

Thomas Kindred is a fugitive from the U.S. Army, having deserted from his Saigon base in 1968. Thirty years later, a plea from an old buddy puts him on a dangerous path of rediscovery of the country he left behind.

A Private War

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A Private War

Special Note

This book is a fictional account of one man's struggle to come to terms with the Vietnam War. The characters are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author. However, Saigon was a real place in 1968, and the Tet offensive of that year was a real event. All attempts were made by the author to depict them as accurately as memory allowed.

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For all of us,
those who came back and those who didn't
and those who are still unsure

And for James Jones, in remembrance

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Stephen Hazlett

Chapter One

He had the phone installed at Carmen's urging, so he could stop using the pay phone down the street to call his father. *Sneaking out at night like some druggie calling his connection*, was the way she put it. With the phone in the house he could call anytime, or his father could call him. *And phone calls can be traced*, he wanted to say, though he didn't. He could almost hear her reply: *who's tracing your calls, after all these years?*

Then he installed the answering machine that he didn't see the point of either. That was also Carmen's idea: *what if your father calls and you're not home?* It occurred to him to say, *he can always call back*. But he gave in to her on that one too. He never minded. And in all the time since, he has never received a real message, so he is surprised, entering his Vancouver flat that afternoon, to see the LED light on the machine blinking.

He presses the play button and hears his name spoken, a name from thirty years ago when he was still called Tommy Kindred. His first confused thought is that it is his father, even though it doesn't sound like him, and anyway it doesn't make sense. The infrequent calls from him are always at night, and he wouldn't use *that* name. It's been more than ten years since he's even seen his father, since that last visit back home when he kept imagining everybody was a cop. He listens to the first few sentences of the message.

"Hey, Tommy. Don't ask how I know where you are. That's not important. I've been in New York for years, and I knew you weren't around here. So I checked out where you used to live in New Jersey. Then I did something I shouldn't have done to find where you live now. Tell your Dad I'm sorry."

He has barely heard anything beyond the first two words. Pressing the stop button, he cuts off the voice in mid-sentence and closes his eyes to bring the memory forming in his head into sharper focus, as if that's what he really wants to do. But it isn't even one of the big memories, which is a surprise now that this is finally happening. It's one of the others, the one where a nineteen-year-old version of himself, in the company of two hundred other GIs, is trooping down the long corridor toward the open door of the airplane. A lot of the others were as young or even younger than he, and they were all in the same fix and probably felt the same sense of strangeness over the fact that they were about to board a big, shiny commercial jet wearing their helmets and standard-issue fatigue uniforms and combat boots, stowing the

helmets in the overhead compartments, some of them carrying rifles aboard and stowing those in the overheads too.

What happened after the boarding experience was equally strange, when they all took their seats like vacationers at the start of a trip and watched movies and eyed the stewardesses moving up and down the aisle serving them meals and drinks. And all the while he kept thinking what an odd experience it was to be flying into a war zone like this. Not that he was complaining, because he knew it could have been a lot worse. He could have spent two weeks being seasick on an overcrowded troopship, only to be ferried to some beach while bullets whizzed by overhead, some to rip into the bodies of his comrades around him, though never into his. But that was the stuff of the old war movies they'd all grown up on. This war was different. Eighteen hours it took in this war, flying into a setting sun, from San Francisco to Vietnam in less than a day.

He pushes the memory aside and tries to make sense of what he's just heard. By now he thinks he knows who it is, but not what it means to have that voice suddenly show up on his answering machine, using the name he forgot about all those years ago. For a minute he looks down through the second floor window of his flat at the traffic passing by outside. When he turns back, the machine is still blinking at him. He presses the play button again.

"I'm in Seattle, which, if I'm reading the map right, is 100 miles south of the Canadian border and about 130 miles from where you are, up there in Vancouver, British Columbia. Hey, I've always known you'd still be out there somewhere. You were my hero back in country. When you went over the hill, you made it possible for the others of us to do the same. You were a hero to us all.

"But now I need your help. I'm in trouble. Freddie Hopper's dead and I think I might be next.

"But hey, how do I know you even know who this is? It's Richard Goody, remember?"

He presses the stop button again, remembering. It's like sending a light beam back into his memory, and he sees Rick Goody's face, the lank hair hanging over one eye in perpetual violation of military haircut policy, the intense look as if he were constantly worried, the goofy grin when you said something funny. But it was never Richard then, just Rick. When you want to think of yourself differently, maybe you change your name.

Rick Goody was one of the first people he spoke to in 67, after the long flight over, after the group of bedraggled new arrivals was finally deposited

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into the heat and the noise of Ton Son Nhut airbase in Saigon and immediately hustled off the tarmac and onto a lineup of blue Air Force buses. He was humping his duffel bag in one hand and his orders and a dog-eared paperback, a copy of "From Here to Eternity," in the other. He'd chosen it because it seemed like appropriate reading for the long flight over. The book would figure greatly in the rest of his life, though he didn't know it at the time.

The blue Air Force buses deposited them at Camp Alpha, which served as the Army replacement camp for new arrivals to Vietnam and as a staging camp for the lucky ones returning home. It wasn't a long drive, but it was long enough for it to sink into all their brains that they were really there. He didn't say a word, aware of the soldier seated next to him and the others on the bus and the smell of body odor they all carried from the long flight. Along with the rest of them, he took in the views outside the windows as they rode through the shimmering heat and dust, looking at the parade of Jeeps and trucks going in every direction. A distant runway was busy with rumbling fighter planes taking off in twos and threes and not to any exercises. This was real.

At the Replacement Company orderly room, when it was his turn, he finally set down the heavy load of his duffel bag and handed over the sealed envelope containing his orders to a seated PFC. Sweat had soaked through in spots on his shirt. He glanced at the nametag on the PFCs starched and unstained fatigues: Goody.

The PFC looked up at him with a grin. "Welcome to the 'Nam." He glanced at the dog-eared book still in Tommy's hand. "What do you think of it?" The guy had an anxious look on his face as though he really wanted to hear Tommy's opinion.

"It's pretty good," Tommy said.

Maybe it was the fact that the company commander of the Replacement Company, a first lieutenant, just happened to be passing through at that moment and just happened to overhear the brief conversation. Maybe that was the seminal moment. He thought about that for a long time afterward.

The lieutenant stopped behind him and took the book from his hand and stepped around so that he faced Tommy from the side. He looked down at the book jacket, then back up. Tommy wasn't sure of the protocol here—should he come to attention? The lieutenant smiled at him. "A James Jones man," he said. "What about Mailer? You like him too?" He continued to smile.

"Yes, Sir." He glanced down at the lieutenant's nametag: Mira.

"Good," the lieutenant said, narrowing his eyes. "Can you type?"

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“Yes, Sir, I can,” he answered before he could think about it. The old Army adage, *never volunteer for anything*, sounded in his head.

“How far did you go in school?” Lieutenant Mira asked.

“A year of college, Sir.”

The lieutenant reached down and took the sealed envelope from PFC Goody’s hand and opened it and scanned over the orders. “You’re going to the First Air Cavalry Division.” He glanced up at Tommy. “How do you feel about that?”

“Fine, Sir.”

“Rumor has it they’re about to make a move from II Corps up to I Corps. You know where I Corps is?”

He did, in fact, know that I Corps bordered North Vietnam, but he also knew that this war could come at you from any direction, so the newspaper accounts had told him—it didn’t matter where you were. Still, the news hit him with the sensation of something dropping into his stomach. “Yes, Sir,” he said.

Lieutenant Mira simply nodded. Tommy tried then to come to a belated attention, but the lieutenant didn’t take notice. He dropped the orders on PFC Goody’s desk and continued on his way.

It was later that day that the same PFC Goody told him the lieutenant had changed his orders. He was no longer going to I Corps and the First Cav’ Division, but was being assigned as a clerk-typist to the Replacement Company at Camp Alpha. Even though the lieutenant was only the company commander of a replacement company, he was at the center of the replacement process, and he could have a man’s orders changed if he wanted. He needed another clerk-typist and apparently Tommy was it.

Of course, he didn’t see then what that change of orders set in motion. He had to admit, at the time, that he was secretly relieved.

He isn’t Tommy anymore—he’s Thomas, though it’s a name no one knows except his father, and Carmen, of course. When he was a boy, only his mother would call him Thomas, sometimes with a rising note at the end when she wanted his attention, and sometimes with heavy emphasis on the first syllable when she was unhappy with him. Now he uses made up names that have a link to something in his past, and he buys fake Ids to match—he knows a guy who can get phony Canadian birth certificates for a price. After that, the rest is easy. He’s been Michael Park for a long time now—Michael for Mickey Mantle, his favorite Yankee ball player growing up, and Park for Park Avenue, the street in Union City, New Jersey where he grew up and where his

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father still lives. Clever.

He always expected this day would come, never mind the years since, more than half a lifetime from when he was a nineteen year old kid. But how did Rick even find out where he is? A phrase replays in his head, something that, through his confusion, didn't quite register the first time. He replays the message and hears the words, "I did something I shouldn't have done to find where you live now. Tell your Dad I'm sorry."

He stops the machine and reaches for the phone, automatically figuring the time difference between Pacific Time and Eastern Time. Add three hours to make it almost nine PM in Jersey. The old man is never out this late.

The phone rings in his ear a half dozen times before it is picked up and the receiver on the other end is fumbled around. "Hello," a hoarse voice croaks as if unaccustomed to speaking. Clearing his throat, his father then tries it again, this time more forcefully, "Hello."

Eighty-two years old and alone and probably still drinking straight Scotch every night. "Pop, it's me," Thomas says, picturing his father sitting half asleep in his favorite sagging chair, not really watching whatever is on the television. In his mind, Thomas sees his old man as an older copy of himself, still with the lanky Kindred frame, though not standing quite so tall these days. His father's serious German face, with the bent nose and the lank hair turned gray, mirrors an image of Thomas in the not-so-distant future.

"Yeah, what's up?" his father answers noncommittally, though the voice brightens. "What's it been, only three or four months?"

Thomas closes his eyes. The old man can't help admonishing. "Yeah, I know," Thomas says. "I can't be calling all the time."

His father lets out a heavy sigh. "We have to go over that again? It's over, I keep telling you. You could have a normal life instead of hiding out like a criminal. Christ, you could come home and live here. Nobody gives a shit anymore."

It's the amnesty thing again. Pop mentions it only every time they talk, which is one of the real reasons Thomas limits his calls.

"Pop, I keep telling you, that amnesty didn't cover me. I'm not included."

"How do you know?" the old man says. "You never even tried to find out more about it."

It's the same conversation they always have, as if they have to get it out of the way before they can go on with anything else. Pop will mention the pardon Jimmy Carter issued for draft evaders back in '77, that was expanded later to include deserters from a non-combat zone. Thomas, of course, had

skipped out of a combat zone, so it didn't cover him. Then Thomas will explain the military court thing to the old man, how, on a case-by-case basis, any deserter wanting to take advantage of the pardon had to go in front of a military court. Could he picture himself waltzing onto an Army base somewhere and applying for a hearing? You could always apply, he would go on, for an upgrade from a dishonorable discharge. But he'd never been discharged, had he? He'd simply deserted. The Army was still looking for him.

"You could at least try," his father insists. "A lot of others did it."

"Not a lot, Pop. Less than ten percent, and they weren't in my situation." That's really the tip-off to how ineffective the pardon had been. Its aim had been to help heal the wounds of the war, but less than ten percent of those eligible had taken advantage of it. It didn't heal anything. What Thomas really wants to say is that, even so, he doesn't care. He can't seem to get it across to the old man: to Thomas, it's still 1968. He's tried explaining it. It's always a disaster. "Pop, let's not go into it again, okay?"

"Sure, I know. You're not ready. Forty-nine years old, and still think you're nineteen, you got all the time in the world."

"Okay, Pop."

"Sure, okay. This thing killed your mother, it'll kill me too." The old man sighs again.

"She died of cancer." Ten years ago was the only time Thomas had chanced a visit back to Jersey, and he stayed only two days, going out only the one time, just long enough to visit the funeral home to see his mother. He half expected to find federal officers waiting there for him. Beyond that, though, the thing that had struck him was how little it had changed, everything still like when he was growing up. It felt like he could move into his old room and dig out his old baseball glove from the closet and go find a game with some of the guys, as if they'd still be there too. Even his mother, made up and hair combed out in a style she never wore, lying in the satin-lined coffin, had looked the same. Only the old man seemed changed, his face lined, his erect posture bent a little. Maybe it was the stress of the moment. That was the first time Thomas tried to explain to the old man that it was still 1968 to him, and gotten a disgusted look in answer, the old man throwing on his jacket and storming out of the apartment to go drink at The Brass Rail tavern across the street, Thomas watching him through the window, the old man angrily striding across the street, ignoring the traffic.

Thomas can't help recalling that now, listening to the hiss of the long distance connection in his ear.

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“Sure, cancer,” the old man says. “Where do you think it comes from? They don’t know. It starts inside, in the soul, when it wants to give up.”

Now it is Thomas’s turn to sigh. “Pop, I didn’t call to talk about that.”

“All right,” the old man says. “What is it?”

“Has anybody been around asking about me?”

“Why do you ask that?” his father says, a sudden innocent tone in his voice.

“Just because I want to know. Has there been?”

“I suppose so. Some guy a few weeks ago. He said he knew you growing up.”

“What was his name?”

“He didn’t give it, I don’t think. Anyway, I don’t remember it if he did.”

“Could he have been from the Army or the police, anything like that?”

“For Christ’s sake. Nobody’s looking for you. Can’t you get that?”

Thomas pauses for a few seconds. “I got a phone call, Pop.”

“Who, Mickey Park got a call?”

He winces at the heavy sarcasm. “No. It was from somebody who used to know me.”

“Yeah? Who?”

“Somebody from the Army.”

“From the Army?” The old man finally sounds surprised.

“Yeah. I don’t know how he got my number. The only thing I could think of is somebody came around asking you about me. Did you tell this guy where I am?”

“You kidding? I got my orders.”

“Yeah, I know,” Thomas says. “What did you tell him?”

“I told him I didn’t know where you were. That we lost touch.”

“Anything else happen?”

“There was something else, yeah,” the old man says and falls silent. You have to drag information out of him.

“What was it?”

“Just that the place was broken into, that’s all, if that means anything to you. The apartment, when I wasn’t here. I come home, I find crap scattered all over. But they didn’t take anything.”

“They were probably looking for cash or something small they could put in their pocket.”

“Your mother’s jewelry sitting right there in plain sight. They took the box out of my dresser drawer, opened it and didn’t take anything.”

Thomas doesn’t like the sound of any of this. “Then what do you think

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they were after?”

“I don’t know. They went through my desk, my papers, emptied it out, all my old cancelled checks and tax returns, all that stuff scattered all over the bedroom.”

“Anything in there with my name and phone number on it?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” the old man admits.

“I mean my real name.”

“I suppose there is.”

He doesn’t even want to ask. “What was it?”

“There’s my address book I keep in the desk.”

“With my name and number?”

“Yeah. I can’t help it. I was supposed to put goddamn Mickey Park or whoever you are at the time in there, then I can’t remember what letter in the book you’re under.”

“You always remember when you call, or when you used to write.”

“Yeah well, every time you gave me a new name,” the old man says, “I scratched out the old one under your real one and put in the new one. This is all your idea anyway.”

At least now Thomas knows how Rick Goody got his number, or at least that must have been it. But how did he even know where the old man lived then? The answer comes to him almost before he asks himself the question—the old man hasn’t moved in almost forty years, since Thomas was nine and they moved to that fourth-floor apartment that overlooked the bus lines to New York and Hoboken, the familiar roar of the buses outside blending into the background of other noises so you would miss it if it ever stopped. And how did Rick know the address in New Jersey? Easy. He got it from Thomas’s Army 201 file, which he had access to thirty years ago, never telling Thomas. That much, the secretly copying down his Jersey address and never mentioning it, sounds like Rick Goody. He probably did that after Thomas had skipped out of the replacement company and gone over the hill. “Yeah okay, Pop,” Thomas says. “I might be moving again. I’ll let you know.”

“Then what about moving back here? It’s about time, isn’t it?”

“No, Pop, it’s not. I’ll talk to you later.”

Chapter Two

Rick Goody became his first real friend at Camp Alpha. He was one of the West Coast guys, but Tommy didn't hold that against him. At least he wasn't one of the California surfer crowd. He came from Tacoma, up in Washington State, and he was at least halfway intelligent in a naïve kind of way, and Tommy liked him well enough. But the thing about Rick was that, even though the guy was bright enough in his own way, he didn't seem capable of figuring out what to do next without seeking someone else's opinion.

They would hang out at the Enlisted Men's, or EM, club, drinking beer. Most nights, their conversations had a rehearsed feel and Tommy would sometimes wonder how much of what he said he even believed. Invariably, the conversations would get around to two main topics: their worthless jobs and acting First Sergeant Murphy.

"Christ almighty," Rick said to him one night after taking a long swig from his Budweiser can and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "I am sick of this fucking place. I'm gonna put in for a transfer."

"Who would have you?" Tommy answered automatically, draining his own Bud. "You're too much of a fuckup to even do the job you got."

Their job in the company orderly room consisted of typing up endless movement orders for the endless stream of bodies moving in and out of the company, either sending fresh replacements from the States to in-country duty or sending the fortunate ones at the end of their tours Stateside. Even though most of the replacements already had assignments, the movement orders still had to be cut. And there were those who came to the Replacement Company without specific assignments, to be put into the replacement pool, and these were matched up with incoming requisitions for fresh bodies in from the world. The clueless replacements would then be sent off, sometimes into the maw of combat and sometimes not; it was the luck of the draw.

"How many of the poor fucks we sent off today you think will ever go home?" Tommy asked, one of the standard questions.

"Better them than us," Rick recited the standard answer.

"The fuck you know?" Tommy said, veering off script for a change. "Maybe we're sending some poor asshole who might invent a cure for cancer off to die. Instead of you, who's just a worthless fuck."

Rick laughed uncertainly. "Yeah, well," he offered, "you better watch

your own ass, or Murph'll send it off to the First Cav. He's got his eye on you."

"I don't know how he could do that when he's got his head so far up the lieutenant's ass," Tommy answered without much feeling.

First Sergeant Murphy wasn't even a First Sergeant by rank, but only acting, and not even a real Sergeant but a Specialist E-7. But that's how it was in the Replacement Company.

"Yeah, but you better watch out anyway," Rick said, grinning by now. "He might have us painting cigarette butt cans again."

Their work usually took less than half the day, allowing for ample goof off time, but they couldn't come right out and goof off in front of Murphy. They had to pretend to still be working or Murphy would find some asinine task for them to do, like the time he had them fashioning and painting new butt cans from fruit cans they got from the mess hall. The cans hung from every tent post of every GP Medium tent that comprised the company living quarters. It seemed that the old ones had become stained and chipped from the constant cigarette mess being deposited in them, and you couldn't have that.

Tommy made a disgusted face. "I think I'm gonna put in for a transfer to a line company and beat Murphy to the punch." It was one of his continuing fantasies that came up under the influence of four or five Budweisers, and sometimes he wished it could be true.

Rick answered, "You got the best job in the Army here. You want to blow that to go humping off into the bush and maybe wind up in a body bag?"

Tommy never quite knew how to take Rick. The guy didn't seem to be affected by the job the way he was, by the numbing boredom mixed with that sense he was conducting a grim lottery for the replacements shuffling through the company.

"Just like the guys we send out there now, right?" Tommy said.

"At least they got better odds."

That was true—Tommy knew the numbers well enough. The chances were heavily in favor of a replacement being sent to a support unit rather than a line outfit. The statistics, at least the ones they'd been quoted, were that four of every five soldiers supported the fighting, while the unfortunate one actually did the fighting. But knowing that didn't help.

He might think about it then, how they would show up in the Quonset hut orderly room each morning with the Saigon heat already building up and turn on the air conditioners full blast until the coolness would bring a delicious chill. He would roll up the sleeves of his starched jungle fatigues two turns

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and sit at his desk and begin matching names with requisitions, sending guys he'd never even met to places like An Khe and Pleiku and Chu Lai, places he'd never seen. Sometimes he would see a mental image of the map of South Vietnam superimposed over the orders he was cutting, and there would be tiny hills and trees and flashes of combat in the image and he would try to imagine a face to match the name of the poor fuck he was sending to one of those places and he would see the face spiraling down to become lost in the tiny jungle below. And all the while he would be playing the game of fooling Acting First Sergeant Murphy into thinking he was working hard. Then, about early afternoon, he would start thinking of the beers he would drink that night at the EM club, and a weary dread would come over him from somewhere. It was probably on one of those afternoons that he started to think of going over the hill.

Tommy went AWOL just after New Year's of '68 and moved in with his girlfriend, Dailin, to a Saigon flat. It should have surprised him shortly after that when Rick Goody followed his lead. Somehow it didn't. He ran into Rick in one of the bars in Saigon where he hung out, Rick acting gleeful at seeing him, telling him he'd skipped out on the replacement company too, he couldn't take any more of Murphy's crap, especially after that incident of Private Dale's swan dive off the water tower. Rick was living with a whore off of Le Loi Street, he told Tommy. And there were the others too, Billy Mendez and Fred Hopper, the Hop, had skipped out too. It was like a club, The AWOLs they were calling themselves, and they got together all the time and got drunk and had a good time, living off the black market, just like Tommy.

Actually, Tommy had to admit at the time, it even made some kind of sense in a poetic sort of way, Rick referring to the group as The AWOLs, where he'd previously dubbed them The Company back at Camp Alpha when they were all still marking time and performing their mundane jobs in the Replacement Company. It was Rick who had come with the original tag, The Company, and Tommy, who'd been a one-fourth part of it, had to admit that it was a passably clever tag, even if it did come from Rick.

The Company referred to the fact that the four of them, Tommy and Rick, along with Billy Mendez and Fred Hopper, ran the Replacement Company for all practical purposes. Tommy and Rick, being company clerks, pretty much ran the orderly room, which comprised the brains of the company. Fred Hopper, immediately and forever after dubbed the Hop when he'd transferred in, was the lone supply clerk, because a replacement company has a small

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contingent of permanent party and doesn't need much in the way of supply. So the Hop ran the supply room. And Billy Mendez was a staff of one working in the motor pool, because a replacement company doesn't have need for much of a motor pool either, and the old-timer sergeant who ran it, the non-commissioned officer-in-charge, or NCOIC, was usually drunk anyway. So Billy kept the wheels of the company rolling. So the four of them collectively, Rick decided one day, when they all happened to be together drinking beer at the EM club, comprised The Company. They all liked it and the name stuck, and they started hanging together more frequently, so it wasn't just Tommy and Rick anymore at their nightly bull sessions.

The discussions typically centered on the fucked-up state of the war and what they were going to do when they got back to the world. Tommy missed the free-ranging sessions of before, when it was just him and Rick and he could more-or-less direct the talks, but he drifted along with it anyway, not really minding the idle chatter. Fueled by the beers they drank, at about twenty cents a pop, it was the kind of talk that meant little and allowed them to forget where they were.

"You know why we'll never win this shitty war?" Mendez was saying one night in the thoughtful way he had, looking around through the haze of cigarette smoke at the noisy EM club. The smoke had them all blinking involuntarily, and they all leaned forward from the press of bodies constantly moving around their table. "Because we don't really want to win it, you know? We're not over here to win it. We're just going through the motions."

"Yeah, I suppose we're all here just for the \$65 a month combat pay," Rick said.

"Might as well be," Mendez said. "You know why you and me are really here?" He jabbed a finger at Rick. "Vietnam is like a proving ground. All of us are here as a test. We're testing out equipment, testing out tactics for the real war, if it ever comes. And that'll be against the Russians."

It must have been Billy's turn to hold forth. The others listened politely, if a little disinterested. It was Tommy's turn to get another round of beers, and he got up and elbowed his way through to the makeshift bar, which was just a long plank propped on saw horses. When he returned with the Budweiser cans, Mendez was still holding forth.

"The South Vietnamese don't want to win this war. The VC, they're the only ones who want to win it. Nobody else cares."

"But you care, right Billy?" Fred Hopper offered with a shy grin.

"Hell no, I don't give a flying fuck either," Mendez replied. He took a long swallow from the Budweiser can in his hand and leaned forward. "Look,

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we all know we don't give a shit. Okay, that's normal, soldiers just want to survive and go home. But the officers don't give a shit either. Maybe that's normal too, for junior officers anyway. But even the generals don't give a shit. Everybody's just going through the motions."

"Westmoreland gives a shit," Rick said. He was clearly drunk, and he smiled in that way everyone always described as shit-faced. Rick was never a very good drinker. "I mean it seems like he does. I heard him speaking on Armed Forces Radio the other day. He says we're about to win the war."

"Ah, Westmoreland's an actor," Mendez retorted. "He's being groomed for the White House. You watch, he'll run in '68, at least by '72."

Tommy, who usually listened noncommittally to this usual chatter, was enjoying the buzz in his own head and sipping at his beer to maintain just the right state of high. Letting out a silent belch, so that the beer fumes wafted up into his nostrils, he was watching Mendez. He knew that Billy's father owned a fleet of fishing boats in Monterey, California, where he was from. Tommy could never picture the tall, gangling Mendez working on a fishing boat. Billy had the thin, sensitive face you usually associated with an intellectual, though he tried hard not to act like one, and Tommy just couldn't picture Mendez doing whatever they do on fishing boats, hauling nets, he supposed, and gutting fish and walking the decks with a seamen's roll. For that matter, though, he couldn't picture Mendez working in the motor pool either.

Mendez's story was similar to Tommy's: the company commander of the Replacement Company, Lieutenant Mira, had drafted him in the same way he had Tommy. After spending a year at the Army Language School at the Presidio near Monterey, Billy had been sent to Vietnam as an interpreter. But somehow, Lieutenant Mira had intercepted those orders, because Billy's 201 file showed he had also been a mechanic and Lieutenant Mira needed someone to keep the motor pool running.

"And if Westmoreland don't care, why should the other generals care?" Mendez said and drained his beer, crushing the can in his fist and reaching for another. "And you know the South Vietnamese generals sure don't care either. They're too busy making money on the black market selling U. S. aid goods to fight a war. And if their generals don't care, why should their soldiers care? Nobody cares. Everybody's just pretending."

"Hey, did you hear this one?" Hopper says. The Hop was just a shy kid from New York who usually didn't say much, which was probably best, because when he did speak he didn't say much either. Mostly, he just seemed happy to be included in this exclusive club they called The Company.

Perhaps expecting to be interrupted, Hopper said in one breath, "This

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Vietnamese businessman who made millions on the black market was thrown in jail for profiteering—he ran things on the Saigon docks, did you hear that one?”

Everyone had heard one version or another of this story, and none of them doubted there was some truth to it. They all looked at Hopper and let him finish.

“So he was sentenced to be shot, you know?” the Hop said. “But he paid everybody off, the guards and the commandant of the jail. So the night before his execution, they let him out and they went and grabbed a beggar off the street and threw him in this guy’s cell. And the next morning they executed this beggar in the guy’s place. And the businessman is right back running the docks.”

“Yeah,” Mendez said with a bored expression. “Except I heard it was some South Vietnamese officer nobody liked that they shot. They filled him with heroin so he was out of his head and then they took him out and propped him up and shot him.”

“And the businessman is in the States, I heard,” Rick added.

Tommy had heard a slightly different version than any of those, but he was too many beers down to care. Mendez was undoubtedly right: nobody gave a shit.

But The Company was never really a tight group. Tommy just drifted along with it, just marking time, and he was sure it was the same with the others—that and the sense of superiority it gave them over the other sad sacks of the Replacement Company. Then the incident with Murphy and Private Dale took place, and that changed things.

The first time Tommy saw Private Dale was when the guy reported in to the orderly room on arrival in country. Tommy looked up to see a pudgy, pear-shaped young man with a nervous expression who looked like he belonged in no man’s Army. But here he was nevertheless and, ironically, the guy had an infantryman’s MOS. Somehow he’d gotten through the advanced infantry training and been sent to Vietnam to fill a line position in the war. Tommy couldn’t believe it when he saw the guy’s orders.

After that, Tommy couldn’t help noticing Private Dale every time he saw him, either in line at the mess hall or at the EM club or around the company area. The guy was a naturally nervous type with a perpetually bumbling way about him, and he was often seen to be mumbling to himself as if he was carrying on an intense private conversation. He seemed totally unsuited to be a combat soldier. That being the case, the Army, in its wisdom, was conspiring to send him into combat with the 101st Airborne Division. He had

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only been in country for two or three days by then.

Early morning, the day of the incident, everyone was filtering down to the mess hall for breakfast when someone spotted Private Dale high up on the catwalk of the water tower. He was wearing only his green GI boxer shorts and he was sitting on the edge of the catwalk with his chubby legs dangling over the side. His naked chest shone white in the sunlight. Soon a crowd was gathered around the water tower looking up at him, mostly in silence, although a few comedians were calling out clever remarks like, *Hey, how's the weather up there?* There was some nervous laughter too, but everyone knew what the guy was doing, which was either getting up the nerve to jump, or at least looking like he was going to jump so he could be labeled a psycho and get out of his combat assignment. But he was pathetic in the least—his face, viewed from below, appeared wet with tears—and Tommy began to hear sympathetic mumblings in the crowd around him. When he looked behind himself, he saw Rick Goody, with Billy Mendez and Fred Hopper nearby, and he could read in their eyes the same thing he was feeling, which was a mixture of pity for Private Dale and an inarticulate outrage that the guy was forced into this situation. There was still some sporadic catcalling, but it was dying down.

By this time, Lieutenant Mira had shown up, and the catcalling was silenced altogether. He yelled up at Private Dale that the base Chaplain was on his way. Private Dale was unresponsive and everyone just milled around waiting to see what would happen next. Then Acting First Sergeant Murphy decided to take matters into his own hands. He started climbing the ladder leading up to the catwalk, which was maybe forty feet off the ground, and the Lieutenant didn't try to stop him.

All the while that Murphy was climbing, he was talking to Private Dale, and some of his words could be heard by those on the ground. The gist of them was that the guy better get his ass down off of there or he'd be court-martialed, and none of this was going to postpone him being shipped out to the 101st anyway. When Murphy reached the catwalk, with Private Dale watching him all the way, and Murphy approached him and stood with his hands on his hips and shouted for him to get up out of there and get his ass back down the ladder, Private Dale, still in a sitting position with his chubby legs dangling, simply pushed himself away with his hands and he fell, wailing as he went, his body turning in the air so that he landed head down with a sickening splat right in front of the knot of watchers. The watchers all recoiled in horror, and there a collective cry of anguish at what they'd just witnessed. Then, after the first horrified seconds, when they saw, from the

smashed skull and the broken neck and the spreading pool of blood, that the guy was obviously dead, few of them could look at him anymore. But their eyes were drawn upward to Murphy still up on the catwalk, looking down at the scene with disbelief.

By the time an ambulance showed up to take the guy to the base morgue, a shaken Murphy had climbed down and Lieutenant Mira was talking to him with an intense look on his face. After that the knot of watchers drifted away, some to see if the mess hall was still open, but most going aimlessly back to their tents or to their assignments for the day.

That night, The Company of four was in its usual table at the EM club, not saying much. The general mood in the club seemed to be subdued as well. Probably a lot of them had witnessed Private Dale's swan dive, and the rest had certainly heard of it. Finally, Billy Mendez spoke up.

"What's going to happen to Murphy?" he said, glaring at the others.

Tommy looked up from his brooding. "Nothing's going to happen to him," he said.

"What do you mean, nothing?" Mendez asked, his eyes bugging out at him. "He made the guy jump."

Tommy, while not totally disagreeing, replied, "Well, he didn't push him. The guy did jump on his own."

"They're not going to do anything to Murphy," Rick added, giving Tommy a furtive look. "If they investigated Murphy, they'd have to ask why Lieutenant Mira didn't try to stop him." He gave Tommy another look. "The paperwork's already been cut anyway. It just went down as a plain suicide. They couldn't have it any other way."

"Who couldn't have it?" Mendez demanded.

"The Inspector General's office," Tommy said. "It's one thing to go after an enlisted man for fucking up. But Mira's an officer."

"I can't believe you guys," Mendez shouted, causing a few heads around them to turn. "We can't just let them forget it. We should do something."

"Like what?" Tommy asked.

"Like go to the IG's office and tell them what happened."

"If wouldn't do any good," Tommy said. Technically, he was pretty sure that Murphy hadn't broken any Army regulation. But Tommy also knew that any investigation would be a black mark on Lieutenant Mira's record. And he wasn't even sure if Murphy could be charged with anything. Reckless endangerment came to mind, but was there even such a thing in the Army? The whole affair made him tired. "The IG's office already knows," he said. "Or if they don't, they will. And they're not going to care. They'll want this

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thing to just go away, just like the Lieutenant does.”

He didn't want to remember the scene back at the orderly room, after Private Dale's earlier belly flop; he tried pushing it out of his mind, but there it was anyway. Lieutenant Mira had walked in looking highly agitated, having just overseen the removal of Private Dale's remains. Glaring around at his company clerks, he'd then walked over to where Tommy sat at his desk and ordered him to make out the paperwork on Private Dale. The Lieutenant had told him to label the death a simple suicide, making no mention of Murphy's role. It was apparent that Murphy's actions were being swept under the carpet.

After a moment, Tommy told the Lieutenant that he refused to do it. He looked up at Lieutenant Mira standing over him with his usual ramrod posture.

“No, Sir,” Tommy said. “I won't do it.”

There was a shocked silence. Rick Goody, seated at his desk next to Tommy's, looked away and busied himself with whatever came to hand.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” the Lieutenant asked.

Tommy shook his head then and repeated his words. After another silence, he added, “I won't have any part in making out a lie about what happened.”

Lieutenant Mira narrowed his eyes at him. “What do you mean?”

“We all know what happened,” Tommy said. “It was Murphy's doing. You should have stopped him. The man's got his head so far up his ass.” Tommy didn't finish the thought, amazed at hearing the words coming from his mouth. “His actions should be part of the report. I won't write it up unless they are,” he finished, his heart racing by now and his face flushing.

Lieutenant Mira stared at him for a long moment and then turned tight-lipped and ordered Rick to cut the paperwork. Then he ordered Tommy into his office.

Tommy followed the Lieutenant into the office. The Lieutenant, after closing the door, took a seat behind his desk and looked up at Tommy, who stood at attention before him.

“You're confined to quarters,” Lieutenant Mira said through clenched teeth, his face white. “I'm going to court-martial you for refusing to obey a direct order.” He let a moment pass. Some color returned to his face, and he let out a breath. “Now, do want to change your mind?”

“No, Sir,” Tommy said, allowing a glance down at the man and returning his eyes straight ahead.

“Do you have any idea what you're doing?” the Lieutenant asked.

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“Yes, Sir,” Tommy replied. He wished he could say something else, but he didn’t know what it would be.

Lieutenant Mira stared at him for a moment. “All right,” he said. “You’re dismissed. And don’t forget the fact that, except for meals, you’re confined to quarters.”

But that night, Tommy had gone along to the EM club anyway. He only asked Rick not to mention the incident to the others.

And he didn’t see any point in mentioning it now to the other three seated with him at their usual table at the EM club.

After a moment of outraged staring, Mendez looked into his beer and muttered, “It’s just not fair. The poor asshole never had a chance.”

Maybe Mendez was referring to the fact that Private Dale, undoubtedly not belonging here in the first place, had nevertheless been signed, sealed and delivered into the machinery of the war, to be used up in one way or another, and the way of it really didn’t matter. If that was the case, then Tommy might be compelled to tell Mendez that none of them really belonged here, and what difference did that ever make anyway? Or was Mendez referring to the fact that the Private Dales of the world never have a chance against the Murphys of the world? If that was the case, then Tommy had to agree, though there wasn’t much to be done about that either. He was feeling very sick of the topic.

“Maybe it’s for the best that they don’t do anything,” Fred Hopper said into the silence.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Mendez said.

“I’m just saying,” the Hop said.

“Just saying what?” Mendez asked with a disgusted look.

Tommy suddenly wanted to not be there. He pushed back his stool and stood. “Fuck this shit,” he said, causing them all to look up at him in surprise. Then he stalked off.

He went walking around the darkened base, trying to calm his jumpy nerves, still seeing the incident in his mind. He hadn’t wanted to watch Private Dale’s tumbling descent from the water tower but he hadn’t been able to turn away, up to the moment when Private Dale’s head had literally exploded on contact with the pavement.

He walked past the water tower and looked up, but it was just a water tower now. In the dark, he couldn’t see the mess that Private Dale had made on the pavement. Maybe it had been cleaned up like everything else about the incident.

By the time he got back to his darkened tent, everyone was apparently

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asleep. He quietly undressed and slipped through the mosquito netting and beneath the thin sheet, which was all you could stand on top of you in this sticky climate. He didn't know if anyone had been around to notice that he'd broken Lieutenant Mira's confinement order. If they had, he would be in more trouble. He didn't even care, though. By then, he pretty much had made up his mind what he was going to do.

The next day, after breakfast, Tommy returned to his tent and sat on his bunk, not sure if his confinement included not going to work. He decided that it probably did, though he didn't care one way or the other. He'd already decided that he was going over the hill, in the parlance of the old-timers, if not that night then the next. He'd had enough of it, and they could all go to hell. He started to feel excited at the prospect.

Later that morning he was sent for and told to report to Lieutenant Mira in the orderly room. Walking past the desks of the other company clerks, who avoided looking at him, he glanced down at his own empty desk, feeling a little pang of regret, which quickly passed. He knocked on the Lieutenant's door and heard the low voice inside tell him to enter. He closed the door behind himself and came to attention before the Lieutenant, who was seated behind his desk studying him coolly. Tommy waited, staring at the wall.

Finally, Lieutenant Mira cleared his throat and spoke. "I've decided to be lenient with you. I realize the shock of what happened was still fresh in your mind, and that led to your actions yesterday. You said some things that I'm sure you regret now. But I can't just let it pass. So I'm going to give you another choice." He stopped then, waiting for a response from Tommy.

"Yes, Sir," Tommy said.

The Lieutenant shuffled some papers on his desk. "I'm going to reassign you," he said. "You were originally assigned to the First Air Cavalry Division coming over here. I'm going to cut new orders now to send you there. That way, you won't be around here, and you won't have the black mark of a court martial on your records."

Tommy looked down at the man. "What?" he said, forgetting himself.

"You're going to your original assignment," Lieutenant Mira said. "I can't have you around here after what happened. It would be bad for morale."

Tommy wasn't sure exactly whose morale the Lieutenant was referring to. He asked, "What if I refuse to go," regretting it as soon as the words were out.

"Don't be an asshole, Kindred," Lieutenant Mira said, tight-lipped. "You've been in the Army long enough to know better than that."

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“Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir.”

“I’ll have the orders cut right away,” Lieutenant Mira said, a little more calmly. “You’ll be leaving in a few days, as soon as I can arrange the transportation. In the meantime, I don’t want you around here. You’ll be on K.P. until your orders are approved, and you’re still confined to quarters the rest of the time. Report to the mess sergeant right away. That’s all,” Lieutenant Mira said, returning to the papers on his desk, his brows lowered and an angry look on his face.

Tommy was still too stunned at the surprising news to do anything else but report to the kitchen, where he spent the day scraping mess trays and stacking them upright into slots on a conveyor belt. The belt moved the trays slowly into the maw of a giant machine that dispensed scalding steam over them.

Later, after his K.P. was over, he went back to his bunk and sat, not even bothering to join the others of The Company at the EM club. That was when he decided that the next night he’d make his move.

The following morning he reported to the kitchen. This time, he was assigned the duties of dining room orderly, which included standing behind the steam tables at meals and dispensing food into the passing trays. When he saw Rick Goody pass by with a weak grin, he gave him back a teeth-flashing grin of his own and a wink.

That night, he disappeared. He left the Replacement Company for good and moved in with Dailin.

Chapter Three

Across the room, the answering machine is no longer blinking, but it is still waiting for him. He should listen to rest of the message. Instead he goes to the bathroom to splash cold water on his face and leans over the sink dripping water, not bothering to look at himself in the mirror. Mirrors are avoided anymore—they give back a jarring image after all these years. In his mind he is still the tall, dark haired, nineteen year old that he was thirty years earlier, with a younger version of his father's German mug of a face. The hair is still dark, though gray flecked, and he is still tall and maybe a few pounds heavier. But the full beard and mustache he's worn the past few years, grown more than any other reason so he wouldn't have to confront himself shaving every day, have gone all gray. Sometimes on the street he'll turn, surprised at a random reflection from a store window, realizing after a second that the old guy looking back at him is himself. He checks his watch. Carmen will be home soon.

He wanders back through his flat on Vancouver's English Bay and gazes out the window from where he can see the bay glinting in full sunlight. A few windsurfers in wetsuits are cutting across the water, leaning back against the weight of the wind in their sails, and there are people on the beach sunning or walking the shore. The view is one of the reasons he took this flat, even though, at the time, he didn't think he could afford it. Now he's thinking about having to move again. Over ten years he's been in this place, and he thought the moving around was over. It had stopped around the time that Carmen came into his life, and they had settled in his current flat where the edge of the city meets English Bay and where Stanley Park is a short walk away.

He immediately liked the place for the bank of windows that gave him a view of the water and the beach and a corner of the park. It was a view completely different than the one he saw daily from the Saigon flat he'd shared with Dailin in '68, and maybe that was part of the reason he chose it. He had never thought of that before, but he thinks of it now, gazing out the window.

He returns to the machine and presses play again, listening for whatever is to come next:

"I'm still out here after all these years. The AWOLs, remember? We're still around, or at least one of us is. There's only me left. Freddie Hopper's

gone.

“But Freddie and I did make it out of the ‘Nam thanks to you. Billy Mendez didn’t. We were all going out together but Billy got drunk in a bar the night before and got picked up by the MPs. The Hop and I went out together the next day. Billy made it out okay too, eventually. We found out later he did some stockade time, but it was only for being AWOL. Then he went back to the company and did the rest of his hitch and went home. I’ve kept in touch with him over the years.”

Thomas shakes his head. The three of them, Rick and Fred Hopper and Billy Mendez, had been stupid enough to try it together. It would never occur to them that three guys from the same company trying to make it out in a group might raise some alarms. It’s a wonder that even two of them made it out. Maybe Billy Mendez did the others a favor by getting himself arrested and reducing their numbers.

“But all that’s not even important. What is important is what all those bastards did to us, starting with Kennedy, he’s the one who got us there in the first place, then Johnson and Nixon. But it wasn’t just them. It was Ford too for pardoning Nixon, and Carter for being a mealy-mouthed son-of-a-bitch, and Reagan and Bush and Clinton for being general sons-of-bitches.”

Thomas isn’t sure what it is that was all the bastards did to them. Sent them over to Vietnam in the first place, he guesses. It’s all so hazy to him now, but he remembers a lot of them going over were okay with the idea at first. They thought they were going to fight a real war, and most of them didn’t question why. It was just their turn, that was all. Later, all that changed.

For him, it was only when the other stuff came into the mix, the chickenshit of First Sergeant Murphy and the act of sitting daily in the air conditioned safety of the Quonset hut orderly room of Camp Alpha cutting order after order sending the poor bastard replacements off to who knew where. The incident with Private Dale was only a last straw. After that he decided he couldn’t do it any more. But all that was personal to him. He never blamed anyone else. The bastards, as Rick refers to them.

Kennedy and Johnson and Nixon are familiar to him. It was Johnson that Thomas would contemptuously watch on Armed Forces Television. Later the contempt was transferred to Nixon, after Thomas had made his way out of the country but still kept up with the war news. After that, he stopped paying attention. He read about the pardoning of Nixon by Ford. And he knew Carter had been the U. S. president, but Thomas cannot put a face to the name. Reagan, of course, is Ronald Reagan, who was a fading movie star

when Thomas was just a kid. In the sixties, Reagan was the California governor and later tried to make a name in national politics, and yes, Thomas can recall from somewhere that Reagan had finally made it into the White House. But the names of Bush and Clinton are only names that have sometimes appeared in a newspaper headline or on television. He's avoided any mention of American politics for years, whenever it tried to intrude on his life. The message goes on:

"But I remember you were never very political, so you might not want to help me now when I tell you it's politics that got me into this trouble. I need somebody's help though. I thought of you because I admired you. These ISW bastards are going to kill me."

Which bastards would the ISW bastards be? Different bastards, obviously, than all the now dead bastards who sent them over there in the first place. And what about this thing with Freddie Hopper? He shakes his head. ISW rings no bells for him.

"I didn't want to come to Vancouver because that would involve crossing the border. So what am I asking you to do now? I'm asking you to cross the border in this direction. Hell, it's probably nothing for you by now. All that shit from before has been forgotten. For me, it's different, because of what I've been involved in all these years. I'll tell you about it if I get to see you. I hope I do. If you can help and you want to, get a pen and paper. Here's where I'm staying and the name I'm using."

Thomas stops the machine to hunt up a pad and a pen and starts it again. He writes down the name Rick gives him and the name and address of a motel in Seattle. He knows that Rick's father lived down near there too, in Tacoma. There must still be other family down there as well. Thomas looks at his watch again, noting that Carmen is late.

How this awakening of his past will play with Carmen, he hasn't a clue. He imagines her giving him her look that sometimes boils over into one of her sudden angry moods that always seems to come from nowhere.

An old fantasy comes back to him then, something he would sometimes engage in when Carmen first came along in his life. Back then, from time to time, he would still think about Dailin, his Saigon honey. And sometimes he would imagine how it might have been if Carmen and Dailin had ever met, and he would picture, usually late at night when he was several drinks the worse for wear, the conversations they might have had. Sometimes it made him laugh out loud to conceive these bizarre exchanges, and sometimes he would watch the fantasy meetings in his mind with rapt attention, as if he could unravel the secrets of women, if only he could understand such a

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coming together. It's been a long time since he's done that.

Chapter Four

It was toward the end of '67 when he found the flat on tree-shaded Cong Ly Street, while he was still acting out the fiction of Replacement Company clerk, before he went AWOL. It was on a block among some old French villas and small apartment buildings. Immediately, he moved Dailin there. The place had some furniture, cheap rattan stuff with faded cushions but no bed, so he got a big mattress and placed it on the floor of the bedroom over Dailin's protests. It was a better bed than the straw-mattressed platform she had at the dump she shared with two other girls, but she didn't like that it was on the floor. It was beneath her dignity.

"Sleep on floor?" she said, eyeing the bare mattress set between two windows.

"Sure," he answered, kneeling and throwing a sheet over the mattress and tucking it under. "It'll be great. Just like summer camp." At her puzzled look, he added, "No more backaches." He grinned and winked at her.

"Sleep on floor, what you think I am?"

"I think you're cute." He stood, brushing his hands on his pants. "It'll be fine. Okay?" He reached for her.

She straightened her small frame and looked at him indignantly, shaking her head, obviously at a loss to explain anything to this thickheaded GI. Then she stalked out of the room.

But she stayed there with him anyway because it was a step up for her. He hired a combination maid and cook, an old lady who also slept on the floor, but in the living room, and who would scurry off to the kitchen every morning, whisking her bedding out of sight, as soon as Tommy entered the room. Dailin bossed her around in rapid-fire Vietnamese, with the old lady stoically submissive, hardly uttering a word in return. Tommy didn't understand any of it anyway, but he liked the old lady and he would give her a grin and a wink and she would smile, covering up her teeth, stained black from the betel nuts that a lot of the older ones favored.

The place seemed perfect, even though, to pay for it, he had to supplement his PFC's pay plus combat pay, which they all got just because they were there, by going on the black market. He started selling cigarettes and liquor, using his own monthly ration card at first and then stealing a few ration cards from the company. That part never bothered him.

Whenever he was at the flat, before he'd ever gone AWOL, he started

imagining not going back to the company. He spent weekends and most evenings there, but it was a long haul from Ton Son Nhut, especially if Murphy had them working late on one of his projects, so Tommy didn't always make it every night. But he would make it every weekend, unless they had some asshole alert that would keep him on the base. He would come into the place from out of the Saigon heat and strip off his soggy fatigues and pad around naked, feeling his sweat dry. He would get a beer from the tiny fridge in the kitchen. The old-lady cook might look up and smile at him, hardly noticing his nakedness. He would put on a pair of shorts then and sit on the patio with his beer, looking down on the courtyard that was secluded from the street and shaded by tall trees from the bright midday sun, and he would think about how perfect the place was, his island from all the bullshit. The Army wasn't anywhere to be seen from this vantage point, no Murphy, no scared looking replacements scuttling around the company area on some mindless detail, no war news or body count. The dread that ate at him more and more lately would disappear as he gazed down at the deep shadows of the courtyard and sipped his beer.

Then he left behind his charade of Replacement Company clerk. He went over the hill, and it felt like he was gone for good. There was only one small regret he had after that: that they might think him a coward, because he'd left right before his pending reassignment to the First Air Cav' Division. He hadn't left over that, but they might believe it of him anyway. It was really more a case of the inevitability of A being followed by B being followed by C. It was the job getting to him and it was Murphy's bullshit and it was Private Dale's death. But it was more than that too. It was something inside him that made him do it, something that had to show them he was his own man

He loved his hideaway. After a while, he even began resenting the time he had to spend away from the place to make money. He especially loved returning to the place from his occasional forays around the city, sticky with sweat from the heat, and he could strip down to his shorts and relax with a cold beer or a mixed drink on his patio, his favored vantage point onto the world. But Dailin was beginning to look at him in an odd way. And there was a different tone in her voice when she asked the same question every evening, after coming home for a hurried dinner.

“What you do today?”

He would ignore the tone and answer, “Did a little business. Came back. Drank this beer.” He would hold up the bottle of “33” beer—Ba Mui Ba, in Vietnamese—for her to see. He'd stopped drinking Budweiser, preferring the

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bitter-tasting Vietnamese beer that allegedly, so the story went, contained some quantity of formaldehyde.

“Business,” she would say. “What kind business?”

“You know.” He never talked about his dealings, but it must have been obvious to her how he made his money, from the stash of liquor and cigarettes he kept around the place.

“Suppose you get caught?” she’d say. “What happen to me?”

“I won’t get caught. The Army’s too stupid.”

“Sure thing,” she would answer and turn abruptly, saying back over her shoulder, “We go eat now.”

She was clearly changing her attitude toward him. It was one thing to shack up with a GI from the base, but it was something else when he became a permanent fixture. She was nervous about his AWOL status, not an official deserter yet, but a fugitive from the Army nevertheless. He knew that’s what she was thinking, though she never said anything.

He started watching Armed Forces Television on an old television he’d bought from a black market dealer. He would ignore most of the crap they broadcast but would listen to the tape-delayed news from the states, mostly the war news that he tried to avoid before. Sometimes he’d watch LBJ addressing the nation, the sly, creased, Texas face gazing out at him through the grainy image of the picture tube, and Tommy would listen to the words in amazement that whatever this old faker said could have anything to do with reality. But he would listen anyway, and his old dread would come back, it would eat at his insides again.

His daily routine didn’t vary a lot. He read books he got in batches from the Special Services library, and he made occasional runs to the Cholon Post Exchange, careful to spread his visits out, buying mostly cigarettes and liquor, occasionally a camera, and unloading the stuff mostly with the one contact on Nguyen Hue Street he thought he could trust. The phony ID and pass he’d procured a on the black market allowed him to move about freely. The name on them was made up, but he’d assigned himself to a real unit: one of the anonymous support battalions that ringed Ton Son Nhut airbase. He’d gotten nametags for his uniforms to match the name on the ID, and he knew the ID would pass muster if her were ever stopped by the MPs. Still he didn’t want to be seen too often. He no longer had his PFC’s pay plus combat pay, so he was trying to live more frugally, paying less of the upkeep for the place. That was another thing that was bothering Dailin.

His drinking wouldn’t start until early evening, just before the time Dailin would come home on her lunch hour from the bar. Tommy would hold off

until then, thinking of that first drink. For Dailin the distance from Tu Do Street was a short cyclo ride away, so she could come home to eat dinner with him and then return to the bar for the evening's work as a Saigon Tea Girl.

Tea Girls were at the top of their trade. They were the pretty ones that GIs were willing to pay liquor prices that the bars charged for the tea the girls drank, just for the privilege of their company and conversation, such as it was. A Tea Girl's idea of conversation usually went something like, "I love you too much. You like me?" Dailin did a little better than that, he had to admit. And she wasn't a whore, she always reminded him.

"I not whore," she explained to him the night he first met her at the bar on Tu Do Street, before they went to bed that first time.

He nodded and kissed her gently, noting that she didn't seem to grasp the concept of the way a kiss should be. But that was okay. Maybe it was something they didn't do here.

After a while, opening her eyes and looking up at him languidly, with her arms encircling his neck and her fingers playing with his hair, she said it again, "I not whore."

She was a beautiful girl, maybe eighteen, Tommy figured, though it was hard to tell. She didn't have to whore to make money, though he knew she took on the occasional special customer for the right price. It was how he had met her. He would tell her how beautiful she was and she would laugh, telling him he was ugly. All Americans were ugly to her.

On the day before the Tet Offensive began, a heavy rain, approaching over the rooftops, was just starting. Tommy sat protected beneath the overhang covering the patio, watching it, feeling the sudden coolness it brought with it. The door slammed behind him and he turned to see Dailin entering the place, having just beaten the downpour. Immediately she started chattering impatiently at the old lady to serve the meal. Tommy, down to the end of his first drink, was about to get up to fix another, but he stayed put, hearing Dailin approach behind him. She placed her hands on his bare shoulders and watched with him the sudden sheets of rain and the water already pouring out of the downspouts emptying into the courtyard. With her small, delicate stature, she wasn't much taller standing behind him than he was sitting.

"Goddamn rain," she said. "I hope it stop or I never get a cyclo back to work."

Her English wasn't bad. She had admitted to Tommy once that she'd been educated at one of the Catholic schools in the city, though she didn't tell

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him much else about herself. Sometimes, on his rounds, Tommy would see troops of young girls being led along the sidewalk by nuns, and he would stare at them, imagining a younger Dailin among them. They were all pretty and they looked chaste and virginal in their identical uniforms and they would never even look at an American. Watching them, he would wonder how Dailin had gone from that to being a Saigon Tea Girl who took on the occasional special customer for the right price. Dailin probably wasn't even her real name but something picked by the old guy who owned the bar where she worked.

Tommy said to her, still behind him, "This is the winter monsoon, remember? It won't rain for long, maybe twenty minutes, like yesterday." She was running her hands lightly across his bare shoulders and the combination of her soft hands and the suddenly cool air brought goose bumps to his skin.

"What you do today?" she asked, the usual question.

"Not much." He picked up the book he'd laid down next to him. "Read most of this book."

She took the book from him and inspected it. "You go out today?"

"Not today."

She handed him the book. "We go eat now, okay?"

The old lady wasn't a bad cook but he was getting tired of the plain fish and rice that he never embellished with the Nuoc Mam sauce that Dailin seemed to love that made the place smell like vomit. He had almost gotten used to the smell but couldn't quite bring himself to actually try the stuff.

That night Dailin came home at her regular hour, about a half-hour after the bars closed in Saigon, so he was pretty sure she hadn't been with any special customer. When she slid into bed next to him, he turned and looked at her. Her eyes opened and shone luminescent in the dark, and he reached for her. She was always willing whenever he wanted it, but lately he sensed some reluctance, which he figured came from the fact that he was paying less for the upkeep of the place than before.

Later that morning, 31 January '68, even before first light, the Tet Offensive started and the sounds of it woke him. At first, in his still sleepy state, he thought it was firecrackers from someone celebrating Tet, but who would celebrate at that hour of the morning? Then as his mind cleared he realized it wasn't firecrackers but small arms fire, a lot of it. It had never sounded like that before in the city. He started to pick out other noises as he lay in the dark, his heart thudding in his chest. There were planes in the air and the distant sound of bombing, probably coming from the outskirts of the

city. There were more helicopters than usual and from one not far away came the chunk-chunk sound of a door-mounted M-60 machine gun. Distant explosions came from the direction of Ton Son Nhut airbase, so they must have been getting hit, a surprise welcome for the replacements just arrived in country. When he finally got up and looked, the whole city seemed to be lit from flares dropped from circling planes and parachuting slowly downward. He recognized the far-away crunching blasts of 155-MM guns firing and the closer sound of a 105-MM battery. Dailin, who could sleep through anything, didn't awaken right away.

Later, when she finally got up and came out to the patio where he was listening to the sketchy reports starting to come over Armed Forces Radio and watching the air show over the rooftops, she gave him a puzzled look. "What happening?" she asked. Still later, she went to work at her usual time but was back in less than an hour.

"Shit hit the fan," she said to him. "Mr. Chang say no come to work for a while. Close down. VC attacking city all over. Mr. Chang scared." She was looking concerned herself. Mr. Chang was the old guy who owned the bar, one of many Chinese businessmen who ran most of the businesses in Saigon.

By that time Tommy knew what was happening. He had been listening to Armed Forces Radio most of the morning, and they were reporting attacks up and down the length of the country. Just about every major city and base had been hit, with the city of Hue getting hit especially hard and the garrison at Khe Sanh taking a renewed pounding. The heart of Saigon itself was also seeing action, with the embassy and the Vietnamese radio station being special targets. At the U. S. embassy, VC commandos, or maybe they were from the North Vietnamese Army, the NVA, dressed in civilian clothes had driven up in an battered old truck and proceeded to blow their way through the outer wall, killing several of the MPs guarding the place outside. But the Marines inside the embassy had held them off until reinforcements from the 101st Airborne had arrived. The MACV compound also came under attack. Westmoreland's own staff was threatened for a time, finding it prudent to scrounge up weapons and join in the defense of the place. And the VC/NVA was hitting Ton Son Nhut especially hard. If they could take the airbase it could get bad in a hurry for residents of the city, cut off even for a while from the massive amounts of goods and supplies that poured through the base. To know it was there—his debarkation point out of this shitty place whenever he got ready to go—was a comforting thought. He didn't like hearing that it was threatened.

Clearly, Dailin didn't like the situation either. Over the next few days,

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with neither of them going out at all and him listening to reports of the offensive on the radio and not talking much, they began to get on each other's nerves. One day she came out of the blue and asked him, "You go back to Army now?"

"Hell no," he barked back at her, causing her to shrink away from him. "What the fuck you asking a question like that for?"

"I think maybe they take you back, no sweat now," she said, giving him a dark look. "They need every swinging dick."

In spite of his own agitation, he had to laugh out loud at her comical use of the popular Army phrase. Her dark look turned puzzled then. He asked, "Why are you bringing this up now?"

"Because, what gonna happen?" she shouted. "You only AWOL, but now with war right here, you could be deserter."

Where was this coming from? "It's not any different just because of this," he said, making a vague motion to take in the city at war outside their flat.

"How you know?" she said. "What you think happen to me if you get caught and I be shacking up with you? What you think ARVN soldier do to me?"

His opinion of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, like that of most GIs in country, was that they were worthless as soldiers. "Nothing will happen to you. Especially not from the ARVN."

"Ha! What you think happen to me if VC take over city? They shoot me."

"Calm down. The fucking VC isn't going to take over the city."

In fact, the fighting in the city, after the first day, was going mostly against the VC/NVA, except in the Saigon suburb of Cholon. With the exception of the city of Hue and at Khe Sanh and a few other places, including Cholon, the VC/NVA was taking a beating. But this tirade from Dailin was worrisome. Maybe she was just scared, not understanding what was really happening. He tried to put his arm around her, but she shrugged it off and stalked into the bedroom. Maybe it was the close quarters these past few days with neither of them able to go out that was getting to her. Even the old lady who stayed in the kitchen most of the day was looking peevish lately.

He stared at the closed bedroom door, debating whether to follow Dailin. She was an emotional girl, sure, but she was no fool, never mind her youth. She had to know the situation, maybe better than he did. She was probably just blowing off steam. Maybe it was best to leave her alone for now. He shrugged, returning to his radio and his ever-present drink to listen to the

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latest from Armed Forces Radio.

Chapter Five

It was a little over a week after the start of the Tet Offensive and a few days since Dailin's brief blowup, but she did calm down. But things didn't exactly return to normal. They were all tiptoeing around each other in their suddenly confining Cong Ly Street flat. Sometimes, Dailin would snap at the old lady for no reason that he could see, and then the old lady could be heard muttering to herself in the kitchen for the next half-hour. And a few times, when he glanced up at Dailin, he caught her watching him with a dark look. She would hold the look for a few seconds and then let her eyes slide slowly away from his face.

Thank God then when Mr. Chang called all the girls to tell them to come back to work at the bar. There was still some fighting going on, but businesses were being encouraged to start up again. The government wanted to give the appearance that things were getting back to normal. The bar where she worked was reopening, though the hours would be restricted. Tommy decided to go out too after she left for work, wanting to see for himself what was happening on the Saigon streets.

Dressed in fatigues, boots and army-issue baseball cap, he walked warily down the alley leading from the courtyard to Cong Ly Street and stepped out into the bright sunshine. The street scene on Cong Ly seemed almost normal. A lot of traffic was moving along noisily toward the center of town and the air was thick with the usual exhaust of all the two-stroke scooters and mopeds. The only thing that seemed different was the number of military vehicles, mostly deuce-and-a-half trucks and Jeeps, speeding along through the traffic, with the soldiers in them all carrying M-16s. That wasn't usually the case in Saigon. He hailed a cyclo and hopped in, telling the driver to head toward Nguyen Hue Street, but to go by way of the Presidential Palace.

It was a slow, pleasant ride with an unobstructed view to the front and just the right breeze to keep away the heat. The driver in plastic pith helmet and plastic sandals puffed and peddled behind him. When they passed the Presidential Palace Tommy could see for the first time the signs of the attack there: a few burned out vehicles inside the compound, and the ornate gates showed signs of scorching. There was also a large presence of ARVN soldiers guarding the place. Several American tanks with ARVN markings were behind the gates with their guns pointed outward, and there seemed to be more sandbagged enclosures than before around the palace, manned by

ARVN soldiers behind M-60s peering outward with stone faces.

As they got closer to the heart of the city, there were more of the sandbagged enclosures positioned at strategic intersections, manned by more ARVNs pointing M60s at the passing traffic. Heading up Nguyen Hue Street, Tommy told the cyclo driver to pull over to let him out before they got to Dong Lat's shop. He approached the shop on foot, having always taken that precaution.

Dong Lat ran a luggage shop that specialized in the elephant hide bags and suitcases that were popular with the GIs. He also dealt in all aspects of the black market, buying liquor and cigarettes and Japanese cameras and tape recorders and whatever else he could get. For a price you could buy almost anything from him: Dong Lat had gotten him the phony ID along with an up-to-date shot card that Tommy might need if he ever wanted to leave this place.

Dong Lat also changed money, American dollars, if you had them, to piastres. He accepted U.S. military scrip from the locals, who sometimes took it in payment from the GIs, and he gave them back piastres at a reduced rate. Tommy did his own money changing at the base, where the phony ID gave him access and where he got the military rate on piastres, not the lower official rate. But Dong Lat was his source for American dollars, which GIs weren't even supposed to have. Whenever he did business with Dong Lat, he would get paid off in a combination of American dollars and military scrip. He would use the scrip, the official coin of the realm that GIs all received as pay, to make his purchases at the PX and to exchange for piastres at the higher military rate. The American dollars he would squirrel away, giving him a growing stash that would see him out of the country when the time came. The piastres he would give to Dailin to dole out to the old lady for their daily shopping or to pay off their landlord, which she had to disgruntledly supplement with her own hard-earned cash.

But it wasn't to exchange money or to barter that Tommy came here this time. He wanted information. Approaching the shop, he saw Dong Lat and his wife arranging luggage displays on the sidewalk in front. One thing that was different this day was the lack of sidewalk peddlers who usually lined Nguyen Hue trying to catch the eye of any GI happening by, displaying their wares and shouting, "You buy, number one."

Dong Lat spotted Tommy coming and said something to his wife. The two disappeared inside. Entering the musty smelling shop, Tommy was greeted by an unsmiling Dong Lat just inside the entrance. "How's business?" Tommy asked.

Dong Lat was small and wiry and always wore a short-sleeved white shirt

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and dark trousers and the ubiquitous plastic sandals favored by the cyclo drivers, and his face usually bore a serious, businesslike expression. He snorted. "Business lousy. Goddamn VC."

"Yeah. What do you hear about Cholon?" Tommy had been hearing over the radio the past few days that the situation was pretty-much stabilized in Saigon, but the Saigon suburb of Cholon was another story. In fact, the theory now was that Cholon had been the staging point for the attacks into Saigon. Cholon was still a VC/NVA strong point, and that was worrisome to Tommy. The Cholon PX was his main source of goods to be sold, mostly to Dong Lat.

"Cholon bad." Dong Lat shook his head, frowning.

On the earlier cyclo ride, Tommy had been hearing sporadic firing and explosions from the direction of Cholon a few miles away, getting progressively closer as they approached Nguyen Hue Street, and he'd cast a wary eye in that direction at each new outburst. They both paused now to listen to the same sporadic sounds coming in through the open doorway.

"How bad?" Tommy asked. He'd heard the official reports from the radio, and he'd even seen some televised images of the fighting, once Armed Forces Television had started broadcasting again. The taped newscasts from the States were full of them, the grim-faced anchors announcing the body counts while staring into the cameras. Walter Cronkite seemed to exude a new disapproval whenever he reported the fighting now.

A televised scene played over and over, usually narrated by a thinly veiled voice of outrage, showed a suspected VC officer being shot in the head by the South Vietnam national police chief. Tommy found himself watching the repeated scene with clinical fascination, watching the guy's grimacing face a split second after the bullet entered his brain and the guy, with his hands tied behind him, falling hard to the ground like a sack of cement. But what was the dumb fuck doing in that neighborhood, one of the hotspots of the fighting, carrying a pistol? It brought Tommy up short. How hardened had he become in his short time in country?

But he wasn't thinking of any of that now. He wanted to hear from someone who would know how the daily life over in Cholon was affected, how business was being transacted. "You go over there at all?" he asked.

"You crazy?" Dong Lat shook his head, an incredulous look on his face. "I be the first one the VC shoot."

"What about the PX? Is it still open?"

Dong Lat gave him a sideways look. "Nothing open. You crazy?"

Okay, that was a long shot anyway. "I got some stuff to sell," he said.

He still had some cigarettes and liquor that he figured he might as well get rid of. He also had the radio, one of the big Zenith multi-band radios that Dong Lat had wanted for some time. Tommy still had his old television and the small AM radio that would be good enough to pick up Armed Forces Radio. He hated to part with the Zenith, but he had a sudden hunger to build up his fallback cash reserves. "I got the radio."

"How much you want?" Dong Lat said, stone faced.

"Twelve thousand piastres, one-hundred dollars," Tommy replied, knowing he was quoting close to the exchange rates GIs got, which was considerably more than the official Vietnamese exchange rate. Sure enough Dong Lat protested vehemently.

"No can. One hundred dollar, eight thousand 'p', no twelve thousand."

"Have it your way. You want the radio. I want one hundred dollars."

"No can." Dong Lat looked outraged.

"How much then?"

"Fifty dollar."

Tommy started to walk out without answering and Dong Lat pulled him back by the arm. It was their usual way of doing business, but sometimes it got tiresome to Tommy, especially when they both pretty much knew what the real price was going to be. "Okay," Dong Lat said. "Fifty-five."

"Bullshit," Tommy said. "That's number one radio." He started to leave again, only to be dragged back by Dong Lat again, shaking his head woefully. They went back and forth that way, finally settling on eighty dollars. Tommy agreed after he made another move to leave and Dong Lat didn't try to stop him. Dong Lat would come by the flat that evening to pick up the radio, along with the cigarettes and liquor Tommy had, and pay Tommy his money. Exiting the shop, Tommy shook Dong Lat's hand and bowed and smiled to his wife, remembering to always be courteous to them, no matter the rancor of the bartering. Dong Lat was a valuable asset and it wouldn't do to piss him off.

He walked toward a strip of bars around the corner on Tu Do Street, though he avoided the bar where Dailin worked. What he wanted was to have a few beers and get a feel for the situation by the business, or lack of it, the Saigon bars were doing. He only hoped he didn't run into Rick Goody or any of the other AWOLs. But it would tell him something if GIs were out drinking and whoring again.

Sure enough, in the first place he entered, there was a scattering of GIs sitting in the dim coolness and drinking their Vietnamese panther piss beers with the "33" printed on the labels and talking to the Tea Girls, not even

looking up when he entered. Just their presence there told Tommy that the military situation was improving. He stayed awhile, making desultory conversation with a couple of airmen who were billeted in town. When he asked about Ton Son Nhut, saying he hadn't been out there yet, that he worked for a supply outfit here in the city, they admitted that it had been bad for a while, over twenty Americans killed and around eighty wounded, a bunch of aircraft damaged. But they had kicked the VC's ass after the first few days and it was pretty much over out there now. In fact it was pretty much over all over the city, except for Cholon, they said. It was February 7th, a little more than a week since the offensive had begun.

By the time Tommy went home, hailing a cyclo on Tu Do and having the driver take him straight home via Le Loi and Cong Ly Streets, he was feeling pretty good about the situation.

Dong Lat came by that evening after dinner and after Dailin had gone back to the bar, and he picked up his goods and paid off Tommy. With what he had already, Tommy was felling flush with cash, and the good feeling lasted a few more days. And though he didn't like to go there, he even made a run out to the PX at Ton Son Nhut to do some shopping, picking up his staples of cigarettes and whiskey and getting a look at the base, which almost appeared normal from outside. Things seemed to be getting back to normal all over, except for Cholon. Then Dailin dropped her bombshell.

As usual, she came home for dinner and came out to the patio where Tommy sat alternately reading a book and gazing out at the pink-tinged clouds over the rooftops. She stood behind him and asked, "You go out today?"

"Not today."

"Good thing, maybe. MPs come to bar today, ask about you."

He sat up from his slouching position, turning around and looking at her, and he could tell right away by the pouty expression on her face and the way she wouldn't look directly at him that she was lying. Her eyes wandered around his face and settled on staring down at his chest. She could never lie successfully; she would always get that little-girl pouty look.

"How many of them were there? What did they say?"

"Two, I guess. They ask me where you are. How they know to ask me? I think I get in trouble. Maybe you go back to Army."

The conniving little bitch. He was pretty sure no MPs had come looking for him. Even though the Tet Offensive had been beaten back in most quarters, it was still a time of high security and the MPs had more important things to do than to look for AWOLs. Dailin was informing Tommy in her

own guileless way that she was getting ready to turn him in, or at least she was thinking of it, sort of dropping a trial balloon and seeing how he would react. He turned away, slumping back into his sitting position, saying nothing further. She waited for a moment and said, "We go eat now, okay?"

But he was in no mood to eat. He padded barefoot past the table inside and went to the kitchen for a fresh drink and returned to the patio without saying a word, and he continued to drink after she went back to work and was drunk by the time she returned at her usual late hour. His mind was clear enough though. When she slid into bed next to him, he turned to her and said, "I'm thinking maybe you're right. Maybe I'll go back to the Army."

"When you go?" she said, staring at him in the dark.

"A few days, maybe a week. I need time to get used to the idea."

"Okay, good. Then we see each other like before." She reached over to touch his face and then rolled over to go to sleep.

But he knew it wouldn't be like before, even if he'd really meant it about returning to the Army. Maybe she was just tired of him or maybe she wanted someone who would pull his own weight around the place, like he used to, or maybe she'd just found someone she liked better to shack up with. Whatever it was, their time was coming to an end. She was telling him that in her own way. But he had no intention of returning to the Army. He just needed time to make his move.

The first thing to do was to see Dong Lat about getting out of the country. They had talked about it obliquely from time to time without actually coming out and naming the thing, and Dong Lat had hinted that he could get somebody out for a price. What Tommy figured was that Dong Lat could get him a phony passport and papers to make him a civilian construction worker or maybe a journalist. It wouldn't come cheap, but that part didn't worry him. As long as he could get out. But when he entered Don Lat's shop the next day and brought it out in the open, Dong Lat showed a particularly woeful look on his face.

"Bad time," he said, shaking his head. "No can, not now."

Tommy couldn't tell if he was being sincere this time or was just buying time until he could figure how much money he could squeeze out of him. "You could do it for the right price, if you wanted to," he said. "How much is it gonna cost?"

"No can now." Again Dong Lat shook his head. "Things too tight. Maybe in few months. Not now."

It deflated Tommy, hearing that. He had a fallback position, one that could work, and it would certainly save him the heavy price Dong Lat would

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extract from him. But he was afraid to try it. It was one thing to use his ID to enter the base for shopping or money changing, but to leave the country using official military transport was something else.

It had never occurred to him that he would be unable to get out. It was always out there in the future, and the present was too comfortable to bother with the details.

Sweating in the hot sun, he wandered away from Dong Lat's shop and turned a corner toward the river. It was the hottest part of the day and his fatigue blouse stuck wetly to his back. Cyclo drivers were parked along the street napping in the shaded passenger seats, their feet up, an occasional one opening an eye to see the crazy American wandering along under the noon sun.

Tommy wound up in front of the My Canh, the famous floating restaurant that he had heard about from the early days of the war. VC sappers had rigged Claymore mines near the gangplank entry to the restaurant and then started a fire on board to panic all the people off the boat in a rush. When the mines were set off, about thirty of the fleeing diners were killed and about a hundred more were wounded. He could imagine the scene now, seeing himself among the ones trampling down the gangplank, only to be blown back by the exploding mines. In his case, though, the explosion blowing him back would be the MP's hands on his arms when he tried making his own escape from in country.

A different scene played out in his mind: he would hand his doctored orders over to the enlisted man at the reassignment desk at Ton Son Nhut, who would take his time studying them and then nod to someone behind Tommy, and there would be the two tall, helmeted MPs taking hold of him on either side and hauling his ass away. He started to wish he'd never left the company; his year would have been almost half over by now. But that only made him angry at himself. He'd never regretted leaving for a minute, and he wasn't going to start now over this. There was nothing left but to do it.

Returning to the flat, he worked on the orders for the rest of the afternoon, starting over several times on the old typewriter he'd gotten from Dong Lat. He'd done them enough times back at Camp Alpha to know the format. Part of his job back then included reassigning the lucky ones going home to their next assignments stateside. But it was obvious that he couldn't just put himself into the normal reassignment cycle going back to the states. That would mean temporary assignment to Camp Alpha until a slot on a plane to the states opened up, and he had to laugh in spite of himself at how that scene might play out, him showing up there under Murphy's watch. No, the best

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plan would be to either send himself to Hawaii on R&R or send himself home on emergency leave, usually done in the event of a death in the family. He opted for the emergency leave, because that would put him on the first plane going stateside. Emergency leaves got priority over just about everyone, even bumping other passengers if there were no open seats. He had typed up a few emergency leave orders back at Camp Alpha, and when he'd gone AWOL he had thought to bring templates for the different types of orders he might need, so he had the format, and he began calming down as he typed, seeing that it could work. After he had them looking right, he retyped them carefully, creating the required numbers of carbon copies, and then threw the originals away. He checked his shot card, making sure it was up to date. They might check it at the airport, and he didn't want to have to doctor it now and screw it up somehow.

When he was finished he sat and he looked out at his courtyard view that he realized with a pang that he would miss, even though it had started to feel like a prison to him lately. He tried to memorize just the way it looked with the monsoon clouds building against the backdrop of the adjacent buildings and the sound the tall trees made when they rustled in the breeze. Then he started thinking about Rick and the other two, Hopper and Mendez, three of the four members of The Company, minus himself, now The AWOLs on the loose in Saigon, emulating him apparently. He argued with himself that whatever mess they might be in, they had brought it down upon their own heads, and they had no one to blame but themselves, and it was none of his doing. He washed his hands of it. Still, he knew that he would have them on his conscience if he left without trying to at least do something.

He typed up a draft of the same emergency leave orders that he would give Rick Goody, without the particulars of name and date and stateside destination. When he was through, he stripped off his fatigues, showered and dressed in a clean set and went looking for Rick.

He made the rounds of several bars he knew Rick frequented and finally found him in one, clearly drunk, his face sweaty, wanting to buy him drinks. Rick was grinning at him, obviously celebrating the offensive in some perverse way. Tommy asked him what he was going to do and Rick replied happily that he was going to sit the war out and become a black market king. Tommy wanted to smack him. But he took a deep breath and a sip of his beer instead.

"I don't know if you've thought about it, but you're going to get caught sooner or later, staying here," he said. "Especially with this offensive, they're gonna be clamping down. You're walking around in civvies, it's only a

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matter of time till they do a sweep and pick you up.” Even though it was not that unusual to see American civilians in Saigon—construction workers belonging to the Morris-Knudson Company, and embassy people, not to mention the media crowd—Tommy had taken the precaution of wearing his fatigues and boots and he had a valid pass he’d doctored up. “I’m getting out, and you might want to think about either going back to the company voluntarily or getting out yourself.”

“I’m never going back there,” Rick said with an angry look. Then he turned thoughtful. “How’re you going to do it?”

“You haven’t thought anything through, have you?” Tommy said. “You send yourself home on emergency leave. Christ, you cut enough legit orders to know how to do it. I brought this in case you might want to use it.” He reached inside his fatigue blouse and brought out one of the leave forms he’d typed up earlier that day. “All you gotta do is fill in the name and date and destination and sign it. You can make up the orders yourself for the other two fools.” It occurred to him then that this might just turn out to be a futile gesture if the three of them hadn’t procured phony IDs on the black market, which they probably hadn’t. He didn’t mention it, though.

“Why didn’t I think of that?” Rick said happily. “I love it. I just sign the lieutenant’s name sending me home.”

“No, sign LBJ’s name, schmuck. Look, get hold of a typewriter and fill this out if you want to go through with it. Though my advice would be to go back and take your medicine. All you guys. You’ll probably just get company punishment, that’s probably all they’ll give you. You haven’t been gone that long.”

“Why don’t you do that, then?”

Tommy shook his head. “That’s not for me. I’m already gone.”

That night, after finding Rick, he gravitated toward the section of jerrybuilt bars clustered around the entrance to Ton Son Nhut. While it was not exactly dangerous there, it was not a good place for him to be. There was always a steady flow of soldiers and airmen from the base coming and going, and Army MPs and Air Force APs patrolled the places regularly. Fights would sometimes break out or the bargirls would run for the MPs over non-payment or bad treatment from a GI. Tommy couldn’t say exactly why he wanted to be there that night, but he knew that he did, wanting to see the faces of the soldiers desperately trying to have a good time in the few allotted hours before they had to return to duty.

He sat in a corner of the place drinking and watching them with the same

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feeling he used to get when he would send them off on in-country assignments with a few keystrokes of his typewriter. He got drunk enough to start feeling affection for all of them, all the shiny, sweating faces lined up at the bar and the ones in earnest, though one-sided, conversations with the Tea Girls and even the one or two who glowered at their beers and looked ready to pick a fight. Tommy wanted to tell them all something, though he couldn't think what it was. Maybe it was something as simple as saying he felt sorry for everyone, himself included, who had to go through life believing that anything they did would make a bit of difference. Or maybe, even if it didn't make any difference, they had to do it anyway.

Tears were forming at his eyes and he had to blink them away. An image formed in his head like the one he would see when he was typing up the orders that would send replacements off to God knows where. In his mind, a map of South Vietnam with tiny hills and trees and flashes of combat superimposed itself over the bar scene, with LBJ sanctimoniously smiling down at it and at all of them. Tommy wanted to stand on a table and shout at everyone that they didn't have to do it, they could just refuse, quit. It would be the first true soldier's uprising in history, tell the politicians and officers to shove it. His image became jumbled. Private Dale looked out from it with his sad eyes, and it even included the other side, the VC, along with the guy being shot in the head by the national police chief. He wanted to tell the guy he was sorry, but it was too late. He wanted to tell all of them to forget it, just go home. Make love, not war. Where had he heard that one before? Christ, he was getting drunk.

But he was leaving the country, and tomorrow was the day. He wandered outside and caught a cab back toward town over the protests of the cabby who kept saying, "Curfew soon."

In the morning, he was hung over but feeling excited. He told Dailin, when she finally got up and came out to the dining area where he was drinking coffee, that he was going to return to the company that day.

"Okay, that good," she said sleepily, actually smiling with affection at him. "When you think you get leave, come back and see me?" Maybe she really did want to return to what it was before, when he was the part timer in her life who paid the freight.

"I'm not sure. I probably won't be getting passes right away. I'll probably be on company punishment for a while."

"Yeah, that too bad." She reached across the table and ran her fingers through his hair, and he thought of taking her into the bedroom for one last time. "But we see each other soon," she said

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He almost wanted to tell her the truth, just to see her reaction. But he didn't. After she dressed and left for work, he started getting ready. He got out his short-sleeved khakis that he hadn't worn since he first arrived there. He pinned on the name tag that matched his phony ID, and he ran a rag across his dress low-quarter shoes to remove the dust, and he packed what he was going to take in a canvas bag—the kind they all called AWOL bags, which seemed appropriate—and strapped on a money belt under his shirt containing all the American currency he'd accumulated, and he left the flat, stopping to wink and grin one last time at the old lady in the kitchen. She returned his grin with her betel-nut smile hidden behind one hand as usual.

Outside it was midday and for once he couldn't find a cab right away, and he began to sweat in the heat, the starched armpits of his uniform showing dark stains. Finally an empty cab came along and Tommy got in, wedging his long legs and his bag into the back of the tiny Renault. It could only take him as far as the gate at Ton Son Nhut. From there he would either have to walk or catch one of the base buses. He decided not to wait for the bus and he started walking, sticking out his thumb at the passing traffic, mostly Jeeps and deuce-and-a halves. Almost immediately, an airman driving an air force-blue International pickup stopped for him. As they jolted along in the pickup, the guy engaged in the usual ritual of talking about how much time he had left in country and what he was going to do when he got back home, making Tommy grin. The guy asked how short Tommy was, how much time did he have left. When Tommy told him he was going home that day, the guy just stared at him enviously.

The guy was working and couldn't drive Tommy all the way to the air terminal. He wished Tommy luck, grinning ruefully at his own predicament of being stuck here, shaking Tommy's hand. After that, Tommy immediately got another ride from an old-timer sergeant driving a Jeep who took him to the air terminal. The sergeant didn't say much except that they ought to blow the whole shitty country up, the lousy people along with it.

The terminal was a big, high-roofed, open-air building. It was relatively cool inside and his sweat began to dry. There were knots of soldiers milling around dressed in wrinkled khakis, some with dyed-green tee shirts showing at the neck. Judging by their good humor and horseplay, they were probably waiting for an R&R flight to somewhere.

Tommy approached a desk bearing a sign that read R&R and Reassignment, manned by an air force sergeant, and handed the sergeant a copy of his emergency leave orders and asked where he should go. The sergeant glanced up at Tommy, who was trying to appear casual as if he

wasn't holding his breath. He knew the phony name on the orders wouldn't appear on any list of AWOLs or deserters the sergeant might have. But what if the orders didn't look quite right and the sergeant, to double check, phoned the real unit Tommy had assigned himself to and made a routine inquiry, reading to them the phony name? They would say they never heard of him, and the game would be up.

Instead the sergeant simply said, "I can take care of these." He handed Tommy a form to fill out, which was a declaration of baggage, how much money he was taking out of the country, his outfit, rank and so forth. "Sorry you have to leave under these circumstances," the sergeant intoned seriously and Tommy knew the guy meant under emergency leave orders, which usually meant there'd been a death in the family. Tommy, wearing a somber expression, nodded. "I know. Thanks."

When he filled out the part of the form about the money he carried, feeling the money belt under his shirt that contained almost three thousand American dollars, he got a momentary scare, wondering if soldiers were routinely searched before returning home. He put down that he carried thirty dollars and the sergeant merely took the form from him and directed him to the U.S. bound flight desk, telling Tommy there was a civilian flight due in from Bangkok in about an hour heading for San Francisco. "Good luck," he said to Tommy.

The sergeant at the U.S. bound flight desk looked sadly at Tommy when he saw his orders. "Have a seat and we'll call your name when the plane arrives." Tommy took a seat on a hard wooden bench and he started to breathe a little easier, watching the assortment of soldiers and airmen and Vietnamese and American, or at least Caucasian, civilians. Some were waiting, some were loitering. Some of the Vietnamese looked like they were hustling, even here. A few of the civilians were booking flights at the U.S. bound flight desk. Out of nervousness, Tommy stood and walked over to one of the tall archways that opened out to the sprawling airbase and stood in the relative coolness looking out at the heat of the day and watched the traffic and the swirling dust. Monsoon clouds that would be rolling in over the city by late afternoon were building up in the distance, and he knew he would be gone before they arrived. His heart thumped at the thought.

His flight was finally called. It was a Continental Airlines flight in from Bangkok that could only take on a few passengers. A small knot of civilians, along with Tommy and an Army lieutenant colonel, clustered around the U.S. bound flight desk. Tommy heard his name called first and then some other names. After that, an airman escorted the group outside, and Tommy saw that

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the Army lieutenant colonel wasn't among them. He realized that his emergency leave status, having priority over just about everyone else, had probably bumped the guy off by flight. He looked back at the colonel, who was standing there staring at him.

Inside the airplane, he took his seat, feeling the delicious chill of the air conditioning and feeling immediately that he was out of this place, despite still sitting in a plane on the runway. There were female stewardesses attending to the passengers, and small television screens hung down from the ceiling to show in-flight movies. Looking out the round porthole, he watched the ground crew dressed in coveralls fueling the plane and loading baggage in the heat, and he already felt far away.

When the plane lifted off, banking almost immediately, Tommy looked out the porthole at the checkered rice paddies below and hills beyond and the fingers of the delta beyond that spreading toward the sun. Maybe Rick Goody would be in a similar position in a few days, flying home. But maybe he wouldn't. Maybe the lamebrain would screw it up and wind up in the stockade for twenty years. Then he put Rick out of his mind and thought about where to go once the plane touched down in San Francisco.

Chapter Six

Carmen enters the flat and approaches him in that slightly mannish though still feminine and sexy way she has of walking, treading lightly in her work boots. It's like a show for him every afternoon, watching her walk in, her shoulders with a slight roll to them like a man's in contrast to the female body beneath the man's work shirt, the shirt tucked tightly in at the waist so that it shows her figure, and her jeans just snug enough to hug her hips. He likes the way he can hear her climbing the stairs to their second-floor walkup before she opens the door, and he likes watching the way she moves toward him and the slim line of muscle he can see in her arms with her sleeves rolled up past the elbows. Thomas will look up and she'll come to where he is sitting and lean over him, holding her hair back with one hand and brushing her lips across his mouth, her serious, pretty face looking him in the eye. He likes that part too.

"Hi," Carmen says on this day. "Any luck on those firsts?"

It's the same question she's asked each day for a week. A shipment of first edition books he ordered from a wholesale dealer in Toronto is overdue. The stock of first editions he likes to maintain at his bookstore is an important part of his business, attracting the book collectors away from the big chain stores. "Nope," he answers.

Carmen sometimes has an intense way of looking at him, when she knows something is up, that is just short of uncomfortable to him. She gives him a long look now. Her dark hair, parted in the middle and not quite shoulder length, hangs loose around her oval face. "You look funny." She grins then and it deepens the lines of age just beginning to show on her face, and her nose wrinkles in a way that changes the shape of it whenever she smiles.

"Yeah, I am funny." He stands to face her, forcing a smile in return. Another look replaces the grin on her face. She is almost as tall as he is, and he places his hands on her hips and pulls her toward him. "So how was your day?" he asks.

"The usual," she replies. Her job with the highway department typically consists of her being the token female on road crews that pave or repair highways that approach the city. She is usually the one who flags down approaching traffic and holds up the signs telling motorists to go slow or to stop and communicates by walkie-talkie with a second flag person, typically another token female at the other end of the construction as they route the

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one-way traffic around the site, first from one direction and then the other. Her status rankles her and she actively lobbies, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, with the construction bosses to allow her to perform the same work as the men. “I was on sign duty today,” she says. “Something’s wrong, isn’t it?”

“I’m thinking of shaving this off,” he says, running his hand across his gray beard and mustache. His face is inches from hers.

“That’s what’s wrong?” she says.

He shakes his head and walks to the answering machine. “You might as well hear this,” he says, rewinding the tape to the beginning and pressing play and sitting down facing her. She is still standing, listening while staring off in concentration, her brow knitted. Watching for her reaction, he is also hearing the message for the second time and trying to glean anything he might have missed. There is nothing. When it is finished and the machine clicks off, she stares at him. “Who is this guy?”

“I knew him in the Army.”

“He knows your name. How does he know where you are?”

“He found out somehow.”

“And somebody’s dead,” she says. “What was his name?”

“Freddie Hopper.”

“Somebody killed him?”

“Apparently.”

She shakes her head. “And somebody’s wants to kill this guy? The ISW bastards? Who are they?”

“I haven’t got a clue.”

“Should we be worried?”

Even in the ten years he’s been with Carmen, he hasn’t told her everything. Leaving the Army thirty years ago, living in exile and unwilling to return home to the states, even if he thought it was safe, which he doesn’t—that part she knows. And being the proprietor for twenty-five of those thirty years of a used bookstore, first in a rundown storefront in East Vancouver and then moving up in the world to his current location, only a few blocks from trendy Robson Street—this she knows too. The store was where they met right after she came to the city.

He sits down and sketches in the rest of his story for her, the haven of the place on Cong Ly Street, his life with Dailin, the other life he led of a black marketeer to support himself. He tells her of Rick Goody and the other AWOLs. She sits across from him, listening, her dark hair falling around her face and curling up at the ends, her hands on her jean-clad knees, her booted

feet together on the floor, the whole picture presented to him looking incongruously prim, and he wants to forget this story and go to her and feel her shirt rough against his face and smell the sometimes pungent smell she carries after spending the day under the hot sun.

It was ten years ago that they met, when she walked into the store and asked for some book that he can't remember. When she took to coming in regularly after that, looking for this book or that, or browsing the magazine rack, Thomas would watch her serious expression, liking what he saw, despite the workman's clothes she wore and a look she sometimes got that seemed to say, *keep your distance*. Private was the word he decided on then, as he watched her. She rarely returned his looks. He would try to start conversations with her in the quiet store, and she would answer in an offhand, sometimes curt manner. Then, one day, he got his courage up and asked her to have coffee with him after he closed up the store. She said okay in her offhanded way, and he wondered if his asking wasn't a mistake. But it turned out it wasn't. A week later he was helping her to move from the seedy hotel where she'd been living into his flat. But she still maintained the same intent look and a sometimes-private manner, even after ten years of living together.

Now, after finishing the telling of his story, she waits, sitting with her knees together and her fingers idly drumming on them, watching him. She asks finally, "Who's trying to kill this guy?"

"I don't know. Maybe nobody. He always had too much imagination." Thomas spreads his hands, looking across at her. "Rick's was always a little dippy, you know? Smart, but a dipshit."

"That's a man's word," she says. "What does it mean?"

"The guy had no common sense. Maybe he's imagining this." The message didn't sound like that way, but who knew with Rick Goody?

"That doesn't seem likely to me. Unless he's crazy."

"Maybe he is. It's been thirty years."

"What are you going to do?"

He hasn't really much thought about it. The first instinct, moving again, changing his name again, he doesn't want to face anymore. Besides, that was probably just his paranoia acting up. Now he imagines Rick sitting in some Seattle hovel of a motel room with the hopeful, almost scared look he would get on his face, anxiously awaiting a visit from his old buddy and sometime tormenter. Somehow, this makes up Thomas's mind for him. "I guess I'll take a trip down there to see him."

"You think that's a good idea?"

But it wasn't really an idea that he'd thought out, was it? "I don't know."

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“Do you owe this guy something?”

Is that what this is, to have his buttons pushed by Rick Goody after all these years? Thomas shrugs. “Maybe it’s something like that. He never would have gone over the hill if I didn’t do it first.”

“Over the hill.” She narrows her eyes at him, her mouth opening slightly, and she nods her head in a barely perceptible way. He looks down at her hands that are now alternately squeezing and releasing her knees. Then she stands and says, “I’m going out for a while. I need to get some air.” She departs abruptly, leaving behind a loud silence.

It is sometimes like this with her, her moods forcing a retreat into some dark someplace, and sometimes presaging an inexplicable anger. He has learned to expect this from time to time.

When she returns it is almost dark, and for once Thomas doesn’t hear the sound of her boots on the stairs. The door opens and he turns from what he is doing, fixing a sandwich at the kitchen counter, to see her standing there. She has that look he remembers from when he first met her, like she’s wearing a warning sign. He usually knows to tread lightly around her at times like these. Pointing to his almost completed sandwich, he says, “I wasn’t very hungry. I can make you one too. Or we can go out someplace.”

“I’m not too hungry either,” she says and turns and shuts the door and walks to where he stands. The forgotten mustard jar is still in his hand. “When are you going?” she asks.

He considers this, looking down at the ham and cheese that he no longer wants. “I don’t know. I thought, maybe in the next few days. I have some things I need to do first.”

She nods and says, “I’m going too.”

“Where?”

“With you. To Seattle.”

“Why?”

“Maybe because I know my way around down there and you don’t.”

It’s true, she came from Seattle originally and is illegally living in Canada, just like he is. That much Thomas knows, though there isn’t much else he knows about her life before he met her. She never volunteered much, and he never asked, because it never mattered to him. They were together for over three years before she even admitted her correct age to him. But, typically for her, she didn’t try to make herself younger for him. She did the opposite. When they first met, she added four years to her then twenty-seven, because she didn’t want him to think she was too young for him. She’s thirty-seven now to his forty-nine. And even her last name, DeMarco, he isn’t even

sure of. It could be made up, not that he cares.

“That’s a reason?” he says.

“It’s a good enough one. If you need another, maybe I just don’t want to let you out of my sight for that long.”

“What about your job?” he asks.

She shrugs. “What about the store?”

“I can close for a few days. Even a week if I have to. People won’t even notice. But you could lose your job.”

“I can take sick time. Besides, I can get another job.”

“Look, I don’t get this. I thought the job meant a lot to you.” He knows it took some doing for her to get the construction work she wanted, even if she had been secretive about it. He also knows, though she’s never talked about it, that the work was exactly the opposite of what she was suited for, and that, for some reason, was exactly the reason she’d chosen it. It was always clear to him from the first that she was educated and smart, though she never talked about her past. That her job didn’t turned out to be all she thought it would didn’t even seemed to matter all that much. She had been adamant about what she wanted to do, and he never questioned why it was important. But it took some doing, her being as illegal in Canada as he was, to go to work for a government agency

“Don’t worry about it, okay?” she says, moving around the counter to him, leaning against him.

When she wants to talk intimately to him, she’ll stand level with him and lean her forehead against his, and the warmth of her breath carrying her words to him makes them a sensuous pleasure to him, never mind their meaning. She’s gotten her way with him more than a few times using this ploy, and he is aware that she uses it to her advantage, and it’s never mattered to him that much that she does.

“It’ll be fun,” she says, her mouth an inch from his. “We’ve never gone on a trip together. And you haven’t been anywhere in how many years?” She leans back against his arms to look at him.

“I’m not going down there to have fun. Besides, I made it for almost forty years in this world before you came along.”

“Came along?” There’s a smile in her eyes and she leans against him again. “Why not just say yes and get it over with.”

When she wants her way, she usually gets it. Truthfully, it isn’t giving in to her he minds; it’s the appearance of giving in. “Maybe,” he says, pushing her away to arm’s length, watching a grin form on her face.

Later, in bed with the sheets pulled up to his chin, even though the warm

day still lingers in their darkened bedroom, he turns to her and says, rubbing his bearded face. “You know, I think I am going to shave this thing.”

The next morning he makes good his promise, feeling as if it’s symbolic of something, painfully scraping away the gray whiskers and slowly revealing his face for the first time in years. He works on the chin first and then the cheeks and neck and finally the mustache until it’s all gone and his skin is rawly exposed. Looking at himself in the mirror, he realizes too late that, without the protective whiskers shielding his skin, chilly winter winds here will be a cold proposition.

His face, minus its girth of beard, looks absurdly small in the mirror. Staring back at him now is more of his father than he cares to see.

Carmen comes into the bathroom as if she has been waiting just outside.

Skeptically looking back and forth between his mirrored reflection and hers, he says, “I look like a shorn sheep.” He peers at her. “What do you think?”

She reaches her hand and runs it across his face several times, smiling at him. “I like it.” She kisses his chin and nods affirmatively. “Handsome. Do you have any old pictures of when you were young?”

“Younger,” he corrects her. Yes, he does, and he knows exactly where they are, though it’s been years since he looked at them. From place to place, whenever he moved, he carried with him an old shoebox of odd fragments representing something, his identity over there, he supposes. It was always important to keep it, though he rarely ever lifted the lid, and, whenever he moved to a new place, he typically buried the box unopened in the darkest corner of the darkest closet. Now, with Carmen in hand, he goes to the bedroom closet and retrieves the shoebox from beneath a pile of old clothes bound for The Goodwill. He sits on the edge of the bed, with Carmen next to him, and sets the tattered box down and removes the lid to reveal the still-familiar effects that were part of his daily life a lifetime ago—his dog tags, his Army ID card, some faded photos, the MACV patch he cut from the left shoulder of his khakis before throwing the uniform away—why the hell did he keep that? Right on top, which seems appropriate somehow, is a *Code of Conduct* card they handed out to everybody. He muses over that: how they would rate his conduct now, in light of everything?

Gingerly, he reaches in and separates a slice of the jumbled items with his fingertips and lays it out on the bed like a poker player showing his hand. His ID card is at the bottom, laminated and still looking the same, but who is the smooth-faced boy looking back at him from the picture? Thomas shakes his head, staring at the card, as Carmen picks it up and examines it and says, “Not

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that different.”

Chapter Seven

They drive toward the official-looking border station spread across the highway, with Thomas in the passenger seat staring at it through the windshield. By now he has the map to the crossing memorized, and the image of it is in his head while he looks out at the real thing. He knows the park just visible on the Washington side is called Peace Arch State Park. Watching the whole scene loom larger through the windshield, as Carmen slows the car in line with all the others ahead of them slowing for the U. S. immigrations checkpoint, he feels the old sense of the exile settling in. It's been three days since he heard Rick Goody's plea on his answering machine and began the arguments with himself over the logic of going. Now, finally, he is going. He asks her to pull over. She slows the car and angles it over onto the grass shoulder.

Until now, they've been a silent twosome driving south in Carmen's six-year old Honda Civic, both their tall frames wedged into the front of the little car, with Carmen behind the wheel.

"I'm beginning to think this is not such a hot idea," he says. He is still getting used to a strange sensation of his naked face, without the protecting beard.

"It'll be okay," she says, turning to him, sitting with her hands in her lap, radiating patience. For the trip, she is dressed in jeans and windbreaker and a lighter pair of ankle-length boots, not quite her work attire, but close enough. "It's just routine. All we do is show our driver's licenses and tell them we're going to Seattle for a day trip."

A day trip. The words sound ludicrous. He's never had a reason, before this, to cross the border just south of Vancouver. As far as he is concerned, the country to the south doesn't exist. That doesn't make sense, he knows, but it's the way he feels: the place called the U.S. just faded from his mind over the years, and he stopped thinking like an exile. At least he thought he had.

"How do you know?" he asks.

"Because I've done it. On a bus once, but it's the same thing in a car."

His gives her a sideways look, and she explains, "One weekend a few years ago. On a Saturday. I told you I was working, so you didn't know anything about it. When I got to the Seattle bus station, I turned around and got on the first bus back to Vancouver."

A thought worms its way into his consciousness that maybe she went down there to find something from her former life. Or maybe she was in one of her dark moods that she sometimes disappeared into, sometimes for days.

“What did you do that for?” he asks, curious to know in spite of the commotion of anxiety inside of him.

“Just to do it. I don’t know. Forget it.” She looks straight ahead and says, “Let’s just go ahead then, okay?”

Squinting through the windshield at the border just ahead, he can’t get the ridiculous notion out of his head that they’ll know who he really is, despite his phony ID. He breathes a sigh. “Let’s do it then.”

They drive ahead, entering the line of cars and slowly approaching the booth where an immigration officer is checking ID’s. When it’s their turn, the officer leans down and peers in the window and asks for their identification, at which they both hand over their driver’s licenses. The officer scans the licenses and asks where they’re going and Carmen answers, “Seattle, for a little shopping.” The officer looks at both of them, shifting his eyes back and forth, and answers, “People usually go the other direction for shopping.” Thomas peeks over at him to see what he might have meant by that, but the officer simply hands back their licenses and waves them on, and just like that they are driving on an American highway. Thomas stares out the window at the foreign landscape, enemy territory so to speak. He’d always thought he would never come back to it. He never wanted to.

“It looks just like the other side, doesn’t it?” Carmen says.

“I don’t know. Somehow it looks different.”

They drive south, Thomas reading the alien-sounding town names they pass through—Bellingham, Anacortes, Sedro Woolley—and the even more alien-sounding names on the road signs pointing east—Snohomish, Snoqualmie. He is in a strange, silly mood, wondering what the people there would think if they knew of his fugitive presence passing through their towns. Finally they approach Seattle; it is suddenly there, visible over a rise in the highway. There’s a gray flatness to it, never mind the green hills flanking the road. Dull, gray clouds press down upon the city, and the whole place has a depressingly industrial look compared to his sparkling Vancouver. The thought occurs to him: they should just turn around and go home. He wonders what Carmen would say.

She points east as they drive past a compressed mass of gray buildings and says, “I went to high school right over there.”

Thomas sees nothing that looks like a school. “What kind of a high schooler were you?” he asks. “Cheerleader?”

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“The rebellious type,” she answers. “I wore all black and wrote dirty poetry.”

In his mind, he sees her in a black mini skirt and black leotards and a baggy black sweater, wearing black eye makeup and lipstick. “Sounds good.”

They have an old road atlas as a reference, containing a tiny street map of central Seattle, showing the street Rick mentioned in his message. The street runs approximately east from Alaskan Way that fronts the harbor. “How far do we have to go?” he asks.

“Not too far. We exit the freeway near the old Kingdome and pick it up from there, work our way east until we find the place.” She gives him a bright smile. She seems to be enjoying this.

They leave the freeway and drive down a street heading straight for a big, ugly domed structure that Carmen says is the old Kingdome that will eventually be torn down in favor of a new baseball park, or maybe a football stadium. They turn on a side street before they reach the dome and drive a few blocks and Carmen spots the place, pointing out the motel sign. “That’s it, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, that’s the one,” Thomas says. The motel has seen better times, but it fits within the scheme of the other run-down buildings along this street. She parks on the street in front of the place and Thomas climbs out of the car. After a look back at her through the windshield, he walks around to the driveway entrance, spotting a faded sign that reads Office toward the back of the building.

Chimes sound when Thomas opens the door to the office, and the pungent smell of Indian curry immediately envelops him, along with the sweet smell of incense. There is no one there at first, and then a young woman enters through a curtained doorway leading from the back. She is small and thin, with dark skin and thick black hair, and wears a garment consisting of material wrapped around her several times to form a skirt with one end and an upper body covering with the other. She smiles at Thomas and asks, “Can I help you?”

At first he can’t remember the name Rick had given him. Then he recalls it, and he recites the name to the woman. “He gave me this address.”

“Oh,” she says, dropping her smile and staring at him. “Are you a relative?” There is a slight singsong to her words, and her voice is clipped and precise.

“I’m his brother. He called me saying to meet him here.”

She drops her head and places her fingertips on her cheek and looks at him from beneath lowered brows. “I am sorry,” she says in her clipped

accent. "Your brother was found dead the day before yesterday. I am so sorry."

He stares at her. "Dead?"

The woman shakes her head. "Yes, I am sorry. He apparently overdosed on something, some drug. That's what the policeman said."

"Jesus Christ." He looks around, the urge to leave this place making his legs tremble as if they are exercising a will of their own to flail their way outside.

"I am sorry for your loss," the woman says. "The police didn't seem too interested. I suppose this sort of thing happens in this neighborhood, but I can tell you it has never happened here." She draws herself up and looks at him indignantly. Her look softens. "They weren't even interested in any of his things. I have them in the back. I was going to take them to The Goodwill, but you will probably want them."

Abruptly she turns and disappears through the curtained doorway. Thomas gets a quick glimpse through the doorway of an old, dark-skinned man with white hair sitting slumped in a chair watching television. The curtain closes just as the old man turns and looks his way. When the woman returns a moment later, again parting the curtain, Thomas can see the old man still looking at him.

The woman sets a small, battered suitcase and a cardboard file folder on the counter. One edge of the file folder has split from age, and some tattered papers are trying to spill out past the rubber bands holding it together.

"These are all his things," the woman says. "His clothes, I expect, and this." She places her hand on the folder. "I never looked in there. I wasn't even sure what to do with it. But you will want it, I should guess."

Thomas says nothing.

"You should probably talk to the police too," the woman says. "They will want to know some things, I would imagine. His background and so forth, don't you think? I will call them." She picks up the phone from behind the counter.

"That's a good idea," Thomas says, his voice thick in his throat. "I'll just take this stuff out to the car and be right back." The woman gives him an odd look, and he nods and smiles reassuringly. He grabs the suitcase and file folder and turns to leave but has to set the suitcase down to open the door, which causes the chimes to sound again. Holding the door open with one foot, he reaches down for the suitcase, almost dropping the bulging file folder he holds under one arm. When he glances back, still smiling, the woman is looking at him in the same odd way, holding the telephone receiver in her

hand.

Outside, Thomas hurries toward the street, the suitcase scraping against one leg. He feels the urge to turn to see if the woman is still watching him, but he continues around the corner of the building and out of sight of the motel office, and then he runs, nearly dropping the file folder again. He slams the folder down on top of the car to free one hand and opens the door and flings everything into the back and then jumps in the car and slams the door. "Let's get the hell out of here," he says.

Carmen is looking at him wide-eyed. "Why? What's the hurry?"

"Now!" he shouts. "Let's go! Rick's dead."

She stares at him, not moving. He reaches for the ignition keys dangling from the steering column, awkwardly trying to turn them with his left hand. "Let's go." Finally she grabs at the keys and starts the car and slams the gearshift into first and launches them away from the place, chirping the front tires on the pavement and chirping them again in second gear. Through his agitation, an odd observation registers dimly in his mind: he never thought the little car could lay rubber like that.

"He wasn't kidding then, was he?" Carmen asks, staring straight ahead. "Somebody killed him."

"Drugs." Thomas answers. "The woman at the motel said he OD'ed on something yesterday." With an effort, he brings his voice down to normal. "She was calling the cops so they could talk to me about him."

She glances over at him.

After going a half-mile or so, with him watching out the back window as if the woman might be following them, he begins to calm down. Carmen turns a corner, squealing the tires again, and he reaches over and touches her hand gripping the steering wheel. "Take it easy," he says. She nods, slowing the car, turning onto another street. "What should we do?" she asks.

"Just drive."

She guides the car through city streets, turning one way and then the other, until she finds a freeway entrance heading north, and they merge into traffic beneath the low clouds pressing down on the city. It is late in the day, and the light from the setting sun is slanting in below the clouds, lending an eerie glow to the Seattle skyline. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Carmen shooting glances at him from time to time as she steers them north, but he says nothing, staring straight ahead. Finally, she says, "Maybe you were right. No one was trying to kill him. He was trying to kill himself and he did."

"Maybe I'm the one who killed him," he says.

She turns her head and gives him a long look, ignoring the road ahead. "Why? Because you didn't get there sooner?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's something like that."

But that's not it, really. He knows when it started: thirty years ago, when he became Rick Goody's in-country hero.

"He OD'ed," she says. She is still staring at him, not watching where she is going, making him want to grab the wheel. "What did you have to do with that? It doesn't make any sense."

Tell me about it, he thinks.

She finally turns back to her driving, and they leave the city behind. He assumes they are heading home, but she abruptly heads onto an exit ramp that is marked "Everett."

"What are we doing?" he says.

"I want to stop." She points ahead through the windshield. "There's a motel."

"Let's just go home," he says. He can still hear the words the woman at the motel spoke to him: *I am sorry. Your brother was found dead yesterday.*

Carmen aims the little car toward the covered entrance to the motel and pulls up in front and stops. "Nobody's after you," she says. "Nothing's going to happen." After a moment, she adds, "What happened is twenty-five miles behind us."

Still, he doesn't want to be here, anywhere on this side of the border. "I don't see why we can't just keep going," he says.

"I'm tired and it's getting late." She opens the door on her side but doesn't step out. She looks back at him.

"We didn't even bring a toothbrush."

She turns her head, looking back the way they came. "There's a mall back there. I'll get us whatever we need."

Carmen parks in front of the door to the room and climbs out of the car and turns to look back at him until he follows suit. Leaving the suitcase and file folder, formerly belonging to the deceased Rick Goody, in the back seat, he steps out and faces her. She crawls into the back and retrieves the folder while he watches her.

Inside the room, she offers the file folder to him. "Are you going to have a look in here?" He shakes his head, and she places the folder on the bureau across from the bed. He lies down without bothering to remove his shoes and closes his eyes. When he opens them again, she is standing there looking down at him with a serious expression.

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She kicks off her shoes and lies next to him and rests her head on his chest. "Sorry," she says. "This must be hard for you."

"I don't know what this is," he says without opening his eyes. He can feel her head rise a few inches to look at him.

"Did you even know the guy that well?"

He shrugs, wondering the same thing. She lays her head back down, and then the only sounds are their twin breathing and the faint traffic noises from outside. He begins to relax; the traffic sounds have a lulling effect, and he begins to feel sleepy. Abruptly Carmen sits up and pulls away from him. He opens his eyes and looks at her sitting up on the bed.

"How about if I go to that mall?" she says. "I'll get us something to eat."

At the door, she looks back at him. "Don't fall asleep on me."

As soon as she is gone, he closes his eyes again, but he forces them open after a moment. He looks up and Rick's file folder is in his line of sight on the bureau, right where Carmen left it next to the television. He tries to ignore the folder and considers turning on the set.

With a sigh he sits up and throws his legs over the side of the bed and pushes himself up. Taking the tattered folder that's about to fall apart, he loosens the rubber bands and spills the contents onto the bed and sits looking down at the mess of papers and newspaper clippings and letters and old pamphlets, the dust and the smell of aging paper making his nostrils tingle in anticipation of a sneeze.

It is over an hour before she returns, thumping on the door with her foot. When he opens it, she practically falls through, not quite dropping her double armload on the table next to the door. "I got us some pizza and beers," she says. "Health food." She flips open the flat cardboard box, releasing the fragrance of garlic and pepperoni into the room, and she reaches into a bag and extracts a bottle and hands it to him. The frosty beer in his hand and the greasy aroma of the pizza immediately begin to work on his taste buds. "I got us toothbrushes and stuff, and I got us these," she says, grabbing another bag and extracting a shirt and unfolding it in front of her. "One for you and one for me." She hands him the pullover sweatshirt with the word "Seattle" printed across the front next to a silhouette of the Space Needle. "In case it gets cold later."

"Thanks. I thought that's what you were for." He takes the shirt in one hand, holding it out at arms length. It is then she notices the bed is covered with a collection of yellowed newspaper clippings, notebooks, packets of letters rubber-banded together and some pamphlets jacketed in pale yellow cardboard. Setting down the beer bottle and the shirt, he turns and takes her

gently by the shoulders and sits her down on the edge of the bed and sits sideways next to her so that they are both turned toward the collected papers of Rick Goody. “It turns out Rick was into some different shit,” he says.

She looks down at the litter of fading and yellowed paper. “I know you’re going to tell you what that means.”

“Rick Goody’s history,” Thomas says, laying a hand on a packet of letters. Again, he feels the anticipation of a sneeze coming on. He picks up the packet of letters. The rubber band holding it together, which he’d already removed earlier and returned, is cracked with age, and it breaks when he tries to remove it for the second time.

“Letters from home,” he says. “Postmarked late ’67 and early ’68. Rick saved his Vietnam letters sent to him from the states all those years ago.”

“Probably a lot of guys did that.”

“Maybe.” The return address on this letter, like almost all of them, is from Richard Goody Sr., Tacoma, Washington—the father who ran a Tacoma car dealership or owned a factory—Thomas can’t remember which.

He extracts brittle pages from the envelope and reads the first paragraph aloud. “*I hope you are okay and that things are going well with you, of course I worry about you all the time, why don’t you write more often?*” He looks up. “It’s the same letter we all got,” he says.

She gives him a blank stare.

How can he explain the enormous sadness the letter gave him the first time he read it an hour previous? He could picture Rick digging these letters out and reading them from time to time over the years, alone in the secret rooms of his life. Or maybe he just kept them for whatever they represented and never looked at them, like Thomas still hanging on to his unopened shoebox of memorabilia. He looks back down at the writing that still reveals the simple feelings—*I hope you are okay and that things are going well with you*. All the sentiments from all the parents and all the loved ones went for nothing, he thinks—all of us are ultimately not okay and things inevitably do not go well in the end. He folds the letter and returns it to the dog-eared envelope.

He picks up a second packet of letters. “These are more recent. From last year and early this year, ’97 and, ’98.” He pulls a letter from the packet. “This one is from somebody named Matt Matthews in Seattle,” he says, studying the address on the envelope. He tosses it aside and picks up another packet. “These others were from Rick’s father to a New York address.” He extracts a single page from an envelope and reads, “*Dear Son, it was good to hear from you the other day. It’ll be great when you come home for good, the*

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war has been over for more than twenty years, nobody is looking for you anymore.” Thomas’s own father could have written the words. When he looks up at her, Carmen returns him a sad smile. He turns his attention to the notebooks.

“These are journals, I think,” he says. “Like a diary. I just glanced through them.” He flips open one of them, stopping at a page containing a particularly colorful tirade against the government along the lines of what Rick said in his phone message to Thomas, only with a broader set of bastards to rail against. He reads the words silently and then flips forward to several pages, which, surprisingly, contain some poetry. He never knew Rick had it in him. He considers for a moment reciting it aloud.

Carmen reaches across and lays her hand on his arm. “So what’s the different shit he was into?” she finally asks.

He picks up one of the pamphlets. “These.”

There are a number of the political pamphlets, all crudely printed, with dates on the covers ranging from the mid-70’s to about a year ago. The one in his hand has the latest date. The cover is bent and frayed and the printing at the top is in capital letters. He reads, “*ISW (INTERNATIONAL SOLDIERS OF THE WORLD)*,” then scans down to smaller letters. “*A Soldier’s Hope, an End to War*. These are Rick Goody’s ISW bastards. ISW stands for International Soldiers of the World.”

“What is it, some mercenary group?” Carmen asks, looking doubtful.

Thomas shakes his head. “Anti-war. He said they wanted to kill him.” He turns to the first page, which is the same as the cover, except for a Seattle address in small letters at the bottom, apparently where the thing was printed. The next page is printed in the same crude text as the cover. He reads the first paragraph, “*There is only one war: the war between those who fight and those who don’t. Forget our side and their side. There’s only one side for the common soldier, and that’s against those who don’t fight: the politicians and the generals and the commanders. To them we serve to further their agendas of gaining power and money and inflating their egos. Their agendas get us killed. It’s time for those that fight, the common soldier, to say that we will fight for them no more. Bill Haywood, Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, 1970.*”

“Well, not the same words exactly,” Carmen says, “but I think I’ve heard the same sentiments before. It doesn’t seem to be anything new, does it?”

She’s right, of course. He had similar thoughts thirty years ago as a PFC in Camp Alpha, though they were never expressed as anything but griping. For that matter, probably everybody in the enlisted ranks, and some officers

too, had the same feelings. They really were nothing new. He just never realized anyone would try to form a philosophy out of them. He reads the paragraph again to himself and then the name, Bill Haywood.

"I wonder who this guy was," he says. "Twenty-eight years ago, written from a federal prison."

"A believer," she says. He looks up at her to see if she is joking.

"Maybe." His eyes return to the page in front of him. "Listen to this: *We might think our enemies are the NVA and VC soldiers in front of us, but we would be wrong. Our enemies are behind us, the commanders who don't fight but ask us to die for them. —Bill Haywood, First Air Cavalry Division, Hue City, Vietnam, February 1968.*"

He looks across at her. "Whoever Haywood was, he was there in Hue back in '68, when it was one of the worst places to be. And he was with the First Cav' Division."

He doesn't mention that it is the same First Cav' of his own original assignment going over, before Lieutenant Mira of Alpha Company had pegged Thomas to be the replacement company clerk-typist. And it's the same First Cav' Lieutenant Mira tried to reassign him to after the incident with Private Dale, before Thomas went over the hill. He's never told Carmen the details of any of that.

"Maybe this Haywood guy was one of us," he says. "Maybe that's what Rick Goody decided."

"One of us? What does that mean?"

"A regular GI who hates war more than anybody, for very selfish reasons. Rick came home from over there as a fugitive, just like me. Maybe he reached out to these people, the ISW. Or maybe they reached out to him, who knows? But then he became afraid of these guys. He thought they were going to kill him. Maybe they were, for whatever reason."

"He killed himself, remember?"

"Maybe." He looks back down at the pamphlet. "Still."

"What, you don't believe it?"

He shrugs. "A drug overdose can be arranged pretty easily."

He leafs through the series of short articles, containing instructions to galvanize the so-called common soldier into direct actions. He can feel her eyes on him. One of the articles is titled, *Sabotage in the Ranks*. It starts with another quotation from Bill Haywood: *Sabotage in the right place at the right time is the most effective way I know of to render a military unit ineffective.*

The article, written in the same stilted language as before, goes on from there:

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Our ultimate aim is to create a society where war is unnecessary. To accomplish that, we must do two things: take the power from the hands of the non-fighting class, the commanders; and render the military machine incapable of waging war.

A general strike by all common soldiers would bring the machine down, but that won't happen until we first demonstrate the futility of military solutions. One way to do that is to take action while maintaining the charade of being loyal to the machine. Creative sabotage within the unit, such as disabling motor pool equipment by removing vital engine parts, rendering artillery pieces inoperable by mixing sugar in the gun grease, destroying or misplacing records, can begin to erode a unit's morale and effectiveness. Simple acts of sabotage on a small scale, when multiplied many times, can halt an army in its tracks.

When he looks back up, he sees that Carmen is still watching him. "I think these guys were serious," he says. "Are serious. About all this." He gestures at the pile of pamphlets scattered across the bed. "And Rick was apparently one of them."

"So what? You're not involved in any of it."

"Yeah. But it's crazy. These guys are trying to recruit ordinary soldiers to do sabotage, when the only real goal for most soldiers is to simply survive and to get the hell out of the military. That's pretty nuts, don't you think? Listen to this." He flips back a few pages and recites, "*Acts of sabotage will serve to bring chaos and anxiety to the command structure. This will filter down to your comrades in arms, your brother soldier. Then it's time to begin to sow the seeds of dissent among the ranks. Talk to them of the weakness of the command structure, how it relies on the consent of the common soldier to wage war. Talk of the sheer irony of war, of the common soldier giving to the commanders, the non-fighting class on high, tacit permission to kill them, all to further the aims of the commanders and never the aims of the common soldier.*"

Thomas sets the pamphlet down. "Rick was involved with this stuff. And there's a lot more just like it," he says, waving his hand at the other letters and pamphlets scattered on the bed, "some from years ago, some recent, some from different places—Seattle, New York, Chicago, San Francisco. This outfit got around." He picks up a newspaper clipping. "Then there's this."

The clipping is a single page from a New York City newspaper with a date of only a few weeks before. It contains a single-column article circled in red and captioned, *New York Man Found Murdered*. The article doesn't say

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much. He reads it aloud to Carmen. The lead paragraph only states that Frederick Hopper of New York was found dead in a city hotel room of a single gunshot wound to the head. It goes on to say that police have ruled out suicide and are investigating the possibility of the crime being drug related. Mr. Hopper, the article concludes, was a long-time resident of New York.

“Frederick Hopper?” she says.

“The guy that Rick mentioned in his message,” he says. “The guy that was killed.”

The same two thoughts circulate in his mind that he felt when he first read it: that there is no mention of suspects and that there is no mention that Frederick Hopper was a deserter from the Army in Vietnam thirty years ago.

She studies his face. “Why not just get rid of this stuff?”

He shrugs half-heartedly.

“It has nothing to do with you,” she says.

“I feel like it does. I feel like I’m responsible somehow.”

She shakes her head at him and looks over at the flat cardboard box containing the pizza and the beer bottles that have left wet circles on the table. “The pizza’s cold and the beer’s getting warm,” she says, with a peevish expression.

“And then there’s this other stuff,” he continues, picking up one of the pamphlets again and holding it up in one hand.

“What about it?” she says.

He feels inadequate to explain how the stilted language of this Bill Haywood echoed something inside of him, even while he was dismissing it.

“What are you going to do?” she asks.

“Find out some more, I think.”

Chapter Eight

The woman looks up over her half-moon glasses and repeats his question. “Information on International Soldiers of the World? Is it a veteran’s organization?”

“I wouldn’t call it that,” Thomas says. Behind him, the library is quiet enough so that he hears the hiss of air-conditioned air coming from the overhead ducts. A cough sounds from among the shelves to his left, over where Carmen is browsing the fiction section. A young guy carrying an armload of books emerges from an office behind the reference desk where Thomas waits. The guy shows Thomas a smile and moves on.

“Paramilitary?” the woman asks. She’s a large woman dressed all in black, with a lot of red hair standing out in contrast. The hair is a loose mass cascading freely from her head. Again she peers up at Thomas over the tops of her glasses, attached to a silver chain hanging loose around her neck.

“No, I don’t think it’s paramilitary either. More like an anti-military group, I guess you could call it.”

The woman has her head cocked to one side. “Anti-military?” She squints at him. “Like a protest group?”

“Maybe something like that.”

She turns to a desktop computer off to one side of her desk and sets her hand on the computer mouse, clicking it and staring at the screen in front of her and then typing in some information. “We could try the Library of Congress web site on the Internet. We’ll search their catalog. Let’s try a subject-name-title search for International Soldiers of the World.” She clicks her mouse a more few times and types some more. “Here’s something on the International Solid Waste Association.” She gives him a wry look. “That doesn’t sound like it, though, does it? Then there’s the International Solidarity Committee. That’s at least warmer. But no International Soldiers of the World.”

It was Carmen’s idea to go to the local library in Everett, not far from their motel, for information. “They have one in this town, I assume,” Carmen said. As soon as they got there, she sauntered off into the fiction rows, leaving Thomas alone with this woman.

“Let’s just try a keyword search then,” the woman says. More clicking of the mouse follows, along with typing and frowning at the screen and then more clicking and typing. Thomas wanders a few steps away, craning his

neck to see if he can spot Carmen.

“Here’s something,” the woman says, looking over at him. “Is this a militia group we’re looking for?”

Thomas comes back to the desk. “I don’t know. What do you mean by militia?”

“Like those right wing groups in places like Montana and Idaho. They live in the woods and build bombs, that sort of thing.” She stares at Thomas for a moment. “I’m sure you’ve heard about them on TV.”

“I don’t watch much TV.”

“Do you read newspapers? You know about that bombing in Oklahoma City that killed all those kids awhile back? That was a militia group did that, wasn’t it? They blew up that federal building with a bomb. Blew the whole front of the building away, and all those kids in there in a day care center.”

“I don’t recall,” Thomas says.

“Well, it happened, and I recall it.” She waves a hand, a sudden angry look on her face. “Anyway, here’s a mention of an International Soldiers of the World in a book about militia movements. See, right here.” She turns her monitor and points to the entry on the screen.

“Do you have the book?”

“I’ll check,” she says, looking away, appearing disgusted now.

When she delivers the book, instead of bringing it to Thomas still waiting at the desk, she drops it at a reading table with a thud and strides past him. He walks over and picks up the book and reads the title: *Militia Movements of the Late Twentieth Century*.

“What have you got?” Carmen’s voice asks behind him.

Seated at the table by now, he points at the unopened book in front of him. “What I have is a bad feeling about this.”

Carmen steps around, seating herself across from him, and turns her head to read the title on the spine. “Militia Movements,” she says. “So?”

“What does the word militia mean to you?”

She looks across at him. “Revolutionary war stuff.”

“Think modern times.”

She shrugs. “Guys who live in the woods and wear camouflage suits and plot against the government, I suppose.”

“And blow up things.”

“Yeah, that too.”

He pushes the book toward her. “See what it says in there, will you?”

Carmen leafs through to the back of the book. “Here it is in the index,

International Soldiers of the World.” Flipping forward, she says, “It looks like there’s a short section on it.” Looking around, she begins reading in a soft voice, “*International Soldiers of the World, founded 1969 by Joseph McGrew, while serving a life sentence at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary for cowardice in the face of the enemy at the Battle Of Hue, Vietnam, February, 1968.*”

She looks up, raising her eyebrows, and then continues reading, “*McGrew had originally been charged with mutiny and insurrection for attempting to rally his fellow soldiers of the First Air Cavalry Division to throw down their arms and refuse to fight. That charge was later changed to cowardice in the face of the enemy.*”

“This McGrew must have known Bill Haywood at Hue,” Thomas says. “One of his henchmen, maybe.”

Carmen holds up her hand and reads on, lowering her voice even further. Thomas leans across the table to better hear. “*McGrew adopted the name Bill Haywood while in federal prison. The original Big Bill Haywood, one of the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW, of the early part of the twentieth century, was an idol of McGrew’s. After a fashion, McGrew patterned his International Soldiers of the World after Big Bill Haywood’s IWW.*” Carmen looks up at him again and then back down at the book and goes on.

“*The IWW was a radical union movement, formed near the beginning of the century, designed to free workers of the world from the so-called tyranny of capitalism. The aim of the IWW was to take control of industry from the so-called non-workers, the elite capitalists, and place it into the hands of the workers. The aim of McGrew’s International Soldiers of the World was similar, except it was in the arena of warfare: to take control from the non-fighters, as McGrew termed them—the politicians and high-ranking officers—and place it into the hands of the fighters, largely the enlisted class. Once that happened, according to McGrew, all war would be eliminated.*”

Carmen pauses for a breath. “So far it fits, I’d say.” Continuing, she reads, “*McGrew, AKA Bill Haywood, was released from prison in the late 1970’s on a pardon issued by the U. S. Federal Government for selected federal prisoners whose charges stemmed from the Vietnam War. This also roughly coincided with a general amnesty for U. S. citizens who evaded the draft during the war. The amnesty was considered to be a political act by President Jimmy Carter to help heal the wounds of what had been a bitter and unpopular war.*”

Carmen glances up and gives Thomas another long look, which he returns

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with a somber gaze of his own. She shifts her eyes downward again, “*Upon his release, McGrew immediately began organizing his International Soldiers of the World, or ISW as it is known to its followers, among disgruntled veterans and left wing peace groups. The stated aim of the International Soldiers of the World is to eliminate war. They have never been known to resort to violence. Further, it’s aims, unlike other militia groups, are left wing rather than right wing. Despite that, it is still considered by the U.S. Government to be a threat to national security.*

As of the writing of this book, the International Soldiers of the World numbers several thousand members and has chapters in a number of cities, including New York, Chicago, Minneapolis, Austin, San Francisco and Seattle.”

Carmen flips to the front of the book and reads. “That was as of five years ago, when this book was written.”

She returns to her place and scans the page and closes the book. “So that seems to be about it. That’s all the space this author,” she says, holding up the book to read its spine, “gives the International Soldiers of the World. It seems to fit with that other stuff, though, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah it does,” Thomas says, thinking along a similar track—that this brief description seemed to shed a little more light on the ISW, *as it is known to its followers*, than Rick’s pamphlets, but not that much more.

Carmen waits for him to say something further. Finally, she asks, “So what do we do now?”

It doesn’t take him long to decide, back at the motel as they are getting ready to check out. “How about I take a trip down to Tacoma?” he says.

Wearing her “Seattle” sweatshirt, she’s been examining herself critically in the mirror. Her eyes shift in the glass to look at him. “Tacoma? Why?”

He can’t really explain it to her, at least not adequately. It’s partly wrapped up in Rick’s death, but also in random thoughts that so far don’t lead to anything about this modern-day Bill Haywood, who wants to lead a soldier’s revolt to end all wars. Maybe it has something to do with justifying his own past, of going over the hill and escaping his own private war for his own selfish reasons. “He had a family down there,” he says.

“Rick’s family, you mean.”

“Yeah. There’s some pretty recent letters from his father in his stuff. I thought I’d just go down there and look the old guy up.”

“What good do you think that’ll do?”

“I don’t know if it’ll do any good. I just want to do it.”

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She doesn't answer.

"Don't make me have to give details," he says, even though she's asked for none. "Besides, I don't know if his father is even aware that Rick's dead."

"Okay," she says.

"I'll go alone. You can stay here, and I'll be back later to pick you up."

Turning away from the mirror, she casts her eyes about at the small room, frowning. "You think I'm just going to stay in this place and wait for you?"

"It was just a thought."

"Not a good one."

He attempts to tell her that it's something he has to do for himself, and she tells him that she's doing this for herself, and not for him. He isn't sure what that means, but she leaves with him nevertheless, and there she is next to him in the driver's seat as they head south again. The U. S. landscape unfurls itself through the windshield again. Approaching Seattle, there is the same overcast as the day before.

Past the mid-morning Seattle traffic and SeaTac airport, it is another half-hour south to Tacoma along the east shore of Puget Sound, which is out of sight behind green hills for most of the way. The overcast diminishes to a thin fog at this end of the Sound, and the sun begins to shine like a bright disk through the haze. Exiting the interstate at a sign announcing *City Center*, they find a gas station on a busy north-south thoroughfare.

"I'll go get us some directions," she says, reaching over to extract the envelope from his inside jacket pocket, one of the most recent letters from Rick's dad that he brought along. Carmen strides over to the gas station in the slightly mannish, sexy way she has. Thomas smiles at her retreating back.

Returning after a few minutes, she says, "It turns out that it's not too far from here. We just get back on the freeway and go south. We should see a sign to go east toward Puyallup. I wrote down the streets to look for." She hands him the envelope, which now bears a short list of street names on the back.

By the time they reach the last street written on the envelope, the sun has burned away most of the gloom overhead and turned the day warmer, causing Thomas to shed his jacket. The street is in an older neighborhood, with large trees that form a deep-shaded arch over the narrow pavement. Address numbers are painted on the curb before each of the homes, most of which sit above sloping lawns. Thomas spots the number matching the return address on the envelope and points. Carmen slides the car next to the curb and cuts the engine and turns to him.

"Do you want me to go in with you?"

He shakes his head, opening the door and pushing himself out of the little car and standing to look up at the old house. The place shows careful tending in its new-looking paint job and tidy lawn and trimmed bushes. The house is approached from a walkway that arrows straight up from the sidewalk. A big porch stands above painted, wooden steps. He ascends the steps.

Pressing the doorbell causes a complicated chiming from inside. A short, plump woman opens the door and gives Thomas an anxious look that seems vaguely familiar. With a shock of recognition, he realizes it's an older copy of Rick's face looking back at him thirty years later, the shape changed with age and different for being a woman's, but it is Rick's face nevertheless, down to the same anxiously questioning look.

"Does a Mr. Richard Goody Sr. live here?" Thomas asks.

"Yes, he does," the woman replies. "What can I do for you?"

"I was a friend of Rick Jr. I came to see Mr. Goody about him." He adds, "I'm sorry to intrude."

The woman stares at him with the same anxious expression, narrowing her eyes. "Richard's dead," the woman says after a pause. "We had his remains cremated yesterday."

"I wasn't sure if you all knew," Thomas says. "I'm sorry about what happened." Looking at her anxious face, he feels a wave of embarrassment come over him.

The woman continues to study Thomas. "I was Richard's sister. You say you were his friend?"

"That's right. For some years, since we were teenagers."

"I don't remember you. What's your name?"

"Michael."

The woman nods, again studying Thomas. "Well, you can find my father in the house around back. Just go down the driveway around there." She points and begins closing the door slowly, peering out at Thomas from behind the narrowing opening and nodding her head, pointing toward the driveway at the side of the house.

Descending back down the steps, he follows the cement walk that connects to the driveway curving around back. He glances down at Carmen, who is still in the car. She is leaning over and looking back at him, and he gives her a little wave that she returns.

Behind the big house is a smaller house, tucked away and separated from it by the curving driveway. The small house is done in the same colors of light gray with dark gray trim as the larger one, with a roof covered in the same shake shingles. It almost appears to be a miniature of the big house in

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front. A small porch is a single step up from the pavement.

Approaching the door, Thomas gets a glimpse through a window of an old man seated inside watching television. The old man, offered in profile to the watching Thomas, has a wizened appearance, with sunken cheeks and the same hawk nose as the remembered Rick's. He is collapsed into a hunched-over seating position, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his position in it making the chair appear too big for him. Prominent eyebrows give him a glaring appearance. The whole picture, viewed in a few seconds of peeking in at the old man, seems sad to Thomas, as if he has been magically transported and is secretly looking in on his own father back in his New Jersey apartment.

Pressing the doorbell brings a two-ring chime from inside. Thomas sees the old man push himself up from the chair and then disappear from view. A few seconds later the door opens and Thomas is confronted with an even older version of Rick Jr. than the sister, thinned and wrinkled with age, looking back at him with the same anxious expression. Maybe the look is a family trait, an accidental arrangement of wide eyes and naturally furrowed brow.

"Mr. Goody," Thomas says, his voice softened almost to a whisper. "My name is Michael. I was a friend of Rick Jr."

"What?" the apparent Mr. Goody asks, leaning forward. It wouldn't be unusual for an old man like this to be hard of hearing. To Thomas, he looks to be about his own father's age. But at least Pop's faculties still seem to be with him. But how would he know? It's been ten years.

"I was a friend of your son's," Thomas answers in a louder voice. He suddenly realizes that there might have been more than just the one son.

"Oh?" The old man peers out at Thomas, standing behind the door as if he's about to close it.

"I'm sorry about what happened to Rick."

Mr. Goody nods with a jerk of his head. "I'm sorry as hell about it too. What did you say your name is?"

"Michael."

"He never mentioned you. Are you from that group that he was mixed up with."

Thomas shakes his head. "No, I'm not with them."

"Well, those bastards killed my son." The old man glares at him, searching Thomas's face for an answer.

Uncomfortable under the scrutiny, Thomas asks, "Do you think that's what happened?"

"Hell yes, I do. Don't you?"

"I don't know. I hadn't seen Rick in a while, until just recently."

Looking into the old man's eyes, he's having a hard time lying to him.

"Where did you say you were from?" Mr. Goody eyes him up and down.

"I didn't say. But I live north of here. I saw Rick recently in Seattle."

"And you knew him from there?"

"I knew him years ago, when we were both still in high school. And in New York, later." He winces inwardly at this lie, hoping the old man hasn't noticed. Some of Rick's earlier letters from the father bore a New York address, he recalls.

"You went to school with him? I don't remember you."

"No sir. I don't believe I ever met you."

"Oh." The old man continues to stare at him. "You said you saw him in Seattle? He was only up there for a few weeks."

"I saw him there. He looked me up when he arrived in town."

"And what did he say to you when he looked you up?"

"Not much. We were glad to see one another, of course."

"And did he mention that group he was mixed up with? What the hell were they called?"

"You mean the ISW? That's what they call themselves. It stands for International Soldiers of the World."

"Yeah. Did he mention them?"

"Only in passing." The old man is still watching him from behind the door, still with the same suspicious look on his face. "Sir, why do you think they wanted to kill Rick?"

Mr. Goody says, with an incredulous look, "I don't know, but I know he was afraid of them. He didn't tell me that, but I could tell."

"Did you go to Seattle to see him?"

"No, he came here." The old man makes a disgusted face. "It was the first time his sister and I had seen him since he went away to the Army. His mother didn't get to see him though. She's been dead for quite a few years, rest her soul."

Thomas thinks of his own mother. "I'm sorry about that."

"Did he tell you they killed somebody else in New York?" the old man demands. "That they shot him."

Thomas nods. "That would be Fred Hopper."

"Yeah, that's the name. Did you know that guy too?"

"From New York, yes." Looking at the old man, he imagines his own father holding ajar the battered door of his apartment in Jersey, talking to some stranger about Thomas's own death.

Mr. Goody gives Thomas a stern look. "Just how did you find out about

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Richard's death anyway?"

"I went to that motel where Rick was staying. The people there told me." At least that part is true.

"And how did you know where to find me?"

"He gave me this address." In a way, that part could be also true, from the father's letters to his son. "He said he was planning on coming home soon." Maybe that lie might make the old man feel better.

"He said that?" The old man gives Thomas a surprised look. "Why the hell didn't he come then? What the hell was he doing up there?" he demands, waiting for an answer that doesn't come. "What the hell. Why don't you come in?"

The old man settles himself in the same chair facing the television, collapsing into it in the same posture as before, waving Thomas onto a listing recliner facing him. With an irritated look, he grabs the remote control from a side pocket of the chair and levels it at the too-loud television blaring a commercial for used cars and clicks the thing into blank silence. Then he faces Thomas.

"The truth is," he says, "my boy never cared about this family. Even before he disappeared for all those years. Never really gave a damn."

Staring at the old man, Thomas says nothing.

"After he went into the Army, I used to write him letters," the old man goes on. "His sister did too, sometimes. We didn't get too many replies." He looks to Thomas as if expecting an explanation.

Thomas wants to mention Rick's old letters from Vietnam that he found, all the letters from the father that his son had saved all those years.

"It was like he was dead," the old man continues, staring at the now blank television screen. "When he was in the Army, we lost touch with him. It was like he wasn't anywhere in this world. Then when he left the Army and I didn't hear from him for all those years, it was like he'd died."

The words are like eerie echoes, disconnecting Thomas from the scene. He could be listening to his own father.

Mr. Goody turns to Thomas. "Did he tell you about the Army?"

"He mentioned that he was in the Army," Thomas says.

"Did he tell you how he left?"

"No, sir."

"No, I don't suppose he would. Well, he was a deserter, and from Vietnam too." The old man looks down, the folds on his face elongating. "Not that I blame him for that. But I didn't even know about it. Right after it

happened, some guys from the criminal investigation division of the Army came here and told me about it. They wanted to know where he was.” He looks over to Thomas, snorting an ironic laugh. “I didn’t know. How was I supposed to know? I never heard from him in the first place. And then I didn’t hear from him for years after that. Not until he was in trouble and he called me. After all those years.”

“When was that, sir?”

“Not that long ago. Maybe three months.”

That coincided with the time period of the later-dated letters. “What kind of trouble was he in? Rick never told me anything about that when I saw him.”

“Well, he never told me much about it either. Not much about anything. But he wrote me a few letters, and what I got out of them was that he was afraid. I thought it was because he thought the Army was about to catch up with him.”

“I’m sorry about that, Pop.”

“Don’t Pop me.” The old man glares at him. “I’m not that damn old, and you’re not that damn young either.”

“Sorry,” Thomas says. “I guess I just forgot myself. Pop was what I used to call my father.”

Mr. Goody gives Thomas a sour look. “Well, Richard never called me that. He finally called me Dad after all the years.” His face brightens. “You know what he used to call me when he was younger? Senior. Imagine that.” The old man smiles suddenly, looking as though he’s genuinely amused at the memory.

Thomas nods. “Can I ask how you learned of Rick’s death?”

“Seattle police. A detective came here to the house.”

“I’m sorry to ask you this, but it’s just that I’m not clear on it. What did this detective tell you the cause of death was?”

“He said my son overdosed on heroin, that he probably took an accidental hot shot that he got on the street. That’s what he called it, a hot shot. He said it happens all the time to addicts. Hell, I don’t think he was an addict. I don’t think he took drugs. Do you?”

“No sir, I don’t think Rick was an addict,” Thomas says, not knowing what else to say. “I don’t take drugs either.” Somehow, it seems important to let the old man know that. Something else occurs to him: he has Rick’s folder of personal stuff that probably represented his life, such as it was, and contained letters addressed from here. How could the police even know where here was? He asks, “How did they know where to find you?”

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“I suppose he had the address on him,” Mr. Goody says.

The ticking of a mantle clock behind him is the only sound for a long moment. Then Thomas asks, “Sir, what did Rick tell you about Fred Hopper?”

“He mentioned the name, that’s all,” the old man says. “Said he was killed. Shot. Why?”

“He was nobody important. Just somebody we both used to know.” Then Thomas asks again, “Did Rick ever say why these people wanted to kill him?”

“Not exactly.” Mr. Goody waves a hand. “But he hinted around it, I can tell you that.”

Thomas stares back at him.

“He wanted to quit,” the old man exclaims. “That’s what I got from what he told me.”

“He wanted to quit?”

“Yeah, he wanted to quit. Like those Mafia guys you hear about. They try to quit the mob, they know too much. And they get a bullet.” He taps his temple for emphasis.

“But Rick wasn’t shot.”

“I know that,” the old man says impatiently. “There’s different ways.”

“Why would they want to kill him for quitting?”

“Because I think he knew things. He was dangerous to them.”

“What did he know?”

The old man simply shakes his head as if to say, *I wish I knew.*

Chapter Nine

He proceeds down the sloping walkway, approaching the car parked in front of the Goody's house. Carmen, behind the wheel, watches him through the side window. He climbs into the passenger seat next to her. She asks, "Well?"

"I met the old guy."

"What did you two talk about?"

"A lot of things. He reminded me of my father." But how could he even say that with any accuracy, after ten years? He looks at her and back up at the big house and the driveway curving around the back to the smaller house, picturing Pop in there sitting alone and stabbing impatiently at the television remote control, muttering about his ungrateful son. The only difference might be that his father would have his ever-present glass of scotch at hand. But then, who knew? Maybe Mr. Goody was a secret drinker too. But then, Pop wasn't so secret about it, was he?

"How did he remind you?" Carmen asks.

"I don't know," Thomas says. "Maybe just because he's old and alone and had an ungrateful son."

"Maybe it's time you made a visit back home to see your dad," she says.

"I have to get it from you too?" he answers with more force than he feels.

Her face slowly arranges itself into a closed look. "It was just a suggestion."

"Sorry." It seems he's apologizing a lot lately. He reaches over and touches her hand. "Why don't we go now, okay?"

She starts the car and jams it into gear and whips it around in a U-turn, pointing them back in the direction they came.

After a few minutes, he makes another attempt. "It was kind of depressing, you know?"

She stares straight ahead, concentrating on her driving. Finally she answers, "What did he have to say?"

"I don't know. Mostly that Rick wasn't a very good son."

She looks over at him.

"He never wrote the old man," he says. "Never cared about his family until he needed help. Familiar stuff." Recalling, Christ, all those years ago that he hasn't thought about since, what it was like writing letters from over there.

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They drive on in silence, Thomas in an absent-minded gloom, which seems to be his natural state anymore. He doesn't notice their progress on the road until they slow down at the outskirts of Seattle. He glances over to see Carmen, gnawing on her lip, navigating the suddenly heavy traffic that darts ahead of them from lane to lane like so many bumper cars. Big rattling semi-trucks pass too close beside them, and he's suddenly grateful that she's here to handle the chauffeuring duties. He reaches over and gently squeezes her arm and slides his hand to hers and pats it. She ignores him.

They are almost through the city when Carmen abruptly exits the freeway. A sign announces Lake Washington ahead. He turns to look at her. "What are we doing now?"

"Something."

"Like what?"

"There's somebody I want to see."

The lake appears in front of them, and they ford the expanse of water over a long, low bridge flung across it. A sign reads, Floating Bridge, and he wonders if it really does float, and how could they do that? He wants to ask, but keeps quiet instead. Silence seems the smart choice now. Reaching the opposite shore, they head north again.

Another sign tells him they are entering the town of Kirkland, Washington. They drive along the lakeshore through an increasingly tidy landscape of houses and lawns and apartments and pass through an area of expensive-looking shops and restaurants. They enter a leafy neighborhood of bigger houses and slow down. The size of the houses increases with each passing block.

When Carmen pulls the car over next to the curb and stops, they are facing down a winding street that curves out of sight ahead of them. The homes here sit high up on large lots, with leafy landscaping that sets them apart from one another. To Thomas's apartment-house mentality, the houses look like mansions.

"This is my street," Carmen says. "Was my street," she corrects herself, looking at the scene through the windshield, her face a study of blank staring. "What do you think? Pretty pretentious, no?" Her mood has finally arrived.

"You lived here?" he says. When she doesn't answer, he adds the observation, "It's not exactly a slum."

"Not exactly," she says. "But the same things go on here, just like they do other places. The same kind of petty bastards can live here, just like anyplace else."

They look straight ahead in unison. A car glides by almost soundlessly.

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“I went from this to a construction job in Vancouver,” she says. She laughs, but the laugh has a bitter edge. “It was about as far away from this as I could think of.” He knows she doesn’t mean just the distance.

After a minute of silence, he asks. “You want to tell me about it?”

She nods but says nothing.

After another moment, he asks, “Which house is it?”

“You can’t see it from here. It’s up ahead, around the curve. That’s why I stopped back here.”

They stare through the windshield for a while longer. “What now?” he asks.

She turns to him in the small car, leaning one leg on the console between them. “My son lives in the house up the street,” she says.

Hearing this for the first time, he’s not all that surprised. This is the secret life that she ran from that he’s never asked about. Well, he has his secrets too.

“Nathan,” she says. “He was born there, or that’s where we lived anyway. Nathan Levy.” She pauses, staring at him. “His father’s name is Dave Levy. I used to be Carmen Levy.”

He looks over at her and offers, “So DeMarco was your maiden name.”

“I just found that in a phone book and I liked the sound of it.” She gives no more explanation on the subject.

She turns back to stare through the windshield. He waits for her to say something more.

“I know they still lived there up until a few years ago,” she says. “Where I lived too, before. I used to check the Seattle phone book every few months. For years I did that. Then I quit doing it.” She ventures a glance at him. “I guess I thought I’d come over here and see him arriving home from school or something,” she says. “How do I even know what their school hours are here?”

After a moment more of waiting, he asks, “Do you want to leave?”

She shakes her head. “I came this far.”

She has a set look to her face, her jaw jutting forward slightly and her brow lowered and her eyes beamed straight ahead, the look revealing equal parts of uncertainty and gloom at the same time. They make some pair, he thinks. But this must be costing her even more than she is showing. Thomas wants to put his arms around her.

“Let’s just do it,” she says finally, putting the car in gear and easing it forward, steering slowly around the curve ahead and pulling over again to stop. She points to a three-story house sitting at the top of a big, sloping lawn.

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“That’s it there.” A long, curving driveway leads up to the house, where a van and a Lincoln Town Car are parked at the top in front of large double doors. A pickup truck is alongside the house.

“Unless Dave Levy has changed his taste in cars,” she says, peering up at the house, “somebody else is home. He won’t own anything but a Mercedes.”

“People change,” Thomas says after a moment.

“Not him.” She leans forward for a better look at the place. “What the hell am I doing here? We should just go.”

“You came all this way.”

“I don’t mind admitting now that it was a wasted effort,” she says.

“Maybe it wasn’t. Why not just sit awhile now that we’re here?”

She frowns at him but sits back, folding her hands in her lap.

After a short while, an older woman emerges from the front door followed by a teenaged girl. The two climb into the van and drive off.

A long silence intervenes. Thomas offers hopefully, “Maybe Dave Levy got married again.”

She shakes her head. “He only likes younger woman. Besides, he’s still married to me, unless he’s had me declared legally dead. I wouldn’t put it past him.”

“That one wasn’t that old,” he says.

“She was on the wrong side of fifty.”

“I’m almost there myself,” he jokes. After a pause, he asks, “What do you think?”

Her hands are on still the wheel. “That they don’t live here anymore.”

“Did you check the phone book before we came?”

“That would’ve been too easy.”

He waits another moment and says, “We can go do that now.”

She says nothing.

“What do you want to do?” he asks.

“Leave.” But she seems to be waiting for something else. After a few more minutes she looks at him and he gives an indecisive shrug. She finally eases the car forward, moving past the house, gaining speed. A few turns farther along through a maze of similar neighborhoods, and they are moving through the area of shops and restaurants again, back the way they came. They drive the reverse of their earlier entrance into Kirkland, along the lakeshore and then onto the on-ramp of the Floating Bridge and back across Lake Washington, and enter the rush of freeway traffic leaving Seattle.

She pulls over then, onto the shoulder, and turns to him with the gloomy look that hasn’t changed. “Would you mind driving from here?”

He's never been that easy about his driving, especially in freeway traffic. His strategy has always been to stick to the prevailing speed in the slow lane, while strangling the steering wheel into submission. A stint of this invariably leaves him with an ache in his neck and shoulders.

Carmen sits in the passenger seat now, half-turned toward him, her back against the door as he merges from the shoulder into the flow of traffic, winding the engine revs of the little Honda motor too high in each gear before finally shifting. She doesn't seem to notice. "I guess you should probably hear some kind of story," she says.

"Not necessarily." He eases off on the throttle to allow room for a car ahead of him with its turn signal blinking. The car moves over in front of them, cutting in too closely, and Thomas taps the brake pedal, causing them to lurch forward in their seats.

"Well, how about if I think I owe you one?" she says, ignoring his abrupt maneuver.

"You don't."

"Why don't you just be quiet?" Turning and arranging herself in that incongruously prim way she has, feet together, hands on her knees, offering her profile to him, she starts, "Dave Levy is a lawyer. He has his own law firm, specializing in personal injury cases." She stops and takes a big breath.

"If you're involved in a car wreck, you hire Dave to sue the other guy. Or, if you're the other guy and you're the one being sued, you hire Dave to defend you. Especially if you were drinking and driving. He's good at those kinds of cases."

Thomas doesn't speak for a moment. He concentrates on his driving. Finally he says, "From the size of the house, it looks like he has a pretty good practice."

"He has his face on billboards around the city. I'd show you one, but you probably wouldn't be too interested."

"Probably not." He affords a peek over at her.

She waits for a moment, and they stare in unison through the windshield. Traffic is moving around them at a fast pace. "I worked for him," she says. "I was an intern at his law firm, in my third year of law school. Then he hired me as a law clerk after I graduated." She turns toward him. "What do you think about that one?"

He wants to tell her again that she doesn't have to do this. Not for him anyway. But she's not doing it for him, is she?

She continues, "I was supposed to take the bar exam but I never did. Right after I finished law school, after I started working for him, there was an

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exam scheduled and I was supposed to take it. But I didn't."

"Because you didn't want to," he says.

"I didn't want to. Because it was clear by then that I didn't want to be a lawyer."

"Not a lawyer like him, you mean." It seems to fit the picture. The husband sounds to him like an ambulance chaser.

"Not any kind of lawyer. I think I knew, even before graduating, that I wasn't cut out for it. Pretty weird stuff, don't you think?"

He shakes his head, trying to listen and relax his grip on the wheel at the same time. Another car pulls abruptly in front of them, and he momentarily slows the car, backing off.

She asks, "Why would I go to work there if that's how I felt? Because," she answers herself, "by that time, we were planning to be married. I was twenty-five. My life was going down a certain track." She makes a bitter face. "This is so trite."

"You can stop now if you want."

"No. I want to say this."

"Let me just ask one thing," he interrupts. "Did you want me there with you today?"

After a moment, she says, "Maybe I was too afraid to do it by myself."

"But you figured, with me there, you'd have to go through with it."

"Something like that." She turns her head to look at him, her brows knitted above her eyes, giving her an almost fierce look that is only softened slightly by an attempt at a weak grin. "I guess I was wrong."

"But you did go through with it."

"I didn't go through with anything. If I had any guts, I would've walked up to the door and rung the bell."

"What would you have said if Dave had answered the door?"

"What would I have said if the boy answered the door? What does that sound like, me calling my own son the boy?"

Thomas decides on a discretionary silence.

"I was actually pregnant with Nathan when I finished law school and went to work for Dave," she says. "I even gave myself that for an excuse, that I'd wait until he was born before becoming a real lawyer. Then I continued working for Dave as a law clerk, almost right up to the day Nathan was born. After that, I went back to work, like I didn't know what else to do. Which I didn't."

Thomas pulls the car over then onto a wide, grassy spot off the pavement. The sound of traffic intermittently roars alongside them. They sit side by side

for a moment looking out at a patch of woods. He asks, "Why did you leave him?"

"I left them," she corrects.

"Them," he says. "Why did you leave them?"

"Why do women leave their husbands? Because the guy is abusive? Maybe he drinks or fools around?"

"Was that it?"

"No." She looks angry now. She takes a breath and lets it out forcefully, and the moment is passed. "He's actually a very gentle man, away from the courtroom, not the type to do any wrong. He's really just a homebody."

"Was it because you didn't want to be a lawyer?"

"I didn't have to do that if I didn't want to," she says. "I could have stayed home and been a housewife." She half-turns toward him again, the better to make a point that she can't really seem to explain adequately. "That would have been fine with Dave. Except it would have been worse than the other. I was even less cut out for that than being an attorney." She turns back to her staring through the windshield. "I told you it was too trite. I didn't love him. I didn't love my husband, Dave. That's it. That's all it is. It got so I couldn't stand him, but that just grew out of the other. I never really loved him, and he knew it. That made it even worse, you know? And I can't even be sure now if I ever loved the boy. Pretty sad stuff, don't you think?"

Thomas shakes his head, remembering his own mother. When she died, it was something unreal, as if it was a stranger that had passed. He never cried, never grieved. He wondered, like the books say, if maybe he was holding it inside. But, when he looked for it, he couldn't find it.

That time, ten years ago, he went back home more for the old man than to see his mother one last time before she was buried. Funny about that. It was always the old man that he missed over the years.

He reaches over now, trailing a finger along the back of her hand.

"So why did I marry him?" Carmen asks.

His own mother could have asked it about his father. Through all the years of his young life back in New Jersey, Thomas would watch his parents and wonder how two such mismatched people ever decided to marry—the old man gruff and private, his mother emotional and outgoing, the two of them always at each other's throats.

Carmen answers her own question. "It was a mistake. He wanted it, and I thought it might be okay. Actually, I didn't know what else to do. I let myself go along. Stupid," she adds, spitting out the word.

It was obvious that she was younger than this lawyer, Dave Levy, since

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the guy had his own practice when Carmen was just finishing law school. So was Thomas's own mother, younger by about ten years than the old man and the first to die. And the old man went on as always, maybe a little more gruff, a little more private. He'll probably outlive you, as well, Thomas thinks.

"Anyway, where was I with this sad tale?" she asks, her mouth twisted cynically to one side. "I was suffocating, was where I was. That's what it felt like. Or maybe drowning. Maybe that's more accurate. I didn't love Dave, and probably not the boy either. And the more I showed it, the worse it got. Dave was irrational. He couldn't understand it. It got so I couldn't stand being around him. There he would be, moping around, looking at me with a long face. I needed out. And that's what I finally did, got out."

He's almost afraid to ask the question. "Why didn't you just get a divorce?"

She jerks her head around to look at him and then slowly turns back to her staring. "I could never stand up to him. I couldn't even bring up the subject. I knew I wouldn't be able to bear the hangdog look on his face if I asked. So I just left." She steals another look at him. "Not too logical, huh? Nathan was two then. He's twelve now."

"And now you want to see him," he says, trying to finish her thought.

"I don't even know why. Maybe just to see what he looks like. To see that he's all right." She turns, not quite successful at suppressing the dark look. "And that's it. That's all of it. Pretty tragic story, no?" She makes a comical face that he can tell she doesn't feel.

"It sounds about like mine," he says, seeing the truth in that like a sudden insight into something he never quite recognized before. Placing his hand on hers, he asks, "What now?"

"Let's go home."

Carmen emerges from the bedroom where she went immediately upon arriving home.

"They don't live there anymore," she says. "No listing for David Levy in Seattle, or anywhere else in the greater Seattle area."

"Maybe the number's unlisted."

"It never was before. They don't live there anymore. I checked the office number too. It's still there, and I called it."

"Did he answer?"

"Dave would never answer his own phone. I got the receptionist. Not that I would have talked to him, but I asked for Dave Levy anyway. She told me Mr. Levy operates out of the San Francisco office now."

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“Did he used to do that before?”

“He didn’t have a San Francisco office. I guess he’s branching out. Apparently, he’s become a franchise.”

Chapter Ten

Carmen brushes out her hair, methodically stroking it while standing in the tiny bathroom of their apartment, staring at herself in the mirror, watching her dark hair curl around the brush and straighten as she pulls the brush through. She repeats the stroke over and over, seemingly mesmerized by the action. Lying on the bed, Thomas watches through the open door, as absorbed in the ritual as she is. It has always amazed him how women can be so unabashed in the act of grooming.

She sets the brush down and turns away from the mirror and enters the bedroom, not looking at him. Standing at the foot of the bed, she removes her shirt and shucks off her jeans and panties and then unfastens her bra at the back, releasing her breasts. They are not the breasts of a young girl anymore, but they are still sweet in his sight. Watching her, his eyes mist over. He wants to say something, but nothing seems adequate.

She clicks off the light and slips beneath the covers, turning toward him as though she has finally become aware of his presence. She usually waits for him in their lovemaking, but this night she moves a hand across his chest and slides a leg over his and she is on him, grasping his hands in both of hers and pushing his arms back above his head, which he doesn't resist. Soon they are both slick with sweat, her body pressed down on his and her breathing loud in his ear.

When it is over, she rolls off of him and lies back, throwing an arm over her head. Her chest rises and falls, and she has a faraway look on her face. He looks at her, at her naked body silhouetted in the darkened room. The commotion in his own body is subsiding. He collects the blanket that was kicked off onto the floor and arranges the rumpled top sheet over both of them. He decides the blanket would be too warm and tosses it aside and shakes out the sheet to straighten it again. She doesn't seem to notice any of it.

He reaches over and touches her face with his fingers. "Okay?" he says.

She nods. She pushes the sheet down and continues her communing with the dark and with herself. He watches her for a few seconds and then rolls over to his side of the bed and closes his eyes. After a moment, he feels her moving toward him, fitting herself against his back. He rolls back over and she nestles her body to his and slides an arm across his chest and settles her head on his shoulder. It is her usual pre-sleep posture. She still has said

nothing. In the quiet, the only sound is the faint, late-night traffic noises below their window.

Over the years, he has gotten used to this routine, which is that she falls asleep first and, when her breathing relaxes, he gently moves her off of him and rolls over into his own normal sleep position. Tonight the soft weight of her pressing on him is too warm. He moves her arm and slides out from under her. When she makes a protesting moan, sounding half asleep, he whispers, "I'm tired and I need to go to sleep." He's not sure if she heard him. After a few seconds, she raises her head to look at him, her eyes shining at him in the dark. Dailin would sometimes look at him the same way. But the circumstances were completely different then, weren't they? This is connected to that, though. It's not the first time in the past few days, after years of not remembering, that he's thought of the time he spent in Saigon with Dailin.

"Is something bothering you?" she asks, abruptly sitting up.

He waits a moment, framing a reply. He settles for, "I thought something was bothering you."

After a minute of staring at him she lies back and pulls the sheet up to her chin. They are silent then, and he closes his eyes and begins to feel the drifting sensation that signals sleep is almost there. Her voice next to him, sounding loud in the quiet bedroom, interrupts that. She asks, "What is it?"

There seems to more meaning behind the question than just what was in the simple words. He opens his eyes and sees her looking at him, her head turned. She must know something is up with him, what's been in the back of his mind since they arrived home.

"I was just thinking," he says. "I should go down to the store tomorrow and put a different sign in the window."

"What would it say?"

"*On Sabbatical. Or, Gone Fishing.*"

"Why would it say that?"

"Because I'm thinking about going back," he says.

"To Seattle?"

"I thought I might start there."

"Start what?"

"Try to find out what happened," he says, watching her and listening to his own words and thinking that that they weren't quite the right ones, but that they would have to do. It isn't just about Rick, he thinks, and it isn't about Fred Hopper either. Maybe Freddie *had* simply been shot. Maybe Rick simply became a statistic of the drug trade: *addict OD's in seedy Seattle*

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motel. Maybe that was all there was to it.

“Nothing happened,” she says.

He looks at her. “Something did, I think.”

“What can you do about it?”

How to explain that? He would first have to explain it to himself. Maybe it’s as simple as the feeling he’d forgotten for all those years that instantly came back to him when he listened to Rick’s message—that he was responsible for both of them. Their lives changed forever when they followed him out to the Saigon streets with some romantic notion he somehow planted in their heads.

But is that even it? Isn’t it also that thing in him that made him go over the hill himself thirty years ago? That would be romanticizing, though, wouldn’t it? He wouldn’t want to do that.

“What do you think you’ll do, play detective?” Carmen asks into the quiet.

He is unsure how to say what he isn’t sure of himself. “It’s just something that’s been eating at me. That motel clerk said the Seattle police didn’t seem too interested. Rick was just another OD to them. And then Rick’s father said almost the same thing: that Seattle detective told him it was probably just an accident, a hot shot, like it’s a common occurrence. Maybe it is. Just another street addict dead of an overdose.” He looks at her. “And then there’s Rick’s phone message.” He doesn’t say the next, but Rick’s words are in his head: *Freddie Hopper’s dead and I think I might be next*.

“What does that all add up to?” She sits up again, leaning her weight on one arm.

“Nothing that I can make any sense of.”

“And what do you think you can do about any of it?”

“Maybe I won’t do much good,” he says. “I just think I should try to at least find out. I feel like I owe it to him. To both of them.” His explanation, as usual lately, falls short.

“That’s not really it, is it?” Her eyes are shining in the dark, and he realizes that she has started crying. He reaches out and touches her face, but she brushes him away.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

She snorts softly through her nose, a derisive sound that tells him his sentiment is misdirected, that she is not crying for him. Or not just for him. “What do you think you can do?” she asks.

“I don’t know. Talk to somebody. That book at the library said the ISW had a chapter in Seattle.”

“What do you think they’ll tell you?”

“Maybe Rick was working there with them. He *was* in Seattle, after all. I don’t know.”

“What good do you think it will do?”

“I don’t know. I just think it’s something I should do.”

“After Seattle, what?” she asks. She has stopped crying as abruptly as she’d started.

“New York. That’s where Fred Hopper died.”

“And the ISW has a chapter there too, of course. And you’ll go hang out there too. What are you going to do, march for peace?”

“Freddie was from around there.”

She lies back down and turns her face to the ceiling. “Well that ought to be a big help,” she says.

He looks over at her

“Your father’s back there too,” she says to the ceiling.

He hadn’t even thought of that. The idea of the trip, which had been vaguely forming, rolls into his mind like a movie on fast forward. The old man will be surprised to see him.

“At least there’s that,” she says and falls silent. When he thinks that might be the end of it, she goes on. “It could be dangerous. That Freddie guy was killed in New York. If Rick was right, they were trying to kill him too before he beat them to it.”

He hears her words, but he is watching the movie in his head; he is already there in a sense.

“It’s more than just what you’re telling me, isn’t it?” she continues. “It’s more than you just trying to find the ghost of Rick Goody or that other guy. Isn’t it? It’s something else too.”

“Maybe it is.”

She turns away from him. “I don’t want you to go,” she says, her voice muffled, speaking into the pillow.

He doesn’t answer.

“It’s just stupid,” she says.

“It’s not like I’d be taking any chances. You know me.”

“Yeah, I know you.” Her words sound far away. “Just don’t do it, okay?”

He lies there looking at her back, not sure if she has begun to cry again. The movie in his head stops and he wants to tell her it’s okay. He reaches over and begins stroking her back through the sheet wrapped around her. “I won’t go, if you really feel that way.”

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“Okay,” she says and seems to relax. But her back feels dense and stiff under his hand. Another movie enters his head: the earlier view through the windshield of the car as they rolled down the curving street past the former home of Carmen Levy.

In the morning, she is the first up, as usual. The highway crews she works with start early, before the commute hour is in full swing, while he has the luxury of opening the store at around nine. So he usually waits until she is gone before getting out of bed.

After her shower, she opens the bathroom door to clear away the steam. Still in bed and covered to the neck, he watches her as she goes through her usual after-shower ritual. Standing barefoot in front of the bathroom mirror with a towel gathered above her breasts, covering her down to the tops of her thighs, she roughly dries her hair with a second towel and then combs it out and rubs some lotion from a tube through it with her long fingers and combs it out again. He tries to read the expression on her face. It has the same dense, distracted look as the previous night.

When she’s through, she enters their bedroom, and it is a repeat performance of the previous night: she doesn’t look at him as she throws off the towel and pads naked to the closet to get dressed. She’s usually modest about it; her usual routine is to take whatever she’ll wear that day into the bathroom and dress behind closed doors. Now, again, it’s as if he’s not there.

“What time will you be home tonight?” he offers to her back as she shoves one arm and then the other through the sleeves of her shirt.

She turns, buttoning the shirt, still not looking at him. “The usual time.”

He sighs, not sure what to say into this mood.

She tucks the shirttails into the waist of her jeans, looking down, and then sits to don her work boots and lace them up. She stands, finally looking at him, meeting his eyes. Looking back at her, he feels the sudden urge to get up and take her in his arms, his big girl standing there regarding him, somehow seeming so vulnerable in her rough work clothes.

She looks away then and walks to the door, her heavy boots clomping on the floor, and she leaves without her usual goodbye kiss.

Chapter Eleven

On the third morning he finally admits to himself that Carmen isn't coming back. The letter he found on the bed, propped up on a pillow, is still lying on the nightstand. He's lost track of how many times he's read it.

The thing doesn't say very much—that she has to go away for a while and that she's sorry and that she'll be back. The letter doesn't say when. It does say several times that she hopes he'll understand, that it's something she needs to do. Her son's name, Nathan, is mentioned once, but she doesn't say that she's going to see him. That's it though, he knows. She's taking the car, and she hopes it doesn't inconvenience him any. She ends by saying again that she hopes he understands. He does, but that doesn't help.

The first evening after he found the letter, he waited for her. Waiting and going over it in his mind, he was not all that surprised. He always expected something like this. He listened for the sounds of her footsteps on the stairs before finally going to bed, alone in the flat for the first time in years. The following night, he slept alone again.

The third morning was when he resigned himself to the fact that she was really gone. Then, like an unbidden edict coming into his head, he knew he had to go too. What else was there to do? The liberating thought flashed into his mind just like that, in a sense taking him back in time to that other moment when he made up his mind that it was time to leave Vietnam behind. That was different—then, he was leaving a woman behind, instead of the other way around—but there the thought was anyway.

In the hall closet, beneath a litter of shoes and Carmen's gym bag, he finds the old canvas AWOL bag that he'd left Vietnam with. The bag is flattened, unused for all these years, but he'd hung onto it nevertheless.

Packing a few things, with no idea how long he will be gone and not caring either—relishing the thought—he then takes down Rick's folder of letters and pamphlets and memories from the top shelf of the closet, remembering a single letter in there that he hadn't bothered to read before.

It isn't much to go on, just the name Matt Matthews and a Seattle address on the return part of the envelope. The postmark is a few months old. Extracting the single page from the envelope, he reads:

Goody, sorry to hear that you and Fred Hopper are on the outs back

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there. To hell with all of them. They've changed beyond all fucking recognition. Why don't you two come out here? Angela's in town for a while and I know she'll want to see you. You and her used to be quite an item, remember? Forget about New York, it's dead for you. Come out here. It'll be like the old days. My address is on the envelope. Here's my phone number.

Thomas finds a pad and pen and jots down the return address and the phone number and tears the page off. He stuffs the page into his jacket pocket and returns the letter to Rick's old folder and places that back on the top shelf. Grabbing his bag, he heads for the door and then stops abruptly, setting the bag down, to write a note to Carmen on the same pad, in case she returns before him. In case she returns at all.

In the note, he simply tells her he is going away too and that she shouldn't worry. He knows what he is doing. He signs the note and leaves the pad lying open on the kitchen counter, staring at it for a few seconds, hoping the last part about him knowing what he is doing is actually true. Then he leaves.

It is a little over a mile to his bookshop. He walks, swinging the bag, occasionally switching it from one hand to the other, feeling like his old, in-country self again heading for Ton Son Nhut air base and a trip out of the country with forged emergency leave orders in his pocket.

At the store, he decides on a sign reading *Closed For Renovation* displayed inside the door. It seems fitting, given the circumstances. After looking around the place, smelling the familiar musty smell of old books and seeing the morning sun slanting through the window showing dust motes floating in the air, he leaves, locking the door behind him, not knowing if he'll ever return. This is getting serious. He makes his way to the downtown bus station, still unsure what to make of all of this.

His mood lasts through the bus trip to Seattle, his second border crossing in less than a week. It almost feels routine by now, except that Carmen isn't with him this time.

At the border, everyone is told to get off the bus. They shuffle along in a ragged line into a small building. When an immigrations officer asks him to show identification and state his destination, which he does, routinely reciting that he's going to Seattle for a visit, he has to wonder what his previous fuss was all about. Once, years ago, he'd crossed the Pacific Ocean with forged papers and an attitude, with the Army looking for him, ready to slap his ass into a federal prison for desertion. Since then, he's grown old. That's the only way he can think of it. Old and tired and scared. Maybe now, he is leaving all that behind him too.

Back onboard the bus, he engages in odd fantasies, the what-if game that he hasn't done in years. What if, instead of being singled out to be the company clerk of the Replacement Company at Camp Alpha, he was instead sent to his original assignment as a line soldier with the First Air Cavalry? Or what if he hadn't run when he did and had taken the reassignment to the same First Air Cav' Division, after the incident with Private Dale and the confrontation with Lieutenant Mira? In either case, he might have wound up with Joseph McGrew at the battle of Hue, and he might have witnessed the moment of McGrew's attempted mutiny. Thomas can what-if the first part about being sent to the First Cav'. The trouble is that he can't imagine the second part, the part about McGrew's mutiny. How did that go down?

Another one is: what if, instead of making it out of Vietnam, he had been caught? Then he might have been a cellmate of Bill Haywood, nee Joseph McGrew, at Leavenworth Federal Prison. Maybe he would have become one of Bills' soldiers of peace. But he knows better than that. Circumstances may change people, but even back then he was too cynical to really believe in what Haywood was selling.

Back in high school, when he was still thrilled with the high-sounding ideas forming in his own mind, he remembers engaging in all-night talks about the state of the world. Later, during his one year of college, before he quit school and the Army claimed him, he would sometimes listen in on one of those discussion groups that were always going on in those days at the Student Union. That was before painted-on peace symbols and long hair and chants of *hell-no-we-won't-go*, when children of privilege liked to dress like field workers and expound on high-minded topics. It was talk that went comfortably around in circles, with everyone feeling morally superior and no one really believing any of it. Not really. At least he never did. Sometimes he wondered about the others, when he looked into their eyes and saw the fervor. Did any of them really believe?

Sure, he would think then, listening. Who wouldn't want global peace, an end to war, or any of the rest of it? Well, apparently somebody wouldn't. And who might that be, he would ask himself? Well, the answer would come back, that would be the powers that be, the establishment, the vested interests that run things, who else? They would never let it happen, there was too much at stake. Where would the economy be without all those defense contracts? What would we do without enemies lurking in the bush to defend against?

But even back then, when he was still young enough to believe in causes, Thomas had cynically come to understand the difference between expounding

high-sounding ideals and acting on them.

So, no one really took any of that rhetoric seriously, did they? Well, maybe Joseph McGrew, AKA Bill Haywood, did.

Arriving in Seattle, the bus leaves the freeway and negotiates the streets to the terminal at 8th and Stewart. Thomas asks the driver for directions to the Kingdome, which he recalls is not far from the motel where Rick was staying. It turns out it's a bit of a walk. Dismounting the bus, he heads south through what must be the downtown area, with high-rise office buildings all around and the sound of the busy freeway just up the hill to his left. Even though it's a bright sunny day, there are wisps of fog streaming across the sun from the direction of Puget Sound, causing patterns of shadow to move across the ground, and the tinge of Seattle coolness feels good after the stuffiness of the bus.

When he spots the ugly structure of the Kingdome, he heads that way, bringing himself almost adjacent to it, and turns east on what he thinks is the right street. A few minutes of walking uphill brings him within sight of the motel where Rick Goody breathed his last. It would be symbolic of something for him to pick that place, except that the Indian woman there might remember him. There are other motels around, he remembers from before, and he picks one a few blocks away that appears almost respectable.

His room is on the second floor, reached by a set of outside stairs leading to a veranda. Identically faded and numbered doors are arrayed all along the outside-facing corridor.

The room has threadbare carpeting and a thin spread covering the bed, and its view through the single dirty window looks out onto his veranda and the parking lot below and an identical veranda across from his with its own mirroring array of doors. It's fitting somehow to be spending his first night alone in the States in a semi-dump. That night in the Everett motel a few days ago and that other time ten years ago, when he spent almost the whole period hiding out in Pop's apartment, hardly counted.

Tossing his bag in a corner, he drags the single chair over to the window and draws open the drapes, which match the bedspread, and he sits, propping his feet on the wall-mounted combination air conditioner and heater, and gazes out at his view. The parking lot is surrounded on three sides by the double-floored motel, with the fourth side being the drive-in entrance from the street. The place almost forms a courtyard except for the scattering of parked cars below, and there are no tall trees swaying in a warm breeze, and the wisps of fog he can see above the motel rooftop can't pass for monsoon

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clouds approaching the city, though the time of day is about right. If he had a beer in hand, it would help evoke the memory, but this will have to do. But there is just something in his current situation, something of a fugitive sense of himself again that attempts to render the view below, if he can only strain his eyes hard enough, into that other courtyard view off Cong Ly Street more than half a lifetime ago.

After a time of blank staring out his window, using his old trick of seeing what is in front of him through a mental image of something else, he returns himself to the present, returning his tilted-back chair to an upright position and placing his feet flat on the floor. His first order of business is to look up Matt Matthews. He extracts the paper with Matthews' address and phone number from his pocket and considers dialing the number. The phone is within reach on the nightstand. But what would he say? Somehow, it would be better in person, if he can find the guy. And what will he say then in person that he couldn't say on the phone? He decides to worry about that when the time comes. He looks for Matthews' street on a Seattle map that he the front-desk clerk gave him when he checked in. The map contains mostly advertisements for local restaurants, and doesn't show all of greater Seattle, but he finds Matthews' street.

It begins close to Seattle University, which looks to be a few miles away, and the street runs for quite a way away from the university. The address could be anywhere along it. There's nothing else to do but to go check it out.

The university is a brisk forty-minute walk away. He's not used to all this walking, and he knows his legs will feel it later. Referring to the map, he finds the street. Luckily, the address is only another four or five blocks farther along. Standing on the sidewalk, he eyes the nondescript apartment building before him. He mounts the outside set of cement stairs leading to an inside vestibule.

Inside the door, a double row of tenant names is displayed behind a rectangular brass plate, with a button next to each name to ring the tenant and gain entrance through a locked inner door. Matthews is one of the names. Below that, a small hole covered by a slotted brass plate looks like a combination speaker and microphone. He presses the button and waits for a minute before pressing it again. He waits awhile longer and is about to give it up when a tinny voice barely recognizable as speech squawks at him from the speaker.

"Who's that?"

Leaning close to the speaker, Thomas answers, "I'm here about Rick Goody."

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There is no reply for long seconds. Then the voice says, “Who are you?”
“I’m a friend of Rick Goody’s.”

After another long pause, the inner door buzzes and Thomas pushes it open and walks through into an inner hallway. A long stairway leads up to the next floor. Matthews’ apartment number, from the list of names outside, is apparently on the third floor. Thomas climbs the two flights of stairs, each leading to an identical landing with doors spaced along one wall. On the third floor, he sees that one of the doors at the end of the hallway is slightly ajar and a face that he can’t quite make out in the dim light is peering out at him.

Approaching, Thomas asks, “Are you Matt Matthews?”

“Who are you?” the face peering out at him says.

The door is opened just a few inches, and the guy has his hand on it as though he expects to slam it shut any minute. In the light of a single bulb in the hallway, Thomas can make out some features of the face—sunken cheeks and shadowy eye sockets, a four or five day growth of stubble and lank hair hanging down.

“Do I know you?” the face asks.

“No. Are you Matthews?”

The face stares back at him.

“I was a friend of Rick’s,” Thomas says.

“Rick Goody’s dead.”

“I know.”

“What’s your name?” the face asks.

“Frank DeMarco,” Thomas says, the first name that pops into his head. The irony of using Carmen’s assumed name for his own doesn’t escape him. “Are you Matt Matthews?”

After a long stare, the face answers, “Yeah. Goody never mentioned you.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

Matthews seems surprised by the question, but he answers anyway, “When he first came to town, a few weeks ago. He came to see me. But I’m losing track of time. I’ve been sick.” As if to demonstrate, Matthews makes a pained face, and the door comes open a few more inches. Thomas can make out a bit more of Matthews: he’s wearing a striped robe hanging open over a tee shirt and jeans unbuttoned at the waist and hanging low on thin hips. The legs of the jeans sag down upon a pair of oversized sheepskin slippers. Matthews follows Thomas’s gaze down and he twists up one corner of his mouth in a wry grin that quickly disappears. He brings his hand up to his mouth and takes a drag on a cigarette and drops the hand. “Where did you

know Goody from?" he asks, exhaling smoke.

"I knew him from years ago."

"Where was that?"

"We grew up together."

"In Seattle?"

"No. In Tacoma," Thomas says. "He was from Tacoma."

Matthews narrows his eyes. "Where did you get my name?"

"From Rick. Before he died. He was staying at some motel." Thomas makes a vague gesture with one hand.

"And he gave you my name? Did he give you this address too?"

Thomas hadn't known what to expect coming here, and Matthews is giving nothing away. He nods. "He told me a little about you."

"And what was that?"

Thomas shrugs. "I guess you two ran together in the old days." Thomas wonders where that odd-sounding expression even came from.

"Ran together?" By now, Matthews is standing in the open doorway, staring curiously at Thomas, though he doesn't seem inclined to invite him in. He takes another drag on the stub of his cigarette, which seems in danger of burning his stained fingers. "He said that?"

"Not really in those words," Thomas says. This next he's totally unsure of, but he decides to take a stab. "You knew him in New York, apparently."

"New York? He told you that? What else did he say?"

"He was having some problems back there."

"Yeah, I'd say." After a pause, Matthews asks, "So what was it you wanted?"

"I wanted to find out more about New York."

"Why?"

"I wanted to find out what Rick was afraid of."

"He told you he was afraid of something?"

"Yeah," Thomas says. He decides to take another stab. "I wonder if it had anything to do with him deserting from the Army years ago."

Matthews twists up his mouth at one corner, squinting through a haze of cigarette smoke. "Nobody cares about any of that business anymore."

Watching the stub of the cigarette between Matthews' fingers, Thomas says, making it a question, "He was involved with some anti-war group?"

Matthews looks down at the cigarette and crushes it out on the doorjamb and tosses it out into the hallway. "What did he say about that?"

Thomas shrugs. "He didn't say much."

Matthews frowns. "Look, I don't think I have anything to say to you."

He starts to close the door.

"I'd like to find Angela," Thomas says, remembering the name from Mathews letter written to Rick.

"Angie? You know her too?" The door comes ajar again.

"That's just it. Rick only mentioned her. I'd like to find her, talk to her."

"Do you know how Goody died?" Matthews asks.

"A drug overdose."

Matthews nods. "What did he say about Angela?"

Thomas isn't sure why he's getting further away from the truth, except that there doesn't seem to be another way. "Not much. He just mentioned her."

"He just mentioned her."

"Yeah. Now I'd like to find her. I just want to talk to her."

"You want to talk to her why?"

"You know her, don't you?"

"Sure," Matthews says, nodding vaguely. He reaches into the pocket of his robe and brings out a pack of cigarettes and extracts a single tube. He places it in his mouth and lights it from a disposable lighter. "Okay, I can get in touch with her for you," he says through the smoke trailing from his mouth. "How would that be? And I'll have her call you. Where are you staying?"

Thomas hesitates. "At a motel," he says.

Matthews, the cigarette dangling from his lips, asks, "Does it have a name?"

Thomas had picked up several cards from the motel. He extracts one from his shirt pocket and hands it to Matthews. "Just ask for room 2J."

With that, the door closes.

Lying on his motel bed watching the sky outside through the window, his hand propping up his head, Thomas has to resist the impulse to phone his Vancouver flat to see if Carmen might've returned. It was only this morning that he left.

The wisps of fog outside have turned into gray clouds pressing down on the city. Watching them, he sees the figure of a large man passing by on the veranda outside his window. A few seconds later, a knock sounds on his door and he raises himself up into a sitting position, a faint unease taking hold of his gut. It could just be someone from the motel. He pushes himself up and pads to the door in his stockinged feet. Opening it, he sees the large man who just passed by his window standing on the veranda, confronting him.

"Are you Frank DeMarco?" the man says, with a friendly smile.

Thomas can feel a crawling sensation across his scalp.

“Frank DeMarco?” the man says. “Have I got the right room?” His eyes flick past Thomas to take in the room behind him.

“Yeah,” Thomas mumbles.

“I’m Detective Dan MacEwan, Seattle Police,” the man says, reaching into his windbreaker to produce a gold shield. “Can I come in?” he asks politely, spreading his hands in a disarming way, his one hand still holding the shield. “I know. You’re thinking, ‘what’s this all about?’ I’m a friend of Matt Matthews, that’s all. He called me and asked me to come see you.”

Thomas nods and steps back, opening the door wider, and Detective MacEwan enters, taking a practiced look around. Standing in the middle of the room, MacEwan turns his attention to Thomas and looks him over. His windbreaker is hanging open, showing a colorful, checked shirt beneath. He is a shade taller than Thomas, with fifty pounds more of bulk, and short, sandy hair over a large, friendly face. He is perhaps the same age as Thomas, maybe a little younger. Thomas closes the door, a random thought flashing through his mind that detectives always wear suits, or at least sport coats and ties—at least in the movies they do. MacEwan seems to be waiting for Thomas.

“Matthews asked you to come and see me?” Thomas says thickly.

“He said you were asking after a Rick Goody.” MacEwan looks down at a notebook and then looks up smiling. “We’re investigating his death.”

Thomas, who hasn’t moved away from the closed door, can feel his legs trembling, and he wonders if it shows. With a force of will, he walks to the bed and sits down on the edge. “I knew Rick,” he says. He can’t stop the quivering in his legs, even in a seated position. He leans forward, placing his forearms on his thighs, which helps. “What about his death?”

“Did you visit another motel just down the street from here three or four days ago?” MacEwan asks, consulting his notebook again and reciting the name of the motel. “And claim to be Rick Goody’s brother?”

Thomas shakes his head. “No.”

“You sure about that?” The friendly look hasn’t left MacEwan’s face.

“Of course I’m sure.”

MacEwan nods, as if that’s settled. “I’ll tell you what,” he says, looking around amiably. “There’s not a whole of room in here. Would you mind coming to the station with me? I’d just like to ask you a few questions and it would be more comfortable there.”

Chapter Twelve

MacEwan leads the way along the veranda outside the room. He stops and turns back to face Thomas, saying, “Let me explain something. This isn’t even official, if you’re worried about it. I’m not even on duty. And you’re not being arrested, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Thomas, barely hearing his words, is still wondering what excuse he might come up with to explain the business of his name discrepancy, which MacEwan will surely discover, if he hasn’t already. MacEwan turns and leads them down the stairs to an unmarked car parked below. Unsure of the protocol here, whether to sit in back or take a seat up front, Thomas looks to the opposite side of the car at MacEwan who is staring back at him over the roof. Thomas decides on the passenger seat in the front and he slides in. MacEwan gets in behind the wheel, settling his bulk down with a barely audible sigh, causing the car to sag slightly on its springs. It’s a late-model Ford or Chevy, Thomas guesses, wondering why he’s even noticing. His heart hammers in his chest. He takes a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself.

MacEwan, steering the car into the traffic, says amiably, “Like I said, I’m just a friend of Matt Matthews. He thinks there’s something about the way Rick Goody died.” He looks over at Thomas. “And like I said, this isn’t even official yet. I’m just asking your cooperation, that’s all. There are just some questions I’d like to clear up.”

“Are you saying that I don’t have to go with you?” Thomas manages.

Detective MacEwan smiles. “But I know you want to cooperate. Am I right?”

MacEwan parks the car in front of a modern two-story building that reads *Seattle Police* above the entrance. They climb out in unison and mount the steps. MacEwan holds the door open. On the short ride, Thomas has calmed down. Maybe, after all these years, he’s just become resigned. The melodramatic thought comes to mind, as he enters the police station and watches the front door shut, that this might be the beginning, that there would be other doors shutting on him forever—*a little matter of thirty years you owe the U.S. Army, pal*. Following behind MacEwan, he has the sensation of his legs not quite working right.

“Why don’t we go up this way?” MacEwan says, leading the way. They troop up a metal staircase. At the top of the stairs is a corridor with several closed doors spaced along one wall. Still leading the way, MacEwan heads down the corridor and opens one of the doors and turns to Thomas. “Let’s go in here.”

The room inside is mostly bare. A table and several straight-backed chairs occupy the center, with a few more chairs scattered along the walls. The room is windowless. A file cabinet sits in a corner. Thomas looks around, seeing that there is no two-way mirror where the interrogation is viewed from the other side, like in the movies. Maybe this isn’t the interrogation room. Maybe this is where they use the rubber hoses. A giddy sensation of wanting to laugh passes quickly through him.

“Take a seat.” MacEwan says, pointing to a chair on one side of the table. Thomas sits, immediately feeling the edge of the chair cutting across the back of his legs. Maybe that’s deliberate; make it uncomfortable, he thinks. MacEwan slides out one of the straight-backed chairs for himself and sits opposite him. He takes out a notebook and flips a few pages and studies whatever is written there. “So you knew Rick Goody,” he begins. “Where did you know him from?” He looks up.

Thomas recites the answer automatically: “I knew him years ago, in Tacoma, where we both grew up.”

“I checked with the motel before I came up to your room. You gave them a Canadian driver’s license number. And you didn’t register as Frank DeMarco.” MacEwan looks across at him for a few seconds. “But you do live in Canada,” he says.

Thomas nods, shifting in his chair so that the cutting sensation is eased. “I moved up there a long time ago.”

“You were an American citizen?” At another nod from Thomas, MacEwan asks, “And you’re a Canadian citizen now? For how long?”

“I’ve been up there about thirty years. Twenty as a citizen.” The afterthought of the lie seems to come easily. He relaxes a little.

“You were pretty young then. A lot of young guys were going up there at that time to avoid the draft.” MacEwan raises his eyebrows.

“That wasn’t me,” Thomas says.

“So maybe you just liked it up there.” MacEwan smiles.

Thomas nods again.

“You have a passport with you?”

Thomas doesn’t own a passport, and he isn’t sure of the implications of that, of not carrying one on foreign soil, so to speak. The recognition of that

fact makes his stomach turn over. "I didn't bring it," he says.

"You really should carry it when you travel to another country. But, technically, you don't need it down here. Do you mind if I take a look at that driver's license?"

Thomas slips the license from his wallet and hands it to MacEwan, who takes it and copies some information into his notebook.

"Michael Park," MacEwan says, handing the license back. He studies Thomas with a smile. "You have a beard in the picture, but you can still see it's you. Why did you tell Matt Matthews your name was Frank DeMarco? Why would you do that?" The idea seems to amuse him.

"I just thought it would be better. I don't know Matthews, you know? And Rick Goody had just died." Thomas shrugs, trying to appear casual about it—no big thing. "I made up a name."

"Maybe you figured, what business is it of his who you are, right?" MacEwan offers back. "Well, there's no law against it." He looks down at his notebook. "So, you're about the same age as me," he says. "That would mean you were about nineteen or twenty when you emigrated. If that's the right word." He looks at Thomas uncertainly. "I can never remember if it's immigrate or emigrate when you go in that direction. Were you ever in the service, Army, Marines? Before you emigrated?" A wry expression crosses his face at his second use of the word. "Here in the states? Or in Canada?"

"No." Thomas says, too hastily it seems, feeling like he's being led inexorably down a path. He asks, "You're investigating Rick Goody's death, isn't that right?"

"That's right."

"It was accidental, a drug overdose, so I heard."

"Who told you that?" MacEwan asks.

Too late he realizes that Matthews never mentioned it. It was the East Indian woman at Rick's motel. "I went to see Rick's father, in Tacoma," Thomas says. He might as well, at this point. "Since Rick and I were friends. A drug overdose is what he said the Seattle Police told him about his Rick's death."

MacEwan nods, looking over at him.

"He said a detective came to his house. Was that you by any chance?"

"It was another detective."

Thomas tries this: "Why the investigation then if it was an overdose?"

"A fair question." MacEwan spreads his hands before him. "A toxicology report estimated that Rick Goody had somewhere around 1500 milligrams of heroin in his blood stream, which might be enough to kill you

or me. It might not kill an addict with a built up tolerance like Mr. Goody's. But he also had a quantity of alcohol in his system, enough to make him legally drunk in most states. Heroin mixed with alcohol is a deadly combination."

"He wasn't an addict, though."

"What makes you say that?" MacEwan asks.

"I don't know. I just think it."

"I can understand that, since you were his friend." MacEwan nods. "But the fact is, he was an addict. He had enough needle tracks on him to tell us that. So, we believe his death was accidental. He'd been drinking, and he probably made a mistake cutting the heroin, because he was drunk. There were no prints on the syringe but his. The thing was still in his hand. A half a bottle of bourbon was on the nightstand, along with his kit. So we think he just shot up and then nodded off. We believe that to be true. Nothing to tell us otherwise."

"So what are you investigating?" Thomas asks.

MacEwan purses his lips. "Matt Matthews wants me to believe Rick Goody might've been murdered. I'm a friend of Matt's and I told him I would look into it. By the way, are you a user?"

Thomas looks at the detective.

MacEwan smiles amiably. "Would you mind showing me your arms?"

Thomas pushes up both sleeves of his jacket and lays his arms on the table for MacEwan to look at.

Glancing down, MacEwan says, "Okay. I had to ask." He looks back down at the notebook. "You said you didn't go to that motel where Rick Goody was staying." Again he recites the name of the place. He looks back up. "And you didn't tell them you were Goody's brother. Right?"

"That's right."

MacEwan shrugs. "Somebody did."

"It wasn't me."

"But you told Matt Matthews you'd seen Rick at the motel. Was that true?"

"I told him that, but it wasn't true. I got a call from Rick, that was all."

"Then how did you find out he was dead?" MacEwan asks curiously.

"I got a call a few days later from someone else."

"Who would that be?"

The trouble with lying about one thing is that it leads to other lies that you can't foresee. "Billy Mendez." Thomas says, reciting the first name that comes into his mind, Mendez, late of The Company of Camp Alpha and

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Rick's AWOLs of Saigon. Billy won't mind. "We both knew Billy from when we were kids and I guess Rick kept in touch with him."

MacEwan writes something in his notebook. "So this Mendez phoned you and told you of Rick Goody's death. What did you do then?"

"I went to see Rick's father."

"And then you went to see Matt Matthews. Why did you want to see Matt?"

"Because Rick's message mentioned him. Him and Matthews used to be friends too, apparently."

MacEwan writes something else in his notebook. He studies Thomas. "Do you have this Billy Mendez's address?"

"Not with me. I have it written down, but it's at home."

"Phone number?"

Thomas shakes his head. "Same thing. It's at home. I can send it to you when I get back there." He adds, "He's from Monterrey, California." Adding at least that much truth to the story is somehow reassuring.

"California," MacEwan remarks. "I wonder how he found out about the death." He pauses, looking to Thomas for an answer. "By the way," he continues, "Rick Goody registered under another name at that motel where he died. Do you know why he would do that?"

"I don't know." Here it comes, Thomas thinks. In his head, he imagines the dialogue: *He usually went by another name, didn't he? Did you know he was a deserter from the Army? Is Michael Park actually your name? Isn't Thomas Kindred your real name?*

"Did you know he was using another name?" MacEwan asks.

"No."

"No?" MacEwan studies him again before going on. "Well, it doesn't matter then, does it?" He shrugs affably. "But I wish we knew who it was went there and posed as Rick Goody's brother, using this other name of his, of course. That would help me sleep better at night." He smiles brightly, and Thomas has the sinking sensation that MacEwan has been seeing right through his lies. He almost expects the detective to laugh out loud. "Rick Goody didn't have a brother," MacEwan says.

Thomas nods.

"Do you suppose it could have been this Billy Mendez?"

"I don't know, maybe."

"Maybe." MacEwan studies him. "And you have no idea why Rick Goody wasn't using his real name?"

"No."

MacEwan smiles. "Well, whoever this guy was that said he was the brother, he left with some of Goody's belongings." He gives Thomas a curious look. "It seems that they were forgotten when the body was removed. An officer went back there to retrieve them, and guess what? They were gone. And the woman there gives us this story about this brother. We didn't know what to think, you know what I mean? Especially because Rick Goody didn't have any brothers. It made us think."

Thomas involuntarily closes his eyes for a few seconds. When he opens them, MacEwan is giving him the same curious look.

"You look tired," MacEwan says. "Well, I just have a few more questions." He waits, looking across at Thomas. "So Rick called you. What did he say?"

"That he was here. He asked if I wanted to get together with him. We hadn't seen one another in years."

"I suppose that makes sense," MacEwan says. "Did he say anything else?"

"That he was scared."

"Scared of what?"

"He said he thought he was in some kind of danger."

MacEwan nods, studying him. "Well, that's what Matt Matthews said too." He looks away, chewing on his lip, and then turns his attention back to Thomas. "Do you know anything about this group that Rick Goody was involved with? An anti-war group? Did he tell you about them?"

"He mentioned them," Thomas says. All of this seems like some kind of game MacEwan is playing before finally revealing that he's known the answers all along. "I did some reading up on them," he adds. "I found a little bit about them at the library. And I got some of their pamphlets." Immediately, he realizes he's given too much away, mentioning the pamphlets that were among Rick's possessions from the motel. But maybe MacEwan won't know that much. Maybe he won't see the connection.

"And what did they say?" MacEwan says.

"It's just a political group," Thomas says.

MacEwan nods. "What kind of political?"

"Trying to get people to join the cause, organize protests, that sort of thing."

"Did you catch the author's name, in these pamphlets?" MacEwan asks, an innocent look on his face, as though he doesn't already know the answer. Thomas is suddenly weary. He wishes MacEwan would get it over with.

"Bill Haywood."

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MacEwan nods. "Matt Matthews gave me some of the guy's writings. After this thing with Rick Goody. Maybe they were the same things you read." He continues studying Thomas. "So what did you think of his ideas? This Bill Haywood. What did you think of what he wrote?"

Thomas isn't sure if this is an oblique attempt to trip up his story. "I don't think that he made a lot of sense," he says.

"He didn't make a lot of sense," MacEwan repeats. "You weren't in the service, right? You said that. This Bill Haywood was, though. Maybe you know that from reading his stuff."

Thomas looks at him.

"He was in Vietnam and he tried to start a revolt or something," MacEwan says. "So I've been told. They threw him in prison. Cowardice in the face of the enemy, I think it was." MacEwan's eyes are bright, and he has the tone of a person trying unsuccessfully to sound casual. "Matt Matthews told me all this. After your friend Rick Goody OD'ed."

MacEwan leans back and folds his arms. "I was over there myself, in Vietnam," he says. "It was a few years after Haywood. Phu Bai, First Marines, 1970. So was Matt Matthews. That's where we know one another. We were Marine Corps buddies. Haywood was there in '68, in the middle of the Tet Offensive. I missed that one, sorry 'bout that."

Thomas remembers the *sorry 'bout that*, and the way MacEwan just said it. Everyone used the expression over there, and it was always recited in a deadpan manner, in a way that made it plain that the person wasn't sorry about that at all.

MacEwan says, "Maybe you remember reading about the '68 Tet Offensive."

Thomas shakes his head. "I tried to avoid news of the war in those days."

"How did you avoid the service anyway? Those days, everybody was going in, mostly being drafted, unless they had an exemption."

"I had a medical deferment." Thomas says. "I got a draft notice, but a bad back kept me out."

"Lucky for you," MacEwan says. "So this Bill Haywood was in the Army, with the First Air Cavalry Division," MacEwan says. "They were in Hue City, along with the Marines, during the offensive. Other than the Marines at Khe Sanh, Hue City probably had the worst of it. Did you know Haywood isn't the guy's real name? I forget what it is, though."

"McGrew," Thomas says, as if he can't help himself. "Joseph McGrew."

"You must have read that," MacEwan says, with a look of surprise. "McGrew, right. I'd hate to think that's a Scottish name. My Scottish

ancestors would be rolling over in their graves.” He shows a sudden grin. “Maybe it’s Irish, I don’t know. Anyway, this McGrew or Haywood was just a grunt—or just a GI, I should say. Only a Marine can really be a grunt.”

MacEwan is apparently like the few ex-Marines Thomas has ever met: fiercely proud of the Corps and allowing nothing to sully the name.

“Anyway, McGrew,” MacEwan continues, “I heard he stood up in the middle of all this and tried to get his buddies to quit fighting. Can you imagine that?” He stares at Thomas, looking as if he sincerely wants to know. “I mean, how did that really happen? I try to picture it, this guy, a scared nineteen or twenty-year old GI. Or maybe he wasn’t even scared. Maybe he already had the courage of his convictions, who knows? Or maybe he believed enough to die for his ideas. That part I’d have to take on faith, though.

“But how did it actually take place?” MacEwan continues. “Did the guy stand up there, with bullets flying around his ears, and tell his fellow GIs to revolt against what was happening to them? I don’t know.” He shrugs. “But let’s say it did happen that way.” He leans across the table, and it’s suddenly like they’re having a friendly discussion about the war, all they need is a couple of beers. Thomas feels the urge to join in the talk.

“What would have happened,” MacEwan says, “if his fellow GI’s had listened to him and thrown down their weapons and refused to fight?” He pauses, looking wide-eyed at Thomas. “I’ll tell you. They would have been overrun by the NVA, and they would have been killed. Or they would have been arrested and sent to the stockade. And they would have been replaced with soldiers who would be too scared to do anything else but fight.” MacEwan finishes this last with an ironic look. He seems to relax then.

“Even if it didn’t happen that way,” MacEwan says, the amiable smile back on his face. “Even if the moment took place in a rear area or in a foxhole during a lull, those guys—McGrew’s fellow soldiers—must have looked at him like he’d lost his marbles.”

All of this seems to be personal with ex-Marine MacEwan. Thomas, almost as if to reassure him, says, “I read something about it, but it didn’t go into any details.”

“Well, the guy had to be a little nuts, don’t you think?”

Automatically, Thomas states a thought that pops into his mind: “Maybe it takes a crazy man to come up with an idea like that. Everybody’s against war, but nobody wants to do anything about it.”

“It’s a pretty thought, that,” MacEwan says. “Not a very practical one though.”

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Thomas continues, "Haywood just wants to eliminate war. What could be more practical?" Suddenly, he's back in college, at the Student Union, having a philosophical discussion.

MacEwan smiles at him and says nothing.

"Well," Thomas backtracks, "in the way the real world actually works, maybe the ideas aren't practical. But idealistically." His voice trails off.

"Yeah, the real world," MacEwan repeats. "It was North Vietnam who invaded the South, remember? You can't just let that happen. Our mistake in going in there was we didn't finish the job. You know what used to make me sick?" he asks. "Back then, people used to root for the VC and the NVA, like they were the ones who were right and we were wrong. How did that happen? They started it, right? And they were the ones who used Cambodia as a sanctuary, and then when we bombed them there, people blamed us." Another look of outrage has come over MacEwan's face. "And you know what else? We didn't lose that war, like you always hear anymore. We just left. The real problem was, we never tried winning it. It's like we didn't care."

Billy Mendez, Thomas recalls, had said almost the same thing at a gathering of The Company of four in the Camp Alpha EM club: nobody cares.

"Did Matthews tell you he's been sick," MacEwan says, changing subjects abruptly.

Thomas looks at him. "He mentioned something, nothing specific."

"Yeah. A little gift from Vietnam. Hepatitis C. They've been discovering it in more and more guys that were over there. It's lucky you weren't over there. It can stay dormant in your system for twenty, twenty-five years, before it becomes active."

"What can it do?" Thomas asks, an uneasy feeling worming itself into his head.

"Hepatitis C? Destroy your liver. Cause cancer. Kill you. It's lucky Matt's was discovered in a routine physical. He didn't even feel sick. When he told me about it, I went right to the doc's to get checked out myself. I was okay, though."

"Matthews didn't have any symptoms?"

"Nope, no symptoms. He's sick now, but that's from the treatments he's taking. They have all kinds of side effects." MacEwan leans back then, a smile returning to his face. "But that's all ancient history, isn't it?" He consults his notebook for a moment. "Just one other thing. Did you know the woman who was staying with Rick Goody at that motel? Matthews said you

mentioned her name. Angela something.”

Just like that, they’re back in the interrogation. Thomas wants to go on with the previous discussion, even if it was one-sided. “Rick mentioned her. I didn’t know she was staying there though.”

MacEwan nods his head in an absent way. “Anyway, she seems to have disappeared. But they told us at the motel there was a woman sometimes staying with Goody.” He leans back and opens a drawer of the file cabinet in the corner, producing a Polaroid camera. “I just need this last thing for my files, and then you can go,” he says, startling Thomas with the sudden flash of the camera and then tearing off the piece of film that rolls out of it with a buzz.

By the time MacEwan finally tells him he can go, directing him downstairs to wait for a patrolman to drive him back to the motel, Thomas realizes that nothing is going to come of this, at least for now. The whole time he’s been waiting to hear the innocent question, *are you Thomas Kindred?* But they apparently don’t know anything about any of that, or at least aren’t letting on. And maybe they don’t care, even if they do know. Nobody cares, like his father said and Matthews said and even Billy Mendez said all those years ago. Thomas stands and MacEwan steps around the table to get the door, and the tension leaves the room just like that.

There’s the other thing too: there was no mention of Rick being wanted in any connection with the death of Freddie Hopper.

Thomas waits downstairs, out of the way, in another uncomfortable straight-backed chair, until a young patrolman approaches him.

The patrolman leads him outside to a squad car and drives him back to the motel. They’re a silent twosome, the patrolman up front driving and Thomas in the back. He is dropped off in front of the motel and climbs the outside stairs and is safely back in his room, immediately sitting on the end of the sagging bed, the first place available, which faces the bureau with the attached mirror. He looks at the image of himself sitting there, studying the face as if it belongs to someone else.

Chapter Thirteen

There is still the matter of the lies he told Detective Dan MacEwan, and there is the Polaroid snapshot MacEwan surprised him with at the end. He can guess what that was for—to show to the woman at Rick’s motel. MacEwan probably hadn’t believed him when he said he never posed as Goody’s brother and made off with his worthless belongings. Maybe MacEwan knew the answer to each question before he asked it. So why would he let him go? Well, technically MacEwan didn’t have anything to hold him on. He said the police believed Goody’s OD was accidental. And the status of Rick Goody and Thomas Kindred, Army deserters, is either unknown to them or they just don’t care.

Still, there is a dead body and now a Seattle detective is considering Thomas with more than benign interest and maybe flashing his picture around and wondering why his story doesn’t add up. Time to get out of town and forget about whatever it was he thought to accomplish here.

He checks out of his motel and walks a half-dozen blocks carrying his AWOL bag until he finds another, similar motel where he spends a sleepless night. The next morning, after checking out of that one, he proceeds straight to the bus station, not sure where he’s going next. Scanning the bus schedules, he considers one last thing before leaving and stashes his bag in a locker and, under an overcast morning sky, hikes back to Matt Matthews’ apartment building near the university.

Inside, he rings Matthews’ bell. A voice squawks back at him from the tinny-sounding speaker, asking who it is.

Matthews probably knows Thomas’s real assumed name by now. “Frank DeMarco,” he answers. That should make Matthews wonder.

The inner door buzzes open and Thomas climbs the two flights of stairs. Matthews is waiting in his doorway, with the door flung wide this time, wearing the same outfit as yesterday of jeans and tee shirt beneath the striped robe and oversized slippers on his feet, holding the apparently ever-present smoking butt of a cigarette between the fingers of one hand. He eyes Thomas. “Sorry about yesterday. You didn’t tell me who you really were.”

“No, I guess I didn’t.”

“But now I know,” Matthews says, with a little smile. “I talked to MacEwan.”

He stands slumped in the doorway. His clothes appear too big for him,

and there are wrinkles of loose flesh under his eyes, as if he's had a recent weight loss. There's a pallor to his face. "Michael Park," he says. "Yeah, right. MacEwan told me who you said you are, and that you're from Canada. I put that together with what I got from Goody."

"Which was what?" Thomas asks.

"The thing is, I know who you really are. You were with Goody over there." He gestures with his head, as if at something behind him. "In Vietnam."

This isn't something Thomas wants to hear. He considers turning around and leaving.

"Rick told me about you. Don't worry, I didn't tell MacEwan." There's a minute of mutual staring, and then Mathews continues, "I only saw Rick the one time on this trip. All he said about you was you were supposed to be coming down from Canada to save him or something. Guess that didn't work out."

"He was already dead when I got there."

"So you never got to see him after all. Sorry 'bout that," Mathews recites the old Vietnam refrain.

Thomas nods. "Sorry 'bout that."

"You know, you would've saved yourself a lot of trouble if you'd just told the truth in the first place."

Thomas stands in the dank hallway, his nostrils beginning to itch from the commingled odors of stale air and cigarette smoke.

"I don't even know your real name," Mathews says after taking another drag, so that smoke trails from his mouth along with the words. "I don't think Goody ever told anybody that much. But there are other people who know about you too. That's not such a bad thing. Let's leave it at that, okay?"

"What other people?"

Mathews looks irritated as if he's said enough on the subject.

Thomas glances past Mathews into the apartment. "Do you mind if I come in?"

"I still don't know what you're doing here," Mathews says. But he steps aside, making room for Thomas to enter.

The extent of the apartment appears to be one large, dimly lit room. There's a stuffy, closed-in smell to the place. The only two windows evident are both closed. A narrow, unmade bed sits against one wall and a couch and coffee table occupy the opposite wall. In a corner of the room, a television set is tuned to a news station on the coffee table, with the sound turned down so that the newsreader's words are a barely distinguishable murmur. A small

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sink and a refrigerator/stove combination take up another corner, and a table and chairs are set between the two windows to the outside world. The shades are drawn, lending a dimness to the room. A partially open door reveals a tiny bathroom.

Turning back, he sees that Matthews is still holding on to the knob of the open door as if it's holding him up. "You knew Rick from where?" Thomas asks.

"From years ago, right here in Seattle. He came here on an organizing trip. I was one of the ones he organized."

"Organized for what?"

"For the movement," Matthews says.

"You mean the ISW movement?"

"Those are the guys." Matthews nods.

"He was an organizer?" Thomas shakes his head. "I didn't think he had it in him."

Matthews finally closes the door and stands with his back to it. "He did. He was a real believer. An evangelist. He got me to join. I was ready, though, given the fucked up nature of this world." He gives Thomas a long, somber stare.

"You believe Goody was killed?"

"I don't know, maybe. I know he was afraid of them."

Thomas considers this. "He was afraid of who?"

"His friends."

"The ISW?" Thomas says.

"The movement. That's them. He told you about them, obviously."

"I read about them."

"Well, whatever you read ain't what they're about anymore. They're into something different these days."

"Like what?"

"Just different, that's all," Matthews says, the irritated look back on his face. "I don't belong to them anymore. I quit over all that and so did Goody, or tried to anyway. So did Fred Hopper."

Thomas wonders how much really Matthews knows. "What about Fred Hopper?"

"I never met him." Matthews shakes his head. "He was from New York and I've never been there. That's one thing that made me wonder about you yesterday when you said Goody knew me from New York."

"Wonder what?"

"Goody dies and you show up asking questions, and it's obvious you're

lying. Then you ask about Angela. She found Goody dead and came over here later, scared. And then you come around asking about her. And I didn't know who you were."

"You think these guys killed Hopper?" Thomas asks.

"I don't know. Maybe. Goody thought so. That's what he said anyway. And he thought they were after him next."

"For what?"

"For blowing the whistle on their operation, I would imagine. He wasn't too clear about that, but that's what it must have been."

"He never told you more than that?" Thomas says. "Like maybe he didn't trust you either?"

Matthews makes a sour face. "I only saw him the one time, when he first got here a few weeks ago. He came here, acting real nervous, and he didn't stay long."

"You never went to see him over at that motel?"

"You ask a lot of goddamn questions," Matthews says. "I'd throw your ass out if you weren't a friend of Goody's. To answer your question, no, I never went there. I haven't been out much lately." He makes a sudden move past Thomas toward the table between the windows. "I got to get off my feet." He plops down in the chair and slumps forward, resting his arms on the table.

Thomas takes the chair opposite Matthews. "Detective MacEwan told me you've been sick," he says.

"Are you two guys buddies all of a sudden?" Matthews says, the peevish look still on his face." He seems to commiserate with himself for a moment. "It's a bitch," he says. "I go in for a routine physical and they discover I got Hepatitis C. I felt fine, but they say I got it anyway. From the 'Nam twenty-some years ago." He looks up at Thomas. "You were over there, right?"

Thomas can't find it in him to lie anymore. Besides, Matthews apparently already knows. "Yeah, I was there."

"Then you better get tested for it. It can be in your system for years before showing up."

He doesn't want to hear this, just like with MacEwan, but he asks anyway, "How do you get it?"

Matthews shrugs. "Blood transfusion, from the water, from screwing a whore without a condom? Did you screw any whores over there?"

Dailin was the only woman he'd been with over there. But she wasn't a whore, was she? She always insisted on that, even though she had her special customers from time to time. But if she hadn't been a whore, what would you

call it? A sudden image of her, an old lady now if she is still alive, enters his head. She would be less than fifty, but women seemed to age faster over there. She would probably look something like their old cook with the betel-stained teeth. Jesus. “No, not really,” he answers.

“Not really? Then you’re probably one of the few guys who didn’t.” Matthews looks down at the cigarette in his hand and then brings it to his lips and takes a deep drag. A long ash hanging from its end falls unheeded onto his robe. “Anyway, now I feel like shit from the treatment, but they tell me I’m getting better. Go figure that. When I feel okay, they say I’m sick, and now that I feel like death they say I’m getting over it. But I guess I’m one of the lucky ones. About half the time the treatment doesn’t work, they say.”

“What’s the treatment?” Thomas asks, curiosity getting to him now.

“I give myself Interferon injections three times a week. That’s the fun part. And I take Ribavirin capsules every day.” Matthews holds up one hand, ticking off on his fingers. “The side effects make you feel like crap. Tired all the time, nauseous, feel like I have the flu, can’t eat, diarrhea when I do shit, my skin itches, the whole nine yards. Then there’s depression. Who wouldn’t be depressed?”

“Sorry,” Thomas says.

“Yeah, sorry ‘bout that,” Matthews says. “Anyway, I’ll be through with it in another month or so, they tell me.”

“Was Rick sick with it too?”

“No, he didn’t have it. And he was lucky because he was a user, and that’s a good way to get it, sharing needles with other users.”

He still has a hard time imagining Rick as a junky, just the way he can’t get over the fact of Rick Goody as an anti-war organizer. He can’t imagine Rick ever having that much imagination, which is a crazy thought, he realizes, as if it takes imagination to be an addict. “I have a hard time believing he was a user,” he says.

“Believe it, he was. But I don’t think he was stupid enough to share needles.”

“So why couldn’t he have just OD’ed himself, like the police think?”

“I don’t know, maybe. But I just don’t believe it.” Matthews smiles. “It’s too convenient.”

“So how did it happen otherwise?”

“Somebody, one of his junkie buddies, mixes him an uncut dose, I would imagine. It’s simple.”

“There were no fingerprints on the syringe except Rick’s.”

Matthews shrugs.

Stephen Hazlett

“Why would anybody want to do that?” Thomas asks.

“Maybe they were under orders.”

“From who?”

“Maybe his friends back in New York.”

“His friends, like Bill Haywood?”

“Yeah, you heard about him too,” Matthews says. “But, it probably wouldn’t have been him anyway. Him and Goody were close. Besides, Haywood’s not even running things anymore, I hear. He’s a figurehead, you know? Either that, or maybe he’s dead too.”

Matthews relates the story to Thomas, as much as he can piece together. The night Goody died, Angela came to see Matthews at his apartment, acting scared, telling him she’d found Goody dead, with his drug kit still laid out on his nightstand. “Yeah, she was scared, but maybe not that scared. Like she’d been expecting it.”

“What did she say happened?”

“She didn’t know, except what she saw. I don’t think she bought my conspiracy theory, if that’s what it is.”

But she knew it didn’t look too good for her, Matthews tells it. She wanted to get out of town, but she came to Matthews first to tell him before leaving that night, on her way to San Francisco.

“Did you tell Dan MacEwan about her?” Thomas asks.

“I never told him this part, what I just told you. He doesn’t need to know everything.”

“What’s in San Francisco?” Thomas asks.

“Don’t you know when to stop?” He gives Thomas a sour look. “San Francisco was one of the original chapters of the movement. They split from New York and Chicago.”

“Split, why?”

“Because they’re still pure, like in the old days.” Matthews makes a tired face, obviously weary of this conversation.

“And New York and Chicago aren’t?” Thomas persists.

“Depends on who you talk to.” Matthews lights another cigarette from the stub of the one he’d been smoking and crushes out the remnant in an overfull ashtray.

Thomas waits for him to elaborate.

“They’re all still for the same things,” Matthews goes on. “It’s just that they don’t all agree on the methods anymore.”

Matthews sits staring at the floor and smoking in silence while Thomas

watches him, thinking that maybe he should leave. He's about to gather himself to do that when Matthews looks up at him, crushing his current butt out. He spreads both hands in a gesture of explaining.

There was this thing going on, he tells Thomas, that started out as a small operation in the New York chapter, more like a joke played against the military than anything else. But it did help to finance the movement's operations. A younger guy in the New York chapter, Joe Buckner, one of the officers, got the idea, and it seemed clever at the time.

Matthews explains: "The chapters are organized, more or less, along military lines. After a fashion, they have enlisted members, and they have officers. The enlisted members are usually the volunteers who drop in and drop out. The officers are the *permanent party*, so to speak." Matthews smiles at his own use of the military phrase, elaborating: the movement had always recruited among Armed Forces personnel, almost exclusively among the enlisted ranks.

"Common soldiers are always prime targets," Matthews says. "For two reasons: one is that they have the most to lose in any war, and they know it, so they can get real interested in the movement; and two, they can do the most good, being behind enemy lines, so to speak."

Having soldiers in the movement, he tells Thomas, gave them access to arsenals of weapons. Nobody had ever thought what that meant before. It just never occurred to anybody that it meant anything. Why should it? The weapons were part of the problem that the movement was trying to eliminate. But this Joe Buckner had an idea about that. Why not quietly eliminate some of these weapons, at the same time funneling them to where they could do the most good?

They had a sergeant on the inside at an Army weapons depot in Massachusetts. He started stealing some of the weapons in a modest way, mostly M16 assault rifles and ammunition. That was the easy part. The weapons just disappeared, especially during shipments in or out of the depot, and paperwork was doctored. The Army was more lax about these things than people knew, especially when the rifles were surplus. Then, and this was the good part, the rifles were sold to right-wing militia groups operating in New York State and New England. The movement had always maintained some relationship with the local militia groups, even if they were on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

"They had certain things in common with us, even though you might not think so," Matthews says.

The rifles were also sold, Matthews continues, in small lots, to drug-

dealing gangs in the greater New York area. That part of it seemed a little unsavory, but so what, so the thinking went, as long as it was for the greater good. The upshot of it was, they were stealing from the military, helping in that small way to disrupt it. In turn, they were feeding the anarchist groups—even if some of those groups, such as the gangs, didn't think of themselves that way—that were actively working to bring the system down, that being the system that ultimately fed the machine of war. The irony of it was beautiful. Everyone thought so, at first, even Bill Haywood, who gave the operation his blessing.

At first, the militia groups were only mildly interested in the M16s. After all, it's not that tough to get assault weapons in this country, better than the M16, which is a big, bulky weapon compared to some other ones. Good ones like the UZI or the MP5 are a little harder to come by, but the TEC-9, for sure, is no problem. But when they found out that the movement also had access to other weapons caches—grenades and grenade launchers, even land mines, Claymores and machine guns—they got real interested.

“Every organization has its militant side,” Matthews says, lighting another cigarette and blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling. Matthews, seated across from Thomas, has lifted the window shade next to him and sunlight slants in on him, and he moves the muscles of his back like a cat sunning itself in the warmth. “Usually it's the younger ones, and that's the way it was in New York. The younger ones, like Joe Buckner, wanted action instead of marches for peace, that sort of thing.”

They organized a commando-style raid, Matthews tells him, on the depot in Massachusetts, without any of the higher-ups knowing about it. They formed a raiding party, about half from the movement and half from this New York State militia group, cutting through the wire late one night, the guys all dressed in black with blackened faces, real dramatic stuff. They overpowered a couple of guards, stole a few trucks and loaded them up with all kinds of weapons and ordinance. “You must have read about it in the papers,” Matthews says. “It was about a year ago.” Thomas shakes his head.

Anyway, the raid wasn't quite successful. They made off with the weapons and ordinance, but one of the militia members was shot and killed, and his body was left behind. “Those guys didn't quite have the discipline they claimed,” Matthews says, a disdainful look on his face. “A good unit never leaves behind its dead.”

So, even though the movement was never implicated, because it was a dead militia member left behind, the raid sent shock waves through the leadership, who found out about it after the fact. Bill Haywood gave the order

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that the weapons procurements had to stop. That was that, so everybody thought.

But it wasn't. That same militant faction in the New York chapter, led by Joe Buckner, decided to go into another business. The others back there who knew about it more or less turned a blind eye to it. After all, it helped finance operations. As an organization, the movement has always had financial problems.

"Being against war just on principle was never all that glamorous," Matthews says.

They started buying drugs wholesale, and they used street kids to sell it, kids who were attracted to the movement in that way that some kids are, all idealistic, anything is okay as long as it's against the establishment. They made sure the kids were underage, so nothing much would happen to them if they were caught selling, and they shielded themselves from the kids with middlemen. "It was all very professional."

Hearing all this, Thomas still can't get used to the idea that Rick was a wheel in this organization.

At first, Matthews explains, Goody, who was in New York at the time and, in fact, was one of the higher ups there, ignored the petty dealing. It didn't involve him, and he figured, whatever helped the movement couldn't be all bad. "He was probably naïve at first," Matthews says. "I think he was always a little too innocent for his own good."

Matthew continues with the tale, chain-smoking his way through it. After a while, these guys discovered they could import the stuff themselves, heroin and cocaine mostly, from the middle east by way of Germany, through some members they'd recruited from the military who were stationed over there.

They branched out after that, mostly in the New York and Chicago areas. It sent alarms throughout the entire organization, Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, New Orleans.

Mostly it was younger members who were behind the dealing. They saw that it gave the movement a new way to expand, not like the old days where everything was run on a shoestring. The older ones, guys like Goody and Hopper, and Bill Haywood of course, opposed it on moral grounds. What kind of a movement, professing itself to be against war and killing on humanistic grounds, could finance its operations by dealing drugs? It would either fall apart or cease to operate as an organization. Or it might change, become something unrecognizable from its former self.

The central committee, of which Goody was a member and headed by Bill Haywood, called for an end to it. And then something happened. Or

rather, nothing happened. The drug operations went on as before in New York and Chicago. There wasn't anything more heard from Bill Haywood on the subject. The other chapters didn't know what to do.

"Two of the chapters split off," Matthews says. "Here in Seattle and the one in San Francisco. San Francisco made a formal announcement, that they were going their own way because of philosophical differences. They've probably changed their name to something else too."

"What happened after that?" Thomas asks.

"With New York and Chicago? Who really knows? What I think is, these younger guys in New York and Chicago just took over the operation completely, not just the drugs. And Haywood went along with it for whatever reason. Maybe he couldn't stop them. Maybe he's not around anymore, I don't know. But nobody's heard from him."

"And what happened with Goody?"

"Like I said, he probably tried to shut them down himself. He was a very idealistic guy. You probably knew that, knowing the guy."

"No, not really," Thomas says.

Matthews give him an ironic look. "Well, that's what I figured happened anyway. Him and Fred Hopper tried to shut them down. And then Hopper winds up dead, and Goody takes of and winds up here. And then he's dead too."

"Tried shutting it down how?" Thomas asks. "By calling the cops?"

"Maybe. Who knows?"

"And Freddie got killed."

"That seems to be the idea."

"And Goody came here after that because he thought it was safe?"

"That and because of Angie. Angela. They were an item at one time."

A look from Thomas launches Matthews into another tale. Listening, Thomas gets the feeling that this guy, despite his illness and his weary demeanor, has been starved for company, someone to talk to.

Years ago, Matthews explains, Angela Price came with Goody from New York, when Goody was here on his organizing trip. She was like his lieutenant, but they were sleeping together too. The story he got on Angela was she was from a rich family in New York City. She was living the bohemian life there and she was attracted to left wing causes. A pretty familiar story. She joined the movement and slept her way through almost the entire New York membership, including Goody. It must have been his turn, when the organizing trip to Seattle came up, and that's why she went along. At least, that much Matthews surmised at the time. Goody was probably

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more interested in her than she was in him, and he always got this look on his face when he was around her.

“Like a puppy dog,” Thomas says, remembering the look.

“That’s it,” Matthews says.

Angela was a restless girl, apparently. She never stayed with anybody very long. Matthews heard that she and Goody split after returning to New York, and then she drifted off. That’s what he heard anyway.

“And now she’s in San Francisco,” Thomas says.

“Allegedly. Though you never know with Angela.” Matthews blows a few lazy smoke rings across the room. The smoke is thick in the apartment by now, and Thomas feels the urge to sneeze.

“What’ll she do there?”

“I don’t know. Hook up with the local chapter there, I would guess.”

“Was she part of the drug dealing back east?”

“I don’t know. Hard to tell with Angela. I doubt it though. She wouldn’t be welcome in San Francisco if she was.”

“Do they have an address?” Thomas asks, thinking at the same time that San Francisco is where Dave Levy has his practice and where Carmen likely went, ostensibly to see her son. He has to think for a moment to recall the kid’s name: Nathan.

“Does who have an address?” Matthews asks, brought back from his reverie.

“The San Francisco chapter.”

Matthews eyes Thomas through the smoke, the ever-present cigarette dangling from his mouth.

Chapter Fourteen

San Francisco was his destination the one time before, in '68, when that long flight across the Pacific didn't want to end, as though the destination really didn't exist, when he sat in that plane for the long hours of the flight and then pressed his face against the plane's porthole when the word filtered through that they were getting close. He was trying to see ahead as they got closer, and he wasn't the only one. He could hear the excited talk around him of others that had been away too long.

Finally, there was the long, gray shape ahead that he couldn't be sure was land or just a low cloud on the water. It grew and became a landmass, the muted greens and browns forming irregular patterns. As they flew over the coastline, he could see the thin white line of breaking water at its edge. Then the land was below the plane, and there was the image out the window, as they banked, of the glistening bay, flanked by cities on both sides, with green hills in the background.

It wasn't like coming home though, back then. He wandered through the airport, watching people going about their business around him without noticing him, and he thought that they *should* notice somehow. The place seemed sterile and antiseptic after Ton Son Nhut, and when he stepped outside the terminal building he could see rows of cookie-cutter houses lining the hills to the west. The people in those houses didn't care; they didn't know him. If he stopped one of the people hurrying around him to their cabs or their waiting cars and tried to explain about Dailin or Cong Ly Street or Private Dale or any of the rest of that, they would only shy away from him, as if he was something to be avoided, and move on.

He was tired from the long flight, and he began to experience a strange floating sensation, and his limbs and his fingertips and toes were expanding and becoming huge and ponderous. It must have been the jet lag and the stress of the moment, he realized dimly. Then he spotted two MPs through the plate-glass windows, sauntering along inside the terminal, and he knew that they didn't care anything about him either. They would simply haul him away if they knew who he was. It snapped him back into the moment, and he went looking for a plane to take him away.

This time, the first inkling of what San Francisco holds in store for him comes as the bus lurches through the traffic on the city's South-of-Market

streets, approaching the Transbay Terminal. Thomas is staring out the window, wondering why bus terminals always have to be in the seedy parts of town, when he spots a billboard ahead. As they pass beneath it and he glances up, he is startled by what he sees and ducks his head for a better look through the window. Recalling what Carmen had told him after the aborted side trip to see her son—that Dave Levy had his face on billboards all over Seattle—Thomas can hardly believe what he is reading on this one sailing on by above him. Immediately he thinks of it as some kind of sign, which is what it is, really, a huge sign advertising the law practice of Dave Levy, Carmen's ex-husband. What a way to be greeted to this place.

The bus parks with a sigh from its brakes as though, along with its passengers, it too is happy the twenty-hour trip is over. Grabbing his AWOL bag, Thomas walks outside the terminal and back down the street to stare up at the big sign that exhorts the city below in huge letters, *Auto Accident - DWI - We Can Help - Call Us Today*. Spread across what must be six feet of the billboard is a smiling face, with *Dave Levy, Attorney* printed beneath. Levy is handsome and dark-haired and distinguished. He appears to be in his late-forties, around Thomas's age, his hair graying at the sides, and a big mustache arching over a friendly grin. The huge face stares back down at Thomas, the crinkled eyes and the hair combed just so and the insincere smile that reminds him of LBJ.

Returning to the terminal, he seeks out a phone book and finds the listing in the business section: Dave Levy, Attorney, with a Sansome Street address. He checks the residential listings and finds another: David Levy, on Sea Cliff Avenue. He writes that address down too. Carmen could be there now. Probably is. Where else would she be?

He sets off in a direction away from the Bay and toward a cluster of tall buildings. A passerby that he stops points him toward Market Street, directing him where to turn for Sansome Street, which, he tells Thomas, is only a few blocks south.

Several minutes walking in the bright sunshine brings him to a plain office building, perhaps ten or twelve stories high. He steps into the lobby, his heart thumping from the thought that he might actually run into Carmen here, turn a corridor and bump into her. What would he say? What would she? He spots a directory in the lobby and locates the name, *Dave Levy, Attorney*.

Somehow satisfied that his mission, if he really had one, was merely to scout out the location for future reference—he retreats outside and heads back in the direction he came, sure he will find cheap lodging in that seamy part of

the city.

In the fading afternoon light, he settles on a residential hotel on Harrison that advertises weekly rates. After trudging up the stairs to his fourth floor room, he opens the door and looks in at a sagging bed and tiny nightstand and scuffed chest-of-drawers. The nightstand has barely enough room for a lamp and a digital clock. In the bathroom, he pulls aside the shower curtain. A damp smell of mildew emanates from the tub, which is etched with rust marks from the leaky faucet. There's a chipped sink and a stained commode. The view out the single window next to the bed looks down on a narrow alley lined with garbage cans. His room in Seattle was plush in comparison.

A weight of weariness from the long bus ride is suddenly on him, now that he's stopped moving. He drops his AWOL bag on the floor and lies down on the bed without taking his clothes off and closes his eyes. Images of Carmen swim briefly into his head.

The next thing he is aware of is the light at the window. It seems brighter now. The clock on the nightstand shows that it's past o'clock. After a moment of pondering those contradictory facts, he realizes he has slept over thirteen hours and it is the next morning.

He showers, standing under a trickle in the mildew-smelling tub, and puts on clean clothes and brushes the foul taste from his mouth. Then, looking around uncertainly like someone checking the surroundings for something and not knowing what that might be, he opens the door and steps out into the hall. He descends the stairs, heading for whatever this city has to offer.

He has no actual plan. One thing would be to try to find the Sea Cliff Avenue address of the David Levy, but he doesn't know what he'd do if he went there. Another thing is the ISW office; he could go there. He has that address from Matt Matthews: Clement Street in the Richmond District. The old clerk at the front desk of the hotel tells him, while showing him on a foldout map, that the Geary Blvd. bus will take him out in that direction and Clement runs parallel to Geary, just one block north. Following the clerk's directions, he finds Geary Blvd. and boards the first bus. Watching the address numbers through the window, figuring them to parallel those of Clement Street, he stops the bus and gets off when the numbers are close.

After walking the one block down a side street, he scans both sides of Clement Street. It takes him a minute to spot the place, across the street and down toward the middle of the block. It could be nothing else, a plain storefront with a hand-lettered sign above the door proclaiming *Against All Wars (AAW)*—AAW sounding like an autoworkers union. Some blown-up

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photographs that he can't make out from the opposite sidewalk are displayed in the two large windows flanking the doorway. The place is set between a Chinese grocery and a hair salon.

Moving across the street through a break in the traffic, he steps up to one window. A photo there brings him a jolt of recognition: the one of the South Vietnamese national police chief about to execute the suspected VC, the '68 Tet Offensive scene that they played over and over back then on the televised news programs of the Armed Forces network. It's as familiar as if he'd just seen it yesterday, the police chief standing in profile with raised pistol pointed at the guy's head, the VC in checked shirt with his hands tied behind him, his grimace, either from the bullet having just entered his brain a split second before or from the anticipation of it. It all still looks the same.

A second photo, blown up to occupy half the window, shows a group of Vietnamese children running down a road. Central in this is a naked girl with arms outstretched, running straight at the camera, a cry frozen on her face and what look like burns on her body. Behind the children, walking in the opposite direction, is a group of American GIs, and you can't tell if they're coming from an action or going. Thomas studies this one for a minute and then scans the photos in the other window, one of a line of body bags waiting to be loaded onto a waiting C130 airplane, another of two GIs interrogating a kneeling Vietnamese at gunpoint. There are others that he doesn't even see. All the photos are apparently from Vietnam. He goes inside.

A middle-aged man with a worn face, wearing a baseball cap that says Vietnam Veteran, looks up from behind a desk. Thomas says the first thing that comes into his mind, "No Gulf War pictures," gesturing with his thumb at the windows behind him.

"We have those too," the man says, peering up at Thomas from under the brim of his cap, a friendly look on his face. "How you doing?" His eyes are flat, as if they aren't focused on anything.

"I thought this place was something else. ISW, wasn't it?"

"We changed our name," the man says.

"The whole organization changed names?"

The man hesitates. "No, just here in San Francisco."

A woman is bent over an open box in the corner of the office. She stands and looks his way. He knows immediately that it's Angela Price, it has to be—Matt Matthews had described her to him, big eyes, black hair done into a single braid hanging down to the middle of her back. Looking at her, his face flushes.

The woman brushes her hands together, smiling back at him. Her skin is

as white as skin ever gets in contrast to the black hair, and her eyebrows arch over her eyes in a quizzical way. She is wearing glasses and she looks at him over the tops. "Hi," she says.

She could be thirty or forty, or she could be even older. Maybe her hands give her away, the backs showing tiny wrinkles. But her fingers are chubby, like a child's. She is thin otherwise, but something about that is sexy, her snug pullover top revealing thin arms and shoulders and full breasts. Her jeans ride high and hang loose around her narrow waist, held up by the flare of her hips.

She approaches Thomas and holds out her hand. He takes it and she shakes his hand with her fingertips. "Can we help you?" she says.

"I guess I was just curious about this place," he says. "I thought I'd drop by."

She is perhaps six to eight inches shorter than him. "What do you think so far?" she says, peering up at him.

"Can't tell yet." He points to a poster on the wall. Across the bottom is printed, *International Soldiers of the World, Berkley Rally, 1983*. The picture above shows a man with long hair and rimless glasses standing behind a lectern, his face in a fervent moment caught in mid-sentence, obviously giving a speech. "Who's that in the picture?"

The woman turns to look. "Oh, that's old long hair Bill." She studies the picture with a critical smile. "Bill Haywood. He doesn't have much of that hair left now. He's kind of cute there though, don't you think?"

"The founder of the ISW, right?" Thomas says.

"Right," she says, turning back with the same smile.

His face still feels flushed. Maybe it's the reason she's smiling that way.

The man at the desk stands and walks around toward them. "Are you a veteran?" he asks.

"I guess it shows, huh?" Thomas says.

"I don't know if it shows," the man says. "We get a lot of veterans. Curious, most of them. You look about the right age for 'Nam."

"I'm afraid so," Thomas says. He might as well.

The man holds out his hand, and Thomas takes it, feeling the strength of his grip. "I'm Tony Burks," the man says. He smiles, creasing the worn flesh of his face, but the smile doesn't reach his walleyes. They seem to have a life of their own. "Where were you stationed?"

"I never got out of Saigon."

Tony Burks shrugs. "I never got out of Cam Ranh Bay. I was in supply the whole time, never saw any action. Doesn't matter. What's your name?"

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He seems friendly enough, except for the disconnected eyes.

“Michael Park,” Thomas says. Turning to the woman, he says, “You must be Angela?”

She looks at him over the tops of her glasses, the smile gone now. “How did you know that?”

“Matt Matthews from Seattle said I should look you up when I got down here.” He isn’t sure where he’s going with this.

“Matt, sure. How is Matt?” Her eyes seem to lose focus and slide away from his face.

“He’s getting better.”

“That’s good.” She shakes her head. “But how did you know who I was?”

“Matt gave a pretty good description.”

Rosy blotches appear on her white skin. “I hope he wasn’t too unflattering.”

“The opposite.”

She stares back at him.

“I also knew Rick Goody,” he adds.

Her mouth pulls down at the corners and she drops her eyes again. The blotches on her face spread fingers down the side of her neck.

Maybe he shouldn’t have blurted everything out like this. He goes on with it anyway. “I went to see Matt after Rick died. I thought he might be able to tell me something. He told me about you.”

“What did he tell you?”

“That you and Rick were close,” he says, and he recalls that Matthews also told him that she was the one who found Rick dead in his motel room. “I was coming down here anyway,” he finishes, glancing over at Tony Burks.

“Tony knows about Goody,” Angela says.

“Yeah, I heard,” Tony says. “Sorry ‘bout that.” His *sorry about that* sounds sincere. He holds out his hand again and gives Thomas another strong grip. “I never met him though.”

Angela looks around, frowning. The blotches on her face are fading by now. “You want to take a walk?” she says to Thomas, turning away to head for the door, looking back at him.

The sidewalk outside is busy with shoppers, mostly Asian, more women than men. There are shops on both sides of the street, several grocers with vegetable displays out onto the sidewalk, a hardware store, a barber, a Chinese restaurant on the corner and another across the intersection, other

storefronts he doesn't bother to notice. The two of them walk facing into a suddenly cool breeze. There are wisps of fog streaming across the sun, reminding him of Seattle. Angela has her arms folded beneath her breasts, pushing them up slightly, and he can see now that she wears no bra. She seems from another time, like the hippie girls of the '60s that he dimly remembers. She stops walking and stands with her feet apart, confronting him.

"Are you a cop?"

He wants to laugh but decides it wouldn't be a good idea. "Of course not. Why would you ask that?"

"Maybe I'm just the nervous type," she says, with a sardonic twist to her mouth. "I had to ask. So." She shrugs and starts walking again, looking down, her single braid swinging in rhythm with her walk. He moves in alongside her.

"I wanted to make sure you weren't one," she says, hugging herself against the cool breeze. "You'd have to tell me if you were. But I don't know how you could be anyway, not a local one. Not and know Matt. Maybe I'm just paranoid." She turns her head to eye him sideways. "You knew Goody from where?"

"From the Army years ago."

"Over there, obviously."

Thomas nods. "How long were you two friends?" he asks, recalling Matthews mentioning that she and Rick were lovers for a time.

"I don't know, ten years maybe." She turns her head slightly to peer up at him. "So you were really coming down here to Frisco anyway and just decided to stop by."

"Yeah, something like that." He jerks a thumb back in the direction they came. "What do they do back there? What do they do in that office?"

"This and that. Don't you know?"

"I read some things. I picked up some ISW literature. The philosophy and all. But what do you do after that? You set up an office, and then what?"

"Are you a believer?" She shows a pained smile. Maybe her corny expression has embarrassed her.

He shrugs, no idealist anymore, if he ever was one.

"We hold meetings there every second and fourth Tuesday of the month, at night," she says. "Tony does. He runs the place."

"What kind of meetings?"

"Recruiting. People see our flyers around town. We leave them at bookstores and coffee shops that'll let us. Most of them let us. And people

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come to the meetings and Tony does the talking. Sometimes he reads some of Bill Haywood's stuff."

"So it's the same movement except that they changed the name."

"It is and it isn't. Bill is still the founder, like God or something. Tony just decided to go his own way."

"So you recruit people at these meetings every second Tuesday. A lot of them?"

She gives him a sharp look, perhaps becoming annoyed at all his questions. "You might be surprised. This is a very *left-o* town."

"Sorry if I sound nosy," he says. "I'm just curious. So what else, other than every second and fourth Tuesday?"

She offers a half shrug with one shoulder. "The place isn't open all the time. But we print up flyers, organize rallies. We have one coming up next week at The Cow Palace."

"The Cow Palace?"

"It's like this huge barn or something. They're holding a gun-nut convention there. Gun dealers will be selling their wares, I suppose you'd call it. Anybody can go in and buy, so Tony says. He knows more about it than me."

Matt Matthews had told him how they were organized like the military, with ranks and a chain of command. He wonders if they have a TO&E, a Table of Organization and Equipment, like the Army. Out of nowhere he's thinking of Lieutenant Mira of the Replacement Company, wondering what he's doing now. Maybe hanging out at the VFW, getting drunk every night. "Is Tony an officer?" he asks.

"Yeah, he must be a general, at least," she says.

"And what are you?"

"I guess I'm just a soldier." She throws out her arms in a haphazard way, like a rag doll, and lets them drop at her sides.

"So what's *Against All Wars*," he enunciates the name, "what's the AAW, going to do at the Cow Palace?"

Again, her face takes on an annoyed look. "Picket, hand out flyers. Block the entrances, so people can't get in. That sort of thing, I would imagine."

"You have that many people?" He tries to picture it, a few dozen or so locking arms in front of an entrance to the place—*we shall overcome*—the cops brushing them aside. The name of the place, the Cow Palace, suggests someplace where they hold county fairs, with cows and pigs standing around in stalls bellowing and shitting.

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“Tony says we’ll have five hundred, maybe more,” she says. At his look, she adds, “They’re probably not all regular members. Most of them will be volunteers. Tony has a way of recruiting them, college kids a lot of them, even some in high school. Idealistic, you know? He might get as many as a thousand if he can talk a few of the other left-o political groups into coming.”

“Who would they be?”

“Anarchists, United Farm Workers. There are others.”

“Farm workers in San Francisco?”

She laughs. “You don’t know much, do you? It’s a union, all over the state. Cesar Chavez, remember? Mostly they’re for the migrant workers that come up from Mexico.”

“Why would they want to protest over gun sales?” he asks, not getting the connection.

“They’re for peace too. All they want is better pay and benefits, and to be left alone to live.”

They walk along in silence for a minute.

“So you’re from Seattle?” she asks, hugging herself tighter against the cool breeze. Her pullover top looks pretty thin.

“I live in Canada.”

She narrows her eyes and looks at him. “You’re from Canada and you knew Goody? You said your name is Michael, right?” She stops walking, causing him to stop as well, and she looks up at him. “Is your real name Tommy?”

He doesn’t answer.

“You’re him, aren’t you?” she says.

Him who? he wonders. But it’s obvious. She knows about him from Rick.

“Do you have any ID on you, a driver’s license?” she asks.

He pulls out his wallet and extracts the Canadian license and hands it to her between two fingers. She studies it. “It says Michael Park.” She looks up at him over her glasses in that way that’s already becoming familiar. “But you’re Tommy, aren’t you?”

What could it hurt at this point? He nods.

She hands the license back. She smiles, seeming to relax now. “Goody used to talk about you.” She drops the smile and starts walking again. “I’m as sorry as anybody about him. You know how he died, right?” she says, giving him another sideways glance.

He nods. “And you were the one that found him.”

“It scared the shit out of me.”

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“And that’s why you thought I might be a cop.”

She shrugs.

“And you thought the cops might be looking for you.”

“They could be.”

“But you don’t look too scared now.”

She stops again. “Let’s get out of this wind.” She leads him around the corner to a side street, but the stiff breeze seems to come swirling around after them. He realizes, remembering the map the hotel clerk showed him, that the breeze is coming off the ocean that edges up to this part of the city. “So why did you come here anyway?” she says.

It’s a good question, he thinks. “I’m not even sure. Maybe reliving old memories or something.”

“Good ones, I hope.”

“I can’t tell anymore,” he says. “I was here one time before.”

“Coming back from over there, right? Almost everybody came home from ‘Nam through Frisco. Or through Travis Air Force Base first, then here.” She narrows her eyes, studying him. “Goody said you helped him get out of ‘Nam.”

It is jarring to hear her slangily use the familiar abbreviation that he could never quite bring himself to utter when he was there. “Did he say anything else?”

“I don’t know, I guess that you were drinking buddies over there.”

“Did everyone know how he got out?”

She makes a face, her mouth twisting up on one side. “Of course, but that was a long time ago. Nobody cares now.”

So people keep telling him. “Did he used to worry about that?”

“I told him he didn’t have to. The important thing is he got out. So did you, apparently.”

“So he got out and into the movement,” he says. This seems a strange conversation, talking to this woman he’s never met before as if they are old friends.

“A good thing too. I don’t know if you know this, but other people in the movement heard about you too, from Goody. I mean, think about it. You were the first, at least as far as he was concerned. You didn’t make speeches or write manifestos, nothing like that. You just did it. What Bill’s always been preaching, you did. You wouldn’t let them use you anymore.”

But that wasn’t it, he thinks. That was never it. He lets out a sigh. “How many people know about me?”

She shrugs.

“Rick was an organizer or something, wasn’t he? I can’t quite picture that. He just wasn’t very bright.” Seeing her look change, he amends it, “Or maybe he was smart enough, but not a lot of common sense, if you know what I mean.”

“Well, yeah, I could see that. People say that about me too.” She laughs and reaches out, grabbing his arm as if to hold herself up against the wind. “What do you say we get out of this pneumonia hole?” she says, hugging herself again. “How about some lunch?”

He’s never had Cambodian food before, and he’s afraid it’ll be like Vietnamese, for which he never acquired a taste. The Nuoc Mam fish sauce that Dailin used to pour on everything always smelled like vomit to him. This, though, turns out to be different, chicken in spicy coconut milk sauce over rice. He hasn’t eaten since yesterday and he eats all of his and some of hers. She talks absently through the meal, sometimes remembering to pick at her food, and he gets a picture of her with Rick—he can see it. She seems to be a female version of Rick, if that were possible, with the same mix of brightness and scatterbrain. “Goody and I were lovers off and on,” she says out of nowhere. “You probably knew that.”

“Knew it how?” he says, his fork laden with food, poised halfway to his mouth.

“From Matt Matthews, I’d guess.”

He doesn’t give an answer, continuing to eat.

“Goody was too serious, you know what I mean?” she says, looking at him over her glasses.

He can’t picture that either, and he shakes his head.

“He took everything so seriously,” she says. “The movement was his life.”

He has to chew his food for a few seconds before he can ask, “Is it yours too?”

“I don’t know what my life is. Do you know yours?”

He blinks at the sudden insight of that.

“Anyway,” she says, “I think it’s what got him into drugs. His being so serious about everything. He had to do something to relieve the pressure.”

He has a sudden intuition that she isn’t really talking about Rick Goody. Maybe she’s talking about herself.

When they are finished, after coffee, she gets up and leaves the check for him. He pays it and follows her outside.

“Don’t you have to get back?” he asks, out in the cool wind again.

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“I suppose. I was supposed to take inventory.”

Thomas isn't sure what the inventory of an anti-war protest group would be.

“I don't really feel like going back,” she says. “You want to go down to the beach?”

They walk a block over and flag down a Geary Blvd. bus, and she climbs the steps ahead of him, passing the fare box without looking. He brings up the rear, after paying for them both. The bus deposits them near Ocean Beach, and they make their way through traffic across the wide street that is covered by a thin layer of sand from the wind blowing across the beach. Ahead of him now, she stops on the opposite sidewalk, waiting for him to catch up. She stands, leaning back against the cement wall that separates the sidewalk from the beach, her arms outspread on the wall behind her. He approaches her and she reaches out and grabs his arm, and he looks out at the sand and the ocean beyond, aware of the pressure of her hand.

“I love walking barefoot through the surf,” she says and moves past him and down the steps to the sand. She sits on the bottom step, removing her shoes and rolling up the bottom of her jeans, and he follows suit and they plow down through the soft sand to the edge of the water, carrying their shoes. Small waves break in on the shore, leaving behind flecks of yellow foam, and the sand is dark, a gray-brown color, with darker blotches here and there. He's never seen sand like this before.

She moves down to where it is firm and wet underfoot, where the waves occasionally wash over her feet, high enough to soak the rolled-up bottom of her jeans, and she prances along like a little girl. He walks a short distance from her, uphill from the waves, avoiding the cold water as much as he can so that his pants stay dry.

“The water's not that clean here,” she says. “It's from all the ships coming in and out of the harbor.”

Over her head he spots a tanker in the distance, heading for the Golden Gate. “Must be,” he says, retreating away from a wave that slaps into her legs, wetting her past her knees, making her laugh.

“Goody didn't like the water either,” she says. “In Seattle, we'd go down to a little beach off Alaskan Way. He wouldn't even take his shoes off.”

“He wasn't in Seattle very long.”

“I know,” she says, suddenly sorrowful. “I wish it never happened. God.” She stops and turns toward the ocean, throwing out her arms. “I feel so guilty.”

He moves close alongside her and she leans against him, and he

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instinctively puts his arm around her thin shoulders, ignoring the breaking water at his feet now. She leans into him, her head on his chest.

“I should have been able to do something. It shouldn’t have happened.”

“What did you do when you found him?”

“I just ran. I came here.” She wraps her arms around his waist and burrows her face into his chest. “I’m a shit,” she says.

“No you’re not,” he says soothingly. “What else could you do?”

“I don’t know. But I’m lucky somehow. I always seem to land on my feet.”

He looks down at her.

“I showed up at Tony’s,” she says, “not sure what I was going to do next. I wasn’t even sure they’d want me there, now that they were on their own.”

“What happened then?”

“Tony took me in. I live with him now.”

She leans her head back and looks up at him with a grin. “Him and his wife,” she says. “They have a flat in the Sunset District. I sleep on a mattress on the floor.”

By the time he persuades her away from the surf, her jeans are soaked all the way up her thighs, and she’s laughing like a child. “Let’s go over to Tony’s place,” she says. “It’s not that far. I need some dry pants.”

It’s farther than she let on, about a two-mile walk, first down a paved path through the sand dunes and then up through the Avenues. Despite his best efforts at wiping his feet clean and shaking the sand out of his shoes, sand has worked its way through his socks. His feet feel tender from the grit by the time they come to the two-story house with the steep stairway leading up from the sidewalk.

“Tony has the downstairs,” she says, climbing the steps ahead of him. “He rents out the upstairs to some yuppie computer guy.”

Inside, she leads him by the hand into a large front room with windows that overlook the street below. The windows are uncovered, with only wispy curtains at their edges, lending an airy brightness to the room. “Give me a second,” she says, leading him to a couch. “I’m going to change my pants.”

He looks out the window, waiting. A few cars slide by outside, making a swishing sound that is somehow soothing, muted by the closed windows. When she returns, she is wearing a pair of white clam diggers that end just below her knees. She’s not wearing her glasses, and it gives her a different look. Her big eyes appear naked, more vulnerable. “What do you think?” she says, holding out her arms and turning around. She is carrying something in

one hand.

“Nice.” He’s not sure where this is going.

She comes over to the couch and kneels on the cushion next to him and lays out a plastic baggie, a clay pipe and a butane lighter on the coffee table. The baggie contains a small quantity of grayish-white powder. She opens it and takes a tiny pinch of the stuff, deposits it into the tiny bowl of the pipe and takes the thing in her mouth, holding the lighter over the bowl. She lights it and sucks in and then holds her breath. After a moment, she breathes out a sigh and taps the pipe upside down into an ashtray and then refills it again. “Want some?” She holds the pipe out to him.

Looking at it, he imagines Rick lying in his hotel room, his dead eyes staring at nothing. But this isn’t what killed Rick. Anyway, he’s come this far. He takes the pipe and Angela deposits a bit of the stuff in the bowl. “What is it?” he asks.

“Don’t you know?” At his blank look, she says, “It’s free-base. Don’t worry, it’s safe.”

He looks down at the pipe for a minute and then takes into his mouth. Angela brings the lighter to the bowl and lights it and he sucks in the same way she did. He feels an instant rush radiating outward through the skin on his face and down through his fingers and toes and he breathes out, sighing like her. “You let it out too quick,” she says, taking the pipe and tapping it into the ashtray.

Still in a kneeling position next to him, she extends one arm across his shoulders and rests her head on his shoulder. “You’re nice,” she says.

“Yeah, I’m nice,” he says, his voice sounding as if it’s on slow speed.

“What did Matthews tell you about me?” she asks.

“He said you were nice too.” He can’t seem to speed up the words coming out of his mouth.

Even without her glasses, she looks at him in that same way as before, as if she still has them on and she’s looking over their tops. “Yeah, I’ll bet he did,” she says. She leans over and kisses his cheek and then his mouth. She gets up then and stands over him. “Want to go lie down?” she says.

Pulling him up by the hand, she leads him through the kitchen to the back of the house. He floats along behind her, enjoying the disconnected sensation in his legs, like they’re not a part of the rest of him.

An enclosed sun porch with a row of large windows extends across the width of the house at the back. The rumpled mattress on the floor reminds him of something. Then he remembers the mattress on the floor of the Cong Ly Street flat that was such a bone of contention with Dailin.

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The windows, almost reaching to the floor, look out onto a weedy back yard and a chain-link fence separating it from another yard and the back of another house facing theirs. A woman is lying on a chaise lounge in the next yard, reading something in her lap. His eyes feel oddly sensitive to the too-bright light outside.

Angela puts her hands on his shoulders and pushes down until he gets the idea and reaches behind to catch himself, landing in a sitting position on the mattress. She slips her pullover top over her head so that she is nude to the waist. The rest of her is as white as her face. From his position on the mattress on the floor, he can still see the woman outside in the bright sunlight, facing their way now, and he realizes that the woman can probably see both of them, and that adds to the excitement of the moment. He looks back up at Angela. When she unbuckles the loose waist of her clam diggers and starts to push them down over her hips, revealing that she wears no underpants, Thomas feels a pulsing in his head and behind his eyes and a tightness in his chest when he breathes.

Chapter Fifteen

The slamming of a door wakes him and he sits up, trying to bring the room into focus. Not sure where he is, he turns his head to look out a window and sees it is nearly dark, but that information is no help to him. A fuzzy rectangle of light somewhere outside slowly arranges itself in his vision into another window facing theirs. Footsteps sound from the next room, and a hand tugs at his shoulder and he looks down and sees Angela, not quite covered by a sheet, and then he remembers.

"It's just Tony's wife Lorena," she whispers. "She usually comes home first."

Thomas lies back down with a sigh, trying to calm the beating in his chest. Angela snuggles against him, and a light comes on in the kitchen and shines through the open doorway to the sun porch. A woman's voice, humming, comes from out there, along with the sounds of pots rattling and hard-heeled footsteps on the floor.

"Lorena," Angela calls out. "We're in here."

"Who's we?" a voice replies. A head pops through the doorway, peering at the two of them lying on the mattress together. By now, Thomas has thought to cover them both with the sheet. "Hi," the woman says.

The sounds and the woman's humming continue from the kitchen, and Angela gets up, slipping on a short silk robe that leaves most of her legs exposed. She disappears through the doorway. Thomas can hear a brief conversation, of which he can only make out about every third word. When Angela returns, the woman's voice from the kitchen follows her, "I hope he likes Mexican."

"Do you like Mexican?" Angela asks, standing over him, her white thighs gleaming in the dim light.

"Mexican what?" he asks.

"Mexican food, what else?"

He dresses, while Angela stays in the silk robe, and the two emerge into the kitchen. Lorena is stirring something on the stove, and she glances up and gives him a quick smile. "Nothing fancy," she says. "Just some chicken in chili sauce over tortillas. Angela, can you grate the cheese?"

Lorena is a tall woman, with bony wrists and long, thin legs and an overbite. She wears big glasses and has a big, friendly face. Busying herself at the stove or setting the table, she glances over at Thomas from time to time

and smiles. He sits awkwardly, after offering his help, which she declines. She starts serving the food, laying out a warm tortilla on each plate in front of them and covering it with the red sauce that has chunks of chicken in it and sprinkling a handful of grated cheese on top of that. The sound of a slamming door comes from the front.

“I thought he wasn’t going to make it in time,” Lorena says cheerfully.

Tony Burks enters the kitchen, removing his baseball cap, revealing sparse strands of gray hair plastered onto his scalp. He stands next to Lorena and looks down at the food she’s serving up. Tony is taller than Lorena, with the beginning of a small pot belly and a raw-boned leanness to him that seems to match hers. He brushes a hand through the strands of his hair and nods politely at Thomas, apparently not surprised, his flat eyes looking through him. Thomas decides that he must be naturally wall-eyed.

“How you doing again?” Tony says, sitting down across from Thomas. His eyes take in Angela in her robe with her bare legs crossed, sitting next to him. “I thought you were supposed to come back.”

“We didn’t make it,” she says. “We had lunch and went for a walk on Ocean Beach and I got wet. Se we came here.” She toys with her food the same way she did at the Cambodian restaurant and looks over at Thomas.

“It doesn’t matter, I suppose,” Tony says, looking down at his food and beginning to eat. “It’ll still be there tomorrow. But we need to get it done by the end of the week, and we need to lay out the design for the flyers and take them to the printer.”

“I know, I know.” She finally spears a morsel of the chili-coated chicken and brings it to her mouth.

Tony Burks looks over at Thomas. “Where are you staying? We got room here, if you need a place to crash.”

It’s been a long time since Thomas has heard that expression.

Living in the flat of Tony Burks and his wife Lorena in the Sunset District of San Francisco is like something from his college days, when casual acquaintances or even strangers would suddenly appear sleeping on your dorm room floor. He moves his few things from the fleabag hotel the next day. Around the house, Angela refers to him as Tommy and he doesn’t object. By now he almost feels like his old self, the old Tommy, from his pre-desertion days. Tony picks it up and starts calling him Tommy too, apparently unconcerned about the name change from Michael. Lorena refers to him as Tom.

Not far from the flat, he can catch a streetcar toward downtown and

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transfer to a bus on Nineteenth Avenue that takes him to Clement, and he can walk the few blocks to the store, if that's where he wants to go. The store is what they all call it, so he calls it that too, the San Francisco headquarters—probably the world's too—of AAW, Against All Wars. Of course Thomas is against all wars, at least theoretically, but he never imagined this scene.

He only goes there a few times. The place isn't open on any regular basis anyway. He is told that sometimes it's only afternoons and weekends, and some days there's nobody there at all. Both Tony and Lorena have day jobs, and Thomas gathers that Angela can't always be counted on to man the place. Sometimes she goes out without a word to him. Thomas doesn't always know where she goes.

After a few days at Tony's, he goes out late one night, late enough to know that if Carmen has gone back home to Vancouver, she'll be there, probably sleeping. Finding a phone booth a few blocks away, he calls his own flat and listens for a long time to the ringing in his ear, more than a thousand miles away. Then he gives it up and replaces the phone in its cradle and returns to Tony's. A few nights later he does the same thing, with the same results.

After about a week at Tony's, it comes to him that he's hiding out there with Angela. That seems to be it, the same way he was hiding out on Cong Ly Street with Dailin. He doesn't know what he's hiding from anymore, and it gives him an odd sensation to realize that.

There's a routine to his life here that's not so bad. Sometimes he roams the city alone, as he did in Saigon before he went over the hill from the Replacement Company and it became too dangerous—then he would only venture out when he had to, on his trips to buy his black-market supplies or to go to Dong Lat's shop to barter with the old guy.

He would roam like that in Vancouver too, at least at first. And here it's a similar thing, only in a new way, as if the air tastes different or the sky is brighter. It takes a few days for him realize it's because he's not afraid anymore. He no longer feels like an exile.

At the same time, this is not the America that he remembers. His America has been frozen in time in his mind since the sixties, rarely ever thought about. Now what he sees seems to be another place entirely. At first he thinks it's just the fast food places that make it seem different. But that can't be it; that can't be the only difference. Vancouver had its share of fast food places that people were always complaining about—creeping Americanism, they called it. But he never took much notice of them there and he never ate in one.

There's something else he begins to notice in the general attitudes of people that he observes: they seem different from what he remembers. There's a crassness here that hangs over everything like a haze—people seem more cynical to him, which comes as something of a shock given that he grew up on the American East Coast, the cynicism capital of the world. Maybe, he decides, they've just been lied to and disillusioned once too often. But people have always been lied to and disillusioned, haven't they? Sure, but what he recalls dimly is that at least people wanted to believe before, or at least they pretended to believe. Now it's like everyone's given up. In his own mind, he's starting to sound like a Bill Haywood political pamphlet.

Another thing is American television. When did all that happen? Angela is a sometime TV watcher, the afternoons when she stays home and she's bored. When he's not out wandering the city alone, he takes to watching with her while she impatiently flips through the channels for something to hold her attention for more than a minute. Where did all this come from, music videos and talk shows and all-news channels? Even the realization that all of this, which he just likely never took notice of before, has probably been available in Canada as well, doesn't keep him from a sense of wonder while he watches, feeling like an alien dropped into this new culture. Maybe it's always been like this, and he's just been too naïve to see it, but there it is now, live, twenty-four hours a day. And the term, *pop culture*, that he keeps hearing? What is that? Where has he been all these years?

He takes to wandering the city's older neighborhoods that remind him of the working-class neighborhoods of New Jersey where he grew up. A diner that he comes across on Nineteenth Avenue, a long, narrow place with a counter running its length and booths along the opposite wall, brings to mind those old diners in Jersey when he was a kid. Sometimes he'll go there, mornings when he's alone, and have fried eggs and bacon and toast dripping with butter, the way he remembers from years ago, and after that he'll read the Chronicle, ignoring the news sections, drinking coffee. Another place, called Mary's, has great cheeseburgers. He hasn't had a cheeseburger in years. He goes there for lunch sometimes.

A few times he finds himself downtown on Market Street, and he walks over to the Transbay Terminal and stares up at Dave Levy's billboard. In his wallet, he still has the residential address of David Levy that he wrote on a scrap of paper.

One night, after almost two weeks of living there, he asks Tony Burks if he knows where Sea Cliff Avenue is, taking from his wallet the creased paper with Levy's address on it and holding it out for Tony to see.

“It’s in Sea Cliff, I would imagine,” Tony says, looking up from whatever he’s reading to glance at the paper. Thomas asks where that might be, and Tony gets out a city map, pointing out the general location. On the map, it doesn’t look that far away, facing the ocean, with a seaward view of the entrance to the Golden Gate. “Pretty ritzy neighborhood,” Tony says, rubbing his thumb and fingers together in the old gesture for money, leaning over to read the address on the paper again. “You know somebody who lives out there?”

“Not really,” Thomas says, folding the paper and putting it back in his wallet.

He’ll sometimes go out with Angela when the mood strikes her. Those days are usually signaled by her playing grab-ass before they get out of bed. She might want to go down to the beach and walk over to the Cliff House to watch the sea lions out on the rocks, or go for a long hike out to Lake Merced, and then walk the five-mile circle around the lake. She’s a sometime fanatic about exercise, walking fast and swinging her arms, so he has to hurry to keep up. It would explain her thin frame—that and her picky eating habits.

One day she wants to go to a movie; she loves romantic comedies, it turns out. In the darkened theatre, she laughs out loud at scenes no one else in the theater seems to think are funny. Still, it surprises him to find he likes romantic comedies too.

Angela has other moods too. It must have been one of her good days, he decides, that day he first met her.

On her moody days, she’ll say little to anyone, and she’ll go out alone, which is okay by him, leaving him free to do his roaming. A few days end with her coming home in the late afternoon and wanting to smoke free-base. He’s reluctant, but he goes along, and they each have a hit, like before, and he notices that she only portions out a tiny pinch of the powder into the pipe, perhaps rationing it down to what they can handle, and each time he tells himself it’s the last time, that there’s something about it he doesn’t like. Then they have sex, because he always wants that part after the free-base, and apparently she does too. He finds himself looking forward more and more to those days, which is another reason to worry about the free-base part. She reassures him that it’s not habit forming, and he more or less decides to take that on faith, though, truthfully, it probably has more to do with him craving the sex part.

Evenings at the flat, the dinner ritual is usually the same, Lorena cooking up something in a hurry, always declining his help. She isn’t a great cook, and she gets no assistance from Angela. They usually eat late, and by the

time they finish, it's past dark, and Tony and Lorena retire to the front room to read or talk. At least Lorena agrees to let him wash dishes. Predictably, Angela is no help there either.

Before going to bed, Angela, like Carmen, has a nighttime ritual. Standing before a badly silvered mirror hung on the wall of their sun porch-bedroom, she undoes the braid in her hair and combs it out, looking like a different person then, softer. Thomas watches her from the mattress on the floor with his hands behind his head. Then she turns out the light and slips in next to him. Usually, she doesn't say much. She's not a talker in bed.

One morning, he's at the kitchen table with Angela, after Tony and Lorena have gone for the day. Angela is wearing the silk robe, her uniform around the house, showing a lot of her white legs crossed, her foot keeping time with some internal rhythm. Thomas is eating toast and drinking coffee. A half-eaten slice of toast is forgotten on the plate in front of her.

He's still not sure of the arrangement here, why Tony and Lorena put up with Angela without much in return—not to mention them now putting up with him too—but he's gotten an inkling in his time here. Thomas recalls Matt Matthews telling him she came from a rich family back east.

He says in an offhand way, "So I hear your family has money. You're rich too then, I suppose."

She turns her attention to him. "Why, are you going to go after my money too?"

She said *too*. He tries something else. "What does your father do?"

"My father's dead. My mother has all the money now. But she doesn't do much."

"And she doesn't give you any?"

She raises her eyebrows. "Why are you asking?"

"Maybe I'm thinking of becoming a kept man."

"Not a chance, babe." She gives him a look, like, *who are you kidding?*

He doesn't pursue it any further, but it makes sense—Tony and Lorena keep her around and she probably helps finance their operations with Mom's money. It has to come from someplace. He changes the subject.

"You going out today?"

"I think so, a little later."

"Are you going to the store?"

She slowly focuses on him again. "Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'd go along if you are."

"I don't think so." She looks away.

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“So where do you go otherwise?”

“Where do you go?”

“I like to walk around,” he says, with a disarming grin. “I’m discovering the city.”

She turns to him again, arching her brows. “I go visit friends. Is there a problem?”

He tries for a casual tone: “Guy friends?”

“What are you, jealous?” she says.

But that’s not it, he thinks. Why is he even asking? He finishes his toast and coffee, his chewing sounding loud in the quiet. She doesn’t seem to notice. Perching one foot on a chair, she starts painting her toenails from a bottle of green polish. The robe doesn’t hide much. At least, this time, she’s wearing panties.

Her hair is still down from last night, framing her face, making it look less severe than when she pulls it back and braids it. He likes it this way and thinks of telling her to leave it. But there wouldn’t be any point to that, would there?

“Did you know Freddie Hopper?” he finally asks.

“I knew him back in New York,” she says without looking up.

“Do you know what happened with him back there?”

“I wasn’t there. I was up in Seattle.”

“But Rick must have told you something.”

“He said Freddie was shot. Somebody probably ripped him off.”

“Ripped him off of what?”

“His stash, probably,” she says. “Some druggie.”

“Did Rick say that?”

“No.”

“He thought people in the movement back there killed Freddie. Did he ever tell you that?”

“I don’t know.” She shakes her head. “Maybe he mentioned it.”

“And he thought they were after him too.”

“You’re starting to sound like Matt Matthews now.” She gets up and disappears through the doorway, taking the bottle of polish with her.

He doesn’t know why he brought it up. He’s pretty much decided by now that what happened with Rick, and probably Freddie too, was just as advertised—never mind Matt Mathews and his subplots. It’s not why he’s here anyway, even if that’s what he thought in the beginning.

The gun dealer’s convention is starting the next day at the Cow Palace,

Angela tells him. It opens the following morning, and the protesters are scheduled to be there when it does.

“What time?” he asks.

“They’ll meet up down there about seven AM.”

“And you’ll be there too?”

She shakes her head. “That’s not my scene.” She gives him her look over the tops of her glasses. “Besides, it’s only a bunch of gun dealers. It’s just nuisance value.”

It doesn’t surprise him that she’s not that interested. Somehow, he expected it. “Are those other groups going to be there?”

“So I hear. It ought to be interesting.”

Neither Tony Burks nor Lorena has mentioned anything about it to him, but they must be aware he knows. That night, after dinner, when Tony rises from his place at the kitchen table, he turns to look down at Thomas. “Would you care to join us tomorrow?”

Thomas looks over at Angela who returns him an arch look.

He says to Tony, “I don’t know. What would I do?”

“Whatever you feel comfortable with. You could just watch, or hand leaflets to people going in, if you want. Or you can join in the silly chanting that we always do. Or you could lay down in front of one of the entrances, so nobody can get in.” He gives Thomas a self-deprecating smile, as if to say he doesn’t take it all that seriously himself.

“Is that what you’ll be doing?”

“Me, hell no. I’m too old for that shit. I’ll be out there with a bull horn trying to maintain some kind of order.”

“Could I get arrested?” Thomas asks, making it sound like a joke.

“Maybe.” Tony grins. “You never been arrested before?”

Angela’s likes to open the windows of their bedroom—the sun porch at the back of Tony’s flat—and bury herself under layers of blankets against the cold, damp San Francisco air. The cold doesn’t bother him, but he often wakes with the noise of sirens or a big foghorn sounding when the wind blows the sea fog through the Golden Gate. San Francisco, it seems, is a city of sirens and foghorns, and the sounds drift, the acoustics distorted by the hills and narrow streets lined with tall buildings. He sometimes gets up and closes the windows against the noise, and in the morning Angela complains about it being too stuffy. They compromise: the windows stay closed but they open those in the next room, and she sleeps with one less blanket. He can tolerate the subdued noise, one room removed, and he learns to sleep through the

night.

He wakes one morning to the sound of small-arms fire. He opens his eyes and tries to focus his eyes, his head in a fog. The sounds, coming from outside, arouse a dim memory in him. There's a muffled explosion of something, maybe a grenade or incoming mortar fire, and then two more explosions in quick succession. He jerks his head to look at Angela in profile. Her face is a mask. He doesn't recognize her. He sits up.

The rattle of small arms fire tapers off, and he gets up, still groggy, and looks outside. Nothing but darkness and a few lights from other windows across the way. No flares floating down on tiny parachutes. It can't be a full-scale attack. It registers in his head that it doesn't look like Saigon outside, and that starts to bring him around. He hears some whooping laughter.

He moves into the next room, and sees that he's in the kitchen in Tony's flat. His head clears. He can't find the source of the rattling, popping noises, but it's not small-arms fire. Now it sounds like firecrackers coming from the street in front of the house. Another booming explosion sounds, followed by the whooping laughter. Cherry bombs sounded like that when he was a boy.

He goes to the front room and looks out the window into the darkness to see four young guys, maybe in their early twenties, standing in the street laughing. One of them lights something in his hand and throws it in the air, and it explodes in a flash and a boom.

A voice behind Thomas—Tony emerging from his bedroom, one arm trying to find the sleeve of his robe—says, "Fucking clowns."

He peers over Thomas's shoulder through the window and then pulls the window up and sticks his head outside and says, without shouting, in a voice that can carry to the next block. "You want to knock it the fuck off?"

"Hey, let's go man, it's time," one of the voices outside says.

Tony closes the window and walks off to the kitchen, muttering. Thomas can hear the quartet outside slowly amble off. He follows Tony into the kitchen. "Who were those guys," he asks.

"Trouble, I think," Tony answers without turning around, busying himself with brewing a pot of coffee.

He explains, watching the coffee drip into the pot: several motorcycle clubs around the city have gotten wind of the protest. "Biker gangs," he says. He pours a cup for Thomas and one for himself. "Hell, I know some of them. Those jerks outside." He motions with his head.

The upshot is that the bikers have decided to protest the protest, Tony tells him. He got wind of the possibility a couple of days ago from one of the cherry bomb wielding crew.

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“So what’ll happen?” Thomas asks.

“Hell, I don’t know. Depends on how many of them show up. I was hoping it was all talk, but now it doesn’t look like it.”

“Are you worried?”

“Nah, I don’t get worried,” Tony says. “It’ll be all to the good, anyway, whatever happens.”

Thomas isn’t sure what to make of that cryptic remark. “What do you suppose they’ll do?” he says.

“Pick fights, probably,” Tony says. “It doesn’t matter. The important thing is we’ll be seen and heard, and the message will get out there. It’ll give people something to think about. That’s all we’re after.”

It’s the first time Thomas has ever heard anything even remotely political from Tony.

Chapter Sixteen

Tony stands in the doorway leading to the sun porch of his Sunset District flat, leaning his tall frame against the jamb while looking sleepy-eyed at Thomas. He says, “Angela split.”

Thomas had seen that much as soon as he entered the big room at the back of the house. The tiny, doorless closet where she hung her few things is empty except for a few bare wire hangers. The top two drawers of the beat-up old dresser, which were hers, are also empty. He thinks to check the bottom drawer. His stuff, at least, is still there. The mattress on the floor remains unmade, the covers tossed aside, but then she was never one to make a bed. He got into the habit of doing it himself after they both got up, but he didn’t think of it before leaving the previous morning, the last time he saw Angela.

She was at the kitchen table, dressed in her shorty robe and reading a magazine, her legs crossed and her foot tapping in time with an internal rhythm. He glanced at her before he left, but she didn’t look up. He didn’t think to tell her where he was going, and she didn’t ask. He hasn’t been back since.

“Where do you suppose she went?” Thomas asks Tony. Why is he even asking?

“New York, I’d guess,” Tony says. “That’s where she’s from.”

Thomas continues to survey the room, hands on hips, unable to keep the images of yesterday from crowding into his head. Jesus, yesterday, what had he been thinking? The Cow Palace rally had sounded dangerous to him, especially after Tony had asked that not-quite innocent question, “You never been arrested before?” But it excited him too, and he thought he could check it out from a safe distance, which was what he decided to do after Tony had already gone. A Muni bus took him south through the city and then a second bus brought him close enough to the Cow Palace to see the big, barn-like structure. The whole time Thomas had to keep suppressing a foolish grin, as if he was a kid on some lark. It was like going into action, his first, so to speak, since the ’68 Tet Offensive. Never mind that he only witnessed ’68 Tet from the remove of his patio, usually with a drink or a beer in hand. Still, he sharply recalled the sounds that filtered in over the rooftops, the chatter of automatic weapons and the whump of exploding ordinance, usually faraway. The other half of his war had been delivered via the reports on Armed Forces television and radio, brought into the comfort of his hideout through the

courtesy of the gang over at MACV headquarters. Somehow, the early-morning firecrackers and cherry bombs of Tony's biker friends had brought all that back.

Tony, still standing behind him, makes a throat-clearing noise. "At least she paid your bail," he says.

Thomas turns to see him leaning in the doorway. "I thought you paid it."

Tony shakes his head. "She did."

"How did she know to?" Thomas asks.

"I saw you being hauled off and I called her. She went down there first thing this morning to a bail bondsman and took care of it." He looks around, taking in the surroundings. "We didn't have the money. And she didn't even care how much it would be—just wrote the guy a check and told him to fill out the amount when you were arraigned. It wasn't that much, anyway. She asked me to go down and pick you up after the arraignment. For minor stuff like this, that's usually done in the morning." He studies Thomas with a somber look. "She must have split right after that," he adds. "Was this really your first time?"

Thomas nods. Jesus, arrested and booked and fingerprinted. FINGERPRINTED. After that, he spent a long night in a common cell with two of the bikers he'd been arrested with and an assortment of others that he was too preoccupied to notice. He didn't sleep, and every sound brought an image into his head of helmeted MPs coming for him, a little matter of thirty years.

The next morning, after a breakfast he barely touched, he was arraigned and told that bond had been posted for him. He was given a date to appear again, and he was released and found Tony outside waiting for him.

"She didn't tell me she was leaving," Tony says now. "But that's Angela. We'll miss her."

Thomas looks to see if he's serious. They'll miss her money, he guesses. "Did she give this address to the bail bondsman?" he asks.

"No. She gave her New York address. Why?"

"I didn't give this address either. At least I thought of that."

It was just a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time that got him arrested. The previous day, even though it wasn't yet noon when he arrived at the Cow Palace, it looked like the rally or demonstration, or whatever it was, had been going on for a while. Walking down the hill toward the place and seeing the knots of people outside the entrance and the police standing around and the few curious bystanders watching from across

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the street, he decided to be a bystander himself. That was appropriate. He'd been a bystander in that other war as well.

He saw Tony standing on the trunk of his beat old car holding a bullhorn down at his side, dispassionately surveying the scene. Periodically, he would bring the bullhorn to his mouth to exhort a line of pickets below him, "What do we want? No more war. When do we want it? Now?" After a minute of this, he would drop the bullhorn at his side and go back to surveying. He spotted Thomas, and gave him a nod and a grin.

A few people—he thought of them as paying customers—were attempting to enter the Cow Palace main entrance and having their progress impeded by a line of demonstrators, all dressed in jeans and brightly colored tee shirts, handing out leaflets. Maybe the similar outfits identified them to one another, he thought. A few of the demonstrators were talking earnestly to the ones trying to gain entrance. A few of the paying customers took the leaflets and began to read them, moving through or around the line of demonstrators without much trouble. Nobody was seriously attempting to stop anybody yet.

The pickets below Tony were about equal parts men and women, almost all young. Some were dressed in worn fatigues and others in jeans and tee shirts. They marched around in a ragged circle in front of the entrance, chanting something that Thomas couldn't quite make out. It wasn't the, *what do we want?* exhortation. Some carried signs, advertising Against All Wars. It was a scene right out of the '60s, like they'd shown on television almost every night. But here it was in front of him in 1998. He watched fascinated for a while, finally recognizing the chant they were reciting over and over. "No guns, no war, hey hey, what do you say?" It was about as nonsensical as most chants. He'd never understood the whole idea of that anyway.

Some of the chanting demonstrators wore motorcycle helmets, and a few more were wearing football helmets. They were either expecting some action or wanted to look silly, Thomas thought. But maybe it was action they were expecting, and it might come from a contingent of bikers milling around their bikes, mostly Harleys, parked down the street. Some of the bikers were raucously yelling curses at the demonstrators or giving them the finger, laughing and pointing. But others of them were riding off in groups of two or three, perhaps giving the thing up already.

It was then that Thomas thought he spotted Billy Mendez on one of the bikes, about to ride off. It couldn't be, but there the guy seemed to be anyway, Billy Mendez, late of the Saigon AWOLs, one of the members of their drinking and general bitching club all those years ago. Thomas started

moving down the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street past a knot of policemen clustered around their squad cars, police motorcycles and a few police vans. The cops eyed him as he went by. When he got closer to the guy he believed could be Billy, he thought that, indeed, it might really be him. Either that or his twin. He had the same tall, gangling body with thirty years of age layered onto it, and he had the same thin, sensitive face, only now sporting a goatee, and he wore sunglasses and what looked like a WWII German Army helmet. He sported leather riding pants and a leather vest over a ragged shirt with the sleeves hacked off, and he was sitting on his bike looking bored, staring off down the street. Thomas called from across the street, "Billy," and the guy turned his head and looked briefly at him before turning away and roaring off on his Harley. Was it really him?

Thomas shook his head. Damn, this was getting good. Billy Mendez, or maybe a hallucination. He went back up the street to his station among the bystanders, watching the chanters and the people trying to move through the line to enter the place. After a while, because nothing much seemed to be happening, he thought to get a closer look. He decided to go inside the place and check out the gun show, so he joined a cluster of people trying to move through or around the line of demonstrators stretched across the main entrance. Then he spotted, off to the side, a group of bikers moving up the street toward them. A leaflet was thrust at him and he took it and stopped moving, beginning to read. Behind him, he heard a voice, "Why don't you assholes get the fuck out of the way?" When he turned, he saw three of the bikers. One of them was looking directly at him. He realized he was dressed enough like the demonstrators to be mistaken for one, and he was holding a leaflet too. But at least the biker looking at him was smiling. On second thought, though, it could have been a mean smirk.

Behind the three bikers, a group of helmeted policemen were crossing the street toward them. While Thomas was watching that, the smirking biker reached around him and grabbed a handful of leaflets from one of the demonstrators and threw them up in the air. The breeze scattered them, and there was some general nervous laughter from the others who were looking at the scene expectantly. The demonstrator, who was suddenly empty-handed, looked up at the biker as if to measure him and then bull-rushed him, hitting him in the chest, knocking the biker on his ass. No turning the other cheek here.

The move surprised everyone, and there was a stunned silence. A second biker lunged at the demonstrator and, in the process, knocked down Thomas. He found himself at the bottom of a pile of at least three people, who were

smashing and kneeling at one another, and he tried to cover up, hearing the cursing and grunting and struggling above him. When the weight was finally removed, he felt a pair of hands lifting him to his feet by his upper arms. Two of the helmeted policemen, one young and the other about Thomas's age, had him, one on each arm, and were starting to escort him across the street toward one of the police vans. "You're under arrest," the older one said.

"But I'm not one of them," Thomas said, attempting to pull back.

The two policemen gripped harder and simultaneously yanked Thomas forward, almost pulling him off his feet. "Then this is your lucky day, isn't it?" the older one said.

"But I mean it. I was just trying to get inside."

"You don't want to add resisting arrest to the charges, do you?"

"What charges?"

"Disturbing the peace," the older one said, beginning to breathe heavily from the effort of dragging Thomas along. He was dragged to the police van and shoved inside. After being joined by a few more transgressors—two of the bikers and a demonstrator—the van was locked up and they were transported to the downtown jail in City Hall. There he was processed: his rights were read to him and the standard front and side view photos were taken, his belongings were confiscated, including his wallet with his ID, and he was fingerprinted, though it wasn't what he expected. His fingers were inserted into some kind of electronic reader that apparently scanned them and made an electronic image. He watched the procedure with clinical fascination and a pounding of his heart.

After that, the group was told they could make one phone call. The others all went off to make their calls, but Thomas stayed put, refusing the call. He didn't want to implicate anyone else in what he thought was about to happen to him. When he was asked his local address, he gave the name of the fleabag hotel where he stayed the one night when he'd first arrived in the city. Then they were all told that they would be arraigned in the morning.

When the subject of bail came out at the arraignment hearing, he was about to ask if he could post it with a credit card, if that was okay—the amount was nominal. But the court clerk told him it had already been posted for him. His belongings were returned to him, and he was told he was free to leave.

Now he finds himself staring out the windows of Tony's sun porch and wondering how he could have been so stupid as to get himself arrested. The woman sunbather is out again today. He watches her for a few seconds and

turns again to Tony. "How many others were arrested?"

"Of our guys? Only two, after you and Teddy." Teddy must have been the demonstrator who rode with him in the police van. Thomas remembers now that it seemed strange that he never saw him again after they were all processed.

Tony attempts a joke. "I guess you were just lucky." He shrugs. "So tell me what you're worried about?"

"That they could trace me to you or Lorena." A part of his mind notices that he didn't include Angela in that.

"What would happen then?" Tony asks, smiling.

"It could be trouble for you." When Tony simply looks at him with his off-center eyes, Thomas adds, "Harboring a fugitive, that kind of thing. Pretty dramatic stuff, huh?"

Tony slowly blinks his eyes, which seems to increase their wall-eyed look. "Tell me why you think that."

"I'm wanted for desertion from the Army, just like Rick was. Now they have my fingerprints and mug shot. They'll trace them eventually. They'll know who I am. They'll come looking for me and find you."

An amused look comes over Tony's face as he listens. "First of all, it's not going to happen. And second of all, nobody cares."

"Why not?"

"There was a pardon, including draft dodgers and deserters, back in the '70s," Tony says. "Don't you know that?"

"That didn't apply to me. I wasn't covered by the pardon." Thomas shows a smile he doesn't feel. "I looked it up."

"So why don't you tell me your story?" Tony says in a friendly voice, motioning Thomas into the kitchen. He starts to brew a pot of coffee while Thomas takes a seat at the table.

Thomas recites the highlights: his walking off the base after the Private Dale incident and his time with Dailin and his black marketeering and the AWOLs following him out and the Tet Offensive of '68 and, finally, his escape carrying the forged emergency leave orders. From the sound of it, he could be reciting a grocery list. Why can't he get over it? Tony has, by now, poured them both a cup of coffee and is sitting across the table from him. He listens while alternately looking down at his steaming coffee and glancing up at Thomas.

When Thomas is finished, Tony says, "Well, I'll tell you, ace, I kind of knew your story beforehand. Not any details, but I had a pretty good picture anyway." He smiles at Thomas in a disarming manner. "Something you

should know. In a way, you're a legend in the movement. Goody used to talk you up from time to time. According to him, you were the guy who stuck it up the noses of the generals and politicians and got away with it."

"I never did anything like that," Thomas says.

"Don't underestimate it. Every movement needs its icons. But Goody made it sound like you were, what you would call, almost mythical. Like some shadowy figure that maybe really existed, maybe didn't. He never even mentioned your name. Not your last name anyway."

"What are you telling me?"

"Goody knew what he was doing. Like I said, every movement needs its icons."

Icons, Thomas thinks, shaking his head. "I don't believe it."

"Believe it anyway," Tony says. "You were one of the first to say, fuck the war. At least that we heard of. And you made it stick too."

Thomas doesn't trust himself to say anything else on the subject.

"But anyway," Tony says, "I never even thought it was you, at first, when you showed up. It never occurred to me. I got the story from Angela."

"How does all that change anything?"

"What's to change?"

"I'm still a fugitive." *Again*, he adds silently.

"You're worried they're going to find out who you really are. It isn't going to happen. They'll probably never even bother to check your fingerprints. They'll just file them and forget them. This is a misdemeanor. It's chickenshit, nothing."

"But it's automatic, isn't it? They run the prints through a computer in Washington. Anybody who's on file, which includes anybody ever in the military, is in the database. Right?"

"That's in the movies. You'd be surprised how lax they are around these parts. Besides, I doubt if the NCIC database the FBI maintains keeps track of anything but criminal stuff. I doubt if military is included."

"But what if military is included? And what happens when I don't show up at my hearing in a few weeks?"

Tony shrugs. "Again, it's probably nothing. They'll issue a bench warrant and then it'll be forgotten. But even if they did check the prints, it's been too long. I doubt if you'd still be on file."

"They have my address in Vancouver."

"They can't just waltz over there, you know. And they'd never bother to extradite over a misdemeanor."

"But they would for an Army deserter."

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Tony sneers. “Look, even if all that happened, they’re not going to go after you. It’s been too long. Nobody wants to dredge up all that old shit anymore. It would be too much trouble for them. And it would be opening up a can of worms. Beside that, even if all your worst fears came true, which they won’t, you’d be long gone by then, and it’d be no worse than it ever was.”

“What about you and Lorena?”

“They wouldn’t even know to look here. And if they did, so what? We’d just look amazed and say, ‘that guy who was staying here? We didn’t know who he was.’ ”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“So what are you going to do,” Tony asks, a friendly expression on his face that manages to look gloomy in spite of it, staring across at Thomas.

“Leave, like Angela.”

But he figures it’s safe to stay for one more day. He didn’t give Tony’s address when he was arrested. As far as the police know, he’s residing in a seedy hotel south of Market. With the one more day, he can at least check out the Carmen situation before leaving.

Following directions given him by Tony, he drives to the street in the posh Sea Cliff neighborhood of San Francisco. The stick shift of Tony’s old car feels awkward to him—he’s had little experience with them—but the car is turned over to him for the day, after they drive together to Tony’s work.

Dave Levy’s house is a boxy three-story structure of stucco with a lot of big windows looking out onto the street, topped with a Spanish tile roof, fitting in with the other houses in the upscale neighborhood. The curving street is lined with a scattering of small, manicured trees. Thomas parks the car where the curve straightens, about a half block from the house, and he waits. Waits for what? he wonders.

It’s early morning, not yet eight o’clock, the morning after he was bailed out and knew he had to leave this city behind him. The early hour is deliberate on his part, before the time that so-called normal people leave the house in the morning. He only hopes the occupants of this house are normal. He’ll wait at least this one more day. There is this matter of Carmen. He’ll give it the one day.

It isn’t long before he spots one of the three individual garage doors along the front of the house slide open. The garage level, occupying the bottom floor of the house, is set down a sloping driveway from the sidewalk. A big Mercedes sedan backs up the slope and the garage door slides back down. At

first Thomas can't see who's in the car because the windows are tinted, and he slides down in his seat as it heads his way down the curving street. Sunlight slants through a side window of the Mercedes, silhouetting two occupants, both apparently male, one shaggy-haired and young—a teenage boy or maybe younger. Carmen's son, Nathan, is twelve, he remembers her telling him. Thomas gets a good look at the driver as the car approaches. It's Dave Levy of the billboard sign—*Dave Levy, Attorney, We Can Help*. But the picture on the sign was that of a handsome, distinguished, graying-at-the-temples guy in his mid-forties. It must have been taken at least ten years ago. This Dave Levy in the car has all-gray hair and a fleshy face. The car slides by, imposing its Germanic presence on the street, and then it is gone.

Thomas takes a few deep breaths. He sits back and waits. No one else appears, going in or out of the house, and he gives it up after another hour, resolving to leave town that afternoon.

He is back the following morning, again driving Tony's car. He promised Tony earlier it would be the last time, but Tony just shrugged. Parked at his same spot at the end of the street at a little after eight AM, he again sees the big Mercedes pull out of the garage, again occupied by Dave Levy and the young boy. After it drives off, he waits a few more hours, during which nothing else happens. He leaves, once more for the last time.

On the third morning, after promising Tony again that it would be absolutely the last time, at which Tony grinned, he parks down the street from Dave Levy's imposing house. Maybe he's just going through the motions now, but he can't quite give it up yet.

Dave Levy and the boy drive off at the same time as before. Levy probably drops the kid off at school, Thomas figures, and proceeds to his shyster's office. An hour goes by, and Thomas begins to get sleepy in the warmth of the car. Then he sees Carmen emerge from the house.

He's not sure at first, but then, yes, he is. The front door of the house opens, and she is standing there surveying the day, dressed in stylish slacks and a blouse and scanning the street through oversized sunglasses. She descends the steps, and he can't help but notice her shoes as she lowers each foot carefully—sleek pumps, nothing like the work boots she always wore. She moves up the short walkway to the sidewalk. The dark glasses hide her eyes, but it is her nevertheless. It's the same walk, the slightly mannish, sexy way she has that she couldn't change if she tried.

He freezes, thinking she'll turn his way and walk right past him where he's parked, but she heads the other way, striding in that Carmen way, treading lightly while swinging her shoulders, moving from sunlight to

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shadow past the line of manicured trees. She recedes down the curving sidewalk away from him, disappearing from his view around a corner and onto a busy avenue that intersects Levy's street. For a long time, he watches the spot where she turned, his heart pounding. His eyes scan the tree-lined sidewalk where she walked. Then he finally relaxes and breathes out a sigh. He starts the car and drives off.

Chapter Seventeen

Riding in a bus going south through the night, Thomas stares at his own reflection in the window, the black night outside acting as backdrop. The bus, on a dark stretch of California highway between Hollister and Salinas, heading for Monterey, is half empty, with Thomas occupying the first seat. Sitting up front, with nothing between him and the onrushing road but the windshield, makes him feel like the assistant driver. The inside lights of the bus are dimmed, and the silhouette of the actual driver, opposite him, is visible in the glow of his instruments. Thomas has been watching the guy, his chauffeur through the night, between times of studying his own reflection in the window. He pulls out the flat bottle that fits nicely into his jacket pocket and takes another sip, tilting his head back. The raw whiskey burns going down, but there's the loose feeling traveling down his arms and legs as compensation. Whiskey fumes rise up from his stomach, and he belches aloud. The driver, a thin, youngish-looking guy with curly hair, glances over at Thomas, and then returns his attention to the road.

Earlier, buying the bottle had seemed like a good idea. Standing outside the terminal with his AWOL bag at his feet, waiting for the bus to leave, he spotted the liquor store across the street and walked over and peered through the barred window at the array of bottles inside. He rarely drank anymore. So what did that have to do with anything?

Now he sits with bottle still in hand, watching the driver's professional competence behind the big wheel. They approach a line of slow-moving cars, and the driver, with a smooth twist of the big steering wheel, moves the bus around the obstacle without slowing and settles it back into the right lane. Thomas feels the urge to talk to him. What's it like, he wants to say, to spend your nights ferrying strangers through the night, instead of spending it in bed with your honey, or hanging out with your pals at the corner saloon? He leans forward, propping his arms on the metal barrier that walls off the passenger compartment from the front of the bus.

"How's it going?"

The driver glances briefly over and returns to his work. "Another day, you know?"

"You drive this route every night?"

The driver's eyes scan the road ahead, and he moves them into the left lane again to pass a truck, with barely a sway of the big coach. "I've been

driving it for five years, but days usually. I'm filling in for the night driver who called in sick." He looks at Thomas again, a longer, assessing look. "You live in Monterey?"

Thomas thinks that over for a moment, realizing that he doesn't live anywhere now. Monterey just happened to be the next bus leaving San Francisco earlier. Back at the Transbay Terminal, scanning the schedule, he remembered the biker that might have been Billy Mendez. Billy was from Monterey. "No," he says now. "Just going to visit a friend." He raises the bottle and tilts back his head for another sip of the burning stuff. When he glances back over, the driver is giving him the same assessing look before turning his attention back to the road.

"Attempt to be cool," he says.

"Sorry." Thomas caps the half-empty bottle and returns it to his pocket.

"We're not supposed to allow that," the driver says in a low voice, still watching the road. He glances quickly up at his rear view mirror, at the scattering of passengers who are mostly dozing. "Pretty empty bus though. But sometimes, you know, they'll put somebody on board just to watch us, make sure we're not breaking any rules. You could be one of them for all I know." He flashes Thomas a grin, his eyes flicking down to the pocket where Thomas has stowed the bottle. "Not likely, though. So, you been to Monterey before?"

"Never been there."

Lights from the cars on the opposing, northbound lanes occasionally flash through the trees separating them from the southbound. "It's a nice town," the driver says.

"I hear it's a fishing town," Thomas says. Billy Mendez's family had a fishing business there, he remembers.

"A fishing town?" The driver shakes his head. "Maybe. A tourist town for sure. Lot of ex-military there, too. Also, it's what they call a bedroom community for people who work someplace else. But fishing? Maybe down by the pier, though places there mostly cater to the tourist trade. You know, restaurants, shops. Maybe fishing boats still put out from there."

"My friend's in the fishing business. That's all I know. That's before he turned into a badass biker. And then he stole my girlfriend." He wonders where that even came from. Dave Levy's with Carmen now. What did Billy Mendez have to do with that? Dave Levy stole her, remember? Well, no, not really. It seems she went to the guy on her own.

"And this is your friend?" The driver grins in profile.

"Yeah, but so what? You can't let women get in the way of friendship,

you know? Her name's Carmen. Hell with her."

The driver gives Thomas another look. "I'm sorry to hear."

"Yeah, sorry 'bout that." Thomas leans back in his seat and slides down so he can barely see the road ahead of them. Another drink might be just the thing, but he decides against. He wouldn't want to get his new buddy, the driver, in trouble.

The image of Carmen in her sleek outfit, moving with that familiar mannish, sexy walk down the Sea Cliff sidewalk, pops into his mind again. What was with the Armani outfit she was wearing? Was that supposed to be a disguise? And what was she doing besides hiding from the world behind those ridiculous sunglasses? But, then, what had he been doing during his little, just concluded, interlude with Angela? What about that, to be fair? Well, who says life should be fair? Besides, he never asked for that. It was just something that happened, and he went with it. It isn't like Angela ever meant anything to him, right?

Still, the Carmen image won't go away. He plays it over and over in his mind, and he keeps coming back to her in that outfit. It looked so odd on her. It seemed like just the kind of creation a San Francisco shyster lawyer might buy for her.

She probably burned the others, the work boots and the jeans and the work shirts, as soon as she got there. Like burning the past away. Sure, he should do the same thing, forget the past and move on back to Jersey with the old man, just like nothing had ever happened. Maybe he will. The sudden picture that that brings to mind causes him to let out a laugh. The driver gives him another look.

Well, at least the Carmen situation is settled, he thinks and then snorts another laugh. Who is he kidding? And there's that other thing, the matter of the San Francisco police floating his fingerprints and mug shot all over the city—maybe the state. The hell with them too. Given the Carmen situation to nag himself with, he decides that he'll just put that other thing aside. That's easy enough. Besides, he was never any good at worrying about two things at once. Maybe Tony was right anyway. Maybe nothing will come of it. He'll just plan to avoid San Francisco from now on—that's all. And when he finally returns home to Vancouver—if he ever returns home—he'll just move to another place and change his identity, just like he's done before. What's it been now, just a few weeks since he left? It seems like another life, that other one of the quiet, book dealer and his faithful girl, Tonto.

"Hey man, you okay?" The driver is casting glances his way, and Thomas realizes he's been talking aloud.

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“Yeah, sure.” He sits up straight. “Women, you know?”

“Women?” The driver says. “Yeah, can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em, right?” After another long look at Thomas, he returns to his driving.

Well, no, he thinks, you can live without them. That’s what you’re doing right now, isn’t it?

They’re moving through Salinas by now, he surmises by the sudden lights of freeway businesses shining at them. Thomas watches, drunkenly aware of something he can’t quite place. America in the nineties, he thinks, with its Wal-Marts and McDonalds and strip malls and all the rest. Not like that other America he remembers. Suddenly interested, he sits up straight.

“What kind of a town is Salinas?” he asks the driver, remembering that it’s called Steinbeck country. He hasn’t been a book dealer for twenty-some years for nothing.

“I don’t know, nothing special.”

“Yeah? It looks okay to me.” What he can see of it, anyway, out the window. It somehow has a friendly, unpretentious look. Nothing fancy. There are dark shapes of mountains against the night sky to the east. Glimpses of neighborhoods and fields of something growing—maybe lettuce—shine beneath streetlights hanging over empty streets. They pass by several industrial areas.

“Yeah, if you like artichokes and onions.” The driver steers around some cars. “Used to be a lot of farms around here. Still are, I guess. Salinas is just a farm town that turned into a city.”

Sure, he remembers now, from a movie he saw on television once—James Dean in his bean fields in Salinas and then riding on top of a boxcar on his way to see his mother, the madam of a brothel in Monterey. How appropriate now. He’ll play the James Dean part. But who’ll play the madam?

He watches out the window at the farm community that turned into a plain, homely city—nothing like San Francisco. Still, there’s something about this place. Places like this have been out there all over America all those years he’s been away, unassuming slices of Americana—you could call them that—sitting there growing up without him noticing them, and them unaware of him. There’s that gnawing feeling inside him that he can never put a name to. It’s like something that’s always just out of reach, that if he could just grab hold of it once he could figure out where he belonged in this world and what he was supposed to do. But maybe that’s just the Carmen situation again, that sense of loss rearing its head from a strange direction. Or

maybe it's just the fact that he's drunk.

Ahead is a small park with curving walks irregularly lit by dim overhead lights. Something that could be a memorial—a plaque set in a marble slab with what could be an outline of a soldier at attention and what might be rows of names beneath—sits on a mound, illuminated by a single spotlight set in the grass. He wonders, maybe a Vietnam memorial, with the names of Salinas boys who didn't come home. He wants to stop and look at it closely, but they're already past it and it's out of sight. Probably not a Vietnam memorial anyway. What difference would it make if it were? Would he recognize a single name? He should find his way to Washington, D.C. on this odyssey of his, see the big memorial there. Look at the names. Some of them, certainly, belong to guys he sent off from Camp Alpha to then become just names on a wall. That's why he left, wasn't it? Well, no, it wasn't. Truthfully, he doesn't know anymore. Just something he had to do.

He leans forward, suddenly excited by an idea buzzing around in his head. "Hey, you know what? This is my country too. You know that?"

The driver eyes him briefly. "Is that right?"

"But I never wanted it to be. I didn't ask it to be. Oh sure, maybe when I was a kid I did. But then kids don't think about things like that, do they?"

"No, not usually, I guess," the driver says. Maybe he's used to putting up with rambling drunks.

"But then I got so that I had no use for it. It was rotten to the core. A plague on their house, you know?"

"Well, lots of people feel that way, I suppose."

"Yeah, maybe. But most of them aren't serious. Maybe they get lousy jobs, or they secretly hate their wives or their husbands, or they wonder how they got all these kids they never wanted."

"Well, what's your excuse?" the driver asks good-naturedly.

Thomas is aware enough, despite his drunken state, to notice the driver alternating between watching the road and casting glances his way. "What's my excuse?" he asks, speaking this as much to himself as the driver. "Damned if I know. I guess it just came down to the fact that I wouldn't take their shit anymore. That's really it. That's really all there is." He's not really sure what he's talking about anymore.

"You're talking about the government."

"No, no, not really. It's just the way it is, and that's all it is. They won't let you alone."

"That sounds like the government to me."

"Yeah, well, maybe it is at that."

“But the country isn’t really the government,” the driver says, sounding now as if he might be getting into the spirit of it. “Not really. It’s just people.”

“That’s right,” Thomas says, looking out at the mostly deserted late-night streets of Salinas, California, a place where people live. “That’s really all it is. It’s people. Hey, you know what?” He leans forward again, staring intently at the driver.

“No, what?” the driver answers.

“I don’t know one damn person in this country. Except for my old man. And you.”

But that’s not even true, he thinks. What about Angela, Tony, Matt Matthews? Carmen, of course. Her face swims into his consciousness, and he shakes his head, trying to dispel the image. “Maybe I should declare a mission,” he says. “My mission from now should be to travel around this country and meet as many people in as I can. Starting with this guy in Monterey.”

“I thought he was already your friend.”

“That doesn’t mean I know him though.”

The driver is giving him an odd look, as though he’s suddenly realizing he’s got a lunatic on his bus. But Thomas doesn’t care. It’s like a flash of light into his brain, maybe illuminating that feeling inside him that sometimes nags at him, that he can never put his finger on. Maybe he’s onto something here. Christ, Kindred, you really are drunk.

He bounces back happily in his seat, watching the American city flying by outside the bus windows. It occurs to him that he should get off the bus and just wander the streets, being out and about where Americans live. Maybe he could stay here. He’s had worse ideas. He could work on a farm, or be a mechanic in a garage. Of course, he’d have to learn something about mechanics first. Okay, not a mechanic. But they have bookstores in American cities like this. He could become the preeminent book dealer in Salinas. What would be wrong with that?

He leans forward again. “Hey, where you from?”

“Fresno,” the driver says.

“What kind of place is Fresno?”

“Another farm town trying to be a big city. Like this one. Only the weather’s hotter.”

“Sounds nice.”

The driver shoots him a look. “If you say so. Me, I go back there maybe twice a year. My parents are still there. Usually I can’t wait to leave.”

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Thomas is smiling, watching the dark road ahead lit by the headlights. “I just meant it sounds like a place where people live.”

“Yeah, people live there all right. Most of them not by choice, is my guess.”

Thomas takes in the view ahead through the windshield. America. What a concept, after all these years.

Then, just like that, they are out of Salinas. They are back on another dark road, with glimpses in the darkness of low hills on both sides. The spell is broken. They pass a sign that tells him that Monterey is close.

“Hey, do you know where I can find a cheap hotel in Monterey?”

But it seems there is no such thing as a cheap hotel in Monterey. He settles for a motel on Del Monte not far from the bus station. The walk there clears his head some, though not a lot.

The sign says *Vacancy - Free HBO*, and the office looks shabby enough and the row of doors facing the half-empty parking lot all appear, in the dim light, to be painted a garish purple. The place promises to be modest, but it costs too much anyway.

His room is unremarkable, with a thin chenille bedspread showing the sag of the mattress beneath. But at least the place is clean. Before going to bed, he does two things: he pours the remainder of his whiskey, which is two-thirds empty anyway, down the drain of the bathroom sink; and he checks the yellow pages under fishing companies and then under canneries, for one with the name of Mendez. He finds nothing. But there’s a marine and tackle shop called Mendez & Sons that advertises everything for the fisherman, along with fishing trips. It’s at least something to check out in the morning.

Mendez & Sons Marine and Tackle is just north of Fisherman’s Wharf and not that far from the motel. He enters the place shortly after it opens for the day. Behind a glass counter displaying huge fishing reels and assorted caps and other fishing paraphernalia is a guy reading a newspaper. He glances up at Thomas over the top of the page.

“Is there a Billy Mendez here?” Thomas asks.

“He’s in the office upstairs.” The guy jerks a thumb at a staircase at the back of the store and goes back to his paper.

It can’t be this easy. Thomas climbs the stairs, his heart pounding. In the office, a young woman is seated at a desk behind a wooden railing. She smiles at him, but before he can return it or say anything, his eyes are drawn to a tall, heavy-set guy seated in the back, bent over a work bench. The sun is shining on the guy through a window from the side. It’s Billy Mendez, no

doubt—never mind the half-bald head and the additional fifty or so pounds layered onto his formerly lean frame. There's still the vestige of the thin, intelligent face beneath the extra flesh. It's also not the biker Thomas saw outside the Cow Palace. No doubt about that either.

Billy is working on something on the bench—what looks like a small motor. He's holding a screwdriver poised in midair when he happens to glance up at Thomas. His look of concentration turns into a frown and his eyes narrow with something like recognition. Then a small smile crosses his face and he stands.

"Tommy Kindred. You don't look that different," he says in that thoughtful way that Thomas remembers. "Somehow I'm not surprised to see you."

At first he makes no move toward Thomas, but just shakes his head, the screwdriver still in his other hand. The woman—maybe his secretary—is looking back and forth with mild interest between Billy and Thomas. Finally, Billy stands and slowly walks across the office and around the wooden railing. He holds out his hand and gives Thomas a limp handshake, all the while studying him. Something odd here, in the way Billy is looking at him, unsmiling now.

Billy turns to the woman and says, "This is an old friend that I haven't seen in years."

It's apparent that they can't talk openly in front of the woman. Billy suggests they take a walk. He leads them to a tiny park overlooking the bay, back in the direction of Thomas's motel, and they sit in the bright sun on a bench looking out at the water.

"No, I didn't know about Rick Goody," Billy says. "OD'ed, just like that."

"Just like that. In a cheap motel room in Seattle."

"Yeah. Too bad. He was always a fuckup though, wasn't he?"

True, but it seems odd to hear Billy blurt it out that way.

"He told me he'd been in touch with you," Thomas says.

"A few times. It's not like we were close or anything. Did you see him before he died?"

Thomas shakes his head. "I got there too late."

They fall silent, watching a lone windsurfer out on the water. The surfer darts his board diagonally across some small whitecaps. A wind out on the bay that they can't feel causes the sail of the surf board to balloon out, making the guy lean his weight back to compensate and the board to go airborne over

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the waves.

“So, tell me why you’re here, champ,” Billy says. He turns his head and looks at Thomas without expression.

“Maybe just to tell you about Rick.”

“And so now you told me.”

“Maybe I don’t know why I’m here then.”

“Stirring up old memories or something?” Billy continues to study him. “Probably not, though, huh? How did you know where to find me? Rick told you, I suppose.”

Thomas shakes his head. “I sort of remembered way back your father having a fishing business in Monterey.”

“He had a fleet of boats. But that business dried up, more or less. The equipment got old. Besides, it’s all fish farms now. So when the old man died, my brother and I took over and liquidated most of what was left. Now we run fishing trips only during peak season. And then we have the shop.” This short speech is delivered in a flat monotone.

“What did you mean before, that you weren’t surprised to see me?” Thomas asks.

Billy doesn’t answer the question; he just stares at Thomas. “Was that woman still with Goody?” he asks.

“You mean Angela?”

Billy nods. “I met her once. They were here a year or two back. Stayed with me a couple of days. I can tell you I didn’t care for it. Especially her. And I didn’t care for them around my kids either. Finally, I asked them to leave.”

“What did they want?”

“Maybe stirring up old memories too. Later I thought, maybe he was hiding out.”

“From what?”

Billy shrugs. “There was something about the woman I couldn’t quite figure. My wife was afraid of her. And there was the drug thing. I didn’t need that.” He looks out at the water. “It’s not like I saw them shooting up or anything. But I know at least he was. He always wore long sleeves, but I saw the tracks on his arm one time when he was changing. And they would go into the bedroom and close the door, and then there would be this sweet smell in the air. They were smoking something, I don’t know what.” He turns to Thomas. “And there was something else about Goody and her.”

“What was that?”

“You heard of people being addicted to people? That was Goody with

her. He was addicted to her. He walked around like a zombie. And it was obvious she couldn't give a shit less about him. She was a little creepy."

There isn't much that Thomas can recall about his few weeks with Angela that he would call creepy. Self absorbed, probably. More than probably. Maybe you just didn't run into her type that often in Monterey, California.

"I think Rick was afraid of her too," Billy adds.

"Afraid of her how?"

Ignoring the question, Billy asks, "You knew her, then."

"I met her."

"She didn't say a lot, did she? I threatened to call the cops on them if they didn't leave."

"What for?"

"I didn't want them around, dragging up all that old shit I'd forgotten about. I don't know what they were into, and I didn't want to find out."

Thomas says nothing, aware that, in Billy's eyes, he too is *dragging up all that old shit*.

"And now he's dead and you show up here," Billy says. He gives Thomas another long look. "Is that some kind of coincidence?"

"What do you mean?"

"You were involved in some of this stuff with Goody, right? He talked about you."

Here it is again, Thomas thinks. He still can't get over the idea that Rick was out there all those years telling his stories about him. "What did he say?"

Billy shrugs, regarding Thomas in his expressionless way. By now he is getting used to it.

"What stuff do you think I was involved in?"

"I'm assuming you know what I mean."

"Look," Thomas says, trying to keep his voice even. "Are you talking about that off-the-wall anti-war group that he was with?"

Billy lets out a laugh. "What's so off the wall about them? What's wrong with being for an end to wars? I'm for that. Aren't you?"

"Sure, who wouldn't be?" Thomas is abruptly deflated at this sudden turn in the conversation.

"All I really know is Goody had his troubles that I didn't want any part of. It had to do with that woman, and it had to do with the using. Maybe he was dealing. Maybe he owed people money, who knows?" Billy waves a hand, dismissing all of it. "That other? The anti-war stuff? He told me about that. I couldn't shut him up, once he got started. He could've saved his breath. I don't get involved, you know?" Billy pauses, looking out at the windsurfer.

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“But I still don’t know what you’re doing here.”

How to explain this, Thomas thinks. He shakes his head. “You know what it is?” he says, not sure how this will sound to Billy. “None of you guys would have gone over the hill if it wasn’t for me. That’s as good a reason as any. The AWOLs, remember?”

Billy gives him a dubious look. “We should have called ourselves the assholes instead. But that’s ancient history. Why do you want to bring that up?”

“Rick told me you got caught the night before you three were going out. You did some time in the stockade.”

“That’s right. And you know what else? Maybe it was the best thing that could’ve happened. I did my three months at Long Binh, got busted to private and went back and served the rest of my hitch. I came home with an honorable discharge.”

“Maybe that was all my fault too. The stockade time, I’m talking about.”

“Champ, I think you’re just confused. We were all old enough to know what we were doing.”

“Rick’s death too. That was probably my fault too.”

Billy goes back to watching the windsurfer. “Something you haven’t told me yet. Did you ever turn yourself in?”

“No.”

“Then you’re still out there.”

Thomas nods.

“What have you been doing all these years?”

“Just living. I’m a different person, or so I thought.”

“And where do you live?”

“That’s not important.”

“Okay,” Billy says. “I don’t want to know anyway.”

The windsurfer disappears from their view. They watch a sailboat gliding on the water farther out. Then Billy slaps both palms on his knees and stands abruptly. “I have to be getting back to work.” He turns as if to walk away and then faces back, looking down at Thomas. “Listen, I have to tell you this. I always liked you. But the fact is I don’t know what you’re up to, and I really don’t care. Maybe you have your troubles too, like Goody. I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt, but I have my own problems, and I have a family. I don’t want to be dragging up all that old shit about Vietnam. Maybe you see yourself as some kind of romantic fugitive from justice or something. But I got no use for that. That shit’s dead and buried and I don’t want to be reminded of it. I can’t have you coming around me anymore.

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Don't come to the store or try to call, nothing like that, okay? I'll tell you the same thing I told Goody. What they say in the movies, I'll drop a dime on you. I'll call the cops. Nothing personal, you understand. It was nice seeing you." He walks off then in that angular way of some tall men, ambling despite the extra pounds he carries.

Chapter Eighteen

There is nothing left but to do it now—make his way back home, three days traveling the entire width of the U.S. of A. on a bus before finally entering New York City through the portal of New Jersey. What better way to see a country?

He's got the bus routine figured out by now. First, you sit and stare out the window at the passing scenery until you're mesmerized and your ass feels sufficiently dead and you're no longer aware of the drone of the motor. After that you enter stage two, that of the semi-comatose, where time passes in a blur of stale air and cities and towns you can't remember the names of and driver changes and food breaks. The sun rises and sets, but it doesn't seem to have much to do with you.

There are three days of this, of catnaps and countless rest stops at roadside restaurants and watching through a veil of weariness the people joining or departing the journey—most of them starting out with slightly bedraggled looks. The looks match his own that is getting the worse for wear over time. A better class of people takes bus trips, he decides giddily. American people, he keeps reminding himself.

Finally, they enter New Jersey in the dim, pre-dawn light, and the road signs for New York are expressed in double digits. Then there is the elevated approach to the Lincoln Tunnel, with its heavy, early morning traffic. The ramp passes within a mile of his father's Union City apartment, and Thomas is tempted to ask the driver to make an unscheduled stop. But he wants to see what comes next anyway—the long approach curving down above the New Jersey waterfront, with the skyline view opening up suddenly to the left. It's not any different than he remembers. The Hudson River looks typically gray beneath an overcast sky, and the same crowd of buildings rises from the water's edge, a solid wall of uneven heights looking the same as ever. He has to laugh as his eyes automatically find the Mutual of New York tower that predicts the weather in lights, that he remembers looking at almost every night all those years ago.

One final time he limps off the bus in the Port Authority terminal, his nose numbed by three days of close air and his own ripening smell. An hour later he's back across the river, on the Jersey side again, and climbing off yet another bus, this one a local, that drops him off across the street from the old man's apartment building. In spite of his numb, weary state, he is more

excited now than he thought he could be.

Dodging traffic across the busy street on tired legs that mulishly refuse to move faster, he enters the building and pauses, taking in the moment. As usual, the door barring entrance to the inner hallway is ajar, the lock broken. The smell inside when he opens the door is still the same indescribable combination of mildew and fifty years of cooking odors saturating the walls. He trudges up the three flights of stairs, the sound of his footsteps on the worn marble steps echoing down the hallways the same way that he remembers. Then he is knocking at the familiar, scarred door, layered with coats of paint over the years but still showing the outlines of the scars beneath. The door opens a crack and he is looking at a slice of his father's face peering back at him.

"Jesus H. Christ. The ghost walks," his father says, with owlsh look of disbelief. He swings the door open. "Does this mean you're back?"

Thomas is not prepared for the change in his father's appearance. It's been ten years, and he is over eighty now. His father backs away from the door and stands in the middle of the small living room smiling vaguely, wearing clothes that he probably bought thirty years ago. He wouldn't get rid of them just because they show a little age. But they no longer fit. He is thinner than ever, and the clothes hang on him like rags. Thomas enters, looking around.

His father, remembering himself, steps forward and formally offers his hand to Thomas. It feels skeletal, but the former strength still seems to be there from a lifetime of labor. Thomas looks into his eyes. They seem clear and alert. Thomas finally lets out a sigh.

"I'm just here for a visit, Pop."

"That's fine, that's fine," his father says. "You're here is all that matters."

"The place looks the same."

His father looks around as though checking to see. "I suppose it does," he says. "You look tired. How about I make us a cup of tea?"

Thomas follows him to the small kitchen and sits at the table while the old man puts a kettle on the stove and sets cups and saucers out and retrieves a milk container from the refrigerator. He always did like his tea English style, Thomas remembers. He busies himself getting the tea bags and setting one in each cup and then plucking the whistling kettle from the flame and pouring the water, while Thomas watches. Amazing. It's as if they haven't been apart all these years.

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The old man sits and makes small talk that Thomas barely hears—he has a new neighbor next door, a young girl who plays music too loud—he can't get the super to come up and repair a leaky faucet anymore—the rents are going up again, you wouldn't believe how much they get these days. Listening, Thomas tiredly closes his eyes, still feeling in him the sensation of sitting in a bus hurtling down a highway.

Finally, his cup empty, he stands. His father looks up at him curiously. “Pop, I'm real tired. Do you mind if I lie down and take a nap?”

His father nods and then looks closely at him. “You know,” he says, studying Thomas's face. “You're beginning to catch up with me.”

Waking later, Thomas has the familiar feeling of not being sure where he is. Dim light at the window could either be from a rising or a setting sun. Checking his watch, he realizes it is evening now, almost dark. Sitting up, he recognizes his old room that looks so familiar and so strange at the same time. He pads to the bathroom for a much-needed shower and shave and then reemerges into the living room. The old man is watching something on the television with a fixed expression. When he sees Thomas, he grabs the remote from the table next to him and turns the set off.

Thomas sits in a chair across from his father. “I don't know how long I'm staying, Pop,” he says. “Maybe not long.” The sleep and the shower have helped, but he still feels dragged down from weariness.

“That's fine,” his father says. “As long as you're here. Are you planning on anything other than the visit?”

“I might look up a woman I know,” Thomas says. Maybe there's even some truth to that. The folded paper that Tony pressed into his hand back in San Francisco is still in his wallet. Was it only four days ago, or five? It seems so long ago now, the scene in the kitchen of Tony's San Francisco flat where they stood awkwardly and said goodbye. Tony, his usual mug of coffee in hand and his sparse hair, uncombed and awry, shook Thomas's hand. Then Tony gave him a sleepy grin and they both looked down at the square of paper he'd left in Thomas's hand. “That's Angela's address and phone number in New York City, if you happen to get back to those parts. You might even find her there.” Thomas nodded and tucked the paper in his wallet. As an afterthought, he scribbled his father's New Jersey address on a piece of paper and handed it to Tony. Maybe that was when he decided he should make the trip back home.

His father grins at him now. “Well, a woman. That's fine. I'm for that. Do you still have the one in Canada? What was her name?”

“Carmen. I don't think so, Pop.”

“That’s too bad,” the old man says.

Thomas looks around at his parent’s old living room. A single window in one corner faces the building next door, allowing little light to enter, giving the room its ever-present gloom. A dilapidated couch, maybe the same one from all those years ago, is set against one wall, and what could be the same chair, permanently sagging with an imprint of the old man’s skinny butt, sits in front of the television. Even the flocked wallpaper covering two walls seems the same. Thomas has a dim memory of his mother standing on a ladder and smoothing the paper in place with a wide brush. “Jesus, Pop,” he says. “This place doesn’t look any different than it did thirty years ago.”

“What are you talking about?” his father says, glancing around. “There’s lots different.”

“Like what?”

“Well, the TV for one. I haven’t had it that long.”

“Maybe that’s the only thing,” Thomas says. “But it looks like the same one from ten years ago, the last time I was here.”

“It still works,” the old man says. “Why should I get rid of it?”

“Have you ever thought about moving, Pop?”

“Where would I go?” his father says, his eyes wandering away.

“Did Mom ever like it here?” Thomas asks. “I don’t remember.”

“She didn’t,” his father sighs. “She always wanted to move to the suburbs. Teaneck. But I couldn’t do that. I needed to be near the work.”

Thomas remembers then. His father’s need to be close to the work would always trump all his mother’s arguments for getting away from this dreary place. The old man was an independent newspaper distributor in those days, with corner newsboys and newsstands and home delivery routes scattered throughout Hudson County. He made his living through the nickels and dimes pressed countless times each day into the mitts of young boys and old men.

The hopeless memories come flooding back. Karl Kindred, the newspaper king—sometimes called Fritz by his friends. The name clung to him like a sly joke because of his German birth, even though he’d immigrated to the states as a young boy, having been orphaned as an infant during World War I. His adoptive parents—the original Kindreds, his father sometimes called them, both of them dead before Thomas was born—shortened the boy’s birth name from Karlheinz so it would sound more American. Still, Karl Kindred was stuck with the comical Fritz. Sometimes he even perpetuated it himself in introductions as if he was proud of the joke. He called himself Fritz, and he invariably introduced Thomas’s mother as Kay, which she never

cared for. She was Catherine, and she always quietly corrected the old man whenever he introduced her otherwise. The things you remember.

But it was always the work that was the bone of contention between Thomas's parents, and that brought along the other conflicts. The argument from his mother would start—why couldn't he just chuck the measly paper business and get a normal job like other men? Then they could move from this place. There were lots of things he could do. Because, the answer would be, it was precisely why he did what he did—so he didn't have to be a slave to a time clock and a boss he hated. So instead, the retort from his mother would predictably come, he had to work seven days a week, from early morning on, to keep the business from crumbling around his own ears. That's right, the old man would end it tiredly. And he couldn't do that from any suburbs, could he?

"Yeah, I remember now," Thomas says.

"Ah, maybe I should have listened to her," his father says. "I don't know. Maybe that would have made a difference with you. Maybe not. You were always a bit of an oddball, you know."

Thomas looks up to see an expression on his father's face that he always thought of as his German look: lips thinned, narrowed eyes over the hawk nose, jutting jaw.

"But that was probably my fault too," the old man says. "Your mother always said I spoiled you."

When did that ever happen? Thomas wonders.

"Well, you're here anyway," his father adds. "I suppose that's all that counts. Want a drink?" He rises heavily and goes to the hutch that serves as the liquor cabinet. Rings of dried stains from all the wet glasses set on it cover the top. He finds a half-empty bottle of scotch and, looking at Thomas, tilts it invitingly over two empty glasses.

Thomas, trying to keep his eyelids from gluing shut, shakes his head.

"Suit yourself." The old man shrugs, fills one glass two-thirds full and sits back down with a tired sigh.

Thomas feels he owes some kind of explanation for his presence here, even though the usual questions haven't been asked yet. But how to explain, as ever? First, you have to explain it to yourself. "Two of my friends died recently," he says.

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear," his father says. "How did that happen?"

"These were guys I knew thirty years ago, in Vietnam. They were both killed." There it is again, that voice coming from some part of him he's not always in touch with. He suddenly wants to talk with Matt Matthews in

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Seattle, he of the conspiracy theories.

The old man, his drink in hand, looks at Thomas and says nothing.

“They were killed in the war,” Thomas says. *By* the war would be more accurate, he thinks.

“You’re not making sense,” his father says.

“I know, Pop.”

His father sighs and shrugs and takes a sip of his drink and stares at the blank screen of the television. Thomas is reminded of Rick’s father in Tacoma, measuring his days in front of the television.

“I mean, they weren’t really killed in the war,” Thomas says. “It’s just a way of thinking of it that helps me.”

“If it helps, then I suppose it’s okay, isn’t it?” his father says. Without looking at Thomas, he adds, “You know, you never really explained what happened over there.”

“I did, Pop,” Thomas says, surprised by this. Maybe the old man is losing it.

“Not really. You had a Vietnamese girlfriend and you lived with her. And some guy dove off a water tower.”

“Private Dale,” Thomas says. “His name was Private Dale.”

“Did he have a first name?”

“I don’t remember it.”

“What made you walk away?” his father asks.

“It was thirty years ago. Who remembers?” Thomas says, though he does.

“But you were in a rear area,” his father says, looking at him now.

“There was no such thing as a rear area, Pop.” Except that there really was, and he was there, typing the names onto the orders. “The truth is, I did it because I had to do it to be able to live with myself.”

His father nods. “That I suppose I can understand,” he says, with a morose look at the blank TV. But something in the look, a vague sliding of his eyes back toward the silent television, tells Thomas that he doesn’t understand any better than he ever did. He’s given up, Thomas thinks. Well, why shouldn’t he?

“Sorry, Pop,” Thomas says.

“Don’t be sorry. It can’t be helped now.”

Maybe he does understand after all. Maybe he can explain it to me, Thomas thinks ironically. “That woman I mentioned before,” he says, thinking of Angela. “It’s not some big romantic thing. I just need to talk to her.” He isn’t even sure why he feels the need to explain this much.

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“Oh?” his father says, giving Thomas an interested look. “Does that mean that Carmen is back in the picture?”

Chapter Nineteen

Starting out from the sprawling bus terminal on Eighth Avenue, he alternates between walking cross-town and then uptown as traffic allows, moving along crowded sidewalks like a broken-field runner slipping tacklers. Like a tourist he watches faces, New York faces that don't offer a glance in return. After all these years, this place still feels like home to him.

Angela's address is somewhere on Park Avenue. He emerges onto the broad avenue from one of the narrow cross-town streets. Sunlight slants down over the glass and steel towers lining the avenue. Walking north, he watches the towers give way to smaller structures of brick and concrete, older apartment buildings that are all about money. Small trees dot the sidewalks, and awnings extend to the street. Scanning the addresses as he goes, he finally spots the one he's looking for. The numbers are etched in understated block numbers in the concrete above the entrance, matching the address Tony gave him. A large glass door gives back his reflection. Behind it he can see a spacious lobby with carpeted floors and polished tables. He knows he won't find the smell of mildew and cooking smells here.

Before entering, he spots a man seated behind a desk toward the rear of the lobby reading a magazine. Thomas pulls open the heavy steel and glass door, causing the man to look up. Probably a doorman, Thomas thinks. The man sets down his magazine face up on the desk and rises. He approaches Thomas, scanning his faded jeans and jacket.

"Can I help you with something?" he asks.

At second glance, Thomas decides he's not a doorman. More like a house security man. His suit has a shine of age on the lapels, and dark stubble outlines the pale skin of his face.

"I'm looking for Angela Price," Thomas says.

"You delivering something?" Narrowing his eyes slightly, the security man again glances down at Thomas's clothes.

Thomas looks down, holding out his arms as if he's checking himself for packages. "No."

"Is she expecting you?"

"I thought I'd surprise her."

"People here generally don't like surprises," the security man says.

"Do you know if she's home?" Thomas tries a smile. "Can you check?"

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“Can you give me your name, please?”

“Tell her Tommy from San Francisco.”

The man looks at him for a moment and then moves to a phone hanging on the wall and dials a number and says something into the receiver. He covers the mouthpiece and turns back to Thomas. “She wants me to ask what you want.”

“Tell her I just came by to say hello,” Thomas says, gathering himself for a quick exit, the bum’s rush.

The man listens at the receiver for a few seconds and then replaces it. “She said to come on up. Tenth floor.” He smiles then, perhaps reconsidering Thomas.

“What apartment number?”

“There’s only the one apartment on ten.”

Only the one apartment, Thomas thinks. How much money does Angela’s family actually have?

The man gestures toward the open doors of an elevator and Thomas enters, the man stepping in behind him and inserting a key into one of the shiny slots in a vertical row, this one with *Ten* embossed beside it. He steps back, smiling, and watches Thomas as the doors slide closed.

Arriving at the tenth floor, Thomas enters a vestibule that is like a small room, where a single door stands next to another polished table and a large vase on the table gives back a shadowy reflection of him emerging from the elevator. The door is slightly ajar, and Angela’s pale face and big eyes are peering out at him. She opens the door wider, and he sees that she is barefoot, with the same shorty robe she always wore riding high over her white legs and her black hair hanging loose, framing her face the way he liked. Still, her opaque expression, staring back at him, brings the thought: why is he even here? A second unwelcome thought joins the first: that she’ll think he came those thousands of miles from California for her.

“Jack told me Tommy from San Francisco,” she says. “I thought he must be kidding.”

Jack is obviously the security man from the lobby. “No, it’s me in the flesh,” Thomas says, holding his arms out.

“What are you doing here?” Angela smiles vaguely, but she is still standing as if she’s barring the doorway.

“I’m in town for a while. I thought I’d stop by.”

“Yeah, I can see you’re in town.” She opens the door and stands aside. “I guess, come on in then.”

He enters into a foyer. The floor is covered in large black and white tiles

and a mirror occupies an entire wall. The mirror reflects back a jarring picture of him towering over her and of her looking like a barefoot little girl in her shorty robe. He turns his back on the reflection and faces her.

“So, how have you been?”

She shrugs and says without much feeling, “What a surprise.”

“Sorry this is a little unexpected. I should’ve called ahead. Tony gave me your number. But I decided just to drop by.”

“Tony.” She nods and her eyes vaguely slide across his face, settling on something behind him.

“I should at least thank you for the bail money,” he says, sorry now that he is here.

“Don’t worry, you don’t have to pay it back.” Her eyes lock onto his. “Really, what are you doing here? In New York, I mean. You didn’t come here just to see me, did you?”

He smiles disarmingly. “Maybe I should say yes, to be polite.” After a few more seconds of her scrutiny, he adds, “Actually, my father lives just over in Jersey.” He offers a lame shrug.

“Because I’m with somebody else now,” she says. “San Francisco was San Francisco, you know?”

More to herself than to him, she says back over her shoulder, “How should I introduce you, I wonder?” She leads the way into a formal living room. Following along, he gets a glimpse through a doorway that opens onto another room where formal-looking chairs and a thick rug cover a polished wood floor. A glance out a window provides a view he could get used to of Park Avenue facing north.

“Nice place,” he says. “Just like my old man’s.”

“It’s my mother’s idea of tasteful.” She flicks a hand out, indicating the place at large. “She’s on some trip someplace. I crash here when she’s not around. Nobody could really live here.”

She opens a pair of double doors, revealing a dining room, and leads him through to a kitchen. “Come on in.” A young man seated at a table looks up at them over the top of his coffee cup. She points to him and says, “This is Joe.”

Joe sits bare-chested and slouched forward, holding his cup up to his face with both hands, seemingly commiserating with it. After a few seconds of looking Thomas over, he sets down the cup and offers up a hand to shake without standing, making Thomas walk over to him. “How you doing, man?” Joe says, giving him a fingertip handshake. His hair stands up in curls on the

top of his head like sheep's wool.

Angela adds, "This is Tommy. I met him when I was still in San Francisco."

Joe looks at her and then glances at Thomas and back at her. "You two have something going on out there?" A slight smile crosses his face. "You never said anything."

"What, I have to tell you everything?" she says. "Anyway, it wasn't important." She seats herself at the table, sliding sideways in the chair and crossing her bare legs, aiming them at Thomas while giving Joe a bored look. Thomas, shifting his eyes from one to the other, wonders what he just walked in on.

"Tommy was a friend of Goody's," she adds.

"Oh yeah?" Joe says. He turns to Thomas. "So you knew him from where?" He leans forward on the table, a grin on his face that doesn't reach his eyes. The contours of his ribs stand out on his bare chest.

"I knew him from 'Nam," Thomas replies, using the popular term the younger ones seemed to like, that he always hated. Looking at Joe, he guesses the guy can't be more than thirty.

Angela says, "Tommy's the guy. The one Goody used to talk about, remember?"

Joe stares blankly at her for a moment, and then a mild look of interest crosses his face. "That guy? No kidding." He looks up at Thomas again.

Here it comes again, Thomas thinks, that legend of the movement stuff Rick Goody apparently made up about him, according to Matt Matthews and confirmed by Tony Burks, that makes him feel like the butt of some elaborate joke.

Joe finally stands and faces Thomas, offering his hand again. "I'm Joe Buckner," he says, the grin creeping back onto his face.

Thomas takes the limp hand, recalling the name. It was Joe Buckner that Matt Matthews told him about, apparently the same guy standing there grinning at him now, who was supposedly the leader of the movement's rebel faction, like something from a movie about third-world rebellions.

"Goody used to talk about you," Joe says. "Some people didn't believe you really existed."

Somehow the guy has immediately irritated Thomas, and he realizes that it must be the grin that seems equal parts insolent and patronizing. He considers turning around and walking out.

"But obviously you do exist," Joe says. "Not like some mythic figure or something." He glances over at Angela, who is still seated, staring at him

with the same bored expression. “And you know that Goody’s dead,” Joe says to Thomas. “Of course you do. How’d you find out about that?”

“He called me and asked me to come see him,” Thomas says.

“And?”

“He was already dead when I got there.”

“And then you decided to go to San Francisco,” Joe says. “Of course. I guess that might make sense to some people.” He grins at Thomas as if he’s just told a joke.

“I went for another reason,” Thomas says, the image floating into his head of Carmen in her designer outfit, strolling away from him down the Sea Cliff sidewalk. Looking at the image closely, he can even detect, as it recedes in his mind, that slightly mannish walk of hers. He squints unconsciously, trying to make the image stay, but it dissolves like a movie fadeout.

“So was it true, the way Goody described it?” Joe says, watching him with that grin of his. “About you two in ‘Nam. That you made it out together after hiding out for weeks outside some jungle village near Saigon, and the army and the VC were both looking for you. And before that, you two went over the hill after some big action. Is that how it happened?”

Thomas knows that Buckner is pulling his leg now. The butt-of-the-joke feeling returns. At the same time, he is still trying to conjure up the image of Carmen in his head.

Buckner shrugs affably. “Anyway, it’s too bad about old Goody. I guess I have to say I’m sorry. But he did it to himself, didn’t he?” He makes a motion of injecting something into his arm.

“I guess he did,” Thomas says. Something odd about this guy, he is thinking, that he can’t put his finger on, as though Buckner’s thoughts are not really connected to whatever it is he’s saying. The grin keeps appearing and reappearing on his face for no apparent reason, and Thomas begins to wonder if Buckner is an addict too. He glances down at his thin arms, but sees no needle tracks there.

“He didn’t really belong in the movement,” Buckner adds. “That’s why he started in on being a user.”

“He belonged,” Angela says, with the same bored look in place. “The movement changed, that’s all.”

“Those things have a tendency to happen, don’t they?” Joe says to her. He looks back at Thomas. “What do you know about the movement? We’re not all that famous, you know.”

“Just some stuff I read, is all,” Thomas says.

“Stuff you read?” Joe looks back and forth from Thomas to Angela like

someone waiting for the punch line.

“Bill’s old political indoctrination stuff,” Angela says.

Joe wiggles his eyebrows at Thomas, nodding in a rapid-fire manner so that his shaggy curls bounce on his head. “Had to be,” he says. “Old Bill’s a real inspiration. But then you must know that, right?” His eyes glint at Thomas. “Hey, this’ll be great. The long lost friend of Goody’s coming home.” Suddenly turning serious, he studies Thomas for a minute, making him wonder again what is up with this guy. “So,” Joe says. “How’d you like to meet Bill Haywood?”

Angela sits up straight, looking at him with a frown.

“You and him would probably hit it off,” Joe says to Thomas. “What do you say?”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?” she says.

“It’ll be okay,” Joe answers reassuringly. “Besides, some of the others would love to meet old Tommy here. How about it?” Joe says to him. “You up for it?”

This seems like more of the elaborate joke. Then again, maybe it’s just part of a natural progression that started when he listened to Rick Goody’s message, that now finds him standing in a posh Park Avenue apartment considering the next logical step to take. Looking at the two of them, he suddenly feels as if he’s watching a scene from a dream. Maybe that’s just the weariness of the three-day bus trip that’s still with him. Maybe it’s something else: the sheer absurdity of the moment. They both seem to be waiting for an answer from him. Why not, he thinks? Maybe this really is just the next step. “Sure, it’ll be okay,” he says echoing Buckner’s words.

Joe’s expression changes; he looks nonplussed. Maybe he didn’t expect it.

“Are you planning on taking him out to the house?” Angela says, folding her arms across her chest, causing the robe to come partially open, revealing the inner curve of her breasts. Thomas can’t help but look, while Joe doesn’t seem to notice.

“Why not? We were going there later anyway.” With an amused look at Thomas, he adds, “Old Bill will get a kick out of it. He spent all those years in Leavenworth, and somehow you got away. But you both did your part for the movement, right?”

“Cut it out, Joe,” Angela says.

“So how did you do it?” Joe asks, ignoring her.

He might as well, he thinks. “I walked away one night, that’s all. Later, Goody did the same thing. One thing had nothing to do with the other.” It

always sounds so simple, so matter of fact when you try to explain, when it's anything but. Besides, he knows that part about one thing being unrelated to the other is a lie.

"So you just walked away," Joe says, turning serious now. "Well, that's a good thing. If more GIs did that, the war would have become irrelevant."

"I didn't do anything special."

"So you had no big antiwar agenda. No political purpose." He shrugs. "What does that matter, right? Listen." He slips on a wrinkled shirt that's been hanging on the back of the chair, not bothering to button it. The overlarge shirt almost completely covers the baggy shorts he wears. Taken together with a pair of beach thongs on his feet and his wooly hair standing up, they seem to complete a picture, to Thomas, of what hip beach bums might look like. "I have a few things I need to do," Joe says, "and then I'll come back here. Then we'll go to the house. Okay?" He looks back and forth between them. "Besides, it'll give you two a chance to catch up." He winks and shuffles off, his thongs slapping his feet with each step. They watch him go.

"Well," Angela says after Joe is gone. "I guess you're going to meet Bill. If that's what you really want."

He shrugs, feeling the weariness of the cross-country trip returning.

"So you jumped bail and you decided to come to New York," she says. A sudden amused glint comes to her eyes. "What did they charge you with?"

"Disturbing the peace. I'm supposed to show up at a hearing." He wishes he could be as casual about it as he sounds. "So where is this we're going to later?"

The glint in her eyes turns vague, like a switch was flipped, signaling in a way he remembers that her mind has just gone off to some other place. "A summer house my family has on Long Island. They don't use it anymore. Nobody does except us." She jerks her head sideways at the door, including the departed Joe Buckner. "Bill's been staying there for a while. And," she says, drawing out the word, "some other people will be there too. I'll let Joe explain that, okay? Hey," she exclaims, as if she just remembered something. "You want a hit?" She produces a pipe from the pocket of her shorty robe, holding it out for him to see. He doesn't recall her ever carrying the thing around with her before.

Glancing down at the top of her robe that is still partially open, he feels a familiar stirring. He hadn't planned for this to happen. Still, there it is.

"Goody invented you," Joe Buckner says, driving the car through the

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midtown Manhattan traffic. “Or he invented an ideal you in his mind. I got that you were some big hero to him.” He glances over, looking Thomas up and down. “Why, I don’t know.” Apparently he can’t help the no-so-subtle digs.

Thomas is next to Joe in the front passenger seat, while Angela is in the back, staring out the window, her bored expression in place. For the trip, she’s changed into a familiar look: tight jeans and a top that hugs her thin frame; hair pulled back and twisted into a single braid; dark-framed glasses perched on her nose. Glancing back, Thomas is comparing her to an image he has in his head, the way she looked at the apartment with her hair loose and her eyes naked without the glasses. She seems like two different people.

“Let me see if I can explain a few things,” Joe continues, maneuvering the car onto the approaches of the Queens-Midtown Tunnel. The car, a battered Land Rover, is along the lines of something he’s seen in some African safari movie. Somehow, it seems to fit with Joe’s beach bum image. “Because you don’t seem to know that much about us,” Joe is saying as he edges the car through the heavy traffic making its way into the tunnel. “Okay, we’re against war in principle. Big deal. Who isn’t? But wars keep happening, don’t they. Why do you suppose that is?”

“Maybe because people really, secretly, want them,” Thomas recites.

“Well, no,” Joe says. “Do you really, secretly, want wars? Even the politicians and the generals, most of them anyway, don’t want wars. Well, maybe we should forget about the generals. Maybe some of the politicians too.” He laughs. “But anyway, most people, certainly the so-called common man, when you pin them down, hate wars, are against them, don’t want them. So why do we keep having them?”

“I have a feeling you’re going to tell me,” Thomas says, bringing a sharp laugh from Angela behind him.

“Because,” Joe says, ignoring her, “it’s built into the system. Our system is based on economic exploitation. Bill Gates and Microsoft exploit the smaller PC companies and the paying public by extension. We exploit third world countries so we can have cheap sneakers from Nike and hamburgers from McDonalds. The European powers colonized the world and kept a foot on the throats of the natives, because it was necessary to keep the machine running smoothly and the goods to flow back to the mother country.”

“Is that supposed to be news?” Thomas asks, thinking that it sounded like a freshman economics lecture.

“No, it’s not news. Look, sometimes it’s simple. The machinery of the whole world needed oil to keep running, so we had the Gulf War. Then

again, sometimes it's not so simple. Ho Chi Minh wanted to give the Vietnamese people a better life and put an end to the exploitation by the west. But the Russians and the Chinese had their own ways of exploiting, and they each wanted Vietnam for themselves. We wanted it for our reasons, to maintain the status quo and, incidentally, to keep Vietnam's natural resources and cheap labor working for us. So we had the Vietnam War, and how many millions of Vietnamese paid the price for that, not to mention fifty-eight thousand Americans? You ever seen the Vietnam Memorial in Washington?"

Thomas shakes his head, staring out the window at the blur of the tunnel walls as they move through it. He really should go there, he thinks. He's seen it on television, people making their plain-paper etchings of the names on the wall, laying flowers on the ground, crying.

"Well, you should see it, man," Joe says. "It's just rows of names, but you can't help but realize what the war was all about when you read them."

"What was it about?" Thomas asks.

Joe gives him a curious look. "You're asking that? Ironic, don't you think?"

"Probably." Thomas turns to face him. "So you're doing something about all of that exploitation?"

"That we are. And we're not the only ones either. You heard of the Center for Global Equality? Probably not. They're one of the groups protesting against globalization of the world economy by the IMF and the World Bank. You know about them, right?"

"Tommy's not very political," Angela puts in from the back.

"Do you know about the World Trade Organization that represents the Group of Eight, so called?" Joe says. "The G-8. You heard of them?" He looks sideways at Thomas. "Never mind. They're the eight most industrialized and, not coincidentally, the richest countries in the world, led by the good old U.S. of A., of course. That's the G-8. So what, right? Except that they, the G-8, are pushing some interesting proposals. Such as debt-relief for the HIPC. The HIPC are the Heavily-Indebted-Poor-Countries of the world." He recites this in a singsong voice. "Cute, huh? And debt relief for them sounds good, right? Except that debt relief, the G-8 says, is financial discipline mandated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the IMF. Is any of this ringing a bell?" He turns his head, aiming his odd grin at Thomas.

"Anyway," he goes on, watching the road ahead while shooting looks at Thomas, "the HIPC, collectively, are required to show some fiscal responsibility, cut down on social and public spending. So what's wrong with

that? Well, there are forty-something countries identified for HIPC membership. Almost none of them currently qualify for admission because they don't meet the IMF and World Bank guidelines. Meaning that they're too busy trying to feed their people to worry about fiscal responsibility. And the G-8 nations, who are responsible for most of their debts, now want to wash their hands of that responsibility." Finally, he turns his full attention back to the road. "Not to forgive it, that is, just to forget that they were the cause of it in the first place. In the second place, the poorest countries of all the HIPC candidates would be the hardest hit under the guidelines, when they're the ones who're most in need of real debt relief: such as having their debts wiped out; such as a living wage for workers; such as guaranteed health care; such as safe working conditions. And this is not even addressing issues of the environment or human rights, which the G-8 regularly tramples over for their own gain. To do something about that would be a burden on the G-8. And then there's the World Trade Organization, which is allegedly out to establish free trade among nations of the world. Free trade, sure. Free for the industrialized nations, the G-8, and not much benefit to anyone else not in their little club. Is this beginning to sound familiar?"

"What does that have to do with the anti-war movement?" Thomas asks, numbed by the sudden tirade.

"Everything," Joe says. "It's all part of the same tapestry. Anti-war, anti-exploitation, anti-globalization."

"Okay, enough Karl Marx," Angela says, half shouting from the back over the traffic noise.

Joe turns to give her a look over his shoulder and then continues his dialogue to Thomas. "There are people all over the world trying to do something about the exploitation, about the rich continuing to get richer. And we're part of that. That's the real movement, not just anti-war, but anti-status-quo, anti-big-government."

Realization begins to dawn on Thomas, recalling what he read about the original Big Bill Haywood of the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World of the early twentieth century. They were considered anarchists in their time and the model that the new Bill Haywood, nee Joseph McGrew, patterned his own ISW after. "Is Bill Haywood really just an anarchist?" he says.

"Not really," Joe says. "His idea was that we could just stop all wars and the world would be this great place. We could all just get along, like Rodney King said. Only it could never be that way. Bill made a great start, but he didn't understand the larger picture. Wars are just one aspect of exploitation. Stop them, sure. But we also have to stop the imbalance between the haves

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and have-nots. We have to put an end to institutions like the World Trade Organization and the IMF. And the U. S. military, of course.”

Thomas wants to shake his head to clear it. “So how do you go about accomplishing that?”

“By any means necessary, as Malcolm X said,” Joe says, looking over with the amused glint in his eyes.

“Didn’t it occur to you,” Angela says from the back, “that if you took him out to the house, he’d see things he shouldn’t?”

“What’s he going to see?” Joe answers. “Besides, Tommy’s a fugitive from justice. He’s won’t say anything. Right?” He winks over at Thomas.

Thomas Kindred is a fugitive from the U.S. Army, having deserted from his Saigon base in 1968. Thirty years later, a plea from an old buddy puts him on a dangerous path of rediscovery of the country he left behind.

A Private War

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