

THE  
ELECTRONIC  
*windmill*



P E T E M C K I N L E Y

THE  
ELECTRONIC  
*windmill*

BY PETE MCKINLEY

SCARS PUBLICATIONS AND

THE  
ELECTRONI  
*windmill*

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*dedicated to my only love*  
*Lindy McKinley*

# *Chapter I*

It all came about when Pilar Jones was invited by Myron Brown, President of McWhorter Brown, to a dinner celebrating the completion of the Brown's new home down the peninsula. Pilar first asked Larry Carver to take her, but Larry had an appointment in Sacramento that couldn't be cancelled, so with some diffidence she asked Cole Rain. It wasn't that she didn't like Cole, but she felt it would be an imposition on his time to ask him to devote an evening to her away from whatever he did with his evenings. Actually, Cole was happy to be with her. Except for business, and this mostly in the company of two or three other people, Cole had had very little contact with Pilar since Bob Jones' death. He had wanted to know her better, but found their business association a hindrance to promoting a social relationship.

The home was situated in the Coast Range rising a thousand feet above the Santa Clara Valley. Cole parked the car on a middle level between the knoll where the house was, and a pool shimmering below. They sat for a moment taking it all in, the valley orchards in bloom and the bay beyond.

"I think we're early. Could we walk down by the pool?" Pilar asked. "I'd like you to see some of the special tile that Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones designed for the area."

They walked down the broad steps to a deck where the tile had been slightly roughened to prevent bare feet from slipping. Each one had been placed within a larger pattern, and the colors reminded Cole of fall leaves in New England; burnt

orange, yellow, green and a tinge of red. The pieces lining the pool shaded from a blue-white bottom to an intense blue just under the coping at the water line.

The setting blended into the landscape so subtly and he was so completely engrossed that he didn't notice Myron Brown's approach.

"I'm glad you arrived in time to see the colors in the sunlight. Pilar, it's nice to see you. You're the only girl I know who can compete with the beauty you've created here."

Pilar's smile revealed teeth almost too white in a golden tan face and her green eyes filled with delight. "I'm happy you like the work and most of all I appreciate the free hand you gave me in spending your money. Oh, this is Cole Rain."

"Mr. Rain, I've been wanting to meet you," Myron Brown said as they shook hands. "Pilar tells me you're the author of 'The Criminal Mind Versus the People'." Cole admitted that he was.

"Studying crime, especially organized crime, has been my avocation for years, whenever I can spare time away from the ceramic business." Brown paused and then seemed to come to a decision. "I've got something I'd like to discuss with you before the evening is over, if you don't mind."

"Fine," Cole said. "We seem to be a little early, perhaps now would be as good a time as any." A tall slender woman was approaching down the steps.

"Pilar brought Mr. Cole Rain, dear. This is my wife, Margaret, Mr. Rain."

"I'm so glad you could come, Mr. Rain," she said extending her hand in welcome. "Would you two be terribly upset if I took Pilar with me? I need her opinion on something I just bought."

"We'll excuse you if you don't keep her away too long, and Margaret, would you ask Roy to bring our drinks here? What would you like, Cole? I'm having scotch and water but Roy can concoct almost anything."

"If you have it, I'd like a glass of sherry."

"We have a cellar full of wine that Myron never touches," Mrs. Brown said. "I'll select one for you and have Roy bring it down."

As the two left, Brown turned to Cole. "Women never cease to amaze me their preoccupation with whatever it is they're always buying and the need for approval from another woman. A man's opinion doesn't amount to a damn." Pausing only momentarily he went on, "But that isn't what I wanted to talk about. Let's sit over here." They went to a marble bench and sat down, and Brown continued, "We have an embarrassing not to say a serious problem at McWhorter Brown. I don't know



how much you know about our company, Cole, but briefly, we produce a wide range of clay products - conduit tile to roof tile, including what you see here," and he swept his hand in a half circle. "For this kind of production, we use a lot of clay and for years we've been importing it from Mexico. We have our own ship making continuous runs between Mexico and the United States, picking up clay in Mazatlan and bringing it to our plant in San Francisco. For some time now I've had reason to suspect that our ship is being used to smuggle illicit drugs." Brown looked at Cole and Cole looked interested. "The ship itself has been searched half a dozen times from top to bottom with no results. The custom officials are positive nothing has left the ship either through the cargo, crew or passengers, but the narcotics people aren't completely satisfied. I think we need outside help to resolve the suspicions one way or another."

"What led to the suspicions in the first place?" Cole asked.

"In the past eighteen months there's been an influx of heroin into the Bay Area. A user, an addict supposedly, had part of the story and insisted that the stuff was coming from Mexico by a ship on a regular run - not a small boat. We seem to fit the story best, and there have been other circumstantial things pointing to us."

"But, how could I help?" Cole wanted to know.

"Having read your book and knowing your interest in this sort of thing, I thought I'd ask your help either to expose whoever is doing the smuggling, or at least furnish us with a clean bill-of-health. I need assurance that our ship is not being used as a smuggling device. But if it is, I want to know and I want it stopped," Brown said agitatedly. Then more calmly, "Of course, money is no object. I'd be willing to pay almost any amount to get this thing settled."

Cole thought for a moment. "This is all very flattering, but most of my work has been done in research and writing. Don't get me wrong - it's an attractive challenge. I've always wanted to use my knowledge practically and actively."

"Now's your chance," Myron Brown urged.

"It's appealing at the moment because I'm not doing anything so important that it couldn't be postponed for a while," Cole said reflectively. "I've just completed an "Investigative Procedures Manual" to be used by municipal police departments, and I had intended to take a few weeks off, but this sounds exciting; could I ask a couple more questions?"

"I'll give you any information I have. Of course, this is strictly confidential, our people are not aware that they have been singled out for smuggling."

“Why do the narcotics people continue to suspect the ship?” Cole asked.

“Well, after they were unable to locate any evidence at all, they did feel confident our ship wasn’t involved. But then about ten days ago the Mexican coast guard picked up a French sailor off the coast near the port of Zihuatenejo. He had left a Greek ship in a small rubber life raft and had been trying to make the mainland. Evidently he had shoved off in a hurry and was further from shore than he thought, because when he was found, he didn’t have any food or water and was taken aboard the cutter in a coma. The only thing he had in the raft with him was a pound of pure heroin. The Greek freighter that he had left was sailing from the south of France and was scheduled to touch at the port of Mazatlan. The sailor later claimed that the drugs came from a cache he had found on board ship. He had taken some and headed for the mainland, evidently planning to go into the drug business on his own.” Brown paused to light a cancer carrier before going on. “He told the Mexican authorities that the heroin he had discovered on the ship totaled some hundred pounds of the purest stuff and that it was to be transferred to an American freighter making periodic runs between Mexico and the United States carrying a bulk cargo. So - if he knows what he’s talking about it almost has to be the Crescent Moon since we’re the only one making a regular run; although he didn’t name us.”

“The tie-in seems pretty strong,” Cole admitted. “One more question; you said the custom officials searched the crew and the passengers. Do you always carry passengers on this ship?”

“Well, yes, we normally do have passengers on board. But these passengers are made up of clients, people who purchase our products. To explain the set-up, the area in Mexico where our clay comes from is also noted for its fishing and hunting. Our sales department takes advantage of this to entertain their customers with an ocean voyage. We have a man who handles the details of these junkets and always makes the trip.” He paused as a waiter came down the steps carrying a tray of drinks. “Oh, here’s Roy. I hope you like the sherry, I know very little about wine; Margaret is the connoisseur.”

Cole tasted the sherry and expressed his approval. “I’ve always wondered about the fun of selling, but I guess it’s a job if you do anything for a purpose.” He took another sip of the wine and placed the glass on a low marble table. “I’m thinking about what you’ve just told me, but I still don’t see how my help can be as good as the help you have available.”

“I think we need a new approach,” Brown said. “Someone from outside with a

completely fresh viewpoint. I don't want anyone from Customs or the Narcotics Bureau, but someone who could make a trip on the Crescent Moon as a normal guest without being obvious as to his purpose. I hoped that if you were willing to do this, you might see some unusual or even commonplace thing that would give us a clue as to how this thing is being done - if it is being done."

"Another thought just occurred to me," Cole broke in. "Why wouldn't the real smugglers be worried about this seaman, who absconded with part of the cache, talking and divulging their methods of getting drugs into the United States?"

"After the Mexicans got the story from the sailor, they never announced that he had been picked up. They merely put him in one of their maximum security penitentiaries and forgot about him. When the freighter arrived in Mazatlan, the captain reported that after their departure from Zjuatenejo, they had lost a man overboard. It was assumed he was lost about a hundred miles off the coast near San Blas and further assumed that he had been drowned. The smugglers on the Greek freighter had only the problem of transferring the drugs to a United States-bound ship while they were in port at Mazatlan, and the Crescent Moon just happened to be there when they arrived." Myron Brown drew a long breath and continued, "Not only your background, Cole, but the very questions you ask convince me that you're the man for the job."

"I can't say I am not interested, but you think this is a continuing thing? That these people will go on with whatever method they're now using to get drugs into San Francisco?"

"I'm sure they will. It's too profitable to give up and has been too easy for them in the past. I'm hoping they'll get a little careless and overconfident and we can get a line on the procedure they're using to get the stuff ashore. Remember, they haven't been alerted in the slightest. As far as they know, the seaman fell overboard and was drowned."

"The transfer from ship to shore has to be their biggest problem," Cole mused. "Let me think about it, Mr. Brown. If I believe I can be helpful, I'll call you in the morning."

"I appreciate that, Cole." Brown looked relieved, as though he had expected a 'yes' answer. "Let's go on to the house. I want to introduce you to Mike Crowder and his wife. By the way, Mike is the man I was telling you about who sets up these hunting and fishing trips for our customers; he's the permanent tour guide."

As Cole started to get up from the bench, Brown restrained him with a hand on

his arm. "Oh, and Cole, I can't stress this too much - all that we have discussed must be kept strictly confidential. So far I'm the only one in the company that knows of our ship's problem. I'd like to keep it that way."

"I understand, Mr. Brown. On any assignment, I would normally discuss it with my partners, but if I decide I can be of help you have my assurance it won't be mentioned to anyone without your express permission."

"Thanks, Cole. How about calling me Myron."

Cole met the Crowders, who appeared to be an average couple dedicated to a corporation and the way of life it demanded. Mike Crowder seemed anxious to please the boss and was determined to be affable to anyone who seemingly had the boss' ear. Renee Crowder told endless stories of Mike's exploits and how they benefited McWhorter Brown. Cole excused himself to go in search of Pilar.

There was no formal plan for the showing of the house. People wandered from room to room. The first door Cole opened revealed a room of mirrors with a lady seated on the stool. Noting Cole's mild surprise she said, "Sorry. I couldn't find the lock. You're next."

"Thanks." Cole closed the door gently and turned through a swinging door into a kitchen. Roy, who had served the drinks, saw Cole's hesitation and said, "Come on in. I'll pour you another sherry."

Trays of hors d'oeuvres were being arranged and shell fish predominated: Alaskan king crab, Guaymas prawns on shaved ice accompanied by a bowl of remoulade sauce, half shelled oysters and tiny Mexican white angulas with black staring eyes marinated in wine vinegar and herbs. Cole accepted a cocktail of the small eels and Roy handed him a drink. He tried to decide whether the subtle flavor came from the herbs and vinegar or from the eel itself. As he ate, he watched the trimming of thick steaks for barbecuing. Turning to leave, he bumped into Pilar coming through the swinging doors.

"Hi, I thought the food would trap you. Have you seen everything?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I have - all the interesting things." He told her of the marvels of the kitchen, but didn't mention the scene in the mirrored bath.

"Well, O. K.," she said. "Let's go out on the terrace and bore the people and in our turn be bored."

The party was better than he had expected. The drinks were excellent, and the host and hostess sincerely wanted everyone to admire their new home as much as they did. Pilar was sensational. He couldn't imagine how he had thought of her only as an

intelligent pretty female partner. Their brief conversations had always been about business and even had a competitive flavor. But that evening, she changed suddenly and she was different. Pilar had always known she was a girl.

After the first couple fell into the pool and everyone decided to go swimming, Pilar held back. But, with some urging, (not by Cole) she finally borrowed a bikini from one of the Brown's daughters and astonished him with a diving exhibition that cleared all the drunks from the pool. He hadn't known that marriage at eighteen had terminated her Olympic aspirations. But this was not the only revelation. There were others, and it didn't seem there was any logical reason for her abrupt change.

The late dinner was served and afterwards the evening was spent in conversation with people with whom Cole had nothing in common, and he was generally willing to keep it that way. The males of the species herded together, talking business and discussing where each fitted into the hierarchy of industry. Cole wandered aimlessly from group to group. A professor from one of the local universities, who lived down the mountain from the Browns, suddenly became vocal. As Cole passed by, he was saying:

"There was a time when we tried to maintain the separation of our capitalistic system from our democratic government, but that was when the economy was young and consisted of many small and specialized business enterprises. Today we have segments of industry that are truly autocratic economic principalities. The princes of industry reign supreme over man and machines without recourse to the democratic process. Their terms of office are predicated upon their ability to maintain and increase profits. Our industrial empire is welded together by knights of management whose economic lives, including the lives of their families, are subject to the corporations' demand for total allegiance."

The professor went on and on and Cole listened and listened, then inevitably became involved. Twenty minutes later, he was saying, "So you see that man doesn't have to be an intellectual giant; he has to be a leader, merely intelligent enough to become aware that to survive, he has to be flexible and change." As Cole finished speaking, he was aware of Pilar's hand on his elbow.

"Hello, Doctor Winters. You two seem to be very intent, but would you mind if I took Cole away from you for a moment?"

"Don't ask him that. He's been waiting for an excuse to break off my monologue for the last fifteen minutes."

Dr. Winters protested that he was very interested in what Cole was saying and mumbled something about getting together sometime to continue their discussion.

Pilar took Cole's arm as they walked toward the terrace. "Have you noticed that most of the other guests have left? Maybe we should find the Browns and say good night."

Cole agreed and they went through the wide open doors to the terrace and were dazzled by the glittering spread of lights a thousand feet below.

They drove back to the City on Skyline Drive and Pilar immediately fell asleep, resting her wet head on Cole's shoulder. He touched the damp curls, and remembered she had dived without a cap. He recalled that when she had left the pool, she had dried her hair on a towel and after shaking her head a couple of times and brushing here and there, she had looked as though she were ready for the first take on a movie set.

Cole's thoughts drifted to Professor Winters and his put down of corporations and big business. The four people who constituted Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones had combined together and accepted the legal device of the corporation to allow themselves operating room within its entity and yet still to be able to act more freely as individuals than was possible in any of the thousands of business combinations with which he was familiar, including other corporate set-ups, partnerships, companies, associations, co-operatives, communes, or what have you.

His thoughts reverted to his driving as they came into the City on Junipera Serra Boulevard, picked up 19th Avenue and cut across Golden Gate Park to Park Presidio. When they entered the tunnel which crossed the United States Military Reservation, the bright lights in the vaulted ceiling and changing sound awakened Pilar.

She put her hands to her hair, then touched Cole's damp shoulder. "ummm - I must have over-relaxed. Where are we?"

"Yes, you did - but more like a hypnotic trance. This is the fifth day. Thank goodness, you've come out of it." As she looked around, he continued, "We're just going through the Holland Tunnel and will be in New York City on the other side in a minute."

Pilar looked at him gravely, then said with a small gurgle, "Did I miss anything exciting along the way?"

"Well, not really. It was a pretty uneventful trip, except I was worried about you. Most things were easy for you to do, but for some reason you were unable to take your pill."



"I'm sorry I caused you all that worry and trouble. What did you do about it?"

"Don't you start worrying; I solved the problem. I'm taking the damn things myself."

"I'm not worried. I've never taken the pill. I was just wondering where you get your supply and was sorry I missed being there when the doctor gave you your prescription."

"Oh, the doctor objected, but I insisted on my legal rights not to be discriminated against because of sex."

"Are you referring to your drive or your gender?" As she spoke the car entered the Marina. "Do you remember where I live?" she asked.

Cole smiled confidently and, without answering, made the wrong turn, and drove two blocks out of the way before ending up at her building where there was no parking space.

"Will you come in for some of my famous instant coffee with a dash of brandy?"

"Thanks, I doubt if the gendarmes would appreciate my double parking. Anyway, you need sleep and I really don't need anything more to drink. May I have a rain check?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment, thinking about all the men she hadn't invited to her apartment. She wanted the evening to go on; being with him had been natural and easy. She couldn't remember the last time she had been so comfortable with a man - maybe never. She thought of denying her sleepiness and asking him to please come in for just a moment. There was a need to be domestic and not to be alone.

"Thanks for taking me to the party," she said. "I hope you weren't too bored."

"Thanks for asking me, and please invite me for coffee and brandy another time."

As the door closed, Cole turned and walked slowly to the car. To touch her hand, to hold her - why the hell hadn't he kissed her good night? But his hunch was that it couldn't have ended there, that any slight involvement with Pilar Jones would become total - and total involvement was not for him. It wasn't needed or wanted.

He drove up into the hills from the Marina and could see the lights of the city reflected back from the low wind-driven fog. Parking the car in an area reserved for 3-C, Rain, he locked the ignition and walked down a half-flight of steps.

Apartment 3 was one of four partitioned off in a turn-of-the-century pile of cut

rock. The old house was on a lot that sloped down from street level. Cole's quarters were in the rear of the converted house, offering privacy, a small garden and a few of the house tops below. The room he entered had at one time been used for billiards; it was now a combination living room, dining room and kitchen; French doors led to a balcony-patio. There was a smaller sleeping room with the same exposure. The bathroom had been built for guests using the swimming pool. The pool had since been filled in and was now a part of the garden, but the bath still had three showers, three washbasins and three cubicles with stools.

Cole got most of his clothes off as he moved through the bedroom to the bath. He brushed his teeth, started the water for a warm shower, stepped in and gradually cooled it, but not too cool. When he shut off the water he grabbed a towel and walked slowly back to the bedroom while drying and then, dropping the towel on the carpet by the bed, he sort of rolled the covers around himself and went to sleep.

## *Chapter II*



Cole called Myron Brown the next morning to tell him he would be interested in making the trip to Mexico on the Crescent Moon. "But," he cautioned, "I've got to go on a plausible basis."

Brown seemed relieved that Cole was willing to undertake the job. "The ship is scheduled to sail Sunday night at eight o'clock, and on the chance that you would decide to go I mentioned it to Mike Crowder. You met Mike last night, he handles all arrangements for the sailings. At the moment there are only ten passengers booked, including Mike. It should work out fine because one of our biggest out-of-state customers, a man and his wife from Portland, had to cancel. You can take over their stateroom. I suggested to Mike that it would probably be better not to try to find anyone else at this late date to fill the extra space, so you'll have the cabin to yourself - it might make it a little easier to work," he concluded.

"That sounds O.K. But what reason did you give Crowder for having invited me?"

"Bill Spence called me directly from Portland when he learned he couldn't go. I told Mike you were an avid duck hunter and fisherman, and if he had no one else in mind, you might be an interesting addition."

"Damn it, I never shot a duck in my life," Cole groaned, "and I haven't been fishing since I was a kid."

"You could tell Mike I was mistaken - you always wanted to hunt ducks and you haven't had the time to do anything lately. By the way, do you have a shotgun?"

"No, the only thing I have are a couple of hand guns and a .22 target pistol I'm good with those, maybe that's the way I should hunt and give those Mexican ducks

a breather.”

“Well, no matter. I’ve got plenty of guns and equipment you can borrow and since most of my pants are getting a little tight for me, you’ll be able to get by with just cinching the belt a little. The deep sea fishing tackle is all on board, unless you have some you wish to bring along.”

“I don’t have any equipment. I’ll use the tackle available.”

Arrangements were made for shotguns and hunting gear to be delivered Saturday morning to No. 10 Black Pearl Road.

“I can give you an advance now, or you can bill me when you return,” Brown offered.

“That won’t be necessary. As I told you, I’ve been thinking of taking some time off. You’ll only be billed if I’m successful in resolving the problem.” Myron Brown had insisted on paying, so Cole explained further: “We have a somewhat different setup in our company. With the exception of Kang Shu-li, our secretary-treasurer who handles our investment program and the little administrative work we have, the other three of us go our separate ways taking on any assignment we like. Fees for this individual work are payable to the corporation. The four of us draw a fixed salary.

“That’s very interesting, do you have time to talk about it for a few minutes?” Brown asked. “Better yet, if you’re free, why don’t we have lunch?”

They made arrangements to meet on Fisherman’s Wharf. Cole arrived fifteen minutes early, left his car at a station to be serviced and strolled over to observe the fishing fleet. Myron Brown was standing at the wooden rail throwing oyster crackers to the sea gulls.

“Are you sure you wanted to know about our corporation, or was that just an excuse to take the afternoon off?”

“Hello, Cole. I guess it was a little of both. I certainly want to hear about the things you young people are doing, but I could use an afternoon off or a month. Are you hungry? Let’s go order.”

A bottle blond girl with low-cut blouse seated them at a table overlooking the fishing fleet. Brown ordered a martini and Cole a half-bottle of Grey Riesling.

“If you’ll have wine with lunch, I’ll make that a bottle,” Cole said.

“Fine, that sounds good with bouillabaisse.”

Cole ordered a cup of chowder and a prawn Louis, both broke off crusts of sour-dough bread and buttered it before they continued.

“As I understand it, the RCS&J Corporation is privately and equally owned by four people: you, Pilar, Mr. Carver and Mr. Shu-li. If each of you draws the same salary, but the corporation receives varying amounts of money for your individual work, how do you reconcile the disparity between what you draw and what you earn for the corporation?”

“At the end of our fiscal year anyone earning in fees an amount over and above his draw takes this difference in preference stock. The extra money remains in the corporation to fund our investment program. Preferred stock disbursements are on a sliding scale reflecting the highest interest rates that could be obtained from a bank or savings and loan.

“To get back to my fee on this present assignment, there won't be any charge without results. If I can determine for sure that the ship is being used for smuggling and am instrumental in bringing the smugglers to trial only - not conviction - or if I can give the ship a clean bill of health to your satisfaction, then we'll make it a nominal fee, two hundred fifty dollars a day, plus expenses. Of course, in this case, the expenses are taken care of. After the trip, whatever time might be necessary to complete the job would be prorated, plus expenses.”

“It's a deal, Cole, and I appreciate it, not only because you're unwilling to charge unless you get results, but because you're willing to tackle the job at all.”

They spent the rest of the lunch hour discussing ways to make crime pay. Myron Brown paid the bill, and just before they parted assured Cole, “I'll have the hunting equipment plus shells for the shotgun brought to your office tomorrow morning.”

Cole picked up his car from the station thinking about how he should prepare for his introduction to duck hunting. He had rated Expert in gunnery school firing at moving objects being towed by the United States Air Force. He wondered if shooting at pulled targets from a flyins platform would help him hit ducks.

On Saturday morning the elaborate hunting gear was delivered to No. 10 Black Pearl Road. Cole was alone in the office and selected an over-and-under twelve gauge shotgun and a Remington pump gun of the same gauge. The clothing fit well enough, although the trousers were a little loose. The lightweight size twelve wading boots were perfect. After setting aside what he would take, Cole spent the rest of the day playing tennis in Golden Gate Park, and flew to Monterey for a date Saturday night.

Late Sunday afternoon, he flew back and hangared his plane at a small strip near Half Moon Bay, picked up his car and met Kang Shu-li at the office. They packed

the gear Cole had selected the day before and loaded it, along with a case of special shells, into the trunk of Kang's car. Brown had insisted Cole take the shells even though Cole learned later there was plenty of twelve gauge ammunition aboard the ship. They ate dinner at Borgia's, drank picon punches while watching Cole's extra-thick pork chops being cut and broiled. While the chops acquired a dark brown crust, asparagus spears were sauteed in butter and seasoned lightly with salt and pepper. Kang's veal scallopini was synchronized with the broiling chops. Mushrooms were added to the scallopini and were flipped in the air to land on the bottom of the black skillet and bubble in butter.

Giuseppe, who had been behind the bar, saw Kang and waved. He came hustling over to the bread block, pulled down a round flat loaf 8 cut it in half, set one half on edge, and chopped slices within an inch of complete severance. He slapped the bread on a platter, slid it in front of them and, turning to the waiter squeezing by, called, "Hey, Tony, bring some more wine here."

"Where's the boss?" Kang asked. "We haven't seen her around this evening."

"Lucretia? She'll be here at eight. Is everything O. K.? Hey, Tony, more butter here." He lowered his voice. "You going hunting or something?" he asked conspiratorily. "I saw you loading your car."

"I'm not. Cole's taking an ocean voyage."

Giuseppe wanted to know all about the trip, and Cole told him what he could, promising to bring back ducks for everyone. Giuseppe explained with gestures Lucretia's old-country duck recipes.

An hour and a half later, they left the restaurant and arrived at the ship with three minutes to spare.

## *Chapter III*

After Kang left him at the ship, Cole went aboard. A seaman met him at the head of the gangplank and took him to the first officer who checked a passenger list and found C. Rain with the assigned stateroom. The stateroom was larger than he expected. On the dresser there was a bowl of fruit surrounded by three bottles of booze - scotch, bourbon and gin. At the moment Cole wanted a beer but decided to unpack his clothes first. Opening a door in the dresser, he discovered a refrigerator with soda, soft drinks and beer. He pushed the gear into a corner and opened a bottle. After a couple of cool swallows, there was a light tap on the cabin door, which sounded sort of sinister. "Yeah, who is it?" he asked, his voice taking on new character.

"This is Mike Crowder. Is everything O.K.?"

"It couldn't be better, Mike. Come on in," he said.

Mike had been looking after the other passengers and had just learned that Cole was aboard. "Everybody dresses pretty casual," he said. "Make yourself comfortable and come into the main salon when you're ready."

After Crowder left, Cole dressed in dark blue slacks, a blue knit tee shirt, dark suede crepe-soled shoes and a blue car coat. Stepping on deck, he decided to take a walk around before going to the salon. He didn't want to be conspicuous or make any noise. Quietly turning port, he walked towards the bow of the ship. He didn't really expect to find anything, his purpose was merely to get the feel of the ship. The ship had passed through the Gate and was beginning to hit ground swells. The wind and spray was so cold that Cole wondered if he should keep a sharp lookout for icebergs. The moon shone through wisps of fog, and you could make out that the deck was very orderly and clean. The life-boats were in their davits and Cole figured they could be checked later if they became suspect.

He circled the deck once from bow to stern and was ready to turn into the cabin to use the head before going on to the salon - beer and cold weather are dynamite on kidney function - when, about thirty feet beyond the cabin door, he saw a peculiarly shaped object. The object itself wasn't peculiarly shaped because it was just square and sort of box-like, but it didn't fit into the surrounding contours of the deck and super-structure. He approached to examine it, but found it covered by a tarp and lashed in place by lines tied to ringbolts set in the bulkhead. He expected the tarp to be securely fastened so that there would be no way to expose whatever was inside to view. However, it was merely tied down on each corner with a simple bowknot. This was a fairly smart maneuver, using a bowknot so that it wouldn't draw undue attention. Untying the binding he lifted the tarp and saw the front side of a black box that was open; it contained the damnedest piece of machinery that one can imagine, and Cole was sure it had no connection with the proper operation of a ship. It was black machinery with springs and wheels, a circular plate and even an electric motor, then there was a long lethal-looking arm. How could a ship use this kind of stuff? There didn't seem to be any plausible reason for it; then it came to him what its function must be. It was a launcher; it could launch missiles, grenades or small depth charges at pursuers.

But even if someone on the Crescent Moon were engaged in smuggling heroin, they obviously couldn't use this from the deck of the ship. Then he remembered the motor launch braced on the after-deck. That had to be it. Whoever used the motor launch took this deadly-looking piece of machinery along for protection. It was sitting on casters, the kind that were used to roll guns in and out of the firing embrasures of old wooden fighting ships. He wondered what reasons the captain would give to explain its presence on board.

He pulled the tarp down around the lethal box, retied the fasteners and turned to go to the cabin. There was a scream as he collided with someone in the dark. Dancing back and crouching, he heard a body fall, and then someone wailed, "What did I run into? I can't see a damn thing." A man's voice said, "It's one of the crew, dear." Then moving out of the shadows, he said, "Coming from the bright lights onto this dark deck, I couldn't see anything either."

Cole straightened up and approached the two dark forms. "I'm sorry. Are you all right?" he asked, and then introduced himself.

They turned out to be Mr. and Mrs. Ederle, the only couple on board. The Ederles decided that another drink was needed more than a walk, so they all head-

ed back to the salon.

When they entered there were two tables of bridge in progress. One table was finishing a hand, and Cole was introduced. The story of their accident was told, embellished somewhat by Mrs. Ederle. Letha Ederle went on and on with the story and then lifted her skirt and pulled down her pants to show a dark bruise on a well-rounded and otherwise unblemished hip. Waldo Ederle made no comment, but with a look of bemused tolerance, tossed off the first drink the steward handed him and signalled for another. Cole excused himself and went to the head.

When he returned there was both a bartender and a steward in attendance and, since Cole was interested in every member of the crew, he watched their movements closely. Lew, the steward, just under six feet, slender and wiry, glided quickly with no jerkiness in his action. He hoisted a tray, moved among the furniture and guests, and swooped the tray down. Even with the slight roll of the ship, no drop was spilled. It appeared the steward was born to do exactly what he was doing. Cole couldn't think of any other occupation where his talents would show up to better advantage. But it was hard to reconcile all this talent being wasted on the Crescent Moon. If he wanted to be a waiter, he could have chosen and got a hundred better-paying jobs; maybe he liked the sea.

The Ederles left to continue their walk. Cole went over to the bar and sat on a stool. The bartender moved a bowl of peanuts closer and continued polishing a glass. He commented on the weather and then said that the long-range forecast predicted good weather for the entire trip. He enjoyed talking and told Cole he'd been born in San Francisco, had gone to sea at seventeen, and had sailed on the Crescent Moon for two years. His name was Chet, his wife's name was Marge, and they wanted to buy a place, a 'little spot of land', near Guerneville, and raise chickens. Lew, the steward, was new, had been on board a little over three months, was a bachelor, and even though he was a strange one, he was the best man he, the bartender, had ever worked with. Then he got into a soliloquy on sports and pretty soon, Cole was ready to bet that if there was any smuggling going on, Chet the bartender didn't know anything about it.

The Ederles returned from their walk and Mike Crowder requested one of them to sit in for him while he went to see the first mate. Letha begged off and came to the bar, sitting next to Cole. She ordered coffee and kahlua topped with whipped cream and then taking Cole's hand, she placed it on her hip and asked, "Do you feel anything?"



“No, I don’t feel a thing,” Cole assumed she was talking about lumps. She let go his hand and Cole glanced at the table where Waldo sat; but he was absorbed in the bridge game.

Letha rambled about the blandness of life; she didn’t like to hunt or fish but had come along on the trip merely because Waldo had wanted her to and she hoped there might be some excitement. Finally the bridge game started breaking up and people began wandering off to bed. Cole turned down another nightcap, but at Letha’s insistence, felt her thigh again. He still couldn’t find the lump and, under the circumstances, decided to go to bed himself.

From the deck a three-quarter moon was rolling in the eastern sky lighting the grey-green waves as the ship sailed south. Away off to sea, just on the horizon, there was a light that probably came from another ship or maybe an island. There was the feel of a great night for sleeping, since there wasn’t a hell of a lot else to do. A little after one o’clock, Cole switched off the lights in the cabin and must have fallen asleep almost at once.

Cole’s slumbers were disturbed by a light tapping sound. He came up on one elbow and listened. Ten or fifteen seconds, and then another light tap-tap. Going to the door, Cole hesitated and then asked, “Yes, what is it?”

A girl’s voice. “May I come in? It’s cold out here.”

Cracking the door, Cole peeked out. “Where’s Waldo, your husband?”

“He’s asleep. I’ve been trying to wake him.”

“If he’s asleep, why do you want to wake him?” Cole asked logically. “Maybe we’d better check to see if he’s O.K.” He opened the door to let her in, then closed it softly.

“No, no, he’s all right. He’s just sleeping,” she explained, and when Cole was silent, “He gets like this sometimes. He’ll be out for hours, but he’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“In the morning he’ll have forgotten all about it. I just wanted to talk to someone.” She moved to the center of the cabin. “I hope you don’t mind. Does my see-through nightgown embarrass you?”

“Not particularly but it’s cold in here too. Put my robe on.”

“I know a better way to get warm,” she said directly. “What are you going to do, freeze?” she inquired, looking at his bare chest and pajama bottoms.

“I’ve got a jacket here someplace, if I can find it.” When he found it he put it on and stayed standing in the middle of the floor.



“Umm, you look like a hunter. What are you hunting?”

“I was hunting a match,” and he started searching his pockets even though he didn’t smoke. “Do you want a cigarette?”

“Thanks, no.”

“Do you want a drink?”

“I could use a cup of coffee.”

“I doubt if anybody is in the galley.”

“We have an electric water heater and instant coffee-in our room.”

“Yeah, me too. I’ll heat some water.” He plugged in the appliance. “What’s wrong? You two have a fight?” he asked.

“No. No fight. I just couldn’t go to sleep. I thought maybe you felt the same way and might want to talk.”

“O.K. Fine. What would you like to talk about?”

“Well, what can a man and a woman alone in a stateroom on a ship in the Pacific Ocean talk about?”

“Letha, it beats the hell out of me, but it was your idea. I thought you had something specific in mind. All I can think about is your husband finding you in my cabin.”

“Please don’t worry about it. He’s sound asleep. I need a man who’s wide awake.”

“That’s my problem. I’m too wide awake,” Cole said sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Don’t disappoint me, Mr. Rain. I need a man and you’re the one I want.”

“I’m the man you want? Hell, I’m the only one available at the moment.”

“Maybe your need isn’t as strong as mine.”

“It’s pretty strong, but our fun hour could turn into another hole in the head for me; with a shotgun, maybe no head.” Cole got up and moved around the cabin then said, “I’m not positive that the ecstasy would compensate for a huge hole in my belly.”

Letha giggled. “I’m not laughing at the horrible picture you describe but you seem to me to be overly worried.”

“Me, worried! With only one woman aboard and her husband sleeping not fifty feet from here in a stateroom loaded with shotguns and shells. Who’s worried? I’m either a great big coward or terribly undersexed. And I’m happy you can laugh about it. To me, it’s a tragedy.”

Letha just sat expectantly in the chair. Cole waited for her to get up and flounce out. He didn't know what he hoped she'd do next, but when she did nothing, he felt compelled to explain.

"I control my urges because I don't want them to control me. I satisfy, but don't sate them. I do it my way. When I'm hungry I eat, but not too much. Who wants to be fat? If I need to escape I read a book, take a hike in the hills, or go to the beach. Maybe even pot; but it's no good if you're down, it merely enhances the depression. Booze has its drawbacks too. One Sunday morning on a weekend from college, I hit my all-time high in hangovers. You know how it is. When you first wake up you think you're going to die and then a little later you're afraid you won't. Anyway, about eleven o'clock Sunday morning, my feeble stirring around brought Aunt Hester to my room with a concoction of tomato juice, lime, tabasco, worcestershire and whatever else she had in the kitchen, plus black coffee. She handed it to me and said, "Well, just as long as you had a good time last night nothing else matters."

"I said, 'Yeah, that's the way it was - eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die'."

"Your dear late uncle lived and died by that marvelous bit of philosophy so I took it up and tried it once," she said. "After that I modified it. Don't eat and drink too much because you might not."

"I can't imagine Aunt Hester ever really getting loaded but since then I've tried to go along with her modification in mind; but I haven't always succeeded."

After this long speech Cole felt a little silly, but he also began to believe some of what he'd said and decided he really did have better control of the situation.

"She sounds wonderful," Letha said. It took Cole a moment to understand she was referring to Aunt Hester. "You know, for the first time in my life I'm really enjoying talking to a man. I've never been able to talk about what I really feel deep down inside. I'll tell you something, since you've been honest with me. My name isn't Letha Ederle; I'm not Mrs. Waldo Ederle. At twenty-seven years of age I'm still the small Indiana college assistant librarian and I'm going back there. But I'm going to be me, slightly changed. I met Waldo in Chicago about a year ago. I thought I liked him but it was like all my other relationships - pure sex. He told me about this trip, invited me to San Francisco, and I came along as his wife. At one time I thought about marrying him, but decided against it because I don't love him. Mike Crowder knows but not my real name or background. Now that we know so much about each other, or rather you know so much about me, do you think it will spoil

the rest of the trip for us?”

“No, it won’t for me and I hope it won’t for you. Let’s relax and enjoy the trip.” Letha smiled in agreement. “One other thing,” Cole considered whether he should ask the next question. Letha seemed interested so he continued, “What does Waldo do?” He hadn’t meant to be so blunt.

Letha’s interest seemed to fade. “I don’t know,” she said shortly. “He never talks about what he does. Maybe he sells whatever the people who own the ship make.”

“Maybe he does, Letha.” She wondered what he was thinking about now. “I guess I still call you Letha. You all right now?”

“Yes, I’m fine, but I can’t wear your robe back. Here take it, and kiss me. Good night,” she whispered.

“Good night,” he whispered back and thought of all the time he had wasted talking.

## *Chapter IV*

The sun had been up for more than an hour and had burned through a slight mist hanging over the sea when Cole was awakened by gunfire. He raised his head from the pillow to listen. There were more shots. He pulled on his trousers, stuffed a Colt thirty-eight special in a forty-five frame in the waistband, grabbed the hunting jacket and left the cabin.

Moving forward toward the sound of the shots he noticed that the depth launcher was gone; the space was empty and the chains and lock hung down from the bulkhead. Staying close to the superstructure he continued to hear intermittent pops. Peering around a corner he saw a group of men near the bow on the port side of the ship. The launcher had been placed on a platform suspended over the side, and a seaman was operating it. A dark object, looking like a miniature flying saucer, left the launcher; there was a blast and the object flew into a dozen pieces.

He started to go back to his cabin, but when one of the group saw him, he instead sauntered toward them stretching and yawning in the fresh morning breeze.

“Did the shooting wake you?” one of the men asked.

“No, no,” Cole said. “I just thought it was traffic backfiring, and, living in the city like I do, it’s actually a sort of soothing sound. I think what woke me was that I didn’t smell any gas fumes. But you skeet shooters do get up early.”

“This is trap shooting,” said a man whom Cole remembered as being called Barney. “Would you like to try it with that cannon you’ve got tucked in the top of your pants?”

Cole looked down in surprise. “Jeeze, I had a dream I was back in the military and couldn’t step out to take a piss without protection against the tarantulas.”

Barney grinned, and Cole went back to his cabin.

At breakfast Cole asked permission of the captain to wander about the ship,

explaining that he was interested in everything nautical. The captain was most happy to give his permission, but suggested Cole let someone know what section he'd be poking around just in case he didn't turn up, they could come looking. Cole checked the bridge, the staterooms, the galley, the salon, the engine room, the life boats; he even went down in the holds where they carried the clay. He imagined how the holds would be full of clay and could hide a hefty cache of pure heroin if you wanted to. But nothing looked as unnatural as that damn clay-pigeon launcher.

Finally he gave up and started shooting clay pigeons, running around the deck for exercise, loafing in the sun, and playing deck games. At night he drank and played some cards - mostly Hollywood gin and cribbage - for money. All the other passengers played bridge, but since there were only eleven and the captain and first mate refused to play, Cole had an opportunity to talk with everyone and even with part of the crew. There wasn't a damn thing out of line that he could find.

The day they sailed around the tip of Baja California Cole was at the rail, having discontinued the search for the time being. He saw a giant manta ray cutting the water fairly close alongside. The ray was probably twenty feet across the wings from tip to tip. It looked like a bat and they scare the hell out of most people, but Cole had seen them before on television. He was further reassured when one of the crew who had been born at San Jose del Cabo said they wouldn't hurt you, that you could jump in beside one and it'd take off like an iguana. Everyone believed him, including Cole.

When the ship dropped anchor off Cabo San Lucas, Cole decided to swim and think while the others went fishing. He had his trunks on when they lowered the big launch and took off for the fishing grounds. Cole found a deck chair where he had meditated before, and went to sleep in the sun. A couple of hours later he awakened, and luckily the ship had swung around so that he was in the shade. By pressing his fingers on the exposed skin he could tell he'd got plenty of sun.

Walking to the rail he was now looking toward the land, so he went around to the starboard side and saw the launch heading back. They were making a lot of noise and everyone had a drink in his hand. Someone reached into the fish locker, which was full of sea water, and pulled out a couple of silvery, flipping fish and held them up for Cole to see. With a fish fry coming up, Cole decided he needed exercise. Anyway, he felt pretty foggy and not quite awake yet, so he climbed over the rail and looked at the water about thirty feet below, then made a perfect swan dive. Everyone

on the launch was looking and Cole was pretty pleased with the dive, so when he came up he showed them his crawl by swimming away from the oncoming launch. The sea had just a slight swell to it, no choppiness at all. When he surfaced to look around he noticed a wave running across the roll of the sea. He was a little curious about what could cause this, when a tip of something, it was the color of an old inner tube, broke the surface. It seemed never to stop coming up out of the water and didn't until about fifteen feet of the bat-like monster was exposed, along with its horrible maw which probably could swallow you whole.

He didn't remember much of what happened next and neither did anyone else.

He only recalled hearing a tremendous slap that hurt his ears, and was later told that there seemed to be a wake of spray appearing in the ocean from where he was, back to the slowed down launch. They said he rose out of the sea, grasped the gunnel, and all of him cleared the side of the launch by at least a foot.

After dinner that night, and Cole wished it had included filet of manta ray, he went up on the top deck while the others had brandy and coffee below. The sun had already set; but there was still a faint glow in the west. A boat had just left the side of the ship, returning to shore. He asked the first mate if it was a mail delivery, and the mate said no, that it was an official of the Mexican Fish and Game Control and that it was the ship's policy to keep on good terms with all Mexican officials. He said they gave gifts from the United States - mostly things you couldn't buy in Mexico, or at least in Baja California Sur. Cole didn't ask if there was any duty involved, but if you could pass things back and forth that easy, why not illicit drugs? Another thing that seemed a little unusual, right away the ship weighed anchor and headed for Mazatlan on the mainland.

Coming from the sea, Mazatlan lies on the lowland in back of an unbroken beach. Green islands humped out of the sea and white water lashed the rocks at their base. As the ship slowly approached the small harbor, the curved narrow sand beach in front of the old town took on more detail. There was a stone and concrete break-water protecting the street and buildings that lined the shore. A broad strip of sand extended north where the new town was spreading; playas, motels, restaurants and bars.

As the ship crept forward to find her berth, the water turned dull and placid. Bits of debris floated by and occasionally a lazy fish flopped the surface.

The ship anchored in close to steel piles that supported large rigid pipes with flexible nozzles. It had been explained to Cole that these pipes would be used to

blow the fine dry clay into the holds of the ship. Beyond the bow of the ship and further into the harbor was a cluttered wharf. Wooden crates were stacked haphazardly and papaya, pineapple, and stocks of bananas were piled in the open. There was a little brown girl in a soiled red dress with a white lace collar sitting atop a dead sea turtle, her dusty legs hanging down and blending in with the mottled shell.

A forward gang plank was being lowered and angled out to reach the wharf. Cole noticed a bald-headed man dressed in tee-shirt and tailored slacks that didn't seem to be part of the scene. The minute the gangplank touched the wharf the bald-headed one started up. Mike Crowder met him at the top. The two shook hands but Cole couldn't overhear what was said.

When Cole came down from topside to have a late breakfast, Mike Crowder introduced bald-head as John Smith, and didn't smile. John Smith was the McWhorter Brown company pilot. He had flown the company plane into Mazatlan the night before. Neither offered a reason for his trip south and Cole wondered why Myron Brown hadn't mentioned the company pilot and plane; then couldn't think of any reason why he should have.

Cole spent the day watching loading operations get under way. The clay was brought in by trucks and dumped under an open tin-roofed shed. A tractor then pushed the material into a hopper where it was transported by the blowing mechanism through the pipes and into the holds of the ship. The operation seemed pretty crude but there wasn't room enough to expand it much. It would be easy to drop a package into the fine clay and blow it aboard. The problem then would be to find it.

People moved back and forth between the ship and the wharf. Some were laborers, others appeared to be officials. There weren't any restrictions to movement about the ship that Cole could see. Just before noon he watched Letha and Waldo descend the gangplank. They were the last of the passengers to leave the ship. He watched them get into a taxi and head for town. About this time he became convinced that his observations were worthless and he might as well join the others and go shopping. Turning he found the bald pilot, he couldn't think of his name immediately, standing about twenty feet away and staring at him.

"I've got to go to Cuernavaca," he said. "And I was wondering if you'd like to go along."

"Yeah sure," Cole said without thinking and remembered the pilot's name. "Will



we fly?" he asked, then decided that was a stupid question.

"Just as soon as we get to the airport," John Smith explained.

As Cole went to his cabin to pick up a sweater he wondered at the sudden invitation. Had he been conspicuous by remaining aboard? Did someone want him off the ship? He decided this was probably unlikely since he had seen several persons carrying boxes and packages aboard and there was no way for anyone observing to determine their contents. If the smugglers were going to be caught, it would have to be in San Francisco.

John Smith stopped the plane just shy of the runway, holding before moving into take-off position, waiting for take-off instructions. During the long wait Cole read the check-off list and watched the pilot move the various controls and read the many instruments. The pilot decreased the pitch of the propellers giving them a thinner bite into the air, ran up each turbo jet engine separately, lowered the flaps twenty degrees, and getting the awaited signal, wheeled into position and pushed the throttle gradually up to full power. The plane rolled forward slowly and then with increasing velocity thrust Cole deep into the copilot's seat. The lift-off was smooth and John Smith placed the plane in a climbing attitude, quickly dropping the earth far below them.

The S.S. Crescent Moon with the two pipes connecting her to shore was swept under the right wing. John Smith selected a southeast heading that, for the moment, paralleled the shore. There were miles of beaches and soon the coastal farmland gave way to jungle and mountainous terrain. It was mostly clear but there were small scattered showers, and one towering thunderhead full of lightening that they flew around. One such detour swung them far out over the sea. A white ship was visible down through the mist, sailing away from the land. Suddenly it became a strange and awful scene to Cole. He waited for impending disaster and was gripped with terror but he knew there was no immediate danger. The storm was off to the left and the strange ship was serenely moving under it into the concealing mist. He wondered if something out of the past was causing this torturous horror to grip him. But he knew he had never experienced this sense of doom before. As his momentary fixed rigidity subsided he became convinced that he had just looked into the future. The sea, the ship, the mist would come again and in this forthcoming time an awful dread would truly exist.

He felt the plane alter course and saw that they were now heading inland away from the sea. An hour later Mexico City spread out a mile below and the peaks of



snowcapped Popocatepetl and Ixtacihuatl jutted a mile above. The altimeter registered twelve thousand feet. Just beyond the rim of the mountains to the southwest John Smith started a steep letdown for the airstrip at Cuernavaca.

The land on either side of the airstrip was lush and green. There were coconut palms and gold and purple flowering trees. The plane touched down smoothly and John Smith talked with the tower in halting Spanish and then switched to English. He asked for a parking space as close to the terminal as possible and received taxiing instructions to move just beyond the modern concrete building. Cole watched as John Smith set the brakes, switched off the communications system and shut down the engines. He was an excellent company pilot, Cole thought, and wondered if there were other things he was good at.

Cole opened the door and lowered the steps, moving aside for the pilot to descend. When he reached the ground the pilot was already walking towards a big old American car that looked to be in mint condition from loving care. A steel cable was lowered and the beautiful old car moved towards the plane. John Smith stopped and slowly started retracing his steps. The car parked beside the plane and a uniformed chauffeur got out and hurried around to the rear door. But it was opened from the inside and a gnome-like creature dropped to the ground. Cole thought of Toulouse-Lautrec but this guy was powerful and agile. He directed the opening of the rear trunk and the removal of what appeared to Cole to be an oversized footlocker. John Smith was opening a storage door on the side of the plane; he swung it back before exchanging greetings with the extra short man, and then introduced Cole.

The short man's name was Gustave Tallarin. Cole thought tallarin meant noodle but wasn't sure. He wanted to help load the trunk into the plane but John Smith and the chauffeur were handling it. There was a heavy iron lock on the latch that secured the lid and Cole wondered how he was going to get it open to see inside. Just as the trunk was being lifted up to disappear into the plane Tallarin said something to the chauffeur in Spanish. The chauffeur answered and nodded his head but Tallarin insisted that they place the trunk back on the ground. The Spanish was so fast Cole couldn't follow it all.

It was hard to believe, but Tallarin brought out a key, opened the lock, unlatched and raised the lid. The trunk contained mostly decoys. They appeared to be plastic ducks. They were different from any Cole knew about, having been molded in various attitudes. Some seemed to be taking off, others landing, and some just seemed

to be sitting, as is normal for a decoy. Very clever, Cole thought, and wanted to see what was under them.

The short man searched down, moving the decoys around and Cole saw what he thought was a pair of wading boots. The chauffeur then pulled a cover from the inside of the lid revealing a dismantled shotgun and a broken-apart fishing rod with reel. This satisfied the short man and Cole was pretty well satisfied too. He watched the lid being relatched and the lock inserted but the short man didn't close the lock. Cole decided that if he got a chance he might take a closer look but he didn't feel any real urgency.

Cole offered the copilot seat to Senor Tallarin, but the short man seemed happy with the luxurious cabin. He accepted a drink and settled back to enjoy the flight.

About thirty minutes after takeoff, John Smith swivelled the controls over to the copilot's side asking Cole to take over while he went to the head. Cole was surprised at the casualness of it, but then remembered telling John Smith that he carried a multi-engine rating. He finally assumed this was one of the reasons he had been invited on the trip.

The plane flew beautifully. Maintaining altitude and course took only the slightest pressures on the controls. Cole saw the sea off to the left and decided the pilot would rather follow the shore than fly over mountains and jungles. He altered course slightly, the seacoast angled west, and he noted the time of the heading change. Glancing at the chart that he hadn't been following too closely, he decided John Smith could make any corrections when he returned.

The pilot came back but didn't take his seat. He noted the slight change Cole had made in the heading, was satisfied since they were VFR all the way, and suggested Cole might descend home if he wished, and move the plane around a bit; to get the feel of it. This was a happy suggestion for Cole. He waited while the pilot sat down next to the short man and then pushed the elevator gear forward and reduced power slightly. They went into a long gradual descent but he had to reduce power even further when the increased speed of the plane caused a levelling off.

At fifteen hundred feet he followed the shore line generally without probing into coves or small harbors. Once he saw whales humping and blowing in the water off to the left and later he saw a cream colored horse with a white mane running and shimmering in the sun as he dashed up the beach away from the sound of the plane. He didn't see any people on the beaches and only once did he see a small fishing vil-

lage. Again he adjusted the elevators and power settings and began to climb. At ten thousand feet he looked at the chart and saw that Tepic should be a few miles off his right wing. He picked up the haze and smoke assuring him of his position. And then he thought of the French sailor from the Greek ship jailed in the penitentiary at Tepic. The brutal fact of any one being caged was impossible for him to imagine. The soaring flight, the lulling events obscured cruel facts from Cole. There had been a moment of prescience over the ocean, but nothing to allow him to foresee the terrible happening converging upon him. It would happen - but not right away.

His reverie was cut short when John Smith Squeezed into the left hand seat. Cole swivelled the controls over without being asked since Mazatlan would be coming up soon.

After they landed a rickety bus was waiting for them in the parking area. Senor Tallarin's gear was unloaded and the trunk was tossed on top. The driver of the bus skirted el centro back to the S. S. Crescent Moon.

Dinner that night was hosted by Mike Crowder at one of the beach restaurants. Colle learned that the bus would leave at four a.m. next morning to take them to the duck blinds. He could hardly wait.

When they returned to the ship early Cole went directly to his cabin and wrote in his diary. He was a little disappointed that the day hadn't provided some big clue to the nefarious activities of the ship. The bare facts he jolted down didn't release him from the instinctive primeval state he found himself in while gliding over the land and sea. So he wrote a poem to a girl.

It didn't occur to him that his regression into the basics of life had been brought about by the use of the most modern technology. He drank a bottle of Dos Equis and went to bed, and before the beer got him up, there was a pounding on his cabin door announcing the bus would leave in thirty minutes for the rice fields.

## *Chapter V*

The bus smelled like the fishing launch, of gasoline and the sea. Letha sat beside him, put her head on his shoulder and went to sleep. Waldo was two seats ahead on the left talking with Senor Tallarin. Mike Crowder was explaining that the blinds had been prepared, decoys set out and hot thermos coffee and sandwiches were in place. The blinds were double and Mike and Cole would hunt together.

When the bus finally stopped rattling and bouncing, Cole pushed Letha awake and helped her outside. The driver turned the lights off and everything was black. There was some milling around and Cole lost Letha but someone found his hand.

“Senor Rain, I am Cerillo. You will follow me.”

Cole’s hand was dropped and he said, “Hey, wait a minute. I can’t see a thing.”

“Hold to my belt. I am carrying your gun and shells,” a voice said. Cole assumed it was still Cerillo.

They stumbled along for about twenty feet and Cole began to hear water splashing around his ankles. He was grateful for the waders Myron Brown had lent him.

“Don’ make too much noise,” the voice whispered.

“O.K,” Cole muttered and started to sweat.

They plodded and slithered for what seemed an hour but was only fifteen minutes, and then Cerillo stopped. “From here you will shoot,” the voice whispered again. Cole felt tall thick grass being parted and then bumped a round island. “Get inside,” the voice said. “There is a seat.”

Cole stepped over and into a concealed blind. He felt the shotgun as Cerillo pressed it on him and then the shells. “There is a dry place in front of you to place the shells and gun,” the voice said close to his ear. Cole found what he thought was a secure spot and laid the equipment down. He really didn’t care if it fell in the water or not. “Here is your refreshment,” the voice said and guided his hand to a paste-

board box and metal bottle.

“Gracias,” Cole said and he supposed it was Cerillo moving stealthily away. After the foot splashes quit he listened for the sound of ducks waking up, but all he heard was a python or a boa constrictor twisting through the slime and grass to attack and strangle him in his lair. There wasn’t anything else to do, so he decided to eat the sandwiches and drink the coffee. Reaching out he found an unexpected bottle of beer. Five minutes later it was open after being pounded on the side of the blind. He smelled the awful fluid too late to prevent filling his mouth, but he didn’t swallow. The stuff was spewed into the tall grass from his mouth and nostrils. The weather was so warm Mike Crowder had forgotten to mention the small stove and extra bottle of kerosene. Cole stretched his hands out and found what he assumed was warm dirty water. He rinsed as best he could under the circumstances and then ate three sandwiches. There was chicken and ham and cheese.

After checking the coffee before tasting it, Cole started to remember what he knew about duck hunting. You had to wait for the first light, that was important. Probing the darkness in all directions, he tried to find some hint of this first light. One part of the horizon or the points where he assumed the horizon to be was as black as another. Suddenly he did hear rustlings and stirrings and then as though someone might be talking, a low melodious sound.

He decided it was more like a coo.

At last he saw first light but it was so faint he had to concentrate hard to make sure it was true. And there it was, only higher up than he expected. A thin shaft of difference in the blackness and at the bottom of the thin shaft a pale spreading, and just below, the tops of hills off to the east. Soon there was no doubt of first light in the eastern sky and the subdued noise of awakening was all around.

Cole reached for the gun and opened the breach, then laid it down again to find the shells. They were smooth and oily to the touch. He loaded both chambers, closed and locked, feeling for the safety catch. It was still on. He left it on and waited with the butt of the gun resting in his lap. There was a splash nearby and a whirl of sound went over his head. Cole ducked. A pop sounded way off to the left and then two pops close together both to the right. Three, four dark objects flew across the pale sky directly in front of him. He raised the gun and fired. Nothing happened. He fired again and was sure that one of the objects fell. A bigger splash to his right. Now what should he do? Put down the gun and go after the fallen bird? As he got ready to do this he saw someone in a crouch approaching the blind. It was

Cerillo. "That is the first one," he said. "Very good shooting." He laid the bird on a tuft of grass before backing into the shadows.

Maybe an hour later, Cole waited for his next shot. The watery rice field was sun drenched now and from its very center one duck approached straight on. Instinctively Cole raised the gun and at the same moment remembered this was supposed to be the most difficult shot. The sight swept along the oncoming bird and into the sky before he squeezed the trigger. The duck flipped over and over coming directly at him. Again Cole ducked to escape the flopping object, but the bird plopped at the edge of the water and rolled within a foot of the blind. The blue head glinting green, and the white necklace of feathers identified a mallard. Except for the natural markings of the beautiful dead thing, there was but a single bright red dot on the blue-green head. Cole stared at the first close-up of the results of his shooting. He hoped it would get up and fly away. It didn't. "To hell with this," he muttered and climbed out of the blind. The bus was maybe five hundred yards away on a little knoll. He slogged towards it not worrying about the noise. Cerillo gathered up the dead ducks and followed.

Mike Crowder was leaning on a fender as Cole approached. "Looks like you did pretty well for yourself," he said.

"Yeah, I got more than my share," Cole admitted. "I thought you were going to hunt with me."

"I had to go back to the ship. I may go out now and try my luck." Mike said a few words to Cerillo in passing on his way to the empty blind.

Waiting for the others to return, Cole cleaned the gun thoroughly and washed off the waders. Senor Tallarin, the short one, was the next to come in. His bag was even larger than Cole's. The guide laid them on the ground for inspection. Cerillo had cleaned the last of Cole's shoot and stored them in an ice chest at the back of the bus.

When the hunt was finished and they were bouncing back to the ship Cole was reluctant to talk about his skill. Only Senor Tallarin had shot more ducks.

The rest of the stay in Mazatlan, Cole swam and fished. One day after catching two sailfish he had his picture taken between them as they hung down. Since they are not that good to eat, the fish guide suggested they be given to the poorhouse. He explained that the poor people liked them. Maybe because there wasn't anything else to eat.

A couple of times Cole went to sleep on the beach and dreamed. Later on it

was hard to separate the dreams from what really had happened, even though it wasn't much. When John Smith left for San Francisco in the company plane Cole thought of returning with him but decided he should see it through. When the ship sailed north he was on it.

He played cards, shuffleboard, and shot skeet. Nothing more occurred aboard ship that raised his faintest suspicion.

## *Chapter VI*



The SS Crescent Moon, leaving the offshore fog bank, sailed into sunlight. A bright blue sky was overhead as the ship altered course, pointing her bow slightly to starboard of center beneath the bridge that spanned the gateway to San Francisco Bay. Standing at the rail, Cole looked up as the ship cleared from under the massive structure. The air was cool even in the sun and there was a crystal sharpness to the sweeping view from his deck. He wondered if Sir Francis Drake had actually found the narrow passage leading to the bay and had sailed around the landlocked harbor. Drake would have seen a desolate sand-blown peninsula with bent and stunted trees. Did the white angular buildings stepping up the inclined land, or the tall towers marking the center of the city add to, or detract from, the beauty of the view? He would be willing to bet that Drake, in his stench-ridden ship seeking fresh water and provisions, would vote for the present panorama over the past.

Off to port, a second bridge crossed the middle of the harbor without enclosing it. Ocean-plying vessels sailed under it to Carquinez Straits and beyond through navigable waterways to Sacramento and Stockton. The ship, heading east, would pass beneath still a third bridge arching out from the peninsula. This structure touched and island two-thirds the way across, bored a tunnel through its hills and then bridged the other third of the crossing to the East Bay cities that ringed the true mainland.

A tug was overreaching the ship's slowing speed, coming up from the port stern preparing to aid in the docking at a covered pier jutting from the peninsula's shore. The compact boat moved past midpoint of the bigger ship, reduced power and nosed gently into the forward port side. The SS Crescent Moon's bow turned toward land and the little boat maneuvered her alongside the pier with experienced ease.

Cole turned from the rail heading for his cabin. Myron Brown would be waiting for a phone call. The cable for the ship phones should be hooked up soon,



but he didn't want to use the ship's phone. He was sure all measures had been taken to prevent the eleven passengers and crew from leaving the ship without a thorough search, or the cargo to be unloaded without the same meticulous scrutiny. He wanted Brown's permission to reveal the purpose of the just completed trip to his partners.

As he reached the cabin door someone called his name, and turning, he saw Mike Crowder hurrying after him waving a piece of paper.

"Hi, Mike, I was going to take my gear from the cabin and stack it by the gangway then give you a call," Cole said. "After the farewell party last night I doubted if anyone would be stirring."

"Yeah, that was the usual goodbye blast, but it normally ends earlier. Probably no one else will get off the ship until afternoon." He paused and then continued, "Oh, this is for the card lessons." He handed over the piece of paper, and Cole saw that it was a check for two hundred and eighty-six dollars.

"Wait a minute; are you sure it came to this much? That's pretty high tuition."

"It was that much and don't worry about it; with the tricks you taught me, I'll get it all back with interest next trip."

"Thanks, Mike. Aunt Hester always told me gin rummy is ninety percent luck and that's gambling, but the other ten percent is using your head to make money, and that's business."

"Some business," Mike grinned.

"You have my phone number and address. How about giving me a call," Cole suggested. "We like doing business with friends, especially when they're such fast pay."

"We're sailing again as soon as the ship's unloaded, about a three day job," Mike explained. "I'll call you in a couple of weeks when we get back." He started to leave, then suddenly turned. "Hell, I forgot the most important thing I wanted to tell you. Customs is checking people and luggage tougher than usual. The luggage is the thing that takes time, so if you're in a hurry leave your gear and pick it up later."

"I'm scheduled for a meeting starting thirty minutes after I return. What about the frozen ducks?" Cole asked.

"I'm sure they'll be held up too. Let me handle them for you. I've gone through this before, you just have to be patient." Mike thought for a moment. "I'll have our company driver drop them off at your office or at your apartment, if you prefer,

along with the luggage. The ducks will be packed in dry ice," he added.

"The office will be fine. I appreciate the help. Now, I owe you some free lessons."

"Next time I'll be charging tuition," Mike muttered.

Without luggage, Cole passed through customs with very little inconvenience, except for the removal of most of his clothes and a rectal probe. He found a pay phone inside the covered pier and called Myron Brown. Brown said if Cole felt it was necessary to discuss his findings with his partners, to go ahead as long as they could be trusted, and that he was looking forward to the full report.

That was the hell of it, Cole thought as he hung up. He didn't have any findings. He'd met some nice people and had had a great time, but none of it seemed to be connected with the possible use of the ship as a dope smuggler. He was anxious to discuss the events of the past two weeks with his partners. The four of them in Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones worked separately on their individual assignments, but always confided in each other, divulging every fact concerning their projects and helping each other when stymied on a job. The annual shareholders' meeting was scheduled, but this shouldn't take more than fifteen minutes, and as always, they would be anxious to listen to his story.

"To solve a problem, four heads are better than one only if the four heads produce one acceptable solution," Aunt Hester always said. This admonition made sense to Cole, and he rejected meetings and conferences where problems were left dangling or put over for further discussion. The three other people in the corporation also discussed their work, but they too arrived at their solutions individually. Now he needed their points of view to help him take a bearing on his present position so that he could decide on the next move.

Taxis are hard to find anywhere in San Francisco. On China Basin Street, they're impossible. Cole waited confidently and saw the empty cab turn into China Basin from Illinois Street. It pulled alongside. Cole got in and directed the driver to Number 10, Black Pearl Road.

Racing the engine through automatic gears, he turned left still on China Basin, swung right into Third, and began a slow cruise. "Black Pearl Road, is that near the old International Settlement?"

Cole wasn't too surprised that the cabbie didn't recognize the address. There was only one ancient red brick building on the road, and nobody had occupied it for years prior to its purchase by Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones. "Not too far," Cole

said. "It probably would be quicker if we took the Embarcadero to Lombard. It's on the other side and about a quarter of the way up Telegraph Hill."

They cut down Brannan to the Embarcadero past the foreign trade zone and the old Ferry Building. Cole pointed across the tracks to Lombard and said, "Take another left at the next street."

Black Pearl Road extended a short half-block. The two-story building at the end faced the center of the road. Cole asked the driver to pull up to the turn-around in front of the old brick structure. Leaving the cab, he overtipped. "The extra money is for being in the right place at the right time."

"Thanks! Say, what is this place? I never knew it was here." The driver leaned over and looked out at the building.

"The lower place is Borgia's, the best food in town." Cole didn't bother to explain that the offices of RCS&J Corporation were located on the second floor.

The cabbie waved and raced the engine. "I'll check it out some night."

Borgia's didn't open until eleven in the morning but it didn't matter. Giuseppe, or someone, would be in the kitchen, and he could call for coffee from the office.

There were only two numbers on Black Pearl Road, and the restaurant was Number 13. Cole unlocked the door to Number 10 and entered a carpeted foyer open to the second-floor roof. A wrought-iron chandelier hung from the second story ceiling, lighting the entrance and circular stairway. He climbed the stairs to a large room used as a combination lobby and conference area and switched on light that sprayed up and down the muraled walls, simulating sunlight. The murals were set in squares depicting scenes from the city, and there were times when one got the uncanny feeling of looking at them through windows. The room was heavily carpeted and furnished with coordinated lounges, comfortable chairs, coffee tables and floor lamps. At one end there was a well-preserved antique bar. Several color-oriented phones rested inconspicuously on small tables. Off this room, four offices overlooked the bay, each furnished and decorated to suit the occupant.

The door to Cole's office was closed. He opened it and moved quickly to a walnut desk. The desk was the only clue that the room was used for business. There were several inner-office memos and a small stack of letters lying on top. He sat down, putting his feet on a pulled-out drawer, and reached for the memos.

One was a report from Kang Shu-Li, Secretary-Treasurer of the corporation. He noted a memorandum from Pilar and also a penciled note from her, explaining that a message from Larry Carver was on the recorder. Larry was Executive Vice President

and had been in southern California when Cole left two weeks ago. Presumably, he was still there.

Pilar's memo concerned a new project she'd undertaken to redesign functional plastic lawn furniture from giving the appearance of lumps or stumps in the grass. There was nothing personal.

Since Kang's main interest was the every-day operation of the corporation, and his report concerned the shareholders' meeting today, Cole read it first.

To the Chairman of the Board, to the other members of the Board of Directors, to the Executive Officers, and to the Common Shareholders of Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones Enterprises, Inc.:

It is gratifying to report that the condition of the corporation at year's end was better than had been forecasted. Our holdings as of December thirty-first included the common and preference shares of some forty-three corporations, in the total amount of \$372,456.00 (market value on that date); five pieces of real estate, including the building we occupy; and three parcels of undeveloped land appraised value of all real estate, as of July last year, \$486,000.00.

One of these parcels sold in January of this year for \$65,000.00. This particular lot was purchased in the deal with late revered uncle, Po Ling-teng, at the same time he sold us this decrepit building. Total price for both properties \$23,758.00.

Rents received from the Borgia lease for the lower half of this building, Number 13 Black Pearl Road, have returned over a period of seven years, after interest charges and taxes for both properties, and insurance for this building, a net gain of \$36,480.00. As my revered uncle's favorite nephew, I was taught all he knew about the intricacies of making money and was cautioned never to do business with relatives. Cole laughed as he read this, knowing Kang was proud of the first deal he'd made for the then partnership. Reading on, he came to Kang's usual close for a report on corporate affairs:

We have learned much from the late Po Ling-teng, from Larry Carver II, from the late Juan Pedro Jesus Mateos y Diego, and from Ms. Hester Coleridge. Our policy is taken from Ms. Coleridge's small volume, titled "The Spiritual Man's Place in an Evil World", written by Ms. Coleridge after eighty-two years of concerned observation of the human race. "If that which God created in his image cannot move against the tide of wickedness or breast the racing current of corruption, then he must flow with these baleful forces, remaining unblemished, until, with God's help

he can control the impious tide and dam the depraved current for his own single, and mankind's benefit."

In her written annotated notes Cole remembered the explanation of this passage was, "If a single human being cannot cope with the modern Babylonian establishment, he should not give up his oneness by joining the opposition rabble, but rather merely comingle his entity with the established bastards and screw them at their own game, sharing any gain with his particular God and other worthy souls of the community." The original partnership had consisted of Cole Rain, Larry Carver, Kang Shu-li and Robert Jones. The four of them had met at the University. Kang Shu-li had been the business manager and Cole Rain the editor of a college publication that went against the popular radical trend. Larry Carver and Bob Jones worked as reporters. Kang had interested the group in investing in stocks, bonds and real estate. They had formed an equal partnership and each contributed twenty-five thousand dollars to its assets. Kang had been investing in the market since high school days, and, through the tutelage of his revered uncle, had accumulated assets over fifteen thousand dollars. He had borrowed the balance to make up his share from that same uncle, Po-Ling-teng. Cole's twenty-five thousand had come from Aunt Hester Coleridge, who was only in her seventies at the time, but said he should have inherited the money years ago. Larry Carver's money came from football. He had signed a contract with a thirty thousand dollar bonus, had played sensationally in three exhibition games and was then carried from the field with a knee that would never stand that kind of punishment again. Bob Jones' parents and his only sister had been killed in an automobile crash while he was in high school. He had been looking for a safe place to invest part of the insurance, and if you couldn't trust people your own age, who could you trust?

One of the first investments made by the partnership was the purchase of the two properties described by Kang in his report. They had planned to use the structure on Black Pearl Road for their offices, but the size of the building made it impossible for them to use more than one floor. The lower floor had been rented to Giuseppe Borgia for his restaurant.

Borgia had been in the restaurant business for fifteen years. "Giuseppe's", his original place near the financial district, had flourished for only one reason: good food. After making a small fortune, Giuseppe sent to Italy for a bride. Six months later, Lucretia Donatelli, who had been selected by Giuseppe's parents still living in the old country, arrived in San Francisco. Lucretia and Giuseppe were married in the

church, and their reception was held at “Giuseppe’s”, restaurant and bar. It was the perfect place for a wedding party, and all the partners, with the exception of Bob Jones, had been present. Lieutenant Jones, accompanied by his bride, Pilar, was in Texas for flight training.

Cole remembered the reception. Giuseppe and Lucretia had signed the lease for Number 13 Black Pearl Road and completed its renovation. Giuseppe wanted to name the restaurant in honor of his bride and had commissioned one of the many artists who frequented the North Beach area to strike off a small bronze plate. It would be bolted to the brick wall beside the entrance. The plate was to be given to Lucretia at the wedding party. The artist had created his masterpiece. The lettering had an Italian look and stood out boldly from the indented and antiqued bronze background. Giuseppe was honoring his new bride by naming the restaurant “Lucretia Borgia’s Palazzo.”

When the plaque was presented to Lucretia at the party, Giuseppe climbed on top of a table to make a speech: “To all my wonderful friends, I want to say that Giuseppe is now Mister Borgia and my wife is Mrs. Borgia who will have the newest and finest restaurant in San Francisco. Before she was my wife, she was Lucretia Donatelli, the best cook in Italia. That’s why she’s now my wife, and she is going to cook up all her secret recipes for my” he hesitated, catching the error, “for our new restaurant, ‘Lucretia Borgia’s Palazzo.’” After making this speech, Giuseppe moved to the edge of the table to jump off. The table tipped and Giuseppe, clutching the bronze plaque, fell to the floor, breaking his arm. But, since he was completely anaesthetized by the spirit of the occasion, the break wasn’t discovered until X-rays were taken three days later.

There were other minor accidents at the party. Tony Coniglio, carrying a large bowl of steaming vermicelli covered with a tomato, mushroom and meat sauce, was accidently tripped by Father O’Connell. The Father was demonstrating what he termed a side-swipe soccer kick, using for the ball a wet wadded-up napkin. Swinging his leg in an arc, he caught Tony just under the right kneecap with the toe of his shoe. Tony fell forward and with presence of mind threw the vessel he was carrying on top of the bar.

Oversized Larry Carver squeezing into a booth had sat on a broken cocktail glass. A doctor at the party took three stitches in his ass with a borrowed needle and thread, sprinkling an antibiotic over the wound. Someone said it was plain salt and Larry agreed.



The one accident that could have had serious consequences occurred when a couple got into heated argument near the entrance of the restaurant. Cole knew them fairly well; Spike and Lenore Swensen. Lenore was a fragile little thing with flashing blue eyes. Spike was a big crew-cut blond, about six-four, two hundred and thirty-five pounds. He had played ball with Cole and Larry at the University. When Cole walked over to them, Lenore was saying, "You're always threatening to use physical violence against me. If you ever dare lay a hand on me I'll see you rot in jail."

"Calm down, Lenore," Spike soothed. "All I said was that you can't handle your booze and there are times when you need your butt spanked."

Cole interrupted, "Hi, everybody. Why don't we all go over to the bar and have a drink."

Lenore leveled him with cold blue eyes. "Why the hell don't you get lost?"

"Now, Lenore," Cole took on Spike's tone, "This is a great party and I just wanted you two to have fun like everybody else. I agree with you. Spike shouldn't threaten physical violence." He put his arm around her shoulder while holding a half-filled highball glass. As she moved away from him, the glass was jarred and the drink splashed down the front of her dress.

"Damn you, now look what you've done." With her open palm she smacked Cole on the cheek. Spike made a grab for her and she immediately turned on him, ducked under his outstretched arms and butted him in the stomach. There was a low planter sitting on the floor which caught the back of his legs and beyond the planter was a plate glass window. Spike made a perfect backward dive through the window, his head striking the concrete sidewalk. Huge sheets of glass crashed down. Spike lay still where he had fallen. Lenore stepped through the window and kneeling beside him, took his head in her arms and cooed, "Oh, you poor darling, are you hurt? Please, please speak to me."

Spike opened his eyes. "I think there's been an accident. I just heard a hell of a crash."

"God, honey, you really had me worried." Lenore took a deep breath of relief. "You're so damned awkward," she said, pressing her lips to his forehead.

Cole wiped a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth, took a last look, and leaving them, walked over to the bar to get another drink.

All this had happened several years ago and Cole found that he couldn't be in a reminiscent mood for long without thinking of Pilar.

After Bob Jones had gone into the service, Pilar Jones was called in to design the decor for Lucretia Borgia's Palazzo and had exactly caught the Italian Renaissance mood. In the first months they had all helped out: Larry Carver with business and administrative advice, Cole with legal help, and Kang Shu-li with suggestions on buying procedures and waste-disposal methods which saved money and increased profits.

A year and a half after the opening, there was no doubt of the success of the new restaurant. It was at this happy time that Cole received a phone call from Pilar Jones. In a barely audible, tear-choked voice she read the telegram announcing Bob Jones's death.

Pilar Priscilla Mateos's ancestors had been land grant holders in California for more than two hundred years and there was no financial need for her to ever work. But after Bob's death she wanted to be more than a fourth owner of Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones. The three remaining partners, with some reservations, allowed her to join them. Pilar had a degree in design engineering, but found that applying engineering principles as taught at the University was too restrictive for her more creative free art form. Recently, it had been impossible for her to accept all the requests for her services, and she now greatly enhanced the corporation's image. Of course Cole's current assignment was due to the fact that Pilar had designed ceramic tile for McWhorter Brown.

## *Chapter VII*



Cole sipped the coffee Mario had sent up on the dumb waiter. His thoughts were interrupted by the ringing phone. Setting the cup on the edge of the desk, he lifted the receiver, "Cole Rain."

"Oh, Mr. Rain, I didn't know you were back," said Mattie Lou, one of the switchboard operators at Columbia Office Services. "I was trying to reach Mr. Shu-li or Miss Jones. How was your vacation?" she asked.

"Fine, Mattie Lou. I just got here and I'm the only one. I thought we had a stockholders' meeting scheduled this morning. Do you know anything about it?"

"I think your meeting was postponed until around noon. Larry Carver called in yesterday to say he couldn't return until sometime late this morning. He talked with Miss Jones and there should be a message on your recorder."

"I've got a note from Pilar to check the tape, just haven't gotten around to it yet. Do you have anything for me?"

"Nothing important, Mr. Rain. I screened your calls and recorded the information. I can place them for you any time you're ready." She paused, "I think Miss Baker has something for you. Let me switch you to her."

Cole waited until he heard Miss Baker's sultry voice.

"Good morning, Mr. Rain. What a pleasant surprise to have you back." Low and husky, Cole thought it sounded as though they had just wakened up together.

"Hi, Joanne. Do you have a slight cold? Mattie Lou said you had something for me."

The burr in her voice was even more pronounced, "I don't have a cold, Mr. Rain. I never felt better, and I do have something for you."

Cole felt a slight twinge in his loins and wondered what the hell it would be like to meet Miss Baker in person. She interrupted the exotic thought.

"You have a half-dozen or more letters from law enforcement people concerning your 'Investigative Procedures Manual.' I've put them on the T-viewer, and I'll be ready for you," she said slowly, "any time you'd like to dictate replies."

Gazing at the couch across the room he saw Miss Baker's nude form reclining there beckoning: I'm ready any time you'd like to ravish me. "I'm ready," he started, "No, I mean - I'll get back to you sometime this afternoon or tomorrow morning, Joanne."

"I'll be waiting." she purred.

Joanne had done the bulk of his secretarial work for the past year and a half, but everything was done through their private line to Columbia Office Service. He had never met her in person. Dictation consisted of pushing a button, talking into a mike directly to Joanne, or into a recorder for her to pick up later. Correspondence was microfilmed and filed in Columbia's office. There was a televiewer with transmitter and receiver at both locations. The transmitters held as many as twenty microfilmed pieces of correspondence, and Cole could switch on the T-viewer merely by pressing a button, and click through an entire file of letters, memos or other data.

He backed off the tape and flipped it forward into a group of telephone messages. Pilar's voice came through, "I've cut you into Cole's recorder, Larry, so you can explain the delay."

Larry's voice was modulated and controlled with half a laugh, "Good morning, Mr. Rain. Hey, that sounds like a song title," and he sang a couple of stanzas from "As Time Goes By." He was big on Bogart and especially, "Casablanca." Smogsville must be Dullsville, Cole thought, if he's reduced to watching the late, late show.

"Cole, baby, we've set up three franchises and one brand new business venture, and it's been such fun - such a great challenge and terribly exhilarating to present cost analyses, market studies, cash flow projections, and the important item, pay-back guarantees, to all these hip bankers, government agents, and plain accountants. You'd have just loved it, but you missed it all. You had to take that dratted ocean voyage to hunt and fish for the meat that will see us through the balance of the winter. (The recording went on):

"Well, I too have had my problems. As I already mentioned, I've been seeing a lot of bankers. Yesterday, I invited this banker to dinner. Actually, she's not the owner of the bank, nor the president, nor even a vice-president, she's been working in this bank as the Number Seventeen teller. But with her intelligence and equipment, I would think she'd make an excellent Chairman of the Board.

"But I digress. During dinner I discovered that she needed my help. Her former husband - she's divorced now - Oh, yeah, I found out an interesting statistic; ninety-two percent of all the people in southern California have been divorced. Anyway, they had bought this cabin in the mountains, which is now hers after the divorce settlement. It has a mortgage on it, and she tells me the place is beautifully furnished, but the furniture isn't all paid for either, so even though she loves the place,

she's decided to sell. She has an offer for everything, including the furniture, that would retire the indebtedness and still leave a small profit of fifteen hundred dollars. Off hand, this sounds like a hell of a deal, but after we talked it over and approached it from a conservative business analysis and financial consultant position, it was decided that I should see the property. She's taking the afternoon off tomorrow, and we plan to lay in a supply of packaged and bottled provisions for an overnight study in depth of the property. Next morning she'll drive me back to the airport, and I should arrive at No. 10 Black Pearl Road around noontime. Since our watchword has always been 'Business Before Pleasure,' I didn't want to risk corporate censure by not helping a banker friend. All for now - see you tomorrow."

Cole flipped off the recorder shaking his head as Kang walked through the door, grinning with an outstretched hand, "You look like there was lots of sun in Mexico; how long have you been back?"

"Hi, Kang. The ship docked a little after eight this morning. I got here around nine-thirty."

"Sorry about the meeting, but I guess you listened to Larry's explanation."

"Yes, I did. It sounded as though he had no other alternative, let's hope he gets back sometime this week."

Kang laughed, "Hell, he's downstairs now. Lucretia fixed him one of her famous potions, and he's getting around to taking a little black coffee. Pilar's there too. She and Lucretia are talking about having lunch sent up here, so if you want anything special, you'd better call. I think they're planning cracked crab, bean salad, hot sour-dough bread and a couple bottles of Pinot White."

Larry stuck his head in the door, and Pilar walked around him.

"Welcome back from the hunt. You look marvelous," she said.

"Hi, Pilar, glad to be back. Who's your friend?"

Larry came over with a sheepish grin and shook hands. "Man," he said, "I, too, need a vacation. I've been thinking about one of those rest cures where you just lie around in hot springs full of mud and sweat. You know, if I had to live in Southern California, I don't think I'd last another five years."

"Who wants to last a long time just to be lasting?" Cole asked. "It's not the locality, Larry, you're just an active liver. Aunt Hester always said 'It's better to die from living too much than not to have lived at all.' But I'll admit you do look a little tired."

"Yeh," Larry said, "If I wasn't black, I'd have dark circles under my eyes."

“Don’t let anybody put you on. You’re black and you’ve still got dark circles under your eyes. I hate to keep quoting Aunt Hester, but she always said ‘Dealing with bankers can be a caution.’ ”

“Why don’t we postpone the meeting and go to the beach?” Larry suggested. “The position of the corporation is all in Kang’s succinct report, and he was only going to quickly go over the certified figures that Cash Weatherholm prepared. They’ve included a balance sheet showing assets, liabilities, shareholders’ investments, along with statements of income, retained earnings, capital surplus and disposition of funds. Let’s each take a copy, look it over, and if there are any questions, Kang can answer them, if not, we’ll go back to Cash Weatherholm.” After he said all this he started moving toward the door, but he was voted down three to one.

Fifteen minutes later Kang moved that the business portion of the meeting be concluded and adjourned, so that Cole could give an account of his trip. The dumb waiter back of the bar in the plush lounge buzzed, signaling the arrival of food and drink. They moved from Cole’s office and opened up a table beside the bar. Pilar and Cole carried trays of food to the table and Kang and Larry brought up chairs. The cracked crab was the usual excellent, but Cole insisted it was the best he’d ever eaten. With the coffee, Pilar asked him to tell them about the ocean voyage and Mexico.

“There is an aura of mystery about this only because Myron Brown insisted that I not divulge - even to you - what my assignment was. The minute I left the ship this morning, I called him and got permission to discuss anything I wished to at this meeting. The trip might still turn out to have been a vacation. I told Brown that if I were unable to resolve his problem, I would so consider it, and he wouldn’t be billed for my time.

“It still sounds like a good deal,” Larry said. “How’d you manage it?”

“I first met Myron Brown at his home on the Peninsula. As you know, Pilar has done work for McWhorter Brown, and she also did some special tile designing for their new home. She was invited, and I went with her to a sort of new house showing party.” Remembering the party Cole decided to talk about Pilar.

“As these things go, they can get a little flat,” he said. “However, Pilar made it a memorable evening. Her design work, as you can imagine, was truly beautiful and later on in the evening, she changed to a bikini and gave a diving exhibition in the lighted pool with what can only be described as devastating effect.”

Larry and Kang both started to speak, and Larry won.

"Hold it! This may give us the diversification we're looking for. I know where we can lease an indoor pool that will accommodate from five to six hundred spectators. We could charge five dollars a head to see the show, get a license to serve drinks and rent a porpoise or two from the aquarium to fill in the act."

Kang broke in, "And I could be Zanter, a Chinese ape man and come swinging in over the audience on a vine and drop into the pool just in time to save Pilar from the lecherous assault of the excited porpoises."

"That's good," Larry said. "You know those babies are supposed to be smarter than people."

"That's the most ridiculous suggestion you two ever made," Pilar said. "I wouldn't perform in a show like that for less than fifty dollars a head."

"O.K., a great idea and I appreciate everyone's contribution but now that we've got the price fixed, shall I go on with my story? Where the hell was I? Oh yeah, after Pilar came out of the pool, she went into the dressing room and put her clothes back on; let me say that it was prior to all this that I'd had a talk with Myron Brown. He told me that the United States Customs suspected their ship, the *Crescent Moon*, of smuggling. The ship operates between the United States and Mexico as a carrier of clay. Having read some of my books on crime and investigation, he thought maybe I could be of help. I thought it over, and the next morning called and told him I'd take the job."

Cole told about the ship's being used both as a cargo carrier and as a sales promotion vehicle for customers. The sea voyage itself was pleasant and the hunting and fishing and other diversions in Mexico were there for those who wanted it. Cole gave a factual account of all that had happened on the ship and shore and even included a sketchy summary of the Letha interlude. He hoped it just might have some bearing. Everyone continued to eat as he wound his story down and he wondered if they understood all he'd said.

"You'll notice that I use the jargon of the sea. After you've been at sea a while, it just comes naturally. It's funny; I've flown over the ocean many times and never run into all the new words that one finds on a ship. I'll explain 'forward' and 'aft', 'port' and 'starboard', 'bulkhead' and just plain 'head' for you people of the land later."

"Don't bother on my account," Pilar said. "I've been sailing since I was five years old."

“My uncle took me to Fo-shan when I graduated from grammar school,” Kang said. “After we landed at Hong Kong, we went on a train from Kowloon to Canton. Fo-shan is about forty miles southwest of Canton on the Pearl River in the Republic of China, so along with my sea slang I also know a little of the language of trains and sampans.”

“And I worked on a Danish freighter one summer when I was in high school,” Larry broke in, “that’s how I became a football player. Being a steward, I had the run of the kitchen, and when I wasn’t serving food, I was eating it. The voyage was supposed to last three months and I was to be back to start school in the fall. The ship got some new contracts in Australia and kept going around the world. I missed a year of high school, grew seven inches and gained sixty-five pounds. Next year I was All Northern California fullback.”

“O.K., O.K.,” Cole said. “I won’t bother to explain any nautical terms.”

He leaned back to await the reaction.

“That’s the damndest detective story I ever heard,” Kang said.

“I kept thinking what Sam Spade would have done in a situation like that,” Larry interjected, obviously referring to the Letha interlude. “Man, she would have been so tired Sam would have had to carry her back to the cabin.”

“Sam Spade and 007 are out,” Pilar stated. “I thought Cole handled it beautifully, although it is a little hard to believe.”

“After Letha left,” Cole said shortly, “I went back to bed.”

“I remember reading about a detective that sort of reminds me of Cole’s experience,” Larry said, emptying one wine bottle in his glass. “This guy, in the department he was known simply by the fraction .00033333 ad-finitum and to shorten it they sometimes called him Infinitum and other times just plain Ad. Anyway, Ad was marked for a hit by Murder Incorporated. He escaped down an alley and went through the back door of an apartment building and raced up the steps intending to escape over the roof tops, but when he came out on top, there was this unclothed broad - excuse me, Pilar, - chick sunbathing. They looked at each other and I guess it was love at first sight because he started taking off his clothes. I forgot to mention that as he ran up the steps, he smelled smoke and noticed that the building was on fire. Anyway, he placed his clothes next to her mat but held on to his sixty-pound Swedish automatic disintegrator pistol. They fell into each other’s arms and kept twisting around on the mat so that Ad could get a shot at his pursuers who were not only coming through the roof, but were also on top of the adjacent buildings. To make a long story short, under the circumstances, Ad was ade-



quate.”

“My Buddha, what happened next - were they both killed?” Kang pretended he he wanted to know.

“Oh, no,” Larry explained. “As Ad’s pursuers came onto the roof, their automatic carbines blazing, Ad shot two of them and then calmly picked off the three who were banging away from the other buildings. When the fire department arrived, he picked up the gorgeous bronze blond and, both nude, jumped into the net below.” Then he concluded sadly, “But from that day on he was known as ‘Inadequate Ad’.”

“I thought you said he was adequate,” Kang protested.

“He was that first time, but remember I said ‘under the circumstances’. According to the girl, and this came out a long time later at the divorce trial, she testified that they were married a few hours after the escape from the pursuers and the fire, and that Ad was inadequate from that moment on.”

“That doesn’t follow. Why?” and Kang really wanted to know this time.

“You see, the excitement the first time had so stimulated him that he could never settle for less,” Larry explained. “Ad’s conditioning had been fixed. They tried again and again but couldn’t quite duplicate exactly the roof, the shooting, the fire, the smoke and the sirens screaming up; so, of course, without these few embellishments, Ad was inadequate.”

“That doesn’t sound like a detective story” Pilar said. “It’s more like a sticky sweet, sentimental, romantic novel and the hero, who just happened to be a detective, was over-stimulated in his job.”

The direct line from Borgia’s buzzed, and Kang flipped the speaker on. It was Giuseppe announcing that Cole’s luggage and ducks had arrived, wanting to know what he should do with them. Then without waiting for a reply he suggested Lucretia cook them for dinner that night. Everyone agreed and Cole said he’d pick up his luggage later. Lucretia would prepare the ducks Italian style, and it was decided the birds would come out of the oven at seven-thirty sharp. Giuseppe was firm. “That means that everybody has to be ready to eat; no delay for another picon punch.”

Pilar had a prior date, but said she could postpone it until nine o’clock if it would be all right for Virgent Eddington to meet her at the restaurant. Kang and Larry suggested she break the date but Cole insisted she should keep it, going so far as to propose postponing the dinner until another night. But since it was the best night for the

Borgias it was decided to let the arrangements stand. After the meeting broke up, Pilar called Virgent Eddington and then left to go home and dress.

Hang and Larry left together to go downstairs to the bar where they would meet Cole later.

Cole went to his office to record his report to Myron Brown. He could only report the lack of results, but wanted to hold out hope that something would fit together, some clue, clearing or condemning the ship of the smuggling charge.

Trying to construct his thoughts, Cole found that Virgent Eddington kept intruding. Where the hell had she found a guy with a name like that? It was obvious that for all her tolerance of the three of them, her ribald comments, and her early marriage, she was completely naive about men. Maybe she was impressed by his looks, but the guy could turn out to be a nonentity and quite possibly queer as well. But to hell with it; it was her life and he had problems enough of his own without worrying about hers.

Before switching on the recorder Cole decided to call Aunt Hester. She answered right away and Cole decided she must be in the kitchen.

"Hello, who is it?" she said much too loudly. Then there was a crash. It could have been a couple of pans or one of Millie Peterson's oversized cookie sheets.

"It's me," Cole said.

"Oh, Coleridge," her voice rose even higher. "You always catch us when we're the busiest. How are you, dear? Where are you? When will you be home?"

Cole expected the multitude of questions and knowing she wouldn't wait for an answer, he didn't.

"Where are you calling from?" she asked. "We'll expect you at six for supper. I suppose you're at the public meeting place you call an apartment. Well, your rooms here are ready as always and I don't see why you don't spend more time here or give up that dreadful apartment altogether." Aunt Hester had only seen his apartment once in two years but he didn't dispute her point.

"I called to tell you I'm back," Cole said. "And also to let you know I'll be having dinner at Borgias' tonight; but I'll be home to sleep and unload some luggage."

"Practically the only things left here are your diaries," Aunt Hester said. That wasn't true, at least half his clothes were there.

"I'm going to make a report now, a case I'm working on. I like to keep my confidential stuff there where nobody can get at it."

"Shall I wait up for you?"



“No, Aunt Hester, it could be late.”

“I’m sure it could. What have you been up to?”

Cole explained much of his dilemma in a broad outline. This was his secondary purpose in calling. It was sometimes uncanny how Aunt Hester could go to the heart of a problem and point the way to a solution. Then there were other times when her responses only very tenuously touched the subject they were discussing.

“It sounds like you’re a detective now,” she said. “I think that’s fascinating.”

“You might say that,” Cole admitted.

“Is it dangerous?” she asked. “What I know about detectives they’re always getting beat up and left in a locked basement someplace or down a back alley. I hope you’re taking proper precaution and I don’t think you should work at night. That’s always the time when bad things happen to detectives. Crooks perform their dire deeds in the dark.” She became alliterative and non sequitur.

“If they only perform in the dark, how am I going to catch them in the daytime?” Cole wanted to know.

“That’s just it, you have to trap them. They’re not used to the day and you’re not used to the night,” she said with some doubt in her voice about the latter.

“I’ll take precautions,” Cole promised. He remembered the time she had sent him to the doctor to learn how to take precautions. She wasn’t giving him much help but it was hard to head her off now that she knew something of what he’d been up to.

“Coleridge, maybe you should stop being a detective,” she worried. “I remember your uncle used to go off half cocked and sometimes I think you take after him.” Cole knew she was referring to his Uncle Abner her late husband, and Uncle Abner was no blood relation. But this had never prevented the comparison.

“Did you know we found a rat in the basement? It was under the wing where your rooms are. Carl killed it and we buried it out back near the big lemon tree. I don’t know if we should have done that but Carl said it would only help the trees. Do you think he’s right? I’ve always heard that rats carry the bubonic plague. I might never be able to use another one of those lemons.”

“I wouldn’t worry about using the lemons,” Cole said. “He could only be carrying the plague if he just got off a ship and why would a rat climb all the way up there if he just got off a ship?” Now he realized he was involved in her problems as sometimes happened.

“Coleridge,” she started hesitantly, “I know that you’ll be careful and I know you’re going to go ahead and do whatever you have to do.” Her voice almost broke

on this last, but then she came on very calm. "If I had to guess how sailors or the kind of people you describe smuggle in drugs off a ship I'd have to say they'd do it the most practical way. I don't believe there's a secret compartment in the bottom of the ship where a frog man swims under and retrieves the drugs, and I don't believe it's blown out through those pipes with the clay. There's too many complications and too many chances to go wrong. All you have to do is think of the most practical way these men have to get their stash off the ship." Cole could tell she had read something about drugs.

"It's probably something very simple and right in plain view. I just read about a man, a big scientist, who put a gyroscope inside an eggshell and sealed the shell all back again so that no one could tell. After he used a magnet to start the gyro the egg wouldn't lay on its side any more. It always hopped up and stood on one end or the other. A lot of people saw it and said it was a marvel, but I don't hold with that. I think Christopher Columbus, and he was a sailor, was a lot smarter. When out of the blue someone asked him to stand an egg on end, he just tapped the egg gently until he'd made a round crushed base and set the egg right up on a polished table."

Cole wasn't sure the table had been polished but he did remember the story and decided Aunt Hester might have something. But what?

"Were you thinking about having home baked beans, stuffed pork chops and homemade cherry pie for supper tomorrow night?" he asked.

"Well, yes, we had thought of it," she said. "But it seemed too much just for us."

"I'll be there," Cole said with a warm note in his voice.

## *Chapter VIII*

When Pilar arrived at Borgia's private parlour, it was apparent that the party had been under way for some time. Mario, the head waiter, led her through the plush dining area to the quiet elegance of the small room reserved for intimate dinner parties. The elegance was still there, but the quiet was being shattered.

"The crabs from right down on the wharf," Giuseppe was waving his arms, "are the best from any place on the Coast."

"I don't know about that," Kang objected, "Some of those northwest crabs are pretty good, especially Dungeness."

"Have you ever had Florida rock crab?" Larry wanted to know.

"Hell, I'm talking about any coast. They're tender and sweeter than Alaska King crab, too."

Kang had switched back to Cole. "Statistics don't prove crap. There's no way to tell who was the best; Ruth, Mays, or Aaron."

Cole took a drink of punch and eyed Kang. "I don't know a damn thing about baseball, but you take your pick of the three, and I'll prove you're wrong."

"How the hell are you going to prove I'm wrong when you just admitted and I agree, you don't know a damn thing about baseball."

"O.K., O.K., who's your pick?" Cole said stubbornly.

"What's the use. I just told you statistics don't mean anything. There's no way you can prove who was best."

"All right, if you won't pick, we'll have Giuseppe decide. Hey Giuseppe, you're a baseball nut."

Giuseppe turned slowly from his argument on shellfish.

"That's a damn lie. I'm a smart baseball fan."

"That's what I mean," said Cole hastily. "Who was the best ball player of all time, Babe Ruth, Willie Mays or Hank Aaron?"

"That's easy." Giuseppe looked knowledgeable.

"O.K., Giuseppe, if it's so easy, why don't you pick?" Cole demanded.

Giuseppe turned slowly to Larry. "San Francisco shrimp are more tender and sweeter." And then with calm dignity to Cole, "Joe DiMaggio."

Cole looked slightly stunned. "Jesus Christ, that wasn't even the question. You better lay off the grappa." Noticing Pilar by the door he yelled, "Pilar, come on in. You're just in time."

"Really, I feel as though I must have missed something," she said.

Lucretia's strong voice rose above the babel, "The ducks come out of the oven in

five minutes. Giuseppe, bring the vino. Hello, Pilar, you look very beautiful.”

Everyone told Pilar how lovely she looked, then Cole remembering she had a date later that night, decided to have another picon punch.

The table was set with Borgia’s best naperery, real silverware, and the finest china from Japan. Five minutes after Lucretia had made her announcement she came again from the kitchen followed by Mario and Tony carrying trays loaded with smoking golden ducks. No hors d’oeuvres had been served, no soup or fish, just succulent ducks, crisp and juicy, accompanied by a huge platter of buttered garden asparagus spears, a dish of mixed vegetables including fresh zucchini, spinach, and lima beans, and steaming baked potatoes seasoned with butter, salt and pepper. There were round flat loaves of sourdough bread and more butter.

The vino was a greenish yellow wine with just a hint of sweet tartness. It was volatile in its lightness and exuded a faint fragrance of nasturtiums. Giuseppe bought the total production of a vintner friend located in the Valley of the Moon; taking it from limestone caves when it reached its peak. It was the perfect embellishment for the duck.

Eleven brown birds were eaten, five bottles of wine drunk, twelve capuccinos sipped amidst stacatto and mostly incoherent conversation, before Virgent Eddington arrived to take Pilar away.

“Come in. Have a glass of wine,” Giuseppe shouted.

“I’ve got another duck warming.” Lucretia left through the swinging doors to the kitchen.

“I’ll bring a cappuccino,” Mario said as he placed the third round on the table.

“Oh, no, please, thank you, I don’t care for a thing.” Virgent Eddington protested.

“You’ve gotta have something,” Giuseppe was firm.

Lucretia came back from the kitchen, “Duck will be ready in two minutes.” She smiled at Pilar and sat next to her.

“Well, if you insist, just a cup of coffee,” Virgent relented.

“With brandy,” yelled Giuseppe as Mario left for the bar.

“No. No brandy. I really don’t drink.”

“You’ll like it,” Giuseppe said. “Sit down. This brandy was made especially for me by my friend.”

Virgent Eddington sat uneasily and looked helplessly at Pilar.

After Kang shook hands, he said in surprise, “Hey, you’re Eddie Eddington,

'Heady Eddie,' the control pitcher." He turned to everyone with his discovery. "Eddie pitched us to a conference championship."

"I saw your picture in the paper a couple years after we graduated," Larry remembered.

"Yes, I grew up in the Bay Area, and I remember seeing you and Mr. Rain play football and Mr. Shu-li play tennis," Virgent admitted.

Mario placed coffee and brandy in front of Virgent, took the chair beside him and poured a water glass full of wine for himself.

"My, you are so handsome. Pilar told me you are a doctor. I want to lose weight. What should I eat?" Lucretia asked.

Pilar put her arm around Lucretia. "He's a Doctor of Religious Philosophy, and you don't need to lose weight; you have a perfect figure."

"Baseball is much better than football or basketball," Giuseppe said judiciously.

"That's a crock," Larry spoke for the first time in several minutes.

"I don't know anything about baseball except it bores me. The rules should be changed to make it more exciting," Cole insisted sententiously.

"How can you say that?" Larry looked injured. "I like a really tense ball game, nothing to nothing in the last half of the seventh, a runner on second, two out and the league's leading hitter coming to bat. An explosive confrontation like that gives me a chance to go to the john and on the way back pick up a hot dog and a cold beer. Of course, you miss the four balls thrown a yard and a half outside the plate, but if you hurry, you might see the batting champ trot to first base. Man, what a relief a situation like that gives me."

"The rules of baseball have been tested over the years," Virgent explained a little stiffly, "and they formulate a method for playing the most perfect game man has ever conceived. I do know something about baseball, and I wouldn't change any of its physical characteristics, nor revise any of the rules governing it."

"We wouldn't change the rules very much," Cole said, winding up from Larry's encouragement. "But why negate the greatest hitters in the league? Let's give the pitcher and batter both something to think about before and after four balls are issued for an automatic walk."

"That seems like an excellent suggestion," Virgent acknowledged from his eminence as a star of the game, "but how would you accomplish all that with just a small rule change?"

“Make it this way.” Cole was ready now. “When a batter gets four balls he can take first base, or he can insist on being pitched to. If he decides to hit he’s got a new count: four balls and one strike, say. If the pitcher gives up four more balls the batter can take second, or he could refuse second and still insist on being pitched to. As you can see, pretty soon you got a hell of a lot of problems cropping up.

“Maybe he’s got eight balls and two strikes now. O.K. What inning is it? The last of the ninth or just the third? Anyway, when he gets up to sixteen balls and two strikes it’s a home run.”

“That’s a great idea,” Kang enthused, then shook his head. “The only problem, Larry might have to sit through nine exciting innings without a relief.”

“What do you think, Eddie?” Larry approved.

“Well, I can see some merit in the change. It might be an expedient to add a temporary quality of freshness to one or two minor league games, but I can’t understand why you’d want to change a sport that is classical in its concept; that has survived and grown for a hundred years and, especially, to obliterate the meaning of certain statistics that have been compiled over those hundred years.”

“One of the reasons might be that baseball has competitors who aren’t afraid of change to get more excitement,” Cole explained. “But maybe the best reason is that if it doesn’t change, baseball will become a volume of statistics. But then the baseball nut can read statistics for enjoyment.”

“I think you’re exaggerating the importance of the hitter,” Virgent fought back. “What’s wrong with a great hitter setting an all-time record for the greatest number of intentional walks?”

Larry looked stunned. “That’s really a good question,” he said, “and I don’t think it’s possible to explain what’s wrong with it, unless maybe it’s one of those ‘self-evident’ things.”

Cole broke in now that he had unexpected support. “All we’re suggesting is that a great pitcher and a great batter be given a chance to do their thing.”

“Hell, Cole, you’ve been studying baseball,” Kang said. “That’s a rule change that would make sense. What do you think, Eddie?”

Virgent wrinkled his brow, thought deeply and finally admitted he might enjoy a game encompassing such a rule change. Then he pushed back his chair and stood up, saying he and Pilar would have to leave if they were to catch the last half of the concert. Pilar seemed slightly annoyed as she accepted her wrap from Kang.

Lucretia and Giuseppe followed the two through the restaurant and waited while the attendant brought Virgen's car. When they returned to the private dining room, Lucretia was enthusiastic about the lovely couple.

"He looks like a television actor and Pilar looks like an angel." She couldn't bring herself to compare Pilar to an ordinary television star.

"I go to only one college baseball game and he was the pitcher. Why didn't he play professional baseball?" Giuseppe asked.

"I guess he wanted to be a philosopher more," Kang said.

Mario came from the bar with a tray full of green chartreuse.

Larry took one and sipped the throat-burning liquid eyeing Cole. "What did you think of him, Cole? He seemed like a pretty intelligent guy to me."

Cole gulped the green fire and gasped, "There's no question about it the guy's handsome, intelligent, has religious convictions, doesn't drink, smoke or swear. But," he paused looking at the last green drop in the bottom of the glass, "he's just not my kind of people, I think he's an ass."

Kang gave it some thought; Mario laughed aloud; Larry smiled knowingly; Giuseppe was delighted; but Lucretia was confused, then slowly she turned a smile of approval on Cole.

## *Chapter IX*

Pilar Jones wakened slowly. A frown creased her brow as she thought of the night



before. The night should have ended when they left Borgias'. The concert was a bore; Virgent Eddington was a bore. What was that silly story that his car wouldn't start and he'd insisted that even if they spent the night together in the queen-sized bed, sans nightclothes, she would be completely safe in his care. Something about not contaminating her spiritual soul with thoughts or suggestions of sin. Anyway on the second try the car had started. He thought perhaps some force greater than they understood had caused the engine to fail the first time. How could he be a doctor of philosophy and such a little boy? she wondered. She was sure Cole would have taken her in his arms and carried her to bed. But why hadn't Cole ever?

Yawning and stretching, she moved her body in a slow twisting roll, emerging to stand on a small rose-red carpet. Shaking the pillow, she fluffed and placed it deftly under the counterpane, making adjustments to match the undisturbed two-thirds of the bed. The bath carried through the color theme, including a mirrored dressing table topped with Italian rose marble. Pilar showered, washed her hair, dried body and hair with a giant pink towel, combed her curls in place, brushed her teeth vigorously, gargled mouthwash, selected clothes for the day and dressed in fifteen minutes. She left the apartment, walked to the small foreign car and headed for the center of the city to breakfast with Cole.

As she pressed the button for the Skyroom elevator, Cole whipped around a corner, turned all smiles when he saw her.

"How the hell can you look like that so early in the morning?" he wanted to know.

Pilar's head came up and she said rather haughtily, "No one looks their best at this time of day."

"That's what I meant," Cole laughed. "How can you look so perfect at seven-thirty in the morning?"

Pilar was silent but her pleasure came through loud and clear.

At the top floor the maitre d' led them to a window table overlooking the patchy-fogged bay. The sun was breaking through dissipating the stringy wisps.

"Before we talk business, what time does the birthday party start tomorrow?" Pilar asked. Larry's nephew and Pilar's niece had seventh birthdays four days apart. R.C.S.&J., Inc. had volunteered a joint celebration with a day at the park, picnic, games, and maybe the zoo.

"Ten o'clock. Larry's bringing Larry II with him," Cole said. "I'm sorry this is a little disorganized but I assumed you'd bring Erica at the same time. Since they're



both getting new rackets they can bat the ball around while we play doubles. I thought you'd scheduled the picnic for two o'clock."

"I did, and that's fine with me. Erica will be happy, but what time is Kang's match?"

"It was his suggestion we start at ten to give him a warmup before he plays at noon. He shouldn't have any trouble winning his first match by one-thirty at the latest."

"He's seeded three?"

"That's right."

When the four of them first started doubles play, they'd switched partners after each set but eventually Kang and Pilar paired against Larry and Cole.

It was still an unequal situation. Kang was the top player and Pilar was probably next in all-around ability. Cole and Larry played an aggressive game and could often overpower Pilar's more fluid but less violent returns. Kang and Pilar had generally won, but recently Cole and Larry had been playing a psych game trying to at least break even.

"It should be a great day," Cole said seriously as they waited to order. "I've been working on my backhand and I'm really getting a little afraid of it; it's carrying a lot of top-spin and has an almost vicious take-off after it hits the court. Maybe you ought to concentrate more on my forehand. I wouldn't want anyone to get hurt - especially a girl."

"Yes, I'll warn Kang to be careful too," Pilar said. "But we came to breakfast to eat and discuss whether I should accept my new offer."

"I don't like the order you put things in," Cole said. "Maybe we should discuss your new job first and then we'll know whether or not we should eat. I was merely cautioning you on the tennis thing," he shrugged and shifted to the reason for their breakfast date. "As I understand it, you're being asked to help develop a gun that will make one man equal in destructive power to an old-fashioned broadside of eighteen-inchers."

The waiter stood with poised pencil until Cole finished and then they ordered breakfast. While they waited Pilar explained the request for her services.

She had met a classmate in the ceramic laboratory at McWhorter Brown. Cecil Glass had the highest achievement record in design engineering at the University. He and Pilar had completed one joint project: reconstructing support crutches for disabled veterans. These crutches were unique in that they could be motivated by

the muscles of the upper arm and shoulders exclusively, leaving the lower arms and hands free. Legless veterans with artificial limbs who had used these crutches had learned to play games requiring standing and moving and the free use of both arms and hands. A side benefit had accrued to blind cripples enabling them to hold a leash in one hand and a tap-cane with the other.

When she had met Glass again at McWhorter Brown, he had not given Pilar much detailed information as to what he was doing. She had learned that ceramics, metallurgy and nuclear physics had something to do with it, and that he was commissioned to design a light weapon that could deliver a nuclear missile. The weapon would be held and directed by one man, but it was necessary that his arms and hands be free, and it was in this area that Pilar's help was needed.

Cole, as the head of R.C.S.&J. Corporation, had been given security clearance, she explained, since she wouldn't accept the work without the corporation's sanction. She had met with Glass several times and now knew all she needed to know to make a decision. The firing piece would weigh approximately ten pounds and would be strapped to the shoulders above the chest's normal movement. It could be pointed by sight, using electronically absorbed light waves completely enclosed and reflected within a binocular-like gadget affixed to the eyes and wired to the gun. With this device the head was moveable in any direction, but the vision within the electronic binoculars would always be a wide-angled panoramic view along the barrel of the piece and through an egg-shaped and hairline-crossed sight.

The target would be pinned at the intersection of the hairlines by body adjustment for direct visual firing. The shell case and nuclear bullet, the complete cartridge, weighed slightly over six ounces. It would be propelled from the muzzle of the gun in the usual manner, but, within a minimal measurement of time after firing, the energy from the slowed fission of a new atom-structured rocket fuel would be released to impart the real force propelling the nuclear bullet as much as fifty thousand yards in an unerring path. This micronuclear shell could be adjusted to explode on impact, set to release within a time-distance factor, or, equipped with a minuscule sensor device, it could be dialed to follow and expend its terrifying energy within a predetermined proximity of a target mass.

These methods of triggering its nuclear explosive power would make the weapon effective not only against visual objects but also those unseen dangers known by various technologies to exist beyond the contours of the earth or high within the earth's thinning atmosphere. By using the time-difference setting, the

bullet could be exploded above the ground target and by dialing the following and proximity sensor, it would be cataclysmically effective against aircraft or fleets of aircraft.

Auxiliary lightweight equipment would consist of a tripod for stabilizing the piece and a circular canister to insert in the magazine for rapid fire. New and old concepts would prevail in this modern weapon, but the predominate change would be the destructive and coercive power such a weapon would give one man. The terror in a simple little single six-ounce bullet would be equivalent to the potential holocaust trapped in a hundred tons of TNT. Pilar concluded by saying that, "For closer work bullets of less destructive power could be fashioned."

"That's very interesting, even if it does sound like the last weapon one that will not only transform an enemy into glowing vapor, but could simultaneously atomize the user." Cole pondered a moment longer. "It seems like a sort of senseless piece of equipment for a nation to want but if you're asking me should you go ahead and help in its design, I'd say, 'yes'."

"You know, just talking about it scares me." Pilar was grave. "I'm not sure that I should get involved in something so final. Do you really think I should?"

"It's your decision and it should be made on what you think you should do, not what I think. But you haven't thought about it yet; you've merely expressed fear and uncertainty based on feelings. I'll help you think your decision if you wish."

"Go right ahead. Where do we start thinking?"

"Well, the weapon is already a fact. Your knowledge and skill will help it to become more efficient, but withholding them won't nullify its existence. If you don't help, someone else will; admittedly this someone doesn't have to be you. You don't have to burden your conscience but, again, and this is the real question, how does salving your conscience solve anything?" Cole took a quick sip of water and when Pilar didn't respond continued, "To put it in perspective, this is merely one more weapon in the arsenal. We know the bad uses to which it can be put. How do we know it won't be put to a good use, or be used defensively for our own or mankind's protection, if you want to call that a good use." Cole paused then felt compelled to go on. "Was it bad when prehistoric man picked up a rock or a club and used it against his predators? If he hadn't discovered the club, the spear, the bow and arrow, it's probable we wouldn't be here. Anyway, here's the food, and it's for damn sure we need the energy to think up all these craziest things."

It was apparent that Pilar was not convinced completely but still without com-

ment she turned to the food.

There was crisp bacon and soft, fluffy scrambled eggs, sourdough muffins toasted and hot with dripping butter, and a choice of orange marmalade, strawberry preserves or red-raspberry jam. Cole ordered coffee and Pilar milk. She loaded a warm buttered muffin with orange marmalade, strawberry preserves and red raspberry jam and took a bite as Cole shuddered. Then she washed it all down with half the milk, saying, "Man needed weapons to survive his early environment, but damn it these weapons were turned against other men. You don't believe man killing man is necessary, do you?"

"I believe we will someday live without resorting to violence, but we haven't learned to do this yet."

"You talk as though it's a learning process. Why wouldn't an international law against war be the starting point?"

"Sorry, I over-simplified it. It isn't only learning, it's also a matter of genetics. Legislation against violence, as against any other human frailty, is worse than useless if mankind instinctively or with reason, right or wrong, believes that violence will secure for it whatever it seeks."

"Then you'd add controlled breeding along with education as a substitute for legislation?" Pilar asked with incisive analysis, keeping her comments to a minimum so as not to disturb her breakfast.

"Let's leave breeding to the vagaries of natural selection, and I'm all for unrestricted vagaries." Pilar ignored the ribald remark but secretly thought it funny. "Right, education is better than legislation, except that too often propaganda is substituted for truth. Everybody is being stuffed with all kinds of bull, so intelligent sifting of fact from fiction, true knowledge from propaganda, is a must. Too many so-called educated people are merely repositories of accumulated propaganda, some facts and some fiction dispensed by our educational institutions. Contrary to popular belief, only a very few people have the intelligence, plus the desire, to think creatively and go beyond the junk knowledge they've stored. We should at the very least try to add just a little to the world's true cache of information." Watching Pilar eat, Cole began to think some more about natural selection. "Damn it, you consume food so effortlessly that I was distracted from the point I was going to make."

Pilar spread more jam, etc. on her muffin and Cole, fascinated, watched, then took a bite of scrambled eggs and a swallow of coffee. "We were thinking about the

weapon,” he said slowly. “There are those who believe that the preservation, and ‘preservation’ is the key word, of their ideological or religious views, or of their economic well-being, is worthy of killing. These are just the mild people who only wish to defend. They have a less violent nature than some others; they merely have a self-preservation instinct to kill. You and I are probably included in this number two group. The really tough-minded killers are the number one group, those who aren’t secure without imposing, remember ‘imposing’ their ideology, their religion, or their economic prerogatives on the rest of us. I don’t know which group is more numerous but these number one bastards have so far been the most potent even though they haven’t always won. History records almost exclusively the conflicts between these two groups. Their affinity for conflict separates them from the third group: this is the bunch that will supposedly inherit the earth. They are not only mild, they are meek, and assumedly they will eventually supplant ‘the age of force’ with ‘the age of reason.’ So far, historians have practically ignored them, either because their numbers are so small or because they have accomplished so little.”

“Then I’ll add to their number,” Pilar said firmly, “I’m resigning from group two and applying for membership in group three.”

“But you can’t resign, any more than you can resign from the human race and become an antelope, - I almost said a tigress,” he grinned, “but that wouldn’t fit the allegory of meekness.”

“How do you know I couldn’t be mild and meek?”

“You may already be mild and meek. I merely said you couldn’t become it if you weren’t. Search yourself for the truth. If your Erica were threatened with kidnapping and a life of drugs and prostitution, even though she herself might enjoy such a life, would you kill if you were sure this was the only way to prevent it?”

“She wouldn’t enjoy it, and there might be other ways of preventing it.” Pilar slowed her eating perceptibly.

“Damn it. We’ve already established the facts; there is no other way.” Cole frowned. “You can’t with reason learn about yourself if you’re unwilling to accept mental suppositions. It is true that Erica can’t be saved without your intervention, and remember, she might not want to be saved. What are you going to do with the cocked and loaded pistol in your hand? Will you save her from a life of drugs and prostitution and save her even from herself?”

Pilar sat rigidly for a moment and then with a slight tremor in her voice said, “I’d shoot the son-of-a-bitch.”

“That’s what I thought, you’re in group two, if we can still classify you as only mildly violent. But don’t worry about it. You’re probably in tune with most people and they aren’t always aware of their savage nature.”

Pilar was merely picking at her food now.

“But to go on with the gun,” Cole said. “How do we know the creation of this ultimate weapon for one man will product more aggressive violence? Hell, maybe its very existence will render it uselessness. To exaggerate a point, you’ve already tacitly agreed that prehistoric man picking up a club and attaching a rock to the end of it for protection probably made a good invention. At least it worked for his survival in a savage world of naturally better-equipped carnivores. His brain and mechanical skill created this first weapon and gave him the means to proliferate and conquer. When he turned his weapons against his own kind, you say this was bad, without knowing what his alternatives were. You could be right, but to continue thinking about it, maybe our natural enemies haven’t changed that much even though man himself is the only premeditated violent killer of man. Nature sometimes kills violently but without premeditation. Perhaps weather is our major natural violent killer. But maybe today we need to most intelligently control nature’s subtle side that may be killing us a hell of a lot faster than its catastrophies. O.K., we’ve been talking about earthly things of which we have some knowledge, but how do we know our final violent enemy has been overcome? Are we sure there are no other forces in the universe to obstruct our existence? Let’s assume we’re aware of all the dangers that exist on earth, although we haven’t investigated every crevice and peak and all the depths of every ocean. We still can’t be sure that our questing for an ultimate weapon won’t eventually save us from an enemy outside of our small world. Nor again can we be sure that the very ludicrousness of this gun’s incredible power of obliteration in the hands of one man won’t help the user to gain ‘the age of reason’.”

Pilar looked up brightly, “You know, I’d like another muffin and another glass of milk.”

Cole was uncomprehending for a moment, bent forward with the thrust of his argument. Then shrugging his shoulders, he signaled the waiter.

“I take it you think I should go ahead and work with Cecil on this ultimate weapon in case we’re invaded from outer space?”

“What I said was that you should think about it before you decide for yourself. I was merely giving examples of thinking, which might or might not coincide with yours.” Cole shook his head and adjusted his eyes. “How the hell can you eat so



much and still keep your shape?”

“I actually eat very little,” Pilar said, finishing the last muffin. Then she insisted on paying her share of the bill. Cole accepted, splitting the bill in half and charging her a dollar more for the extras she’d ordered. As they left the restaurant, it was decided to leave Pilar’s car for servicing and a wash. They picked up Cole’s car and headed for Number 10 Black Pearl Road. Cole maneuvered through a section of the city where many of the buildings were being demolished to make room for sterile structures of concrete, steel and aluminum. The narrow streets were clogged with trucks and stacked building materials. The early morning motor and pedestrian traffic was slow. Cole missed people, trucks, and stacks a hair closer than Pilar had experienced and at the same time watched the construction in progress and the girls clumping to work.

Pilar was diverted only by the people; their dress, the personal animation or lack of it in mobile or slack faces, the body movements and the gestures. A girl waiting at the curb squeezed a lighter, lit a cigarette, expelled smoke from her nostrils, released her thumb extinguishing the flame, and dropped the cold metal in her purse. “How does it happen you’ve never smoked?” Pilar asked suddenly.

Cole tore his eyes from the bouncing bubbles and undulating hips weaving their fantasies and with some astonishment asked, “What?”

“I was just wondering why you never smoked.”

“What gave you the idea I never smoked? I used to smoke but I quit.”

“Were you worried about your health?”

“Not particularly.”

Pilar waited a moment. “I’d really like to know. Why did you quit?”

“I quit when I found I couldn’t get along without them.”

She thought for a moment, “Is that supposed to make sense?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Well go on.”

“One time in the mountains I ran out of cigarettes. I worried a day and a half before I got back where I could buy some. You know, just feeling that thick, fat, slick pack gave me a sensuous pleasure. I opened the damn thing and smelled for maybe five minutes. Then threw them away.” He didn’t say any more and Pilar waited.

Finally she said, “But you still haven’t explained why you threw them away and quit.”

“I didn’t want to be controlled,” he said. Cole wondered why she’d asked that

particular question at this particular moment; her mind was becoming more complex, instead of less, with his greater exposure.

Pilar thought: he's revealed in small inconsequential things, but that isn't exactly true; he thinks and talks too far away from the present. Maybe I don't understand because he's too direct and too detailed about objects and too terse about himself. 'I quit when I found I couldn't get along without them.'

"If a person should resist doing things that might control him," she said, "then I don't agree with producing nuclear weapons that might control me. Why should I help to develop this one? And also isn't it inconsistent with our corporate purpose?"

"I don't think so. We're supposed to meld and learn; to be positive and constructive; to win while playing within the rules of the game. Hell, if you can force everybody to play by your rules, then you can change the rules around and make yourself a winner by tailoring them to fit your weaknesses. Remember the difference. We don't know as much about this new weapon as I know about smoking cigarettes. At the moment we know very little. If the government is developing a nuclear gun to be operated by one man then I think they're making a hell of a mistake, maybe the last big mistake. This whole thing seems illogical, but we don't know enough about it. If it is as we understand it, then perhaps the politicians, the generals and bureaucrats don't foresee the danger of such an individual weapon, but remember the 'if.'" He paused and looked at her. "What good would it do us not to participate, or for you as an individual not to lend your services? You might feel better morally, but how would this affect the gun's eventual being? Einstein was that super but he too had no idea where his creative thinking, his new math would lead. Should his thoughts have been repressed? I'll bet the future will record benefits far in excess of the harm made possible by his theories. But to your problem: if you withhold your services, maybe the weapon won't be as excellently balanced, but it will be just as deadly. Sometimes we intellectuals - excuse me, I didn't mean to include myself - you scientific-intellectuals believe that by withdrawing your individual knowledge and creative ability, you can change man's aggressive nature, his selfishness and greed. That's just not true. His nature hasn't changed yet and all we can hope for is that he will eventually begin to reason that wholesale killing in the nuclear age could engulf him. Probably for that reason the bomb has only been used to end the one war. But the threat of the big one hasn't stopped little wars, maybe this small baby will. It's yet to be determined if world wars are obsolete but



everybody seems a little more cautious. If Einstein was the indirect cause for the deaths at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then he was the indirect cause for ending the war and the probable reduction of over-all killing. Again, remember it's all merely speculation, and so far only death is positive. Our short life has almost no positive pegs; it consists of probables and if you don't learn early to accept a life of probabilities then you're eligible for a sick head. Too many people blow their minds because they insist upon an exact past, a perfect present, and a known and secure future. Forget it. It doesn't exist except in the minds of dangerous fanatics or your average man looking for a place to hide. Look askance at the positive view; it's the one to consider longest, to question most fully. Really, the laws of probability are much more appealing than the fanatic's advocacy and selling of the one true religion, the postulated economic system, the axiomatic government or the triple-A rated blue chip stock. The only thing you can be sure of is that all things are changing and that your next breath will be somewhat different from your last; in fact, it may be your last."

Pilar shuddered. "I like to be sure of things; then I can forget them and go on to something else. It's a good feeling to know the sun will rise in the morning."

"What do you think the odds are that the sun won't come up tomorrow? A million, a billion, a trillion to one? The odds just have to be established. The sun might explode before morning, not very likely according to our best astronomers, or a stellar collision, or what about the earth's rotation being altered by some stupidity of man? The great probability is that the sun will come up tomorrow, but there isn't any real doubt that someday it won't. Think of the money you could make if you could predict the sun's failure to rise tomorrow." Cole gave a short laugh thinking of all that money in a gelid blue world or in a vaporized red-purple glow or maybe even in a solid black hole with compressed matter at tens of thousands of tons per cubic inch.

"What are you thinking about?" Pilar asked.

"I was just thinking that it's your decision and I'm sure whatever you decide will be O.K. with Kang and Larry. Sorry, I should have said I'll give you a hundred to one they'll agree."

"Then there is some doubt in your mind; they may not agree?"

"Right. They may not. Do you want the odds?"

"No, I just wondered if you'd back with cold cash the odds you pulled out of the air. Knowing you would, I too am sure they'll go along with whatever I

decide.”

They parked the car, unlocked the door at No. 10 Black Pearl Road, climbed to the second floor, and were alone in the silent outer room. They didn't go to their offices but sat lonely in the stillness and then ordered coffee from the restaurant below to occupy the waiting for Kang and Larry.

When the coffee arrived, Pilar brought it on an enameled tray donated by Kang. She poured a cup, added cream and set it on the low table before Cole. He wasn't too conscious of the burn when he swallowed. He was watching as she sat opposite and filled her own cup. The crossing of sinuous legs reminded him of a beautiful boa constrictor he had once seen winding along the smooth branch of a tropical tree. She no sooner became comfortable than she untwined them and fountained up to go to the bar for sugar. He wasn't sure, but had the impression of seeing pubic hair beneath the flowing material molding her thighs. He wondered what she wore under. Moving away from him the curve and crease of her rounded rear rippled and the burning coffee he drank had even less effect. On her return, carrying the sugar, he was positive that the two points moving with each stride under the thin cloth couldn't possibly be entrapped in a brassiere. It was only after her question was repeated the third time that Cole became aware of the sound of her voice.

“I'm not too sure about that,” he said vaguely, and when he noticed that she expected him to go on, he continued with more force, “I'd have to think about it for a while.”

Pilar stirred a half teaspoon of sugar into her coffee and then a little worriedly asked, “Are you feeling well? You sound like something's bothering you.”

“No, I feel great - nothings bothering me. Why do you ask?” There she goes again.

“Well, nothing in particular, except I asked you three times if you wanted sugar in your coffee and you said you weren't sure, you'd have to think about it for a while. I just thought a simple yes or no would have been more like you.”

Cole recovered fairly rapidly. “There are many questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. I didn't want any sugar in my coffee, but at the moment I was thinking very positively about something, and I just didn't feel like giving a negative answer. I didn't even feel like maybe. All I wanted to do was think about it for a while. What have you got against thinking? That's just what we've been talking about.”

Pilar's perplexed expression was changing to an amused smile but he was saved

further explanation by the noise of Larry and Kang coming up the stairs. Cole got up. "Hi, I've got some mail to look at. Pilar wants to talk to you two. If you want me for anything, I'll be in my office." He walked stiffly to the door, entered, and closed it softly.

There was a small stack of mail on his desk. He riffled through the envelopes and selected one to read. He slit it open, and a card attached to a form letter dropped out. He glanced at it briefly, noting the contents and getting the gist of the communication before he picked up the mike and buzzed Joanne at the Service Center. Joanne's husky purr brought back visions of Pilar, but Cole didn't want to get into that mood again so he said quickly, "Hi, Joanne, I'm in kind of a hurry. Could you take a letter for me right away?"

"Certainly, Cole," Joanne cooed this time. "Just a moment, I'll get my equipment together."

He could see her throwing her arms back, stretching the tight sweater across bulging boobs as she casually reached for pencil and pad. He jerked his mind away from the image, asking, "All set?"

"Yes, of course, Cole. Go right ahead whenever you're ready. I certainly am."

He thought for a moment about the machined letter and the computerized bill that he had paid almost a year ago.

"This will be another letter to the Ace Corporation - you have copies of all the correspondence?"

"Oh, yes."

Cole dictated:

Dear Mac:

Hello, there. I hope I won't offend you by using the familiar but after our eleven months of correspondence, I feel I know you well enough. But to get right to business. You were quite correct in rejecting this check for sixteen dollars and thirty-eight cents. This check is a copy of the one I sent in full payment of the bill, and on the reverse side, it shows that the original check was cashed by Ace Corporation. I had a hard time finding this cancelled check as my personal files aren't too well kept. It was submitted to you as incontrovertible evidence of payment. Don't get me wrong. I'm sure the problems we've had for almost a year

now haven't been caused by you.

It's those pin-headed sons-of-bitches that you work for that have been stuffing you full of a bunch of god damned lies about me. Perhaps your sensors aren't set for you to scan the back of checks so that you can see they have been cashed-in and the bill has been paid.

Anyway, I'm going to return the copy of this cancelled check once more and stress the fact that it isn't the real thing only a copy and it serves as good evidence that the Ace Corporation has received all the money that's coming to them. If this is finally accepted as proof of payment by the knot-headed bastards you work for, I trust it won't prevent us from keeping in touch. I recall, the only thing that really bugged you in our long relationship was when you accused me of mutilating one of your cards. As I explained at the time, all I can say is that I read your instructions very carefully about not folding, bending or spindling, and if the card wasn't in perfect shape when you received it, it was either the fault of the United States Post Office, or those mealy-mouthed moronic mothers at Ace.

As I say, if this thing finally gets settled, let's not lose touch. We've spent too much time, thought, electrical energy and money on postage to just forget.

I shall be looking forward to hearing from you without the sixteen dollar and thirty-eight cent bill coloring our relationship and I will remain your friendly correspondent, but piss on the Ace Corporation.

Happy punch-card.

Cole Rain

"Thanks, Joanne, I'll talk to you later," Cole said with relief and hung up.

Disregarding the rest of the mail he went back to the living room lounge. He wasn't surprised to learn that Pilar's participation in the development of the controversial nuclear gun had been sanctioned by Larry and Kang, but hit a low point when he was told she had left to keep an appointment with Cecil Glass. They suggested Borgia's later for lunch but he wanted to get away and excused himself to go

look at sail boats. For some time he had been considering buying a boat so he could sail along the Coast and explore the remote beaches of Baja California. Just before he left, Larry handed him a note from Pilar.

Cole -

Your Aunt Hester phoned and I assumed she wished to talk with you, but it came about that I was the object of her call and have been invited to tea Sunday afternoon - just the two of us - so we can have 'girl talk'. She's such a dear and she did talk about you! She said you'd be home for dinner tonight and were staying in your old rooms at least half the time. I'll give you a big boost as though you need it with her. I'm looking forward to Sunday tea.

P.

Why the hell would Aunt Hester be telling Pilar his business. If they wanted girl talk, fine with him. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, Kang called from the top. He climbed back up and went into Kang's office.

"I thought I'd go look at a boat," he said. "What's up?"

"I just got a phone call from a girl," Kang explained.

"Congratulations, I was sure sooner or later girls would start calling a handsome, intelligent tennis player."

"It was the tennis that did it. Otherwise she would have talked to you."

"I'm going to start playing more," Cole vowed.

"Do you want to know about the call?" Kang asked.

"Yes, what does she think of your forehand?"

"It was from someone who knows what you were doing on the SS Crescent Moon."

"What do you mean knows what I was doing?"

"That's it. They know or, at least, think they know."

"Tell me about it."

"After I tell you, you'll say it's a small world," Kang said. "Anyway, it was a girl that was in one of my volunteer tennis clinics. I don't know her or at least I can't remember what she looks like. Maybe when I see her. She's got something to tell that her sister thinks might be a big help to you."

"Who's her sister?"

“That’s what I was going to ask you.”

“Letha?”

“Could be,” Kang said.

“But what’s she got? What else did she tell you?”

“Not really anything, except she lives in one of those communes. I said we’d come to see her and she said she’d like to meet you but she only wanted to talk to me. That’s the mystic connection between teacher and student. It’s got to be Saturday and I told her we’d be in the park. It seems she lives out that way. A lot of them do. She wouldn’t give me her address, said she’d meet us there in the late afternoon after our party is over.”

“How’s she going to find us?”

“I told her the area we’d be in. She says she knows her way around and she’d find us. If she doesn’t remember me any better than I remember her, I just hope there aren’t too many Chinese tennis players in the park.”

“That’s not true that they all look alike,” Cole said. “You look a lot like the late Rudolf Valentino. I saw him on the late, late show.”

“Well, what do you think?” Kang said.

“Fine, let’s meet her, coach. I’ll be glad to get any information she’s got.” Cole thought for a moment shaking his head. “She sounds like she might be afraid, though.”

“Maybe,” Kang admitted. “She didn’t want us to know where she lived and she can only make it late Saturday afternoon.”

“Thanks, Kang, I appreciate your help. I think I’ll go find a boat.”

The tall bare poles crossed with smaller sticks near their top and with lines streaming to the decks below rocked gently at the boat’s mooring and sometimes in unison. Cole shuffled along a floating boardwalk admiring the sleek little boats, coveting each one he saw and thinking of the neglected opportunities to become a sailor he’d wasted in a misspent youth. Coming to the end of the floating dock, he retraced his steps, always examining more closely the boats on the left. The one he liked best was white with a clean scrubbed teak deck and varnished rails. He paused to look her over and then saw a man kneeling and leaning over the side lettering a name on her bows upside down. He moved along a little further to get a better view. As soon as the man finished the letter C, he looked up and saw Cole. “Hi! We decided to change her name.”

"It's a beautiful boat," Cole said admiringly, "I'd like to have one just like her."

"Oh, she ain't mine," he explained, "I'm just dressin' her up for the owner. Would you care to come aboard and take a look around?"

"Yes, I would - if it's O.K."

"It's all right. I live aboard most of the time. The owner only uses her once or twice a month, mostly when there's a race." The man got up and moved back to the stern and Cole hopped over the low gunnel to the deck.

"What are you looking for?" the painter inquired.

"I don't know," Cole admitted. "Something that one person can handle - or maybe two. I want to be able to sail her in the open sea, but mainly to explore along the Pacific Coast." He hesitated. "I don't know what kind of ship that would be."

The man laughed and said, "She won't be a ship; she'll be a boat. But there ain't many around that'll do all the things you want her to."

"I guess not," Cole said. "I've wanted a boat for a long time, but now I'm not really sure about it."

The man got busy cleaning his paint brush and finished by wiping it dry on a much-daubed but otherwise clean piece of cloth. "This ain't the boat for you," he said, "but let's look her over. You'll find a lot of things on her that should be on any good boat."

They toured the little craft and Cotton Hawke explained to Cole the ordinary parts of a sailboat as well as the unusual features of the "Lindmac." Cotton, whose hair looked like a curly ball of the stuff, suggested a cold beer as they completed their inspection of the cabin. Cole sat at a small table and watched the bottles being opened.

"I can always tell a prospective boat buyer," Cotton said as he edged into the seat opposite and placed the two bottles in front of them, "and it'd be my guess that you've got the fever."

"How can you tell?" Cole went along.

"Well, one thing struck me right off. You were real interested in seeing everything, then you got that far-away look in your eye and sort of stared out over the bay, looking right through the Gate to some place and beyond. That's a surer sign than just being interested in the boat because it's what you see out there, all the places she can take you, that brings a man and a boat together." He drank from his bottle and gave Cole an understanding look. "What are you goin' to call her?" he asked.



“Rocinante II,” Cole said.

“The name ain’t the important thing, it’s that you’ve already decided on one,” he paused. “That’s a new one on me, but then boats have some strange ones. Was there a Rocinante number one?”

“No, I never had a boat.”

“I was just wonderin’ about the II,” Cotton explained.

“It was the name of a horse once,” Cole said, “but that was a long time ago.”

Cotton considered this and then predicted, “I figure you’ll have your boat in a couple of weeks.”

“Do you know where I can find what I need?”

“Not right off, but when a man’s decided on the name, he’ll find the boat to fit it. If I run into anything that’ll take you where you want to go, I’ll let you know. I know most of the boats around and I’ll be sure and keep a weather eye out.”

Cole finished his beer, thanked Cotton, left his name, address and phone number and then made his way through the gently rocking boats to his car. When he reached the street he almost turned back towards Borgia’s for lunch. But thinking about Aunt Hester’s stuffed port chops, baked beans and homemade cherry pie, he decided to save up. She was the only female who ever really understood and appreciated him, and he felt the same way about her.

He turned toward Golden Gate Bridge, going someplace and beyond.

## *Chapter X*

Saturday morning, Larry Carver, driving a two-year-old sports convertible, dressed in tennis whites and exposed to the early morning sun, idled down the street on which his sister and her family lived. The turn-of-the-century houses abutted each other and seemed to have a common wall. They were two and three-story structures, neatly kept and painted in a concert of colors; architectural curlicues of another century trimmed the front elevation and were generally embellished by a contrasting shade of the same hue. Parking wasn't easy. If there were any garages for these homes they had come as an afterthought and added on in an era when one car

to a family was considered plenty. Larry was lucky and parked half a block from his relatives' light grey, black-trimmed home. Nephew, Larry II, had gone unnoticed as Larry backed the car and cramped the wheels to the curb to prevent a run-away. Larry II opened the door on the street side and before his uncle could switch off the ignition cried,

"Don't turn her off. I've got my stuff right inside the door; it won't take a minute to get it." He slammed the car door and started running back to the house.

Larry shouted, "Hey, hold it a minute, your mother invited me for breakfast."

Larry II stopped. "I'm not hungry; are you hungry?" he asked. "Let's go now; we can get something to eat at the park. We don't want to keep everybody waiting."

"Nobody will be waiting. It's only eight o'clock and we're not supposed to meet until ten. Anyway, your mother's making something for the party and it won't be ready now. We're only ten minutes from the park, relax."

Larry II grabbed Larry's hand and tried to run with it as they started back up the street. Larry's brother-in-law, Dewey Ridge, met them at the door.

"You've got nobody to blame but yourself. It was your idea. At least, it looks like you picked the right day for it."

"There's only going to be two kids against four grown-ups," Larry grinned. "We'll handle them."

Larry's sister, Delia, coming from the kitchen had just a suggestion of being hurried. "You'll have a wonderful day," she defended. "Larry II has promised to behave and mind everything you say. Isn't that right, honey?" and she put her arm around Larry II's shoulder and pulled him to her.

"I already opened my presents that Mom and Dad got me," Larry II said excitedly. "But I can only take one with me. It flies and we can do it in the park. There's no place to throw it out front; come on in the back yard, I'll show you how it works."

"I'd rather wait till we get to the park where we can do it right," Larry said seriously. "I don't want to spoil it by just seeing it fly a little way in the back yard."

"O.K., I'll show you some jacks I got. Did you ever play jacks? I had some old ones, but these are better, the ball bounces a lot higher. Oh, I forgot. Mom says I can take them because they're small. Come on, I'll show you."

"I was probably the best man at jacks in the whole kindergarten system at one time," Larry told him.

"Not now, dear," Delia said patiently, "we're going to have breakfast and I've

cooked all your Uncle Larry's favorites and yours too."

"I'm not hungry," Larry II said.

"You wait till you see what we're going to have. The biscuits are just ready to come out of the oven, and we're having ham and eggs and grits with redeye gravy."

"All right," Larry II ran to the table, "but we've got to hurry."

Larry looked at his sister in disbelief. "Holy mackerel, Delia, how do you expect me to play tennis and keep up with this guy all day if I start out with a breakfast like that!" But he also moved toward the table. Larry II insisted on sitting beside his uncle, and when the food was served tried to eat as much - but didn't quite make it.

After breakfast, Delia iced the banana cake with a fluffy white frosting and placed fourteen candles in a plastic bag - seven for the side labeled 'Happy Birthday to Larry II' and seven for "Happy Birthday to Erica.' She had thought one big cake would be better than two small ones and had been particularly careful to keep the lettering even and the halves equal. She packed it in a portable cake holder and cautioned Larry on how to carry it, and then at the last moment decided she'd better take it to the car herself. Larry opened the trunk and cleared a space in one corner. Delia placed the container carefully and arranged a small satchel with Larry's change of clothes on one side of it and wedged a bag of golf clubs to protect the other side. Larry II grabbed up a particularly deflated basketball and tried to dribble it, shouting, "Let's shoot some baskets. We can stop at the station and get some air in it."

"You've got enough things to play with," his father said. "I don't think you're going to have time to shoot baskets."

"Sure we will. We're going to be there the whole day and Uncle Larry promised to show me how to shoot one-handed when I got older."

"O.K. If we have time," Larry sighed, "but your Dad's right - we're going to do a lot of things, so climb in and let's go."

Delia, half-frown and half-smile, looked worried. "Are you sure you want to take care of him for the whole day? You know we're going to the delta to visit friends on a houseboat and there's no phone. We probably won't be back before five. Are you sure it's all right?"

Larry rolled his eyes and grinned, "Yes, Sis, it's fine. We'll have a ball."

"But this is the first time You'll be completely responsible for a whole day."

"Yeah. Well, I appreciate your confidence in me, but don't worry. You have fun fishing and we'll have fun with the kids. Oh, and everyone said to be sure and thank

you for baking the cake - especially Pilar.”

“You tell them I enjoyed doing it. I just hope it’s as good as the last one we had when they were all here.”

“Come on, Uncle Larry, we’re going to be late,” Larry II screamed. His father laughed and shook his head and said again, “Well, you asked for it; take care now and we’ll see you later.”

Delia called out as they started to pull away, “Did you put everything in the car to play with? Have you got what you need for tennis?”

“I’m only taking my flying bird and the jacks, and I’ve got my tennis shoes on.”

Both Larrys waved happily as they rolled toward the park to spend the day.

Kang was warming up on the backboard, Cole was lacing tennis shoes, and Pilar and Erica were changing in the ladies’ locker room when the two Larrys arrived. Cole looked up and waved one hand. “Hi, Larry II, Happy Birthday.” Then he noticed Larry II was carrying Larry’s old beat-up racket.

“Did Uncle Larry trade you out of your new racket?”

“This is his racket. Don’t you know where my new one is?” Larry II looked doubtful.

“Yeah, I forgot. Pilar has yours and Erica’s both, she’s keeping them safe.”

Kang caught the bouncing ball on his racket and walked over to the three of them. “Happy Birthday, Larry II, I’m glad to see you like tennis. Some day you can play for the Davis Cup instead of winding up like these two ex-football sausage heads.”

“I can already hit the ball good,” Larry II said. “Uncle Larry told me if I tried hard, you promised to teach me the fine ‘rodents’ of the game.”

“That’s right. We’ll have a class of four and you and Erica will be half the class if you really want to.”

The girls came down the path to the courts, both ready to play. Pilar had made Erica a short slipover dress with laced pants to match. She looked very much like a small edition of her aunt.

Larry II’s clothes for the day were white Levis cut off above the knee and a light-weight tennis shirt, another birthday gift. When he saw the girls he began a series of somersaults on the grass, calling for everyone to watch, and challenging Erica to show what she could do. Erica wandered over and when he sat up to look around she said, “Happy Birthday, Larry II.”

“Oh, yeah, I was supposed to say that to you. Happy Birthday, Erica.” He got up and took her hand and they walked over to the small stack of presents and Erica asked:

“When do we get our tennis rackets?”

“I like surprise parties, but are you sure these kids aren’t undercover agents for the CIA?” Cole wanted to know.

The presents were opened with some delay in getting the rackets to the proper recipient - they were exactly alike. It was explained to the kids they could play tennis on the adjacent court, play with any of the other toys they’d brought along, or watch the grownups’ match. The only rule was that they must stay within the bounds of the one court. The rules were barely listened to, and then they both took their new rackets, grabbed a ball apiece and ran to the far court. The effort in getting this settled seemed to have taken something out of the group.

“Shall we spin for serve?” Kang asked.

Larry looked at Cole. “It really doesn’t make that much difference who starts the serve; why don’t you two go ahead if you think it’s an advantage.”

Kang’s eyebrows raised slightly because this just wasn’t true. It did make a difference who served first. He knew if he took the serve their chances of beating him ranged from poor to none and he didn’t understand Larry’s comment. He finally concluded that since this was a warmup for his benefit, to help his tourney play, they were just being nice giving him more practice on his serve. They should realize that with the competition he had in the first round, he didn’t need any practice. With some gratitude in his voice, he said, “I think it would be better if we spin, unless you want to serve first.”

“O.K., we’ll serve first.” Cole accepted at once.

With no further comment, Kang took his place in the back-hand court for a brief rally before starting the match.

Pilar was aware that Cole and Larry were trying to shake Kang. But realizing that champions aren’t made by their mechanical skills alone, she too made no comment.

After the warmup, Cole took a couple of practice serves and then to start got a real hard smash to Pilar. She returned it well enough, but Larry gambled at the net, crossed over, and was able to get an unreturnable angle on the ball. With Cole’s fair-to-good serve and Larry’s gambles, they won the first game. Kang with court courtesy insisted that Pilar serve first for their side. Cole and Larry broke Pilar’s

serve, putting them ahead two - love. After the second win, confidence and hilarious repartee ran high between Cole and Larry and continued when Larry muddled through and won his serve. The fun was somewhat dampened when Kang's turn came and he served three blazing aces. Each time he served the ball it barely caught the serving court line, but was good enough so that it couldn't possibly have been called a fault.

To gain a little time Cole got something in his eye, and Larry went to look at it. Confidence ebbing, Cole said in a low voice, "We've got to slow him down, we'd better start talking to him."

Kang called out, "What's the matter - did you get something in your eye?"

Pilar started around the net with real concern. "Maybe I can see it."

"No, it's O.K. now," Cole assured, "Let's play. My vision was blurred. I thought a couple of your serves were awfully close and Larry wasn't looking, but that's O.K. I played them anyway. The game's still 40-love."

"Do you want me to serve that last point over?" Kang asked.

"No, no. Your serve is really great. It's got a lot of zip. I think if you put a little more muscle behind it, I won't be able to hit it even though my eye isn't blurred any more."

Kang netted his next serve to Larry. On the second try it was obvious he was consciously making an effort to get it well within the serving court. Larry pounced on it and shot it hard at Pilar. With exceptional reaction she got a return, but it was just weak enough to give Cole a chance to pass her.

The score was 40-15 and Kang moved over to serve to Cole but Larry interrupted just as he was ready to toss the ball up. "Are the tourney officials pretty strict on foot fault or not. You do everything so smoothly that from where I'm watching, it would be a hard call to make, but a guy looking along the base line would probably pick it up pretty quick. I'd hate to see you get into trouble during the tournament."

Kang didn't say anything, just got ready to serve again and then netted his first try to Cole. The second was even less confident and Cole, returning it got good top spin and looped it over Pilar's head at the net. Kang rushing in to the net was clearly surprised at Cole's deft handling of the serve and tried to race back, but was too late.

"Sorry about that, Kang. Larry shouldn't be talking when you're serving," Cole commiserated. "Just relax and don't pay any attention to him. Everybody



foot faults once in a while.”

The muscles visibly tightened in Kang’s jaw, and he double faulted to Larry, evening the score at 40-40. Walking slowly back to the opposite corner of the court, he was breathing deeply. His first sizzler to Cole’s forehand was a blur, but was close enough to the corner that there was no way to call it out. Cole nodded his head and spread his hands in resignation, indicating he was conceding the point.

Kang shook his head and said, “No, it missed,” and got ready for a second try. Cole and Larry looked at each other realizing Kang must be really upset because he never gave up a point when the other side conceded, but nothing could dissuade him now. His next shot hit with the same speed in the same area, but almost six inches within the corner. He looked at Larry and Cole shouting, “How are you calling that?”

“Oh, that was in by almost six inches.” Cole admitted.

With a barely visible smile, Kang said, “I know it was in. I was just asking how you were calling it.”

Cole held up his hand for time and walked over to Larry, turning his back to the net and saying sotto voce, “I think he knows what we’re up to.”

“Yeah,” Larry said, “we’ll change our strategy. When he serves to me, he’ll rush the net, I’ll lob deep to the base line and even if he gets back it will be tough to handle - and we’ll both come in fast for a kill shot.”

On the add-in serve, Kang and Cole both broke for the net from opposite sides but Larry got a bad lob and Kang saw that it wasn’t deep, that it would drop barely six feet beyond the net. Cole was oblivious until he saw Kang poised for an overhead smash and he only had time enough to throw himself down and back of the net as the ball whistled through the space his body had just occupied. He rose and walked slowly back to Larry.

“Next time I’ll lob and you rush the net,” he said shakily.

With the game score three to one in their favor, things rapidly got worse for the psych experts. Strategy was revised again and again, but the game score mounted to 5-4 against them. It was at this point they decided to both play back near the base line; this ploy, of course, wasn’t overlooked. On the last play of the day, Kang had another setup for a perfect overhead smash, but seeing both opponents playing back, he changed tactics at the last moment and with a beautiful soft touch barely tapped the ball across the net. Cole and Larry were horror-stricken when they saw the ball dropping so far away in front of them, they broke for the net as one, racing each

other to forestall defeat. Cole, attempting to reach the ball with his backhand, accidentally stuck his racket between Larry's flying legs. Larry naturally crashed headlong into the net, but an instant before the crash his racket caught the ball and sent it into a high lob. Both the upper and lower net supports were snapped from the post closest to where he hit and he was partially rolled up in the loose webbing. Pilar looked frightened, Kang registered amazement, and Cole was stunned. Larry sat up and tried to remove the twisted net from his head and shoulders and in a concerned voice asked, "Was that a good return?"

The kids had stopped to watch the doubles match and Erica immediately assured him, "Yes, it was good. The ball went high up in the air and fell inside the white lines."

Larry looked relieved, but Larry II said, "It doesn't count because you touched the net."

There was a moment of silence and finally Pilar spoke. "Those are the rules, but it's your call to make - whether or not you touched the net."

Larry slowly became aware that they were waiting for him to speak. He raised his head and smiled weakly. "It took the rule book to beat us," he said.

While Kang discussed and Cole cursed the rule of idiocy that said you couldn't touch the net while playing the ball, Pilar dabbed an antiseptic on Larry's skinned knees and covered the wounds with band-aids. The argument ended when Kang left for the central courts to play his tournament match. Cole strolled over to look at Larry's knees and Erica and "Two" stopped their play and came running down the grassy slope to report that the police were on their way. A park official and a policeman on horseback approached. When they got to the tennis courts, they paused to examine the damaged net. The park official turned away from the havoc and looked at the group with an air of disappointment.

"What's been going on here? We had a report of rough play, but we didn't realize it included the destruction of property."

"My uncle got hurt, but it wasn't his fault." Larry II spoke up. "Mr. Rain tripped him."

"But he didn't mean to." Erica came to Cole's defense.

"No, he didn't mean it." Larry II admitted. "It was an accident."

"Hold it, kids, we'll explain." But when Cole had finished explaining, the official and the mounted policeman didn't seem to be any more enlightened; however, since the lawman rode off on his horse, he had apparently decided police action was-

n't necessary.

In turn, the park official explained that even though he would accept their version that the cause of the damage was accidental, it would have to be paid for. Cole and Larry admitted their culpability and paid twenty dollars each to cover the forty dollar assessment. The official took their names and addresses, handed them a receipt and told them that after the repairs were completed, if there was anything left of the forty dollars, it would be returned to them. He folded his receipt book, stuffed it in his pocket and left with the admonition that they should be more careful of park property henceforward.

"Henceforward, we'll play without the net," Larry muttered. "Who needs all that fancy equipment, I can tell if the ball is over or not. When do we eat and drink?" he wanted to know, forgetting the irritation and his skinned knees.

Cole had brought wine and soft drinks. Kang had cooked southern fried chicken, and Pilar had prepared two salads and baked a pot of brown beans. Larry and Cole were to pick up ice cream for the cake later. While they were placing the packed food on a park table to reserve it, Larry II brought his flying bird and his jacks from the car. Erica clutched a new doll and carried a small suitcase filled with a complete wardrobe; she intended making two or three changes of the doll's clothes to coincide with the various activities of the day. She explained to Larry II just how precocious the doll was, that it could walk and talk, that it could cry and get wet and need changing, and it could do anything. Larry II suggested changing the doll's party dress for a tiny bikini and then throwing it in the lake to see if it could swim. Erica hugged the doll close to her and, waiting to make sure Larry II wasn't looking, placed it back in its box and covered the box with a blanket.

Larry II got busy with his flying bird and went racing over the grass and up a tiny knoll. He stopped on top and turned to face the picnic grove. Holding a life-size plastic bird, he tried to attach it to a short cord that in turn was fastened to a long whiplike rod. There was a hand grip and a leather loop to circle his wrist on the end of the rod. Finally, he hooked the tip of the thong to the breast of the bird, whose wings were spread in a permanent position of flight. Turning round and round, he whirled it over his head and shouted for everyone to watch and just before he began to run down, he brought his arm forward like a pitcher throwing overhand, and the willowy rod with the attached cord snapped the bird into free flight. The hook at the breast disengaged when the pressure was relieved at the end of the ship-like action. The bird flew straight as an arrow making a perfect arc and sailing fifty feet

over the heads of the watchers. Larry II came tearing down the hill screaming, "Did you see that? He's the best flyer in the world." As he raced past the mildly startled picnickers he shouted, "I'll go get him and then I'll show everybody how to fly him."

"Where the hell did he get that thing?" Cole asked.

"My sister said he picked it out himself. He found it in a toy store when they were shopping for his birthday."

Erica had followed Larry II and they came running back after retrieving the bird, Erica squealing, "It's my turn - you promised." Larry II hadn't promised Erica anything. "Let me do it," she demanded.

As the children ran for the knoll, the others followed, curious to see just how Larry II's toy worked. Erica was first and surprised them all with the distance she got out of the bird. Pilar tried and then it became a contest between Cole and Larry for the long distance championship. Larry II and Erica were stationed far down the grassy valley to alternate as retrievers. According to the kids, one of Larry's efforts produced the longest free flight, but Cole insisted that his last whip would have been further if the bird hadn't struck the branch of a tree and veered off into the side of a hill. The contest didn't stop until the kids got tired and insisted it was their turn.

Larry and Cole agreed to run back with the bird until each of them had three turns. This was subsequently increased to six turns each. After the last counted turn, and ignoring the kids' protests, Cole, breathing hard, suggested he try once to land the bird on the water of the pond. This was a little less strenuous because the time it took for the wind to blow the bird back to the bank where it could be reached provided a breather. Another twenty minutes of spot landing on the small lake, and then Larry came up with the idea that the kids go take a look at the buffalos, but Larry II and Erica insisted on staying to play with the grown ups. They walked wearily back to the table stacked with boxes and baskets and Larry stretched out on the grass. Pilar went through the usual motions of women preparing a feast, and the kids asked Cole to read them a story. Cole, leaning back against a tree with his eyes closed said, "Well, I'd like to but I don't have a book."

"Think one up then," Erica insisted.

"Tell us a story about space and exploration," Larry II demanded.

"Well, I don't know about that. What would you like to hear, Erica?"

"Tell us about Sleeping Beauty and how she couldn't be waked up only in a special way."

"Hmmm... I don't think I know that well enough to tell it."

“You must know a lot of stories,” Larry II said. “Tell us the one you like best.”

Big Larry was dozing and only heard part of the conversation, but he heard Cole say, “Let me think a minute This is about a little girl who lived on the edge of a desert, probably some place in the southwestern United States....”

“Don’t you know where she lived?” he heard Erica ask.

“Well, yes, I know where she lived, but you see her father was a scientist. He was working on a secret project and where they lived was classified top secret.”

He heard his nephew ask why? and Cole say, “Just take my word for it that it was so.”

It was the most updated children’s story Big Larry had ever heard, but then he hadn’t heard many recently. The father was this space scientist; the little girl, his daughter, was the product of a broken home; the little girl’s brother was a junkie who had disappeared. When Erica asked what he looked like, Big Larry heard Cole say, “Well, he had a lot of hair and he was sort of wild-eyed. O.K.?”

Later on he heard something about the mother and heard Larry II ask, “Was she dead?”

“No, she wasn’t dead, she had just gone away some place with one of the assistants at the space lab.” More questions from the kids, then he heard Cole say, “She had fallen on hard times and was earning her living as a go-go dancer some place in Orange County - that’s south of Los Angeles.” Big Larry learned that the little girl had got in trouble trying to find her brother. Then Cole said something about a horrible hairy monster who strapped the little girl into a chair, pushed a button, pulled a couple of levers, and ‘whoosh’, they took off straight up.

“Was it a girl monster?” Larry II asked.

“Yes, it was. You can never tell about monsters,” he heard Cole say.

Big Larry must have dozed off a long time because the next he heard was both kids asking, “What’s vigil?”

“Their parents were just watching and waiting for the kids to return that’s vigil - and while they waited the mother who could cook as well as dance prepared a huge feast.”

Big Larry decided the story was finished so he sat up. Kang had returned from his tennis match a winner. Then he heard Cole say, “That’s the end of the story, but there’s a sequel to it if you’d like me to go on.”

Kang and Big Larry both got up and advanced on Cole. Kang held a dirty towel and Larry said, “I’ll hold him, you gag him.”

Cole jumped up and ran to the table, saying, "I nominate Larry to say grace." Larry II demanded to be seated between Pilar and Kang. This worked out fine because Erica was clinging to Larry and Cole. When everyone was arranged, Larry relinquished to Pilar the honor of saying grace. The children looked at her expectantly. Pilar hesitated in apparent deep thought. She bowed her head and with softness and distinctness started her prayer:

"We pause briefly to give thanks before partaking of these delectable and life-sustaining substances prepared by us, but created in a mystery. We acknowledge ignorance of life's source or the reason for its being given into our care. We value its joys and will protect its flame, knowing it as our most precious gift. Lastly, we hope to contribute to its ultimate purpose whatever that may be. Amen."

An hour later there were just token amounts left of the overabundance of food that had filled the table. Pilar had covered the remaining dabs and was playing jacks with the children while Cole and Larry stretched out on the grass. Kang sat under a tree reading a paper. Cole could hear the conversation coming from the jacks game. Larry II wanted to play the "Flying Dutchman" but Erica preferred "Pigs in the Pen." Pilar was on threesies while the children argued.

Larry wasn't sleeping either because suddenly he called out, "I used to be the King of Jacks in the Mission District. I won so many toys and comic books they called me the junk man. Kids nowadays get everything for nothing so the game doesn't mean anything."

"That's right," Cole said. "The best way to learn anything is to have a reason for learning and you don't develop an urge to win unless you stand to lose something. It's part of our evolutionary process. Hey, Larry, I used to be pretty good too; do you want to show the kids how it's done?"

They both got up, stretched and strolled over to the corner of the tennis court where the jacks game was in progress. The ball Pilar was using was better than the old ones Cole and Larry had played with. It was rounder and bounced higher, giving the player a longer time to pick up the jacks.

"Oh boy! Now we're going to have a real game." Larry II said.

Erica jumped up, "I've got some in Aunt Pilar's car; I'll go get them." But Pilar stopped her and said she would get them.

Cole took charge. "O.K. This is the way we'll do it. Larry and I will stand you two guys. In the first game I'll play against Larry II and Larry can play Erica."

"O.K., Cole," Larry II was enthusiastic. "I've got my jacks, we can start right now



- let's play the 'Flying Dutchman.'"

"Wait a minute, Larry II, I never heard of the Flying Dutchman. That must be a new kid's game. Let's just play onesies and twosies, but when you lose you forfeit something so the game will have some meaning for you."

"Onesies and twosies is the best game," Larry agreed. "But whenever you make a mistake, you have to give something up but you don't lose your turn. You just keep on going to tensies. Understand? Touchsies, helpsies, burnsies, dropsies and movesies will cost you whatever we decide to bet."

"That's the problem," Cole said, "What have you guys got to bet?"

"I've got five dollars and thirty-two cents," Larry II said. "Mom gave me this wallet and my Dad gave me some money and I already had some."

"What have you got, Erica?" Larry wanted to know.

"I got over eight dollars for my birthday and Aunt Pilar has it in her purse."

"Right," Cole said. "Every time anyone makes one of those mistakes Larry was talking about, he has to pay so much money to his opponent - that's us and we'll let you two start first."

"How much money are we going to bet?" Larry II asked. "Let's make it a dollar every time we miss."

"No, you don't have much money," Larry said. "Let's make it a quarter, and if you run out of money before you get to tensies, Cole and I will lend you some."

Pilar had returned with the other set of jacks and had been listening to the betting arrangements. "I think you should be ashamed of yourselves," she said, "teaching two little children to gamble, and I'm not going to let you do it."

"Oh, Pilar, you don't understand," Cole groaned. "All right, kids, go over and talk to Kang. We're going to have a conference with Pilar."

"Aren't we going to play?" Larry II protested.

"But, Aunt Pilar, we want to play with Larry and Cole and bet money." Erica wailed.

"Don't worry. We'll play, but we've got to have a conference now. Go talk to Kang and we'll call you when we're ready." Cole herded them toward Kang, who looked up from his paper.

"The kids won't lose their birthday money," Larry explained to Pilar, "We're only going to keep it for a little while and then we'll figure out a way to get it back to them. Just as Cole says, it will be good for them. It'll teach them not only to concentrate on what they're doing, but it will give them a taste of the value of



money.”

Cole interrupted, [This is the greatest lesson children can learn - it's part of life - it teaches them that their actions can cause penalties or rewards. You'll see, they'll enjoy it after it's all over and they have their money back but they'll understand that they could have lost it.]

Pilar wasn't wholly convinced, but acquiesced reluctantly. The conference over, they called the kids back to get the game under way.

“We can also play silence,” Erica said. “That means if you talk or smile or even show your teeth, you lose a quarter.”

Agreement was reached on all the rules of the game and the two kids got first turn. They dumped their jacks at the same time and both got a good spread for onesies. Erica played methodically with a graceful rhythm. To everyone's surprise, she picked up the ten jacks one by one without a mistake. Larry II had lightning fast hands but lost one on touchies and once again when he said “damn” because of the mistake. Pilar wanted to forgive the penalty because she said Larry and Cole said “damn” practically every time they missed a tennis shot and it wasn't the childrens' fault if they picked it up, but she was overruled and Larry II was down fifty cents. From then on he played with deep concentration and completed the game through tensies with only three more mistakes. When he placed a dollar and a quarter in the pot, his eyes brimmed with tears.

Erica did better starting out, making only two mistakes up to ninesies and then with her smaller hands committed four more errors before completing the game. Her lower lip trembled and she blinked back tears as she bravely placed a dollar and a half forfeit into the pot.

“Don't worry about it, Erica, I thought you played very well,” Larry said. “I want to take a couple of practice bounces with this ball. It's better than the one I used to have.”

Cole commiserated with Larry II by pointing out that after he got past onesies his concentration had become a lot better and he'd played a beautiful game from then on. Larry II looked doubtful and said, “Yeah, but I lost a dollar and twenty-five cents and I was saving up to buy a pony.” The tears almost came again.

Erica folded her hands resignedly and waited for Larry to finish his practice bounces.

Kang had given up on his paper and come over to watch the educational process.

“All right you two, let us know when you’re ready to start,” Pilar said. “Kang can count Cole’s mistakes and I’ll keep Larry honest.”

“We don’t need any help in counting our mistakes,” Cole said calmly, “but if it makes you feel better, have at it. I’m ready. Are you set, Larry?”

Larry took a last practice bounce with the ball, picked up the jacks, and dropped them. He realized too late that he had forgotten to practice this phase of the game; the jacks were all bunched. Cole, watching, saw what had happened so he tossed his jacks in the air to make sure of a good spread but a couple of them rolled over against Larry’s pile.

This was merely the start of what turned out to be a minor disaster. They committed all the offenses - touchies, helpsies, burnsies, dropsies and movesies. The only offense they missed was smiling, but both were guilty of swearing and showing their teeth. At the end of onesies Larry had committed thirteen fouls. Surprisingly, Cole came up with only eleven. The children forgot about their tears and watched the money pile up in front of them. When they reached sixies Larry had lost forty-four quarters and Cole fifty-three. Cole suggested that they stop the game and offered to put another dollar each in the pot as a forfeiture. The kids accepted this arrangement gladly.

“Uncle Larry, let’s play ‘Flying Dutchman’ now.” Larry II was happy.

Erica wanted to play “Pigs in the Pen,” but Pilar and Kang stepped in and vetoed cancelling the gambling game, insisting that it be played out to the bitter end.

“You know, I apologize,” Kang grinned. “At first I thought you were putting these children on but this really is an educational process.”

Pilar asked Cole and Larry to forgive her saying she hadn’t fully understood their intention but now she realized they couldn’t have been nicer to the children or made them happier.

There was nothing to do but struggle on through tensies and at the end Cole had lost twenty-six dollars and fifty cents and Larry was down twenty-two and a quarter. Cole, being out of money wrote a check for his share and Kang accepted it and gave the children cash. Larry II and Erica split the money into equal shares and, having learned a valuable lesson, matched for the extra quarter. Erica won and wanted to buy candy, promising to divide it with Larry II. This was promptly vetoed by all, and then the children wanted to continue playing but it was time for the birthday cake and, since Cole and Larry were to furnish ice cream, they borrowed five dollars from Pilar and took off in Larry’s car. Both children wanted to go along, but were

persuaded to go to the lake and watch the miniature sailboats instead.

When Larry and Cole returned with the ice cream, the fourteen candles were divided, seven to a side, and stuck in the fluffy frosting of the cake. They were lighted with ceremony and blown dead with prodigious simultaneous puffs. So far the adventures of the warm sunny day gave them every hope that their secret wishes would be granted. Cole asked what their wishes were but neither would tell, so he asked what they intended to do with all the money they'd won. Erica decided she would make a down payment on a house in the desert, but Larry II had to think. Cole asked him again, "What are you going to do with all my money, Larry II?"

"It's my money now," Larry II said, "and I'm going to buy an electronic windmill. Did you ever see one?"

"Not recently," Cole said. "In fact, I don't think I ever did see one."

Larry II jumped up and started toward the cars. "If you'll take me in your car I'll show you one right now. It's down by the beach."

"I've seen that one," Cole admitted, "but I'm pretty sure it's not electronic."

"The one I buy has to be 'solid state.' That old one by the beach is probably a tube model."

"Could I ask one more question?" Cole hesitated. "What would you do with an electronic windmill?"

"I'd take it with me all over. If I was on the great plains or in the desert it would bring water up out of the ground for my pony - or grind my corn. I could even use it to charge a motor-bike. Are you sure you don't want to look at the old one by the beach?"

"I'm sure. I'm just not sure I shouldn't go fifty-fifty with you on the one you buy." He looked at Larry II for a minute and then said, "Anyway, right now I'm ready for cake and ice cream."

"Me, too!"

"Me, too!" Erica echoed.

Pilar removed the candles and Erica and Larry II made separate cuts in the three-tiered vision. The wedge they severed was so huge that it had to be quartered, but only after it was explained that everyone could eat as many pieces topped with ice cream as he could hold. This might have been the sixth or seventh mistake of the day. Larry II had three and a half helpings, while Erica stopped at three. The cake was the best they had ever eaten and they proved it by not stopping until all were a little sick. When the cake was gone the day at the park began drawing to a close. The

first strands of cold fog from the sea barely skimmed the tree tops.

After the trash and remnants were cleared away and when it was time to go, Erica refused to budge unless Larry carried her to Pilar's car. Larry II, even though he had been moving listlessly toward the parking area, now sat on the grass and demanded to be carried also. Kang stooped and swung him onto his shoulders and they moved slowly down the winding path. Cole, loaded with baskets and boxes, followed along in deep thought. There had been a catalyst somewhere in the day's events that had steered him into a new train of thought about smuggling and the ship. He wanted to follow a lead Larry had suggested earlier, but there was something else nagging his mind. When he got to the cars he deposited the picnic things and arranged to meet Larry around eight o'clock at Borgia's.

Erica kissed everyone goodbye with the exception of Larry II who refused to be kissed, insisting on shaking hands all around. As the two cars left to take the children home, Kang and Cole waved until they were out of sight around a bend in the road. Kang thought the day had been a big success; Cole agreed but decided that celebrating birthdays once each year was probably overdoing it.

As they turned back to their cars a girl appeared from out of the trees and walked into the parking area.

After they left the park, Larry II fell asleep, his head resting in his uncle's lap. Again there was no opening to park near the house on the crowded street and Larry didn't find a slot until a block and a half beyond. He gently shook Larry II awake. They collected the tennis racket, the toys and the empty cake container and wearily trudged back up the street. Larry was surprised and happy to see that his sister and brother-in-law had returned early. Delia said it was just too hot in the delta country and they were glad to get back to the city fog. Wide awake now, Larry II launched into a detailed report of the neat day at the park, spreading out the crumpled money he had packed tightly in his pocket and explaining how he and Erica had won it. But his parents couldn't quite understand the involved description and Delia scolded Larry, saying that he and Cole shouldn't have given Larry II that much money. Dewey took his son on his lap explaining to him that he would have to return the money to Uncle Larry and Mr. Rain.

"Look," Larry broke in, "he's telling you exactly how it happened. He and Erica won the money fair and square. I've listened to him and I really don't think I could explain it any better than he did. Cole and I were trying to be fatherly and teach the kids a les-

son in the value of money but maybe neither of us were meant to have all the many joys of fatherhood. Anyway, we had a great time and next week I'll bring Cole around and let him explain how it all happened; it was his idea."

"I'll bet you're tired," Delia said. "Why don't you just sit down and relax and I'll fix you both something to eat."

Larry turned pale visibly. "Please don't mention food," he choked.

## *Chapter XI*

As the girl moved out of the trees directly toward them, Cole said to Kang, "It must be Letha's sister, she walks like her." Then addressing the girl, "Hi, you look like someone I know."

"I don't think so," the girl said. "Are you Mr. Rain?"

"Yes." Then pointing toward Kang, Cole said, "I guess you know him."

"Hello, Mr. Shu-li. I saw the last set of your match today. You were very good."

"Not really. I'll have to be very good next week." Cutting short the preliminaries, Kang said, "Mr. Rain - that is, Cole - appreciates your willingness to talk to us. But why do you think you have some information he can use?"

"I don't know if he can use it or not. My sister thought he could."

"Why did your sister think I needed this particular information?" Cole asked.

"A friend of hers was suspicious of you," the girl said. "They're not friends anymore and my sister has gone back east. When I told her what I knew she made me promise to get the information to you. She knew all about your company and I remembered Mr. Shu-li." She wrung her hands gently and finally folded her arms. "If it's all right with you I'd rather tell him, but not here. If we talk too long some-

body might see us.”

Cole rose, stretching. “I’ll see you sometime tomorrow,” he said to Kang, and turned to the girl. “Goodbye, and when you can, tell your sister thanks. I’ll appreciate any information you can give Kang.”

Kang and the girl watched his car swing out of the parking area and turn toward the beach. It wasn’t fully dark but it was getting cold and when Kang looked at the girl he could see her eyes were filled with tears. The tears rolled down her cheeks and one dropped from her chin. She didn’t brush them away but when he caught her direct gaze she lowered her eyes slightly and they continued to drip.

“Should we go now?” Kang asked.

“I don’t have to,” she said, “but maybe we should.”

“We can talk in the car, then I’ll drive you home whenever you’re ready.”

“I don’t want to go home,” she said more evenly now. “Could I stay with you?”

“We can stay here a while longer, if you think it’s all right.”

“I don’t have to stay here. I mean I want to go with you - wherever you’re going.”

“After we talk, I’m going home,” he said.

“Oh, I didn’t understand. I’ll go back after we talk.” She wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“You can go with me if you want, but how old are you?”

“I have an ID that says I’m twenty-one. I’m really nineteen.”

“Where do you live?” he asked suddenly.

“I live with some people, but I don’t want to go there just now.”

Kang pulled a blade of grass, looked it over, put it in his mouth and chewed. Then he got up and, reaching down, helped the girl to her feet. She followed him to the car and got in the front seat. He walked around and got in beside her, wondering if he should tell her about his home. They left the park and turned towards Chinatown without speaking.

Kang and the girl walked through a part of the city that hadn’t changed much since the fire. The streets were narrow and crowded with people. The shops were busy and the restaurants were full, approaching the evening peak hour. Kang lived in the middle of Chinatown and garaged his car five blocks away. They left the main street of the section and turned down a cluttered alley which ended after half a block in a sheer concrete wall. Groping left they climbed a flight of steps. At the top was a twelve-foot solid wood fence painted a dull brown to match the rest of the alley;

in its center was a door fitted so perfectly that the girl hadn't seen it in the dim light. Only a small round brass lock and a carved wooden handle gave it away. Kang inserted a key and opened the gate for the girl to enter. She stepped into a garden world, seventy by seventy feet square, surrounded by tall buildings on three sides and the wooden fence on the fourth. Gently he nudged her along a gravelled path that wound through a miniature redwood forest, the dwarfed trees ranging to eight feet tall. Coming to a small clearing of white sand in the center of the enclosed land the girl stopped to look beyond the sand where there were palm trees approximately the same height as the redwoods, with lush little banana plants sprouting beneath them. To the right the sand gently sloped to a fifty-foot lagoon and incredibly there was an ocean in the distance with waves rolling on a beach and a sun half-buried in the sea; molten red-tinged golden clouds moved in a blue and green sky.

Kang took the girl's hand and they went from the warm sand to a curved inclined path whose grassy edge was sprinkled with wild flowers. They came to a ledge, and beyond were open doors to his home. The room was softly carpeted and strewn with pillows and at one end a bamboo bar and utilitarian kitchen blended into the mood with low lights and muted colors. The girl returned to the ledge to gaze again at the lagoon, the trees, the ocean and the sky and then questioned Kang with her eyes. He beckoned from an open door to the far end of the room, and she came to peer inside at an array of strange equipment. A central object was pointed through an opening in the wall, and unlike a movie projector, it had several projections that pierced the now dark night with directed beams of intense light. A reflected ocean, sun and sky was created on the treated surfaces of the smooth concrete buildings. As she watched the sun disappeared. Flipping one switch off and another on, Kang brought forth a moon shining down on a calm sea. Stars began to pulse and then she saw a small sail come out of the shadows and cut with slow grace across the vast expanse of the ocean. When she started to speak he placed his fingers to his lips, listening. From off out on the ocean came the sound of music, the whipping of wind on sails and the slap of water against a hull. And now she heard other night sounds: of birds and insects, and even of happy voices chattering way off in the distance. She wanted to get closer and they went to the open doors and out on to the ledge - and she wasn't sure what was real and what was fantasy.

She moved toward him and as he embraced her she huddled close in the protection of his arms and looked down again on the redwood forest, the white sand before the lagoon, and deep into the ocean where the sailboat skimmed the waves. Suddenly she



was conscious that to her left, beyond the coconut palms, there was a dim glow and out of the mist there appeared in the distance a cone-shaped mountain with a dark cloud rising from its summit, tinged fiery red from a bubbling and spouting crater. A warm rain began to fall as high on the walls of the buildings a sprinkler system installed for the magic garden automatically erupted. She looked way up at the square of real sky and could see fog scudding by, lighted yellow from the lamps of Chinatown. This time she took Kang's hand and they went to the path that led down to the lagoon. At the beginning of the white sand, she slipped off her sandals and ran to the water's edge. With one motion she shed the loose blouse, stripped off her pants and dove into the warm water. She made two gliding passes across the pool and returned to the sandy beach. Raising herself from the water, she stood before Kang without shyness, sure of her physical beauty.

"Aren't you coming in?" she asked. "The water's great."

And then doing a backward flip she exposed her inner thighs with a frog like kick.

Kang removed his clothes and followed, swimming and stretching his muscles for two laps before he paused in chest-deep water to look for the girl. Almost immediately he felt a current surging around his legs as she swam by. He stood motionless watching for her to surface, but she returned under water, and he felt her arms encircle his hips and her head press against his stomach. She nibbled at him like a minnow, and then he felt the incredible heat of her mouth and the touch of a fluttering tongue. A shudder shook his body and he reached to pull her to him but she clung like a leech, greedily demanding his fulfillment.

He fought for control, refusing to be taken without giving in return. He was on the verge of losing the battle when she surfaced for air and came into his arms searching his lips and mouth with her warm tongue. Slowly her legs parted and enwrapped his torso. Kang's fear of bursting had subsided somewhat; the cool water gave him respite. Her smallness made a difficult passage but she strained to him and Kang forgot his control and with a vicious thrust entered again into an incredible hotness. They were as two antagonistic living things in a death struggle, the water was thrashed to a froth and before they entered the first portals of darkness and the girl uttered a cry of anguished pain and ecstasy, burying her teeth in his shoulder. Plunging and jerking, Kang subsided finally with low whimpering cries. Then there was a fraction of time when both wished to sink slowly into the waters and be surrounded with its liquid protection forever. Minutes passed before he felt strong

enough to carry her from the pool and place her gently on the warm sand. He lay down beside her, and they gazed languidly at the contrived moon, the stars and the sailboat in the distance and listened to the recorded sound of the surf until they were lulled to sleep.

Sometime during the night Kang wakened and carried the girl to his bed; she too awoke and they made love again. It was afterward that she told him what she knew about the smuggler ship, the SS Crescent Moon. The next morning when he wakened for the second time she was gone. For a moment he wondered if she'd ever been there. He got up and strode to the ledge to see if she might be by the pool and then he saw the note pinned to an oversized pillow lying on the floor.

Dear Sir:

I'm still afraid. What happened to me was the most beautiful experience of my life so far but I wonder if there's any more? Or, can it ever be better? Also, could I settle for what there was in our few hours together if I could be sure it would last forever and would always be the same? I think maybe I could, but then I know that in the morning everything will be different. I forgot, I don't like mornings either. Why does everything have to be so real?

Sincerely, Clara

Kang turned back into the room thinking he should call Cole, but he was famished and decided first to cook breakfast in his utilitarian kitchen and have bacon and eggs and hotcakes covered with orange blossom honey. As he went by he dropped the girl's note into a large oriental vase.

## *Chapter XII*

After leaving Kang and the girl, Cole drove directly to his rooms at Aunt Hester's. He parked at the side of the old house under an olive tree and unlocked the private entrance. The rooms were shut off from the main structure by an only door whose key, as well as the one he'd just used for the outside door, had been given him on the day he'd started high school. The room he entered had been used for study and occasionally to entertain friends. Subconsciously he glanced at the shelved books on one wall to see if they'd been disturbed. He had built the shelves that first summer between his freshman and sophomore years. As usual, the place was immaculately clean since the connecting door had never been locked. Aunt Hester had always protected his privacy scrupulously; if there was any doubt as to whether he was occupying the rooms, she would phone for permission to allow one of the Petersons to come in and clean, or even before she made a personal inspection.

As a constant reminder of the precaution she took in protecting his identity, one of the middle shelves, just below eye level, which held only his leather bound diaries, was thick with dust. In checking an early yearly edition, it would often be necessary to brush away the cobwebs. All the other shelves and books sparkled. He selected the last volume, the one he placed there two nights before and in which he had made the most recent entries, brushed away the dust it never ceased to amaze him how quickly it collected - and, as he started to read a notation, a piece of paper fell to the

floor. Picking it up he noted its contents and then re-hid it in the pages of the diary. Reading quickly for several seconds he finally closed the book and returned it to its proper place without disturbing the dust and cobwebs covering the other volumes.

He showered and from his wardrobe split half and half between his two quarters was able to change clothes. When he'd finished, it was still more than an hour before he was to meet Larry at Borgia's and the restlessness came again. It didn't all fit; there was something that needed thinking about. He switched on the stereo and the room filled with sound. He sprawled on the sofa and tried to relax and meditate but after three minutes got up, turned the music off, and went out to the car.

The tires screeched as he gunned down the curved driveway and at the street, braking only momentarily, he turned toward the wharf. He exceeded the speed limit for three blocks and then, taking his foot off the throttle, reduced speed to ten miles under the limit. Poking along, seemingly oblivious to traffic, but observing all the rules from sheer habit, he drove even slower, passing the fish grottoes on the west end of the wharf and continued to the Embarcadero and its covered piers.

Something had occurred while they were in the park. He went over the day in his mind; the tennis match, they had almost won; the fiasco with the kids, they had probably conditioned them into confirmed gamblers; the picnic, he had eaten too much; Pilar's prayer, he was in love with her, but she would never guess. What the hell was it? Something was there. A police siren electrified him suddenly and he couldn't remember if he had run a red light or not, but the black and white car screamed by, and he saw that he was getting pretty far south on the waterfront.

Continuing the slow cruise he turned left into China Basin Street and saw the SS Crescent Moon at her pier. There was unloading activity aboard and trucks were moving from the dock to the street. He drove on past to the end of the street, made a U-turn and headed back to the restaurant, arriving at Black Pearl Road a little before eight o'clock. He waved to Borgia's parking attendant after he had parked in his reserved space. There was a couple in front of the restaurant waiting for their car or a taxi, and as Cole walked by, the young man said,

"Mr. Rain? Excuse me, are you Cole Rain?"

"Yes, I am. How are you?" Cole couldn't think of a name or remember the face.

The young man extended his hand, "My name is Glass. I'm a friend of Pilar's. I recognized you although we've never met."

"Oh sure, Pilar told me about you."

The attractive girl was introduced as Mrs. Glass. Cole hadn't known there was a

Mrs. Glass. They chatted for a few moments before the attendant brought their car; no one mentioned the project Pilar and Glass were working on. When Cole entered the restaurant he asked Mario for a table in the corner, explaining that Larry would be meeting him in a few minutes. He ordered two picon punches and sat with his back to the wall surveying the dimly lit room. Only half his picon was gone when Larry shoved through the doors walked to the middle of the bar, and flicked his eyes quickly to the four corners. Cole sat impassive, waiting. Larry made a second check of the bar and then again his gaze more slowly circled the room. Coming to Cole's corner, his teeth flashed once and he angled and side-stepped in that direction.

"How did you work it out that I wanted a picon punch?" he asked.

"I diagnosed that your digestive track needed a soothing agent. If you don't want it, I'll drink it and you can order your usual margarita special with Irish whiskey."

"Ugh, another time, man. No need to discuss it." He sat down and took a sip. "By the way, my sister and brother-in-law don't understand how Larry II came by all that money. I told them I'd bring you over next week and you'd explain."

"Hell, the explanation is that I'm gullible. I believed you when you said you were a champion jacks player. I can't help it if you've grown big and awkward with all thumbs picking up those little bitty jacks."

"Yeah, maybe by next week, we can get a little humor into it," Larry grunted.

"Glad to explain about you. I owe them a dinner anyway. I'll call and set it up. Maybe we could all get together. Kang can bring his new girl friend, and you could invite someone from your overstuffed grab bag."

"Sounds like a real rally. Maybe Pilar will bring Virgent Eddington - but what about you?" He took another drink of punch. "I was going to ask whatever happened to Myra or Lena or Theresa and that red-headed Ophelia? How can you let women like that slip through your fingers? I worry sometimes you're losing your lechery."

"It's being pent up for the moment," Cole explained. "I hope to hell I don't explode."

Giuseppe went hurrying by and catching a glimpse of them, stopped and trotted back to the table.

"What - you hide in the corner? There's a friend of yours ask about you, Cole. Come on, I give you another table, your friend is over here."

"We don't want another table. This is fine. Who's asking about me?" Cole

wanted to know.

Giuseppe turned to look and as he did so, Cole saw a man raise his arm and wave. Cole waved back not knowing who it was.

"Hang tight," he said to Larry. "I'll check this guy out." He rose and wended his way to the table where a man and woman were seated. In the dimly lighted room, he was almost there before he recognized Mike Crowder.

"Mike, how are you? And Renee," (her name is Renee?). "Nice to see you both again. When did you discover Borgia's?"

"This is our first experience," Mike said. "The food is excellent. But Renee made me taste her drink, afraid Lucretia had spiked it." (It is Renee.,

"They serve only legal poison here," Cole assured her. "Let me order you a capuccino, Lucretia's most famous potion."

"Thanks, Cole," Mike declined. "We're due at the theatre in twenty minutes. The couple we had dinner with forgot the tickets and left early to go pick them up."

"Have you seen 'Excreta'?" Renee interjected. "It's had marvelous reviews."

"No, I haven't," Cole admitted. "I read a short piece on it, though."

"I can't wait to see it," she gushed. "I have a friend who has seen it twice and has reservations for a third time. She says that regardless of what you've read, it's a play of hope and symbolizes the indestructability of life - carried on in some form or other. Everybody should see it," she concluded.

"I hope you enjoy it," Cole said. "The title sounds immortal and should add a richness to the growth of our cultural heritage."

"I'm going to quote you to my friend," Renee promised. "I think it better expresses what she was trying to say."

Cole turned to Mike. "I saw the ship at the pier when I drove by this evening."

"She just got back to her berth. She's been in Alameda for repairs ever since we disembarked. We'll probably sail again Monday morning." He hesitated for a moment, taking the last sip of his coffee. "Things are happening so fast," he said. "I had hoped we might have a chance to talk. There was an idea I wanted to discuss; I think you might have been interested." He paused again and looked in the empty cup. "I want to tell you I enjoyed and appreciated the rap sessions we had aboard ship. I...," then he trailed off and looked at his watch. "We've really got to hurry," and they both stood up. "Thanks, Cole, and so long."

"So long, Mike. Good night, Renee - nice seeing you both again."

Moving slowly back to the table, he wondered about Mike's strangeness. Why was he appreciative of the rap sessions? Hell, he'd forgotten to thank him for delivering his luggage and the ducks.

"What happened?" Larry demanded. "Was it an apparition? You look confused."

Cole sat down and emptied his picon punch. "It was Mike Crowder and his wife. I told you about him."

"Oh yeah, the guy on the perpetual vacation."

"That's right, only it isn't a vacation to him and he's changed since the last time I saw him." Cole looked at Larry. "Are we going to eat anything, or are you ready to go?"

"I'm not hungry, unless you want to."

"Let's go."

Larry dropped a bill on the table and they started for the door. Giuseppe, seeing them leaving, came running.

"What's the matter - where you going? I told you I'd give you another table. We've got one of your favorites - veal picante with fettucini."

Larry grinned and said, "Thanks, old buddy, but we've got an appointment, and anyway we're not hungry right now. We'll try to get back before closing time."

Cole looked at Giuseppe and shook his head. "Lucretia told us the veal was tough and now you want to push it onto your best friends."

Giuseppe's eyes got round, and he turned to scream at Lucretia who was seating a party of six. Cole grabbed him just in time, while he was still only sputtering.

"I'm kidding, Giuseppe. We haven't even talked to Lucretia. She never saw us poked back in the corner like that." Giuseppe opened his mouth wide and Cole hurried on, "where we insisted on being put. We'll be back and thanks for being a great guy and our best friend in the world."

As his two friends pushed out the front door, Giuseppe beamed his confusion.

"Since you know where you're going, why don't you drive?" Cole suggested.

Larry was parked next to Cole. He backed out and maneuvered through the lot to Black Pearl Road and then decided on Broadway and the tunnel which would take them through one of the hills that sectioned the city.

"Where are we meeting your friend?" Cole asked.

"We may not be meeting him at all. I'll check his pad and we'll swing by his favorite shooting gallery."



“I thought you made a date.”

“I did, but that doesn’t mean anything. He might have forgotten it by now and could be anywhere of a dozen places, or he might be boxed.”

“Yeah, like man, you’re going to have to help me out with some of this jargon,” Cole grinned.

“‘Boxed,’ he’s in jail; ‘shooting gallery,’ where they shoot up - inject drugs.”

“If he’s high, is he going to make any sense?”

“He’ll make more sense turned-on than he will if he’s cold. But maybe not a hell of a lot either way. I think he’ll try though, he wants turned-off.” Larry kept looking at the dark buildings until he found a gray dirty one that looked like all the rest.

“Here’s his pad. Let me check it out.” He doubled-parked and Cole waited in the car but he came back a few minutes later alone. “We’ll go to Jollo’s. It’s only a couple of blocks over.” This time Larry found a parking slot a half block away. “I’ll be right back. I hope to hell Sam’s taking a night off... Uncle, or Sam - federal narcotic agents,” he explained and left Cole to wait.

Twenty minutes later three people appeared suddenly from out of the dilapidated store front that Larry had entered. One of them was a girl. When they got to the convertible Larry introduced them.

“This is Cole Rain,” he said, “and this is Cicero and Debbie.”

Cicero was a tall, slender, good-looking black boy and Debbie a long-legged, long-haired blond with intensely blue eyes. Cole got out of the car and the couple moved into the back seat.

“How about closing us in, man, the heat could be cruising round and round and we got a spike and two speed balls stashed.”

Larry pressed the button raising the top, lashed it down and then started driving cautiously to his own pad.

## *Chapter XIII*

Larry Carver lived across the park in a fairly new section of the city where land costs dictated that homes should still abut each other. He found his place in a wall of white houses all looking alike and parked in the slanted opening of the curb leading to the basement garage. Cole got out, pulled the seat forward and helped Debbie from the rear. Her hand clenched his tight and strained. Cicero followed and stood beside the car with hands in hip pockets hunching and shivering against the cool night air. Larry led them up half a level, hurriedly unlocked the door and reached in to switch on the lights, motioning them to enter. When he came in he closed the door, pressed the lock and attached the chain.

Cicero checked the oblong room that seemingly made up the whole of the house. Satisfied, he unzipped his pants and reached down the left inseam searching for scat and spike. Larry waved toward the far end of the room where the total wall surface, with the exception of the door on the right, was one painting. Leaving Cole, the three of them went through the door and closed it too.

Cole looked around to see if anything new had been added since his last visit. The carpet, the walls, the ceiling, the furniture and the fireplace in back of him were almost exactly the same beige color. Only the texture of the various items made them distinguishable. Three pictures dominated the room; two on the long wall to the left were large but small compared to the painting covering the end wall. There was only the reflected light from the illuminated pictures and Cole moved in front of the first to marvel again at the color and detail. He glanced at the almost illegible signature

in the corner knowing it was “Laurie.” Laurie, Larry’s twin sister, had been dead more than two years and since the cold misty day of the semi-private funeral Larry had never mentioned her name. The extent of Larry’s loss and loneliness could only be guessed at.

There was a small typewritten card announcing the trilogy of pictures as: “Our Relatives” by Laurie Carver. Under the first painting was another card; Cole read it again: “Our Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Great Grandparents”. The picture itself was set in a small clearing in a jungle at dusk. There were two people squatting beside a fire. A huge carnivore of the cat family lay dead before them and the ancestral grandmother was handing a bloody red heart, just hacked, with a dripping stone knife, from the breast of the beast, to the ancestral grandfather. She was holding it out with both hands, still clutching the red tool. The bestowal as well as the sharp-toothed laughter showed her approval. The male ancestor was accepting in somber dignity the hacked heart of victory as his due. The subtleties of expression, the features lighted by the flickering fire, the resemblance to Larry and Laurie were there but the impelling subtlety was the faces stamped with the crude and cruel conditions of their primal existence. He backed off to get a last perspective and then moved slowly over to the next painting.

For maybe the twentieth time he read the typewritten card beneath it: “Our Nephew - Larry II”. Larry II was sitting on the back steps of the house where he still lived; a five-year-old boy holding an alley cat on his lap. A machine pistol and a sling shot lay on the step below. His dark intelligent eyes were level and there was just a hint of impatience, of wanting to break the pose; the need to move, to be active; perhaps to burst into laughter for no reason at all other than that he felt good. The untouched innocence of five-years-old stared straight at Cole.

He moved on to the largest picture and glanced at the title card: “Our Nephew and Friends.” Cole backed off to see it all. Five people were in the scene; two women and two men of various shades of human color crouched inside a cage that apparently had been constructed from wire mesh and reinforced steel protruding from the smashed concrete of a destroyed city. One of the women was straining to hold open an iron-barred make-shift gate, reaching out from inside the cage and ready to slam it closed as soon as the fifth human gained the enclosure. This last figure was a man running and carrying a dead cat, probably twice as big as the one Larry II held on his lap. Behind him were at least two hundred cats of the same size or slightly larger. They were all the variations in colors that has ever been seen in a cat and they

were weird and terrifyingly wild. Some were rabid; white froth flecked from open jaws and yellow pus exuded between needle-sharp fangs. It was a questionable race; whether the runner would reach the make-shift gate in time. He was taking a quick backward look at the closest gaping-jawed cat and there was a half-grin on his face. He was bent low to hurtle through the opening before it closed. (Cole was reminded of Larry being hit by two defenders five yards from the goal line.) It appeared that the cats would be on him, but maybe he could fight them off long enough to just get through. The race would be close but that wasn't the real doubt. The runner's death or life, and the death or life of those in the cage really depended upon the girl holding the gate. If she slammed it too soon the cats would rip and tear the flesh from the runner's bones, too late, and a horde of ravenous felines would get through and gorge on those inside also. The caged people, all except the girl at the gate, were enjoying the race and ignoring their own peril.

Just as Cole was deciding for the hundredth time what would probably occur if the painting came alive and started to move, Larry came through the door with a couple bottles of beer and two glasses on a tray.

"Let's sit by the fireplace, I'll start it up," he said, making his way to the other end of the room and placing the tray on a low beige table in front of a low beige lounge. Cole took a last look at the ruins of some future crumbled city, at the people in the rusted iron cage, at the pursued hunter with his life-sustaining kill and at the death horde of multi-colored cats and turned away.

"Whoosh, man, like whoosh. Crazy pad, Larry baby," Cicero bubbled.

"Groovy colors on the wall - groovy," Debbie said dreamily. "But give me mountains with white, white snow."

"While you're smellin' the snow, I'm reachin' up and sniffin' me some stardust and keepin' right on goin' higher and higher," Cicero said.

"How about circling around and coming in for a landing over here," Larry suggested. "What would you two like to drink?"

"Coke for me, man. Debbie'll have Squirt - anythin' with lemon or lime."

Cicero dropped on the couch stretching his stick-like legs towards the new fire. Debbie wandered aimlessly over, touching the rocks of the fireplace. Cole leaned forward from one end of the long lounge and poured his beer and Larry, returning with the soft drinks, said, "It's a cool night but we're cozying it up."

"Have a juice, baby," Cicero called to Debbie. "She gotta get back to the big street," he explained. "We need the bread for when we livin' low instead a high like

right now.”

“Relax, Cicero,” Larry said, “We got bread for you.”

“Front and center, Debbie,” Cicero demanded. “We got action right here.” Debbie turned from the fireplace looking first at Larry and then Cole, waiting.

“Come on and sit down, Debbie,” Larry said. “We’re just talking. Your conversation is worth money.” Debbie glanced quickly at Cicero and he nodded.

“I’m goin’ to talk about Jollo,” Cicero said, staring directly at Debbie. “You don’t know nothin’, you don’t hear nothin’, you don’t say nothin’. Sit down.” He clasped his hands in back of his head, leaned on the couch stretching out his thin feet even closer to the fire and opening his mouth as if to speak, closed his eyes and didn’t say anything.

They waited for a minute or two and finally Larry asked in a low voice, “Where’s Jollo getting this high grade stuff if it isn’t coming down from the top? And how do you know he still isn’t on the same chain gang?”

Cicero stirred but didn’t open his eyes. “No more, man. Jollo is the top hook. Everythin’ hangs from him now - he the source and he got nothin’ but thorough-breds hustlin’ for him.”

“I thought no one could operate outside,” Larry insisted.

“Jollo don’t need to be inside no more,” Cicero stirred again slightly. “When you connected with jolly Jollo, you connected with the top.”

“Right, Cicero, but the stuff’s got to come from someplace. Where does he get it?”

“It fly in from tamale-land - tha’s all I know ... an’ it pure horse. He makin’ up with his own cuttin’ and packin’.”

“How long has he been on his own?” Larry asked.

“Long time...months...maybe a year, I don’ know.”

“What makes you think he flies it in?”

“That’s the word and I got faith.”

“I thought you were ready for a kick in the head,” Larry said. “You change your mind?”

“Yeah, I did. I don’t want to turn off when I’m high or when I’m low only in the diddle middle. Will you and this cat he’p us sometime when we in the diddle middle?” he asked, suddenly sitting up and looking from Larry to Cole.

“We’ll help,” Cole said. “You’ve got to let us know when, though. We’ll keep asking.” He paused for a minute and then looked at Debbie who was slumped staring into the fire. No one said anything and finally he turned back to Cicero. “I think

you've helped us but I want to check something out tonight."

Cicero surprisingly came completely awake, stood up and reached for Debbie, pulling her to her feet.

"Take us to the swingin' scene, Larry. We gotta get back on the track."

"Have you got what you want?" Larry asked Cole.

"Maybe, I don't know. Let's take the kids back and then run down to the wharf if you haven't got anything better to do."

"Right," Larry agreed. "Nothing better to do."

They circled through the park and back to the buzzin' street where they had picked up Cicero and Debbie. Cole got out, pulling the seat forward again, and as they came clambering from the back he handed Cicero two fifties.

"This bread will buy bread you know," and then deciding his comment was worthless, "Thanks, we'll see you around....give us a call, like soon."

"Right, man, than's for the bread."

"Where to?" Larry asked when Cole got in the front seat.

"Take Bush to Powell to Ellis, cut across Market and we'll go Fourth to Mission Rock and into China Basin Street."

Larry drove and Cole thought about Cicero's ramblings. Larry didn't ask what he knew and Cole didn't volunteer anything. Coming into China Basin Street Cole said, "Turn right here." The unloading of the Crescent Moon was still under way. They drove on past and then Cole asked Larry to swing around and come back again. As they approached the second time, Cole said, "Pull over by the small building where the gate guard's stationed." He got out of the car and walked over slowly looking at the ship mostly. When the watchman saw Cole approaching he stepped out into the cool night air.

"Is that the Crescent Moon?" Cole asked before the guard could challenge him.

"It is. Are you looking for someone?" the guard asked suspiciously.

"I know some of the crew. I was just wondering if anyone was aboard."

"Are you from the company?" the guard wanted to know.

"No I'm not, but I've sailed on the Crescent Moon. I thought if anyone was around I might know, I'd say hello."

"The people on her now are the unloading crew. I think the ship's crew are all ashore. Mr. Crowder sometimes stays aboard to get her ready for the passengers but they won't be leaving until Monday so he probably won't show up until tomorrow evening sometime."

"Is it still Saturday night?" Cole asked in surprise.

The guard got out his watch. "It's about twenty-five minutes to go until Sunday morning." As Cole started to leave the guard asked, "Who will I say was here?"

Cole stopped and looking back, hesitated slightly. "Conrad," he said. "Joe Conrad." He went back to the car and got in, and as they pulled away he saw the guard making an entry in his record book.

"What do we do now?" Larry asked.

"There's about an acre of ground right across the street from the ship. If you look back you can see it's got a board fence around it. This evening when I drove by, all I could see inside it was a couple of small stacks of lumber. I'd like to take a closer look at it."

"When? Tonight?"

"Yeah, right now - but I need a light. I better go back and get my car."

Driving slowly down China Basin Street, Larry looked at him for a long moment. "There's a flashlight in that glove compartment," he pointed, "and I haven't got anything else to do, or any better sense," he said. "But we can't park across the street from the ship. Maybe I can come in from Illinois or Michigan." He kept on driving at a slow pace and at the end of the street doubled back into Illinois, squared into Eldorado and turned left into Michigan and then, stopping the car where he thought would be opposite the ship, started to get out.

"No, you wait here," Cole said. "I just want to confirm what I already suspect."

"Anybody catches me here they're not going to wait to confirm anything. I'll just wind up in the stout-house," Larry protested.

"Don't worry about it" Cole commiserated as he faded into the shadows. "I'll be right back." Moving cautiously beside a white building he came to the end of it and the reflected light gave out. He stopped, closed his eyes for a minute to adjust them to the blackness beyond and looked off to where the Crescent Moon should be tied up. He saw a faint glow against the low fog. Then he began to make out the dark outline of what he was sure was the top of the wooden fence enclosing the storage area that fronted on China Basin. Starting toward it confidently he stepped into a hole and his left leg dropped into water above his knee. Flinging his arms out instinctively he caught the edge of the other side of whatever he had fallen into and hung there for a moment. As his eyes adjusted further to the darkness it was apparent that he had fallen into a four-foot-wide ditch. He let the other leg slide in and,



pushing with his hands in the damp grass, pulled himself out, felt his clinging wet pants, and took off toward the dark silhouette of the fence a little more cautiously. As he came close, he stretched out his hands and finally touched moist boards. With his fingers, he found a crack and put his eye to it. It was just as black on the other side, so he moved to his right and almost at once came to a corner. Turning, he started pacing off the distance to the other corner. It was sixty-four yard-length steps before he found it. Making a ninety-degree turn this time, he continued his measured tread towards China Basin Street. When he came to that end of the fence which was almost on the street, he wasn't sure whether he had taken sixty or seventy steps but finally decided it was seventy. In either case, the enclosed space was approximately an acre - plenty big enough. He reached up and barely got his fingers over the edge of the boards. It must be seven-and-a-half or eight feet high, he thought, but couldn't remember how high he could reach either. Feeling along the top he touched a metal bracket screwed into the board extending upward. He jumped and waved his hand above it and felt a sharp tearing pain in his palm. One of the barbs in the wire-strung brackets had caught it and ripped it open. "Damn!" Clasping his hands together, the palms felt warm and sticky. He got out a handkerchief, balled it up, and squeezed down hard and then started at a half trot back the way he had come, trailing his good hand along the fence. When he came to the corner he felt his hand leave the fence but before he could slow down there was a bright flash of light and his head was rocked back. Reaching out instinctively, he contacted arms groping for him. Going into a clinch he hissed, "Larry?" but there was no answer and whoever it was didn't have Larry's bulk, but Christ, he was strong and quick.

Cole pinched one of the arms against his side as his left hand grasped a wrist, and then he felt cold metal. He broke the clinch and grabbed with both hands to keep the cold metal from pointing toward his body. Sweat came quickly and fear-goaded strength soared as he tried to break or jerk the arm from its socket. It was a static strain and again he felt steel pressing down toward the top of his head. He disengaged his right hand and chopped short for the belly, not wanting to miss. There was a high sigh of escaping air and this time he aimed at the sound. His knuckles splatted against a twisting jaw and sharp teeth just as metal crashed against his forehead and spurting blood rolled into his eyes. With all his strength he struck now at a gurgling noise, aiming lower, and felt his fist drive under a chin and into a neck and then a body was falling backwards and he was jerked forward on top of it. The

left wrist was painfully stretched and seemed to be caught up in the cold metal. Pushing away from the inert form, Cole still couldn't get untangled and then he saw a light swinging across the field, lost it momentarily about where the ditch was and then saw it come on again sweeping over the ground until it found them and he heard Larry's voice.

"What the hell happened? Are you O.K.? Who is he... Christ!... is that your blood or his?"

"I don't know, but I think it's mine. My head hurts."

Larry bent over and played the light on Cole's head. "It's not very deep but it's bleeding like hell," he said, taking out a handkerchief. "Here, hold this on it."

Cole reached for the handkerchief and another arm came up with his.

"Look out!" Larry yelled and Cole fainted off with his right hand, but when there was no more action Larry examined the arm that had moved. "How did you get him cuffed?" he wanted to know.

Wiping blood from his eyes, Cole looked at the handcuffs in disbelief. "Where the hell did those come from? I thought he had a gun."

"I wonder who he could be," Larry said with some concern as he turned the torch on the quiet face.

"It's the steward, Lew."

"Who?"

"The steward from the ship. I figured there was something wrong about him but I really didn't pick him as a part of this operation." He looked the still form over carefully. "Maybe you'd better dim that light and we'll try to get him back to the car."

"Here, you hold the light," Larry said, "and I'll carry him."

"You can't carry him. I'm handcuffed to him." And then he paused and looked again. "I wonder what the hell he's doing handcuffing me."

"What do you mean, handcuffing you? I thought you cuffed him."

Cole shook his head. "Let's get out of here. I'll figure it out later."

He got off his knees, pulled Lew up and slung him on his shoulder as easy as an oversized duffle bag. Larry lighted the way and this time both avoided falling in the ditch. When they got to the car Cole worked Lew's dead weight into the middle of the seat and squeezed in beside him. Larry got behind the wheel and pushed Lew's lolling head off his shoulder.

"Are you sure he's still breathing?" he asked Cole with real concern.

"Yeah, he's O.K. - his pulse is strong."

“Now where would you like to go?” Larry asked in a business-like voice.

“Let’s go to my place, I’ll call Thad Bocana. Maybe he can get something out of this guy.”

“Who the hell is Thad Bocana?”

“He’s an acquaintance of mine with the FBI who read my book on investigative procedures.”

Larry raced down the Embarcadero rather than across the city.

“Slow down, for Christ’s sake,” Cole said. “You’ll get us into trouble.”

Larry took his foot off the gas, pushed Lew’s head from his shoulder again, checked the handcuffed wrists and then Cole’s blood-streaked face.

“You mean we’re not in trouble... now?” he asked incredulously.

Twenty minutes later Larry eased into the parking space reserved for C. Rain Apt. 3, got out, closed the door softly and went around to the passenger side to help drape Lew over Cole’s shoulder. Then he fished the keys from Cole’s pocket and opened the apartment door. As they went in Lew straightened suddenly and heaved himself head first towards the floor. Larry caught him before Cole was twisted completely around, carried him to the couch and dropped him. This jerked Cole off his feet and put him on top of Lew, who started to struggle again.

“Take it easy. Where are the keys for those things?” Larry demanded.

Cole got off Lew and sat down beside him. “Hi, Lew - nice running into you again.” It was hard for Larry to believe they could both look so bad and still be able to function. Lew started to talk:

“I didn’t know you were there by the fence. I was just curious as to why you were nosing around the Crescent Moon.”

Cole interrupted, “Have you got a key for these things? Don’t tell me you lost it.”

Lew searched around in the waistband of his pants and finally came up with a key. It took him some time before he succeeded in snapping both links open, and Larry didn’t offer to help.

“What’s your story, Lew?”

“What’s yours?” Lew asked.

Cole ignored the question. “I concluded a long time ago you weren’t a steward but I’ll admit I didn’t figure you for part of the law. Where do you fit?”

“I’m not interested in talking to you, Mr. Rain,” Lew said stiffly. I’ll call a cab and get the hell out of here,” and he started for the phone.

“Wait a minute, Lew. I was going to call Thad Bocana and invite him over for a

drink. You don't happen to know Bocana, do you?"

Lew stopped, looked at Cole and then at Larry trying to grasp a complex combination and turned slowly back to Cole. "What do you know about Bocana?"

"Nothing, really, he's just an acquaintance of mine. He read a book I wrote."

"What would that be?"

"A book on investigative procedures for law enforcement officers."

A look of surprise touched Lew's face. "Oh, you're that Rain," he said frowning. "I've got to pay more attention to who writes those things." He thought for a moment longer, placing his hand gently on his jaw. "I never knew a guy who wrote books could hit like that though. It seems it was all a mistake," and he manipulated his head gingerly to see if it would still turn.

"Some mistake," Cole grunted as he dabbed at the still seeping scalp wound.

Lew fumbled out a folded piece of leather and tossed it on the table. "I'm with the Narcotics Bureau," he said shortly.

"I thought you'd given up on the Crescent Moon," Cole said in mild surprise.

"We gave up a couple of times, but things kept happening. If you and your friend can explain what you were doing there I'm ready to forget the Crescent Moon for the last time."

"This is Larry Carver," Cole said, "a friend and business associate of mine."

"I'm Hal Bronte. Lew's just one of the names I use from time to time." He paused for a minute squinting at Cole. "How did you happen to be out there tonight?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell you but it had nothing to do with me or my friend smuggling dope from the ship. Sorry I can't tell you more." Then he asked, "You're convinced the Crescent Moon is clean now, is that right?"

"That's right," Lew said, "and I'm turning my report in that way."

"Would you hold that report for a day? I'm too damned tired and sore to think clearly right now. I'ds like to take a hot shower, put a couple of band-aids on my head, get some sleep, and then think about a few things."

"What is there to think about?"

"I've got some angles to mull over. We might even bring Bocana in on it tomorrow."

"My report wouldn't go in until Monday anyway," Bronte said as he got up from the couch wearily. "I'm a little sore myself, maybe the sleep would help."

Larry, who had been quietly listening, shook his head negatively to himself but

didn't voice all his thoughts. "I'll take you anywhere you'd like to go," he said. "But are you sure you shouldn't have a doctor look you over first?"

"No, I'm all right," Bronte said shortly with a sort of sigh. "All I need is a couple of aspirins and some sleep."

Cole went as far as the door when the two left the apartment and shook hands with Bronte a little formally. He watched them go down the steps and move toward the car before he called to Larry, "If you stop by Borgia's tell Giuseppe I'll see him tomorrow." Then he closed the door quietly, hesitating before attaching the latch. Finally he snicked it in and walked slowly to the couch, flopping on it to think for a minute before going to sleep.

## *Chapter XIV*

Carl Peterson picked up a tray of potted begonias and carried them from the small glass house around to the shaded side of the old mansion. He set the tray on the grass beside a plot of ground that Hester Coleridge was working with a short-handled hoe.

“Is there any of that sand left? This ground is too hard,” she complained as she straightened up and rested the hoe in the chopped dirt.

Carl Peterson reached down for a piece of the dark soil, inspected it closely and broke it in his hands, letting it sprinkle back on the ground. “One wheelbarrow’ll do it,” he said softly, as though to himself. “There’s plenty of sand.”

Hester didn’t argue the point, just grasped the hoe and continued to dig at the earth, deciding at the same time to wear her pale blue ribbon-knit dress when Pilar came to tea in the afternoon. She would have to buy a new outfit for the wedding and she allowed the excitement to envelope her and wanted to hurry the planting of the begonias to give her plenty of time to bake orange cookies to compliment Catherine Peterson’s lemon nut bread. It was somewhat disturbing to her that she had not guessed, or that Cole had never hinted at his romantic interest in Pilar. Of course she wouldn’t be the first to mention it to him but there was no reason why it couldn’t be discussed and arrangements made with Pilar. These things required planning to which most men were oblivious.

The squeek of the wheelbarrow as Carl pushed it around the corner broke her reverie. “Where do you want it?” he asked. She directed him to dump it in the middle of the bed and an hour later it was raked in and a dozen begonias had been carefully set out and watered. It was just before noon when she entered the back door of

the house, washed her hands at the sink, and dialed Cole from the kitchen phone. She knew when he answered that her ring had wakened him.

"I waited to call till I was sure you were up," she said and not waiting for a reply, "Mrs. Peterson and I are going to do spring house cleaning in the morning and we'll start on your rooms first if it won't disturb you."

"Fine," Cole croaked. "Fine," and he fought to control his voice. "I thought you'd already done my rooms. They look fine." He wondered if he sounded fine. "I'll probably stay here until the middle of the week, Wednesday or Thursday."

"We'll be finished in your rooms long before then," she said and adjusted the receiver more firmly to her ear. Cole recognized the pause as a signal for the real reason she had called.

"Pilar is coming to see me this afternoon," she announced after the proper interval, and this time the wait for his reaction was real. When none came, she continued, "That girl has the truest marks of breeding and proper upbringing. She'll make someone a fine wife." Cole was only slightly startled at this sudden switch since Aunt Hester had always come on strong, nudging him toward marriage. "Most of these modern girls aren't worth a continental," she stated flatly.

He was awake and grinning now, wondering what was coming next. The archaic 'continental' must have filtered down from one of their revolutionary ancestors.

Another of her favorite words was 'tarnation'. Finally he broke in, "Well, Aunt Hester, I hope you two have a nice tea and I'll see you again sometime around the middle of the week."

"All right, Coleridge," she relented. "Sorry if you were flaked out when I called. I've got to split now, see you later." She hung up just before Cole's burst of laughter came through the receiver. She decided to have a light lunch and then bake her cookies. She would still have time for a warm bath and a nap before putting on her blue ribbon knit.

Twisting the ancient mechanical bell, Pilar waited at the heavy front door framing etched plate-glass. Millie Peterson opened it wearing a pink creation that in no-way stamped her as a domestic.

"Hello, Pilar," she greeted, and then conspiratorily, "Hester got a bad do on her first batch of cookies and she hasn't caught up yet."

"I hope I'm not early," Pilar worried. "You look lovely in pink, Mrs. Peterson."

"Thank you. I hear the elevator rattling so she'll be down in a minute," Millie



Peterson said as they moved into the foyer. "Let me take your wrap... what a beautiful shade of blue! Mr. Peterson laid a eucalyptus fire in the parlor," she went on. "Come in and make yourself comfortable I'll see if that was Hester."

Pilar loved the old formal room and particularly admired the Persian carpet and the polished parquet floors. To sit near the fire, she selected a rigid and uncomfortable last-century settee. The flames from the burning wood made glowing waves on the floor and mantel, and the warm colors in the carpets gave her a comfortable and secure feeling. She leaned forward to brush her hand over the top of the low table, savoring the texture of the bits of burnished ivory, pearl and exotic woods. There was a china tea service reposing on a mobile cart. The faded flower design on the eggshell-thin rim of the cups was yellowed with flickering light.

Suddenly she had the feeling of being watched and, looking over her shoulder, saw Aunt Hester standing in the open doors. She was wearing azure of almost the same shade of Pilar's frock and her silver hair intensified the blueness of the lovely gown and her wise eyes. She walked to Pilar with hands outstretched.

"When I saw you sitting there before the fire I wanted to call to you.... Lydia, Lydia hurry, we don't have time for tea....Alex is taking us in the carriage to a little shop on Sutter Street."

"I hope it was a pleasant remembrance. I don't need to ask how you are, you look divine."

"Lydia was my dearest friend and the prettiest girl I ever knew. You don't suppose that's a sign I'm getting old?" she asked twinkling. "But the past is gone and now you're the prettiest girl I know. Sit down, dear," and in a confidential tone, "Can we talk before I ask Millie to bring tea?"

"Oh yes, let's do," Pilar said. "Please tell me all about Lydia."

"No, no, dear. Lydia is from another time. I only remember when I'm reminded," she said, looking someplace beyond the room and then quickly back. "I'd like to talk about you and Cole and your plans...and to ask if you'll let me help."

Pilar's eyes widened, her mouth opening slightly as if to speak but she only portrayed a rather startled expression.

"I've known for some time that you two were in love," she said gently. "I don't want to meddle but I'd be proud to be a small part of any plans you might have." Since Pilar was unable to speak Aunt Hester continued, "There's a ballroom on the east wing of this house that would be big enough for a reception. The last time it was used was Cole's thirteenth birthday party, but after he started high school he

didn't want another one."

Pilar held up her free hand, brushing her brow with it, and finally spoke. "Are you under the impression that Cole and I are planning to be married?" she asked in astonishment.

"Oh no," Hester assured her, "I didn't know what your plans were. I realize that both of you are very modern and up-to-date on these things, but when two people are in love it sometimes follows that they get married."

Pilar had regained part of her composure but still couldn't understand how Aunt Hester had jumped to this impossible conclusion of love and marriage or something else. Perhaps it was merely old age, but Cole had never suggested that Aunt Hester had mental aberrations. Something was seriously wrong; she would have to set her straight, but gently. "There's nothing between Cole and me, Aunt Hester, other than being good friends and having mutual respect for each other as colleagues in the corporation." It was Aunt Hester's turn to be surprised. Pilar suspected that she should allow this blunt statement of fact to handle the situation but couldn't help asking the obvious. "Where did you ever get such an idea that Cole and I were in love?"

Aunt Hester was still slightly shaken but she said firmly, "I know that Cole is in love with you; maybe being so fond of him myself and so taken with his many charms I assume that whomever he loves would naturally love him in return."

"Oh, and I'm sure that's so," Pilar hurried to agree, "but Cole doesn't love me, Aunt Hester, that's where you're mistaken." She must be just as firm; but then she asked again, "Why do you think he loves me? Did he tell you so?"

Aunt Hester hesitated for a moment in thought and then seemed to decide to reveal everything. "I know many things about Cole without him telling me," she said in a confidential voice. "When his parents were suddenly taken and he came to live with me, I had no understanding of little boys - never having had any children of my own. I loved him so, but was worried that I wouldn't be able to help him because of this lack of understanding. I tried not to over-indulge him but I suppose I did. Then in his eighth year his boyishness seemed to become more mysterious to me and I needed to know him better to understand him more, if I were ever to be of any value or help to him." Pilar listened to all this with much interest and decided that the explanation was coming so she didn't interrupt.

"When Coleridge was nine, as one of his birthday gifts, I bought him a rather expensive leather-bound diary. There were spaces to make entries for each day of the

year and extra pages to be inserted if necessary. The diary could be locked and of course I gave Coleridge a key. I was very happy when I found that he immediately started to use it - writing out his activities of the day." She released Pilar's hand and relaxed visibly before continuing. "About a month went by before he began describing his thoughts. From that time on we seemed to have a greater understanding and I was able to help unobtrusively as well as not to interfere with his growing up. Boys are rather complicated," she stated with some authority, "much more so than girls, even though we try to make out the opposite." Then she went on: "Each year I have always given him an annual diary on his birthday and he has a special shelf in his room where he keeps them. He doesn't always fill in every date now but when he's here he writes things down more fully and sometimes leaves bits of paper between the leaves with notes and jottings on them."

Pilar had to break in, "But how did his keeping a diary help you to understand him more?"

"I read them," she said calmly, "but of course he doesn't know and we must never let him know."

"But I thought you said you gave him the key?" Pilar was stunned.

"No, no, dear. I said I gave him 'a' key. There were two master keys that will open any volume and I kept one. So you see I always knew what he had been up to and could anticipate his changing moods and sometimes figure out what he planned to do next without bothering him with a lot of questions." Aunt Hester seemed relieved that she'd finally told her secret and happily began expanding on it. "One of the most interesting aspects in reading them were the subtle changes that became apparent as Coleridge grew from a mischievous boy to a fairly thoughtful young man. You wouldn't believe some of the things he wrote."

Pilar couldn't hold back the giggle. "But didn't he ever suspect? You must have let slip things that you couldn't possibly have known except by peeking at his diary - and didn't he ever notice that they had been handled or moved around on the shelf?"

"Oh no, I'm always very careful to place them back exactly as they were before. The shelf never looks different, not even as though it had been dusted. In fact, unless he looks at the earlier volumes and brushes them, they are covered with cobwebs as well as thick dust."

"But if you read them wouldn't the dust and the cobwebs be disturbed?"

"Oh yes, but after they once got dusty and full of cobwebs I never touched them

until I found a way to replace the dust and webs. When my husband was alive, he invested in several theatrical productions and we became acquainted with a very nice man who produced effects for the stage. He furnished me with a little bellows that has a spout and when you press it, it sprays dust. He also had a compact machine that creates cobwebs when you turn a crank something like the way cotton candy's made. With these two gadgets I always keep Coleridge's diary shelf dusty and cobwebby so when he takes a volume down and brushes it off he feels secure in the knowledge that his secret thoughts are locked inside. I'm a firm believer that this security of their own private thoughts is very necessary to male growth and maturation." With this twisted bit of rationalized psychology Aunt Hester rose suddenly from the couch and said, "But, come my dear, let me show you Coleridge's rooms - and then there's something I'd like you to read."

They left the parlor and crossed the foyer that contained an ancient walnut stand with a mirrored back that Pilar hadn't noticed before. There was a slippery combination of scatter rugs on the polished floor and an elephant's leg cut-off and hollowed-out that was being used as an umbrella stand. Beyond a broad staircase was a hall leading to Cole's quarters. Aunt Hester opened a solid-looking door and motioned Pilar to enter. The room and all that was in it was immaculately clean as Pilar had expected and the book shelves mounting the far wall were packed with cared-for volumes. But as they approached, and even though she had been warned, the single shelf almost filled with leather bound diaries covered with dust and cobwebs was a shock. Aunt Hester removed the end volume from the untidy shelf, carried it gingerly to a desk placed under a high window and drew the drapes all the way back. Selecting several paper tissues from the top drawer she wiped the leather clean. From a locket suspended on a chain around her neck she shook out a small gold key and unlocked the flap that held the volume secure. She opened it to where a single sheet of paper was inserted between the pages. Extracting it, she laid it face down on the desktop and handed the diary to Pilar indicating where she should start reading.

"Aunt Hester, I don't know...are you sure we should read this?" Pilar hesitated, but with hope in her voice.

"Yes, of course we should, child. We're reading this not for our own benefit but so that we can better anticipate Coleridge's needs and help him even though he's unwilling to ask our help."

Pilar didn't bother to examine this overly solicitous logic but with no more

encouragement turned the diary to the light and read:

“After leaving the ship I became increasingly nervous and anxious to get to the RCS&J Building, telling myself it was because of the stockholder’s meeting and not wanting to be late. But I knew what was wrong. I wasn’t hurrying to the meeting at all - I was hurrying to see her and she had been with me more than she had ever been. I’ve got to sort out my thoughts and the best way is to set them down. As soon as I have a moment to think deeply I’ll write out how it first came to me on the beach in Mexico and then I’ll forget it. This is like nothing else - this could be total involvement and that I don’t need. Anyway, no one will ever guess the way it is - especially her.

There were no further entries in the book. “What does it mean?” Pilar asked, laying the diary down and looking at Aunt Hester. “And he doesn’t even say who he’s writing about. Why are you so sure of what he means?”

Aunt Hester picked up the pieces of paper that she’d placed face down on the desk top and handed it to Pilar.

Pilar accepted it with a little less hesitation and began reading again:

TO PILAR

We were together

I was alone.

When we were apart and

Time was slow and quiet

I wasn’t alone;

You were there too.

The Sun shone on us and

In a soft and fragrant dawn you smiled.

There were green forests

Craggy snow mountains in the mist and

White crested waves hissing on a bleached beach.

A stallion raced the sand

From surf’s edge to golden grass.

Suddenly the sky turned black,

Thunder rolled and jagged lightning

Cracked a thousand fiery fingers.  
The vision turned inward and  
There was us and a storm.

Rain pelted hair,  
Dripped from dark lashes and  
Iridescent drops clung.  
Our lips touched.

My eyes spilled tears  
And I cried  
Before I died  
And was banished to earth and reality;  
But you were there too.

She read it again more slowly this time while Aunt Hester looked on. Then, picking up the open diary, she carefully placed the writing between the pages, closed it and snapped the lock. Neither of them spoke and Pilar caressed the soft leather before returning the volume to its place on the shelf. She wasn't sure she should have done it but was very glad she had and while she searched her conscience Aunt Hester produced a small round box with a spout that operated like a bellows and replaced the thin film of dust that had been wiped away. Then she examined the shelf, the desk and the room meticulously, straightening here and there, before leading Pilar back to the old-fashioned parlor where Millie Peterson was already bustling about.

They ate crisp warm orange cookies that melted almost without chewing, drank redolent pink tea from the Far East, and then stuffed themselves on lemon nut bread with sweet butter as they planned the future.

## *Chapter XV*

Cole opened his eyes wide and lay motionless, staring at the phone by his bed. As he wondered why he had bothered to waken at this particular moment, the phone rang again and then he remembered that it had rung once or twice before way off somewhere in the distance. He picked up the receiver and curved it from ear to mouth, paused before answering and, trying to sound wide awake, croaked, "Hello." It was Aunt Hester and she was talking about cleaning his rooms and about seeing Pilar. Damn! If he wasn't dreaming about her he was reminded of her the moment he wakened. It probably didn't matter though, he would have thought of her in a minute anyway. He told Aunt Hester he would see her sometime around the middle of the week and burst out laughing at something she said just before she hung up. He replaced the receiver and rolled over with the vague thought of going to sleep again but almost immediately decided sleep was impossible, which was just as well because the phone rang again. It was Kang.

"Did I wake you up?" Kang wanted to know.

"No, you didn't wake me up." Why the hell did everybody worry about waking him up, it was already ten o'clock. "What's on your mind?" Then he remembered about the girl and asked, "Did you get anything worthwhile from the girl?"

"Yeah," Kang said. "I think so. But she's a strange one."

"So is her sister. But you wouldn't want all girls to be alike."

"No, true," Kang said. "Still..."

"You didn't learn anything," Cole broke in.

"Yes, I did," Kang said. "It's the strongest kind of confirmation that the ship's being used to smuggle dope. The things she doesn't know are just exactly who's doing it and who picks it up here in San Francisco."



“Does she know how they get it off the ship?”

“She couldn’t tell me anything about that.”

“This is no information at all, Kang, if that’s all she could tell you.”

“I think it is. You haven’t been able to come up with anything but suspicions so far and if you didn’t get something tangible soon, everyone was going to forget about the ship. But this information has got to be authentic. You didn’t ask for it and they only suspected that you wanted it. If it weren’t the truth how could they ever dream you’d be interested in the first place?”

“Wait a minute, wait a minute... you’re right,” Cole said. “I got a conflicting report last night that it was flown in from tamale-land but I see how it could fit together now.”

“You do! How does bringing it in by ship and flying it in fit together?”

“Thanks a million, Kang. I really appreciate what you’ve done. I’ll explain it all to you later.”

“Why not now?”

“Later, Kang. But wait a minute... did it rain last night, or was there a low fog?”

“It didn’t rain where the ship was,” Kang said. “There was some high fog.”

Cole didn’t ask why he was so specific - ‘didn’t rain where the ship was.’

“But nothing low, right?”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Kang asked.

“Kang I’ll call you later, and thanks again.”

After a few minutes of staring at the high ceiling, his mind racing, Cole got up and went to the three-oriented bathroom, selecting the middle stool. He showed no favoritism, keeping the use of the three stools fairly even. If his conscious mind intruded and he wasn’t sure which toilet he had last used he invariably gave his custom to the one on the left; it being farthest from the door, probably giving him the mistaken impression of its being neglected. Contemplating it now, allowing his subconscious mind to rove other thoughts, he felt reasonably sure that he followed the same pattern with the washbasins and showers. Henceforward he would remember - when in doubt, select either the middle or the right hand facility and give the left one a rest. When he finished he showered to the right and shaved before the mirror over the middle basin, all this time thinking of what he would divulge to Lew, or rather to Hal Bronte of the Narcotics Bureau, and whether or not he should ask Thad Bocana of the FBI to sit in. He speculated as to how these two proud agencies might work together but since the two men knew each other maybe their personal

relationship would smooth any official hitches. Unplugging the electric razor he placed it in the left drawer, hesitated only a moment before removing it and dropped it in the middle one to serve as a marker for the washbasin last used.

Back in the bedroom, still in deep thought, he opened a drawer and reached out a pair of light blue wool socks, pulling them on while standing. He stepped into a pair of shorts as he moved towards a closet where he selected blue slacks and a dark red pullover sweater. He shoved his feet into cordovan loafers and then, still with a frown of concentration, moved into the living room and stared at the phone. He picked up an indexed pad, flipped to the B's, found Bocana's number and dialed. A click interrupted the intermittent buzz and a child's voice came through, "Hello - do you want to talk to my daddy or to my mom?"

"Hi," Cole said, "I'd like to talk to your dad. Can you get him for me?"

"Sure, he's right outside."

While he waited Cole continued to work on the best way to explain his hunch, or rather the reasoned facts that had brought him to his bizarre conclusions. Thad Bocana's brusque voice short-circuited his thoughts.

"Hello, this is Bocana." And the way he said it demanded return identification.

"Hi, Thad, this is Cole Rain. Sorry to bother you on your day of rest."

"Cole, how are you?" He seemed relieved. "This is no day of rest business as usual - I'm just not doing it at the office."

"Do you have time to listen to a problem of mine?"

"I didn't know you ever had problems," and Bocana sounded happy to learn that others did.

"I'm not sure it's in the province of the FBI," Cole ignored the jibe, "but I need to talk to someone who can suggest the right procedure to follow."

"Sure, go ahead," Bocana said. "It's unofficial for the time being. I'll be glad to help if I can."

"Right. First - do you know Hal Bronte of the Federal Narcotics Bureau?"

"Yes, I know Hal. He's a good man."

Cole decided to describe Bronte, or Lew, to make positive they were talking about the same man. The identification accomplished to both their satisfactions, he quickly explained the problem of the SS Crescent Moon, his part in the investigation, and the accidental meeting with Bronte the night before, or rather, that morning.

After Bocana stopped laughing, he summarized: "Now you're telling me you have

a theory based mostly on hunch, that the dope is brought ashore from the Crescent Moon, past customs, through the surveillance of the Narcotics Bureau - and the local authorities - and it's all really a very simple procedure. Is that right?"

"That's what I believe," Cole said firmly, "and if I'm right, tonight's the only time they'll have during this stay to work their gimmick. I'd like to explain my theory and set it up, so that if I am right, the one link missing in this chain of heroin flow will hook-up with the known links."

"Well," Bocana mused, "you say the ship has been searched repeatedly and no sign of narcotics has ever been found?"

"Right," Cole admitted. "But getting the stuff on the ship in Mexico and bringing it to the pier in San Francisco is easy to do without detection. It would take the complete dismantling of the damn ship to find all the various hiding places. But again, if my reasoning is right," he refused to call it a hunch, "the SS Crescent Moon is still the top suspect." Bocana continued to listen. "The one place where it comes to an end is the transference from ship to shore, and I think I've got that solved. But I need help to prove it."

"All right," Bocana finally decided. "I've got to go to the office anyway. Why don't you phone Bronte and the two of you meet me there in forty-five minutes."

"Sure it won't interfere with what you're doing?"

"No, my problem," Bocana said, "shouldn't affect this area too much. In fact, it'll probably end with some of our citizens crossing that Mexican border the other way. I'll see you in forty-five minutes," he concluded.

"Thanks, Thad." Cole hung up and in the same motion reached for the phone directory. Finding Bronte Harold W., he checked the address with the one Bronte had mentioned earlier that morning and dialed, waiting through eight rings. When Bronte finally answered he sounded hurried.

"Hello."

"Morning, Hal - just checking your temperature."

"Yeah, thanks. It's normal. A few bruises here and there and my jaw's a little stiff - other than that I'm O.K. How are you?"

"Fine. A couple of band-aids are keeping my head together but I guess you could say I'm holding my own." Then he quickly gave the narcotics agent a rundown on his conversation with Bocana, not mentioning that the FBI man had been hugely amused at their life-and-death struggle. Bronte tried to pump him on the details of his theory but Cole would only reiterate that he was reasonably sure he knew how the stuff got

ashore and would save the details until they met at Bocana's office.

There was plenty of parking space in front of the Federal Building and after Cole bumped the curb gently he saw Bronte heading for the front entrance. As Bronte opened the door he turned and waited for Cole and they entered the building together and took the elevator to Bocana's office. They were ushered directly into Bocana by a crew-cut boy who looked too young to have been in the Bureau for two years.

Leaning back in his chair, Bocana had just finished talking and was now listening to the transceiver resting on his desk. He motioned for them to sit down and continued to listen absorbedly to the report emanating from the open speaker.

"...The number five and the least probable assumption is that the suspects will make their way into the Bay Area by car. The weapon and ammunition taken from the Nevada Proving Grounds are readily concealable as normal pieces of luggage or packaged civilian goods and -"

Suddenly, Bocana seemingly just becoming aware of their presence and the permeating voiced report, reached forward and picked up the receiver, cutting off the sound. He leaned back again, placed the receiver to his ear, and continued to listen just as intently. Cole examined the room, noting its efficient appearance of sterility. After three or four minutes Bocana returned the receiver to the desk phone, jotted a couple of notes and looked up at his visitors. "I expected to see more bandages," he said. "Sorry I missed the main event."

Bronte smiled weakly. "I knew you'd consider it all a big joke but can we get on with Mr. Rain's theory?"

"By all means," Bocana grinned. "I imagine you're both anxious to get it over with."

"This is my vacation and I'm supposed to take the family skiing for a week," Bronte explained stiffly.

Cole broke in quickly. "I appreciate everyone taking the time to listen to what I have to say." And with no further preparation he launched into his explanation, interspersing it with a couple of drawings on a chalkboard. He developed his theory expertly. When he had completed the detailed account Bocana shook his head in amusement and looked at Bronte.

"If you're right," Bronte said, "why isn't the dope already off the ship?"

"Because the ship has been in Alameda for repairs. She was berthed last night and only the unloaders were there all night. The crew and Mike Crowder will go

aboard tonight.”

“Well, I don’t know....I suppose it’s possible,” Bocana said. “What do you think, Hal?”

“My report is made,” Bronte said. “Rain has worked out a wild hunch but I don’t think there’s any way possible to smuggle dope or anything else from that particular ship. That’s why I’m taking a week off,” he concluded.

“If your report is final and you’re positive it’s correct, why did you bother to follow me last night?”

“That was an accident. I was picking up some clothes I’d left on the ship and I just happened to see you and your friend cruising along the Embarcadero. Maybe this business I’m in makes you overly suspicious; anyway, I followed. Then when you parked in the dark spot on Michigan I had to see what you were up to. As it turned out it was all a mistake.”

“A hell of a mistake but I still think I’m right and I can check it out myself,” Cole said independently. “Tonight has to be the night for them to move during this particular docking.” He stood up, thanked them both for listening to his story and started to leave.

“Wait a minute. What do you intend to do?” Bocana wanted to know with some concern.

“Nothing that will cause any trouble,” Cole grinned. “And whatever I find out I’ll call it into you.”

Bocana looked a little doubtful. “I’m sorry I don’t have anybody I can release to give you an assist,” he hesitated. “But I’ll be close to a phone either here or at home.” Then he abruptly got up from behind his desk and reached across to shake hands with Cole and Bronte. Even before they left the office he was back on the phone.

As they dropped to street level, Bronte seemed anxious to justify his vacation by yammering at Cole that investigating the ship further was a waste of time and that if he felt any slight possibility he was wrong he’d postpone his vacation to help. Anyway, until his report was final, there would be agents checking this last unloading.

Cole thanked him. “If I am right,” he said, “I’ll get the proof myself and then Bocana can handle it with the local authorities.”

Outside the building they shook hands warily and turned in opposite directions. As Cole twisted the key in the ignition, he was thinking hard about what

to do next.

## *Chapter XVI*

At the first cross street he turned left and headed for Spike Swensen's house. Spike was general manager of Swensen's Trucking Corporation whose primary business was moving freight to and from the docks. The last time he had seen Spike and Lenore Swensen was at the Borgias' wedding reception and he remembered that Lenore had shoved Spike through the front of the building out the large plate glass window. He switched his thoughts to the problem at hand and five minutes later parked in front of the Swensen home. He should have called ahead, he thought, but remembered he hadn't seen any phones along the way. He walked to the front door and pushed a button. It seemed to be in working order because he heard a lilting chime come from inside. The door opened almost immediately.

"Cole, darling, come in - how nice to see you," Lenore Swensen gushed in apparent happy surprise. She was partially covered with a filmy negligee, opened and unbelted, showing an even more filmy nightgown with only Lenore inside. He was acutely conscious of the lightly-covered spiky nipples and lower down, the tantalizingly protruding dark vee. Cole stood outside and thought of the contrast between her platinum hair and the dark spot.

"Come on in," Lenore demanded. "It's getting cold in here." When he stepped inside she closed the door and threw her arms around his neck, kissing him on the lips and pressing her body as close as she could get it.

Cole was too startled to react quickly but finally got her arms from around his neck and sort of held her off while he looked about the hallway and into the rooms beyond. "Where's Spike?" he asked with some concern.

"You don't need to worry about him, he took off for the office an hour ago." Cole licked his lips and tasted coffee and brandy. "We had a tee-off time at the club for eleven o'clock but it's like this every weekend and even on holidays and



I'm getting damn tired of it," she complained. "Come on in and sit down - I'm just having coffee." She held his hand and guided him through two mussed-up rooms into a breakfast area where a table was set for two and an electric coffee pot was bubbling.

Cole followed cautiously and when he saw the table set-up he asked rather inanely, "Were you expecting someone?"

"Just you, darling. That's why I sent Spike off to the office," and she moved in a little closer.

Cole backed off. "I wanted to see Spike," he said. "I should have called but since I was in the neighborhood...." He paused... "I'll just go on down to his office now," he said, backing away a little farther.

"No you won't. You'll sit down and have a cup of coffee with me," she said determinedly, pulling out a chair for him. "A half hour won't make any difference and you can call Spike from here and tell him you're on the way."

"O.K.," Cole relented at the prospect of talking to Spike. He moved forward to the table, pulling out a chair and holding it for Lenore in turn. With a curtsying swoop reminiscent of a bunny, she accepted the seat reaching for the coffee and cups while Cole returned to his chair.

"God, do you remember the night we spent on the beach wrapped in one blanket?" she giggled.

Cole was a little surprised at her reference to that night since it had never been spoken of before. "Yeah," he said. "I do. But that was a long time ago. Before you were married," he added.

"That's right," she said with some asperity. "And nothing as exciting has happened to me since."

Cole took a sip of coffee. "Maybe I'd better call Spike and tell him I'm on my way."

"You've only been here five minutes." She looked disgusted. "Don't worry about him. He won't be home until one or two o'clock - he never comes back before that time when we have a golf date. What did you want to see him about?"

"I need a truck for about twenty-four hours. I thought maybe he might rent one."

"He doesn't rent trucks but there are plenty of them down there. I'm sure he'll give you one to use." She took a deep swallow and set the cup down carefully before she asked, "Are you moving?"

"No, as I say, I just need it for a little while - in my business." Then, seeing a

phone on a desk in the corner of the room, he jumped up. "I'd better call him and let him know I'll be down."

"Tell him you'll be there in about an hour. I've been dying to talk over old times with you." Leaving the table on her way to the kitchen she brushed past him, trailing a faint fragrance that he liked, and her body touching his gave off an electric shock.

"I'll tell you what," he said quickly. "I don't think there's any need to call him. I'll just go on down there." Hurriedly he replaced the receiver and started for the front door. He had it open and was already sliding out when Lenore grabbed his arm.

"Damn you, Cole Rain. Don't you dare leave without having a cup of coffee and chatting with me."

"I'm sorry, Lenore," he said. "But this is really important and we can do all that some other time. Thanks for everything and goodbye for now."

The last he heard was, "Goodbye forever, you bastard."

He trotted to the car, jumped in, and left the Swensen home for the Swensen Trucking Corporation's offices and yard. As he drove he couldn't help thinking about the night on the beach. When some of the details really began pressing in on him he decided he better stop thinking about it and concentrate on the plan he wanted to follow. Spike's car was parked beside a one-story stucco building in the space reserved for the general manager. Cole circled in alongside, slid out and started for the front door when he heard Spike yell:

"If you're looking for me, I'm over here." He looked back and saw Spike leaning against a truck talking with two men. Spike waved and called, "I'll be right there - go on in and have a chair."

Cole signaled and went on into the office. The small lobby was furnished with a lounge and a couple of leather-like plastic-covered chairs. He dropped in one, picked up a magazine, stared at it and continued thinking about what he was going to do. Five minutes later Spike came through the door.

"Hi, Cole, where you been? Lenore was just asking the other day if I'd run into you recently."

"I just saw Lenore," Cole said easily. "I stopped by the house - should have called first, but I was in the neighborhood and took a chance you'd be there. She's looking great," he said. Pausing for only a moment, he went on hurriedly, "But you better get home - she's anxious to go play golf."

"I know it, damnit. Something always comes up just when we've got a game

planned, but I've got to wait around here for about a half hour. We can still go, though. Why don't you make it a threesome?"

"Can't," Cole said shortly. "I'm like you, always working."

"Yeah," Spike said and took the other chair. "What can I do for you? What did you want to see me about?"

"I'd like to rent one of your trucks, or maybe just one of those big vans that you leave sitting around down at the docks."

"You want a tractor and a semi?" Spike asked.

"Well, I've got a problem. I need to go down on the Embarcadero and be able to see what's going on and still be inconspicuous - you know, as though I belonged there. I've noticed that sometimes you leave your - what do you call them - semis? just parked on the dock."

Spike nodded. "Right, sometimes they're loaded and sometimes they're waiting to be unloaded. We just drop the landing gear until we're ready to move them again. But you'd still be conspicuous if you were just loafing around one of those things."

"I was wondering if there was some way I could be inside and still see out."

"They don't have any windows or holes in them. How long would you want to be on the dock?"

"I'm not sure - maybe all night." And there was a flash-back to the all-night he and Lenore had spent on the beach.

"Why don't you drive a tractor down and park it? We've got some cab-over engines with a sleeper in back and if anyone saw you they'd just think you were waiting to pick up a load."

"That would be great, Spike," getting back to business. "Do you think that would do it?"

"The only thing is, you don't look like a truck driver. You'd have to change your clothes." Spike didn't question, knowing that Cole sometimes did crazy things in his business, whatever his business was. He went on: "We've got a shower room out back. There's always plenty of old clothes hanging around. You could change and look exactly like a big rough truck driver," he grinned.

Thirty minutes later a cab-over engine diesel tractor looking overburdened with huge rubber-tired wheels rolled slowly out of Swensen's yard, rhythmically puffing black smoke from an exhaust stack pointing straight up. The man at the controls was wearing boots, baggy pants, an old leather jacket trimmed with brass rivets and a

peaked cap that had a round metal button pinned on the side marked STC 23. The rig was unusual in its bigness but was common enough moving towards the dock. The driver, in his shower-room clothes, had lost his identity.

Cole had been surprised that it had taken less than fifteen minutes to learn to operate the tractor and he had driven cars that weren't as easy to handle. The dizzying height above the pavement was the most unique sensation. In back of the seat was a bunk with a couple of blankets and best of all, the cab was equipped with a radio phone. Spike had checked him on procedures in calling the special operator to connect directly with any telephone in the country - or out of the country, for that matter. His first thought had been not to chance the wharf until late afternoon but when he checked the mirror and hardly recognized himself and found the tractor easy to operate and loaded with bed and phone, he decided to drive immediately to China Basin Street. Bumping along the Embarcadero, looking down on everything, he saw a one-man sandwich shop with an 'Open' sign in the window reminding him he was hungry. Cutting across the imbedded rails in the road he tried to bring the big rig carefully to the curb by pressing the air brakes gently, but the tractor snapped to a stop forcing him against the steering wheel. As he eased on the brakes slightly it coasted in, touching the curb and sat panting like an overgrown puppy. He switched off the engine and climbed down a narrow ladder to the street.

The sandwich man had been watching through the dirty window and when Cole came in he said, "I can give you eggs any style with ham, bacon, or sausage and a hot stack if you can wait a few minutes."

"All I want is a couple of sandwiches to go," Cole explained.

"Burger, cheeseburger, ham and cheese, egg - what'll you have?"

"Make it one cheeseburger and one ham and cheese grilled. And can I get a coke and a couple of beers to go?"

"No beer. Can't afford a license for a small place like this," the sandwich man said, opening the refrigerator to get burger patties, sliced cheese, and thin ham. "There's a liquor store down near Fisherman's Wharf if you're going that way."

"I was going the other direction but while you're fixing those I might run back down to the Wharf."

"O.K. They'll be ready when you get back."

Cole wasn't sure if trucks were allowed on Fisherman's Wharf and when he found the liquor store there was no place to park. He doubled in back of a convertible with the top down and since convertibles are a little unusual for San Francisco, especial-

ly on a foggy day, he climbed down and checked it. There were a couple of tennis rackets and three cans of balls lying carelessly in back of the bucket seats. It was Larry's car and Cole assumed Larry was in one of the Wharf restaurants. He went into the liquor store and took a six-pack from the cooler. He placed the beer near the cash register and waited his turn to pay. Coming out of the store carrying the beer, he saw Larry and Kang in the open car. Kang was making a point by drawing a figure in the dust on top of the dash. Larry was shaking his head in disagreement. They both glanced up when he started between the cars to get to the tractor.

"Is that your truck?" Kang asked in a loud voice.

"Yeah," Cole said hoarsely trying to disguise the sound as he climbed on up.

"You're only breaking the law three ways," Larry shouted up disgustedly. "That truck's illegal here, you're double parked, and you can't drink beer in a motor vehicle."

They must be in a hurry to get to the courts, Cole thought. "Screw you," he said shortly, starting the big diesel and moving it on down the street. In the rear view mirror he saw them both scrambling for the convertible and as he turned the corner he stuck out his left hand with middle finger pointed toward the sky. He wasn't sure if they'd come after him or not. It was too bad they couldn't help but what he had to do was better done alone.

The sandwiches and coke were ready in a bag and, placing them on the seat beside him, he opened the diesel up to fifty miles an hour on the deserted Embarcadero. When he reached the basin the Crescent Moon was still being unloaded. She was higher in the water and her prow loomed above the street. He slowed to watch the trucks move on and off the pier and to see the guard at the gate exchange slips of paper with the drivers. The high-boarded storage area with the barbed wire on top was directly across the street, reminding him of the cut hand which still hurt from the barbs ripping it the night before. About fifty feet from the driveway leading to the gate in the fence was a row of parked cargo containers with their landing gear down. He wheeled the tractor in front of them and carefully backed in alongside, and was surprised at how visible everything was from his high perch in the glassed-in cab. He was just as visible, but the meeting with Kang and Larry had given him confidence in his camouflage. If anybody noticed him, they paid no attention, considering the tractor and its operator a natural phenomenon. He selected the still-hot cheeseburger from the sack, opened the coke and set it on the lip of the dash. He took a man-sized bite from the combination bun, meat,

cheese, onion and tomato and then a gurgle of coke, relishing it all, and then settled back in the comfortable seat for the long wait.

Nothing seemed to change about the routine truck movement in front of him and the minutes and hours dragged. The fog lifted some as one, two, and then three o'clock checked off, but there wasn't a break as he watched and waited. Once a lighter spot in the sky portended a thinning of the overcast but the fog quickly moved in to blot it out. The trucks continued to roll and the guards and drivers continued to pass pieces of paper back and forth. He even wondered idly if there could be heroin concealed in the papers, but seeing them flutter slightly as they were handed about, decided they were clean. He felt sure the paper-passers were clean too. Until Bronte's report was accepted; clearing the SS crescent Moon, undercover agents were watching the dry clay being sucked up and blown from the holds of the ship into the trucks, and other agents were watching the unloading at the McWhorter Brown plant. And he knew that it didn't matter a damn. After this last surveillance, with Bronte's report in, they'd give up. The method for getting dope off the ship was foolproof in its simplicity but if he was right, after the transfer was made this time, the amateurs who had planned it would be trapped in the China Basin Street. Again he went over in his mind the possibilities for moving the stuff out of the area. There were railroads for sure but there were only two exits and if he went overland or even decided on one of these normal exits he'd be awfully conspicuous and easy to apprehend. Practically the only movement in the basin was motor vehicles of one kind or another. If smuggling was going on, and now he was sure, there was no way to accomplish it other than the method he'd deduced. And yet, some small doubts persisted. He finally decided that thinking on it any more was a waste of time. Now was a time for quiet observation and action when the opportunity came. Suddenly he wished he had bought more coke instead of so much beer. The beer made him sleepy, but then it also made him climb down once in a while to relieve himself between the tractor and the parked semis, breaking the monotony. There had been maybe three cars all afternoon cruise slowly by and he assumed their drivers were either lost or taking a Sunday sightseeing trip along the wharf and somehow had stumbled into the Basin.

He had just climbed into the cab from his third relief trip and the sky was beginning to darken a little when he saw a panel truck approaching from the left. Leaning back to be less noticeable, he watched it come toward him at a moderate speed. It was a fairly new blue panel truck and he assumed it would go on by, but the driver



braked and turned into the gravel drive leading to the fenced storage area. It rolled on up a little way and the lights were switched on. The driver got out and walked to the gate. Sorting through a ring of keys, he inserted one in the bottom of the heavy padlock, took it off the hasp and pushed the gates inward. It was hard to believe, but on the side of the panel truck in large letters 'JOLLO ALLEYS' was advertised. It was so damned blatant Cole began to doubt his reasoning again. Either they were stupid or so over-confident of their ingenious plan that they felt no need to conceal the identity of the truck. The driver drove the panel through, stopped again just inside the enclosure, got out to close the gates and bolted them tight. Cole felt better; there had to be a subconscious reason for making the gates that secure since they wouldn't keep the fog out. It was the only suspicious thing the driver had done and it was so trivial that it would generally go unnoticed. Cole picked up the radio phone and gave the special operator both the numbers Bocana had given him, but Bocana was in the office and answered on the first ring. Bocana sounded more relaxed, as though the pressure were off, but Cole still asked if he should call back with his report.

"You sound as though you've got something," Bocana said. "Go ahead."

While Cole was describing the situation a long black car came into the street from the opposite direction from which the panel had come and pulled up alongside the guard house. Cole's attention was divided between the telephone conversation and what was happening across the street. Since the trucks were still moving on and off the pier the passengers from the black car were unloading right where they parked. Three couples got out and the men started removing luggage. there was the usual conglomerate of bags and then there were the long narrow gun cases and two square boxes probably containing special shells for the hunting. If anyone in the party could shoot, the Mexican ducks were in for trouble. Cole reported to Bocana that he could see Mike Crowder and his wife and thought he recognized one of the other couples but couldn't recall their names; he was sure he had never seen the third couple. Mike Crowder had gone on to the pier and now he came back with one of the longshoreman who was pushing a low-wheeled cart. First they placed the two boxes of shells on the cart and then the guns in their cases and finally what luggage it would hold. Leaving the rest of the bags sitting by the car, they followed the longshoreman with the loaded cart and passed out of sight around the corner of the covered pier.

Cole recounted all of this and then went back to the panel truck and told what



he knew about Jollo's dope connection and his apparent break-away from the syndicate. Then he asked Bocana if he thought the panel truck with 'JOLLO ALLEYS' printed on the side was too obvious.

"Hell no, Cole, it only seems stupid. It's so obvious it throws you off. I'll probably owe you an apology. There's got to be a reason for what's going on and you've got the only logical explanation."

"Glad you're beginning to think so. That's the way I figured it, but I butted in on you when you're busy with other things."

"Don't make excuses for me, Cole. What do you want us to do? I'll alert the local narcotics people and you'll have all the help you need in thirty minutes."

"Not yet," Cole said hurriedly. "If I'm right, the transfer hasn't been made and won't be until tonight. Everything should stay exactly as it is here in the Basin. Later I'll need people ready to intercept the truck at either end of the street. There's an intersection of China Basin Street by Mission Rock on the north and by Illinois Street on the South. I believe they're keeping it very simple. Only one man came in the panel and he's going to go out that way. But just in case he decides to walk out we should have some people posted on Michigan Street."

"Maybe someone should be in the tractor with you," Bocana suggested.

"No, don't do that. I don't need anybody. I'm not trying to do this all by myself but if anything else unusual moves along this street, it could cause them to change their plans. Oh, and also, whoever is on the intercept should be posted as inconspicuously and naturally as possible."

Bocana laughed, "Right, Chief."

Cole caught himself before he went on, "Hell, I should try to tell you your business."

But Bocana was sincere, "Keep in touch," he said. "I'll be here until the super-heist breaks, which might be a week from now." Then he added, "And good luck."

Thanking him for the promised help Cole replaced the transceiver and switched off. Across the street he saw the big black limousine still there, but the rest of the bags were gone. And now the unloading operation seemed to be winding down, he remembered only two trucks rolling out in the last five minutes and none going in. Peering out the side window at the fenced storage area, all he could see beyond the bolted gate was a dim light that must be coming from the shack in the farthest corner of the lot. He settled down and prepared to wait some more.

It was almost dark now and he imagined Kang and Larry finished with tennis, showered down and sitting in Borgia's. He decided to drink another beer. Right after he had drained the last drop and tucked the empty back in the carton, he had to relieve himself again. Climbing down he let go but before he was half finished the whole area around him was bathed in sudden blinding light. It was so unexpected that he jerked back too soon and felt the continuing wet flow trickling down his leg. Looking up disgustedly he saw that he was directly under a high bright arc light. To hell with it. Hauling out he tried to start up again but finally decided he was finished for now and climbed back up in the cab and then noticed he was still unzipped. Correcting that, he cursed himself for not having seen the light before parking under it. While he was debating if the tractor should be moved he realized that inside the cab itself there was complete shadow - the light sprayed down on the outside. He decided he was more invisible in this location than he would be if he were parked on either side of the light allowing it to shine through the windows at an angle. Then speculating on whether, if he had seen the light first, would he have been smart enough to pick this very spot directly under it, he finally decided he would have been. It was hard to believe time was passing so slowly. Nothing was stirring, lights were off in the guard's shack and the big gates to the open pier were closed and chain-locked. Perhaps the guard had moved inside the covered pier because there was now a light coming from a window of the building and shining faintly through the cracks of a door beside it. He assumed anyone coming from or going to the ship would have to go through the building past the guard, but all this idle speculation was getting pretty boring. He rolled down both windows to allow the cold damp air to blow through and bent forward to look up at the fog that had now descended to a point where the top of the ship's stack was no longer visible. There was nothing to see and, hoping he wouldn't relax too much, he climbed over the back of the seat and swiveled into the bunk, pulling one of the blankets around him. The cold air would keep him awake and any noise from the outside coming through the open windows would be an alert. If he was correct there wasn't actually going to be anything to do. It was just a matter of waiting, but there was always the off chance that the smuggler's plans might be altered in some way, and staying close to the scene of action he could hope that any change would be visible or audible from his outpost.

The night stood still and he didn't know how long it was, but the fog finally enshrouded the floodlight overhead and there were wisps of it filtering down almost

even with the top of the cab and now the light was dispersed and ghostly. But under the mist he could still see both closed gates; the one to the storage area from the side window and through the windshield to the chained gate closing off the pier. The black limousine was just an outline in front of the covered pier and there was only a faint glow marking the shack at the back of the storage area. After this last check he glanced at his watch and was again surprised to see that the luminous indicators had moved so little.

The comfortable bunk made him uncomfortable and rolling back into the seat he picked up the transceiver from the radio phone, got the special operator and called Bocana. Bocana was at the office sounding tired but maybe mostly bored.

“China Basin is sealed off,” he told Cole. “I got a report forty-five minutes after I talked with you that everything you suggested was covered.”

“Thanks,” Cole said softly. “I wish to hell something would happen. This rig I’m boxed in is getting a little cramped.”

“This business is ninety percent patience and ten percent action. Try to relax.”

“That’s one of my problems. I’m getting too damned relaxed.”

“Well, hell, you’ve got a phone - call your friends. I’m going to be here the rest of the night; keep calling me if you don’t know any girls.”

After he had hung up Cole decided that Bocana’s suggestion wasn’t too bad so he got the operator back and gave her Pilar’s number and listened to it ring eight times before giving up. Then he began wondering if she might have a date with Virgent Eddington, that stupid bastard. He didn’t try to call anyone else, just let the night stay fixed. The fog never got any lower while he watched and sometime during the night, as he rested his chin on the steering wheel he must have dozed off.

## *Chapter XVII*

Suddenly, with the first shock of wakefulness from impending disaster, Cole became aware that the scene in front of him was changed. The ship at the dock was distinct in every detail and the fog had lifted and must be two hundred feet above where he sat. Concentrating his gaze on the ship's bow, he had the feeling that the truck was moving backwards. He watched intently and it came to him that the ship was moving; she was backing out of her berth into the bay and doing it so quietly he hadn't heard. With some panic he turned to look toward the storage area. The shack was dark but in the first light of day he could just barely see the top of the panel truck. Slight relief trickled through but then he realized that it wouldn't have made any difference if the truck had got out without him seeing it since there was no way for it to leave the Basin unmolested.

Either the transfer of the dope had been made or it hadn't. The ship was sailing and the waiting was over and also he needed to piss again but decided to hold off to watch the ship back slowly into the harbor. She was beginning to turn, showing the length of her, triggering him to reach for the radio phone to call Bocana. Just as he got the operator he heard an engine start somewhere in back of him. In the storage area, the top of the panel truck was no longer visible. He gave the operator the office number and again Bocana answered and this time his voice was tired and full of sleep. Cole explained what was happening.

"Good. We're not going to pick him up." Bocana was wide awake now. "The intercept people have orders only to follow. You may be right about who's responsible for all this but we need evidence. We've alerted a police traffic helicopter to hover by. He's already up and has reported that the fog is lifting enough for him to operate."

While they were going over all the possibilities, Cole watched the gates from the storage area open and the truck slide through. The driver stopped on the outside, got out but didn't relock the gates, merely closed them.

Getting back into the truck he drove to the street and turned left. Cole was giving

a running account of this and he could hear Bocana relay it to someone else who in turn was in contact with the intercept people. Cole was feeling good and confident and a little less tense although he had never doubted that he was right. Then he thought of Bocana's double ordeal and his all night vigil and was considerate enough to ask if the major problem Bocana had been working on was resolved.

"No, nothing has turned up," he said wearily. "Several false starts in other areas, but nothing at all here." And then evidently feeling the need to talk to someone, he continued: "Hell, we've got airlines, railroads, bus stations, charter plane services, even automobile traffic being checked and that's the toughest."

While Cole listened he could see the SS Crescent Moon out in the harbor picking up speed and heading for the Golden Gate. He let Bocana unwind and then asked: "What about the ship? She's headed for the Gate and the open sea."

"A Coast Guard cutter is trailing along right now," Bocana explained. "We don't need to stop her yet. We'll see what happens here and we can board her later if we have to, even beyond the Gate. I'm requesting..."

Cole's thoughts had shifted again and he broke in excitedly, "What was it that was stolen?"

Bocana was a little slow, "You mean on the case here?"

"Yes, something damned funny just occurred to me. Can you tell me what it was?"

"It's not funny. I can only tell you it's a top secret weapon."

"But it must be pretty important with all the hell it's causing. Is it a nuclear weapon?"

"I would presume so," Bocana said cautiously. "I understand part of the missing items came from the Atomic Energy Proving Grounds in Nevada and part from a defense laboratory here in California. Sorry, I couldn't tell you more about it even if I knew."

"Are these items small enough so that they could be carried by one person?" Cole insisted.

"I suppose so, at least by a couple of people," Bocana admitted. "Now that you think you've got your problem solved do you want to solve ours too?" he asked with only slight amusement.

"Listen, Thad, believe it or not, maybe I can help. This is the damndest thing and it all ties together." He hesitated, trying to think how to put it.

"You mean the dope smuggling and the theft of top secret weapons is somehow

connected?" Bocana asked.

"That's exactly what I mean."

"Let me have it if you've got something," and Bocana's voice conveyed his new respect for Cole.

Cole's explanation was fast but complete and from the beginning. He told about Pilar Jones and the fact that she was working on the design model of a small nuclear weapon and then of her status with Rain, Carver, Shu-li and Jones. He explained how her services had been requested by a young scientist whom she had known in college. And as things began to fall in place Cole became even more convinced of what he was suggesting.

Then the name he'd been seeking popped out. "Glass did some kind of work or performed a service for McWhorter Brown," he said. "And I think he took a vacation on the Crescent Moon one time, or at least what was ostensibly a vacation. That's the name...Cecil Glass." Then he reverted to Pilar's work for McWhorter Brown and the fact that she and Glass had become reacquainted there. Glass had asked her to do some design work on a nuclear weapon that was top secret. After her clearance, probably by the FBI, she had accepted the assignment and as far as he knew was still working on it. In fact, he was sure she was still devoting part of her time to it.

"And you think the weapon they're working on is the one that was stolen?" Bocana asked.

"I don't know," Cole said. "But there's a hell of a lot going on that suggests it could be."

"Well, assuming that it is," Bocana said logically, "how does that help us find out where it is and who took it? Are you suggesting that one of your partners was in on the heist?"

"No, I'm not," Cole said confidently, and then remembered he'd been unable to reach Pilar by phone. "I'm sure Pilar Jones has nothing to do with it. But I told you about the people that came in the black limousine last night and the luggage they unloaded and took on board. The gun cases and what I assumed were shotgun shells in boxes..."

Bocana broke in a little impatiently, "Hell, Cole, you said they were going hunting. Why wouldn't they have guns and shells?"

"But that's the point. The ship's a perfect way out of the country. It's always leaving with passengers going hunting and loaded down with guns and shells. Anybody

seeing them go aboard with a small arms arsenal wouldn't suspect a damn thing."

"O.K., Cole, why so you suspect anything?" The crackle had gone out of Bocana's voice and he sounded weary again.

"It just came to me who one of the other couples were getting on the ship with the Crowders last night, that I didn't recognize," Cole said slowly.

"Who were they?" Bocana asked.

"Cecil Glass and his wife. I only met them once at the entrance of Borgias. I know now that they'd been having dinner with the Crowders. They had forgotten their theatre tickets and were going home to get them. Later I met the Crowders inside the restaurant and they told me they were going to the theatre with some people who had forgotten the tickets and had just left to pick them up. It all ties in. There's too much to be coincidental."

"You might have something." Bocana was short and crisp again, going up and down like a yo-yo.

"Let me call Pilar," Cole said hastily. "She sees Glass almost every day. I want to find out if she knows he's taking a vacation." He was also praying that the call would find her home in bed.

"That should help pin it. I'll get things moving here. Call me right back," Bocana said and hung up.

Cole switched off and then on again and began signalling the special operator. She was there on the second signal and he gave Pilar's number and then sat tensely waiting through the faint rings. It rang five times before he heard Pilar's low voice.

"Hello."

"Pilar?"

"Yes." She paused. "Is this Cole?"

"This isn't a social call," he said. "Although I wish to hell it were."

"You mean we're doing business before breakfast?" she asked.

He asked his own question. "Are you still working on the aiming mechanism for the nuclear weapon?"

She was evidently getting her thoughts together. "The design work's over. We've got a test model and it should be demonstrated either today or tomorrow. Is that really why you called to ask me that?"

Again he ignored her question. "Will Cecil Glass be there?"

"Yes, he's setting up the demonstration."



“Thanks, Pilar. Go back to sleep.”

Pilar took the receiver from her ear and brought it around and rested it on the pillow where she could look at it. A minute later she replaced it, closed her eyes, but couldn't go to sleep.

In the cab of the tractor Cole was reporting to Bocana what he'd learned from Pilar. When he finished, Bocana asked, “How well do you know these people?”

“I think I know Crowder pretty well. As I said, I met Glass only once but have heard about him off and on from Pilar.”

“Hold it a minute,” Bocana said. “We've already asked the Coast Guard to pick up the ship and talk to her.”

Cole could hear voices in the background and Bocana saying something and then he was back on the radiophone.

“It's pretty well confirmed,” he said matter-of-factly. “We have a report from the Coast Guard that they signalled the ship. The ship told them to standoff, denying their request. The Coast Guard made a second demand that they haul-to. This also was refused and they told the Coast Guard to stay clear or suffer the consequences. We've given an order that they're to stay clear but keep her in radar range.”

“But hell, isn't there some way you can stop her?”

“Not if you're right. Not without endangering the lives of everybody aboard, not to mention the possible destruction of the Coast Guard cutter. I understand there are innocent people on the ship - probably most of the crew and the harbor pilot hasn't been taken off yet.” Then he added, “If you're wrong there's no need to stop her.”

Cole ignored this last comment. “Can you get in radio contact with her from your office?”

“We're trying, but no luck so far. The Coast Guard communicated by radio so we're assuming the operator aboard must either be part of the group or under their control.”

“I'd like to talk with Mike Crowder,” Cole said.

“For what reason?”

“I don't know exactly but all this doesn't make a hell of a lot of sense and he seems like a reasonable guy. Maybe something would come out of talking with him.”

“You couldn't do it very well from where you are. Unless we get counterorders

we're going to let her go. Wait a second."

Three minutes later Bocana came back. "We don't seem to have any alternatives. Do you really want to try talking to Crowder?"

"Sure. It can't do any harm."

"Are you still in the Basin?"

"Yes."

"How long would it take you to get to the heliport at the Ferry Building?"

"With this rig....between five and ten minutes."

"Get there and we'll have a traffic control helicopter pick you up. It's loaded with communication equipment."

Before Cole could answer, Bocana cut him off. For a minute he forgot how to start the diesel and then he saw the keys still in the ignition. He fired the engine, got her rolling and raced down China Basin Street. Coming into the Embarcadero he pressed the throttle to the floor. Traffic was light and the only thing he passed was a black and white police car coming from the opposite direction. Glancing in the rear-view mirror, he saw it wheel around in back of him. His only reaction was to try to push the throttle through the floor. As the Ferry Building loomed ahead he could hear the siren and see the red flashes almost directly behind his high perch. At the last moment he jammed on the airbrakes and braced himself as the tractor skidded to a halt in front of the building. The police car swerved and blurred past the window wildly weaving a hundred yards beyond before it shuddered to a screeching halt. Cole was already on the ground running for the heliport and as he sprinted past the last corner the chopper was gently settling down in the marked-off landing space. The rotors continued to turn slowly and the door opened when Cole ran up to scramble in. The pilot didn't comment, just reached across and locked the door as he manipulated the lift-off. Looking down Cole could see two heavy-set cops trot into view gesticulating with hands moving palms downward, signalling that the chopper should land again.

The young police pilot grinned at Cole. "You might have some explaining to do when we get back."

"I'm glad you said 'when'." Cole grinned too.

The dock, the bay, and the city sank and swayed away below. The chopper banked towards the Gate and Cole saw that the tops of the bridge towers extended up into the fog. The pilot was talking to someone on the ground and when he replaced the mike he swiveled to Cole and pointed up.

“We’ll go through this, it’s not very thick. Farther out there’s even less ceiling but it’s more broken.”

Cole looked ahead trying to spot the Crescent Moon but could see nothing on the water but some small fishing boats heading out. Suddenly a swirling light gray surrounded them and a few seconds later they popped on top of the thin layer of fog into a blue morning sky. The sun was in back of them, low on the eastern horizon. Going west the chopper flew directly between two dark areas, barely discernible in the white blanket below, that marked the location of the bridge towers. Peering through the plastic bubble Cole saw the tops of the coast protruding north and south above the fog. The pilot, searching in a tray beside his seat, came up with a pair of dark glasses similar to ones he was wearing and handed them to Cole. The glare from the morning sun on the white mass below was reduced. The chopper hunted slightly from side to side while maintaining an approximate altitude of a thousand feet above the fog as they whirled westward.

“How did you know I was the guy you were supposed to pick up?” Cole raised his voice slightly, addressing the pilot’s right ear.

“I was told you’d be coming down the Embarcadero in a diesel tractor, but I didn’t believe it until I saw you park and get out. What’s this all about?” the pilot asked. “Why is part of the department chasing you and I’m ordered to give you a ride and follow a ship we can’t see?”

“It’s a long story,” Cole said. “Don’t you know anything of what’s going on?”

“I guessed that a ship is being hijacked and that I’m supposed to get you in direct radio contact if I can. I’ve got their frequency and I’ve heard them talking to the Coast Guard. What did they steal, a battleship? I understand the big chief asked the Coast Guard to back off.”

“It’s not a battleship but it’s presumed they do have some powerful authority aboard. I know some of the people and volunteered to talk to them. Do you think you can get me in contact?”

“I’ll try. We should be at the point where the harbor pilot will be dropped off.”

The pilot put the chopper in a long slow circle, switched on the radio, adjusted the frequency, picked up the transceiver and placed one end of it to his ear. Pressing the button in the center he said something into the mouthpiece. Cole couldn’t hear what was said but assumed the pilot was trying to raise the ship. The pilot called for several minutes and finally he was listening to someone and then he said something else and handed the transceiver to Cole. “Do you know how to operate this?” he

asked. "Hold the button down while you're talking and release it when you want to receive."

Cole nodded; this type of equipment was in his own plane except he generally used a speaker to receive. In this case he decided it would be better if the receiving were private. He pressed the button. "SS Crescent Moon, this is Cole Rain in a chopper approximately a thousand feet above your present position. Do you read me? Over." There was a long wait and Cole was ready to repeat when:

"We read you, Rain. Why are you following us and what do you want?"

"I'm a friend of Mike Crowder's. I'd like to speak with him. Is he available? Over."

"I'd have to check that." The voice sounded negative.

"I'd appreciate your checking with Mike. Please ask him to talk with me. I'd also appreciate your maintaining radio contact while you check. Standing by."

Cole glanced at the pilot and nodded his head. "It looks O.K.," he said. "Waiting for my friend." The pilot merely blinked his eyes and continued to circle.

Mike must have been in the radio cabin all the time because they made less than one circle when Cole heard his voice.

"This is Crowder calling Rain in the police chopper. Do you read me?"

"Loud and clear, Mike. How do you know I'm in a police chopper?"

"What else would be following us? Unless you've enlisted in the Air Force."

"You were right the first time, Mike."

"I thought so. I'm waiting to hear why."

"They want to question you about smuggling." Cole hit him with the lesser charge.

"Me? Why would they want to question me? Smuggling what?"

"Probably heroin, Mike, but maybe cocaine or some other hard drug."

"You're hallucinating, Cole. I've known for a long time that the ship was suspected of smuggling but no trace was ever found." Then in true surprise he said, "I didn't suspect you of being part of the fuzz."

"Mike, I'm not. But to explain it would take a long time. I'll admit I was looking for evidence. How I found it was pretty accidental." Cole noticed that they had stopped circling and were heading west. He couldn't judge their speed but was aware that the SS Crescent Moon was one of the fastest cargo vessels in the Pacific.

"It's been nice talking to you, Cole, but I've got other things to do and we're outside the territorial waters of the United States, or soon will be, so I'm going

to close down this conversation.”

“Hold it, Mike. Let me tell you what we know for sure. We know that you refused to talk with the Coast Guard and then refused to stop. What you must know is that they’re keeping you within radar range.”

“They have no reason to stop us,” Mike broke in.

“Wait, Mike I’ll hurry it up. The dope was flown in from the ship.”

“You’re crazy.”

“No, wait. You were evidently desperate for money for some other project.” Cole decided to hint at the major charge. “And that’s why you did it. While the ship was tied up at the dock you sent those little plastic ducks winging over China Basin Street, in the dark, through the fog and rain; which was the best cover you could get, and landed them in that fenced-in storage area directly opposite.”

“You’re crazy,” Mike said again, but it was weaker this time.

“You had those plastic ducks all over the ship as ornaments and some even made up as decoys. The Mexican manufacturers didn’t know what you were doing with them. They thought they were producing a toy and I saw the toy in Golden Gate Park, and watched it fly straight as an arrow, even when a little kid threw it on the end of a springy stick.” He had to hurry to get it all said. “You scooped the insides out of the ducks and filled them with half a pound of dope, resealed the seam, which is a simple process, and launched them through your forward stateroom window. The same as you sailed out clay pigeons with that funny mechanism you had on board that you were always fiddling with and repairing in your cabin.” Cole paused, “Are you listening, Mike?”

“Listening and laughing, but go ahead.”

“You had the perfect setup to use all that paraphernalia - the plastic ducks, the clay pigeon launcher, the hunters as camouflage. It was amateurish but it was so damn innocent looking. It took a series of coincidences to put it all together.”

“But you did it,” Mike came in.

“You got overconfident. You even got Jollo overconfident. The police right now are picking up Jollo along with his panel truck and the million dollars or so worth of stuff you flew in last night in all the little ducks. Why don’t you make a one-eighty, Mike, and come on back - you have no chance of getting away with this.”

“Sorry, Cole, I wouldn’t admit anything to you. But to demure to your wild imaginings - suppose they were true - we’re beyond the jurisdiction of the United States and we have no intention of turning back. So goodbye, Cole. Over and out.”

Cole pressed the button and shouted, "Hold it, Mike. That's only half the story - the minor half. You and your friends carried stolen property on board last night - a gun that fires rocket-propelled bullets with a nuclear warhead. You'd better talk about this, Mike. Over."

He looked down and could see through the thinning fog to the dark sea below, but nothing moved on the surface. He worried that he'd been cut off and that Mike might not have heard the last charge. It didn't occur to him any more that he could be wrong about the stolen nuclear gun. He was sure now that it was on the Crescent Moon, but even if it was, what could be accomplished by talking with Mike? He glanced at the pilot and was about to ask him to try raising the ship again when out of the corner of his eye he caught a ghostly white shape moving under the broken mist a thousand yards to the south. He pointed to his left and down and the pilot immediately picked her up and nodding, banked the whirlybird in the direction of the ship. It was only a matter of minutes to get on her tail. Cole glanced at their air-speed and was sure, even with a headwind, that the ship was beyond her cruising speed making knots at full throttle. She was a pattern of white against the blue sea with lacy white lines angling from her bow and white bubbles churning up from her stern.

Cole had just decided to ask the pilot to drop down on a level with the ship's deck to try to get their attention when Mike's voice came back. It was hollow and wary now.

"You're babbling, Cole. You're not making any sense to us. What are you trying to say?" But he didn't sound as though he really wanted to know.

Cole was thinking hard before answering and seemed absorbed in staring at the gray smoke streaming from the ship's stack and listening to the rotor blades swishing overhead. He was conscious of the calm sea, the thin fog imparting the look of a ship gliding as in a dream, and he knew he'd been through it all before. Doubts nudged him; maybe it wasn't true. His stomach ached and his mouth was dry. Gripping the transceiver tightly, he closed his eyes and pressed the button.

"You and your friends have stolen United States property. It consists of top-secret equipment that gives your country a breakthrough in tactical nuclear defense. The contraband is on board the SS Crescent Moon and you're taking it out of the country for your own personal gain." Cole said this with slow cold conviction, and then his voice became harsh with urgency. "The international waters you're in won't protect you from this criminal act. You have only a few minutes of initiative left. Use it



wisely, Mike. Over.”

Cole held the receiver to his ear but all he could hear was a faint hum as he waited for Mike to answer. A minute went by and the ship sailed almost exactly due west. The chopper maintained a position of a hundred yards off her stern with an altimeter reading of four hundred feet. Again Cole had almost decided to break the silence when there was a flow of static and he heard a new voice.

“We still do not understand what you are trying to say.”

Cole was sure it was Cecil Glass speaking. “You know exactly what I’m saying, Mr. Glass. You’ve committed criminal acts against your country and your people. Had they been perpetrated against almost any other people in the world, your chance to talk would have been long gone.”

“Now you’re trying to frighten us, Mr. Rain. If what you’re saying were true, we could wipe you out of the sky in an instant.”

“Yes, I’ve thought of that, and it’s not that comfortable sitting up here talking to you knowing what you’ve done.” Then a thought popped, “But I’m still willing to drop aboard to talk anytime you people come to you senses.”

“And if we refuse to discuss it and go our merry way, are you telling me that the great government of the United States and all its little people would try to destroy this ship - just for something that you suspect?” The voice dripped venom and sarcasm. “And even to be so ridiculous as to suppose you were right about your fantastic nuclear weapon, you can’t be accusing everybody aboard this ship. Some of us are certainly innocent of your stupid accusations. By the way, we still have the harbor pilot on board.”

“You’re the one who’s scaring the hell out of me, Mr. Glass.” Cole made a quick decision. “If my opinion is of any comfort to you I’d lay odds that the commander-in-chief of the United States armed forces wouldn’t order that you be blown out of the water - even though the Air Force could do it with impunity. As you suggest, there might be innocents aboard.”

“You sound like a true redblooded American patriot, Mr. Rain. Mike Crowder’s got the wrong impression of you. He believes you think for yourself.”

“I’m just beginning to realize how much of a patriot I am, and the distorted thinking of your group doesn’t appeal to me worth a damn.”

“As you realize, Mr. Rain, it seems we have the upper hand - so we’ll continue on our way.”

Cole was thinking desperately of a way to resolve the impasse. They were many



miles from shore and getting further away by the minute. The pilot was maintaining the chopper's position in relation to the ship and seemed to be unconcerned as to what was going on. Cole's racing mind wondered what the pilot's reaction would be if he could listen in on the conversation and then again he spoke to the ship. "You have the upper hand at the moment, but with our sure knowledge of what you've done, you won't escape forever."

"We may have stronger protection in the future," Glass countered.

"You mean you plan to turn the weapon over to an opposition government? If you do, don't change your mind and try to retrieve it later. In this same situation with any opposition government you and any innocent comrade party members would last only as long as it took to get a missile on you."

"If we give anything to an opposition government, as you call it, we won't want it back."

"That would be very wise of you. In fact, that's the wisest thing you've said so far." There was no answer and Cole waited, but he couldn't wait too long. "Let me come aboard," he urged. "Your plans are all shot to hell anyway. What can you lose? Maybe we can work a compromise."

"You mean throw ourselves on the mercy of the United States government?"

"Think about it. You'd do a lot better here than where you're going - now that the word is out." There was another long pause and Cole was just about to break in again when Glass came back and asked warily, "How would you propose to get aboard?"

"From the chopper. I think there's a rig that can lower me down to the deck."

The pilot had turned his head and was looking questioningly and Cole realized that he had been overheard; at least some of his conversation had filtered to the pilot.

"Do you have a winch and a cable that could drop me down on the deck?" Cole pointed below.

"There's a winch but the cable rig is back in the barn. I didn't think I'd need it."

"I didn't either," Cole admitted wryly. "How long do you think it would take to get it? We must be thirty or forty miles from home."

"It would take all of an hour or more. We'd have to refuel and then catch up again."

Cole pressed the button. "I'm sure I can get permission from my end to come aboard and talk but we'll have to go back and pick up the equipment to lower me

to the deck. If you'll stay on this frequency, I'll get clearance and report back to you in forty-five minutes. Give me an hour," he corrected.

"We would expect you to come alone, Cole." It was Mike's voice again. "Just you and the pilot in a single chopper. We don't want anything else in the sky or on the sea. Do you understand?" This time his voice was hard and uncompromising and then, as an afterthought, "What assurances can you give us that this will be done just as I've described it?"

"My word, Mike. That's all I've got. If the authorities won't agree to my coming aboard on your terms, I'll wash out of it."

"Can I trust you?" Mike asked.

Cole's laugh released some of his tension. "The only answer I've got is, yes. The decision is now yours."

The chopper whirled on lazily. The white ship below slipped cleanly through the blue water still trailing an angry white wake. The last traces of fog were almost gone and on the vast spread of ocean way off to the horizon there was no other visible object. Where the sky took over it all merged into a huge dome of lighter blue. Nothing moved in it. Far to the north he could see small fluffy white clouds. Suddenly, the receiver crackled again.

"O.K., Cole. We'll take your word, and we'll leave this frequency open for one hour."

"Will you maintain this course?" Cole asked.

"I'm not promising that," Mike said. "I'm sure you can find us if you're sincere."

"Roger. I'll get back to you in less than an hour if I can. Over and out for now."

Cole dropped the transceiver in his lap and switched on the overhead speaker in case the ship wanted to call back. The pilot again looked at him questioningly.

"Let's head for the barn," Cole said.

The pilot moved the controls and the chopper went into a tight turn. Cole watched the sun's rays creep into the plastic bubble and when they were slanting into his eyes, just slightly south of their course, the pilot established a level straight-on heading, tilting the rotor blades forward. Their speed picked up as they made for San Francisco. Both, settling back for the run home, had for the first time, a chance to appraise each other.

"My name is Cole Rain. Sorry I didn't think to mention it before."

"I've been wondering who you were. I'm Kevin McDowell," the pilot said with a slight burr extending his hand. Cole took it and they grinned at each other.

“Are we going to pick up the cable rig and then come back and put you aboard?” Kevin McDowell asked.

“I think so, but I’ll have to check first.”

“Do you want me to radio in to your people?”

“I’d like to keep this frequency open to the ship. We might as well wait until we get to the hangar and I can call while you’re refueling and putting the equipment aboard.”

“Right,” Devin McDowell said, squinting ahead through his dark glasses trying to shut out the slanting rays of the sun.

Cole listened to the faint cracklings of the overhead speaker, turned it up a little and then settled back to think. Would Bocana want him to go aboard, he wondered? If he got the okay, what the hell could he say to Crowder and Glass and the others that would induce them to turn back? There had to be others. At least the other couple that had arrived with them in the black limousine had to be part of the group. Were the captain and crew in on it too? Or were they completely unaware of the deadly cargo they carried? If they were not aware, were they being forced to comply with Mike’s orders or were they accepting his authority as an executive of McWhorter Brown? The captain was in complete tactical command at sea but would he sail to Cuba or China if Mike so ordered?

Both Mike Crowder and Cecil Glass had been jarred loose from their teeth when he had mentioned the nuclear rifle. And in their present state of shock the sooner he got back to them the better. His chance of success, of at least retrieving the weapon and ammunition, would diminish with the passage of each hour, he thought. During all his pondering upon the action he was about to take, he hadn’t considered his own personal peril, or, if he were unsuccessful, how he might be returned from the ship after he once got aboard.

Kevin McDowell tapped him on the arm, pointing ahead to the coastline. The fog was mostly dissipated over the distant land but there was still a thin broken layer below them that extended only to the water’s edge. The Golden Gate Bridge was visible in the distance to the left and the shadowed green Coast Range covered the horizon as far north and south as could be seen. Kevin McDowell established a heading that would take them directly over the center of the city.

“Holy Mother of Jesus” Kevin McDowell choked out in an awed voice as he crossed himself and turned to Cole Rain.

Cole was staring straight ahead in horrified bewilderment. The sun that had been

so brilliant before had taken on the look of a full moon and the surrounding sky seemed dark from a scintillating brightness of light emanating from someplace behind them. Kevin McDowell, reacting to the terror in front of him, turned the chopper sharply back on its course. To the west a hundred fiery suns were boiling up from the shattered sea and as their position in the sky became completely reversed, that first incredibly intense light flashed again. They both snapped their eyes closed and threw their arms up to cover them but the burning searing brightness was everywhere.

“Go back!” Cole screamed. “For God’s sake, turn her back!”

But this time Kevin McDowell reacted instinctively and the whirling ship was already in a violent turn. The terrifying yellow, red and purple inferno was finally in back of them again but the scene to the east was just as grotesquely repellent in the macabre light. The white wispy fog, the orange bridge, the blue sea, the white and red-roofed city, and the dark green hills, were all something different. The colors had been twisted tortuously until their earthly shapes were diabolical and the churning light moving into them created obscene forms. The once familiar landscape ceased to exist as it was bombarded by radiations from the west.

“What the hell’s happening?” Kevin McDowell shouted.

Cole shook his head in disbelief. “They exploded,” he shouted back. “We ought to get the hell out of here.”

Before he finished his shout the first hot blast hit them and they were driven deep into their seats as the chopper pushed forward and up. The booming, moaning sound engulfing them was almost unbearable and they watched the altimeter in dismay as it spun past two thousand, three thousand and through five thousand feet. Cole straining forward checked vibrating rotors that looked like the whirling skeletal ribs of a giant umbrella turned inside out, the fabric blown away in a super typhoon. While he watched, the end of a blade broke off, twisting down in front of them. The shaking became even more intense and the hurtling speed increased as the chopper suddenly reached the top of its upward surge and began to plunge toward the sea.

Concentrating directly ahead Kevin McDowell said calmly, “I’ll try to make the beach. We can set her down there.”

“Not the beach,” Cole screamed in his ear. “Go beyond to the highest ground try to make the park get her down on the highest point you can find.”

Kevin McDowell frowned before a stricken look of horrible understanding seeped

over his face. The mass of water was already on its way. Unsuspecting people on the beach or close to it would be swallowed up by the sea. He continued working to halt the chopper's downward plunge and to guide it to some uninhabited high ground. Within seconds they passed the water's edge and crossed a sandy beach. Only a few people were visible and most of them were hurrying inland. Seeing a little boy running toward the beach Cole screamed futilely for him to go back, and at that moment the chopper was jarred by an impact with something reaching above the trees. Whatever it was hit on the pilot's side breaking the chopper's wild plunge and then they were crashing and ripping into the stunted windblown trees below. Cole was hurtled forward, his head smacking cruelly against the crash pad. Kevin McDowell was already dead, impaled on a piece of splintered wood that had thrust through the side of the chopper when it failed to clear an extended arm of the old windmill down by the beach.

## *Chapter XVIII*

The seat belt, still buckled, was loose in the lap where a hand was lying at an awkward angle. Closing his eyes tightly for a moment, then opening them quickly again, Cole stared at the hand. Something hurt and when he tried to touch the hurt, the hand rose from the lap and he felt stickiness and something that was full of pain. He brought the hand in front of his eyes and recognizing it, saw that the tips of the fingers were covered with brownish blood. Deciding it all belonged, he dropped the hand and tried his feet and they worked. Bending and raising his knees he looked for the other arm and as he moved forward it was released and fell down by his side. He swung it from the shoulder and plopped it in the lap too and then picking it up with the good hand, felt of it. It wasn't broken, just asleep. Having examined himself and feeling reasonably sure that again, it was only his head that was damaged, he raised his eyes to look around.

Outside there was a man and boy draped from head to foot in what appeared to be old blankets. They were standing in a clearing of the stunted trees about thirty feet away and just to the right of the unbroken plastic canopy. They peered in silent, unmoving intentness. He peered back but when they made no advance he turned his head left and refocused his eyes on the pilot and looked for a long moment before deciding not to touch Kevin McDowell. Massaging the left arm had given it life again and he pulled the release on the safety belt that was too loose. The door was still tightly closed and when he pressed the latch it sprung open normally. The man and the boy watched as he crawled from the intact bubble. The chopper was resting on broken branches that had been ripped away by the lost under-carriage. Below the torn branches and springy needles was solid ground. He stood up straight, swaying slightly, and raised his eyes to a yellow sky. The man and the boy in their tent-like apparel were now walking cautiously toward him and getting close the boy looked inside the crashed helicopter at the dead pilot.

"Is your friend hurt bad?" he asked in a scared voice.

"He's dead," Cole said glancing back.

"We called the police," the man broke in. "Right after it happened but they

didn't come. The boy and I walked to where we saw you come down and then went back and called them again. We told them it was a police helicopter and then they said they'd be here right away."

Cole heard a siren that sounded close and was aware of several sirens in the distance. "How long has it been?" he asked.

"A little over an hour," the man said. "The boy and I were still asleep. My son and daughter-in-law left early for the valley. We saw you crash when we ran out of the house."

"I thought there'd be a tidal wave," Cole said absently.

"There was." The man pointed where the water had come, to within fifty feet of the wrecked helicopter. "We live only a block from the park but it's higher yet."

"What happened on the beach?"

"I don't know. Everyone has been told they should stay inside so we haven't gone down there but we heard on the radio that lots of people were drowned."

The boy was holding a portable radio close to his ear. He turned it off as the sound of a siren growled closer and suddenly stopped. A red light flashed through the trees and Cole started in that direction. The man and the boy followed and as they brushed through the low trees they could see a policeman working his way in. Cole assumed he was a policeman, although he was covered in a long gray cape with a hood.

"Is the department chopper down in there, that we had a report on?" he called.

"Yes," Cole said. "These people here reported it."

The policeman nodded to the man and boy as he got to them and then turned to Cole. "You don't look so good. Can you make it to the car?"

"I'm all right," Cole said, "but the pilot's dead."

"Aren't you the pilot?"

"No, I was a passenger," Cole said. He stepped on a loose rock and almost fell. The policeman grabbed and wrapped Cole's arm around his neck and they continued toward the flashing light. When they got down to the road the squad car radio was squawking and a second policeman was reporting in.

"The pilot's still in the chopper," Cole said to the second policeman calling in. "Can you ask them to send an ambulance right away?"

"Who's he?" the second policeman wanted to know.

"He was a passenger. Tell them we're bringing him in to the clinic, but the pilot's



dead," the first policeman said.

The second policeman continued to report while the first one helped Cole into the back of the squad car and then went around and got into the driver's seat. The engine was still turning over and Cole, looking out at the man and boy raised his hand. "Thanks very much."

They started to move and then they stopped and the second policeman kept talking to the precinct. When he had finished and had asked for an ambulance the driver stuck his head out the window and said to the man and boy, "You'd better wait here even though you ought to go home." He pointed towards the downed chopper. "They're coming for him. Appreciate your staying on the road so they can see you....and thanks."

"We'll wait," the man said. "No thanks necessary."

The second policeman pulled the cape over his head and got out.

"You'd better go back to your home," he said to them. "I'll take over here. He's one of our men and we thank you very much."

The man and the boy looked at the driver, who didn't say anything, and then they started walking along the road away from the squad car.

The driver turned to Cole in the back seat. "Are you O,K.?"

Cole, wrapped in the cape they had given him, merely nodded and the car started moving again along the Crossover drive. They left the park at Park Presidio bypass and went on to Geary Boulevard turning right for downtown. A car crossed in front of them at the intersection of Arguello. It was the first one Cole had seen and after fifteen empty blocks he hadn't seen any people either. A dog crossed the road with an aimless gait and the driver slowed and swerved to miss him. The reflection of the dirty sky imparted an amber cast to the deserted streets and other than the distant sirens, a total hush engulfed the motionless trees and the blank buildings.

"Where is everyone?" Cole asked hitching forward.

"Watching television or listening to their radios. Civil Defense has asked everybody to stay under-cover and off the streets."

"Were many people killed?"

"Not in the city. Just along the outer shore. I understand the bay raised several feet and caused damage but I didn't get a report on people killed or hurt."

"I've got to make some phone calls," Cole said.

"You can make them when we get to the Emergency Clinic - although they've asked people to limit their calls."

“Is that the clinic connected with the city jail?”

“That’s the one. Do you know it?”

“I know it. Why are you taking me there?”

“The hospitals are jammed and you need medical care.”

“What I need is sleep. Otherwise, I’m O.K.”

“They’re asking everybody with any exposure to take a shower with some kind of medicated soap and then use a special ointment.”

“All I want to do is make some phone calls and get some sleep,” Cole reiterated, but settled back and didn’t say anything more. Five minutes later, without the usual traffic to fight, the driver pulled in beside the city jail next to the small emergency clinic. Cole tried to get out of the back but found there were no latches on the inside of the doors. Two caped and hooded policemen came from the side door of the stone building carrying a stretcher and one of them opened the back door. Cole got out as they were arranging the stretcher and followed.

The driver asked, “Did the ambulance pick up the dead pilot yet?”

“We haven’t got a report on that,” one of the stretcher bearers said.

When Cole entered the building he was surprised to see people lining the corridors, mostly old men, many of them sitting on the floor with their backs against the wall. There was barely enough space to walk between. He stopped and the driver of the squad car squeezed past saying, “Come on down this way.” They turned left and went up a short flight of steps and then into a brightly lighted interior room. A young bearded man looked up from behind a desk and pulled his glasses down on his nose, pinching the bridge of his nose where the glasses had rested.

“This man has probably had more exposure than anyone else,” the squad car driver said. “he was in a police chopper over the ocean and saw the whole thing.” Then to Cole, “This is Doc Carsey. I’m sorry, I didn’t get your name.”

The young bearded man behind the desk didn’t bother to rise, merely motioned them to go through the door at the back of the room and as they went by started giving instructions:

“You can use my room and private shower. Take your clothes off and put them in the basket by the door. There’s some special soap there - show him, Carmody. Suds down a couple of times and rinse off, wash your hair good, too. Afterwards, get ointment all over him, Carmody. There’s a clean gown in the coset. Put it on and you can use my bed.”

“Thanks,” Cole called from the other room. He felt weak and hungry but mostly he wanted sleep. Then he remembered. “I need to make a couple of phone calls.”

“There’s a phone by the bed, use it but don’t take too long.”

Cole saw the phone by the bed and started to sit down.

“Take your clothes off first,” Carmody said hastily.

Cole stopped, and swaying slightly, started to remove the truck driver’s clothes that he had put on so long ago. When he was naked he tossed the clothes into the basket by the door and sat gingerly on the edge of the bed. Picking up the receiver he dialed Pilar’s number. It rang eight or nine times and then he shut it off for five seconds before releasing the button and dialing the office. There was no answer there either and before he could try Aunt Hester the young bearded doctor came in. He didn’t say anything, just walked over and started looking at the bruise on Cole’s head. Pushing the hair back he examined more closely and then poked around the edges. He took a small pencil-like instrument from a breast pocket and shoving Cole’s head slightly, held open the upper lid of the right eye with his thumb. Probing it with light he peered through the end of the instrument and then the same with the left eye.

“You have a concussion,” he said tersely. “I don’t know if there’s a fracture. We’ll x-ray later. The skin is broken around the bruise. Wash it carefully but good. I’ll put a dressing on it after you’ve had your shower.” He pushed the pencil-like instrument back in the breast pocket of his dirty white jacket, re-examined the bruise and left the room.

Cole reached for the phone again and dialed Aunt Hester’s number. This time there was only one and a half rings and he heard Aunt Hester’s, “Hello.”

“Hello - How are you? This is Coleridge.” He didn’t know why he always referred to himself as Coleridge when he talked to Aunt Hester.

“Coleridge, where are you? Everybody’s been calling and leaving messages. Are you at that dreadful apartment now or are you at your office?”

“I’m downtown but not at the office. Are you all right? I just now had a chance to call.”

“Yes, I’m fine. I saw the whole thing. Of course, I knew what it was and took the precaution of watching through the stained glass window,” she went on excitedly and then asked, “Where were you when they dropped the bomb?”

“Nobody dropped a bomb - where did you get that idea?”

"It's all on television. No one's been accused yet but someone had to do it and those poor people along the coast. I've called the Red Cross and Salvation Army and offered this place for refugees. I'm sure we can handle fifteen or twenty- but I won't let them disturb your rooms. When will you be home?"

"Not for a while. You might as well use the whole house, and don't believe everything you see and hear on television."

"Do you know anything about this, Coleridge?"

"I know something. We'll talk about it later."

"I thought as much."

"Who called and left a message?"

"The first one was some crank...a Mr. Swensen. He said the police were at his place about some kind of tractor but that they were really looking for you. He said you almost caused two policemen to have a terrible smashup when you were driving this thing and then you parked it in the middle of the Embarcadero and just left it. He said you got away in a stolen police helicopter. I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life and I told him so."

"You did right. Who else called?"

"Mr. Shu-li and Mr. Carver. They've gone down to the beach to help the poor people there and said to tell you where they were."

"Did you get any other phone calls?"

"Oh yes, Pilar called from the airport - said she was leaving in ten minutes for Washington and to be sure and let you know."

"What is she going up there for? Did she say?"

"She wasn't going up to Washington, she was going back to Washington, D.C. and that you should call a Mr. ....wait a minute, I wrote it down....Bocana. She said you'd know..."

"Oh for Christ's sake!"

"Coleridge, there's no need for that sort of language. I'll have to ring off dear, there's someone at the door. I've got a hundred things to do - come home as soon as you can." He thought, if it weren't for the tragedy, she would be positively happy with all the things she had to do.

When he set the receiver down he heard the shower running. Standing up he steadied himself for a minute and then shuffled slowly into the bathroom. Carmody was there and stood by while he soaped down twice including his hair, and he was very careful with his cut and bruised head. Over his objections, Carmody helped

him towel down and then stopped him when he was all ready to fall flat on the bed and sleep for a week. Carmody insisted he put on the white stiff gown that tied up the back. With the knots fixed he dropped forward and embraced the bed and the last thing he remembered was a slight stinging in both thighs and Doc Carsey's voice coming through from a long way off.

"I'm giving you a massive dose of vitamins and minerals." After the second sting, "This injection is to combat the effects of radiation. It's worked well on experimental animals but this is the first real test on humans and -" Hearing Cole's deep steady breathing, Doctor Carsey stopped talking.

## *Chapter XIX*

Less than seven hours later Cole struggled from his coma of sleep to escape the brilliant inferno rising from out of the sea that threatened to swallow him. A harsh white light beat down on his upturned face. Groaning and covering his eyes he left the terrifying dream and finally pushed to a seat on the side of the bed. Squinting around through the glare he saw a short fat guy standing in the center of the room.

“Sorry if I startled you,” the short fat guy said. “Doc thought it would be all right if I brought you some food. Doc said after fatigue like yours you probably shouldn’t sleep too long at one stretch anyway.”

Cole felt of the bandage on his head and of the cool damp skin around it. “What time is it?” he croaked.

The short fat man placed a couple of sacks on the table and curving his left arm, pulled back the sleeve of an expensive sport jacket exposing a watch. “It’s not quite eight,” he said. “I brought some cheeseburgers and beer figuring you’d like them better than the chow you get in this Joint.

“What I need most is a drink of water and a john.” Cole got off the bed and went to the bathroom, fairly steady this time. He filled a paper cup from the dispenser and drank and then did it all over. Relieving himself with the door still open he washed and dried his hands and then walked back to the bed and sat on the edge again. “How about turning that light on in the corner,” he said to the short fat man and when it was on he reached over and switched off the overhead light. “Who are you? You didn’t come by just to feed me, did you?”

“My name is Tuperman. I’m with the Enquirer.” He opened one of the sacks and placed four sandwiches wrapped in transparent plastic on the table. “Do you like cheeseburgers and beer? I brought a six pack.”

“Great. I haven’t had a cheeseburger and a cold beer since before the cataclysm.”

“That’s it. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” Tuperman said.

“About it?” Cole asked. “Were you out of town?”

“I was sound asleep. I woke up just about like you did a few minutes ago. When I dressed and got to the paper, it was something like wild. No one knew exactly what had happened or what might follow. But after the first hour every-

body started to guess, especially the hams on television. You got to give them credit though. Some of them really expected to be turned into cinders at any minute but they wouldn't give up their place in front of the camera for hell or high water and we were having both."

"How was the town?" Cole asked, "How did people take it?"

"After the tangle on the bridges, which was a nightmare, everybody wanted to go back from where he came. Oh sure, the first shock caused a lot of people to run around crazy-eyed screaming 'What is it?' But then they settled down in front of their television sets and took it pretty calm. Except along the coast the city itself is in fairly good shape. The water in the bay was raised quite a bit but it wasn't hit like the beaches with a solid wall of water."

"What was the damage along the coast?"

"Millions and millions of property damage but the latest, less hysterical figure, is probably somewhere between fifteen hundred and two thousand killed or drowned."

"God, I was hoping it wouldn't be that bad."

"I looked at it from the air," Tuperman continued, and my first estimate was at least ten thousand dead. You couldn't believe the things that happened to people and the way they worked to help each other. Are you ready for another cheeseburger and beer?"

"Might as well - no use wasting them."

"Have you seen the paper?" Tuperman asked and pulled some folded newsprint from his side pocket. "Eight sheets. We got this out A C."

"What do you mean A C?"

"After the Cataclysm'. You named it."

"You pick up words fast," Cole said as he glanced through the paper. The front page was a photograph of the cataclysm. There were no headlines just the paper's normal format and then the picture.

Tuperman anticipated the question. "A birdwatcher up on Twin Peaks with his expensive camera and telephoto lens. It was all of thirty minutes before we had it in the lab."

Cole leafed through the rest of the paper shuddering at the scenes of devastation. He quickly scanned some of the first-hand accounts that wouldn't be believed if you hadn't been there. On page five there was a photograph of a building that fronted on Market Street near Powell. He remembered having seen a



banner over the door, printed in big letters, BAN THE BOMB. In the picture a smaller sign had been placed on the window:

Norm & Norma, Numerologists

Have relocated. Planned return 2/2/2222

On the last page he saw his picture and an account of the arrest of Jollo and three accomplices for illegal possession of ten million dollars worth of heroin.

“Is this the item you wanted me to see?” he asked, pointing to his outdated photograph.

“Yes, that’s one of them. I was responsible for getting that in the paper,” Tuperman said.

“I’m a little surprised you managed with only eight sheets and all the other news you had to print.”

“Believe it or not, we needed a fill in. Eight pages is a lot of news when you’re hurrying to get on the street. There are no ads or sports included.” He looked at Cole speculatively. “But I’m interested in your reaction to the wild stories with their explanations of the cataclysm.”

“I only read completely through the one about China testing its first nuclear warhead missile that went astray and damned near wiped out San Francisco,” Cole said. “I thought the reporter’s demand that the President order one of our missiles dropped near Shanghai was pretty equitable thinking.”

“Yeah, well, there’s another story speculating that the Russians actually pinpointed a missile as a warning of what we could expect if and when trouble starts. This writer demands that the President immediately have all nuclear systems, offensive and defensive, dismantled and put to peaceful use as a show of good faith.”

“I don’t think there’s any question, that if the President did as suggested, it would show good faith,” Cole said.

“But the one I like best,” Tuperman said, “is the one about a munition ship having just left the harbor and once outside, ran into some sort of trouble and blew up.” He paused, studying Cole. “And I think you know something about it.”

Cole couldn’t think of any real reason why he shouldn’t tell Tuperman what he knew; but then again, he couldn’t think of any real reason why he should. Ever since the short fat man had switched on the overhead light jarring him awake and offering to feed him, something in his manner had grated on Cole. A couple of

times he'd felt like belting him for no apparent reason at all, but now looking at him Cole could understand how people might hesitate to hit the short fat fellow.

"Give me the story and your picture will be on the front page of every paper in the country," Tuperman interrupted Cole's thoughts. "It'll be the biggest story since the fire and quake."

"The earthquake and fire," Cole corrected. And immediately decided he should not tell Tuperman what he knew. Trying to think now how he would eventually tell the story, it came to him that the truth wasn't nearly as plausible as some of the bullshit in the paper. Tuperman wouldn't believe him anyway. Hell, it was hard for him to believe and he'd gone through it. "What makes you think I know anything about the cataclysm?" he asked.

"A lot of little things. The guy that brought the story in about Jollo's arrest and the heroin find said the stuff was smuggled off a ship." Then he suddenly asked, "It was the ship that blew up, wasn't it?" And he tried to level a wavering gaze on Cole.

"Look, Tuperman," Cole said becoming weary of the sparring. "Your name is Rafe, isn't it? I've seen your column."

"That's right - 'Life with Rafe'."

"O.K., Rafe. I'm not interested at the moment in talking about what I know. I've been, mostly either unconscious or asleep since it happened and I want to think about it and get things straight in my mind. When I do that and if anybody is still interested, you'll be among the first to know," and he stressed the 'among'.

"Look, Rain, you don't understand. I picked up your story and traced you here. I want an exclusive and it's worth something to me and my paper. If you've got the story I think you've got, it could be worth several thousands of dollars to you."

"Money isn't everything," Cole said shortly. "Sleep and privacy is worth something. What do I owe you for the sandwiches and beer?"

"The public has a right to know the truth and, like you, I don't believe a one of these stories. But I need a first-hand account to give credence to my theory."

"You've got a hell of a head start," Cole said.

"You mean by finding you?"

"No, I mean by not believing anything you read in the newspapers."

"You reject the public's right to know the truth?" Tuperman asked sanctimo-

niously.

“Telling you what I know and getting the truth to the public isn’t the same thing. Hell, you just said you’d use my account to bolster your own theory. And since when does the public have a right to know anything? The only rights I ever heard of are the freedom of speech ones, where you can say or write any damn thing you please. The public’s protection from lies, innuendo, twisted opinion and slanted news is nil. So let’s talk about your right of free speech and then tell me what the hell your duty is to tell the truth to the public.”

“Man, you really get wound up, don’t you? I thought I was doing you a favor. I could put you on the front page and throw some money your way. I made a mistake, Rain, in finding you. Do you know why?”

“Yeah, you spent your newspaper’s money on sandwiches and beer and you’re ashamed to ask for it back.”

“No, Rain, that’s not it. I’ve got to admit you’re pretty funny - but you’re also a phony. You don’t know anything. That’s why you can’t tell me anything. You don’t know anything,” he repeated. “If you did you’d be the first one to grab the money and the headlines. I run into loudmouth guys like you every day,” and he reached a pudgy hand for the door. “You’re a phony,” he said as he wedged through and closed the door quickly.

Cole looked around the empty room, the sack lying on its side with one sandwich left, the half empty six pack, the closed door; and then his gaze fell on the black telephone and he burst out laughing. He reached for the receiver and dialed Bocana’s office. Bocana wasn’t there but the operator asked, “Is this Mr. Rain?”

“Yes it is.”

“Mr. Bocana left a message that if you called you could find him at home.”

“Thanks,” Cole said and dialed the Bocana residence.

“Mr. Bocana, please,” when a woman answered.

“I’m sorry. Mr. Bocana retired early. Could I take a message?” Cole hesitated and then the voice came back, “Is this Mr. Rain by any chance?”

“Yes, it is,” he said.

“Just a moment. He left instructions that if you called I should waken him.”

In less than a minute Cole heard Bocana’s hoarse voice.

“Hello, Cole, it’s great to hear from you. How are you?”

“I’m fine, Thad, but we’re probably having problems all over northern California and you’re sound asleep.”

“Yeah, well, my problem-handling equipment is worn out. I decided you citizens could take care of things for a while. And, by the way, you and Pilar Jones have been doing a pretty good job of it.”

“That was my next question. Where is Pilar Jones? And why was she arrested?”

“Didn’t you get my message? I left it there with the doctor at the clinic.”

“He probably forgot. I think his message-passing-on equipment is worn out, too. But what about Pilar?”

“We explained the situation to her sometime yesterday, or whenever it was, and asked her to go to Washington; she very graciously assented.”

“Yes, but what was the reason for it?”

There was a long pause. “Well, Cole, you gave us the lead to the Jones girl. You told us she had been working with Glass preparing for the demonstration of the nuclear gun. We wanted her testimony. All information and evidence was being funneled to Washington. She was just one of the witnesses we asked to testify - and the only one from this part of the country. We at first thought it was an international plot but have since come to the conclusion that it was a local action and that all or most of the people involved were on the SS Crescent Moon. This conclusion was arrived at mainly from the information Pilar Jones gave us and from the things that happened subsequently.” Bocana caught his breath and then went on. “I’ll admit we reacted pretty fast - she probably was on her way to Washington by the time you got aboard the police helicopter.”

“Where is she now? When will she be back?”

“That’s in the message, too. Her flight’s due tomorrow morning at eight-fifty. We’re picking her up at the airport and bringing her to my office. We’d like you to be there at nine-thirty. The doctor says he’s satisfied with your condition and he’s sure you can make it.”

“What the hell is this, Thad? Why should I come to your office? And why are you taking Pilar there?”

“You’re really a hard man to do business with, Cole. It was supposed to be more or less of a surprise. The FBI, the Federal Narcotics Bureau and the local police are very appreciative of the help you gave them and the President of the United States wants to present a preliminary citation to both of you for all you did on the matter.”

“What the hell are you talking about? The President of the United States?”

Have you been smoking lettuce?”

“Something happened, Cole, that you’re not aware of...something that nobody could know or could have foreseen. You both just happened to be in the right place at the right time and your courage and honesty have made you heroes.... maybe accidental heroes but damn deserving ones nevertheless.” Then he concluded, “If you’ll look at the record, Cole, you’ll find that all heroes are more or less accidents of their time.

“I’m sorry I kidded you about going to bed, Thad, you really need the rest. Does your head feel all right?”

“My head’s fine and it’ll all be clear to you tomorrow. Go back to bed and get a good night’s sleep so you can be at my office by nine-thirty in the morning.”

Cole looked at the empty basket where the borrowed truck driver’s clothes had been. “Wait a minute - I don’t have a thing to wear. Am I supposed to travel through this polluted air with no protection?”

“I understand the polluted air and contamination has been mostly washed away by the storm that started at six o’clock.”

“Is it raining out?”

“I forgot you’re in that pile of stone and iron. We’ve had a real Pacific storm blowing in for the last four and a half hours. The weather man says it’s the three-day variety.”

“We’ll be washed clean,” Cole mused. “But what about the poor damn fish? What will we eat for the next six months?”

“Will I see you in the morning?” Bocana asked.

“Yeah, I’ll be there, even though you can’t imagine how depleted my wardrobe is. I’ll manage somehow.”

“Good,” Bocana said and hung up.

Cole sat on the edge of the bed thinking and feeling the bandage on his head. Trying to concentrate on his physical condition he couldn’t come to any conclusion other than that he felt all right. The conversation with Bocana didn’t make any sense. He could understand somewhat about the several agencies wanting to thank him for his help on the dope arrests, but from then on the only thing heroic about his actions were that they had ended in a cataclysm of destruction and death. He’d be lucky if some insurance company didn’t file a suit against him for the loss of the SS Crescent Moon, alleging that he was the catalyst that had caused the fumble that had in turn caused the eruption and disintegration of

their insured property and on, and on, and on. This led him to examine the reasons why it had all happened and he decided that most of the time he had been working to bring the smugglers to justice and it hadn't been any vacation. Myron Brown owed him for the two week boat trip plus the subsequent time he had spent solving the problem. Myron didn't have to worry about his ship's reputation any more; it's place in history was assured. After Cole settled all this and decided to go back to sleep, the door opened and the bearded Doc Carsey came in.

"I see you're awake. My assistant said you had a visitor."

"Yes, I did. He told me the food was lousy in this place and that he had come to feed me."

"The food isn't that bad. We didn't wake you for the evening meal because we thought you needed the rest more."

"That I did - and still do - I think."

"I can have a tray prepared for you. What would you like?"

"I'm not hungry, Doc. Everything's fine. But you're right about my needing more sleep."

"Before you turn in, could we get a few pictures of your head?"

"My head's fine. Do you think it's necessary?"

"I think we should. I don't believe there's a fracture and I doubt the concussion was so severe that natural rest won't dissipate it. But I'd feel better having the x-rays."

"O.K., let's do them. I wouldn't want you to worry."

Cole lay on the cold slab under the x-ray camera, turned on both sides, flat on his back and then stretched out on his stomach to have pictures shot of his head. When it was all finished he wended his way back through the bare corridors, not clogged with old men now. He wore only the white gown tied up the back with coarse tough strings. Doc Carsey was sitting at his desk and glanced up as Cole went by.

"Here's a message for you," handing Cole the note. It's from a Mr. Bocana."

"Did he just call?"

"No, I'm sorry. This came in about six o'clock. I forgot to give it to you."

"No problem. I've already talked with him."

"He asked if you'd be well enough to go to his office tomorrow morning at nine-thirty. I told him I wanted to look at the pictures first but from what I could

observe you'd be O.K."

"Did you happen to see my clothes around here anyplace?"

"I had them destroyed," Doc said. "I didn't know how badly they were contaminated and didn't want to take a chance on your wearing them again. I've got your wallet and keys and some other valuables here. Sorry about the clothes."

"That's all right. They weren't mine anyway," Cole said, deciding he'd find the owner and pay for them.

"Oh? I was sure they were the ones you wore in here."

"I was wearing them. What I mean is....well, anyway it doesn't really matter. Maybe in the morning I can borrow something to wear and then take a taxi home to get mine."

"My things wouldn't fit you but my assistant's got some fresh whites around someplace that should do."

Cole covered a yawn. "Thanks. I'll worry about it in the morning." He went on into the little room and opened the piece of paper to read Bocana's message. It conveyed nothing he didn't already know, even though he had the feeling he knew very little. He thought about what Bocana had said: 'Something happened that you're not aware of....something that nobody could know or could have foreseen.' To hell with it. Placing the message on the night stand he switched off the light and went to sleep without any more thinking.



## *Chapter XX*

Without an alarm clock, Cole awoke late the next morning. He forced himself to stand up beside the bed. A gray light was coming from the open door of the bathroom. Going to it he looked out a narrow window at the rain falling straight down into the drab courtyard. The windows opposite were barred and

dirty but there was a little light coming from somewhere inside. The rain had to look of permanence, as though it had been falling for days and would continue for days more. It was now ten minutes after nine but Cole had the complacent feeling that it was much earlier. Opening the medicine cabinet above the lavatory he found an empty razor and package of blades. A bright-colored tube was there and he covered one side of his dark beard with the foamy substance it contained, which turned out to be toothpaste. Before washing it off in disgust, since there was nothing else to use, he decided to insert a blade and try it. It worked as well or better than some shaving creams he had used. Toothpasting up the other side, he shaved it. The toothbrush was plastic covered and biting it open he looked for the 'Made in Japan' label but it turned out to be "Made in Taiwan." As he leaned over the bowl brushing his teeth he heard a noise, and turned to see Carmody standing in the narrow doorway holding a pair of white shoes and some clothing draped over his arm.

"You ought to be able to get into these things," Carmody said. "I'm supposed to drive you wherever you want to go whenever you're ready."

"Thanks. What time is it?"

Looking at his wrist watch Carmody reported, "I've got nine-twenty. Doc said your pictures turned out O.K."

"Dammit! I'm supposed to be across town in ten minutes. Well, I'm going to be late." He finished brushing his teeth and gargled a strong antiseptic and wondered if he'd picked up a chemical intended for the toilet instead of a mouthwash. Hurrying into the bedroom he pulled on loose white shorts, a white snug-fitting tee shirt, white sox, white pants, white shoes, and last, a stiffly starched white jacket. His wallet, keys and watch were lying on the night stand. He grabbed them as he went through the door, shoving things in his pockets and strapping on the watch.

Doc's office and the corridor beyond were deserted and as they came to the outside door Carmody lifted a raincoat from a peg. "You better put this on. I'm parked up the street a way."

Cole struggled into the too-small slicker, watching Carmody sprint for the car. When he saw the door open he took out after him. The rain hadn't let up any and as he got in and slammed the door Carmody began jockeying out of the tight parking space.

"Where to?" Carmody wanted to know.

Cole gave the address of Swensen's Trucking Company. The repossession of his keys had decided him to pick up his own car since it was close and he was late anyway. When they arrived Swensen's yard was wet and empty, except for the car that was huddled in the rain where he'd left it. He wondered if the rain had washed off the fallout.

"That's my car there," he pointed and opened the door to get out.

"Are you supposed to drive?"

"As long as I carry a valid driver's license," Cole said. "Thanks, Carmody. I really appreciate everything you've done. I'll see you later." Then, as an after thought, "Maybe you'd better wait until I get started."

Unlocking the door he dropped behind the wheel and was relieved when the engine caught on the first turnover. As he drove out of the yard he waved to Carmody but didn't see anyone else. He wondered how to thank Spike properly after he paid for all the trouble he had caused and for the clothes that had been destroyed. The City had the look of a ghost town and he saw very few people before parking at the Federal Building in a spot marked 'Reserved, H. Storm'. He wondered inanely if the Storms were distant relatives of the Rains. There were people inside the building and they stared at him in the elevator. He had removed the too small raincoat and almost decided he should put it back on but then let it drip over his arm. The door to Bocana's office was closed and he opened it only far enough to edge through. The efficient young lady behind the desk, seeing the white apparition, jumped up.

"Yes? Were you looking for someone?" she asked.

"Mr. Bocana."

"I'm afraid Mr. Bocana can't see anyone just now." Then a closer look, "You're not....?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I am. I was supposed to be here at nine-thirty but I overslept."

"Oh, they're all here. I'm sorry I didn't recognize you Mr. Rain," she apologized as though she had been guilty of failing to recognize her favorite TV personality merely because he was in costume. She hurried across the room to open the door to the inner office and usher him through. Bocana was seated at his desk. A stranger sat on one side of it and Pilar on the other. He couldn't remember ever being so glad to see anyone. She rose hesitantly from her chair, looked searchingly at him and as he moved across the room met him half way. They held each other and he kissed her and she kissed him and they both forgot that there

was anyone else in the room or the world. When they parted he held tightly to her hand.

"I thought you two would be glad to see each other," Bocana said, as though he were some modern day matchmaker. "This is John Raditch, motioning at the stranger who was standing uncertainly beside his chair. "He accompanied Pilar from Washington."

"Hello, Mr. Raditch, thanks for bringing her back." As they shook hands, Cole dropped the raincoat on the floor and as he turned to pick it up the secretary, watching the scene unfold, said, "Oh, I'll take that, Mr. Rain," and pulled it from him, cuddling the wet thing as she backed into the outer office and closed the door carefully.

When the four were alone and arranged comfortably but not completely relaxed there was a moment of embarrassed silence as sometimes happens when no one can think of a starting point. Finally Bocana cleared his throat. "Ugh..um...well, Cole, I thought you told me you didn't have a thing to wear. That ensemble blends perfectly with your bandages." Doc had also wound a white dressing around the ripped hand.

"Maybe you shouldn't have left the hospital," Pilar worried.

"I'm O.K.," Cole insisted. "Go ahead, Thad, I'm anxious to know what this is all about."

"I mentioned to you over the phone," Bocana began rather more stiffly, "that the several agencies involved in the arrests and recovery of the heroin from the SS Crescent Moon are most anxious to express their appreciation to you." He paused, maybe for effect. "But the real purpose of this meeting goes beyond that, and even though I know something of it, I think it can better be explained to you by Mr. Raditch."

Cole appraised Mr. Raditch for the first time noting the conservative suit, the close-clipped gray hair, the bushy eyebrows, the rather severe mien. All this was softened somewhat by a hint of humor around the intelligent gray eyes.

"Most of the things I'm asked to do," Mr. Raditch stated in tones too sonorous, "are pretty prosaic and I'm afraid sometimes, or even most of the time, fairly unimportant. But on this occasion I feel a high honor at having been chosen by my superiors in the State Department to convey to you, Pilar Jones, and to you, Coleridge Rain, the highest commendation from the President of the United States." Mr. Raditch fumbled in his inside coat pocket and brought forth

an official looking sealed envelope and tried to get a fingernail under one corner. Bocana handed him a letter opener. Slitting it open carefully, while Cole fidgeted, Mr. Raditch finally extracted two other envelopes and several thin sheets of typed script. He placed the envelopes on a smoke stand beside him and riffled through the typed pages and Cole began to feel even more uncomfortable and also to itch in several spots, especially his scalp. Reaching up to scratch surreptitiously, he touched the bandage on his forehead and thought back to the sympathetic stares in the elevator.

Mr. Raditch cleared his throat: "Oh yes, this seems to be a copy of what's in the two envelopes. One for each of you and a set of written instructions for me - including what constitutes my authority to discuss this matter."

Bocana's chair screeched as he turned slightly. Cole and Pilar sat motionless and silent and looked expectantly at Mr. Raditch.

"Let me start by reading a copy of the letter the President has prepared for Pilar Jones," and with no further preamble began to read: "To Pilar Priscilla Mateos Jones: It is with the sincerest pleasure and much gratification that I take cognizance of the great service you have rendered to your government, to the people of the United States, not excluding the rest of humanity, and to all living things upon our earth. The testimony you have given before the heads of our government and in confrontation with the leaders of a great foreign power was the key that allowed us time to garner subsequent evidence disproving that there was ever any act of direct aggression by the United States of America against that foreign power. The truth of your words alone might not have been enough to hold in check the more impetuous representatives of that foreign government but the strength of your convictions and the trueness of your heart could not be disbelieved.

I extend to you the highest commendation from the people of our country as its elected representative and from myself as a fellow man. Signed, the President of the United States."

Mr. Raditch shifted this copy to the bottom of the sheets he held in his hand and without taking notice of the puzzled expression on Cole's face continued: "I will read this copy of the President's letter contained in Mr. Rain's envelope: 'To Coleridge Teofolus Rain: The several billions of people in the world, and all the living things upon it, are in your lasting debt. The individual actions directed by your unique intelligence and bolstered by a physical courage uncommon to most

of us, has given respite to all life, and we can hope, total succor for the foreseeable future. Your dialogue with the defectors fleeing their country with stolen contraband and cowering behind the shield of innocent humans, was monitored and relayed for our desperate need in Washington. Pilar Jones provided the delaying action and your replayed conversation with the conspirators on the ill-fated SS Crescent Moon gave incontrovertible proof that the terrible tragedy following could not have been other than accidental. We may never know its exact cause but the balance was weighted in our favor and the possible destruction of three-fourths of the world was averted.

It is my fervent hope that all men will soon understand the very ludicrous aspect of finality here imposed. The end of civilization rested in the heart and eyes of one woman and the intelligence and courage of one man. May no man or woman ever again be so burdened. It is my further hope that such devices of total destruction will now be removed from the arsenals of nations, assuring that a mere accident cannot threaten the obliteration of life on earth.

First, as the representative of the people of the United States and, secondly, as a fellow human being I extend to you, Coleridge Rain, my sincerest gratitude and highest commendation.' Signed, the President of the United States."

Mr. Raditch looked up from his reading with a bright smile. Bocana appeared benign. Pilar's direct gaze was leveled at Cole in adoration and Cole was dumbfounded. Rising from his chair Mr. Raditch handed the envelopes containing the President's message to the two newest heroes. "I'm sure Mr. Rain has some questions to ask," he said. "And I have been given the authority to answer them. But I must caution you that the information I am about to divulge is highly classified and will not be released by our government for publication. Such public announcement can only be made after the foreign government referred to decides it is in their interests to do so. Actually, since my conversation with you is confidential, there is no need not to state flatly that the government referred to is the Soviet Union."

Mr. Raditch was enjoying his role, but before he could continue Cole broke in: "As you say, Mr. Raditch, I'm pretty much lost. Am I right in understanding that you're permitted to answer any question to help clarify this mystery?"

"By all means, Mr. Rain. That's why I'm here." Returning to his chair Mr. Raditch folded the papers he held and inserted them in the original envelope tucking it inside a concealed pocket. "First, Mr. Rain, would you indulge me in

one question? I think it's proper to ask this question prior to our discussion of what actually occurred while all that happened to you on that fateful day is still fresh in your mind and unencumbered with extraneous facts."

"I can't think of anything to add to the information you must already have," Cole said. "But go ahead."

"Let's just say you can satisfy our curiosity. What I would like to know," Mr. Raditch lit a cigarette before asking, "Can you recall how many nuclear eruptions there were that morning?"

Cole was startled by the question and repeated it slowly, "How many eruptions there were?" His thoughts turned inward and he seemed to be alone and out of focus. "I've thought about it some," he said at last. "But truthfully I've tried to forget everything that happened that morning. I was unconscious for a while and I've slept a lot since. But to answer your question: We were in sight of the coast. I could make out the bridge and the city in the distance, and the whole Coast Range was visible north and south. The first we were aware that anything was wrong was the shifting emphasis of light that suddenly was coming from behind us. The pilot shouted something and put the chopper in a sharp bank. When we were turned back toward the ship I knew what had happened but I'm sure the pilot still didn't understand, not knowing what I knew. The light had changed from the first flash; it wasn't so intense and color had entered into it. And then again, and it couldn't have been more than a few seconds, there was another incredible white flash and even though I was wearing dark glasses I recall throwing my arms up to protect my eyes but I still couldn't blot out that blinding flare." Cole paused for a moment before going on. "If I thought about it I must have assumed that the two boxes of nuclear cartridges exploded at different times. Maybe they had been separated to each end of the ship. But, as I say, I've tried not to think about it too much."

"That corroborates what we know," Mr. Raditch said, pleased with what he'd learned. "I doubt if the cases were separated but if they were it wouldn't have made that much variation in the time lag of the two explosions. The second brilliant flash was a Russian undersea nuclear ship lurking in the vicinity that was detonated by the first explosion."

"I was beginning to guess something like that must have happened," Cole said thoughtfully. "And the Russians decided we deliberately bombed their nuclear sub?"



“That’s correct,” Mr. Raditch said. “But it was almost two hours before the Russians reacted and precipitated the crisis. There was great activity at their Washington embassy and when the President got word of it, coupled with the news from the west coast, he immediately activated the satellite communications system to the Kremlin. His denial of any knowledge of what had occurred, to understate it, was less than well received. All agencies and departments were alerted to the danger developing and the FBI produced Pilar Jones, who because of the two-hour delay in the Russians reactions, would soon be arriving from the east. Assumedly she had the most knowledge of the weapon and ammunition that had exploded. She testified before the Soviet representatives in Washington and her story went by satellite to the Kremlin where it was interpreted for their heads of government. When the tape that had been monitored between yourself and the defectors was relayed and played for these same Russian representatives and transmitted to Moscow, the truth of the President’s assertion that he had no knowledge of the event and that it was a tragic multiple accident, was inescapably clear.” Mr. Raditch paused only long enough to catch his breath. “The President insisted, against contrary advice, that you both had every right to know immediately that your unselfish deeds were of incalculable value not only to your government and fellow citizens but to all humanity.” And then directly to Cole he said, “I was very interested in your graphic account of what took place at the time of the explosion. I’d appreciate knowing what your reactions and thoughts were just prior to and after the crash of your helicopter.”

Pilar, never having taken her eyes from Cole, noticed his appearance of calm acceptance become outwardly troubled again.

“I thought we would probably die. Kevin McDowell did, but I wasn’t too worried about it.” He hesitated for a moment before going on. “The one thing I think about most, and I’m sure it’s what I’ve been trying to forget...” He stopped again before continuing, “I was looking down when we came in low over the land and I saw a small boy running to the beach to join the excitement. All the vicious stupidity wrapped up in the wall of water that would crush him on the beach was suddenly crystal clear in my mind. He was just a little boy, anyplace in the world, hurrying to get a better look at the fire.” At the end his voice was very low and it was a strain to hear the sound of it. The torture of what he told was close to unbearable. It was accepted only because it was done, and now there was so much more to do. After he stopped speaking the others sat silent and tense. Cole

slumped in his chair, passed his bandaged hand across his eyes and said in a stronger voice, "Actually, I'm still sort of tired. I feel as though I could go back to bed and sleep for a week."

Released from their taut positions the three rose at the same time and looked with concern at Cole. Pilar placed her hand on his shoulder. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"I'm fine," he said getting to his feet. "It's always been a terrible effort for me to think." He encircled Pilar with his arm and held out his hand to Mr. Raditch. "I appreciate your bringing Pilar home, Mr. Raditch. And even though I still can't quite comprehend all that you've told us, it seems reasonable, since nothing that has happened the last few days has been too real. Will you convey our appreciation to the President for his thoughtfulness in writing to us?"

"I will, and I'm sure that when the Russians release the news giving the fullest facts of what occurred you will be invited to the White House to accept the President's personal thanks." Then he corrected himself. "Even if they don't release the facts the invitation will be forthcoming."

Bocana moved from behind the desk and Cole accepted his hand.

"You did a great job, Cole."

"Thanks, Thad, for your kind words. I know you love people who meddle in your business."

"We're in debt to you, Pilar, for your gracious acceptance of our request to go to Washington. It made for a happy coincidence when your testimony became so vital."

"I enjoyed part of it but I'm glad to be home."

"You've both been through an ordeal. I'll have someone drive you home."

"I've got my own car," Cole said, "parked in a space reserved for some bureaucratic dignitary."

"I thought the police department brought you here."

"Did the doctor give you permission to drive?" Pilar wanted to know.

"He didn't tell me I couldn't," not explaining that Doc Carsey had provided him with a driver.

When they moved into the reception area Bocana's secretary was ready with the raincoat and rushed to Cole's side. She helped him put it on and he felt less conspicuous even if it was too tight. Outside the building it was still raining and Cole struggled out of the raincoat again and wrapped it around Pilar. They ran

the quarter of a block to the car.

“Where would you like to go? And where is your luggage?” he asked.

“We didn’t wait for it at the airport. One of my government men, assigned exclusively to me, will deliver it to the apartment later today.”

“You really are a VIP,” Cole said admiringly.

“Yes, and from now on I’m only going to associate with VIPs. I’ve missed all of them so much these last few days. But now I’d like you to drive to Twin Peaks and we can look at the city in the rain.”

“Good idea. I’d like that too.”

The wet streets were mostly empty and with the windshield wipers swishing they looked for other changes but there were none apparent. When they reached the top Cole stopped and they sat quietly listening to the drops beat on the top and watched them bounce off the hood. Both bridges were mistily outlined against the grayness and the city below was still San Francisco in the rain. Turning toward the beach Cole couldn’t see where the land and water met.

“Larry and Kang are working along the shore,” he said. “I’ll go down there tomorrow and help.”

“Shouldn’t you rest?” she asked.

“I’m going to until tomorrow.”

The rain continued its steady soft beat.

“What did the doctor say about your overexposure to radiation?”

“He said my hair and eyebrows might fall out but if they did they’d grow back in six months. Then he told me that in his considered opinion my hair wouldn’t fall out.”

“But supposing he’s wrong. Aren’t you worried?”

“Why should I worry? It’s his reputation that’s at stake.”

“You’re feeling better,” she laughed for the first time.

“Do you want to continue living in San Francisco?” he asked. “Or would you rather commute from Marin, the East Bay, or down the Peninsula?”

“I like the City.”

“So do I, but things change.”

“Yes, they do,” she admitted cautiously.

“When this is all over, maybe we can have a party in Aunt Hester’s ballroom. It’s full of cots and people now, but when their homes are rebuilt and the place is empty we’ll invite all those other VIPs for a rally. Aunt Hester can wear her

lavender lace dress that she only wears on special occasions. Larry plays with a local musical group that he can invite and Kang can bring his Magic Lantern for a light show. That old room was made for music and light," he said slowly, giving her a chance to interrupt. But when she didn't say anything he continued, "After I apologize to Spike for double parking his tractor and pay him for the damages we can invite the Swensens. Maybe Lucretia will help you and Aunt Hester plan the refreshments and Giuseppi can look up a lot of statistics to be ready to settle any arguments. We'll invite Doc Winters and his wife, and Bocana and his wife and Doc Carsey - I don't know if he's married or not - and there's a sailor by the name of Cotton that's looking for the kind of boat I want to buy - we'll ask him."

"Is it a sailboat?"

"Right, with an auxilliary diesel. We can explore the bay and the delta country and then take her outside and sail her along the coast to Baja California."

"With that kind of boat you could sail around the world," she said, relaxing in the sound of the quiet rain.

"We could," he said. "We sure as hell could."

"Are you going to write in your diary all the things that have happened to you?" she asked.

"Not me. From now on we'll keep a joint log and you can make the entries and I'll go over them to see if they're accurate."

She seemed a little disappointed but then with a happy smile, "Are you trying to tell me something? Or ask me a question?" she wanted to know.

"Yes, I guess I am," he said in a husky voice. "I'd like to know what your innermost, deepest stirrings are."

Placing her head on his shoulder she caught a faint whiff of a popular mint-scented toothpaste, and in a low voice audible only to his right ear, "Darling," she confided, "I feel an urge to merge."





## *C. W. “Pete” McKinley*

Born Trimble, Ohio, May 5th, 1912

Attended:

Grade Schools; Trimble & Athens

High School; Athens. My brother “Burnell,” also called Pete, was my football coach and showed no mercy.

Commercial Pilot’s License. Flew for “Curtis Wright” out of Port Columbus, Ohio.

Bad Depression - 1930s.

Ohio University: Major - Economics, Minor - Science.

Smartest Move: Married Lindy in 1932. We took all of our courses together at O.U.; during my junior, her senior year.

Astronomy: only student ever to receive a “100 plus.” Lindy received her usual “A.”

University of Cincinnati: Law school

Philippines: Law school

O’Brien Law: Contracted supply shipments in foreign vessels for Corregedor and Cavite: U.S. Army & Navy bases in the Philippines.

World War II started while I was in Kobe, Japan - 1939.

Returned to U.S. and was V.O.C. for World War II; medically discharged 1943.

To California, San Francisco, and “Standard Oil of California” Legal Dept.

Switched to “Kaiser Industries.”

Bigger salary, and

brand new Hudson sedan (very difficult to get at the time).



Crazy times in Claifornia, especially the Bay Area. Of course, we thought it was all normal.

Retired in 1970 to be with Lindy full-time.

Took her to Japan, South Korea, Shanghai, Taiwan, Philippines and Hong Kong.

Then Europe, Mid-East Africa, and to South America where our son was an international lawyer at the time.

Lived in Rogers, Arkansas for seven years. Played tennis with Sam Walton. Sam offered shares of Wal-Mart from their treasury at twelve dollars per share. I turned him down. I've thought of suicide since.

Much time we spent in Naples, Florida and our summer home which we built at Ajicic, Jalisco Mexico. The home is on Lake Chapala, which is a mile (5,400 ft.) high. Beautiful weather all year round. I was asked once by a person who know all about Mexico if "Ajicic was close to a large city?"

I answered, "Yes, Guadalajara, the second largest city in Mexico."

She said, "Oh, yes... I was there on a cruise ship once."

Lindy passed April 6, 1996 at 5:30 p.m. We had 64 beautiful years together.



*May 5th, 1997*

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# THE ELECTRONIC *windmill*



P E T E M C K I N L E Y

Brown paused to light a cancer carrier before going on. “He told the Mexican authorities that the heroin he had discovered on the ship totaled some hundred pounds of the purest stuff and that it was to be transferred to an American freighter making periodic runs between Mexico and the United States carrying a bulk cargo. So - if he knows what he’s talking about it almost has to be the Crescent Moon since we’re the only one making a regular run; although he didn’t name us.”

“The tie-in seems pretty strong,” Cole admitted. “One more question; you said the custom officials searched the crew and the passengers. Do you always carry passengers on this ship?”

“Well, yes, we normally do have passengers on board. But these passengers are made up of clients, people who purchase our products. The area in Mexico where our clay comes from is also noted for its fishing and hunting. Our sales department takes advantage of this to entertain their customers with an ocean voyage.” He paused as a waiter came down the steps carrying a tray of drinks. “I hope you like the sherry, I know very little about wine; Margaret is the connoisseur.”



Cole tasted the sherry and expressed his approval. “The transfer from ship to shore has to be their biggest problem,” Cole mused.

“I think we need a new approach,” Brown said. “Someone from outside with a completely fresh viewpoint. I don’t want anyone from Customs or the Narcotics Bureau, but someone who could make a trip on the Crescent Moon as a normal guest without being obvious as to his purpose. I hoped that if you were willing to do this, you might see some unusual or even commonplace thing that would give us a clue as to how this thing is being done - if it is being done.”



“Let me think about it, Mr. Brown. If I believe I can be helpful, I’ll call you in the morning.”