I know. But give yourself a little time. With just a little luck, Connie, you too will see again with innocent eyes."

She was quiet now, chastened. He seemed to have realized they had come to a parting of the ways even as they'd reached a meeting of the minds. He kissed her with gentle fervor. "I have no regrets. We have nothing in our past that can mortify us."

What we've done can only bolster us, give us courage as we move on."

Move on to what? Move on to where? She kept her arms around him like a necklace. "I can't help but wonder if there wouldn't always be three of us in bed, fighting over the pillows."

"Which third party?" he laughed. "The ghost of Eliot or the spirit of the Virgin Mary?"

"Either way, it would prove quite a wrestling match."

So they left things on a note of friendly good humor. Finally, he murmured goodnight and went, alone, toward his suite. "There's always a price to pay," he said softly before closing the door. "I guess we were fools not to think so."

She asked, "Was I the price?"

"Was I the fool?"

She left the next day without sleeping with him. He didn't seem surprised or dissatisfied. Neither did he seem to understand that this was, for her, the final break.

On the return flight to Honolulu, she decided it was the transitions that were hardest, the turnaround points, the crossovers. It was hardest of all to say, X marks the spot. Life to memory, the war to not war, the pregnancy to not, love to not. It was absence of things once known that was so hard to bear. What she remembered now were mere glimpses which flashed through the mind like tableaux or frozen moments.

The islands came into view, stepping stones southeast to northwest, largest to oldest. Islands were supposed to be

magical, mystical, mythical. These played their part well, frozen in the sea thirty-five thousand feet below, jeweled butterflies temporarily lit. They might jostle upward and flit away at any moment like her other collective illusions of the past, those still-forming black scabs of memory.

She was met at the deplaning ramp by a greeting committee of one. Instead of the traditional lei, or even a hug, she was given a brisk handshake and taken in tow by her official MIA liaison captain. "Mrs. Hopkins--uh--Connie."

"Why, Captain, what are you doing here?"

"It's Commodore now. I've been promoted."

"Congratulations."

"Well, Mrs. Hopkins, I told you that I hoped someday to have some news, one way or the other, for you. Well, Mrs. Hopkins--"

"Connie," she corrected for a final time. She sat down on a handy concrete bench, lurching away from his grasp. She put her overnight case at her feet. "Well, what is it?" Her voice had the steely sound of ball bearings clicking together.

The captain--make that Commodore--reported, "The Navy takes care of its own." He sat down beside her and held her arm, giving the wrist rhythmical little squeezes, as if inflating a life preserver.

Her eyes tingled with heat and her feet moved uncertainly across the lauhala mat runner. She quizzed him with tired eyes.

"Your husband's been released."

She heard the words. She heard without emotion or movement. It didn't seem to matter. Her first complete thought was that it probably wasn't true, anyway.

She listened. The Commodore, standing excitedly now in his crispiest stance, recited details of a "humanitarian release" in some sort of exchange in Laos.

"It doesn't matter."

"What? Are you hearing me, Mrs. Hopkins? Your husband, Eliot, is at this moment on a jet heading for Hawaii."

"It doesn't matter."

"Why not?" He was brusquely angry.

"It's too late."

"He will have to be debriefed. Some of that can be done en route. You ought to have him back, safe and sound, in forty-eight hours."

"It's too late." She stood up, took the overnight bag in hand and headed for the long-term parking lot where she'd left her car. She hoped she had enough cash to bail it out. The Commodore attempted to follow, explaining mightily and futilely. She cut him off. "No more, please. I've had it. I'm finished. No more. No more."

Inside the house on Hospital Point, Connie brushed her hair and put on her lipstick without turning on the makeup lights around her mirror. Outside, she could hear noise. Trucks with camera equipment. Workers stretching cables, cursing for another electrical outlet. The television crews were setting up for her reunion with Eliot. She stared at the clock. In fifteen minutes, some man purporting to be Eliot Hopkins would arrive. What would happen? The cameras would whir, the reporters would stick microphones in his face, and the nation would demand to look on and see if he or she could uphold certain predetermined standards of patriotism, loyalty, and fidelity.

The phone rang. It was Peter. "Do you need anything?" he asked.

"No," she lied.

"I'll be close as you need," he promised. "I'll call you tonight."

She didn't believe that either.

A car motor raced, a siren trailed into a groan. A swirl of voices. Stiff steps made by boots crossing the porch. The brusque, "No interviews." A curious, polite knock at the door.

She sat in the straight-back chair at the desk in the living room. "Come in."

"Hello, Connie."

She looked into the face of an unknown man, a stranger who had once been her husband.

For a moment, she thought how disappointed the cameramen would have been had they succeeded in filming the reunion. For

a few seconds, nothing at all happened. She and Eliot simply looked at each other. He was thin but not emaciated. The blue eyes were pale but clear, calm, and alert. His complexion was darker than she remembered, and he now had a full beard and unruly, thinning hair. When she spoke, it was as if her mouth had been stuffed with cotton. "How are you, Eliot?"

He took a step towards her. She stood. Then the embrace was substantial, her tears real. But even as she felt wet drops rolling down her cheeks, they seemed more for herself than for him, more for herself than any long-ago concept of "them."

"I'm so sorry," he began.

"No, I'm so sorry--"

"Don't say that, Connie."

So she didn't. But what should she say next? Mismatched thoughts rambled around in too much space. Have you seen the miniskirts? Aren't they funny? Do you like the Beatles sound? Once I was pregnant but I miscarried. The mynah still sings at night. I planted plums--prize plums. The carburetor gave out on the car. Once you were my husband, but. . . .

Eliot shook his shoulders, like a dog coming out of water. He forced a grin. She noticed a front tooth missing. "A lot of water under the bridge, eh?"

"Too much, Eliot."

They went into the kitchen and sat across from each other at the kitchen table, holding tall glasses of tea in their hands and rotating the stems against damp palms. As he drank, he broke into coughing spasms.

"What's wrong? Are you ill?"

The choking subsided. "I have been." He put his hands out on the table as fists. "My god, Connie, where are we supposed to begin?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing to say." Her voice trembled.

"What I have to tell you isn't easy."

Funny Eliot! She laughed, inappropriately, at his tongue-tied message. It cut right to the quick of matters. Again she wondered what to communicate to this stranger. Did you know a singer named Glen Campbell has a new hit album in release? Lebanon made a brief flurry in the news but no one thinks anything will come of it. I had to sign a death certificate for an infant daughter. I took a lover out of need and desire. "Some things are just better left unsaid."

"It was rough."

"Well, amen to that!" Was that the best he could do?

"In a way," he suggested tentatively, "I suppose that coming back now is harder than not coming back at all." A sag crept into his formerly unflinching shoulders.

There was a scrape at the kitchen window. A cameraman was trying to open the latch from outside.

They sought refuge in the bedroom, locked behind the door, the drapes closed. He reached out to her, stroked her face, saw their reflection in the mirror and jerked away. Other than feeling awkward, she didn't mind. He pulled the chenille spread from the bed, heaved himself across the top sheet. His knee bobbed and he fell in the process.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"Have been."

She stretched beside him, easing her head onto the pillow. Methodically still, she felt her nerves clinking, but was devoid of other sensation. He undressed her. Steadily, rather wearily. She closed her eyes. There was a perfunctory exploration, she trying to make the effort to lift her arms around his neck. He couldn't seem to compensate either. His body worked, when the moment came, slowly at first, then frantically. But there was no evidence of delight or even satisfaction. She had the feeling of a nameless motel with a nameless couple coming together with drinks unfinished and ashtrays overflowing.

Eliot pushed himself to one side, panting. He punched the pillow. "Damn it, I knew it was wrong."

She had known, too. But cowards that they were, they had allowed it to happen. She sat up, drawing the sheet around her. His curves were unfamiliar; there was a knot on his knee like a tumor. His ribs were prominent, the thighs an unhealthy yellow. "It's not just us, Eliot. No one could pick up the pieces. Too many things have shattered--"

"I'm going back."

She heard without comprehending. "Back? You are back."

"I'm going back to Laos." He turned his head as she struggled for her clothes. "I need to. I want to. I . . . I have to."

She glanced up; something in the admission had cost him in terms of self-respect. "What are you saying? Why do you have to go back? What possible reason could you have for--"

The attempted explanation came out in a jumble. "I must go back. My god, you don't know how I've worked. I built a school, a shop, a hospital. A rice mill." He stuck out his bony fingers, evidence of the work. "It will take awhile, I know. There are things to clear up. But I must go back." His eyes searched the closed drapes, looking for the sea.

Things to clear up. How quaint. She was one of those things. And the Navy. But, in the end, Eliot was off on another mission. To the crusades, men! Eliot in one direction, Peter in another. Neither had room for her or the Navy.

"I'm a different man," he asserted. "A man long gone from your life, Connie. I can't come back now."

She finished dressing carefully, like playing with doll clothes, arranging the folds of her skirt neatly. She spent a long time aligning the buttons and holes on her blouse. Whatever words were called for now, she didn't have. Somehow he'd been tested in ways she had not; where she had broken, he'd held fast--and vice-versa. "Eliot, one thing I have to know. Could you have come back? Sooner, I mean. Couldn't you have let me know?"

"No. That's what killed us, isn't it?"

Yes and no. So why return to taunt her with never returning? This was double damnation, coming back merely to

tell her he was never coming back. A false, ugly pride reared in her mind. She wasn't the one who had capitulated!

"I know what you endured, Connie."

Doubtful. She turned her head from his foreign breath. But she also realized he had never asked her to burden herself with impossibilities. No one had demanded the sacrifices she'd made.

"Will you be all right?" His voice echoed as he moved away.

Her mind flashed back to the many times he'd asked the question when preparing for stints of sea duty. What was the required response? "Sure. I'll be fine."

"Where will you go? What will you do?"

Minor questions, indeed.

He shifted sideways so she couldn't see his face. "Exploring new territory is always hard. You don't know what I went through."

Right. But he didn't know the new territory she'd charted, either. It might be equally difficult terrain. Further, she hadn't asked to be an explorer. Left to her own devices she'd have stayed happily and snugly on her peninsula in the Pacific. "I won't stay here, of course," she amended. "I've practically been run out of town anyway. Everyone's embarrassed I've hung around on the Point this long."

"I'll talk to the press. There's some information I want to relay. Anxious to have them as an ally. There's such important work to be done in that part of the world."

She stared with empty eyes.

He left, closing the bedroom door softly. He left behind only a transient feeling of warmth and the words, "Something good will come of all this, even if we can't see it right now. We can't patch this nation together with blood any longer. The will for justice is growing stronger."

She jumped to her feet and followed him, finding her voice as well. "Good God, Eliot. This doesn't even sound like you. What have you been doing this past year?"

"Well, I've borne my share of the injuries, just as you have."

"But you sound like you were downright happy!"

He paced, a slight limp noticeable on the turns. "Not at first. Of course not. But I discovered that since I didn't have the courage to die, I'd better make the most of my will to live. After awhile, I made peace with captivity. Then, after I got the trust of the people, after I showed them the way to a better life, after I took charge--"

"Oh, my God. I can't stand it."

Eliot bent over, a stricken look on his gaunt features. "Connie, you put up a good fight, I hear. A great fight. But there's real meaning in my life now. And . . ."

"And?"

"And there's . . . a girl--a woman, I mean."

She looked up and saw absolute terror. "Don't tell me any more," she pleaded.

"I know I've made mistakes. I don't make any claims to--"

"I did, too. Plenty of mistakes."

"But, son of a gun, we came through!" A strange, blazing pride lit his eyes.

The difference was, she suspected, that she was sorry for her mistakes, while he was anxious to be en route to more!

"Yeah, a lot of mistakes, but sorry isn't among them," he confirmed. He went out swiftly.

For a few minutes she sat in the rocking chair and mused on their separate trials by fire. Then her mind wandered. Thunderbird was coming out with a sun roof on the new models. Did the 747 aircraft really make too much noise? What about Caesar Chavez and the lettuce? Should women wear bras or not? Tareyton said their filter had more charcoal. Twiggy said her figure was natural. Westmoreland said he personally saw light at the end of the tunnel. Take his word for it.

She thought of her grandmother breaking an embroidery hoop. As a child of six, Connie could not understand the importance. "Without the circle, there's no way to center things," Grandmother had explained.

Another memory. Grandfather. Connie at twelve discovering lipstick and curls. "Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked.

"Pretty ordinary," came the taunting reply.

From that experience, she had learned the value of not asking certain questions.

Next, for some reason, she thought of the modern ballet that retold the story of the prodigal son. In the ballet--not the Bible--the character lost his pride completely. Redemption was granted. But in the end, the redemption destroyed rather than

restored his dignity. It was a ballet from the twenties. She wished someone would revive it.

If there was to be redemption for anyone in her own private cast, it would have to come from beyond circumstance and time and, apparently, dignity. Penitent? Yes. For her, penitence was quite real. A pathetic creature? She hoped not. She would keep her pride. As for forgiveness--almost.

Almost, she forgave.

Last nights and empty houses and scents of the sea. The three did not mix well, but it had come down to that. To Connie's surprise, the Navy had no further use for the quarters on Hospital Point. They came and took away the portion of furnishings which belonged to them, but wouldn't divulge future plans for the house other than it was to be "stricken" from the list of official quarters. It would give way to a parking lot or a parade ground, she supposed. Hospital Point now lived on borrowed time, much as she had.

Izuki's prize plum was in bud. He would see it safely through the next season before the garden was "stricken" also. The mynah bird, grown fat on the bounty of crack seed and oatmeal, perched on the sea wall. The scene this evening was peaceful enough, but in the last week, someone had poured blood on Nimitz Gate, three blocks away. Other unknown parties

had sneaked close enough to the limousine of a visiting VIP to throw paint-filled balloons at the car. The red and green Viet-Cong colors looked incongruous on the official black vehicle. Pickets still marched outside Makalapa, such a fixture of the landscape that no one paid them much attention anymore.

Today, the Core had returned from a tour of duty in the far east. The ship came down the channel quietly, limping home past the degaussing station. No band played. No tissue-paper lei draped the bow. Last year she'd watched the same helicopter carrier depart proudly, the Marine squadrons formed up on deck. Now, instead of spit and polish, the ship had a dented section of stern and the flight deck was mangled at elevator level. A bewildered air of disbelief seemed to make an invisible aura around the ship.

The evening Star-Bulletin said four chemists had quit at the Ft. Ruger lab when they discovered what they were making was Agent Orange. Paul Simon's new record was the week's top hit on KULA. The surf at Makaha was running light to steady.

At Izuki's request, Connie kept her promise and took tea with him in the side yard at twilight. It was a occasion, involving two fire ceremonies and two teas. She brought the brazier, the tea pot, and the cups. Izuki brought the water vessel and the tea. He proceeded to clean, dip, pour, and mix, using a whisk to beat up a froth of tea until it held a satin sheen. Even the drinking bowls looked luminous with the green tea in them. One brew was a brilliant jade green, the color of sunlight on wet forest foliage.

Izuki talked of the four principles: harmony with nature, respect for people, purity, and tranquility. Wa, kei, sei, jaku. "This has been your respite," he insisted. "This was your island of meditation before you return to your life of busyness. Now, drink your tea. And remember, if you feed mind, body, and spirit, then things will happen as they should."

Maybe that was what had gone wrong. Some mineral or vitamin missing from her diet. For whatever reason, for the space of seasons she'd lived on this island, things had not happened as they should.

She wondered briefly how Eliot would feel about her leaving here. He didn't know. Nor did Peter. She was not their concern; they were not hers. She had every right to leave, every necessity for it. Yet, somehow, the move seemed clandestine.

Now it was done. Nothing left to pack. A suitcase and a plane ticket to Texas. Marge had offered a guest room; the Navy had offered a hotel voucher. The Navy takes care of its own. For reasons too personal and numerous to share, Connie wanted to spend the last night in the empty house. She went through the rooms again, flipping the lights on as if to illuminate something new. She found a ping pong ball. Already there was dust on the closet rods. She ran a hand along the grooved cylinder. How many starched and crispy uniforms, glistening with braid and gilt stars, had hung on that taut rod since the turn of the century?

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terrible thing, and Conrad scoffing at facts, relying on the senses. That was the total from night after night of falling asleep with her head propped against the headboard and a book sliding off her lap, of waking stiff-necked with the bedlamp shining hot against her cheek. Wait. One more thing for the list. The greatest temptation, the "ultimate," was described by Thomas à Becket as he faced martyrdom. She could quote it exactly: The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason.

The sailor-boy hunkered down, knees bent, and let his fingers trace the grooves in the concrete walkway which sloped downhill into the water. He smoked a cigarette, neatly tucking the ashes into his trouser cuff.

Connie thought about asking him if he'd like some tea. She could bring him a cup and they could discuss further matters of importance, such as Joanie and the mynah bird. But she knew her idea wasn't feasible. He had a mike boat to run. And she had a plane to catch. "I wish you luck. Hope you get that chance to ship over."

"Hey," he mused, "you never can tell. I'm just a seaman. We're the little people, the technicians. The cogs and gears in the system."

"I was a cog, too. But cogs and gears are what run the system. It's not supposed to run over us."

"Hey, what's to say it does?"

But she still felt as though she'd been run over by a steamroller. Down deep, there was that center of abandonment

that caused bewilderment. It hurt the way it did when her mother had died, ten years ago. To this day, she still felt like an orphan.

A paper cup and two napkins swirled at the base of the trash container. She automatically stooped to corral the errant debris and dispose of it properly. A siren in the distance announced an ambulance turning into Hickam's nearby back gate. The lights on the refinery at Barber's Point blinked red, green, red again. She turned her steps toward the house on Hospital Point.

What good was living on an island? It was only a saturation of blue water and volcanic ash, a mynah that couldn't--or wouldn't--accept dark from light. The night ocean stirred, asking not to be overlooked. The Pacific. Too salty to drink, sands too shifting to stand on, tides too unstable to trust. A seashore was not solid enough to sustain. Here, you couldn't even drown--the salt water buoyed you up. If you died on an island, it was because there was no center, no place for your toes to touch and dig in and because you could find no way to say "Here I stand," for here was nowhere. As a dancer, she was always aware of how many steps were required in a work. To dance some parts required too many steps, so long, so arduous . . . that she'd come to question taking the first step at all.

The mynah squawked as she turned in the drive. So? She now knew the mynah was mixed up. This was really night. And darkness. And she was alone. She took a last glimpse at the

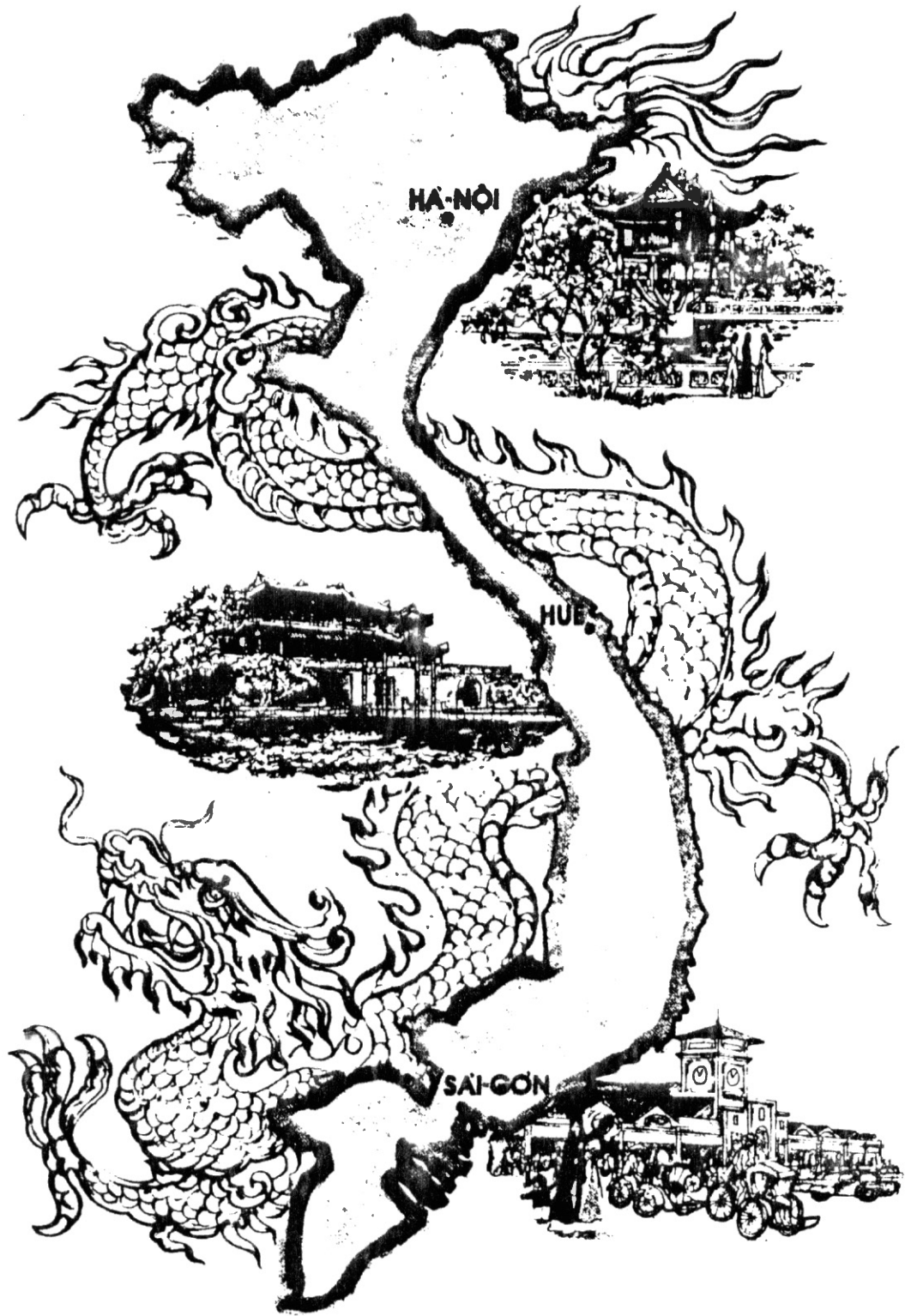
water, silver streaked like a vial of bleach and quicksilver. She no longer filled this space. I'm losing definition, she thought. My boundaries are shifting and going mushy, like air seeping from a balloon.

The moonlight colored the channel pewter, the air became a flannel shawl around her shoulders. The mynah whistled. But she wasn't fooled. This was night in winter. This was farewell and it was final.

How far have we come, how far have we strayed, and what a long, strange trip it's been.

I can't go!

I'm already gone.



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2
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