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Sugi Sorensen

NEVER AGAIN Book 1

***WAR & DEMOCIDE
NEVER AGAIN***

R.J. RUMMEL



Llumina Press

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Pray tell, my brother,
Why do dictators kill and make war?
For glory, for things, for beliefs, out of hatred;
For power.
Yes, but more because they can.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks to Nicholas Gordon for the use of his poem, "Souls Do Not Disintegrate and Die," in the Epilogue.

And foremost, is my wife Grace. She made this novel possible. Without her, I could not have written it. A kiss, sweetheart.

To be sure, this is a book of fiction. Although some characters may in name and position bear a striking resemblance to historical figures, they are fictional. Nonetheless, I must say that whatever errors of fictional facts exist are mine, and wholly mine.

Foreword

Love is one of our greatest mysteries and the greatest reward that we can receive and give to others. It comes in many forms: love for our children and they for us; love for another person; love for our pets and the unconditional love they give us; our love for humankind; and our love of our country.

This is a story of the love between a man and a woman, and their love for humanity. It may make you laugh; it may make you happy—possibly even elated. It may make you sad. It may make you tear up, as I did frequently when I wrote it. All this is part of the aura of love, and we all have experienced it.

While love is a mystery, there is something in human relations that is not. It was known to the ancients, but has to be relearned by each generation, sometimes disastrously. It is the enemy of love, and this book follows the intimate and international struggle between the two.

Someday in the future, two people may undertake a mission such as the one you will read about here. If they do, I hope that they will understand this insidious, subversive, almost invisible enemy they will have to fight—an enemy against which they may have no protection.

What is it? Now that would be telling, wouldn't it?

Many of the sub-stories you will read here, such as that of the Cambodian woman Tor, the Chinese woman Gu, and the German Ludger are false in the names of the characters themselves, but generally true in the background war, genocide, and mass murder. If you wish to read more about these events, you can visit my web site at www.hawaii.edu/powerkills.

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Chapter 1

Joy had a body to die for. That's why the deaths of over 200,000,000 people—the vast majority murdered—never happened. Joy's body . . . and the roar of a 110-story building collapsing before my eyes.

Just thinking about it brings back the suffocating stench of death . . . God, how could I, an ordinary Ph.D. in history from Yale, have ever smelled death? It began with good advice.

New Ph.D. in hand, I was lucky to get a tenure-track assistant professorship to teach at Indiana University. I was on my way. Do my research, publish a book or two and some articles, keep my relations with the lovelies on campus discreet, and tenure—academic heaven—would be mine.

I'd learned from my graduate advisor at Yale how the academic game was played. Publish, yes. But also get to know the greats in the field. Mingle with them, carry their books, show devotion to their ideas, attend their presentations, and ask softball questions that make them look good. Then, as flowers attract bees to produce honey, they'd help get my books and articles published, and help me win research grants. And where else does one meet such esteemed individuals than at conferences and seminars held by the central organizations of one's field of study?

I took this advice to heart. Only two weeks into the Fall semester at Indiana University, my department chairman, Sam Palmerton, approved an invitation for me to participate in a democratic peace seminar held by the International Studies Association at Rutgers. I no longer recall what happened there. I surely played the game and showed my stuff, but it's all been squeezed into an infinitesimally small point of memory by what followed.

After the seminar, I delayed my flight out until noon the next day—September 11—so I could visit my cousin, Pete Baxter. Pete was a bond broker for Tucker Brokerage in the World Trade Center, North Tower. He was managing \$43,000 in bonds that I had inherited, and I

wanted to discuss selling my bonds and moving into stocks. Besides, this was an opportunity to see him for the first time in years.

That morning, I took the PATH train from New Jersey to the World Trade Center. I arrived at 8:50 a.m. and hopped on the escalator up to the concourse.

I found the area empty of people; spooky, to see a public place so still and quiet. I looked around; for the first time, I noticed the smoke hanging in the air. It smelled sour. The air felt sticky. Empty shoes lay scattered over the floor.

My heart began to pound. Something was very wrong.

“Get out! Run!”

I whirled to see a policeman gesturing frantically towards the concourse doors. Without thinking, I obeyed.

Outside, the street was littered with glass, concrete, and papers of all kinds. Still more papers floated down from above. The stink of burning things and gasoline hung in the air. I couldn't run, but had to step over and around the debris.

I almost tripped over what I initially thought was a side of beef. As I dodged it, I realized it was a naked torso without arms or legs. I was too dazed to do anything but register the mangled torso and automatically look for its sex, without absorbing it at all.

Further on, I passed a large tire and then a woman's delicate hand with a wedding ring on one finger. It was severed at the wrist, lying palm upward, fingers slightly curled. Not one of the polished fingernails was broken. *The owner would be happy about that.* The stupid thought flitted across my mind like the CNN Headline news items that pass across the TV screen.

By the time I got across the street, I felt sick and weak. Several people stood there, looking up at the tower. Some of them held their hands over their mouths—either because of the stench or out of horror; I didn't know.

I leaned against a building and finally started thinking again. Yes—Jesus!—I'd seen a naked torso. A man's. And I did see a woman's severed hand. *God, I thought, what is going on?* Finally, I followed the gazes of the people standing around me.

Clouds of smoke billowed from an inferno visible through a gaping hole in the tower, somewhere around the 90th floor. I stared. I couldn't imagine what had happened.

Above the flames, men and women stood at the windows. Some stood on the sills of broken windows with smoke rolling out from be-

hind them. Suddenly, a man jumped from a window and twisted in the air as he fell more than ninety floors.

A collective gasp of horror burst from the crowd around me.

Another person jumped. And another. One landed nearby with a wet *plunk*.

I leaned over and vomited. When I straightened, wiping my mouth, my eyes rose on their own to the burning building. *Oh my God, I realized, my cousin is above the flames.*

My hand trembled as I took out my cell phone and called my cousin. I was surprised when he answered immediately.

He asked quickly, “Honey?”

“No,” I responded, “this is John. I was about to come up when I saw the fire. What happened?”

“A plane hit the building. I can’t get Julie. She’s not at work yet. Look, I’m going to try to keep calling her, but I don’t know how long—” I heard muffled coughing “—I think I’m going to die. I can’t get the door open, and smoke is coming in through a large crack in the wall. It’s hot. Too hot. I’m sitting under my desk. I can’t breathe.”

He paused; for a moment, I thought something had happened to him. Then he said softly, “Please John, if I can’t get to her, tell her I love her . . . I love our children. I want her to be happy, to find someone—” more coughing “—who will make her and our children happy. Tell her that, John. Tell her that . . . ahh . . . we will meet again in heaven. . . . Goodbye.”

The connection ended with a click.

Tears filled my eyes. Heart thudding, I unconsciously shook the cell phone and beat it against my trembling hand. It was as dead as my cousin would be soon, I knew.

Then I heard the unmistakable sound of a low flying jet. Its engines grew to a scream. I jerked my gaze upward, and watched the plane fly into the South Tower. It disappeared inside for a half-second, and then the near and opposite sides of the building erupted in a huge red and yellow mushroom cloud of burning aircraft fuel and debris.

Except for emergency personnel, people on the street tore their eyes away from the horrible sight and fled. Police and firemen tried to help the wounded, but there were too many. I saw one woman stumbling along, her hair melted to her head. Her clothes had been burned off her body, and skin hung from her arms. I rushed over, lifted her, and carried her to an ambulance.

“Thank you,” she managed to say. Patches of her skin still clung to my arms and I tasted the stench of burned flesh when I resumed my flight.

I’d only gone fifty feet or so when the sight of a bloody woman sitting on the curb stopped me. Slivers of glass glittered in her hair and on her shoulders. A little boy, probably her son, tried to stanch with his shirt the blood streaming from myriad small cuts on her head and shoulders. Before I got to her, a fireman whisked her up in his arms and rushed her down the street to a police car as the boy held onto her dangling hand.

As I fled amid this bloody horror, I heard a loud rumbling sound. I stopped and turned, just in time to witness the South Tower collapse in on itself. A tidal wave of concrete dust, paper, chunks of the building, and other debris billowed between the buildings and churned down the street. It was like a Hollywood spectacular with the best special effects. Except it was real. I was in it.

I ran.

I tripped over a concrete slab, scrambled to my feet, but too late—the cloud swallowed me. I heard pieces of concrete and steel hitting cars, but it was so dark I couldn’t see anything. My nose filled with the stinking dust, soot, and ash; my lungs and throat were full of the stuff. It coated my body. It tasted like white glue and felt like gritty sand when I rubbed my face to clear my eyes and nose.

I slowed to a crawl, moving ahead carefully. I almost tripped over a young girl who fell down ahead of me. As I helped her up, I made out the dark lines of blood streaking through the thick gray ash covering her face. Before I could do anything to help her, she vanished.

I threw off my coat, took off my shirt, and wrapped part of it over my nose so that I could breathe through it. Fortunately, there was just enough light for me to see that the people at Chase Plaza II had opened their doors so that those near the building could escape the cloud. I stumbled through the opening.

Inside was heaven. In stark contrast, those who had fled inside looked like war refugees. Thoroughly covered in gray soot and dust, red eyes standing out like those of zombies emerging from their graves, we all splashed bottled water and soda on our faces and guzzled still more, trying to clear our throats. Like many others, I puked black soot until only spasmodic dry heaves remained.

After an hour, the cloud had dissipated into a gray mist. I ventured outside and joined a procession of haggard looking people escaping

across the Brooklyn Bridge. Some cried, leaving lines of wet skin showing on their sooty faces. Some stumbled along in shock. Others, injured, dribbled spots of blood into the inches of accumulated fallout. Some of the injured streamed trails of blood behind them

I came upon a young boy with a compound fracture of his right arm. Sooty white bone showed through his flesh. I helped him across the bridge and to a police car. One older man, a small step at a time, tried to carry two briefcases while dragging a third through the fallout. A woman plastered in gray concrete dust and soot took his bags in her arms and helped him across the bridge. She turned him over to emergency aid workers.

Somewhere along the way to Pete's house in Queens, a motorist offered me a ride; somewhere else, I was able to wash my face and hair. Still, when I arrived at the house, I looked like a creature from Hell in a grade B horror movie. Pete's young daughter Betty opened the door when I rang the bell and screamed when she saw me. Pete's wife Julie came running, recognized me, and dragged me into the house.

The living room was full of friends, many crying or with wet eyes. Faces were drawn and haggard. No one talked. Some held hands. Two TVs tuned to different channels blared the news about the attack on the Towers. I smelled coffee.

Julie's face was drawn, her eyes red, and her cheeks tear-streaked.

I couldn't even think to say hello. I just blurted out to Julie in a voice I didn't recognize, "Did Pete get through to you?"

"Yes. I was on the phone with him when the tower came down. His voice was cut off and then I only heard static." Sobbing now, she continued. "We saw it. We saw it and he's not dead. I know he's not dead."

Immediately, her friends rushed over and enveloped her in their arms. Pete's little daughter Betty began to cry hysterically, and his son Paul tried to comfort her with tears in his own eyes. I went to them, pulled them into my gray, sooty arms, and hugged them to me. I could do nothing but make soothing sounds and give them human comfort.

I stayed over that night and wouldn't abandon Julie and the children all the next day. I called Sam, who understood why I couldn't make it back to Indiana and my classes. One of the other professors would take over for me, he said.

"We're all horrified," Sam exclaimed. "Of course we understand. It's terrible, just terrible."

I could not return if I wanted to, since all commercial flights were grounded for the next four days. Full commercial air service was not available for many days more.

Pete remained missing. Having seen the collapse of the tower, I held no hope for his survival. Julie at first refused to escape to her parents' home in Toledo, despite their pleas for her and the children to stay with them. She wanted to remain in Queens, in case Pete was found. She filled out a missing person form and included a sample of hair from his hairbrush for DNA tests.

Julie, like the rest of us, volunteered to help in the search for survivors. We stood in a chain of volunteers among the collapsed wreckage and passed debris from person to person to trucks in order to clear the way to search for survivors.

In a few days, we were no longer needed. Hope had dimmed. On Monday, September 17, a full week after the attack, Julie's friends and I persuaded her to depart for Toledo on a morning train. That afternoon I caught a flight to Chicago, and took a bus from there to Bloomington, Indiana, and my faculty apartment.



The terrorists made one serious mistake when they destroyed the World Trade Towers. Timing. A week earlier, a week later would have made a universe of difference. I wouldn't have been here.

Chapter 2

Hard to believe now that the very first words I heard from Joy would eventually end in my ultimate horror. I was an ordinary new assistant professor living an ordinary academic life. And gorgeous Joy? She was just my student. Or, so I thought.

Thinking back on my academic life is like looking at a photograph of me when I was four years old. I can't believe I was so young, that I knew so little, that I've changed so much since. Or that I would contract the death of people and kill some with my own hand. That time when I was a professor has become ethereal, like a half-recalled dream. Except for the last class lecture. The last class lecture of my life. The time when Joy shot into my life with a question that set up all the events to follow.

I'd returned from New York to resume teaching the Fall semester of 2001 at Indiana University—my “History of Democracy and Violence” class, wasn't it? Still so far in the future.

I'd had difficulty getting the course in the curriculum, since I was a new professor and it was an odd course. But Sam had published research on the topic himself, so he wrote a long justification to the Dean. He pointed out that democratic peace was now well established in historical and international relations studies, and it was about time that undergraduate students became acquainted with it. Not really persuaded, the Dean nevertheless had agreed to allow the course for one semester, its future approval conditional upon enrollment and student evaluations.

Amazing, isn't it? If the Dean had said no, Joy would not have taken a class from me. And the history of the world would be as different as life from death.

As I organized my notes for my final lecture of the semester, I worried over the same questions I'd asked myself when I began the class: *How can I make my students feel in their gut what ten million or one hundred million bodies mean in human terms—that people died in ag-*

ony, often for nothing but their ethnicity, religion, or political views, or to meet a death quota enforced by their rulers?

This frustrated me. I didn't know how to convey the true horrors without making the students ill and turning them off. I wanted to show them that there was hope, that by fostering democratic freedom throughout the world, we could end war and the terrorism, genocide, and mass murder we call democide.

I decided to tell them a story about a student—someone like them; someone with whom they could relate. I knew well the reports of Chinese refugees, including former Red Guards that escaped from China during its killing purge called the “Cultural Revolution.” I'd studied this period of Chinese history in detail. So my story, though fictional, was accurate in background. There were rumors among former Red Guards about such a girl.

Well, in my hot and stuffy classroom I gave my final lecture. I began with something I thought would get their attention. “Even after the most painful physical torture, facing execution afterwards, people can die with a smile,” I said. When I felt every eye upon me, I told the rest of the story:



As an aspiring chemist attending a university in Shanghai, Chen Ying was a very serious student. Although attractive, she shunned boys in favor of studying in her room—her solitary home except for classes and trips to the library or chemistry laboratory.

Her dedication to science made her suspect. While she attended classes, Red Guards invaded her room and rampaged through it looking for evidence incriminating her as anticommunist, pro-Western—a capitalist-roader. They found all they needed: physics and chemistry books in *English*, and her diary. The diary damned her; it contained critical remarks she'd foolishly written about the Communist Party.

Security police arrested Chen Ying as she left her chemistry class, and took her to the municipal jail. There, teenage Red Guards tortured her for the names of the accomplices aiding her in spying on the Communist Party.

A young girl, no more than sixteen years old, in a Red Guard uniform grunted as she forced the large butterfly screw on the thumb crusher another quarter turn. Chen Ying screamed hoarsely and jerked

her head, spraying tears and mucus around her as tremors wracked her body. Slivers of bone glinted white in the ruin of her other thumb, which the Red Guard had already mashed into a bloody pulp.

Two boys held her down and took turns yelling at her, “Confess. You are a spy. Who do you spy for?”

Pain was her universe. She shuddered and quaked with it. It made her dizzy and nauseous. It had made her release her bowels and she squirmed in her own waste. Twice already she had vomited. One of the boys had cupped a rag in the vomit and smeared it over her face.

Between the shouted demands of the boys and her screams, she could hear bone cracking in her left thumb.

She struggled to remember that name, just that one name, that’s all she now desired. But the excruciating pain of the thumb crusher destroyed all Chen Ying’s thoughts, thwarted all memory.

Then the agony leveled off and receded slightly. Impossible agony now became unbearable pain as somehow her body fed her system enough endorphins. And just at the edge of her mind, almost within her grasp, it was there. She fought to pull that name through the pain.

A new burst of pain drove it away; desperate, she tried to change her focus to chemical formulas. She only could recall H₂O—water. Agonizing seconds seemed minutes. She thought of CO₂ for carbon dioxide, and bore down mentally. She battled the excruciating, burning pain. She struggled to imagine pushing the waves of pain aside with her hands to give her mind space to remember.

It was coming. There—the more complex formula for glucose. Then it almost escaped her in a new wave of pain. She caught it—C₆H₁₂O₆.

Out of nowhere, the name she sought popped into her mind.

“Stop!” she cried. “I will . . . confess.”

The girl at her side stopped turning the screw on the thumb crusher.

Gasping for breath, Chen Ying tried to get the name out before her pain submerged it. “Zhao Jin,” she whispered. Her voice broke on the last name. “I am . . . the . . . concubine of Zhao Jin.”

The girl looked shocked. Both boys leaned forward, staring at Chen Ying. One said, “Zhao Jin? You screw Zhao Jin?”

“Yes, I . . . spy . . . for him.” Now more strongly, she said, “That barrel of pig shit . . . said he would . . . protect me.”

“You lie,” the girl said, without conviction.

“Ask him. Why . . . would I lie? Nothing . . . can save me . . . I’ll soon die.”

The Red Guards said nothing more. The girl's blood-flecked hands flew to unscrew the thumb crusher. She tossed it on a shelf with other torture instruments. Then she and the two boys left without a glance back.

Chen Ying waited for the inevitable. The pain lessened, and she was able to think. She imagined the results of her victory as she prepared herself for death.

A few minutes later, two uniformed policemen came in and lifted her by her arms. She screamed as the movement in her thumbs sent new waves of agony through her body. They force-marched her out to a small yard enclosed by high concrete walls.

One of the policemen forced her to her knees and pushed her head forward. The other took out his handgun and shot her in the back of the head.

There was the beginning of a smile on her face as it hit the dirt.

The next day, security officials invaded the home of Zhao Jin, the leader of the Maoist faction of Red Guards in Shanghai. A thorough search discovered a Japanese camera, an American radio, and a Western pornographic photograph. Security police arrested and tortured Zhao Jin, but he would not confess. Nonetheless, the items found in his home made Zhao Jin's guilt clear. A week after police arrested him, they forced Zhao Jin to hang a large sign from his neck that proclaimed "I am a capitalist spy." A cordon of security police led him to the Shanghai Workers' Stadium. All along the way, people screamed at him and pelted him with stones, broken pieces of wood, and any other debris they could pick up. Finally, at the stadium, before a crowd numbering in the tens of thousands that the Maoists had gathered for this event, all beating the air with their little red Mao books and hollering revolutionary slogans, security police shot Zhao Jin to death.

Three days later, officials went to the home of Chen Ying's mother. They told her that they had executed her daughter as a spy, and that the bullet was a waste of government money. The cost of the bullet, they said, was five fen—about three cents. Officials demanded she pay for the bullet the police had shot through the back of her daughter's head.



I finished the story in a hushed classroom. As my gaze swept the room, it touched on Joy, seated in the back, and I saw her wiping her eyes. She was the only student so affected.

I used the story as a launching pad for my general conclusions of the semester. I gestured, making figures in the air to shape my points. I paced back and forth, every so often writing a crucial word on the blackboard. I slapped my hand on the podium for emphasis. I was an actor playing out my truths.

I yelled, "Something like 174 million people were murdered in the twentieth century by governments." Moving my hand around in a circle, I yelled louder, "That many corpses, laid head to toe, would circle the earth about four times." I drew a straight line in the air as though underlining this, and exclaimed even louder, "Four times!"

I leaned forward, one hand on my hip, and swept the classroom with the other hand. I dropped my voice to a conversational level. "That's a conservative estimate. The number murdered might even be as many as 340 million."

I let that sink in.

After ten seconds, I said softly into the silence, "This does not even count the nearly forty million killed in combat in all the domestic and foreign wars over the same period."

I briefly reviewed the details of these murders and wars, and referred to Chen Ying's story. I paused. I scanned the faces before me. I stood still, except for my hands, which I brought to my chest and then swept outward. As I did, I said, emphasizing each word, "This need not be. There is hope and a solution. Democracies do not make war on each other and, as a historian, I say bluntly . . ." and now I wagged my finger as though each word was at the end of it ". . . they . . . never . . . have."

I took two steps to the podium and folded my hands on top. In a low voice I asked, "But what about genocide and mass murder, what we call *democide*—murder by government?"

I waited as though I expected a student to throw me the answer. None did. They knew my lecturing style by now. I deserted the podium and stepped as close to the front row of students as I could get. Leaning forward, pointing with both fingers toward the class, I answered, "Democracies not only don't make war on each other, modern democracies, with their civil rights and political liberties, commit almost no domestic democide."

Now for the final questions of the semester. I returned to the podium, leaned over it with my hand on each edge, and asked, "Is democracy a practical solution?"

"Yes," I answered. "Democratization is practical and in fact is being aided by many current democracies."

I hesitated, as though making a paragraph break.

“Is it desirable for reasons other than ending war and democide? Yes, it is desired by all those enslaved by autocracies around the world.”

Now, a longer hesitation for the most important point of all. I looked over the class before I asked, “Is universalizing democratic freedom possible? Yes. Oh, yes. If we work to foster universal democracy, we can do it.”

I stopped. My hands dropped. Nothing remained. I was sweating, my armpits beneath my brown corduroy coat were wet, and I think I smelled. Voice almost breaking, I ended with a simple, “Thank you.”

As a professional, I’d studied this subject since I was an undergraduate at Yale. I was a teacher teaching my specialty, but this was the first time I’d tried to communicate this horror, and humanity’s hope, to students, and I came close to choking up.

No use. I could see open disbelief on the faces of the students I had failed to reach. The same incredulity I saw whenever I mentioned this to my colleagues, other than Sam.

Many politicians had visited the university that semester, and I was often invited to a “look the new boy over” dinner or cocktail party with them. But, just mentioning that democracy could end war, genocide, terrorism, and mass murder by governments earned me a polite look, a “how interesting” response, and a change of subject. One hostess, a sociology professor’s wife, gave me a stern look and a surreptitious shake of her head when I broached the subject at her dinner table.

There was mild applause when I finished my lecture. The students rapidly departed, some seeming to flee. Surely due to the overheated classroom, I told myself. For most, this was the last class of the semester.

Joy, however—whom I’d noticed from the beginning of the semester because of her outstanding beauty—came up to me after class.

She always sat in the back and never asked questions. However, she had received an A from me on all my quizzes, the midterm, and her first term paper on the Cambodian democide. I presumed from her name, Joy Phim, that she was perhaps of southeast Asian descent, and her light olive skin and the long black hair she wore tied in a ponytail seemed to confirm this.

“Professor Banks,” Joy said in a soft, feminine voice. She stood about five feet, eight inches tall to my six feet, so she tipped her head up as she talked to me. From this new angle, I admired her beautifully oval face and the full lips that she lightly emphasized with lipstick. “I

am very impressed with your course. My mother also likes it very much—she also did the reading you assigned. We often discussed these readings far into the night.”

Joy looked at me reflectively for a moment with her remarkable black eyes. They were large, almond-shaped, fringed with long black eyelashes, and tipped up at the corners. Her eyes and her voice . . . I could never just observe her voice and her eyes. They always attacked me with their declaration, “I am woman. I am feminine.” I melt now, thinking of them.

Joy said, “My mother would like to meet you. She hopes that you will be the guest of honor at her dinner party.”

That’s when I saw her look of anticipation, of eagerness peeking out from the aura of calm she projected.

Surprised by her invitation, I answered reflexively, “No, I can’t do that. You’re my student and I have yet to read and grade your final term paper and give you a grade for the course. I’m sorry. It would be wrong for me to accept such an invitation from a student.”

“I understand,” she said without any hint of disappointment. “I will explain to my mother, and I am sure that she will consider inviting you after all the grades are in. Goodbye, and thanks for the excellent class.” With that, she turned about gracefully and glided out of the classroom.

I couldn’t help noticing how well her denims outlined her sexy rear end. Clever of her to wear those tight jeans. With them, she laid the cornerstone for my lust—lust that she soon would build into a towering edifice.

I immediately regretted my “no,” but I had no choice. Even if I had not considered it wrong, another student might if he had received a low grade and heard about the dinner party and the probable A that Joy would get.

This was in fact the grade I gave her for the course a week later. Joy wrote a first-rate term paper on the Vietnamese boat people—those who, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, had tried to escape persecution and death in Vietnam. They generally had sailed unseaworthy scows, large rowboats, and coastal fishing vessels into the deep ocean, attempting to reach China, the Philippines, or Indonesia. Joy put this incredible suicidal exodus in context, and estimated that about 500,000 boat people had probably drowned or were killed by pirates. I thought this was close to the truth.

I didn’t know at the time that her parents had been among the victims.



A day after I posted the grades in my class, I got a call from a woman with an Asian accent. “Are you Professor Banks?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said. “Can I help you?”

“You are Joy Phim’s professor, yes?”

“Yes.”

“I am her mother, Tor Phim. My daughter says that you could not eat dinner with us because you had yet to give her a final grade in your class. She now has her grade. So I repeat my invitation to dinner at my house with some friends.”

“Thank you, but I am—”

“Please. It is very important to meet you and talk. I will give you five thousand dollars to come to my dinner. If you agree, I will send the check now so that you will get it before my dinner. Okay?”

I was stunned. Who was I to get such money? If I were a retired president, famous star, or athlete, yes. But I was unknown outside Indiana University, its students, and a small group of colleagues.

“But you don’t understand,” I said, feeling lame. “If I were to accept your offer, I could never again let your daughter be my student.”

“That’s okay. She has quit school now.”

“What?” I blurted. “She’s an excellent student. She can’t drop out!”

“She has. Anyway, come to my dinner to find out why.”

“Okay, give me some time to think about it.”

“You must decide soon. There are many people invited who must come from far away, and the scheduling is difficult. I need one week’s notice.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Phim. I will call you. Please give me your phone number.”

After I got the number, I hung up and sat back in thought. *Is this a joke?* I wondered. *So much money for so little. Maybe it’s a con game.*

I went to my computer, opened the Google search engine, and looked up “Phim.” I got over 35,000 results. So much for that.

I called the secretary to the Dean of Students, and after identifying myself, explained, “I’m about to write a good recommendation for a student of mine, but I want to be sure she hasn’t had any problems in other courses or with the administration. Could you just check the name of Joy Phim for me?”

“Fin?”

“No, P.H.I.M.”

“Just a moment, please.”

I heard her computer keys clicking, and she soon came back on the line. “She is an unclassified student and was only taking your course. In fact, she has taken no other courses here.”

“Thanks. Bye.”

I knew from my class enrollment sheet that Joy was unclassified, but I didn’t realize she was taking only my course. Over the next two days, my mind kept coming back to her: *Why just my course? Why would she quit, or transfer? And what prompted her to do so?* I must admit that my questions were often punctuated by images of her beautiful face and her sexily filled jeans.

The third day after Mrs. Phim’s phone call, a check for five thousand dollars arrived, drawn on the account of Nguon Industries. After staring at the check, holding it up to the light, examining it closely, and smelling it, I settled down. With the clue in hand, I returned to my computer. I brought up Google on my browser and input “Nguon Industries.”

This time Google responded to my search with a few thousand possible matches, but each of the first ten or so seemed to reference some product or other of Nguon Industries. I located their home page, and was surprised to discover a privately owned conglomerate. Its home page listed shipbuilding, imports and exports, oil drilling, and electronics. It also linked to a page listing their top executives, and there she was—Tor Phim, President.

My curiosity got the better of me. I called the number Tor Phim had given me.

A male voice asked, “Can I help you?”

“My name is John Banks. Mrs. Tor Phim is expecting my call.”

“Yes, thank you. She said you would be calling. I must shift your call to another line. Please be patient.”

The line clicked a few times, an operator spoke in a foreign language, and soon I heard, “Hello, Professor Banks. Thank you for calling. Do you hear me okay? I am in Seoul, Korea.”

“Yes, fine,” I blurted, taken aback.

“Did you get the money?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Will you come?”

“Yes. When will the dinner be held?”

“I will set a date. What is convenient for you?”

Since I planned to spend my Christmas vacation researching a book I was writing, my schedule was flexible until class began in January. “Any time before Spring semester is okay,” I said.

“Good. I will let you know. Goodbye.”



A few days later, Joy knocked on the frame of my always open office door. “Hello Professor,” she said, “remember me?”

“Of course; come in.” I recognized her voice, in spite of the sultry tone. I didn’t see her at first. My gray metal desk faced a wall, and the door was behind me. I never liked talking to students over a desk. I swiveled in my cushioned office chair, stood up as she came in, and stood staring for some seconds until I got a grip on myself. Joy smiled at me coquettishly, but for the moment it was lost on me. I was staggered by her sheer beauty.

Joy’s shiny black hair cascaded down over both her shoulders and brushed her waist. Her bangs fell across her forehead like a curtain drawn aside to reveal large, bright eyes and a flawless complexion. Gone were the student’s backpack and jeans. Now she wore a tight blouse, open at the collar to expose a golden choker, and a taupe skirt complemented her light olive-colored skin and showed off her long legs. She carried a light, fur lined coat over one arm.

Her lipstick seemed brighter; redder, I noticed. And what a perfume she wore! Light; not overdone; just a hint of gardenia. Must have been a hundred dollars an ounce.

Joy exuded a heady mixture of Asian femininity and sexuality. If she’d been a photo in some fashion magazine, I’d have scissored it out and hung it in constant view. Weeks later I realized that she had selected her clothes and had made herself up to make me lust for her. Perfectly done. Perfectly achieved.

Ah, so typical.

There was laughter in her eyes as she broke through my breathless silence with, “I’m glad that you will be joining us for dinner. It is now tentatively planned for Friday, January 4. Is that okay with you?”

“No problem,” I said. “Classes don’t begin until the next week.”

“You will be picked up at 5:30. Where is your home?”

“I live in a faculty apartment.” My hand trembled as I wrote my address on a sheet of paper. I hoped she didn’t notice the paper shaking

when I handed it to her. *At least I can control my voice*, I observed wryly as I said, "I'll be waiting at the entrance at 5:30."

"Good. I could not find your dissertation in the library. Do you keep a copy of it, and drafts of any other writing projects, that I can duplicate? I'm sure my mother and her guests would like to look at them."

"Sure," I responded. Glad for the excuse to regain control of my hormones, I wheeled—or so it seemed to me, although perhaps it was more of a gentle turn—and pulled my prize possession from the bookcase. "Here's my dissertation," I said, only to be overcome again when my gaze returned to her. "Because you were such a good student," I stammered, feeling self-conscious, "I trust you, but please bring it back to me when you're done."

I lifted a pile of papers from my desk. "And here's the first draft of my untitled book on genocide and mass murder in the twentieth century, minus the chapter I'm working on. Please excuse all the markings on the draft, but that's the way I work—I can't write and edit these things on the computer."

Even as I handed the manuscript to Joy, I couldn't believe I was doing this. Never before had I given a draft in this condition to a student. If she'd asked, the keys to my Toyota MR2 were hers to borrow also. I was that mesmerized.

"Thank you, Professor," Joy said, wrapping shapely arms around the dissertation and manuscript. "I'm sure my mother will be pleased. Bye." She flashed a smile dipped in honey, and then she was gone.

I just stared at the empty doorway in disbelief. I'd read about reactions like mine and thought they were all hyperbole. Yet there I stood, a well-educated professional, knocked off my feet by a young woman. I refused to believe it was love at first sight. More like throbbing lust, I told myself. I even thought I *smelled* horny. No matter what I chose to call it, I couldn't get her off my mind ever again.

Never.

When I returned from lunch the next day, I found a note in my mailbox that a package was waiting for me. I retrieved my dissertation and the manuscript Joy borrowed and tore open her accompanying note:

Dear Professor Banks:

Thank you and I trust you will find everything in order. Looking forward to seeing you at the dinner on January 4.

Joy Phim

I reread the note, inordinately pleased by her small courtesy. I studied the neat, feminine handwriting as though it held some hidden meaning. Finally, I said to myself, “John, you stupid ass, you let yourself be caught.” I felt my mouth stretching into a grin. “What’s stupid about it? It’s . . .” I looked for the word. “Wow!”

Chapter 3

Ah, that limousine ride. The beginning of my education about this woman who would dominate my life ever after. I ask myself now, “If I knew then what I know now, would I jump screaming from the limo, rush back to my apartment, and barricade the door?” Would I have allowed myself to become an executioner, a murderer? To play god? To be a crusher or creator of governments? To become Joy’s lover?

Joy’s lover, of course. As to the rest, well, it went along with the territory, didn’t it?

I reached the front door of my faculty apartments at 5:30. It was more than being anal about punctuality. I couldn’t wait to see Joy again.

A white stretch limousine with opaque rear windows drove up. Joy sat next to the driver. She waved at me and got out of the car while the driver stepped around the limousine and opened the rear door. Although it was cold out, she wore no coat. With her jet-black hair cascading down her back and over her shoulders, she looked as much a work of art as she had in my office.

Joy motioned me into the limousine, but my eyes seemed pinned on her face.

“Hello,” I managed to say. “After you.”

I followed her into the warm limousine and we took seats on either side of a small table. I squeezed out of my coat and let it hang over the back of the soft white leather seat. I couldn’t keep my eyes from roving over the luxurious interior as the driver raised the partition between us and the driver’s compartment and the limo purred into motion. A little drink bar was tucked into a corner behind the front seat, and the blank screen of a small television occupied the other corner.

I now knew how rich her mother was, but knowing was different from seeing and feeling, and here I sat in this incredible limousine. While she was alive, my mother made enough money from tennis for us to live a middle-class lifestyle, and there was my dead father’s pen-

sion. After her death, her insurance, and the pension, along with some part-time work on my part, put me through college. Wealth of this magnitude amazed me.

Joy smiled at my expression. “Isn’t this limo something? We used to live in California before moving to New York ten years ago, and in both places I was always taken to school and picked up afterwards in a limo like this. Some of the boys teased me about it, and started trying to trip me, pull up my skirt, or steal my books. So I beat each one of them up, and then they kept away, far away, from me. One husky boy tried to ambush me several times. Each time, I took it easy on him, until I got fed up and broke one of his legs.”

“You broke his leg?” I repeated, stunned.

Joy nodded matter-of-factly. “His father sued my mother and the school, but she put a private investigator on him. In weeks, her lawyer met his lawyer and threatened to divulge his affairs. He dropped the case.”

This hit me like a brick. Here she was, this beauty I knew only as a student sitting in the back of my class, revealing in her very first conversation with me that she’d beaten up on boys who bothered her, and broken a boy’s leg. On purpose.

Joy sat looking at me with large almond eyes that shone with anticipation. She was enjoying herself.

I had to break the silence, but what could I say? I let the words fall out, hoping they would be intelligent. “Miss Phim—”

“Please, call me Joy.”

“Okay, I’m John—unless you take another class from me,” I hastened to reply. Then I forgot what I was about to say, and lamely asked, “Oh yes—why will you be quitting school? Or are you transferring?”

“I will let my mother tell you about that. She has everything planned.”

My eyebrows climbed of their own accord when I thought of her words of a moment before. I got up the nerve to ask, “How could you beat up all those boys?”

Her chin lifted. Looking at me as though I were going to challenge her to a duel, she explained, “I’ve been trained in martial arts since I was four, by the best teachers in karate and judo. I’m also a weapons expert, above all with the knife.”

As surprised, disconcerted, and confused as I was, she might as well have said she was a man. I felt like I’d sat down in the middle of a

spy thriller—a lot was going on in the movie, the cinematography and directing were great, but I didn't know the plot or who were the good or the bad guys. I brushed my hand through my hair. "Why are you telling me this . . . Joy?"

"Because you must know. And you must believe."

"What?"

Joy ignored my exclamation and slid into the seat next to me. "Punch me as hard and as fast as you can," she said.

Was my whole evening going to be one shock or surprise after another? "You're kidding. I won't do that."

"I guarantee you, you won't lay a fist on me, and I'll be in a position to kill you, if I want."

This is so ridiculous, I thought, and threw a half-hearted punch at her shoulder.

Joy caught my fist in her left hand, even though the angle was awkward for her, and commented, "I could have parried that when I was five. Come on, John, go for it."

I threw another punch with more force behind it. She also caught it easily.

Joy stuck her tongue out at me! "Weakling, weakling," she teased. "John is a powder puff."

I still hesitated. So she took a sheet of paper from a pocket behind the front seat, wrote something on it, and handed it to me.

"I absolve Professor John Banks of all responsibility for any injury I may incur as a result of my request that he punch me as hard as he can," I read aloud. She'd signed it "Joy Phim."

Well, she'd asked for it. I swung a powerhouse right at her forehead. I still couldn't bring myself to aim at her nose or chin.

Joy moved her head aside so fast, I swear I saw it blur. With her left hand, she caught my fist where her head had been, cupped it, and let her hand roll over her shoulder with it. And tickled me under my chin with the fingers of her right hand.

"These fingers would kill you if this were for real," she said in a bland voice.

More silence as I digested that. I tried to calm my swirling emotions. "What's going on here?"

"You must get to know me and my special . . . skills," she responded, with a curiously sensual emphasis on the last word. "And don't ask why you must know me. You will find out tonight."

Now I know, years later, that this was also an ego thing with her. She just had to show me what she could do. And if she couldn't show me, she'd drop hints—in her sensual emphasis of “skills.”

“How old are you?” I asked, with some exasperation overlaying my awe.

“I'm twenty-five.”

“I thought you were much younger,” I said. I'd always found it difficult to tell the ages of Asian students. Some looked as though they hardly belonged in high school, not to mention university. I hastened to move onto more familiar ground. “What is your major?”

“I took only your class,” she countered.

“Well, you should take more classes and major in something, if you want a degree.”

“I don't need more degrees. I got a B.A. in political science at Berkeley four years ago, and an M.A. in computer sciences in another two years at Princeton.”

I couldn't believe my ears. “Political science? Computer sciences? My God, Joy, why were you in my class?”

“My mother wanted a firsthand account of your interpretation of the democratic peace.” She laughed and put a finger on her lush lips. “Be patient. You will soon find out everything. But, I want to tell you about my mother before you meet her. Please listen carefully. Her story will tell you why I must do what I will.”

“What is that?” I asked in exasperation.

“Be patient and listen, John!” That was the first of a million commands she would give me. I never got used to it.

She leaned forward and solemnly looked into my eyes, as though she could pass through them into my heart. “Live this story, John. I want you to feel the agony of what my mother went through. I want you to know it deep inside where you keep your empathy, your compassion, your love. No, not your mind, John, not your thoughts. Don't think. Relax your mind and just listen. You must *feel* this. Then, you will understand better what is to happen this evening.”

She sat upright, brushed her hand against her eyes “My mother, Tor Phim, once lived with her husband, Nguon Theary, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia,” Joy began. *///*

April of 1975 was a happy day for Tor as she waited for Nguon beneath the torn awning on the ramshackle building where they lived.

The war was now over. After successive retreats, General Lon Nol could no longer even defend Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, against the Khmer Rouge guerrillas. The Cambodian Army had de-

clared a cease-fire and laid down its arms. Soon afterward, the government conceded defeat and opened Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge and their leader, Pol Pot. An army of 68,000 guerrillas achieved victory for a communist party of 14,000 members against an army of about 200,000 men.

Naturally petite, Tor was skinny from lack of food—a common problem in Phnom Penh at that time. Her face was still round, though—“Just,” Nguon always told her, “as I like it.” She had kept her black hair cut short to keep it out of the way as she worked in her cousin’s small restaurant. On this day, she wore an orange blouse and a beige sarong.

Nguon was teaching, but she was sure he had heard the news about the great victory. No doubt he would cancel class and join her to welcome the guerrilla soldiers. They were supposed to arrive within the hour.

Tor heard people celebrating all around her. Many intellectuals and middle-class Cambodians, disgusted with the everyday corruption of the government, were willing to try anything that brought change, even communism. Tor was no less happy. She was already thinking about bringing her own mother from the northeast, where she had been trapped by the war.

There Nguon was, all smiles as he approached her in his common black shorts. He took her hands and, looking into her eyes, said, “My dearest one. During all these years of war we prayed to Buddha for peace, and now it’s here. The world will change today. What a great moment.”

They walked to Sisowath Quay down which they expected the major force of Khmer Rouge to come on their way to the Royal palace. Many people were out on the streets, laughing, talking, all waiting. Almost every other building had white material—clothes, sheets, or towels—hung from windows or poles.

A low rumble grew into the mechanical roar of trucks. Everyone stopped whatever they were doing and looked toward the approaching noise.

Down Sisowath Quay came the Khmer Rouge. Those soldiers in the vanguard rode in trucks and vehicles of all descriptions. Behind those, squads of guerrilla soldiers walked in single file down the center of the street. They carried an assortment of weapons. No guerrilla seemed older than eighteen. All wore black, pajama-like uniforms, sandals made from strips of tires and inner tubes, and black Chinese caps.

Each soldier had wound a red-checkered headscarf around his cap or neck. None of them smiled or looked at the crowds of people lining the roads.

Some of the people cheered and clapped, but most just smiled and waited to see what the victorious guerrillas would do next.

After watching for a while, Tor commented, "They are so young. How could they defeat the army?"

"Well, they did," Nguon responded. "Let's go back to our place. I've seen enough."

Tor and Nguon ambled back to their apartment climbed the worn steps and walked down the dim, unpainted hallway to their room. Although almost too excited to eat, they thought it best to get something into their stomachs before what surely would be an evening of celebration. As they ate some reheated rice and fruit and a little leftover ham Tor had saved from the restaurant, they discussed what they would do once the city settled down.

Shots echoed out on the street as they were cleaning up. Tor and Nguon rushed over to the small window and peered out. They saw people moving past their building, their faces creased with confusion. They were looking around and glancing often over their shoulders. Waving their guns and yelling, several Khmer Rouge soldiers pointed in the direction the people were moving.

Tor gasped. "What's going on? I thought the war was over."

"I don't know," Nguon replied. "Maybe some Lon Nol soldiers don't want it to end. I'm going out to take a look as soon as we finish here."

But when they finished cleaning up a few minutes later, the noise from the street had increased greatly. Babies cried; car horns blared; people yelled constantly. Nguon and Tor exchanged an anxious glance. They decided to take a look outside, but when they reached the street they couldn't believe their eyes.

A mass of people of all descriptions, packed almost shoulder-to-shoulder, moved in the direction the soldiers indicated. Like a stream around boulders, the crowd eddied around the spots where the guerrilla soldiers stood yelling. Here and there, a crowded car, small truck, or motor scooter crawled along in the flow of humanity. Tor glimpsed several motorbikes loaded down with possessions.

"Move, move. Get out," the Khmer Rouge soldiers shouted, waving their rifles.

Standing on their steps, Tor looked up the road in the direction all

these people were coming from, and saw a body lying on the walkway two buildings down. Another body lay a little further away. Everyone in the crowd avoided them, creating little eddies of their own in the stream of people.

A black-clad soldier with a red scarf around his neck rushed up, pointed an AK-47 at them, and screeched in the high, thin rasp of a teenage boy, "You must leave this evil place. Go now!"

He couldn't be over fifteen years old, Tor thought.

Nguon didn't understand. "Go where? Why?"

"Go! Go! Out of the city. Now!" he screamed at them, even louder.

Tor was scared now. Her voice trembled when she asked, "But can't we get something to take with us? It will take just a—"

Nguon grabbed her hand and jerked her off the steps. He pulled Tor down the side of the crowded road. They were jostled and pushed by people and bumped by the heavy suitcases a few people carried. A short distance down the crowded walkway, Nguon, who was tall for a Cambodian, looked back. Not seeing any soldiers nearby, he pulled Tor into an alley with him.

"What are you doing?" she asked between gulps of air. She'd begun to shake.

"Don't say anything," Nguon urged, putting his finger on her lips.

Still gripping her hand, he pulled her with him as he cautiously rushed down the narrow, trash-filled alley. When he came to an intersecting alley, he peeked around the corner.

"No soldiers," he murmured, and turned the corner with Tor still in tow. Several old people milled around in the alley, asking about all the noise and what was going on. Nguon ignored them.

Within minutes they reached the rear of their building without seeing any soldiers. Obviously, the soldiers were stretched thin in trying to cover all the alleys, roads, and buildings in Phnom Penh. He guessed, however, that the soldiers would begin to search these buildings soon.

A small step at a time, Nguon entered the building through the rear entrance, peering down the hallway to make sure there were no soldiers inside. He motioned for Tor to follow him, and they rushed to their room. The hallway was deserted—others had also gone out to investigate the noise in the street.

Once they were inside, Nguon allowed his own fear to show. Looking at Tor, he said quickly, "I think that kid was going to shoot us. I don't understand it, but I think we should prepare for the worst and get away before they search the building."

“Where are they sending us?”

“I don’t know, but hurry now, let’s pack what we might need. Pack food, of course, and blankets, clothes, and the money we’ve hidden.”

Tor walked to the corner of the room and pulled out from under a glass topped rattan table a large, battered French suitcase that had been in her family for two generations.

“No, no,” Nguon said, stopping her. “That’s too clumsy. Just two bags, one for each of us, and not too hard to carry.”

Tor fetched her wicker shopping bag from their small closet and Nguon picked up the school bag he used to carry books and papers, and they began to fill them. Just in case they lost a bag, they split the rice and fruit between them, and each took a small bottle of drinking water. They also divided between them their family heirlooms and their other few valuables. Tor kissed her old gold locket containing a photograph of her mother and father, then tucked it into the side of her bag where she wouldn’t accidentally pull it out. She also threw in a box of tissues.

Nguon looked around, stood thinking for a moment, and chided himself, “I almost forgot.” He took an old Cambodian tourist brochure from a drawer in their one cabinet, tore out the map inside, and put it in his bag.

He stepped over to the sink they had used for everything from washing dishes to their bodies, picked up an old Japanese chef’s knife and handed it to Tor. “Wrap this in some of your old clothes and hide it in the bottom of your bag,” he told her. He picked up a six-inch French carving knife, wrapped it, and deposited it in his own bag.

“Okay, let’s . . .” Nguon trailed off as they heard more shots.

Tor rushed over to look out the window. “No, they can’t be doing this!” she exclaimed.

Here and there in the stream of people, invalids were being pushed in wheelchairs. Others staggered along on crutches. People pushed hospital beds with their loved ones still in them. Tor saw an intravenous tube stuck in the arm of one of the invalids. The tube was connected to a bottle hanging from a pole being wheeled along beside the bed by a woman who was probably a relative.

“The soldiers must also be emptying the hospitals,” Nguon said. “We can’t do anything about it. Let’s go.”

They hurried down the hallway and paused on the stairs to look both ways before plunging into the moving mass of people.

Teenage soldiers stood at the intersections they came to, waving their rifles or AK-47s to split the human mass onto the different roads.

After hours of slow movement, tired from being jostled along and from carrying their bags, Tor and Nguon reached the countryside. But there was no stopping.

Along the way, they continued to see the bodies of those the soldiers had shot.

The crowd was thinning out as older people or those burdened with heavy suitcases or many children fell behind. Suddenly, Tor and Nguon saw two of the black-clad soldiers who had been standing nearby pull a boy out of the procession.

He looked about fourteen years old; no older, it appeared, than the soldiers grabbing him. He wore shorts, a blue shirt much too big for him, and army boots that were much too large—the tops of the boots came almost to his knees. He surely had stuffed stockings or tissue into the toes so that he could wear them.

“You’re an enemy soldier,” one of the Khmer Rouge soldiers yelled, eyes blazing.

“No, I’m not!” the boy cried, eyes big, fear in his voice.

“Where’d you get those boots?” the other soldier screamed at the boy.

“They’re his dad’s,” his mother protested, rushing up to stand beside the boy and bowing up and down to the soldiers, her hands clasped in front of her as if praying.

“My dad’s,” the boy whimpered.

“Your father was shit,” yelled the first soldier. He aimed his rifle at the boy and shot him in the stomach.

The shock of the bullet sent the boy sprawling backwards. He and his mother screamed simultaneously. The boy lay, clutching his stomach. The soldier reached down and dragged the dying boy away from his mother, who had fallen on her knees by her son and was trying to put her arms around him. The soldier pulled off the boy’s boots, tied their shoelaces together, and swung them over his shoulder. He shot the sobbing mother in the head.

No one in the crowd, including Tor and Nguon, did or said anything. Each knew to do so could mean death. Tor started to cry, but Nguon pulled her away from the scene as fast as he could.

As night fell, the soldiers allowed people to find places to rest in the nearby hills and fields. Everyone tried to form groups of family members, friends, or just acquaintances, as long as it was someone. A few older men moved from group to group, asking for water, food, or ciga-

rettes. The evacuation had caught them when they were away from home. They had brought nothing with them.

The soldiers offered no food, nothing. The Khmer Rouge had not stocked any food, water, or medicine, and provided no aid stations along the evacuation routes. The soldiers abandoned the sick to die or recover on their own. The infirm were forced to find help from other evacuees, or fall out of the crowd and risk being shot. On some evacuation routes, there was no food until the evacuees reached the villages where the Khmer Rouge almost randomly settled them. Those without food starved unless they could find, steal, or beg food along the way.

In the rest area, people were using a slight depression nearby to relieve themselves. There was no privacy, but no one looked anyway. Tor and Nguon took turns visiting the depression, while the other watched their bags. Afterwards they sat by a tree on a slight knoll, making sure they were upwind from the depression.

Tor opened her bag. She was now very glad for it, although it had grown so heavy to carry that her arms ached. Nguon had tried to take it from her and carry it with his own, but she wouldn't let him. She took out a white sheet, stood up, and spread it on the ground beside them. She sat down on it and motioned for Nguon to join her. She pulled chopsticks and a bowl of leftover cold rice from his bag, and set these down between them while she lifted two bananas and some grapes out of her bag. They ate their feast in silence and washed it down with some of their water.

When they finished eating, Tor said, almost in a whisper, "Dearest, I don't understand any of this."

"Neither do I," Nguon replied. "There were rumors of the Khmer Rouge evacuating towns that they controlled before the war ended, forcing everyone to be peasants in the fields, and shooting former government officials and all captured officers. We all thought that was government propaganda."

"What are they going to do with us?" Tor wondered aloud, putting her arms around her knees and looking at a squad of soldiers passing by in the dim light.

For a moment Nguon looked at the soldiers too. He turned his back on them, shook his head, and admitted, "I don't know, honey. If we don't rest and sleep, however, they won't need to do anything to us."

He pulled a blanket out of his bag and lay down, pulling her down with him. She snuggled up to him as he covered both of them with the blanket.



In the morning, as Nguon was putting his blanket away, a Khmer Rouge soldier, a boy with an old American M-1 rifle, strode up and pointed to Nguon's wrist. "I want to see your watch," he demanded.

Without a word, Nguon took it off and handed it over. The boy looked at it, held it up to the sky, held it to his ear, smiled, and put it on his wrist. The band was much too large for the boy's skinny wrist, and the watch dangled. He stretched the band and pulled it up his arm over his black shirtsleeve until it fit, just below his elbow. Looking at it happily, he strode off.

Tor later learned that the Khmer Rouge had evacuated everyone in Phnom Penh—between two and three million inhabitants and refugees. They evacuated all the cities and towns they occupied after their victory. The wealthy or middle-class citizens who had tried to ride out in cars soon abandoned them, or the Khmer Rouge soldiers seized and destroyed the vehicles. They also soon confiscated loaded motor scooters or bicycles. The vast multitude of pitiful urbanites and refugees had only possessed their feet, like Tor and Nguon. They formed straggling, trudging columns that extended for miles, like a fatal migration of lemmings.

The soldiers killed anyone who disobeyed their orders. They killed anyone who withheld any items the soldiers wanted. There was no law, no rules, no order except the soldier's commands, demands, and whims.

Day after day, Tor and Nguon plodded along the narrow roads and trails, crowded together in the jumble of humanity that flowed out of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge had told them that the evacuation was for a few days. This had been a lie. To minimize disorder, Nguon guessed.

Aside from the outright killing by the Khmer Rouge soldiers, the arduous evacuation, the lack of food and medical facilities, exposure, and sheer fatigue and emotional stress soon took its toll. Babies, young children, old people; the already sick, injured, and infirm died along the way. A medical doctor named Vann Hay, evacuated with all the rest, told them he saw a dead child every two hundred meters.

Tor and Nguon trudged for eleven days, and at each village along the way, the soldiers chose a dozen or so evacuees to accompany a Khmer Rouge village chief. Sometimes a village fed those that were to continue; sometimes they came across a store along the road and the

soldiers allowed them to take whatever food was there. They ate their fill at one small Buddhist temple stocked with military rations.

Finally, they reached a small village that Nguon thought was near the much larger village of Phum Knol. He'd stolen glances at his map to keep track of where they were. Phum Knol was northwest of Phnom Penh, on the edge of the Chuor Phnum Kravanh Mountains. These were low mountains with many passes through them to Thailand.

The village was a simple clearing in the forest, with several dozen huts on both sides of a single lane, and a cleared area for planting. They could see the bent backs of peasants tending the crops. Tor and Nguon and eleven other people were the last group to be settled. There were three older men, two young women, and two other couples, one with two children whom Tor had befriended. When the soldiers led them into the village there was no one around except the fat village chief, Theng Pech. He stood, dressed in the usual black, baggy, pajama-like clothes, waiting for them with his pudgy arms across his chest and his short legs spread apart. The soldiers led the group to stand before him, and moved off at a distance to watch.

Frowning, his lips puckered, Pech studied each of them. When he finished, he scowled. "Are there any doctors among you?"

Everyone looked blank.

"Any lawyers, former government officials, or soldiers?"

Still, no one said a word. Along the evacuation routes, all had seen what happened to those admitting any such profession, or even contact with them. They were either shot where they stood, begging for mercy, or they were taken into a field with their families and one by one beaten in the head with a hoe until dead.

"Any teachers?"

Nguon said not a word. Tor gasped out an emphatic, "No," under her breath.

Teachers, lawyers, and other professionals, according to the Khmer Rouge, had been contaminated by Western influence, and were therefore to be exterminated. Cambodia had received its independence from France twenty-two years before, but the French corruption, the Khmer Rouge believed, still permeated the professions. They sometimes even exterminated those with college educations.

Pech moved among them, stopping before several of the men to demand they tell him about their jobs. One said he couldn't find work; another claimed he was a cook. One naive fellow said that he was a court clerk.

Pech leaned forward. Spittle flew from his mouth as he hissed, "You are a counter-revolutionary. You worked against the people."

"I wasn't a government official!" the unfortunate man protested, "I was just a clerk!"

Pech's voice rose to a scream. "You die!" He waved to the soldiers and pointed at the man, who had fallen to his knees, shaking, clasped hands rapidly moving up and down, pleading, "I did nothing. A clerk. Only a clerk. I love the revolution."

Two soldiers came up on either side of him and lifted him by his armpits. They dragged him, crying, into the nearby forest. Minutes later, those in the village heard screams and loud thumps.

Then silence.

Pech strode up to Nguon and tilted his head to look up at him with a questioning expression. "What did you do?"

"I worked in a vegetable and fruit stand," he lied.

"Did you own it?" Pech asked suspiciously.

"No. I hate capitalists," Nguon responded.

"Show me your hands," Pech demanded with a black look.

Nguon held out his hands and Pech bent over to study his fingers and palms—searching for a soldier's blisters or calluses, Nguon explained to Tor later.

Not satisfied, Pech ordered, "Take off your shirt."

Tor was shaking now with fear, and could hardly stand as Nguon took off his shirt.

"Bend over," Pech demanded.

When Nguon obeyed, Pech knit his brows as he studied both of Nguon's shoulders, looking for any discoloration, thickening of the skin, or marks that indicated Nguon had recently carried a pack, rifle, or machine gun on his shoulder and thus had been a soldier for the former evil government. "If there had been the slightest suggestion of this," Nguon told Tor, "I'd be a dead man."

Pech flipped his hand at Nguon for him to put his shirt on. Without a word he turned away and strode to the front of the group. Tor let out her breath and, blinking back tears, tried to grab Nguon's hand. He shook his head in warning and put a finger to his lips, indicating the watching soldiers with his eyes.

Pech motioned for the group to spread out in front of him. When their shuffling stopped, he began his little welcoming speech.

"You are here to work for the revolution. You will learn to farm from the peasants, and through your work in the great soil of Cambo-

dia, your thoughts will be purged of the evil capitalist and Western influences that pollute your minds. Here you will be reborn as true sons and daughters of our land.”

Pech glared at them all, as though daring them to show unhappiness or unwillingness. He continued. “Okay, here are the rules. The married among you will get a hut to yourselves. The rest of you will all live in the large hut you see behind me. You will all turn over any utensils, food, pots, knives, and anything else you possess, except for your clothes and blankets. We are all communists here and all equal. We share everything.”

Pech stopped, folded his arms across his chest, and again looked at each of them in turn. He now harangued them. “There will be no talking without permission, except between married couples, and only in their hut. You cannot leave the village without a pass, and when you go to work it must be in groups of no less than five, with a guard. There is no money. We will provide you with everything you need. We do not allow you to pick fruit in the woods without permission. If we give it, all that you pick you must turn over to the village.”

Someone behind Tor shifted uncomfortably. Pech paused and glared at the culprit for a moment before continuing. “You will always eat together, never privately. You will work from 6 AM to 8 PM. After work, you will spend no more than thirty minutes eating, so that you can attend our reeducation lectures and learn about our great revolution. We allow no radios and no letter or note writing.

“If you disobey any of these rules, we will execute you.”



The work was exhausting. Nguon’s hands were always bloody and when he straightened, he clutched his back. Tor was in no better condition. They all were growing weak from insufficient food. All that they produced from the fields and picked in the woods was trucked away, except for a small portion. They dared not complain.

One day, while working in the field, Tor saw the boy Yann collapse and sprawl on the ground. Possibly he died before he hit the ground. Possibly he was on the brink of death. Possibly malnutrition or some disease caused it. No one knew anymore why people died. They were all in such poor condition that a simple cold was often lethal.

Chek shrieked when she saw her son fall and, her hands reaching for him, dashed to where his skinny body lay stretched across his hoe.

She threw herself on the ground next to him and cuddled his limp head on her lap. After a moment she realized that he was dead. Wrenching sobs shook her whole body as she bent over him, rocking back and forth.

A soldier wearing the inevitable Chinese cap and the red scarf around his neck had been watching all this. He rushed over with his rifle, lifted Chek by the arm, and tried to drag her away. At first she would not release Yann, but Tor ran over and tenderly took the boy from her arms. By that time, Chek realized the danger she was in and let the soldier take her through the village to Pech.

Three days later, when the soldier was out of hearing, with silent tears streaming down her cheeks, Chek shared with Tor what happened next:

In a high-pitched voice the soldier told Pech, “Her son died, and she bawled over him, crazy-like.”

“I couldn’t help my tears, even in front of Pech,” Chek said, “but I collected myself enough to bow to him. I clasped my hands in front of me subserviently. I’d seen what happened to one of the women who broke down in tears of fatigue while digging an irrigation ditch. She would not or could not pick up her shovel, even when the guard yelled at her to get back to work. The guard reported her and Pech accused her of being a counter-revolutionary. You remember it, Tor? A soldier dragged her into the woods, and in minutes returned alone.”

Chek wiped her tears away so the soldier wouldn’t see them. “Pech hates anyone who is unenthusiastic for the revolution.” When Tor nodded, she continued. “I was so scared when Pech asked angrily, ‘Why are you crying? You think more of your son than of the revolution. You’re a fucking antirevolutionary. You cry just because your son died. The revolution means chicken shit to you.’”

Chek stopped to look around to make sure they weren’t observed. Tears still flowed, and she wiped at them with the back of her hand. “I knew, Tor,” she whispered, “that I would soon join my son in death unless I did the right thing. I had learned over the months how this horrible *Angka*—organization—works.

“I shook my head, trying to stop crying over Yann. I was afraid my voice would give me away to Pech, but it grew firmer as I spoke. I told Pech, ‘I’m ashamed, that’s why I cry. The revolution is now deprived of my son. I know . . . that he’d have grown up to be . . . a strong communist.’ I looked Pech in the eye—I itched to scratch them out with my

fingernails, Tor, but what could I do? —and I added, ‘Maybe even a good village chief, like you.’

“Pech snorted, ‘You lie,’ but his voice lacked confidence.

“‘No, no, no,’ I asserted. ‘I love the revolution.’”

Chek’s voice was a hiss of hatred as she told Tor, “I would shit on the revolution, and I almost said that, but I didn’t want to die. I wanted to do something, anything, for my dead son. Even if all I could do was live, so I could remember his life.

“Pech’s brow furrowed, and he squinted at me for a few minutes. He turned to the soldier standing nearby, holding his rifle pointed in my general direction. ‘Has she shown any other counter-revolutionary behavior?’ Pech asked him.

“The soldier responded with clear reluctance, ‘No.’

“‘Has she been a good worker?’

“‘Well . . .’

“‘Answer me!’ Pech roared.

“‘Yes,’ the soldier barked, almost coming to attention.

“‘Okay.’ Pech looked back to me. I still held my half bow. He told me, ‘Go back to work and we will take care of your son’s body. I warn you: I’ll be watching you. Go.’

“And that’s when I returned to the field.”

Chek stopped for a moment and looked down at her callused and dirty hands. As Tor had listened to Chek, she remembered how she had felt when watching Chek come back. She had seen Chek will herself not to look at her son’s body, now lying alone in the dirt. Tor had cried inside. She had ached to put her arms around Chek, to comfort her, but had known it might mean her own death.

Chek looked at Tor again, but her gaze was turned inward at her private horror. Her eyes were wet. She picked up where she had left off. “When I got back to my place in the field, my tears returned, and with my back to Pech and the soldier, I let them fall. The pain, Tor! The pain of passing by Yann’s body without saying goodbye, without kissing him one last time, without caressing his beautiful cheeks, was almost too much for me. My stomach knotted, and I thought I would vomit. The aching pressure of containing my grief had built behind my eyes until a throbbing headache made thought almost impossible. I felt I would collapse, but I made it past my son’s body.”

Tor nodded in silent sympathy. She again remembered Chek’s effort, had seen the woman lurch past her son’s body, then catch herself from stumbling outright.

Chek drew a tremulous breath and finished in a flat voice, "I took up my hoe and returned to work."



Weeks later, Tor saw Chek's body dangling in the woods. She'd taken a vine and hung herself.

That night, when Pech's spies would not see her, Tor wept. She realized then she could not long survive herself. Chek's death was the reason she later agreed with Nguon to attempt an ill-prepared and hasty escape from the village and Cambodia when he said they must flee or die.

What had done it for him was the sheer horror of Mey Samoeun's murder.

Also evacuated from Phnom Penh, Mey was an agricultural scientist and college teacher. He kept this a secret from everyone, but he forgot himself during one of the reeducation lectures on the great agricultural revolution wrought by Pol Pot, and the Khmer Rouge "breakthrough innovations in irrigation."

Mey, who had become a close friend of Nguon, whispered, "Pure crap." He then explained why he knew so much about it.

Nguon, of course, returned the favor and admitted he taught as well.

Later, as Mey worked in the field, he couldn't help displaying a deep knowledge of plants and soil. The soldiers noted this and informed Pech.

During one mealtime, Pech approached the branch table where Mey was eating and leaned over to look at him. "I hear you are a good man in the field," he said briskly. Mey didn't know what to say.

Pech stared at him for about ten seconds, as though expecting him to confess to a plot to overthrow the Khmer Rouge. Then he gave him a grisly smile and ordered, "Every day, starting tomorrow, from 9 to 11 AM you will teach the kids what you know about farming. We will pick the kids out. They are the ones still too young to do the revolution's great work."

Trembling, Mey started to breathe again.

He began teaching the next day and seemed to enjoy the children.

A month later a squad of soldiers stopped at the village to rest, and happened to pass by Mey's outdoor class. One of the soldiers halted so suddenly that the one behind him almost bumped into him. The soldier

stared at Mey. Then he hurried over to a peasant feeding the village chickens, and demanded to know where the chief was. The peasant pointed out his hut.

The soldier cast another look over his shoulder at Mey, who was unaware of the attention, and strode to the chief's hut.

"Comrade Chief," he had yelled outside the entrance, then disappeared inside. Several minutes later, the chief came out with the soldier, who now pointed his AK-47 in Mey's direction.

His mouth a thin line, his eyes narrowed to slits, Pech stalked up to Mey's class. Waving his hands in the air, he roared, "Stop. Mey, come here."

Looking at the soldier, Pech demanded loudly, "Is this him?"

"Yes," the soldier snapped, now looking frightened himself. "I was a student in his class. I heard he did work for the government."

"You're a *spy*," Pech yelled at Mey.

"No, I'm not. I did no more than help the government protect mango from midge and weevil."

"*You're a spy*," Pech spat. He motioned to the soldier. "Take him and tie him to that post in front of my hut."

The soldier moved behind Mey and poked him in the back with his gun. Using it as a prod, he forced Mey over to the post, where he made Mey sit down and then he picked up a nearby rope and tied him fast by wrapping it around his torso, arms, and the post. Pech ignored Mey the rest of the day and through the evening. No one could approach him for fear for their own life.

As Nguon worked in the field, he asked various people, "What happened to Mey?" One of them was the peasant who'd been feeding the chickens and heard everything. He relayed it all to Nguon.

When everyone was released from work for the day and the reeducation lecture was over, Nguon sat for hours in the door of their hut, looking down the line of huts to where Mey was tied. Tor tried to get him to sleep, but he wouldn't even respond to her. She found him still there in the morning, lying on his side, asleep.

At mid-morning the next day, Pech called together all the peasants and evacuees and took them to a flowering shower tree that grew behind the huts. They stood beneath masses of beautiful bright flowers in shades ranging from pale red to white. Birdsong filled the air around them. The sun had not yet burned away the delightful morning smell of growing things—of life. A few white puffs of clouds dared to intrude on the rich blue of the sky. The air was dry and comfortable. A gentle breeze played across the downcast faces of those waiting by the tree.

It was a great morning, a gorgeous spot.

Mey was still tied to the post, now with soldiers standing on either side of him. Pech, dressed in his usual black uniform, glowered at them all and waved an American military .45 caliber handgun at Mey. Nobody had seen the handgun before.

“The CIA and KGB are working to overthrow our glorious revolution,” he bellowed. “Their shitty spies are everywhere. There are also agents of hated and corrupt capitalists at work among us. Now watch and you will see what we do to these counter-revolutionaries.” He raised his gun and fired a shot into the sky.

The two soldiers guarding Mey untied him from the post, then retied his hands when he staggered to his feet. He was too weak to walk. They half carried him to the tree. A soldier threw a long rope knotted into a noose over a lower branch. Mey did not protest or move when the soldiers dragged him over to the noose, tied his feet, and placed the noose around his neck. He said not a word.

A soldier had entered one of the huts. Now he emerged with six of the children Mey had been teaching. Soldiers led them to the tree and instructed them to line up by the long end of the rope that fell along the ground from the tree limb. They were too solemn and quiet for young children, and seemed confused. A soldier picked up the rope and put it in their hands. Although the soldier had probably spent some time early in the morning instructing them, he still had to make tugging motions several times before the children would pull on the rope.

Looking back and forth between the rope and the soldier, the children pulled halfheartedly on the rope, yelling, “Bad teacher. Bad teacher.”

They pulled Mey off his feet and he hung a few feet above the ground, his tied legs jerking back and forth. The children released the rope, and Mey fell to the earth in a shower of flowers knocked loose from the shaken branch. Encouraged by the soldier, the children picked up the rope and tugged with more vigor, walking backwards several feet, pulling Mey off his feet and above the ground a second time. They still chanted, “Bad teacher, bad teacher.”

The soldier motioned the children on several more times, until Mey was dead. By then, the children were enjoying the new game. And the ground around Mey was carpeted with flowers.

Nguon watched, his face frozen in grief. Tor was terrified that he

would do or say something. She got as close to him as she could and tried to hold his hand, but it was stiff, ice-cold, and unresponsive.

When the hanging was over, Nguon rushed back to their work on the irrigation ditch. Tor hurried after him. He worked silently, with single-minded determination, for the rest of the day. He ate nothing at the evening meal. He said nothing during the re-education lecture, or afterwards. Finally, back in their hut, he whispered to Tor so that none of Pech's spies could hear, "We are escaping tonight."

"But dearest," Tor whispered, "can we? We're not ready."

Nguon looked at her with tears in his eyes, his face revealing the misery he had been holding within him all day. "We must. I can't promise that if we stay another day, I won't say or do something that will get us both killed. All I think about is grabbing a gun from one of the soldiers and shooting him, and finding and killing that fucking bastard Pech. I would then die happily, but the soldiers would also kill you, my love."

With the image of Chek hanging from a vine still fresh in her mind, Tor touched a finger to Nguon's tightly compressed lips and whispered, "We'll go. Let's get ready."

They'd been planning to escape, though not this soon. They'd been stockpiling food and supplies, but couldn't hide them in the hut, for Pech's spies occasionally searched their hut while they were working. They had bartered for a raincoat, wrapped everything in that, and hid it in a pile of rocks beneath the thick trunk of a leaning tree, where it was protected from all but the worst rainstorms.

Now, they put in their bags the few items they kept in their hut.

They waited.

The night was warm and low clouds hid the moon. It felt like rain was coming. Her body shaking, Tor wiped sweat from her forehead and listened to the night sounds, breathing deeply to soothe her rapid heartbeat and, perhaps for the last time, to capture the sweet smell of plumeria flowers nearby. Nguon was so still, so quiet next to her. When she took his hand, she could feel his heartbeat through it. She knew he was trying to think through their escape. She knew he also feared this would be their last night alive.

Around one or two o'clock in the morning—without lantern, flashlight, or matches, without food or water, without much hope—they fled.

Their night vision was good, and Nguon knew the direction they

must go. They felt their way carefully through the woods, following certain trees and bushes whose locations they'd memorized to bring them to the rocks and their store. They quickly put everything in their bags and pushed on.

"By dawn," Nguon whispered, "we must be far away from here."

He led the way through the woods, relying on his memory and landmarks to find the road away from their village. They hurried along the road until the sky began to lighten. Then they moved far enough into the gloom of the woods that soldiers would not see them from the road. When it got light enough, Nguon was able to determine the direction the sun traveled by the moss on the rocks and trees. He led them west, toward Thailand.

They traveled this way for several days, wending through the woods and sleeping in them during the day, treading the narrow roads and paths during the night, their eyes scouring the darkness in every direction for patrols. They gave Phum Knol and several smaller villages a wide berth. At last they reached the wide pass through the mountains to Boi Russey, the last small town before Thailand, and part of a line of Khmer Rouge outposts whose patrols sought to catch those trying to escape from Cambodia.



After they had passed the village of Boi Russey, they were caught in a rainstorm. Nguon slipped on a mossy rock, and as he fell his foot slid under another rock, breaking his ankle. He couldn't muffle his scream of pain.

Behind him Tor also cried out. She rushed over and knelt by Nguon's leg. Her wet hair fell over her face as she studied his foot. It was bent at a right angle and twisted backwards. She covered her mouth, but could not prevent a gasp from escaping.

Bracing himself on his elbows, Nguon looked at his foot for a moment. "Give me some cloth."

"Why?" Tor cried.

"Please," Nguon said in a voice tight with pain.

Tor got up and leaned over her bag to protect the contents from the rain as she pulled out an old blouse. She handed it to Nguon.

He took it, folded it into a thick roll, and told her through gritted teeth, "I'm going to put this in my mouth and bite down on it. When I do, don't wait. Straighten out my foot."

He chomped down hard on the cloth and motioned to his foot. Tor

leaned over, sheltering the broken ankle from the rain with her body. She gripped it and with a jerk twisted it back to its normal position. Tor heard the broken bones grinding against each other. Nguon groaned as his body heaved.

Shaking with sobs, Tor looked up at Nguon as he tried to control his pain. After some moments, he gasped, "Get me a straight, thick stick."

Tor got up and staggered over the unfamiliar ground in the drizzling rain, searching for a fallen branch. Finding one, she returned to her bag, pulled out her knife, and cleaned the branch of leaves and twigs. Knowing why Nguon wanted it, she cut the branch into a two-foot length, placed it beside Nguon's broken ankle, and took a shirt out of his bag. She cut it into strips, and placed them beside the stick. She had been able to stop crying, but still her voice broke when she told him, "Put my blouse back in your mouth, dearest."

He gripped it with his teeth again, and closed his eyes.

Tor placed the branch against his broken ankle. It came almost up to his knee. She took off his floppy slipper, held the branch against his leg, and wound the strips of cloth until she was sure the leg couldn't move. The most difficult step was securing the limp foot to the branch, but she did this by winding the strips around and under the foot, and then around the branch. She was gasping for breath when she finished.

Nguon took the rolled blouse out of his mouth. His face was drained of blood, his eyes full of pain. He wheezed, "See if you can find something I can use as a crutch."

Tor searched the woods nearby for a long, solid branch with another branch protruding from it at nearly a right angle. It must fit under his armpit to support his weight. She found nothing on the ground, and she was about to climb a tree to cut off a useful branch when she heard voices in the distance.

She scampered back to Nguon, who had also heard the voices. They were indistinct, but getting louder. Suddenly, a few clear words made plain that this was a Khmer Rouge patrol. They were tracking them.

Nguon tried to sit up, but fell back. He pointed to their bags and whispered urgently, "Go, go, take the bags and go west." He pointed in the direction they had been headed "Quick. *Go.*"

"No, I can't desert you. No dearest, we will die together."

Gritting his teeth, he managed to raise himself on his elbow, and tried to push her away. "You must not die. You must tell people about

the horror here. All the deaths and killing. Go. Make it never happen again.” He pushed her again, weakly.

Her eyes widened and her hand flew to her mouth in terror. She could hear the soldiers in the distance, moving through the forest toward them.

Tor looked at her loving husband for the last time. She tried to fill her memory with his beautiful face. Too soon, too quick, the approaching voices broke the spell. “Goodbye, my dearest husband,” she said tenderly, but the words felt ripped out of her. “I will never forget you, and I will never forgive. I love you.”

She slipped into the forest.

About fifteen minutes later, she was sure she heard a shot. She stopped, leaned her head against a tree, and silently sobbed, “Yes, my dearest, I will never forget you. And I will join you as soon as I can.” Her commitment calmed her enough to move on. She noted where the sun was through the haze of rain clouds, and pointed herself west.



For days, Tor trudged through the forest. She was lost, but knew one thing—west, she must head west, always west. The sun was her guide. When it was cloudy, she determined west by where the moss grew the thickest on the tree trunks. She thought of Chek, of Mey, but most of all, of Nguon and their happy, loving life together. Only thus could she distract herself from her awful physical pain.

She was bleeding from numerous thorn scratches on her bare legs, and her skin was bruised all over from falling on rocks and tripping over roots. Her slippers had fallen apart and she now limped along barefoot, her feet bleeding from blisters and cuts.

Tor stopped at a little stream to wash herself, soak her battered feet, and eat the last grains of rice and some fruit she had picked. She was bone-weary, and the cold water was a blessed relief. She thought she’d shed all the tears humanly possible, but when she saw her reflection in a little pool the stream created, she broke down in sobs again.

She tried to gather her strength. She must survive for the sake of her husband. He had told her to survive, to “make it never happen again.” Tor wiped her tears and placed Nguon’s six-inch carving knife close by, as she had done whenever she stopped. She pushed her tortured feet deeper into the cool water.

At that moment, from the edge of the forest, she heard, “Who are you?”

Her heart thumping, almost dizzy with fear, she slowly raised her eyes toward the voice and saw a Khmer Rouge soldier no more than fifteen feet away. He probably was part of a patrol and had decided to stop at the stream for a drink. He held an American M-16 carbine on his shoulder. A combat knife hung from his American military belt, and grenades were attached to his bandoleer. He was a skinny kid, no more than eighteen years old, she thought.

For a moment, she sat stunned, rocking with the rapid beat of her heart. Then from deep inside, her most basic instinct told her what to do. No thought was needed. She took two deep breaths and painted a smile on her face. Without saying a word, she rose and turned full toward him. Eyes vampish, she swept her hair back from her face, then slowly unbuttoned and removed her blouse. She wore nothing underneath, and she bent forward to let her breasts shake a little. A moment later she straightened and took off her shorts and panties. Turning her body away from the boy soldier, she bent over to place her shorts on the stone beside her knife, at the same time lifting the knife and holding it so that her right wrist hid the blade.

As she intended, the boy saw Tor's genitals as she bent over. When she stood up and turned toward the boy, his eyes were round and his face was flushed. Naked, she glided toward him, murmuring huskily, "I want you. I want to fuck. Fuck me."

The boy stood frozen in place as he ogled her breasts and pubic hair. Quite probably, given the strict rules against sex imposed upon the Khmer Rouge soldiers, he was a virgin who had never seen a naked woman so close before. She approached him and put his hand on her breast, and then dropped her left hand to rub his swollen crotch.

The boy soldier reached between her legs, and she lifted her free hand with the hidden knife as if to slip her arm around his neck. She sliced deep into his throat, cutting the carotid artery, and quickly dodged the spurting blood.

The boy grabbed his throat. Blood gushed between his fingers. He gurgled, dropped to his knees, and toppled over.

Tor scrambled for her clothes, bundled them under her arm, and shook her knife in the stream to wash it. She picked up her bag, then rushed back to the boy's body and pulled the carbine from under him. Now armed, she continued west. She stopped to dress only when safely away from the dead boy and the patrol.



Three torturous, never-ending days later, after climbing and descending a series of wooded hills, weakened by lack of food, with leaden legs and her feet a bloody mess, she staggered down an incline toward a level area of bushes and grass. Partly delirious, she muttered over and over, like a Buddhist mantra, “I will survive. I will live. I promised him. I must survive . . .”

Tor heard a motor. She stopped, swaying, and silently screamed, “No, no, please, no. Not *them*. Not after I’ve come so far.”

She could barely lift her head to look death in the face.

She stared.

There! There—a good road, running parallel to the hills. And on it, she saw a man riding by on a bicycle. And another one, riding from the opposite direction. She stumbled toward a patch of tall grass, hoping it would hide her movements as, one small step at a time, she approached the road. She stared as a motor scooter driven by a woman in a flowing blue dress passed along the road. Then an American car.

She was in Thailand!

Tor tried to stand straight. Swaying with the effort, she looked back at the mountains as if through a wet window. She planted her bleeding feet, gripped the carbine by its barrel, and swung it forward, hurling it back toward Cambodia. She fell as she released it, and buried her face in the grass, inhaling the smell of growing grass and rich earth—of Thailand. She kissed the ground.

She twisted onto her back, looked up at the cloudy sky, and croaked, “We made it, dearest. You are here,” and she touched her chest. “Here in my heart forever, my husband.”

Tor sat up and pulled her bag to her. She had consolidated what she could from Nguon’s bag, and saved from it a photograph of them that Nguon always kept with him. She took it out, laid it on her lap, sought for the locket she would not barter, and set that beside the photo. Then she took out her knife, wiped her tears away, and cut her and Nguon’s faces out of the photograph. After making sure Nguon’s face fit the locket, she folded her face underneath that of Nguon’s, and trimmed the sides to fit within the locket. She opened it and inserted the result over her parents’ picture. She looked at Nguon’s face for a few moments, kissed it, closed the locket, put the chain over her head, and let the locket fall down above her heart.

“Now, my dearest, you are here,” and she put her right hand over the locket and her heart.

Her legs were almost too cramped with fatigue to move as she struggled to stand up. Putting one bloody foot in front of the other, she hobbled toward the passing vehicles.

Chapter 4

Tears streaked Joy's face when she finished her story about her mother. "She is my hero, John. If I am half as brave as she was, I will be proud. I will die happy."

Joy *was* as brave. She didn't die happy.

I was embarrassed by the story of her mother. This was a heroic story, but no different from what I had read in many Cambodian refugee reports. Hearing it in all its graphic detail from this exotic woman, whom I was only now getting to know, was like having a stranger I'd just met in a bar telling me an intimate family secret. I would be intrigued, but at the same time I would want to say, "You shouldn't be telling me this."

And now she was crying.

I turned toward Joy and held my hand out, palm up, in a conciliatory gesture. "Okay, Joy, I'm very impressed by your mother, but really, why are you telling . . ." I trailed off as the limo came to a stop. *Saved from making even more of an ass of myself*, I thought.

I'd been so entranced with her and overcome by all I'd heard that I didn't realize we had driven up to a farmhouse. I looked at my watch. We'd been driving for almost an hour. *We must be well outside of Bloomington*, I thought, although I didn't know where we might be.

Joy quickly collected herself and brushed the tears from her face with a sweep of her hands. The driver got out and opened my door. I noticed for the first time the elderly Asian lady waiting on the walkway to the house. She had gray hair, cut short and held back from the side of her face with ornate jade hair combs. She wore a white blouse tucked into a tan skirt. Like Joy, she wore no coat.

Before Joy could introduce us, she came up to me and reached out to shake my hand. Smiling, she said in a still youthful and sweet voice, "Welcome to dinner, Dr. Banks. I am Joy's mother, Tor Phim." Her warm black eyes looked deep into my own.

While Joy had overwhelmed me with her beauty and accomplishments, her mother impressed me with the force of her charismatic presence. No wonder she was president of a huge conglomerate, I

thought. It was a moment before I gathered my poise enough to respond with, "It is my pleasure to meet the mother of one of my best students."

"Oh yes," she said with a smile and twinkling eyes, "she takes after me." With that she led the way into the farmhouse.

I knew then where Joy got her humbleness.

The farmhouse contained three rooms on its lower floor, with a very large dining room open to the living room, in which all the furniture had been moved against the walls. A fire blazed in the stone fireplace. A huge round oak table in the middle of this great open space had a dozen conference chairs pulled up to it. Almost as many people stood by the door and around the table.

"Hello," Tor said to the room, then waved a hand at me. "This is Dr. John Banks."

I waved self-consciously, saying, "Just John, please."

Tor took my coat and then led me up to a stunning, middle-aged Asian lady dressed in a blue suit. "This beautiful lady is Dr. Gu Yaping."

"Call me Gu," she said, smiling.

"She is a physicist and owns Peng Magnetics and Propulsion," Tor added. "Joy did computer work for her before she took your class."

She moved on to an older man who stood tall and straight, despite a huge pot belly. He covered that with loose-fitting slacks and a long sport shirt he let hang out. "This handsome guy is Dr. Ludger Schmidt. He is an electronics engineer and president of World Enterprises, based in Switzerland."

I was startled. Schmidt's company was considered one of the top ten electronics companies in the world, with holdings in all major industrial countries. I knew of it because I'd inherited stocks in the company that my mother had bought on the New York exchange. Its share price had gone up every year since.

Tor Phim continued to introduce me around the room. Almost everyone present was a president or owner of their own company, or the director or president of an institute or center. I felt very much out of my league. I was so tongue-tied that, after the first few introductions, I only mumbled, "Hello, nice to meetcha."

Joy's mother sensed my discomfort. She said with an encouraging smile, "We all use first names here. Relax. We're all informal."

Then she led me to the table and motioned for me to sit down. Joy sat next to me and Tor took a seat across the table. As the rest of the

company also sat down, she said, “I know it’s customary for people to mingle and chat before dinner, but we want to get the meal finished so that we can all talk with you, John. You will find that we are unusual people in more ways than our dinner customs.”

Servers brought tea and soup—a lusty broth with eggs, pork, soy sauce, and what I thought were bamboo shoots.

“I have the meal catered,” Tor said. “It is a simple meal. When the caterers leave, we’ll talk business. Now, enjoy.” She motioned toward the soup.

I thought for a moment that this would be it for the meal, but after we finished our soup, more food was put on the table. It was a good thing I liked Asian restaurants, or I would never have identified what we were eating. The main dish was marinated beef with lime sauce and a lot of pepper, served over jasmine rice. It was delicious. There was banana rice pudding for dessert.

Conversation during the meal focused on world events: the possibility of an Arab oil boycott; the likelihood of another war between Israel and her neighbors; a new outbreak of terrorism against the United States after its military attack on Afghanistan; and whether former President Clinton would ever run for another office.

“Like, for mayor of New York?” someone quipped.

Joy was quiet during the meal, but a thin black man with a narrow face and large eyes who sat on my right leaned toward me and said, “I’m Dr. Laurent Nkongoli. Tor introduced us, but you probably can’t remember me in that crowd of names in your head.” He paused and smiled. “I’m head of medical research at the Samoeun Institute of Medicine that Tor started in New York.”

Oh yes, what a story Laurent had to tell. A month later, when I had a chance to talk with him about his former life as a doctor in Rwanda, I learned about the infamous Rwandan genocide from him firsthand. He and his nephew had barely escaped with their lives. I remember well what he told me:



At the beginning of the genocide in April of 1994, Laurent’s nephew, Seth Sendashonga, was a student at the National University of Rwanda in Butare. There was some concern among Tutsi students and faculty at the university about massacres of Tutsi unleashed by the

Rwandan Armed Forces in Kigali, the capital. But by Rwandan standards, that was a long distance away. Few worried about it.

So all were taken by surprise when, on the morning of April 10, the Hutu Interahamwe paramilitary militia and Hutu Army soldiers surrounded the university. Once assured that no one could escape, the head of the militia, Stanislas Munyakazi, passed out lists of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu students and professors who must be murdered. Each name had a building and a dorm room or office number designated next to it. Consulting the list, squads of three men each entered the buildings and searched from room to room.

Soon, Hutu professors and students whose sympathies lay with those instigating the massacre joined the squads and helped identify those to be killed. They took up machetes themselves and joined the search, using their knowledge of the campus to seek out possible hiding places. Larger squads broke into the classrooms where classes were in session and forced Tutsi professors and students out of the classrooms, marching them through the building and into the university parking lot, where a large group of militia waited.

The militia had the greatest trouble in the university's Leopold Library. Most had never seen the inside of a library and were unaware of the maze of book stacks. When they discovered that these provided an ideal hiding place and started to search them, they lost themselves in the winding, narrow aisles between the stacks.

This delay saved Seth. He was then a gangly young Tutsi who wanted to be a doctor like his Uncle Laurent, and work at Butare Hospital. Seth was in his second year of premedical courses. He'd been looking for a United Nations book of world health statistics in the Government Documents section on the first floor of the library when he heard shots fired in the parking lot. He rushed over to join other students who were staring out the windows. They could see the parking lot, the trucks parked there, and the militia and some soldiers moving around—all armed. Several large objects lay on the ground. They looked like bodies. Seth opened his eyes wide and gasped.

One of the students at the window called to another, "What's going on?"
"I don't know."

But Seth knew. His parents had heard about the genocide in the capital, but Laurent's cousin, who was in the local Butare government, had said that this was a minor outbreak by Hutu extremists, and not to worry. Nonetheless, they'd told Seth to take a knife with him when he went to school.

Most of the students at the window looked like Hutu. As soon as Seth realized what was happening, he backed away, whirled, and tore back through the stacks. In his haste to escape, he bounced and pushed off one shelf after another, until his flight was marked by the sound of falling books. He slammed out the rear fire escape door into the dumpster area behind Florence Hall and dashed across the pavement to the dumpster. Panting, he looked into it. No good. It was barely large enough for him to hide in. He would be trapped if the militia searched this area, which they were sure to do.

So far he had kept his backpack with him. With his heart pounding against his ribs, he knelt and opened it and tossed aside his books and notes, leaving his knife, water, and the lunch his mother had made for him. He pulled out the nine-inch knife. Sunlight trembled along the length of its blade. He swung the pack over one shoulder so that he could easily drop it, if the need arose. Hugging the building's wall, knife in one hand, he crept on shaking legs around the corner of the building and into a narrow lane between it and the library. This led to the woods that bordered the parking lot.

His body had known. His instincts had carried him this far. Now his laggard mind caught up. As he slowly crept along, he suddenly realized how very near death he was, as close as if he were about to stumble into a pride of hungry lions. He knew that if even one militiaman or soldier with a rifle came into the lane, he was dead. His whole body started shuddering with the hammering of his heart. He had a hard time getting his breath; he almost fell away from the wall. But it was keep moving or die.

He glimpsed a sliver of the parking lot at the end of the lane. He slowed. Now he could see two militiamen with guns standing at the edge of the lot, obviously stationed there to prevent anyone escaping the massacre. Seth didn't realize he had been holding his breath until it came out in a wheeze when he realized he was in shadow between the buildings, and the militiamen had not seen him.

Little by little, Seth slinked backwards until the parking lot was out of sight, and then he lay down and sprawled in the lane as though he had been shot. He kept his right hand with the knife in it tucked under his stomach so that he could rapidly pull it out, and he partly covered his head and one eye with his backpack. Trembling, his stomach knotted, he waited.

Now he heard distant screams and cries, gunshots, yells, and cheers—the rumbling symphony of mass murder. A slight breeze car-

ried the acrid odor of gunpowder, the unforgettable smell of blood, and the stench of human excrement evacuated in death or deathly fear.

The cries and shouts, the gunshots and screams grew louder—they came from the parking lot now. Seth slowly inched himself forward so he could see whether the commotion would cover his escape. The two militiamen had joined others who were shooting and hacking with their machetes at a group of men and boys. The militia showed no mercy. Some seemed to enjoy the Tutsis' pain, and cut open their stomachs or hacked off their legs or arms so that they bled to death in agony. Within minutes all the male victims were on the ground, some writhing in pain and covered with blood, some moaning.

Part of Seth's view of this slaughter had been obscured by a large group of female students and older women the militia had separated from the males. Now they turned on the females, who were huddled together, screaming and crying. A few fell to their knees, begging for mercy. One woman cried, "Please, kill me fast. Now. No torture. Please."

The militia leader shouldered his way through the militiamen. Seth recognized him from photos he'd seen: Stanislas Munyakazi. He stopped in front of the women and held up his hands for quiet.

The women sobbed even louder.

Stanislas waited a few moments and then smiled at the militiamen now standing on both sides of him. Then he turned his flat face back to the women and bellowed, "Do you want to live?"

The crying stopped in mid-sob. All that Seth heard now were the moans of the dying men and boys and muffled shots from inside the buildings nearby. The women all stared at Stanislas.

"Very, very good," he barked. Smiling even more broadly, he added, "Strip. Everything. Or die."

Some hesitated; some immediately began to take off their clothes and drop them on the ground. Some stood dazed, unable to believe what was happening.

Stanislas reached over and took a machete out of the hand of the militiaman standing next to him. He walked up to a young student no more than eighteen. She just stood there, unmoving; head lifted high, lips pressed together, she unblinkingly looked Stanislas in the eye.

He grabbed her by her blouse, pulled her to him, and then stepped aside and tripped her so that she would fall in front of him. Gripping the machete with both hands, he hacked off one of her arms. Without pausing, he stepped over her quivering form and amputated the other.

He next cut large slices out of her legs and her back, until she no longer twitched and squirmed in the large pool of blood that had poured out around her. She had not made a sound.

When he finished he turned, panting, back to the group of women. All were now naked. The militiamen leered at them, making obscene jokes and laughing. Two trucks drove up. Stanislas ordered the women into the trucks. Seth knew what that meant. The trucks would take the women to the militia camp, where they would be the militia's sex slaves before being killed.

The naked females lined up behind the trucks and began climbing into them, fully displaying their genitals. Seth saw his chance. The militiamen were getting their jollies, ogling the women. They had forgotten about guarding against anyone escaping. Seth stood up shakily. He jammed the knife up his sleeve, accidentally cutting his arm, swung his pack onto his shoulder, and hurried on wobbly legs past the lot and into the woods.

Once the trees hid him, he dropped to the ground and beat his fist on it in relief. He waited there until he caught his breath, then clambered to his feet and ran along a path, heading for Butare Hospital.

When Seth reached the hospital all seemed peaceful, with the usual bustle of patients around the entrance. He hurried into the hospital and up to the surgical department where Laurent worked.

A nurse told him, "Dr. Laurent is in surgery, performing a mastectomy. We don't expect him out for a half-hour or so."

Seth scribbled a note, folded it, and asked the nurse, "Please be sure to give this to Doctor Nkongoli when he finishes surgery."

Then, still trembling uncontrollably, Seth went to the waiting room.

Less than ten minutes later, the public address system came on. After some initial background noise and the murmur of voices, a firm voice announced clearly, "Government authorities have ordered all Hutu doctors to come to the hospital entrance immediately. Turn over whatever you are doing to your assistants. This is an emergency."

With a feeling of *déjà vu*, Seth frantically searched for a window that provided a view of the entrance. He rushed in and out of several rooms in his search, muttering apologies when he found them occupied, and attracting an angry nurse, who trailed behind trying to stop him. Finally he found a window overlooking the hospital's parking lot.

One quick look out was enough. Stanislas Munyakazi and his militia and a few soldiers were motioning the doctors coming out of the entrance to gather around him.

Seth pointed this out to the nurse, and slowly opened the window while trying to remain in the shadows. Stanislas had a loud voice, as Seth already knew, and he was yelling his loudest at the doctors.

“The Tutsi are foreigners,” he shouted. “They are really white men from the North, again trying to take over our country. For the future of Rwanda, and to protect our women and children, you must kill all the Tutsi doctors, nurses, and patients in the hospital. You have no choice. Kill them or we will kill you.”

Stanislas slowly turned to look each doctor in the eyes. “Understand?” he asked in a normal voice.

No one spoke.

“Okay,” Stanislas barked, and pointed to a truck behind the doctors. “We have weapons in that truck for you—machetes and some axes. Get your weapons and do immediately what you must.”

The nurse disappeared. Seth had heard enough. He rushed back to the waiting room, snatched his pack from the chair where he’d left it, and scampered down the hallway, past alarmed nurses, to the surgery. Grabbing a startled nurse by the arm, he breathlessly demanded, “Which surgery is Doctor Nkongoli in?”

Eyebrows raised, the nurse propped one hand on her hip and pointed to the second door down the hallway. As he rushed off, he yelled at her over his shoulder, “Get out. Hutu are killing all Tutsi.”

He shoved open the door and burst into the outer surgery just as Laurent was washing up. “We’ve got to get out,” Seth cried. “They’re killing all Tutsi here.”



“Who?” Laurent asked, regarding Seth. Laurent could tell he was on the verge of panic, so he spoke calmly and continued to wash his hands, hoping to relax his nephew.

“Hutu doctors and militia. I heard the order.”

Laurent held his dripping hands in front of him as he stared at Seth. When he saw how frightened usually calm Seth was, he realized they had to act quickly, or die. Laurent dashed to the supply closet, jerked open the door, and grabbed a white coat and surgical hat. Then he ran back into the surgery room, where the patient was just being wheeled out and the nurses were cleaning up. He screamed at them, “Get out. All Tutsis are being murdered.” No one had ever heard him yell like that. They all disappeared in a flash.

With Seth hugging his shadow, Laurent quickly looked under the operating room table and sighed in relief when he saw the amputated breast still in the disposal box. He seized it and wiped it over the white coat and cap he held, then over the front of his own coat, mask, and hat, adding to the bloodstains picked up during surgery. Laurent also picked up a surgical knife and made sure it was bloody, as well.

Ah, yes, he thought. He dragged the blood receptacle from beneath the operating table, plunged a rag into it, and shook the rag over his shoes and the bottom of his coat, splattering both with blood.

Laurent motioned Seth over and handed him the coat, mask, and cap. Seth donned the garments, putting the bloody coat on over his backpack. Laurent then splattered the blood on the lower part of Seth's coat and shoes.

"Do you have a weapon?" Laurent asked.

Seth wordlessly showed him his knife. Laurent made it as bloody as the surgical knife.

"Now, hunch down and bulk up so that you don't look so tall and thin, and it's simple," Laurent lied. "We just look like we're seeking and killing Tutsi."

They suddenly heard muffled screams and gunshots, even through the wall of the outer surgery room. Looking in the direction of the sound, Seth's voice broke with fear as he asked quickly, "Won't the Hutu doctors . . . recognize you?"

"No, not if I stay close behind you and have my bloody mask on. Let's go. Quick!"

They rapidly exited the surgery room, carrying their bloody knives as though ready to carve someone up, and dashed down the hallway to the stairs.

As they passed the recovery room, they heard patients yelling at them, "What's happening? What's going on?" They kept going, knowing that there was no hope for those patients. The militia and Hutu allies would kill all who looked like Tutsi, and any Hutu who objected to the killing.

As Seth and Laurent started down the stairs, two militiamen were on their way up. When they saw Seth with Laurent behind him, they stopped and pointed their guns. Seth smiled and waved his bloody knife, as though saying, "Look what we've done."

One of the militiamen, seeing all the blood, laughed and yelled up the stairs, "Good hunting, eh?"

Seth's hand holding the knife shook wildly; to the militiamen, it must have seemed he was waving in agreement. He almost stumbled down the stairs, with Laurent following. They brushed past the two militiamen.

On the first floor, Laurent directed Seth to the emergency entrance. They passed the bodies of patients and visitors scattered along the hallway. Soldiers bent over some, searching for valuables. A doctor came out of a room with a bloody fire axe in his hand. When he looked at them, Seth waved his knife in greeting. The doctor smiled grimly, and then went into the coffee shop.

They made it to the emergency room, where several doctors and nurses were sprawled on the gore-slick floor. An emergency patient lay on a bloody gurney, where she had been hacked to death. An ambulance attendant was searching the pockets of a dead doctor for money.

Seeing that, Laurent's mouth set in a grim line, and he narrowed his eyes. He looked around. No one else was alive. He walked up behind the attendant, who looked over his shoulder at him. Seeing Laurent's bloody scalpel, the attendant turned back to his search.

Laurent bent over the attendant and grated out, "Find anything?" As the attendant was about to answer, Laurent suddenly straddled him, put his left hand under his chin, jerked his head back, and slit his throat with surgical expertise. Laurent felt no horror, no remorse—nothing—as he did so. To him, it was an execution. Justice had been served.

At that moment, a doctor in a bloody white coat, gore-smearred machete in hand, came in from the hallway. He looked around, saw all the bodies, smiled and waved, and strode back out.

The blood pouring out of the attendant as he squirmed on the floor in his death throes further sickened Seth. He looked ready to retch, and his legs about to buckle in on themselves; he cast his gaze desperately around the room, seeking something to lean on. Laurent grabbed his arm and, partly supporting him, walked them both out the emergency entrance.

A soldier stood guard over an ambulance backed into the emergency parking area. They headed toward him. Seth managed to calm himself enough to join Laurent in waving at the soldier as they approached.

Feigning a south Rwandan accent, Laurent commented casually to the soldier, "Good show." He then asked, "Do you have a cigarette?"

The soldier, a typical southern Hutu with round face and bulky build, rested his Vektor assault rifle in his left hand, butt against his

wide hip, while reaching into his shirt pocket for his cigarettes. He handed a pack of Cameos to Laurent, who took a cigarette out and handed the pack back.

“I’m terribly sorry,” Laurent said, “but I lost my matches while killing Tutsi. Do you have a match?”

The soldier laughed. “Of course. Here.” He rested his rifle against the ambulance, took out his matches and, holding the matchbook in one hand, lit a match with the other. He held it out to the cigarette in Laurent’s mouth.

At that moment, Laurent drove his scalpel into the soldier’s solar plexus and up into his heart. With only a groan, the man dropped the matches, clutched his chest, and fell onto his side, dead.

Motioning Seth to follow, Laurent entered the ambulance and got behind the steering wheel. The keys were still in the ignition. He started the engine, put the ambulance in gear, and accelerated as fast as he could out of the emergency lot. They hurtled down a short lane onto a major road.

Suddenly they heard shots nearby. Glass shattered, slicing into the side of Seth’s face. Two holes appeared in his door’s window about where his head would have been, if it had not been pushed forward by his backpack between him and the seat. More bullets thumped through the side of the ambulance and shot out the other side. They’d surprised a squad of militia stationed along the road to prevent anyone from escaping in their car. Before the militiamen could aim well, Laurent accelerated the ambulance out of range.

“Where are we going?” Seth barely managed to get out, wiping his cuts with the sleeve of his bloody coat.

“We’re heading to our border with Zaire. We should make it in about two hours, if the militia doesn’t call ahead. But I doubt they will. We’re just two Tutsi, and they are in a hurry to kill hundreds of thousands of us. I don’t think they’ll take the time away from their more important work.”

“What about your wife and my parents?”

“We prepared for this genocide, although we doubted it would reach us. We made arrangements with Hutu friends to hide your parents and my wife until we can sneak them out of the country.”

“But, how will they know to hide?”

Laurent told him, “Prompted by the death of our president and the genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutu in the capital, I arranged a phone signal. Every day, I called my wife when I got to the hospital, at noon,

and at five o'clock. If she'd still received no call half an hour after these times, they were to take what we had already packed and seek refuge with our Hutu friends." He reached over from his driver's seat and patted Seth on the leg. "Don't worry, these are good Hutu I have known almost my whole life."

About a mile before the border and outside of the Rwandan town of Bukavu, Laurent pulled the ambulance off the road and they concealed it. Then they walked into the wild forest that covered a good part of the Zaire and Rwanda in that region. They found a little clearing deep in the forest, where they could rest and wait safely.

Seth took off his bloody coat and his backpack, and then joined Laurent where he sat with his back against a tree. "I guess I should eat," Seth mumbled. "Breakfast was a long time ago." He opened his pack, his hands no longer shaking like tree limbs in a storm, but only trembling, and took out the water and his lunch. Then he must have realized that he wasn't hungry at all, because he offered his lunch of fruit and chicken to Laurent.

He declined, saying, "Save it. We'll probably need it before we find other Tutsi in Zaire. They shouldn't be far, however. I understand that there is a large Tutsi refugee camp about two miles west of the border. But I need the water."

Laurent dozed off and on until after midnight; Seth just stared into the darkness. They met no one on their walk into the Zaire. The night sky was clear of clouds, and they steered by the stars when they could see them through the forest canopy. They found many little paths worn by those who had preceded them. Without really knowing it, they crossed into the Zaire within an hour and kept to their westerly course. By midday, they found the Tutsi refugee camp and safety.

There, they later learned that 170 Tutsi doctors, nurses, and patients in all were slaughtered in Butare Hospital. They never found out how many were murdered at the university.

Chapter 5

Had I known Laurent's story earlier, I might have forgiven his putting a memory-wiping drug in my tea during Tor's dinner party. Actually, I did forgive him.

As we ate side by side at the huge table, he waved a hand at the other guests, all engrossed in their conversations. "Let's leave them to current events," he said to me. "I wonder, Professor; how many people do you think died in the Black Plague in the middle of the fourteenth century?"

Unsure where he was going with this, I replied, "About one-quarter of the European population—and about a third of those deaths were in England, I believe."

He nodded.

Knowing his prestigious medical position, I asked him, "Do you think such a catastrophic plague could ever befall the modern world?"

He smiled and replied, "I believe science and world health services have now made that impossible."

He hesitated a moment, considering what he was about to say. As he thought, he pushed his plate away. It looked as though it had been washed, he had so thoroughly finished off his meal. He put his right elbow on the table and turned toward me, gesturing with the other hand as he looked directly into my eyes and asked, "Was not the Black Plague like what you call democide in the twentieth century?" He raised his brows as if in inquiry, but he didn't wait for my reply; instead he brought his fist down on his leg for emphasis and continued with, "Haven't more people been murdered in cold blood by their governments in the twentieth century than died in the plague in the fourteenth century?"

If I had only known his background, I would have answered with a reference to Rwanda. And what a discussion we could have had! I knew nothing about him then, so I responded in general. "Yes, but billions more people lived in the twentieth century than did in the Middle Ages. It's strange, however, that the history books pay more attention

to that ancient pandemic than they do to the mass murder of human beings during our lifetime.”

Laurent nodded, and sighed. “You say about 174 million human beings, in fact. Right, Professor?”

“Yes,” I replied, surprised that he knew my estimate. I looked askance at Joy. “You’ve been talking out of class,” I accused her with a grin.

Joy just smiled in return.

Discussion continued as the caterers cleaned up, leaving behind only a slight aroma from the delicious meal we’d eaten. After they bundled everything out of the house and said their good-byes, Joy’s mother went into the kitchen they had just vacated.

“What’s Mrs. Phim—ah, Tor—doing?” I whispered to Joy as Tor came out of the kitchen and climbed the stairs to the upper floor.

“Making sure we’re alone,” Joy replied. “She’s checked the kitchen, now she’ll make sure the bedrooms and bathroom are empty.”

I looked around the table. Everyone sat husbanding their thoughts, waiting for Tor’s return.

“Okay,” she declared as she rejoined us at the table and sat down. “The Survivor’s Benevolent Society is in session.” With that, she lifted an old-fashioned gold locket from around her neck, kissed it lovingly, and gently rested it on the table in front of her.

Remembering what Joy had told me about it in the limo, I stared at the locket. Such a sad history embedded in a simple ornament.

Tor interrupted my maudlin thoughts. Looking around the table, she announced, “As you know, several members could not make it here. They will follow along on the conference phone.”

Ludger retrieved a round, black, conference phone from a side table behind him, placed it in the center of the table, and spread five wireless mics evenly around the table.

After an initial flurry of greetings to and from the phone, Tor said in a sad voice, “I must report that Nebojsa Spahovic died yesterday of his injuries from the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Even with the best medical help, we could not save him. He never came out of his coma.” She looked at me and explained, “He was a survivor of the Bosnian ethnic cleansing, and a member of our Society. He had business in the North Tower and was walking toward it when the hijacked commercial jet flew full-throttle into the building. He was injured by falling debris.” She looked around the table. “I wish to remember our good friend with a minute of silence.”

I bowed my head with the others. I didn't know this fellow, but I had my own dead to mourn, and my own horrible experience to remember.

After a minute, Tor looked up. "He will be with us in spirit, I know," she said softly, and then her voice grew firmer. "Okay, let's move on. I am the head of the Society this year, but . . ." She looked at me. "I will ask Gu Yaping to speak to you, John, on behalf of the Society. She speaks better English, and she is a scientist."

I studied Gu. She was a Chinese woman in her late fifties or early sixties with a lively expression on her round, still unlined face. Her double-lidded black eyes were slightly slanted, like Joy's. Her hair was cut short and, though black, I suspected she dyed it. I knew nothing about her at the time and now wish I had. I would have been even more impressed by her words.



Days later, Joy told me about Gu's horrible experience in China. Because of my own historical interests in China, during the following weeks I asked Gu many questions about what happened. In return I told her my story about Chen Ying, to see if she thought it as credible as I did. She said it was not only credible, but she knew a woman whose daughter had been murdered in that way.

"My experience occurred at that time, too," she told me. "When Mao Tse-tung launched his so-called Cultural Revolution in China, it was nothing less than a bloody civil war between the Maoist faction and that of Liu Shao-ch'i. It killed upwards of ten million Chinese and threw the country into a period of terror, mass murder, and pitched battles."

I knew much of this from my own studies, but I wanted to hear it from her. She continued, "Mao's supporters mobilized secondary school kids, university students, and other young people into what the Maoists called the Red Guards. These youths beat up and killed people they thought to be bourgeois or counter-revolutionaries. They invaded homes at will, ransacking belongings while seeking proof of subversive activities. Just a shortwave radio, just some Western music, just foreign language publications, even photographs branded residents as traitors. This meant their death."

In another conversation, I asked, "What about your being a scientist? Didn't that make you suspect?"

For the first time I saw her emotionally animated. She couldn't sit still, but leaned towards me for emphasis and then sat back to gesture with her hands. She almost spit them out. "Intellectuals and scientists? We were all suspected of being counter-revolutionaries, rightists, capitalist-roaders, or spies for the West. Under such a heavy load of suspicion, it's a wonder we weren't all wiped out. Many of us died."

She stopped and tried to calm herself down. She took a cigarette out of a pack of Virginia Slims and lit it with her lighter. She settled back in her task chair and crossed her legs while she puffed on it for a few minutes, then waved the cigarette at me. "It's like a nightmare. I now find it hard to believe myself. But all I have to do is look at my husband's old photograph and . . . Well, to go on.

"The Maoists considered the scientists they allowed to survive much too dangerous to govern or direct important agencies, universities, hospitals, scientific centers, or technology institutes. Maoists believed it better to put reliable party hacks or fanatical radicals in such positions, despite their ignorance, rather than risk subversion."

She shook her head in disbelief over her memories, her short-black hair swirling against her cheeks. "Mao even believed he knew how many intellectuals and scientists were bourgeois sympathizers or counter-revolutionaries—about 10 percent. So the command went down to all Maoist Party officials: Purge 10 percent of these employees."

In several weeks, I learned her personal story well. Gu's husband was one of those scientists purged. When I heard this from her, in my usual tactless way, I asked, "How did you find out what happened to him?"

The question didn't bother her. She replied, "I secretly questioned friends in the Institute of Sciences in Shanghai where he'd worked, and even some acquaintances close to its director who were sympathetic. I took a great risk—one word from any of these people to the director or his assistants and I would be dead. But I had to know why my husband was murdered. I just had to know." She paused. "I needed to know my husband's story—all of it."

Another cigarette came out of the ever-present pack of Virginia Slims. Then she said, "I found out that Wu Zhen, the director of the institute, received the order to purge 10 percent of his workers as rightist or counter-revolutionaries, and dutifully put two of his communist cadre to work on a list of those to be purged."

Gu laughed derisively. “Wu Zhen was short, fat, and balding, and tried to conceal his bare head by combing his few remaining wisps of hair over the top of his head. To contain his big pot, he always wore his gray Party uniform two sizes too big. While it did contain his bloated stomach, it hung loosely elsewhere on his body, as though from a hook. His face was round and flat, and his tiny eyes never seemed to open wider than slits.” The laughter died when she added, biting off her words one by one, “He was a fanatic—an ignorant radical. But, he was a follower of Mao, and that was enough to get that stupid man appointed as *director*.”

She stopped to think for a moment, and then continued in a harsh voice, “I imagined him propping his feet up on his rosewood desk while he looked over the names on the list of workers he received from his assistants. Each entry included a short summary of each person’s file. A check mark in the margin beside a name indicated that this person was recommended for purging. At the bottom of the list, some ambitious assistant had totaled the number of check marks, divided this by the number of people employed, and multiplied the result by one hundred to calculate the percentage. It came out to almost 10.6 percent.

“Wu Zhen accepted every check mark, and at the bottom of the last page he penned the order that each of these employees was to be fired as a probable counter-revolutionary before their names were reported to the security police. He set the discharge date for the following Monday so that the institute could find replacements, warned that secrecy must be maintained until then, and then stamped his seal on it.”

The corners of her mouth turned up slightly in a grimace masquerading as a lopsided smile. “Now for the really crazy part. One of Wu Zhen’s assistants told me that he read *Tales of the Plum Flower Society*, a popular Chinese spy thriller, over the following weekend. It was a wholly fictional account of a spy network in the Academy of Sciences run by the hated Chiang Kai-shek—”

Ever the historian, I stupidly interrupted. “He was the former President of China who fought the communists for two decades. He fled to Taiwan with his government when the communists won the civil war against him in 1949.”

Startled, she focused her eyes on me with some difficulty. Then, in a tone that put me in my place, she replied simply, “Yes . . . John.”

She leaned back while keeping her eyes focused on me, as though watching a puppy who might pee on a clean rug. “Anyway, in that novel, clever communist security agents discovered the spies and cap-

tured them, of course. The chief spy's name was Peng Jiamu, and unfortunately, this was also the name of a real scientist—"her voice broke—"my dearest husband."

She took a moment to collect herself. No tears. Her face just turned to steel. "He was a scientist in the institute. His name had not been among those to be purged.

"Incredibly, Wu Zhen did not believe the book was fiction and thought that my husband was the same fictional Peng in the spy thriller. So, along with all those on his purge list, that brainless bastard, that fanatic Wu Zhen had my husband and another 165 scientists at the institute arrested. Arrested as *spies*. A death sentence!

"Well, you know how that worked," she said, then quickly added, as though I would interrupt again and tell her, "security police invaded the homes of all these people. Owning a radio, a camera, or knowing a foreign language was believed proof of spying. If none of this so-called evidence was found, the security police tried to beat a confession out of the suspects, often killing them. Anticipating this fate, some of those arrested committed suicide. Some even before their arrest, when they heard rumors about what was going on."

Gu shifted position. Her eyes narrowed slightly, and I'd swear I could hear the steel around them cracking. She reached for her purse and took out her pack of cigarettes, held it for a moment, and then tossed the pack back in and dropped her purse next to her chair. "What I am going to tell you, John, I have only told to those very close to me. Joy and Tor, of course, and a few others. I want you to hear it also, because you are an historian of these tragedies, and because you may die for us, for me."

She then told me of her personal horror, much of which I had already heard from Joy. Since she can no longer contradict me, I can say with abandon that I'm repeating Gu's story with the exact precision that only a brilliant historian like I could exercise:



I was not at home when police arrested my husband, Peng. As I approached our home on my bicycle after shopping, I saw him, handcuffed, being pushed into one of two police cars. I knew immediately that I would probably never see him again.

All the scientists at the institute understood that arrest was a possibility. As scientists, they had interacted with foreigners, had read

foreign publications, and therefore were always in danger of having such normal activities misunderstood or misinterpreted by the Red Guards. Peng and I had prepared, as had so many others, for such an eventuality.

I quickly pedaled my bicycle past the police cars and down a side street. I could hardly steer it, I was shaking so much. My feet shuddered off the pedals several times. My breath caught in my throat; my stomach knotted. The devastating thought, *Peng, my poor, dear husband Peng*, kept beating in my mind. I could barely see through the tears that stung my eyes.

I wonder now how I stayed upright on my bike and didn't crash into the police cars or a tree. I knew if I did, the police would discover who I was and arrest me. The Red Guards often jailed whole families. I steered the wobbly bike around a corner, around another corner, and into some bushes. I dragged it behind the bushes and fell on the ground, beating the earth with my fists, and sobbed into the dirt for my husband and our lives, now totally destroyed.

Maybe an hour or two later, emotionally and physically exhausted, I used the bottom of my dress to clean my face and wipe my eyes. I ignored the food that had fallen out of the bike's rear basket. I knew what I had to do.

I headed for my cousin's small *dim sum* restaurant on Yunnan Lu Road. There, I hid my bicycle in the rear among the garbage cans. I entered through the back door.

My cousin, Ding Xiaoshuang, was in the kitchen preparing meals with another cook. He was too skinny to look like a cook—cooking made him lose all taste for food, he said. Lack of a good chief's fat might cast suspicion on the quality of his food, but his friendly, outgoing nature compensated for that. About every fifteen minutes he toured the restaurant, asking customers how they were, what their children were doing, and how they liked his *dim sum*. He always suggested his custard tarts as a treat.

Ding looked at me without surprise when I came in the back door. This was one of the signals we had planned if Red Guards, soldiers, or some other faction arrested one or the other of us. Otherwise, I would have come in the front door of the restaurant.

No doubt my eyes were puffy and red. "Hello, cousin," Ding said, as mindful of his cook working nearby as I was in hiding my face from him. Moving towards the stairs to his apartment above the restaurant,

Ding added, "I have that present for Peng you wanted me to get. Come on upstairs and I'll give it to you."

I had so far not said a word. I followed Ding up the stairs. We moved towards the room at the front, where Ding's cook and the waitresses hustling in and out of the kitchen would be least likely to hear us.

He put both his arms around me, and I quietly wept into his chest. He just held me tight and rubbed my back with one hand. He had never seen my tears before. He knew what would cause them. He didn't hurry me, but he risked arousing his cook's suspicion, so I knew I had to stop. I fought for control.

Peng and I had been married for only a year. I had met him at a conference at the institute, where I had served as a lab assistant. I had a degree in physics and had participated in experiments on magnetic propulsion, his chief area of research. I found Peng, with his tall, athletic build and his strong Manchurian features, handsome; he often attracted the stares and smiles of strangers when we ambled down the street—although he claimed they were admiring my willowy figure.

After we were married, we tried to reduce the risk of arrest. Only Peng worked at the institute, and we cleared our home of everything foreign. We concealed as much as possible from those at the institute the fact that we were married—as I mentioned, whole families were often arrested—and that both of us spoke and read English.

As I pulled back from my cousin and rubbed my eyes to clear them, Ding asked me in a subdued voice, "What do you want to do now? I haven't touched what you and Peng prepared. Do you want to flee to Hong Kong?"

Warily, I answered, "No. I first want to be sure about what happened to Peng."

Ding had to lean forward to hear me. I tried to raise my voice but only increased its quaver. "This might only be a warning or harassing arrest, and he might be home within a week or so." More firmly, I added, "I must find out. Can I hide here until I do?"

Ding hesitated. He took my hand and held it in both of his. "I think I can find out for you. You know my dim sum is famous," he whispered proudly, "and I get many prison guards with their families coming here to eat. When one of them gave a party for his son's graduation, I offered to cater it. There were over one hundred relatives, friends, and their families there. The food was sumptuous, I must admit, and I gave him a big cut on the cost. Now I can get my payment, yes?"

“How often does that guard eat here?”

“About once every one or two weeks, and I think he was here about a week ago.”

I didn’t have to think about that. I wanted to know. Absolutely. “Then I’ll wait. I’m leaving now, so that no one gets suspicious. I’ll come back after you close at . . . when, eleven?”

“Right.” He took a rag out of his back pocket and carefully wiped my face with it, and leaned over and kissed me on the forehead. “Be careful, now. Oh, here, take this package and make believe it’s the present I mentioned.”

I straightened up and went down the stairs first. At the bottom, I turned and yelled up with false cheer, “Thanks cousin, Peng will really like this.”

I headed for the waterfront on my bike, where I could bury myself and my heartbreak among the crowds.

Ding met me at the back door when I returned that night. “Peng’s dead,” he told me, reaching to hold me. “I’m sorry.”

I’d known it was coming. Now it was real. I staggered under the blow of his words, and sagged into his arms.

“You have to escape,” Ding continued. “Go to Hong Kong.”

Through his contacts in the Shanghai harbor market where he often bought fish for his restaurant, Ding knew a fishmonger named Wen who dealt with freighter captains that could be bribed. Much later, in his room, when I had stopped sobbing, he tore a small piece from a sheet of rice paper on his worktable and scribbled a message on it. He brought it back to me and, pressing it gently into my hand, said, “Give this to Wen. If the police stop you before you see him, you can easily swallow and digest it.”

I sought Wen first thing in the morning.

He was easy enough to find. He sold tuna filets at the market in the third stall nearest the dock. After looking over several filets, I asked Wen for one. When I paid him, I included the note. He took it with the money and placed it in the bottom of his moneybox, so that only he could read it. Closing the box, he told me to come back at 4:30, when he could give me a special deal on fish.

When I returned at the appointed time, a thin young boy stood with Wen. When Wen saw me approaching, he said something to the boy, who then moved from behind the fish table. As he brushed by me, he whispered, “Follow me.”

I followed him through the market crowd, out onto the Shanghai docks, and into Dadong Warehouse through a small side door. I found

myself in a small room that smelled of long-dead fish and rotting wood. Rope, hooks, canvas, and bags of all descriptions were heaped in corners and against two walls. The place was so dirty that I halted and flinched back as I entered.

The boy spoke for the first time since we'd left the market. "Turn around and face the door and be still." He studied me for a moment, eyes curious. He twitched his shoulders as though shrugging, turned, and swiftly disappeared out the door.

I could hear muffled sounds from the warehouse and occasional yells from dockworkers outside. An engine roared in the distance. I was beginning to worry about Wen setting me up to be kidnapped into the Chinese sex trade. This sometimes happened on the docks.

A door opened and closed on the other side of the room. Softly at first, then louder, I heard footsteps approaching behind me. As the person drew closer, I heard heavy breathing. The person stopped. The breathing got louder. I twitched my nose at the added stench.

I jumped at a sudden, unpleasant sound.

"Name?" a man's voice rasped in the most awful Chinese. I thought I recognized a Portuguese accent.

"Gu . . . Gu Yaping," I said, trying to keep my voice firm.

"Got jewel?" the voice grated.

"Yes." In the emergency store that Ding had hidden for us, Peng and I had included most of our family jewels, especially several antique jade rings and miniature ivory statues left to us when our parents died. The items were worth thousands of dollars on the black market.

"Give me."

I spun around and saw an older Caucasian man in a dark blue coat with two stripes on each sleeve. He wore an officer's cap with salt-tarnished, fake gold braid. His face was barely visible, but its red complexion and his bulbous nose could not be missed.

"No," I said, speaking pidgin Chinese, "you get when go on ship."

The man asked, "You go Hong Kong?"

"Yes."

"You fuck on ship?"

I gasped. I felt my face get hot. I suddenly shivered in the warm room.

The man stared at my hips, trying to imagine me naked, I guessed. He then unhurriedly raised his eyes to my blouse, apparently judging my hidden breasts. I wore a shapeless white blouse and it hung loosely over my gray slacks. I had done my best to hide my femininity, not

only out of traditional modesty in public, but so as not to invite any propositions in the docks, where many prostitutes worked their trade. But, I couldn't hide everything.

I forced myself to stand still, stop trembling, and endure his lusty inspection. I had to. I was not dumb. I knew that, once aboard his ship, he could take my jewels, kill me, and throw my body in the Huangpu River as the ship traveled to the sea. All that would keep him interested in keeping me alive would be sex and the promise of more sex.

Now blushing at what I must do, I lowered my head a little and looked at him demurely out of the corner of my eye. I whispered, "Yes."

"Do now. Take off clothes."

Well, I thought, what choice do I have? This was not going to be a strip tease. I promptly set a personal speed record in taking off my clothes, and let them fall anywhere. I stood naked with a straight back, head high, looking into his eyes, willing my knees not to shake. He probed me with his eyes, hurriedly took off his coat, tossed it on the dirty floor, and motioned me to lie down on it.

As hasty as he was to gratify his lust, I was more anxious to get this over with. I dropped down and spread my legs, turning my head away from him. He did nothing more than pop the buttons on his trousers to spring his erection free and fall on top of me. Straightaway he tried to enter me, but I was too dry. It was painful. I motioned for him to stop. I might have had more success in halting the charge of a bull. I had to grab his shaft in one hand to get him to stop long enough for me to spit on the fingers of my other hand and moisten his penis as best I could. Then I guided him into me.

As he vigorously pumped back and forth, my body jerked in unison. It was nothing to me but forced physical exertion, but I knew to save my life I had to fake pleasure. I moaned and put my legs around his back and moved my hips in rhythm with his. Fortunately, the time he took to ejaculate was almost shorter than it took to pronounce the word. I had to rush to lower my legs, reach between them, and pull his quivering penis out. I slid down and managed to put it in my mouth a second before he came.

Damned if I'll get pregnant, I thought, spitting everything out.

Afterwards, he lay on me and stroked my breasts. Finally, getting his breath, he murmured, "Good."

I pitied this man's frustrated girlfriends.

He got up, helped me to my feet, and again devoured my naked body with his eyes for a few minutes. Finally, he picked up his coat,

shook the dirt off it, and motioned for me to get dressed. While watching me cover myself, he said, "Go to Longwu Port dock by Longwu Road. At 1 AM. You know?"

I felt sick and dirty. My tears seemed to have a will of their own. I struggled not to show them, but I felt one escape down the side of my face. "Yes," I whispered.

"What?"

"Yes, I be there," I said, more loudly than I'd intended.

The man disappeared without another word.



When the Portuguese freighter *Bartholomeu Dias* docked in Hong Kong, among the many boxes unloaded was one labeled "Toys" in Chinese. Customs passed the box, as did a British inspector who beat on three sides of the box with his baton to make sure it was full and not hiding a refugee. A small truck picked up the box and took it to the bustling market on Tung Choi Street. There, two men unloaded the heavy box in front of a small women's dress shop and lugged it through the front door and into the rear, where they dropped it on the floor with a loud *thunk*.

The owner of the shop, Wu Jin, a thin man in his thirties whose thick, black-framed glasses dominated his face, signed for the delivery, and then impatiently waited on two women in the shop. When they left, Wu closed and locked the front door, then rushed into the rear. He pried open the box, flung aside the toys and stuffed animals inside, and then saw me.

I was curled up in the box, my chin touching my knees. I turned my head slowly and looked up at him with what must have been weary, red-rimmed eyes. Suffering and fatigue had etched years onto my face, I'm sure. I whispered huskily, "Hello, third cousin. I see you got Ding's message."

I tried to get out of the container, but fell back. Wu bent over me and, with a grunt, lifted me out. I moaned and put a hand over my abused crotch as he carried me over to a Chinese low chest and set me down on it. I must have lost ten pounds.

Weakly bracing myself with my hands to stay upright, I looked over at the container and saw the label. "Toys from China," I murmured. *Yes, I thought, how appropriate. I had been a sex toy for half the ship. But I'm alive.*

My hand trembled when I raised it to my lips. I kissed the palm, then tilted my head back and blew the kiss toward the ceiling. *That's for you, my sweetest. I made it and I will never forget you and what was done. Please now, rest in peace.*

Chapter 6

I waited for Gu to explain this incredible dinner party. Especially, why I was here with all these company presidents and institute or center directors. And for which I had been paid five thousand dollars. Just like somebody important.

There was a dripping faucet somewhere and the old farmhouse creaked in the increasing cold outside. It was getting warm in the room from all the people, and stuffy. The breath of one of the attendees was rasping loud enough to hear; another coughed.

I leaned forward in my chair, glanced at Joy, and saw her looking at me with the same concerned, wide-eyed, “is that a letter from the IRS?” look I would get to know so well. I gave her a counter “you’re guilty of something?” gape that I would, over the following years, turn into an art form. That done, I gave Gu all my attention.

Her gaze piercing in its solemnity, her mouth firm, Gu peered deep into my eyes. If she hadn’t folded her hands on the table, I almost would have believed she was reaching through my eyes to imprint what she was going to say on my brain.

She spoke directly to me: “Now, John, you should realize first that we know all about you.”

The words crawled up my spine.

With what seemed an audible twang, I swear, she broke eye contact with me to nod to a younger, well-dressed woman whose name I had forgotten. The woman rose from the table, went behind her to a large, rich leather case leaning against the wall, and pulled out a sheaf of letter-size papers. As she placed them neatly before me, Gu continued.

“We all have seen these reports, and have discussed their contents in detail. Take a minute to look at them. They should contain nothing that is new to you.”

I looked at the small stack before me, read “Parents of John Banks” on the top report, then I lifted it to read with wide eyes the titles of those underneath: “Early School Years,” “University Years,” “Friends,” and “Love Affairs.” *Holy Christ, five separate reports, each*

on some aspect of my life. I sat stunned and bewildered. Love affairs? *Jesus.* I was a healthy young male and made much of my years of teenage discovery. I found to my advantage that girls and even older women easily liked me. I snuck a glance at Joy, who was focused on the bare table before her and seemed amused by something. She must have read this stuff.

Shit. In growing anger fueled by increasing embarrassment, I flipped through their executive summaries and paused to scan some of the details, especially in “Love Affairs.”

More creaking from the farmhouse. A dining room chair scraped on the floor, and someone near me was audibly flipping through some papers. I felt hot.

Scowling at what I saw in the reports, I looked up at Gu, my eyes throwing daggers at her—this is the way I hoped I looked, but I had no practice. I did ball my fists, however, and half-rose from my chair to lean on the table. I exclaimed, “What the hell—”

Gu held up her hand, smiled warmly, motioned me to sit down. Women who smiled at my anger like that always had the upper hand. I would melt, and Joy found this secret out in one day, I’m sure. *Maybe that’s already in these damn reports,* I thought. *Given the power of these people around me, they probably know how many times I piss a day. Shit.*

Gu said gently, her eyes still boring into mine, “We had to know whether you were the right person for our proposal. All will be explained. First, however, we must be assured of absolute secrecy. Most people would not believe what we do, but were many nondemocratic governments to find out about our plans, they would try to assassinate us and all our associates.”

She hesitated and looked questioningly at Laurent, who nodded. She continued. “To ensure our secrecy remains intact, Laurent put a tasteless drug in your tea. It will activate in about three hours, and cause you to forget everything about today. Without an antidote, you will wake up in your bed with a note from Joy on your desk, telling you that this dinner was cancelled and that Joy had to leave for New York unexpectedly. If you commit yourself to us, we will give you the antidote to that drug, and you will remember everything.”

“I don’t understand any of this!” I protested loudly, fuming. “You have violated my privacy.”

Joy put her hand on my balled fist and said softly, “You will understand. Please listen.”

“Shit,” I muttered, drawing again on my extensive sailor’s vocabulary. But I sat back, put my clenched fists in my lap, took a deep breath, and nodded at Gu.



“We are a secret society,” she explained, “formed with only two purposes. We want to . . . ” She paused, and her face sagged with a great sorrow when she saw Tor pick up her locket from the table and hold it in both hands. Gu seemed to assure herself that Tor was okay without special comforting, and continued after a moment, keeping an eye on her. “We want to remember all the people who were murdered by one horrible government, terrorist group, or another—especially our loved ones. We are all survivors, except for the few children of survivors who have joined us in remembrance of their parents’ agony and dedication to our cause.” She glanced at Joy.

“We are survivors of the Holocaust, the Rwandan Great Genocide, the genocide in East Pakistan—now Bangladesh—and the mass murders in China, Cambodia, Chile, Mexico, and the Soviet Union. We, in this room and on the conference phone, are survivors of the murder of well over 100 million human beings. You, of all people, John, should know this toll. What did you teach? That around 174 million people, as a best estimate, were murdered in the twentieth century. Correct?”

I nodded, not appeased.

“We not only wish to remember the dead and through our Society build a testament to their souls, we also want to ensure that no human beings ever suffer this again. But not just ‘never again.’ We want it to be ‘never happened.’”

Murmurs of assent rippled around the table and over the conference phone.

“You, John,” and she pointed a finger at me that trembled with the force of her emotion, “are the instrument of this.”

I am? I thought. That kicked their violation of my privacy from my consciousness.

None of this made any sense, but I held my tongue and listened as Tor held her locket in one hand and waved her other one at those around the table as she declared, “Collectively, we are rich beyond your imagination, John. Together, through our companies, we control over a trillion dollars worldwide, all built and accumulated with only the goals of our secret society in mind and immediately available for the Society to draw on.”

She motioned toward an older man with a ruddy complexion, who wore a pinstripe suit. “Jimmy Wilson, the father of Ed, here, was the founder of our Society. Jimmy lost an arm in the First World War, but survived its horrors to dedicate his life to ending that killing machine, war. He came to the United States, where he thought his chances of getting a college degree would be better. He was right. He got a joint degree at Columbia University in business and economics. After he graduated, he worked at the Standard Chartered Bank of Britain and invested every penny he could save in the stock market. Less than ten years after his graduation, with the help of several investors who had faith in him, he launched Bank Britannica in London. He made his first million by the age of thirty-four.

“Jimmy used half of that million to secretly set up our society. Through his financial and political contacts, he sought out other, like-minded survivors who would commit themselves absolutely to the Survivor’s Benevolent Society. The Society’s growth had to be each member’s first priority, even above nation, clan, and family.”

Gu added, “Jimmy died in 1961, and his son Ed has carried on his work.” She gave Ed a partial salute before continuing. “The Society has always had a low membership, never more than two dozen members. But, size never mattered so much as our collective wealth and specialties. When survivors committed themselves to us, we discussed with them the best industry in which to seek wealth for us, if they were suited to that. For others, we helped determine the best science or profession to pursue, and the best personal specialty—physics, chemistry, medicine, banking, construction, and so on. Once a survivor decided how to personally contribute to our effort, all of us secretly gave the survivor our maximum support, using our wealth and network of contacts to multiply the level of their success and in turn build our combined wealth.”

Gu sighed, her face downcast. “We have been in existence for seventy-two years. At first, our Society concentrated on helping to develop the League of Nations and promote international law. Our consultants strongly believed then that peace and nonviolence lay in developing the international institutions of law and world government. Members of the Society were bitterly disappointed at the unwillingness of the League to do anything about the mass murders perpetrated by Stalin in the 1930s, the invasion and colonization of Manchuria by the Japanese, and the outbreak of the Second World War.”

Ed broke in. “My father was devastated by this war. Under his leadership, the Society had already distributed vast sums of money to peace groups, international law institutes, and peace-oriented politicians. Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of Great Britain who tried to avoid war by making a critical peace agreement with Hitler at Munich, would not have risen to power without the Society’s secret funding to his supporters and the favorable media.” Ed shook his head sadly. “My father was devastated by this failure to prevent world war from happening again, and by its horrors, which even exceeded those of the war he had survived. He withdrew from active participation in the Society, although he continued to bestow his wealth on it.”

A very old man with a cane propped against the table beside him leaned forward, and Ed paused. I recalled the earlier introductions; this was Viktor Pynzenyk, a mathematician and the owner of Yana Electronics.

Viktor’s age clearly showed in his tremulous voice when he took up the story about the Society’s attempts to prevent war. I had been listening avidly. As an historian, I was mesmerized by what I was hearing. And I was testing it against my own knowledge. I wanted to know how credible these people were.

As an historian? Ah, yes, I did say that. I learned in later years that Joy would become upset by my frequent use of “as an historian” in my arguments with her. But, as I would point out, she used “as a trained warrior” just as often against me. What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, or something like that.

Well, anyway, I listened carefully as Viktor said, “I took over the Society after World War II. We decided to act more democratically, and rotate the chairmen . . . chairpersonship every year.”

Tor and Gu both smiled at that slip, and Joy gave him a little wave of appreciation.

She would.

Viktor continued. “We also completely revised our approach. We decided to concentrate on finding a technology to help us fight war and democide—your term, John—and to seek a new international strategy. Clearly, international organizations and law didn’t work to prevent war and mass murder.”

He bent over, covered his mouth, and coughed. He waited a few moments to gather strength to go on. Gu was about to say something, but Viktor waved his hand to stop her.

His voice raspy with effort, he resumed. “We thought the best route would be improving global communications and travel so that people would get to know each other through radio and television, and meet each other and share cultures. So we put billions of dollars into inventions that would facilitate this. You use the Internet, of course, but did you know that the Society’s secret funding at the right time to the right people accelerated development of the desktop computer and the Internet by a decade? Our people built on this with inventions of their own. We also contributed to the rapid progress of commercial jet travel. Our members bought up a significant share of the outstanding stock in key industries, so we were able to steer research and product development in the most useful direction.”

His voice was growing weaker, but he seemed determined to finish. Tor looked concerned, and Gu was on the edge of her seat. For some reason I did not yet know, this was very important to him. Indeed, I found out later that he felt this was his last meeting, and he wanted to be involved in what he believed would be the culmination of something he had worked for all his adult life.

He was clearly drawing upon the last of his strength to finish what he wanted to say. “We shifted our focus to aiding diplomacy and weapons development among major powers to create a balance of power, especially a balance of terror, among the nuclear powers. While these policies were successful, and played a role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were still the Korean and Vietnam Wars, many wars elsewhere, and even more mass murder than there’d been before World War II. And there has been state-sponsored terrorism, the latest being the September 11 attack on the United States. Rapid communication, diplomacy, and maintaining a balance of power only seemed to prevent another world war—no mean achievement—but it did not end war, genocide, and mass murder.”

Laurent added grimly, “Yes, look at the Rwandan genocide I saw firsthand. That was less than ten years ago.”

“Yes, that’s why we are here,” Ed said, giving Laurent a look filled with compassion.

“So we . . . rethought our strategy again,” Viktor said so softly that I unconsciously leaned forward to make sure I heard him. “Twenty years ago, one of our members was alerted to research on war that suggested the answer we sought.”

What he was about to say lent his voice new strength. “The finding was that democracies do not make war on each other. Of course, if cor-

rect, this would mean that we should promote democracy. We distributed secret funds to encourage more research, and the original findings were replicated. Equally important, researchers also found that modern democracies that guarantee civil and political rights, what are often called liberal democracies, commit no domestic democide. Democratic freedom seemed to be the solution.”

He coughed again, and his face got red. He put his hand up to his forehead and Laurent rushed around the table to him and immediately took out his stethoscope and listened to his heart.

Laurent looked at Tor. “I’m going to take him to the bedroom. I think he should lay down and rest.”

Poor Viktor. He had lost his family in the Ukrainian famine and almost starved to death himself. That horrible experience had taken its toll on his health.

The Ukrainian famine had been another one of my historical interests. Later, when I sought him out to ask him about it, he responded willingly and bluntly. It was why he was a member of the Society, after all.

“We were starving to death,” he told me. “My father, Petro Pynzenyk, was powerless to do anything about it, which made him very angry. I remember him shaking his feeble fist in the air and yelling to my mother Olena, ‘How could he do this to us? How could he starve us to death? God, why? What have we done to him?’”

“My mother wouldn’t answer. Skeletal and weak with hunger, she could no longer leave their bed.”

Joy had heard about Viktor’s experience from Tor, and she heard it again in more detail from me as, of course, I perfectly remembered it from what he told me.



Drought had brought famine to the Ukraine. But this famine was nothing compared to what Stalin, the absolute dictator of the communist Soviet Union, or USSR, was doing. He had launched a total blockade that prevented any food from getting into that Soviet republic. The communist cadre even searched travelers to the Ukraine to make sure they carried no food with them.

According to Stalin’s fanatical communist reasoning, Ukrainian peasant nationalism was a danger to his power that had to be subdued. The peasants also had strongly resisted giving up their homes, farms,

and livestock to be collectivized into factory farms. Stalin's weapon against such stubbornness and nationalism was starvation. He sent the communist cadre, activists, and security forces into the region to enforce his own man-made famine.

Petro Pynzenyk's anguished outbursts against Stalin would almost exhaust him. He had been a handsome man in his youth, taller than most other peasants, with a round, open face and a strong brow. Even when age had grayed his hair, he had been well muscled, as heavy farm workers usually were. Now his ribs showed and his stomach was caved in; his arms and legs had grown bony, their muscles raped by his body for sustenance.

Viktor remembered watching him pry the soles off his shoes and then drop them into a pot of boiling water hanging in the fireplace. "Maybe they'll add some flavor to the tree bark," he rasped. It seemed that he could no longer say anything normally.

He was nonpolitical, tried to stay out of trouble, and did what the local communist functionaries asked. Except that, with all his being, he dreaded the demand he knew would soon come from Kiev—that he give up his one-acre farm and small home to collectivization. His father had worked all his life to develop and build this small farm. Petro did not want to give it up, but if he resisted, the communists would shoot him and his family.

Viktor was fourteen at the time. He spent the days hunting alone, because Petro, much to his shame, had grown too weak to join him. With a long-handled net, Viktor tried to catch any animals he saw around the village or in the unplowed fields, even former pets that the communists had missed when they came through, shooting them and stuffing the dead ones in sacks to be carried or trucked away. They'd also taken all the livestock, and had gone house to house looking for food, even seizing warm bread off the tables. When they learned that the villagers had started catching birds to eat, the communists again came through, shooting the birds out of the trees and bagging their little bodies.

When they came to the Pynzenyk home, they poked around the grounds outside the house with long rods, searching for buried food. They thus found the seeds Viktor's mother had hidden by the pump, which they'd planned to use for planting if they survived.

Finally, as much as he didn't want to believe it, Viktor realized they would not survive much longer.

One late afternoon when Viktor returned empty-handed to their house, he was just pulling the door shut behind him when he heard a distant scream. Alarmed but too weak to move himself, Petro waved Viktor outside to find out what was happening. Petro and Olena waited in tense silence as Viktor left the house. Viktor could tell they were scared. He followed the sound of the screams, which were soon punctuated by loud moans and gasps for breath.

When Viktor discovered what had caused the screams, he vomited up what liquid lay in his empty stomach. Sickened, revolted, he ran home and lay by his house and wept until too exhausted to cry anymore. Finally, he staggered inside.

He pushed the door shut behind him and stood there, swaying as if cornered. He could only gape at his parents, his mouth working. He started crying again, fighting to gulp air into his lungs, but dreading the news he had to tell his parents.

“What is it?” Petro demanded weakly.

Viktor ran over to his mother’s bed and threw himself down beside her, his whole body shaking. Olena put her bony arm around him, murmured some soothing words, and waited.

Finally, still trembling, Viktor blurted, “They ate her.”

“Ate who?” asked his father.

“Yana.”

“Yana? What are you talking about?” His mother looked from Viktor to Petro in confusion.

Viktor calmed down enough to explain, although tears still flowed. “Little Yana down the road. She went missing, and her father searched the woods and finally checked that crazy man Taran’s house on the other side of the stream. She was . . .”

“What, Viktor?”

“She was . . . cut up in his . . . in his food pot. Her father grabbed a shovel and killed Taran and his mother with it.” Viktor’s stomach heaved at the memory, but nothing would come up. He whimpered, “She was such a fun little girl. She was always laughing and trying to trip me. She would make believe I was a horse.”

“My Holy God in Heaven,” Petro groaned. “I had heard this was going on, but in our village? No, God, I can’t believe it.”

Olena could only close her eyes and let the tears flow.

The days went slowly by, each a torment of hunger. Petro also grew too weak to leave his bed. Viktor continued to hunt, and captured some rats in the field. With the head of one he saved from the pot, he actually

caught a starving dog whose own hunger had overcome its natural fear. His parents always gave him the largest part of any catch. They wanted Viktor to live to remember them, and what had happened.

Olena died two weeks later, and Petro the following week. With the death of his father, Viktor gave up all hope. He was lying on their bed, just waiting for the end, when Stalin ordered the release of grain from the military warehouses.

Local officials soon started going from village to village, looking for survivors. When they came to Viktor's house, they knocked on the door. Receiving no response, they entered and, one told him later, were nearly overcome by the smell of urine, feces, and death. They found Viktor almost dead, lying next to the rotting corpses of his mother and father on a pile of filthy blankets. Viktor was not the first one they'd seen in this condition; they knew what to do. He was carried outside and propped on the ground to be spoon-fed thin soup.

Unlike all but a few in his village, Viktor survived. Five million Ukrainians did not.

Even this did not satisfy Stalin. He decided that the core Ukrainian culture had to be destroyed. And who was at the heart of this culture? The blind traveling musicians, who played and sang the classical Ukrainian music and folk tunes, and recounted tales of Ukrainian heroes. So, Stalin had communist officials call all the folk musicians together for a festival, and then had them all shot to death.

Chapter 7

Claims that time travel is impossible in principle have been shown to be in error by an Israeli researcher. Amos Ori, of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, in Haifa, has found a flaw in the argument put forward recently by Stephen Hawking, of Cambridge University, claiming to rule out any possibility of time travel.

This is the latest twist in a story that began in the late 1980s, when Kip Thorne and colleagues at the California Institute of Technology suggested that, although there might be considerable practical difficulties in constructing a time machine, there is nothing in the laws of physics as understood at present to forbid this.

— John Gribbin

epunix.biols.susx.ac.uk/home/John_Gribbin/welcome.htm

Laurent helped Viktor from the table, and supported him as they made their way to the bedroom. At the foot of the stairs, Viktor looked back at me, smiled wanly, and whispered loud enough for me to hear, “Say yes, young man. I’m counting on you. We all are.”

As Viktor had spoken of democracy I had leaned forward, trying to absorb every word. This, finally, was something I understood. But Viktor’s parting comment thundered in my mind. *What am I supposed to do, anyway? Jesus, what do these people want?*

After Viktor left, Gu leaned forward to add to what Viktor had said. “At about the same time—”

Viktor’s concluding summary flashed in my mind. Ever the teacher, even in this environment, I automatically held up my hand and blurted,

“You know, this idea about the democratic peace goes back to the philosopher, Immanuel Kant.” Then I noticed Gu waiting, and I felt my face heat with embarrassment. “I—pardon me.”

“Thank you, John,” Gu said with a smile. “We value your knowledge, but let me finish.”

I nodded and sat back, suddenly eager to have everyone’s eyes return to Gu.

“Now, according to Einstein’s general theory of relativity, physical matter warps space-time,” she said. “My labs began testing a possible time displacement. By distorting space-time enough, we felt we could create a path—a worm hole—to a specified time in the past.”

I shifted in my chair, suddenly uncomfortable. I had no idea where this was going, but it seemed to be straight out of a science fiction movie.

“Using a complex system of high powered laser beams, we did succeeded in sufficiently distorting space-time to send an object back in time. In our first experiments, with the expenditure of incredible amounts of energy, we displaced a tiny object to milliseconds in the past. As the work of our physicists continued, we sent objects back further and further in time while decreasing the amount of energy required. By the mid-1990s we could count the time travel in years and the energy required as that for a small town.”

“Time travel?” I sat back and crossed my arms. I could feel Joy’s eyes on me, but I didn’t look her way. I felt as though she’d betrayed me. She’d brought me to a meeting of lunatics.

“Yes,” Gu said, as though surprised by my slow comprehension.

“What does this have to do with democratic peace?” I demanded. I was a brash young fellow in those years. Not the mellow, *savoir-faire* man I am now.

Gu held up her hands. “Please, John, be patient. Let me finish.”

Did I have a choice? I had no idea where I was, and no way back except the limousine that had brought me. I sighed and nodded, but I didn’t try to hide my skepticism.

Satisfied, Gu resumed. “Granted, what we’d accomplished up to that point was all relatively useless, but then, through the mathematical work of Gertrude Zawtoki, we determined how to relocate objects in space while sending them back in time.”

I decided to humor her. “That’s fine, in theory,” I said, “but wouldn’t this ‘relocation,’ as you call it, change the future—or even the present, as we know it? Could we not irrevocably alter the natural order

of things so that, say, lizards become the dominant species on Earth? Who knows what changes an object from the future suddenly appearing in a past environment would cause?" I inwardly smiled at my cleverness.

I glanced at Joy. She didn't look impressed.

Gu replied, "It all depends on how much of a causal impact the object has. If the object is very small and enters a very stable environment, such as a desert, it has little impact. However, if we send a person to live in the past, there will, of course, not only be an effect on the environment, but on the society that person contacts. By our best theory, we create a parallel universe. We have not found a way to test this directly, but our indirect tests imply that the theory is correct."

Ludger Schmidt, the electronics engineer and president of World Enterprises, had remained silent so far. Now, his eyes alight, he waved one hand at me as he leaned forward and pointed out, "We have carried out sixteen time travel experiments. We have sent bigger and bigger objects further and further into the past. We have recently sent living things, John, including rats and a monkey."

In his excitement, his voice rose and his gestures became more agitated. "The monkey we named Hero—"

Just what I thought. They're up to monkey business. I was so pleased with my pun I missed some of what Ludger was saying.

"—to 1900 in a sealed, waterproof capsule, with enough battery light inside for a month. We also included enough food and water to enable Hero to survive for that time, and had him fully wired to gauge his survival of the time travel and its short-term effects. We also assured him a peaceful death. After a month, a skin injector taped to him gave him enough morphine to make his end very happy.

"We sent Hero's capsule to the bottom of Lake Superior off of Two Harbors, Minnesota. There were no earthquakes in that region we could find in the records, and of course, no hurricanes to roil up the bottom. The outside of the capsule was sterilized to minimize impact on the environment and it was small. The object created no parallel universe, since ninety-nine years later we were able to recover it. Inside was the evidence that the capsule had landed in 1900 and Hero had survived for his allotted time."

Here was Ludger speaking about a monkey named Hero, when I found out weeks later that he was himself a true hero during the Holocaust. One of the big reasons I got into the study of democide in history was the horror of the Holocaust that I discovered as a student. I

couldn't believe that any government would systematically exterminate millions of human beings simply because of their ethnicity and religion. Unbelievable. I had to study it. I did. This led to the historical study of other genocides, and from that to mass murder by governments, and finally to the study of war itself.

Days after the dinner party, Joy told me about Ludger. He had been a German citizen and policeman at the time of the Holocaust, and further, one of those detailed to murder Jews in Poland. I just had to hear his story from him. This is what he told me over a huge stein of Sprecher Black Bavarian beer.



As a member of Lübeck's Reserve Police Battalion 17, I was ordered to prepare for an assignment in Poland. I was told that we had an important mission there for the Fatherland, that we'd be involved in the final solution of the Jewish problem. Our battalion of 314 men was split up into companies and trucked separately to different camps.

When members of my undersized Third Company reached their temporary barracks, a converted brick dairy barn near the Polish town of Plock, we were ordered outside to listen as *Oberleutnant* Hans Schaefer gave us an orientational speech.

Standing stiffly, the heels of his boots touching each other, his officer's cap square on his head, Schaefer began in a loud monotone, "Congratulations on being chosen for the work you are about to do, and welcome to Plock. You are here in the service of the Third Reich and the Fuehrer. It would take too many soldiers from the front lines to do this glorious work, and so you policemen are to replace them.

"Now, Jews from Plock will be collected from their homes at day-break tomorrow and trucked to a field about a mile from here. You will be taken to the field after breakfast and calisthenics. There, you will take the Jews one by one into the adjacent woods, make them lie down on their stomachs, and shoot each in the back of the head."

The oberleutnant abruptly stopped and looked at us, as though expecting a sudden outcry. Hearing none, he resumed, his voice taking on a sermon-like tone. "I know that this will be hard; I know that you may see these people as human beings. But, they are not. They are . . ." Suddenly changing tone, he spit, "Vermin, cockroaches!" He punctuated the words by violently swinging one fist into his other hand. "And

you are pest exterminators. You will be cleansing not only Germany of their filth, but the world.” Another beat of his fist accompanied the last word.

He settled himself, and put both hands behind him. His boots had not moved a millimeter so far. Again he spoke, “I recognize the personal strain this will place on each of you, however. You have been trained as policemen, to protect and save lives. Only those of us who are privileged to participate in this work will ever know what this will cost you emotionally, but that is your challenge and your heroism.”

He paused and scanned our faces. “If you cannot do this work, if you are psychologically or emotionally unable to, then you may stay here, cleaning the barracks and helping the cooks, until we are finished. Nothing will be done to you. There will be no mark on your record.

“Now, Doctor Alfred Helmut will show you how to carry out your task.”

The doctor had been standing nonchalantly off to the side with a large pad and a portable painter’s easel, which he now carried to the front of our group and set up. He put the pad on the easel. On the front page he had drawn an outline of the back of a human torso and head. He took a red crayon from his pocket and drew a small circle to indicate the precise point on the back of the head where a bullet would kill a person immediately. Then he took out a blue crayon and drew a rough picture of the barrel of a rifle with its bayonet attached.

He stood back to look at his drawing critically, and after a moment he nodded at it. He then partly turned to us, pointed with one unwavering finger to where the bayonet was pointed in the drawing, and announced, as though declaring the winner of a lottery, “Here!” He jabbed his finger closer to the spot. “Here you must aim the point of your bayonet. Then you can sight along it for the perfect shot into the back of the head.”

Looking self-satisfied, the doctor stood beside his pad, looked at us, and waited for questions.

When none came, the oberleutnant asked, “Are there any questions?”

Some of the policemen stared at the ground; others into the distance. Metal clanked on metal as one policeman shifted his position. Nearby tree branches rustled in the pleasant northern breeze.

“Okay, you men know what to do for the Fatherland.” The oberleutnant put his hands behind him again, and nodded to *Unteroffizier*—Sergeant—Rudolph Hermann.

Hermann saluted the oberleutnant and immediately ordered, “Dismissed.”

All of us were quiet as we headed into the dank barracks and found our bunks. I felt nauseous and my head ached from anxiety. I sat on my bunk with my head in my hands. My skin felt flushed. I could feel my heart beating rapidly. *I can't do this*, I thought. *But I must. If I don't, they will all think I'm a coward. A Jew-lover. God in Heaven, what can I do?*

There were a few idle conversations going on, but most of the men ignored each other and avoided meeting anyone's eyes. There was none of the usual banter.

I pulled a newspaper I'd brought from home out of my pack, stretched out on my bunk, crinkled the paper more than necessary just for the distracting sound, and pretended to read. *Tomorrow I will be murdering Jews*, I thought in disbelief. *The Nazis say they are vermin, cockroaches, and subhumans. Even so, why kill them? Why not force them out of Poland or wherever they are? Send them to Africa or somewhere like that. Or put them in ghettos. From what I've seen, they prefer to live together anyway. But, to kill women and children?*

I didn't get to sleep until it was almost light. By then I had convinced myself that I could do it.

Early morning crawled by in a haze. Roll call, calisthenics, breakfast, and a few mumbled exchanges with the others. Then we received extra ammunition and clambered onto the trucks for the bumpy ride to the field outside of Plock.

I peered out the back of the truck as it slowed. There they were in the bright morning sun—the Jews. A few old men, old women, young women with children and babies. The last of the trucks that had brought them were just exiting the field by another road in a haze of exhaust fumes.

I gripped my rifle and got out of the truck with the other fully uniformed, helmeted policemen. Ukrainian Auxiliary Police guards around the Polish Jews began to organize them into ten columns, with about five feet between each. The Jews behaved as though they were at some civil function. They obeyed quietly. There were no screams. The only yelling came from the guards. Only the children were noisy, sometimes trying to talk to their mothers or to each other. Some of the babies cried.

The policemen lined up in front of Oberleutnant Schaefer, who stood now with his chest thrust out and, as usual, with the heels of his

well-shined boots together and his officer's cap squarely on this head. He held a typed page of instructions in one hand. Like the others, I stared at the oberleutnant as though only he existed, even ignoring the *Unteroffizier*, who stood beside him. Nobody looked at the Jews.

"First, are there any of you who cannot do this?" Oberleutnant Schaefer asked. He waited a few moments.

I heard the trucks that had brought us driving off in their own cloud of fumes.

"Okay," Schaefer continued, "here is the way we will do this." He paused to consult his instructions, and then barked, "There are twenty of you, so count off beginning on my left." He pointed at the first man.

We counted off to twenty.

"Now," said the oberleutnant, "those numbered eleven to twenty form a second line, eleven behind the first man, twelve behind the second, and so on. Go!"

When our two lines had formed and we stood awaiting further instructions, the oberleutnant glanced at his instruction sheet again, then said, "The men numbered one and eleven will take Jews from the first column on my left." He turned, swung out his arm, and pointed to the appropriate column. "Men numbered two and twelve will take Jews from the next column, and so on. Keep the mothers and their children and babies together. Once you deal with the mother, the children will present no problem.

"You will take your Jews into the woods, down that path behind you. Unteroffizier Hermann will be along the path. He will point to the area in the woods where you are to take your Jew. Once you are assigned an area, pick your spot and do your work. When you are finished, come back out and pick the next Jew from the same column. Any questions?"

One of the policemen put up his hand, and when the oberleutnant looked sharply at him, he asked, "W-what will happen to the bodies?"

The oberleutnant looked confused for a moment. He looked at his instructions.

A baby somewhere among the Jews started crying loudly. I heard its mother trying to hush and comfort it. I couldn't look away from the oberleutnant.

He finally said, "There is a small concentration camp a short distance from here. A Jew work crew will be marched here from the camp. They will dig a pit, drag all the bodies from the woods into it, and close it up. More questions?" He scanned the policemen ranked before him. "No? Then for the Fatherland, do your duty."



Third in the first row, I moved stiffly toward a woman in the third column. She was perhaps in her middle thirties, with curly black hair that stuck out from her head and fell in a tangle to a shawl around her shoulders. She wore a shapeless blue dress, beneath which showed what might have been her slip. She appeared to have been suddenly roused from her sleep and forced to dress hurriedly. She was pleasant looking, with a square face, high forehead, and small eyes.

I grabbed her arm and said, "*Gekommen*—Come." I pulled her toward the woods. She looked up at me with an entirely blank face and walked with me toward the path.

I couldn't believe this was happening. This woman was so willing to go with me. *She must be afraid. She must fear death. Is it that she doesn't know? Maybe she thinks I'm just going to rape her*, I thought. I was shaking. Could she feel it through my hand on her arm?

We reached Unteroffizier Hermann, who pointed to a patch of grass well into the woods on the right.

I heard the first rifle shot when we reached the assigned spot. It startled me. I heard another shot as I pointed to a small grassy area between a bush of white flowers and a tree. My hand now visibly trembled. I gestured for her to lie down. She lay down on her back. I motioned for her to turn over.

When she did, all I could see of her head was her black hair. At that moment, I heard somebody nearby. I looked to the left and saw a girl stretched out on her stomach. One of my fellow policemen had his rifle's bayonet pointed at the back of her head. The scene seemed frozen in time, a still picture. It will be in my mind always. No day goes by that the image doesn't appear to me, sometimes when I get up in the morning; sometimes before bed; sometimes in my nightmares. Even while I'm trying to make love it will flash into my mind, which immediately destroys all passion.

Then the rifle jerked just as I heard the shot, and blood and brain tissue splattered from the girl's head.

I looked back at the woman on the ground in front of me. I already had my rifle's bayonet pointed at her head and she still had not made a sound. I stood there for minutes, unable to move, unable to pull the trigger, barely able to breathe. When I did, I smelled gunpowder on the breeze, and something else I hadn't smelled before. Maybe it was the smell of death, emanating from its executioners and their victims.

I heard more shots, but still I could not pull the trigger.

Finally, I patted her shoulder. She turned her head and looked up at me with empty eyes. I think she was already dead, but for the physical act. I collapsed next to her, pulled her into my arms, and cried, rocking my whole body. My tears seemed pulled from deep inside me, from my soul.

At first, the woman just hung in my arms as though also physically dead. Then she slowly put her arms around my shoulders and held me as well, without a sound, with no tears of her own. She pushed away after a couple of minutes, looked at the tears in my eyes, and for a brief moment her eyes came alive. In one quick motion of her hand, she removed her shawl. She wiped my tears away with it, and then shoved it inside my coat.

I heard another shot nearby. Neuberger, a fellow policeman, came over and grabbed my sleeve and shook it. He hissed, "What are you doing, Schmidt?"

I gently released the woman and she turned to lay back on her stomach. I got up in a daze. Without looking at Neuberger, holding the rifle listlessly in one hand, I plodded away, heading back to the field.

I heard a shot behind me as I passed by Unteroffizier Hermann.

I saw Oberleutnant Schaefer chatting with an officer of the auxiliary guard company that had brought the Jews to the field. They watched the progress of the cleansing operation while they spoke. I approached the oberleutnant, saluted, weakly apologized for interrupting him, and asked, "May I be excused, sir? I don't feel well."

The other officer looked away. Oberleutnant Schaefer gave me a steely look for what seemed like minutes, and finally ordered in a cold voice, "Stand at attention here until we're all done with our work."

The other policemen stared at me as each emerged from the woods to get another Jew. Shots from the woods were almost continuous, some muffled, some sharp. The light breeze carried the gun smoke into the field, and with it again the hint of death. Everything went as smoothly as it did for a Berlin speech by Hitler. There were no voices, no screams, no yells. It was like a silent movie with the offstage piano music replaced by staccato rifle shots.

After a while there were no more Jews left in the field, and our trucks returned and parked near me. With a sharp motion of his hand, the oberleutnant released me to join the others as they clambered into the trucks. No one spoke with me as we returned; no one looked at me.

In the barracks, no one came near me. I just lay on my bunk staring at the ceiling, the image of the girl I had seen shot mixed in my mind with that of the woman who wiped away my tears.

An orderly came in, silently strode up to me, and gave me several papers. One was an order for me to be trucked to the local train station, another was an order for my passage to Lübeck, and the third was my pass. I was to depart within the hour.

Back home, I was reassigned to a police battalion largely made up of old and middle-aged men exempt from “exterminating vermin,” and from the front lines. I never got a promotion, of course. Word went around that I was unpatriotic, so many of the townspeople shunned my family.

I survived the war, saved all the money I could, and with my police contacts, played the black market for American dollars.

Four years after that day in the woods near Plock, I calmly walked into the law office of former Oberleutnant Hans Schaefer. Without a word to his secretary, I opened the door to his inner office and approached the astonished Schaefer, just as I had approached him in that unforgettable field, years ago. He was sitting at his huge mahogany desk, eyebrows arched, small eyes round and staring, his thin lips slightly parted, surprised by the unannounced intrusion. On seeing me, he put both hands palm down on top of his desk as though about to push his corpulent body up.

Before he could rise fully, I strode quickly behind him, jerked his head back, and sliced into his throat with my old bayonet. Blood spurted.

I pulled the still gasping Schaefer onto the floor. When he was finally still, I rolled his body face up. From my pocket, I pulled the shawl I had carried with me since that murdered Jewish woman had given it to me. I draped it over Schaefer’s open, unseeing eyes.

Chapter 8

Ludger was about to add some last detail to his description of their experiments with the monkey Hero, but Gu interjected with, “He’s too modest. We had one more experiment to carry out, and that was with a human—him.” She pointed at Ludger.

“He volunteered to be sent one year into the past in order to test the effect on a human. We felt that one year was enough to gauge the effects that were of interest to us. However, we had to do this in a way that would prevent the inadvertent creation of a parallel universe—or at least, not create one that would cause Ludger to disappear from ours. So we rigged what looked like a small diving chamber, which had just enough room inside for Ludger to lie down. We wired him as we had Hero. He remained awake for one week, and then took a special drug that Laurent invented. It put Ludger into suspended animation until we could open the chamber, over eleven months later. We followed this experiment with every possible test of his body and mind, and determined that he’d survived without any physical or mental change.”

Tor looked at Ludger. “Say something, Ludger, that will convince John that you were unaffected.”

“Er, has Lincoln died yet?”

We all laughed.

Getting serious, Ludger described his feelings. “During the time travel I felt an overall tingling, as if my body were waking up from a long sleep. Other than that, I felt fine, and spent my week testing my body for negative reactions and catching up on my research.”

He smiled at me—which made me uncomfortable. He seemed to be trying to reassure me. “It’s seldom that we can find a week free from commitments anymore. And after my capsule was hauled up to our ship and I was awakened, I felt as though I’d had no more than a rare, really good night’s sleep.”

“I thought it wasn’t possible for a person to travel into the past and coexist with himself in the same universe,” I countered. “At least, that’s what science fiction novelists would have us believe.”

Without hesitation, Gu asserted, “They are wrong. The mathematics on this is clear, and to be sure, we redid the complex equations up, down, and sideways until we were absolutely certain that our friend Ludger could do this. And now we have the empirical proof. The secret is in the isolation of the two Ludgers from each other. What *was* impossible was for them to meet and shake hands with themselves in the same universe.”

“That’s nice to know,” I said, “but what does all of this have to do with me?” After all the talk about watertight capsules, I did *not* like where this was going. What did they intend to do to me?

“Okay John,” Gu said. “You now know that we can send people back in time, possibly as far back as 1900. This may or may not be a great discovery for humanity, but we don’t intend to announce it. It is, however, of the greatest importance to us. This is where you come in.”

Finally. What took them so long? I stole a glance at Joy. She had been sitting there, next to me, silent throughout. Now that I know her so well, I’m sure she was just enjoying the big build up, anticipating the clashing cymbals of the announcement, and waiting for my shock. In her mind, I’m sure, Maurice Ravel’s *Bolero* had been playing; she probably imagined the music ending at just this moment.



And it was that dramatic. Or I recall it that way, anyway. Gu speared her forefinger toward me. She sat on the edge of her chair, leaning forward across the table. Tor stared at me, nervously folding and unfolding a sheet from her notes. The others had their eyes fixed on me. I glanced at Laurent, who was looking at me as if he’d just found cancer in the x-ray he was examining.

Jesus, what do they want me to do?

“We investigated not only your background,” Gu said, “but also the backgrounds of all the major researchers and professors working on or teaching about democratic peace. We have selected you for our plan because you are young, athletic, unmarried, committed to and very knowledgeable of the democratic peace, and a historian who understands the historical context—”

Should I bow?

“—And your parents are dead.” She paused, and then said quietly, “There is nothing really keeping you in this universe, John.”

Before I could protest, Tor added, “And we’ve determined, from investigating your love affairs and friends, that you have good character. You are very trustworthy. You have the best profile for what we want to do.” She glanced from me to Joy.

Get on with it, damn it.

“Mother, Gu, let me tell him the rest,” Joy said. Both nodded.

I didn’t know Joy well yet, except for that crazy introduction in the limo on the way here. And she had been so quiet through all this that I’d wondered why she was here, except maybe to fetch—or, I thought suspiciously—to lure me here.

Joy turned in her chair to face me. She gave me her dynamite smile, folded her hands, ladylike, on her lap, and slightly leaned toward me. Her manner suggested that what she was going to say, in spite of it being in front of everybody, was between us. I noticed her delicate perfume for the first time since we arrived.

“The idea is that you and I will be . . .”

The “you and I” startled me and I bumped the table with my elbow as I moved in my seat to look directly at her.

“. . . Sent back to sometime around 1900 to implement the democratic peace. You, John, will provide the political and historical guidance. I . . .” Joy tilted her head and looked at me demurely out of the corner of her single lidded, almond eyes “. . . will provide the muscle, the weapons expertise, the computer skills and . . . other skills as needed.”

I was being vamped. And I was entranced by every second of it.

Joy continued. “We’d like to include others with the necessary specialties, but we can’t. We simply don’t have the energy capacity to send more than two people, and even that is stretching our available energy resources to maximum.

“Once there, our purpose will be to democratize the world and, based on what you and other democratic peace researchers have told us about history, to thus prevent the wars, genocides, and mass murders that have destroyed so many millions of people.”

She can’t be serious.

I was flabbergasted, to put it mildly. I must have sat there for several minutes with my mouth open. All I could finally utter was, “You’re kidding, aren’t you?”

“No,” several around the table said at once.

“Even if your crazy notion of a time machine was workable, how could just two of us do this?” I blurted.

“With the stick and carrot,” Tor offered. “You kill political mass murderers before they get into power; you provide the necessary wealth and incentives to help democracy grow.”

“What?” I exploded. “Murder people? I would never do that!” This was too much. This scared me. I wanted to get up and run from this group of maniacs.

Well, from all except Joy.

Joy gave me that smile again. I felt like telling her to stop it. Her smile and what I was hearing were like huge cymbals clashing my thoughts between them.

She read my face. “Cool down and think about this,” she said, resting her hand lightly on my shoulder. To my surprise, the gesture had an immediate calming effect. “You know what these Stalins, Maos, Hitlers, Pol Pots and others like them have done. You know what war is—the mass slaughter of soldiers and millions of civilians, all at the command of some dictator who sits in his palace or mansion moving his soldiers around on the battlefield as though they were pawns. Why should these monsters not be assassinated, John?”

I shook my head. “We’d never get away with it, for one thing.”

“If there were an international court of justice that could try them for crimes of war and crimes against humanity, would they not get the death penalty, as many Nazis and high-ranking Japanese military leaders did after World War II? Why should we wait until they have committed the horrors we know they will commit? Should we not save tens of millions, probably hundreds of millions of lives by assassinating these criminals beforehand?”

Now I wondered who was the student and who the teacher. There was a certain morbid logic to it all. “But . . . murder!”

“This is what we plan to do,” Gu said, as though I hadn’t said a thing. “Besides sending you two, we will also send capsules with weapons, ammunition, communications and medical equipment, and personal items like the clothes and toiletries you will need initially. To fund your effort, we will also send counterfeit American dollars, detectable only with today’s technology; diamonds and other precious stones; and nineteenth century gold coins and bars. In all, this will be worth about two billion in current dollars.”

Her hands painted the air, accompanying her description. “You will also have two Macintosh G4 laptop computers with batteries we have engineered to last thirty-six hours, and we will include two alcohol-fueled electrical generators. We will include informational CDs con-

taining, among other things, a distillation of relevant news from all the major newspapers from 1900 on and, most important, the daily New York Stock Market closing quotations.”

Gu lowered her hands. She gave me a smile, one as different from Joy’s as a friend’s is from a lover’s. “You see, we have tried to think of everything, and have spent decades working out the technology. There is much more to tell you, but you should now have enough information to make a decision. What questions do you have, John?”

My mind filled with a million questions, all fighting, bumping, and scraping against each other to come out first. I was speechless for minutes, I’m sure, as I tried to grasp the most important of them. Finally, I just let my mouth do the choosing.

“Why should I do this?” I asked.

Joy answered, “Because you want to prevent all the killing you know about: the over 200 million killed in war or by democide. Because you want to create a peaceful world, and because you believe in democratic freedom.”

I sat there. Boy, did she know how to get to me, as she always would. Joy was right, but I couldn’t get my mind to work on it. All this was too much.

“How can I believe this stuff about a time machine?” I finally asked.

“We knew you would ask,” Gu said. She got up, slipped into one of the bedrooms, and came out with a machine that looked like a microwave oven. A heavy black cord looped out of the back of it. She then wheeled out of the same bedroom a bulky transformer, with a similarly thick electrical cord stretching out behind it.

“Is the connection to the electric meter set up with the extension?” she asked Ludger.

When he nodded, she disappeared into the kitchen with the transformer cord connector in her hand. In moments she was back. She plugged the microwave-like box into the transformer and set the box on the table.

“Can I have your wallet for this experiment?” she asked me.

I pulled it out of my pocket and gave it to her.

“Now,” she said, “I’m going to send this back fifteen seconds in time, and send it under your chair. First, I have to get the precise coordinates.” She pulled two gadgets from her pockets.

“One measures the farmhouse floor’s correct height above sea level,” Joy whispered in explanation as Gu held up the devices, appar-

ently taking the measurements, “and the other measures, via the positioning satellites, the spatial coordinates of the chair.”

“More than fifteen seconds has passed,” Gu announced when she was done, “so there will be no problem concerning your wallet coexisting in one place simultaneously if we are a little off. Moreover, the possibility of creating a parallel universe in this brief timeframe, with this insignificant object, is minimal.”

Now, opening the door of the box, she placed my wallet inside. She closed the door, very carefully turned five dials on top of the box, and asked Ludger to double check their settings. He did so, referring to a typed sheet he held, and nodded.

Gu pressed several buttons. “Ready?” she asked.

When I murmured, “Yes,” she unlocked a toggle switch and flipped it. There was a loud humming noise, then all the lights in the house went out for a few seconds and came back on when the humming stopped.

Gu bowed towards me and asked, “Would the honorable gentleman check beneath his chair?”

I leaned down and peered under my chair. There was my wallet.

It was not even warm when I picked it up, and I found my credit cards and money undisturbed inside. That kicked my mind into functioning again. I was convinced. And excited.

“I don’t understand—why only two of us? You have a time machine. If I understand your explanation correctly, you can always program it to send more people back to the same day and year. Why not find and train more people, even if it takes a decade or so? Whenever they are ready, you could send them back in time to arrive when Joy and I do.” Quickly I added, “If I go.”

A member answered from the conference phone, “Our technology had to be developed in large laboratories, and no matter how tight our security, no matter how well trained in secrecy our scientists and engineers, there are secretaries, accountants, builders, and many others involved at one level or another. Word of some of our inventions has leaked out, particularly that of the time machine. We’ve learned that the Chinese and American governments are trying to locate the machine. There are too many people involved to keep this hidden for long, when the huge intelligence agencies of these countries are searching for it.”

Tor jumped in with, “You see, its huge sudden drain on power will announced its location to those searching for it. After we send you and

Joy and the equipment capsules into the past, we must destroy the time machine, the materials and equipment we used to construct it, and all our scientific notes.”

“Why?” I blurted. “This is an incredible invention for all humanity.”

“You don’t understand,” Ed replied. “Like the atomic bomb, once a few countries have it, others will soon, as well. Can you imagine what Saddam Hussein, absolute dictator over Iraq, would do with it?”

“And the Chinese Communist Party?” Gu added. “If we can send you and Joy back to end this scourge that afflicts humanity, the leaders of these murderous regimes can use it to go back in time and kill all their rivals, or make sure their particular religion or ideology triumphs.”

I suddenly realized something else, and a chill settled between my shoulder blades. “Then how will we return, if you destroy the machine?” I asked.

“We won’t,” Joy responded matter-of-factly. “We will have to live out our lives in the past.”

Staggered by this, I sat there looking from one face to another. Everyone around the table met my gaze with understanding in their eyes.

Gu finally said in low voice, “This is a one-way trip. We have not discovered how to reverse the time loop and travel to the future. The basic problem is that the changes you will introduce in the physical and social environment of the time will create a parallel universe. You will reside in that parallel universe, not this one. We have not found a way to move from one parallel universe to another.”

“We would be stranded in time.” I surprised myself with how calm my voice sounded.

“Yes,” Joy said.

Tor whispered, “I will lose my loving daughter.”

I looked at Tor. Her eyes glistened in a drawn face, and her lower lip trembled almost imperceptibly. I don’t think she realized she had spoken out loud. When she saw Gu looking at her with great sympathy, Tor shook her head as though to clear it, and looked at her watch. She said hastily, her voice wavering, “We have less than an hour before we must give you the antidote, John, or you will lose all memory of tonight.”

To give Tor time to collect herself, I was sure, Gu spoke up. “If you agree, you will undergo three months of intensive training in martial arts, emergency medical aid, proper use of our weapons and equipment,

and business management. That is all the time we dare risk before we destroy the time machine and all that goes with it.”

“Business management?” I echoed.

Gu nodded. “With our instructions, you will be able to set up an import and export company that will give you all the cover you need for making international contacts and transferring money into foreign hands.” She paused, then said simply, “That’s it, John.”

“You have maybe forty-five minutes to make your decision,” Tor said. “We are sorry we cannot give you more time, but you know too many of our secrets, and we must watch you until you make your decision. If you have any questions, we are here to answer them. If you want to go outside with Joy and talk, you can.”

They were finished. Gu rose and went over to Tor. She put her arm about the other woman’s shoulders, and touched her head to hers.

I got up and headed for the door on shaking legs. I needed air and room to think.

Joy followed me and got my coat and her own. She handed me mine wordlessly, her fine black eyebrows drawn down in great concern. We went outside together.

There was some snow on the ground, and a cold moon was out and almost full, with the Milky Way spreading a wide path of stars across the sky. I watched as Joy fluffed out her hair so that part of it fell over the front and sides of her coat. In this cold light her beauty looked ethereal. We sauntered down the walk to the driveway, and then she stopped. I ambled on a step before I realized she wasn’t with me. I turned and looked at her.

“John,” Joy said in a soft voice, her breath puffing out small white clouds in the cold air. “I want you to make your decision as freely as possible. It’s your life, and you will have to give up all this.” She waved her hand at our surroundings. “But you and I, John, have the chance to create a universe in which genocide, mass murder, terrorism, and wars don’t exist, where everyone will live under democratic freedom, and where everyone is guaranteed human rights.”

But then she slightly covered what seemed at the time gross hyperbole. “We may well fail. We may only partially succeed. But, we also may fully succeed. Is not just the possibility worth it?”

She paused, looked down at the ground, and then lifted her face to look up at the sky. Finally she looked directly at me. Her eyes were wide black pools with, I swear, the moon and stars reflected in them. In

a voice now so soft I could hardly hear it, she said, “And there will only be you and me, John.”

Again she hesitated, and then moved a step closer. In this cold air, her delicate perfume was supercharging her pheromones. I couldn’t believe I was getting aroused. This was not the time. I took a mental cold shower, easy enough in this temperature.

She added in a voice softer still, “I will be your . . . partner in all this.”

Joy was so clever; yet, too subtle. I’m not often this dense when it comes to sexual clues, but I was still so dumbfounded by all that I had heard from the others and the decision I had to make, and I was so overcome by Joy, that I hadn’t caught the implications of this arrangement. “I think you’re very beautiful, and I . . . am attracted to you, but don’t you think this is . . . presumptuous?”

Holy Christ, I said that? I thought. *Where did that word come from?* I could feel my face warming in the cold night air. I mentally ripped my head off and bounced it like a basketball. *Jesus.*

Joy spoke louder now. “Look at it frankly, John. We will have to live in this new universe until we die. We cannot marry others because of our work and the secrets we’ll have. We are both young adults with lively hormones. We can make temporary arrangements with others, but that has its own dangers. No, John, it has to be you and me. And this was one of the things that the Society had in mind in choosing you. Our compatibility was one of the top criteria. If the Society couldn’t find a compatible partner, I would have done this time travel mission alone—even if the possibility of success were small.”

She stopped, looked down, and then added in a lower voice, “But we found you, and you matched me intellectually; we’re close in age, we’re both heterosexual, and to be honest, John, you attracted me within the first few days of your class.”

Again, her delicious scent wafted toward me. *How the Hell did she time that?* I wondered. I put my hand in my pocket and pinched myself.

How many times in one short evening can someone be stunned, shocked, surprised, amazed? I now felt all of these at once. I stood there looking at this most desirable woman, this intelligent person, who was offering herself to me. No. That was degrading her. She was saying that, given our situation, if I accepted the Society’s offer, our intimacy would be natural, not contrived or used as a bribe.

Joy raised her eyes and looked into mine, searching for my answer.

I finally broke my paralysis. My legs felt like stilts as I moved off the walk and sat down—dropped—onto the snow. Joy sat next to me,

drew up her knees inside her coat, and put her arms around them. She tilted her head up and looked at the cold stars.

I tried to organize my thoughts, tried to form a mental list of pros and cons, with each given a plus or minus of one to five points. I started off with the possibility of ending war—five points. Ending democide and terrorism got five points. Losing this present and all its personal comforts—minus four points. Giving up the teaching I loved—minus four points. Murdering people, no matter how many people *they* would murder in their future—minus five points. The personal risks involved—minus three points. Joy? I looked at her. She was so damn beautiful—and impressive. I suspected I was already in love with her. And I wanted her. Okay, five points.

Let's see, I calculated. That adds up to minus one point. Shit, I never did like this system.

When it came down to it, there were only two things that really moved me at that moment. I still had vivid images in my mind of the terrorists hitting the World Trade Center, and the horrors I saw afterward. The death of my cousin. The devastation of his family. I would do almost anything, just to prevent that from ever happening.

The second thing was Joy.

Well, this stupid decision-making system did one thing. It made me realize what I wanted.

“Yes,” I said, then again in a firmer voice, “yes. I want to do this. Boy, do I want to do this. And thanks to you and the Society for giving me hope for a better world—at least one better world.”

I got up, leaned over and extended my hand to Joy. But she jumped up and hugged me, kissed me, and exclaimed, “Thank you, thank you!”

Then she calmed down, straightened out her clothes, and took my hand. We walked hand in hand back to the farmhouse, where Laurent waited in the doorway. I gave him a thumbs-up. Laurent grinned and pulled out a syringe containing the antidote.

Joy was so smart. She had played my normal male lust like a violin. But that doesn't matter. Really. The feelings I already had for her would only deepen over the years into an all consuming love. No matter what happened between us. No matter the horrors to come.

How can I say this without sounding corny? I can't. I'll just say it: She became my life. She filled my heart. And I never regretted the unqualified love I gave her. Not once. Not for a second. Not even when I . . . No, I can't mention that yet.

Chapter 9

Joy's unbelievable body was my shadow while I settled my affairs in Bloomington. It kept me in perpetual arousal so that I wouldn't change my mind about the mission. And I knew it was available, if I only made the move. Incredibly, amazingly, I didn't.

There was, of course, the possibility that she was also with me to answer any questions I had about our coming partnership and mission. I didn't believe it.

The day after I made my decision to join Joy on this mission to the past, I wrote my letter of resignation from the University of Indiana. I apologized for the short notice, but explained that I had terminal cancer and only a few months to live, and could not have finished the upcoming semester anyway. That last was the truth—once I traveled into the past, I would be gone forever from this world. I also spent the next two days, all the Society would allow me before training, settling my accounts.

As Joy accompanied me everywhere, she carried a change of clothes and toiletries in her student's backpack. The first evening, before going to sleep at my apartment, we had a long talk about ourselves and our hopes and dreams. I now felt almost relaxed with Joy—as much as a man can be with his sexual fantasy. She was frank and without airs. I had no feeling that she was trying to play games anymore or make herself anything other than what she was. What I did feel was an electricity between us that opened me up to her.

I told her about my parents and what the death of my mother meant to me, how I had cried when she died, and that sometimes, I still caressed her picture. My father had seldom been home, I revealed, but when he was, he tried to make up for his absence. But I always had the feeling that he was hiding his real self from me—that inside him was a different person that he could not show me. He had exuded an inner strength and a quality of leadership that I always hoped to emulate.

I told her about the baseball games and tennis matches he'd taken me to, and his pride in my mother's achievements on the tennis court. I told her about how the tennis pros treated me as a mascot, and even al-

lowed me in the women's locker room, where seeing partly-dressed pros sometimes embarrassed me. I admitted that I'd seen the famous Jane Smith come out of the showers naked. She'd seen my red face and laughed. My mother apologized profusely, but Smith reminded her that I was only a little boy.

I asked Joy about her father.

"I'm adopted," she said. "My parents were Sino-Vietnamese, I think. No one really knows. I believe they tried leaving Vietnam in 1979 on a rickety boat, to escape persecution. Maybe there were other families on the boat, but I was about three at the time and remember nothing about it. My guess is that they were trying to reach the Philippines or Indonesia, and somewhere along the way, pirates attacked the boat. I don't know what happened. Somehow the pirates missed me. Perhaps I was asleep and covered by blankets or something, and the pirates didn't see me. When Filipino fishermen found the boat off Cabra Island, I was alone, sunburned, and near death.

"A Filipino reporter happened to be doing a story on the Lubang Islands, of which Cabra is a part, and heard about me—a child that fishermen had found alone on a sinking boat and taken to the local hospital. He wrote a story that got carried in the *Manila Bulletin*. *The New York Times* then picked up the story."

"That's incredible," I said. "You never found out anything about your parents?"

"No. After the pirates searched the boat for valuables they probably killed everyone except for hidden me, since that was their pattern. They only kidnapped the young and pretty girls.

"Now, do you remember what I told you about my mother escaping from the Khmer Rouge and Cambodia?"

"Of course."

Joy mentioned again how her mother had to leave Nguon to be killed by the Khmer Rouge. Tears rolled down her cheeks. And she cried over her mother's bravery in facing the Khmer Rouge soldier who would have killed her. When Joy retold the moment when her mother reached Thailand and threw the soldier's rifle back toward Cambodia, she mimicked the motion with her arms and almost knocked me over.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"No," I responded quickly, "I'm sorry about what she had to go through. I've been impressed by your mother ever since you told me her story."

For a few moments we stared at one another, both deeply touched by the story, and then she finished with, “Mom settled briefly in a Cambodian refugee camp, but because she had studied English as a second language in school, and had the valuables and body to bribe officials, she survived where many died.”

“She told you all this?” I blurted.

“Yes,” Joy said. “You must understand, John. In these situations, a woman has only two things she can use to survive—her body and her jewelry. If she has neither jewelry nor looks, she is often dead.”

When she told me of her mother using her body to survive, I could only nod. I didn’t know why this embarrassed me. I knew all this from my research and had taught it, but I had only book knowledge—I had yet to hear Gu’s story. Hearing this firsthand from a young woman who was talking about her mother—a woman I knew—struck home in a way it had not before.

“She got on the quota for resettlement in the United States. Once here, she worked as a translator for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who was trying to handle the hundreds of thousands of Boat People from Vietnam. Through her work she met Gu, who was a volunteer translator for refugees from China. My mother impressed Gu, who then had her secretly investigated by the Society. Satisfied by the result, Gu sounded her out on the aims of the Society without revealing the Society’s existence. When Mom took off her locket, showed her the picture of Nguon and whispered in a firm voice, ‘This was my husband and I loved him deeply. He will always live in my heart. I don’t want him to have died in vain,’ that’s when Gu put her arms around Mom and said warmly in her ear, ‘Dear Tor, I want to introduce you to the Survivor’s Benevolent Society.’

“As a member of the Society and with its assistance, Mom bought a bankrupt Asian import company, which she built into the Nguon Industries you know today. Soon after she bought the firm, she read about my survival in *The New York Times*, and persuaded the Society to help her bring me into the United States. They did. I heard that, when an airline official placed me in Mom’s arms at the San Francisco airport, she cuddled me, kissed me on the forehead, and cried. She says that she fell in love with me immediately, that she thought of me as the child she would have had with Nguon. That’s why she named me Joy.”

Joy smiled and her eyes grew distant for a moment, in recollection. Then, eyes bright, she smiled at me. “After she became my mother in

heart and soul, she formally adopted me when she got her American citizenship the next year.”

I quietly absorbed all of this, and then it occurred to me to ask the question that had been bothering me about her since I agreed to this mission.

Chapter 10

As incredulously as one would ask a beautiful and feminine prostitute, “How the devil did you get into this business?” I asked Joy, “What is all this about your training in martial arts and weapons?”

She shrugged. “A few months after Mom took me in, she started me on simple agility exercises to give my body flexibility—such as this.”

She rose and stood in front of the futon sofa where we had been talking. With an impish smile, she bent over backwards, put her arms around her legs, and touched the back of her legs with the back of her head.

I gaped. I had seen this before in Chinese acrobatic shows, but I’d never known a person who could do it.

Still holding the position, she lifted her left leg until it was straight up in the air, her toes pointed to the ceiling. There she was, almost one straight, vertical line, with her back held against her lower leg. Then she rolled her torso toward the upraised leg, and somehow gained enough momentum to end up standing on the formerly raised foot, with her torso now straight up, her back still held against her leg. In one smooth movement, she brought her leg down and stood there facing me for a moment, looking normal.

Joy bowed, waved her hand at me with a flourish, and exclaimed, “Ta da.” Then she sat back down.

Laughing, I said, “What else can you do?” Seeing the look she gave me, I hastened to add, “Joke, joke.” I was lucky. At that time I didn’t know what that look presaged.

Joy chuckled and continued her story. “After she adopted me Mom hired the best martial arts and weapons experts to train me in a gradual program—I was very young and my bones were still soft, so we couldn’t progress too quickly, but it was really the best time to begin. I saw it as so much fun, and eagerly awaited every session. Mom did the same warm up exercises with me before breakfast every day, which I enjoyed. She also took the same training, but always in a different room and from different sensei. Only in my teens did the fatigue and repeti-

tion of training begin to bore me. My senseis were clever about this; they brought in boys they'd been training. They were usually older, taller, and weighed more than I did.

"My sensei would let the boys loose on me. Sometimes I lost, but none of the boys were as limber as I was, and their training had started much later. So I could beat the boys most of the time. In one case a big brute of a boy got so mad at me, he came at me with all his strength. My sensei at the time stood back to see what I would do, and to defend myself I broke the boy's arm and knocked him unconscious. Another sensei took the boy to the hospital, and my sensei did nothing more than show me where my movements and anticipation had been wrong."

I muffled my exclamation of surprise without much success. She flashed me a look of amusement, one brow raised in silent query.

"*Why* were you getting all this training?" I asked. Then I recalled her mother's horrible time in Cambodia, and looked at Joy, this gorgeous young woman beside me, imagining her as a pretty child blossoming into an adult beauty. "Aside from wanting you to be able to protect yourself against the predators of this world," I added. "Did she plan, even back then, to send you on this mission?"

"Not this mission exactly, of course," she replied. "But Mom told me that her work was very dangerous and secretive, and made me promise with all the love in my heart never to say anything about it to anyone outside the Society. As her daughter, there was a possibility that I would need all the skills I was learning in order to protect myself or other people. She reminded me of her awful experience, and said that, although we live in one of the most stable democracies in the world, a coup or defeat in war could put a dangerous dictatorship in power, and I would need such skills to survive."



Joy paused and looked directly into my eyes, as if trying to determine how I would react to what she planned to say next. "Because you are a westerner, John, what I am now going to tell you may embarrass you," she said slowly. "It will surprise you. I would not tell this to anyone but my lover, because he would find out anyway."

My chest tightened. I imagined some terrible secret. "What—"

Joy put her finger up to my lips to hush me, and continued. "In Asia, people consider sex a natural function and a learned skill. It is not furtive, pornographic, or indecent. It is something to be celebrated, and

in some parts of Asia there are festivals where little statues of the erect penis are presented to young girls to celebrate their fertility.”

I could feel my face heating up and my heart beginning to thud in my chest. This *was* surprising, and not what I could hear from this passionately desirable woman without it arousing my emotions.

“There is a custom in Asia among wealthy and middle-class families,” she was saying. “They have their young boys and girls trained in the arts of love, so that they are well prepared for marriage or for the girls being concubines. When I reached the age of seventeen, when my hormones were beginning to distract me, Mom enrolled me in the secret Three Pillows Art Academy in Chinatown. The Academy taught me how to prevent pregnancy, the delicacies of male and female anatomy, and the Eastern erotic and sexual arts. I was deflowered, of course, and taught the arts of love by male and female instructors.”

She was right. Now I was embarrassed, and I couldn’t keep my voice from sounding hoarse as I asked, “Did you make love?”

I must have blushed rose red with that asinine question, for I felt as though I was leaning against a hot stove in winter, and I wanted to take out my tongue, nail it to a wall, and whip it. *Jesus!*

The corners of Joy’s mouth tipped upward, but she puckered her lips—it must have been a supreme effort for her not to guffaw outright. As it was, she still had to respond, “How else does one learn, except by experience?”

Immediately realizing its implications, she reconsidered what she had admitted. Now she looked at me with a worried expression. “John, it was just training, all physical, nothing of the heart or soul. It was like masturbating, only learning to do it well.”

My face must have turned a deeper red, perhaps shading toward violet, and it felt as though I had my head in an oven. Joy looked even more concerned.

I was hopeless, mind-wiped. I asked in a feeble voice, “Have you made love since?”

“John, I’m twenty-five.”

She must have realized at that point that she should never had admitted this to me, because she took my hand and said sincerely, “Until now, I have never met a man or woman that I’ve truly wanted to make love to. You know what I mean?”

With that she changed the direction of my thoughts, all right. *She said “until now.”* Until now. It rang in my head. *That’s right. She will*

be my life companion, and she has already hinted that we would be sexual mates—this beautiful woman, this incredible person—and me.

I was suddenly overcome by what she intimated, although such an intimate relationship had been made clear before I agreed to this mission. I just couldn't believe it. I looked at her. She had released my hand, drawn her legs up onto the sofa, and was looking out the window at the night sky. She had let her long hair down, and it covered half her face. Her chin was up as usual, and her pert nose was silhouetted against the lamp glowing behind her. Her natural scent delighted my nose. She was clearly waiting to see what I would do or say.

I wanted to make love to Joy at that moment, but I couldn't. It was all so sudden, all of it—learning about the time machine, agreeing to travel back to 1906, the loss of everything I knew in this world, and Joy—Joy, who would be mine.

I looked at her. "Don't misunderstand," I said. "Now I want you more than anything. I want to be your first real partner. I want to make love to you. But I can't right now. I'm too overcome by everything that has happened to me since I agreed to be your partner. I've got to collect myself. I feel like somebody who has won a 100 million dollar lottery."

More like I've taken a shot of Novocain in the balls.

I rose. "You take the bedroom," I said. "I'll sleep on the sofa."

This was our first battle, and Joy won the sofa—only because I didn't feel much like fighting, you see. I couldn't have beaten a hen sitting on her eggs. I really was overcome with all I had learned, and by what I soon was going to do. So I warned her, "You win this one, but when I really fight seriously, you haven't got a chance."

Joy replied sweetly, "Of course," and then added, placing particular emphasis on the last word, "you are the man."

She was half undressed when I brought a pillow, sheet, and blanket for her. I threw the stuff on the sofa, mumbled a fast "good night," and escaped to my bedroom. It took me about three hours to fall asleep, and I spent some of that time kicking myself for not taking advantage of the opportunity that pounded on my door with a sledgehammer. All I needed to do was open it and, as she put it, "Ta da."

Ah, tomorrow night, I kept repeating to myself. With that arousing thought, I finally went to sleep.

Chapter 11

Joy was a flirt. And she had a temper. Her flirting, my stupid jealousy, and her temper—the perfect catalysts for nuclear warfare. But I had yet to learn that. Early the next day I kept thinking, *This is the day. This evening I'll show her that red-blooded males do not need schooling in the erotic arts. They come naturally.*

Around mid-morning, we went to see my lawyer, Pete Sawyer, about writing my will. Joy came into the office with me. This was the first of what would be uncounted office visits we would make together the rest of our lives, often armed with enough hardware to defeat a regiment. I introduced her as my research assistant. Pete took a long look at Joy. She was dressed in her usual jeans and loose sweatshirt with sleeves rolled up, and her hair in a long ponytail. She looked coyly at him. I hadn't dated a million girls not to recognize that look. She was flirting with him. I was dumbfounded.

Pete finally said hello, and much later, when we were bending over his office desk to look at the will he had drafted, he whispered to me, “Where did you find her? Are there more for me?”

“Sorry,” I whispered in return, “she was a robotic experiment that went bad. So I got her at a discount.”

He gaped at me, then caught himself and laughed. He elbowed me and murmured, “Hot stuff, huh?”

I'm sure he would not believe how true that was.

When he added, “She likes me,” I said nothing.

In my will, I turned all my assets over to the Society. I explained to Pete that I had only a short time to live and would probably commit suicide in a private place when the pain became unbearable. I put all this in writing for him so that, upon the one-year anniversary of my disappearance—the minimum period of time that had to pass before the state declared me dead, even with my written declaration—he could disburse to the Society what he got from selling my car and the jewelry I'd inherited, my meager savings, and my stocks and bonds.

Pete was sorrowful to learn I was dying, tried to comfort me, asked me to come to his home to share dinner and drinks. He invited Joy along.

Ah-hah.

Joy looked at me and shook her head ever so slightly and I refused, explaining that I simply had too much to do before catching the plane out the next day.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Around the world to see the sights, if you know what I mean. Bangkok, of course.” I smiled in mock resignation.

Pete nodded sadly, and then said, “My sincerest best wishes for your trip. I hope, by some miracle, that you recover.”

As we were going out the door, Pete called, “And it was pleasant meeting you, Joy. If ever I can be of help to you, let me know. Really.”

Joy smiled much too sweetly and replied pleasantly, “Why, thank you, Pete. I will.”

Like hell.

Now, so many years later, it’s hard to understand my agitation, coming only two days after our limousine ride and my first conversation with Joy. But I already saw her as my intimate partner-to-be, and I was feeling the first stirrings of the love for her—not passion, but love—that would grow to encompass—no, to command—my life. I had committed my existence to being her partner and intimate. I was giving up everything for our mission. And Joy clearly liked me; she’d unmistakably invited me to make love to her the evening before. In short, she was my territory.

I wasn’t unreasonable. I had no right to question her. She had every right to be sweet and flirt with whomever she wanted. But, damn it, she had made it clear she would be mine . . . I go on. As a one-time professor, I make these human situations too complex. Put simply, I was bugged. I was jealous.

I held it in until that evening. When Joy commented in passing that Pete was a very nice person, it came out like an unintentional fart: “Why don’t you cancel our partnership and take him instead?”

We were eating pizza at Mother Bear’s in Bloomington. It’s the home of Indiana University and a college town. As a result, it’s hard to go out anywhere without mixing with former students or faculty. Fortunately, I didn’t recognize anyone there, for in spite of the fact that I asked her the question in a calm, even voice, several people at nearby tables suddenly looked at us. Telepathy, obviously.

Joy rewarded their attention. She gave me that look, really *that look* for the first time, and it was like being devirginated. The first time, one never forgets.

She stiffened and sat back, the pizza slice she'd been about to chew a bite out of hanging in her hand halfway to her mouth. As her narrowed eyes blistered me, she spoke in a tone that froze my Coke. "You get this straight. Now," she said, enunciating her words so carefully that an idiot would understand. "You will never own me. If I want to flirt with the Devil, you have nothing, zip, zero to say about it. You understand that?"

She dropped her slice on the tin, and then pushed the pizza tin with the remaining pizza onto my lap. Unfortunately the Coke was between my lap and the tin. It landed square where it was least desired. So this was what incontinence felt like.

Joy rose and drew herself up to her full height. She was about to stalk out when she noticed that the pizza tin was still right side up, angled half on my lap and half on the table, with the melting ice from the Coke beneath it. To show me that she was entirely rational and not emotional about this, she flipped the tin upside down. Her departing words were, "Maybe I will."

I felt my face flame with embarrassment as people looked at me and smirked and laughed. Suavely, I motioned over the waitress, who had been watching events unfold. She came with a towel, but I waved it away with an elegant motion and said, "Doggie bag, please."

Now, this unladylike act of Joy's was another first, but not the last. When she was unreasonably angry with me, my lap became the repository of many things over the years. Unfortunately, they were usually wet and hot. I don't think much of Freud's psychological theories and all that, but I must say, there seemed to be something Freudian about her choice of my anatomy.

In a loving and peaceful moment between us, I once dared to bring this up. "Why my damn lap?" I asked nicely. "That's bitchy, you know"

"Because it's there for when you act bastardly, you know," was all she would say.

Freud vindicated.

Anyway, when Joy left me in the pizza parlor she had no place to go, other than to rent a hotel room. She waited outside by my MR2, her back turned to me. I carried the doggie bag in one hand and unlocked her side of the car with the other. I opened the door for her. The walking glacier got in without looking at me or saying a word. Before entering on my side, I shook bits of pizza off the front of my pants. I couldn't do anything about them being wet

with Coke. I got in and, since it was winter in Bloomington and still colder inside the car, I turned the heater on full force. I knew it couldn't handle the arctic cold, but I had to do something to keep my pants from freezing to my anatomy.

I tossed the doggie bag onto her lap and she looked at it like there was a snake inside.

When we got to my place, Joy followed me up to my apartment and went in first when I opened the door.

So far, so good.

She sat in the easy chair by the sofa this time, probably so I couldn't sit next to her. I got a Samuel Adams Beer for each of us, and she took it when I handed it to her.

Better.

I offered her a slice of cold pizza. She just raised an eyebrow and compressed her lips.

Very good. She was melting.

Emboldened, I asked, "What were we talking about before that meteor hit Mother Bear's?"

Muffled music came through the walls from the neighbors down the hall. A car roared by outside and a truck rumbled by in the opposite direction.

After drinking half her beer, she looked at me neither defiantly nor apologetically and asked, "Do you understand what I said?"

"Yes. You are your own person and nobody owns you and you can flirt with whomever you please. Do I have it down correctly?"

Joy nodded.

I wasn't angry, but the flirt thing had gotten to me. I responded in my invariably nice voice with, "And same for me. If I want twenty mistresses and have forty-one children by them, that is my business. Nobody owns me. Right?"

Now, this woman had as many looks as there are Alaskan snowflakes, and now I saw another one. This time Joy tilted her head, partially opened her lips, widened her eyes, and let a twinkle show in them. "If you're so stupid, go ahead. I would think this one woman," and she bowed her head and rested the bottom of her beer bottle on top, "would be enough to drive you crazy. Think of what twenty like me would do to you. Could your lap and . . . other things . . . take it?"

And she laughed and I laughed, but inside I thought, *Whew. I'm not going to dominate this one.*

"Any pizza left?" she asked.

I bit off the “Say please” before it came out, and handed her the last piece, which was a little sodden with my spilled Coke. She ate it nonetheless, with a barely perceptible smile on her face. Her eyes never left me.

She finished the pizza and took a last drink of her beer before setting it down on the coffee table. She wiped her hands on a napkin, then went into my kitchen. She emerged with a damp towel and asked me to stand up. Then she started to rub the tomato sauce and melted cheese off the front of my pants with the towel. I didn’t know whether this was a lead-up to the best of all apologies, or if she was raw innocence manifest. No. I knew better. She knew exactly what she was doing. And she was arousing me.

I didn’t want to make love like this, not at her instigation. She was not going to dominate *me* like this. It would be at my choice of time and preliminaries. I grabbed her wrist and pulled her over to the sofa to sit on it. As she looked at me in surprise and, I’m sure, with respect, I took the rag from her and cleaned up my pants as best I could.

Afterwards, I got another beer for Joy and joined her on the coach. She sat quietly drinking.

More traffic noise, and now a kid was crying somewhere. I put my feet on the teak coffee table and wiggled my toes inside my shoes. Finally, to get a conversation going, I asked her, “When did you learn about the time machine?”

“When I was eighteen,” she replied. “After I sensed the excitement in the air at our Society meetings. That was the year the Society formally admitted me, and Mom described the Society’s purposes and reiterated the background of most everyone in it. I learned about the horror those people went through.”



I had asked the right question. Joy’s face and eyes softened, and she seemed to be gathering herself to tell me something heartfelt and very emotional. She put her hand on my arm, and I felt instant warmth.

In a compassionate voice, she continued. “I have to tell you that I cried that night, when I heard in more detail what had happened to Gu and all the others. Mom also made sure I read all about what the Society intended to do, and why. The why, John! The why, I couldn’t get out of my mind.”

Joy leaned forward, suddenly intense. "Let me tell you about Gu and what life in China was like for her." She hesitated, then went on. "Her experience played a role in my decision to accept this mission."

Then she told me about the Red Guards and the death of Gu's husband, which I would hear about again from Gu herself in several weeks. Joy got especially emotional when she described what Gu had given up to flee to Hong Kong. "Her body, her honor, her pride, her decency. Do you know what these mean to a woman? Everything."

Joy pressed her lips firmly together, and her wide almond eyes gazed intently into mine. She was speaking from her heart and soul, and I could tell that she had more she wanted to tell me. She withdrew her hand from my arm, and I immediately felt its absence. She sat with both hands folded tightly on her lap for a few moments. Then she leaned toward me again and when she spoke, her voice was still weighed down with sorrow and compassion.

"Not only my mom's and Gu's experiences persuaded me to participate in this mission. What happened to Laurent and his nephew Seth in Rwanda, and the experiences of others in the Society, whose stories were no less horrible, also influenced my decision. I loved and respected these people I'd come to know through the Society. I had grown up with many of them; they were like aunts and uncles to me. Gu was my godmother. I heard and reheard their stories over the years. I knew in my heart that I *had* to volunteer for this one-way mission.

"I want you to understand this, John." She clasped her hands together. A tear welled in her eye and spilled over to run down her cheek. "This is a mission of love for me. If it weren't, I could never decide to leave my mother for the rest of our lives."

Again, she brought up the horror that her mother had experienced, only touching on the worst parts. Then she went into Laurent's and Seth's story of the Rwandan genocide. Afterward she leaned back on the sofa and the intensity went out of her. In a more relaxed voice she said, "I think now you will understand why I made the decision I did. When Mom told me about their experiments with time travel, she was very excited and said the latest tests had worked. She said that they now could send two people back into the past. 'Who will go and what will they do?' I asked her.

"She told me about the mission as the Society saw it, and the difficulty they were having in finding the right people to carry it out. It was dangerous, the risk of failure great, and so much depended on the peo-

ple who were sent to carry it out and their willingness to go. There was no way of bringing them back. They would forever disappear into the past.

“That night, after Mom told me that, I couldn’t sleep. I thought of the people in the Society who had devoted their lives and wealth to its purpose.”

The intense feeling that fueled what she was about to say furrowed Joy’s brow and narrowed her eyes. Her voice rocked with that emotion; her hands bounced in agitation on her lap. “I thought about my mother’s great loss of Nguon and how she would never marry again. And her locket—oh, her locket!—that she would kiss and sometimes shed a tear over. I thought of Gu and the death of her husband, Peng, and that she would never marry again, either.

“John, I got to know these people in the Society, and it is heart-breaking to see what good people they are, how devoted and loving they are, and yet know that they could not suffer any greater horror, any greater pain, than that already inflicted on them with the loss of their loved ones, and what they saw done to others. And of all these others, the ones that most stuck in my mind and heart were the Jewish woman who wiped Ludger’s tears away before she was killed; and that proud young Tutsi woman, that very proud Tutsi woman who refused to strip—to bow—to that beast that chopped her up, or to give him the pleasure of hearing her agony.”

Joy paused and wiped at her eyes with the back of one toughened but still womanly hand. “I thought of the true parents that I never knew, and what they might have had to go through—their suffering. I then saw quite clearly that I had to do whatever was necessary to ensure the success of the Society’s plans. By morning, it was perfectly clear to me. I had survived on that empty boat for a purpose, and that was to make sure this mission of the Society, of *my* people, was successful. I knew I could do it. Mom had prepared me well.”

She had leaned very close to me, looking into my eyes. Hers were large and sparkled in the lamplight with unshed tears. When she blinked, I reached up and wiped at two tears that trickled down her cheeks.

She shook her head and continued. “The next morning, while Mom and I were putting on our jogging clothes, I said simply, ‘I will be one of the two to go back in time.’”

“Mom didn’t move. She sat frozen for minutes, and then she started to cry. She looked at me and misery painted its lines on her face. Her

lips trembled and her face contorted in a mother's ultimate anguish. She let the black words fall between us: "I know."

Now Joy was openly crying, and I put my arm around her and caressed her back.

Joy pressed on. "You see, John, she knew there could be no other choice. I was the most prepared and the most capable, and there was too much at stake to risk a second choice. We knew the other person would be a man, for at that time, only men had the historical reputations the Society demanded for this mission. So partnering this participant with a young, healthy woman was desirable. If it weren't me, we'd have to go outside the Society for both candidates, which was too risky."

She stopped and pulled back and stared intently down at her lap for several seconds, composing herself, steeling herself against what she said next. "My mother and I knew that when I entered the time machine, no matter what happened at the other end of time, we would never see each other again," she murmured, then looked up at me. "I can't tell you how much this amazing and loving woman means to me. I will never forget her. She will always be here," and she put her hand over her heart, "I will always miss her here."

Joy broke down in huge sobs, and for the first time this woman who had mastered martial arts and weapons, this young woman who was incredibly expert and poised, this woman whose angry looks could sear buffalo hide or freeze oxygen out of the air, this woman who could publicly dump pizza on my lap, and this woman who calmly invited me to make love to her—seemed just a very fragile and distraught young lady. I pulled her to me, put both arms around her, and held her tightly while she cried against my chest. I thought of my life and the death of my parents and how easy it was for me to leave it all to travel to the past. Clearly, in this we shared an unequal burden. Silently I promised her to do my best to lessen her loss in some way, although I knew I could never overcome it.

I could say nothing then to ease the emotional pain she was already anticipating. I just held her.

Soon, her sobs turned to whimpers, and she slowly quieted. Finally, she pushed herself away and said, wiping her wet face with the sleeve of her sweatshirt, "One has to do what one has to do, if I may invent a saying."

I went into the bedroom and brought out a box of tissues for her. She wiped her eyes, and sat silently for some minutes.

Finally, she sat up straight and looked at me. “Thanks for the chest, I needed that,” she said with a lopsided smile, and added, “There is another thing I wanted to mention to you, since you and I will be partners. Once I decided that I would be going in the time machine, the Society knew it was very important that the second person and I be compatible. Our mission could succeed even if the two of us hated each other, but that would make things very . . . ah, how should I put it . . . complex. The Society considered compatibility of paramount importance, as I mentioned when you were deciding whether or not to join me.

“That’s why I attended your class, John—to find out for the Society what you believed, and to see whether you were right for me. And you are. I am attracted to you, and your compassion and understanding just now—” she smiled a little self-consciously, and gestured absently at the box of tissues “—cinched it for me. You and I will make great partners, John.”

She suddenly buffeted me with a tossed cushion, taking me totally off guard.

“Now I’m going to sleep. Get off my bed.” She pushed me off the sofa with her foot. “See you in the morning.”

“Good night,” I said, “and . . . if you feel like crying again, let me cry with you.”

I went into the bedroom and left the door open, just in case Joy would need comforting again. In bed, in the dark, alone, I thought of her coming loss of her mother, forever. I thought of how I would have felt if, while my mother were alive, I’d had to make a decision to be separated from her forever. I thought of Tor’s and Gu’s loss of their loved ones. I could not help it. It got to me. The tears rolled out of my eyes, and I cried quietly into my pillow so that Joy would not hear.

Chapter 12

Gorgeous Joy was as available to me as some hungry hooker. Tomorrow night would be it, I told myself. After our flight the next day, I would make my move. All I needed to do was say, “Let’s make love.” Just like that. And she would get naked, and I would get naked, and whammo. No more emotional Novocain. I now had been hit with Joy and her mother’s background and we had cried it out. All had been said. So, tomorrow night!

It’s not that I was preoccupied with sex. I was—had been—a professor, a man of the mind and intellect. I just wanted what was coming to me, that’s all.

I finished with what I had to do in Bloomington the morning of the third day, and we flew to the Society’s home base in Silicone Valley for our training. This would also be our departure point when we traveled back in time.

We had to transfer planes in Chicago and Dulles before landing at San Jose International Airport. Joy’s mother had bought us first-class tickets. Always the gentleman, I let Joy sit at the window. I knew this was my last plane ride in this world, and since I was going back to about 1900—we had yet to determine the exact time—I’d probably never see the land from the sky again. So, shortly after we took off on the first leg of our trip, I occasionally left her to take a vacant seat at the window across the aisle and stare down at the houses, buildings, roads, and towns; and eventually the hills, desert, irrigation patterns on the otherwise barren earth, and the straight, narrow roads that traversed the nothingness. I was leaving all this—all this that would flower out of the past in which I would soon live. Some things would never change, however. The clouds. The way they looked at eye level entranced me, and I just let my eyes feast on them, one after another in all their blossoming and billowing, white and gray, and black and thundering beauty.

I tried to paste it all in my memory forever.

Joy, it seemed to me, was doing the same thing. She was also hunched over her seat window, staring down at the land below or at the

clouds, hardly moving. At one point, the stewardess, who had noticed my movement between seats, leaned over her and asked, "Is everything okay?"

Joy paused for a moment, and then said, "He's mean. He won't make love to me here on the seat. He won't let me join the Mile High Club—you know, for those who have made love at 5,280 feet or more."

Startled, the stewardess shot upright, shaking her head as though she had a bug in her hair. Then she leaned toward Joy again and offered, "Honey, we have a little private place to the rear of the galley that you could use." She smiled at Joy. "We sometimes use it ourselves."

"Thanks," Joy said, waving her hand airily. "We'll use the aisle if the seat gets uncomfortable. That is, if I can persuade him."

"No, you can't do that," the stewardess exclaimed, and then realized Joy was laughing. "Okay," she said, "you got me."

When our plane landed and we passed the stewardess on our way out, she elbowed the steward standing next to her and laughingly pointed to Joy and me.

"Joy, what's with the stewardess?" I asked.

"Tell you about it later," Joy said. And when she did, I got a good laugh out of it. I told her, "You're a pixie, you know."

"Get used to it," Joy said, fluffing my hair.

Another side of her revealed.

A limousine met us at the airport and took us to a large, warehouse-like building on Saratoga Ave. There was not a window in the building that I could see. The limousine driver called ahead, so her mother met us at the entrance.

"Hello, you two," Tor greeted us. "I hope that everything went well."

"Yes," Joy responded for both of us, and kissed her. They hugged each other for a long moment, and then Joy took my hand and said, "Come on in."

It was late evening, and with plane and airport time, the trip had taken about eight hours. We were tired and must have shown it, for once we got inside, her mother said, "We will start the training in the morning after a tour of the classrooms. You two have a good sleep." And she showed us to our rooms, which were side by side.

I thanked Tor, waved good night to Joy, and entered a sparsely furnished room with a huge bed, a side easy chair and table, a cabinet against the wall, and a closet with clothes hanging inside. I looked at

some of the clothes, most of which were for exercise. Some were old-fashioned suits, with funny hats on a shelf above them. They were clearly for our time travel. I had almost nothing to unpack, so I undressed and went to bed, exhausted.

My new life was beginning. But, lying in bed, all I could think of was Joy. Three days had passed since the limousine ride and, each night since, she'd been available to me.

Yet, no whammo.

Jesus. What's the matter with me? I wondered. *I've had more action on first dates with women less willing. At first, that is.* I smiled. *Tomorrow night will be it. Right now I'm blasted. For once I can go to sleep without being aroused.* Sighing with weariness and anticipation, I soon fell asleep.

Chapter 13

Tonight is it, I thought, sitting on the toilet the next morning after being awakened at a horribly early hour. I was as aroused as a teenage boy seeing his first porno movie. I could smell the sex, taste it, feel it. I had to take a fast cold shower just so I could pee.

The training the Society put me through beginning that morning was the most intensive and extensive I had ever had. *So this is what Marine basic training is like*, I thought only halfway through that day.

We got up at 5 AM for a five-mile run—correction, a five-mile run, jog, walk, and stumble. That was just the first three miles. This torture was followed by half an hour of calisthenics, and another half hour of weight training. Then after a fifteen-minute breakfast of juice, fruit, and cereal—Joy helped me lift the heavy spoon to my mouth—we were off to one kind of training after another. Except for breaks to eat lunch and dinner, we kept going until 9 PM.

I was too tired that first evening to do anything but collapse across my bed, still dressed, and instantly fall into a deep sleep. I didn't even think of sex. I don't think a troupe of naked Joys dancing the cancan around my bed would have aroused even infinitesimal interest.



Joy already had much of the training I was given, so she must have been taking refresher courses. She also underwent new training, as I recall, such as writing the advanced computer programs that we might need. She had an M.A. in computer sciences, so she already was thoroughly familiar with computers and their programming languages. But the laptop computers we would have available to us were special, Joy told me, and the Society's computer engineers had written a variant of triple C, mixed with a new language called Solo, to make the best use of them.

Institute instructors were also training her in the care and treatment of wounds, broken bones, and all the diseases we might contract despite the thousands of shots we must have received.

“My arms feel like goddamn pincushions,” I yelled at Joy one day.
“Don’t be a sissy,” she yelled back.



We usually trained separately, but for the martial arts, Joy was my sensei. I never, absolutely never, got used to this. It was not right. It was against nature, evolution, human rights, the balance between male and female among all mammals, and the Declaration of Independence, for this madly desirable woman—four inches shorter than me, about fifty pounds lighter, smaller muscled, much thinner at the waist, possessed of smaller hands and tiny feet—to be teaching me, a *man*, how to fight. Jeez!

Before our first martial arts session the second day, Joy had carefully laid out my clothes. “Proper clothes; proper attitude,” she informed me. Since I will be teaching you karate jutsu and judo, with *my* improvements, you should learn the related Japanese. She pointed to my new clothes. Those are your *gi*—uniform.”

She picked the white pants and held them out for me to put on.

I did so and asked, “Why are they so baggy? I don’t like that.”

“Those pants are called *hakama*, and they are baggy so that I can grab and throw you.”

“By the pants?”

She only smiled as she handed me a white, collarless shirt. “This is your *uwagi*.”

It was also white and made of heavy cotton, fell to my mid-thigh, had a 3/4 th length sleeve, and a rear vent.

Then she passed me a white, cotton canvas belt to tie around my . . . *uwagi*. As she held it out disdainfully in two fingers, she said, “Your *obi*.”

Joy dressed in similar clothes. Except that she also wore a bright red headband and a black satin *obi*. She had wound her hair into a knot for this first time, a rare hairstyle for her. Normally, she braided her hair or put it in a ponytail. I guessed that, during this first session, she was afraid I would accidentally pull her hair out by the roots.

Our training room was large, with two adjacent mirrored walls. It was fully matted, except for several feet in front of the entrance, which were tiled. We stood in the center of a mat in the center of the room,

I had a fair idea that a black belt meant she has advanced skills in her martial arts, but I wanted to ask anyway. I pointed to it and raised my eyebrows.

“The obi means I can bend a steel rod with the flick of my hand and kick a hole in reinforced concrete.”

“Then why do I have a white belt?”

“White is for stupid beginners who couldn’t kick their way out of a wet paper bag,” she kindly informed me.

“But you can’t jump the tallest building in a single bound, can you?” I asked nicely.

She grabbed me by the uwagi, and threw me over her shoulder. I landed three feet in front of her. Dusting off her hands, she replied, “I won’t need to, will I?”

To start the training, Joy said, “This is my *dojo* and I am your *sensei*. When you first come in you are supposed to pause at the entrance and bow to the *dojo*, then bow to me as a black belt. You begin your instructions with a bow to me as your *sensei*; when I ask you to show me what you have learned, you bow to me before and after you do so; and you bow to me when the session is over.

I gaped at her. She was enjoying this, I knew.

She continued as though our relationship didn’t hang in the balance. “However, there is too little time and too much for you to learn. Anyway, I don’t believe in all the formalities of the Japanese *dojo*, like giving you the command ‘*Sensei ni rei*’—bow to your teacher. But I do think that we should bow to each other before we start. It is like a handshake. Just recognition of me as your *sensei* and you as my student. Do you know how to bow?”

“Sure.” I bowed my head at the neck, looked up at her through my eyebrows, and may have twitched both shoulders down an inch or so.

Her turn to gape.

She waved her hand back and forth in front of her face for a moment, as though battling noxious fumes. “And I volunteered for this,” she murmured.

She brought her hand down to her hip. “Now, when you bow you should face me, hands down, palms to your side with your fingers close to your buttocks. You then bow at the waist at an angle of about 30 degrees, and hold it for about a second. The deeper the bow and the longer you hold it, the more respect you show. However, it should never be more the 45 degrees or less than 20 degrees.”

She showed me with a bow.

“Wasn’t that only about 20 degrees?”

“Yes, stupid first time students only get 20 degrees.”

Then I remembered, “Weren’t you supposed to bow before you just threw me?”

“No,” Joy replied, “that was not training; that was what is known as ‘Woman putting man in place.’”

Ignoring such an absurdity, I tried to make a joke. I said huffily, “I bow like that to no one. Especially a woman, and particularly, to my partner-to-be, who will be my equal.”

I guess she didn’t see my smile.

Joy retorted, “I see,” and glided out of the room. Not angrily. Just with a nice, graceful stride out the door, which didn’t slam. It just clicked when she shut it.

“I’ll be damned,” I exclaimed. I stood where she had left me. I felt like I’d just put out my hand to shake hands with a stranger, and he’d ignored it

Okay, if Joy was going to take this so seriously, so was I. I didn’t move; I refused to sit down; I would not leave. Not even when the polar icecaps melted. “Well, my lovely warrior,” I told the room, “you’re not going to dominate *me*.”

After an hour my stance got tiresome and I shifted my weight from leg to leg, thought about our mission, thought a lot about Joy, and even invented practical jokes on her, imagining how I would carry them out. I laughed out loud at some of the best.

I stood through the rest of the morning. Through lunch. Halfway into the afternoon. I missed several other classes, and since no one checked up on me, Joy must have excused me with my other instructors. No doubt she told them about my admirable manliness.

My legs were beginning to tremble. Maybe she’d feel sorry for me when all my blood collected in my legs and my brain, so deprived, went dead.

I didn’t think she would notice.

Then I started thinking of how I could get even with her for what she was putting me through. I had it: No meal with rice, which she ate in nine out of ten meals. Never rice. Always potatoes—mashed, fried, scalloped, hashed. Everyday, potatoes. That would get her. I started to think of how I could arrange this, doubtless with the sympathetic support of her mother, when Joy opened the door and walked into the room as if she had left it only a moment ago.

Not a word.

She stopped in front of me and waited, hiding well her great respect for my willpower and independence, I was sure. I was going to fire off a snide

comment, but I thought better of it. *What the hell, this is for my benefit and that of the mission. I'm a reasonable fellow. And I showed her.*

So, I bowed about 15 degrees. Remembering my samurai movies, I said while bent at the waist, "My name is John Banks. I am from Bloomington, Illinois, and my lord is . . . President Bush." Even if I were on the rack, my bones being pulled out of their sockets, I was not going to say "Joy Phim."

Without a smile, her face inscrutable, she stepped to my side and adjusted my bow to about 30 degrees. Then she bowed to me, twenty degrees I was sure, and said, "Good enough for the first time."

I don't know who won that one. But I felt good about it. Maybe because I finally moved my legs and got the blood flowing back to my brain.

With barely a hesitation, Joy went on. "Now, John, the second thing you have to learn is the initial ready stance. There are many stances, such as the cat, hour-glass, and rooted stances, and one flashes from one to another depending on what your opponent does and what you want to do to him. However, there is a starting stance I want you to learn."

"Yes, boss."

She narrowed her eyes for a moment, but continued. "Stand up straight and move your right foot until your feet are shoulder width apart."

I did so.

"Right foot, John, not left."

"But I end up the same way."

She mumbled something I couldn't hear, sighed, and rubbed her nose. After a moment, she went on, "Now, slightly bend your knees, and lightly close your hands about six inches from your body, heart height. Keep your eyes focused straight ahead and square your shoulders."

She adjusted my stance, and stood back. "Your shoulders slope like a horses ass. Square them like this."

She showed me. As she squared her shoulders, her breasts pushed out her uwagi and reminded me what I was missing. I'm afraid I began to put more than my hands in front of me. To distract her I squared my shoulders.

She stood back, put one lower arm across her stomach, supported the elbow of the other arm on that, and rested her chin on her hand.

Ah, I thought, another look: the thinker.

She decided to continue. I didn't want to think of the alternatives she might have considered.

"The third thing you have to learn is *ukemi*—falling safely. You have to learn how to fall down, forward, sideways, and backwards, and to land such that you roll with your fall and finish with your body standing, alert, in a ready stance. Can you remember all those words?"

Wow. Sarcasm, too.

"Let me see you fall," she said.

I dropped onto my knees and then rolled over them onto the mat.

Joy gawked at me, and I swear she looked up at the ceiling for a moment, apparently seeking spiritual support.

"That was a flop, John. Thrown wet clothes flop better than that. Watch me."

Then she fell forward, headfirst toward the mat. She turned her head under so her shoulder rolled into first contact with the mat, her weight and forward momentum carrying her into a crouch, left leg forward, feet parallel and a little more than a shoulder width apart, and her fists out in front of her body with knuckles down.

"*Half-moon* stance," she said. "It's good for attack and defense."

Next she demonstrated the sideways and backwards falls, always immediately coming erect and in different stances in one easy motion. I had not appreciated before how smoothly she moved. Like a ballet dancer—incredibly agile, with everything moving in rhythm.

I was impressed, but I said, "Well, give me a couple of hours and I can do that."

Joy had a stance unknown to even the most arcane martial arts when I said things like that. She would stand on her right leg with that hip thrust out and her right arm hanging down across her hip, while her left leg would be loosely bent at the knee, her left hand on that hip. She'd tilt her head and her face would take on an expression of disbelief, as if to say, "So, you were beamed up to an alien spaceship to make love to an alien female, huh?" It was a whole body look. It was lovely. And it never failed to break me up.

I burst out laughing. She put a "humor him" smile on her face and said, "We'll see, won't we?"

The rest of that session, every minute of it, I did nothing but practice falling and getting up in one motion.

That night I flopped—yes, flopped like wet clothes—onto my bed, exhausted. I was asleep before my imagination could conjure up an image of Joy's naked body. I was sentient long enough, however, to think,

tomorrow. It must have been habit. I'm not sure I even knew what it meant. Nor did I realize it was New Year's Eve.

Chapter 14

“Tonight.”

I intoned my mantra as I got out of bed the next day, my muscles complaining at the strain of walking across the room to the toilet.

There was no break for New Year’s Day. “No time for it,” Joy told me. These people were as serious as generals involved in a military campaign.

Our second training session began with me standing in front of Joy for five minutes while she looked at me as though waiting for grass to grow, saying nothing. I’d begun to feel like we were two cool gun-slingers in a high-noon standoff when a balloon containing a light bulb popped into being above my head—she was waiting for my bow.

I did so.

Joy bowed back, although not as deeply, since she was the sensei.

For the whole session, Joy continued her instruction on how to fall. I threw myself at the mat, executed nice trajectories through the air, and rolled to a standing, ready position. Near the end of the session, she started to grab my uwagi and throw me in one direction or another. Even when thrown by another person, she wanted me to hit the mat properly and roll to my feet—ready, I began to fear, to be thrown again.

I can still hear Joy almost yelling in exasperation, “Roll, roll, John! Shot deer do it better.” Or, “Jesus, John, is that a ready position or are you taking a piss?”

Now, I had been a college teacher. I knew how to teach. She was no teacher. She had the skills, but not the manner. Were it not for the mission, and that I was falling ever more deeply in love with her each day, and our mission—of course—I would have told her to do the anatomically impossible.

I rebelled in my own way, with comments like “You’re jealous that I’m learning so much faster than you did,” or my favorite, “Look, I’m going to take that tongue of yours, rip it out, and stuff it down your throat.” I accompanied it with a mean stare. I only used that one once.

She responded by stepping back and giving me the whole-body incredulous look. She added a neat raised brow. And she broke me up. It was maybe ten minutes before I could get back to training. Seeing her standing unmoving, unsmiling, watching me roll on the mat with laughter, only made it worse. I think she actually let up on the verbal harassment for a while, however.

That night, I was again almost too tired to think. But I was able to sit on the bed and get under the covers before falling asleep. I was too tired, but Joy was in shape and full of energy. I couldn't understand how she could put off making love to me. I'd just lay on my back and reverse-whammo. My last thought was, *I'm going to wake Joy up an hour before our run tomorrow for vigorous, extracurricular warm-up exercises.*

Chapter 15

The next morning I hit the snooze button on my alarm too many times and finally woke to Joy pounding on my door. I almost missed my run, jog, walk, stumble. I didn't have time to think "Tonight" until I was regarding my breakfast of cereal and a banana. I left the banana and ate my cereal. I refused to watch Joy eat her banana. The male body can only stand so much punishment.

That third session, I bowed right away. Joy looked at my bow critically, bowed back, and we got right into the training. She began to teach me simple contact moves, like a shoulder throw of an opponent.

First, she said, "From here on in, you must have confidence in my teaching." She went to the phone on the wall of our practice room, dialed three numbers, waited, and then said, "We're ready for Tiny."

The door opened a minute later, and a large man came in. He must have been about six feet, two inches tall, and weighed perhaps two hundred pounds. He looked Slavic, with a square chin, small eyes, and high forehead. He had more the muscular build of a swimmer than a weight lifter, and moved lightly on his feet as he joined us.

Joy introduced us and said laconically that Tiny was a brown belt in karate. She then asked me to stand against the wall, out of the way. "John, don't interfere no matter what you see. I don't have to tie you down to make sure of that, do I?"

"No," I said, my curiosity clear in my voice. "I will be a concrete statue."

Tiny strode to the center of the mats and she glided after him. He rotated like a tank to face her, she stopped, and they bowed to each other. I'm sure she smirked in my direction. She took up a ready stance I hadn't seen before. She stood almost sidewise to him, with her hands loosely on her hips, and her knees lightly bent, center of gravity slightly to the rear. She told me later this was her big opponent stance, and was called *back stance*.

Tiny stood low to the mat, lower body angled, knees slightly bent, fists in front chest high. Joy looked like a little girl play-acting in front of a wrestler. *David and Goliath* immediately came to mind.

They seemed rock solid for a moment, each looking into the other's eyes. Each automatically calculated the other's body language at the subconscious level, where all one's training and experience resides—at the level of what Zen proponents call Self Two.

Tiny suddenly threw a right hand to Joy's cheek, and Joy blocked it with her left as though washing a window with it, stepped inside his right arm and grabbed Tiny's left hand, pivoted and spun his heavy weight around while bending his hand back and with that leverage she dropped him to the mat; he rolled up and feinted forward, and then twisted his body to his left to grab and throw her, but she did a left step past him and, slapping her right hand to his groin, she released a right front kick to his face; then took a right, then a left step to Tiny's right side and grabbed his right wrist with her right hand while her left hand gripped under his elbow, and stepping back she dropped her right foot onto his right knee while keeping the pressure on his elbow. Locking his wrist close to her body, she dropped him again.

He fell heavily, but twisted on the mat and bounced up trying to chop Joy's neck as she moved under his hand, fell to the mat twisting her legs around, and thrust one foot against his hip while throwing the other across his legs to trip him, and as he fell he turned his shoulder to the mat to roll up again into a ready stance, facing her.

She had taken another stance, a *cat stance* she later told me. It looked like Tiny wouldn't make the first move this time, and would wait her out until nighttime, if necessary. Joy was not the waiting type. In an eye blink, she skipped to the right and, as Tiny covered that with a leg thrust, she leaped to the left; and as Tiny changed direction to cover that, she bounded back to the right, caught his arm in the direction it was moving, and twisted him to the mat.

Again he was up, and this time increased his distance from Joy by about a foot, clearly hoping to use the added space to react to this small demon.

After a few minutes of staring into his eyes while in what she called a half-moon stance, she dropped one hand to her side, appeared to relax, and crooked a finger at Tiny, motioning for him to approach her. He raised his thick eyebrows and questioned her with his eyes. Satisfied, he approached her slowly, still keeping his hands ready.

Joy smiled at him. He further relaxed his guard and approached closer. She leaped headfirst to the mat on his right, angled her body while bringing up her legs, pushed off the mat with her hands, and got a side scissors lock on Tiny's head with her legs to spin him forward to

the mat, her legs still around his throat; and as he tried to twist out of the lock and grab her foot, she used her incredible limberness to get a backwards arm lock on his arm, grabbed hold of his little finger, and twisted it as far back as it would go against his wrist.

With the locks on his throat and arm and the painful strain on his finger, she had him, and he knew it. She gradually released him, and they got up, bowed to each other, and Tiny left without a word.

I clapped. Joy gave me a dirty look. I gather that violated her dojo code.

“Okay, do you believe?” Joy asked me.

“Yes, but what if you lost? You’d never have convinced me, then.”

“I couldn’t lose to him. He’s only a brown belt, while I’m a seventh-degree black belt in karate and sixth-degree in judo.”

I supposed I should be impressed, but I decided to make sure. “How many degrees are there?”

“For the schools in which I trained, ten in judo and nine in karate.”

“Why both karate and judo? Why not concentrate on achieving the highest degree in one?”

“I have trained for battle, not for sparring or tournaments. Karate is good for punching, blocking, and kicking; judo for grappling, locks, and throws. A specialist in only one is vulnerable to the other. Someday my life, and maybe yours John,” she said looking at me askance, “may depend on my skills in both.”

What about the other martial arts?”

Her eyes lighted up. Leaning toward me, she answered rapidly, “Oh, there are hundreds of variants, but I’ve tried to learn the basic moves of the oldest and most important, like *Shaolin kung fu*, *tae kwon do*, and *t’ai chi ch’uan*, while learning both the *hard external* and *soft internal* styles.”

I shouldn’t have asked and changed the subject. “Wasn’t that little trick of yours dirty, ungentlemanly?”

Deflated, she leaned back. “You mean seeming to relax and beckoning Tiny to approach with my finger?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not a gentleman,” she said. “Let that ruse be a warning to you. In combat you never let your guard down. Not even if your opponent sits down, takes a newspaper from their back pocket, and starts reading it. Paranoia is the best defense.”

“When do you let your guard down, then?”

“When your opponent is down and incapacitated. Dead is best.”

“Okay,” I said, and then added, “There is a small chance you would’ve lost—even small probabilities can happen. Then you would have been human.”

“John. Understand this. I would not have lost,” she said, as definitely as stating that the earth orbits the sun. This was another side to Joy that often drove me up the wall and caused some fights between us in the years to come, no matter how well-founded her confidence—her ego: “I wouldn’t lose; I can’t miss; I will guard you, don’t worry; Here, I can do it.” It was hard enough to live with a person of her many skills without the neon sign her ego erected.

I had the occasional sweet moment. Or, so I thought. Once, many years later, I heard grunting in our kitchen. Before I could investigate, Joy emerged with a large jar in her hand. She held it out to me. One should enshrine such sweet moments; they come so seldom in life. I knew instantly what this meant to me, to our life together, to the balance of power between us, to the universe.

She was about to say something when I held up one gallant hand to shush her, took the jar, and intoned, “No problem.”

I clasped the lid in an unbreakable grip, anchored the jar in my iron left hand, held it near my pelvis to get the most leverage, and hunched over the jar. I put every ounce of power I had into twisting that lid. *It’s simple*, I thought. *Either the jar or me; either the lid comes off or I break my arm.* This was my moment. I grunted loudly. My face contorted with effort. The lid came loose with a sucking sound. I straightened with an utterly bland expression so as not to rub in my triumph, and handed the jar back to Joy. No flourish. I was a good sport.

She stared at me. One eyebrow rose. Her eyes glittered, and the corners of her mouth twitched with a suppressed grin. She broke the stare to glance down at the jar in her hand for a moment before looking back at me, her chin now quivering with hidden laughter. Poor sport.

Finally, she waved in front of my nose the spoon that I hadn’t seen in her other hand, and pointed out in a voice so sweet it would make sugared cinnamon seem bitter, “I had loosened the lid, my he-man. I just wanted you to taste the jam.” For the rest of the day she looked like somebody recovering from laughing gas. I must have looked like I’d had root canal surgery.

There were other incidents fueled by her ego. In a moment of irritation, I once told Joy in my customary pleasant tone, “You may be able to do all those things, but I can stand up to pee in the toilet.”

Joy got into that one hand on her hip look and stared at me for a long moment. Then she turned and strode into the bathroom. She waited until I followed her in, lifted her dress, took down her favorite white cotton panties, thrust our her pelvis, and peed. She got it in the toilet; I'll give her that much credit, but I noticed she also dribbled down her leg and on her panties.

"You dribbled," I commented pleasantly, pointing to her leg.

Joy suddenly turned and pissed on my leg before I could move. "So I did," she said.

She had purposely kept ammunition in reserve. Still, I won that one.

Ah, sweet moments . . . Joy, screeching in the kitchen. I rushed in to see her wielding a broom at the dish shelves, her face twisted with loathing. I stopped dead in my tracks. I thought the Devil must be emerging from between the shelves, like a genie from a bottle.

"What the hell?" I yelled, scared. *And God*, I thought, *if it's doing this to her, then I'm ready for a diaper.*

"A spider, a giant spider!" she sputtered, pointing at the shelves with one shaking finger while holding the broom at a protective angle with her other hand.

"A spider?"

"Get it out of there, John."

Well. Hahaha. I kept that to myself—a survival instinct.

This was one of the greatest moments in our relationship. I nonchalantly walked over to the shelves and started taking one plate down at a time, turning each plate over in my hands, hoping the spider would run up my arm in full view of sissy Joy. After several dishes, there it was, pressing its back into a corner of the shelves. A typical wolf spider with a palm-sized leg spread. I reached in, over the first two legs it had raised for protection, and grasped the cowering thing by the back, between its legs. I held it out toward Joy. All its legs were spread defensively wide.

"Is this it?"

Joy stood at the kitchen entrance holding with two hands the broom in front of her at about a 30 degree angle, one leg a little in front of her—a typical samurai swordsman's defensive posture.

Now, I'm a merciful fellow. I could have tossed it at her to see how good she was with the broom. I could have put it on the floor, just for the entertainment value when it scuttled toward her. I contented myself with asking, every syllable a profound question mark, "So, why didn't you chop it flat with your warrior hand?"

“Get that fucking thing out of here, John!”

What? No “dearest”?

I told her to open the back door. She cautiously obeyed, then leaped aside, still holding the broom in front of her. I took the poor, frightened spider outside and released it.

When I came back in, Joy asked, “What did you do with it?”

“I let it go.”

“Huh? You didn’t kill it? It’s going to come back in.”

In life, each man is fated to have one moment that is totally his, a moment for which there is no identifying date or time, a moment that he will always relish and recall to lighten his darkest moments. This was mine. When Joy got overbearing or her ego was out in bright lights and loud music, I would think of the heavenly words I uttered in response: “Baby, I’ll protect you.”

Chapter 16

Our lovemaking had to happen, and this was the day. But in no way had I anticipated or planned it. We just slid into it, so to speak.

After Joy's merciless dominance over Tiny and her mammoth display of ego, she asked, "Ready for your instruction?"

"Here I am." *Like I could say no.*

Joy then proceeded to throw me over her shoulder several times, pointing out the mistakes in my fall each time. She grabbed me in various places—the arm, the chest, and once by the crotch—and threw me over her shoulder, hip, or back, each time naming the technique, such as the *ashi guruma*—foot wheel, *ippon seoinage*—one arm shoulder throw, and *harai goshi*—sweeping hip throw.

Seeing her strength and agility with Tiny was one thing. Experiencing it was another. Here was this little woman, no more than five feet, eight inches tall to my six feet; 130 pounds to my 180 pounds, and she swung me to the mats as if I were a bag of clothes.

Sweating and aching, I finally asked, "How the hell do you do that? Even if we were the same size, I would have twice as much muscle as you."

"It's physics—a matter of using the opponent's weight and direction of movement against him, and then letting nature take its course. It's being able to center my strength rather than diffusing it. And, very importantly, it's readiness for action, anticipation of an opponent's moves, being able to reflexively counter each and every move, and speed."

"And how do you do all that?"

"Here," Joy said. "Let's work on you throwing me, and I'll introduce you to the basics."

She let me throw her to the mat, each time bouncing up to her feet. Then she said, "Now grab me here," and pointed to her chest. "Throw me this way." She demonstrated a throw with her arms, then gripped the clothes on my chest in her fists, rotated her body, and tossed me over her hip. "That was the *hane goshi*—spring hip throw. Now, you do it."

I hesitated and looked at Joy's chest. Then I grabbed her near her underarms and tried to throw her. After all, she was a woman. And I am a gentleman, unlike her. Anyway, she resisted, and I could hardly move her.

"On the chest, John." Joy patted her breasts.

I hesitated again.

"I see," she said, and pursed her lips thoughtfully. "I'm going to have to get you over this hump."

Joy came over to me, undid her black belt, and pulled off her uwagi. She had on a black athletic bra, which she pulled off over her head. It was all very matter-of-fact.

I stood there, my heart thumping, jaw bumping my toes, gawking at her with eyes that must have been as round as dinner plates. She had pert breasts that, once released from her bra, stuck out firmly.

"Here," Joy said, "feel them and get used to them so that you won't be shy about touching me." She picked up my hand and rubbed it over her firm breasts.

Standing there like an idiot, with my hand on her breast, I felt what the pre-modern novels used to intimate as a stirring in my loins. I mean, of course. Jesus!

Joy looked down at my hakama and sighed. Still holding my hand on her breast, she pulled down her hakama with her other hand, and then her white cotton panties. She kicked them away and stood erect with her pelvis thrust forward. She took my other hand and placed it on her crotch. "Don't be embarrassed," she said, looking up at me.

I let my hot hand rest there. I was now so passionately aroused that my hakama looked as though they had a pistol in them, pointed at her.

"Feel," Joy said, "know what I am like all over."

Her hand remained over mine on her crotch. With an ardor of its own—I was beyond thought, a quivering jellyfish in a sea of mad desire—my fingers went into her and started stroking her clitoris. I could see I had aroused her also, and I began to caress her stiff nipple with my other hand.

Joy looked at me with half-closed eyes, her face flushed, and then she took her hand off mine and pushed it against my throbbing erection. "Let's do it," she meowed.

I stripped off my uwagi while she swiftly undid my draw strings and jerked my hakama down. Then she gently lifted my shorts over my erection, and held it for a moment.

"Hmmm," she murmured, "I've wanted you for months."

“Wait, I don’t have a rubber,” I blurted, still finding in me somewhere a molecule of sanity.

“Don’t worry, I’ve had an operation in preparation for our mission,” she purred, turning those ordinary words into an erotic song. At that moment she could have made a doctor’s diagnosis of cancer sound intimate and bursting with sexual promise.

Joy released me and bent over to spread her clothes on the mat. I was practically shaking with hot passion and almost mounted her then. But that fleeting second of opportunity passed, and she was reclining on the mat. I somehow got down beside her and lustily devoured her beautiful face and body. Breasts just right—not too large, not too small. Small waist and nicely shaped hips and thighs. I’d already noticed her long legs. A million times.

I could tell she admired my body as I did hers, and we both began to stroke and caress each other. Then she kissed me deeply, moving her tongue inside my mouth, and I reciprocated until she pulled a little away and groaned, “Come inside.”

And I did.

Unbelievable. Those times in the evening, when we could have bathed together and made love in a clean bed and didn’t, paled; now, here, in mid-afternoon, on gym mats in a training room with mirrors, in sight of anybody who happened to walk in, our sweaty bodies joined for the first time in lovemaking. I know what it was. Joy just couldn’t resist my body any longer.

I had never made love to a woman like this. Her athleticism, physical skills, and training in sex showed immediately. She was not only able to grip my erection with the muscles around her vagina, but she was also able to ripple them so that, even if I were not thrusting back and forth, it was almost as if she was masturbating me. I tried to hold back my ejaculation, tried to think of being marooned on an iceberg, of being immersed in a bathtub full of ice or, better, of being in an airplane as it spiraled down to crash, but I was so aroused my stupid mind wouldn’t work. I came within a minute or so. At the same moment, to my joyful surprise, she turned rigid, shuddered, and with a loud cry had her own orgasm.

Instead of releasing me, Joy held me within her with her vaginal muscles, and kept me aroused. Without a break we went at it again, and this time we were both able to play around with the rhythm. After a couple of minutes, she arched her body up and, holding me within her with her muscles, she bent her head under her, doubled at the waist, and

put her head under her buttocks. She then twisted her torso and took my testicles into her mouth. The sensation was incredible. While still in her I put my thumb on her clitoris and diddled it rapidly. I soon exploded inside her as she tightly wrapped her legs around me and pressed me in even deeper. Another shuddering orgasm sent a shriek between her lips.

I felt as though I had turned inside out. I tried to slowly bring us both down from paradise and caressed and fondled her until we finally untangled ourselves. Joy said, "I'm going to love you," and then she cuddled up to me.

I was so satiated that I could hardly speak. In a very husky voice, I finally asked her, "Was having me touch you part of my training, or was it . . . hormones?"

"Don't know, do you," Joy said as huskily. "Don't let this spoil you. Back to real training tomorrow."

"Excuse me," I said, "but do you mean this isn't training?" We both had a good laugh.

Thinking back on that, I now believe Joy held her tongue. She had been trained in the erotic arts and surely must have realized that, in this also, I needed schooling. But if she had said something like, "I'm still training you, but in a different skill," it would have been my prostrate operation. I'm sure that it would have taken months and all her training in the erotic arts to undo the psychic damage. Apparently her sexual training also included dealing with the male ego and associated malfunctions.

It was done. The first time was over. It was better than I imagined it would be in my wildest fantasy, and I was now so besotted with Joy that I made "Tonight" a permanent morning mantra.



When we had dinner that evening in the building's cafeteria, Tor joined us at the table. She took a long look at Joy's rosy cheeks and my "I've been to heaven" expression, smiled to herself, and touched her locket. Then she asked softly, "So, how was the . . . training?"

"Very good, Mother. John is learning fast."

"Yes. Well . . . very good," Tor said, and her face lit up as she smiled at me.

Tor turned to her food, moving her fork idly as the smile disappeared from her face. She seemed lost in memories. Then, eyes focused on another place and time, she put her fork down and briefly held her locket.

Joy looked at me and gently shook her head, asking me not to break her mother's reverie.

Finally, Tor seemed to jerk into an awareness of our presence. She released her locket and looked at us, saying, "Ah, yes, well, I've got to tell you about your minor operations, planned for tomorrow. You will each have a transmitter implanted in your throat and a receiver in the bone behind your ear. This system will be powered by your body's own electrical grid, and will never need replacement. Each implant will be cushioned against jarring. It will survive all but a hard and direct blow. It will operate on shortwave for about eight thousand miles, and even further if sunspots are quiet. Your body is the antenna. You toggle on the transmitter by saying 'KK,' which are letters unusual enough that you would not say them accidentally. Once turned on, the transmitter is voice activated and will transmit what you say, even in a whisper. You also toggle it off with a 'KK.' This will keep you two in touch." She smiled directly at Joy this time.



What a meal, what a day, and what an evening! That night, Joy came to my room and we made love in privacy with clean bodies on clean sheets, on a soft bed, before falling asleep in each other's arms. I did miss the mirrors, though.

She showed me some new tricks. But if I had to read the *Kama Sutra*, the Japanese *Pillow Book*, and every other love book I could find, I was determined that some evening, I would surprise her with tricks of my own. I really never did get around to that, but after a few years I didn't care.

And it didn't matter.

The next day, Joy moved her things into my room. From then on, we shared everything, including toothpaste. Everyone knew about our togetherness. They surely expected it. Members of the Society constantly asked questions about how we were getting along together. After all, our togetherness was the crux of their plans. I wondered sometimes if my room was bugged, given how important Joy's and my relationship was to the Society. Were it bugged, they would have known that Drill Sergeant Joy Phim and her new recruit John Banks were doing fine. More than fine, as a matter of fact.

Chapter 17

My training progressed to weapons. And, I must admit, Joy's shooting skill and her training of me would save our lives. But that was in the future.

At this time all I could do was sigh, knowing my little beauty would be my trainer in this, also. I was fated to be under her command. But, being the healthy male that I am, we had some real fights over it in years to come.

First, however, we underwent our surgical modifications to implant the communication devices. We had to practice with them, and we even spared a little time in bed together to do so. It was fun, especially when we left them on during our session of mattress polo. We stopped that, however, when Joy discovered through her mother's embarrassed hints that the Society's engineers had a receiver tuned to our communicators for testing and adjustment purposes. Yeah. Sure.

During the following weeks, the weapons training was added to my martial arts regime. Joy taught me how to handle a person attacking me with a gun or knife. She tried to pound into me that, even if unarmed, utilizing speed, proper movement, and surprise against someone with a weapon could leave me the victor. She showed me that shoes could be deadly against a gun. Pencils, pens, and even fingers could also be lethal weapons, if thrust straight up where the chin meets the throat, or deep into the eyes, for example.

Joy brought a weapon resembling a gun to one session. I learned that it fired a laser beam instead of bullets. The laser, she said, showed where the bullet would hit, were it a real gun. It burned a small hole in clothing and left a burn blister on the skin.

"Here, use it as though it were a gun," she said, handing it to me. Then she put on a protective face cover similar to what welders used, walked about ten feet away, and said, "Okay, shoot me."

I had anticipated this. Even before the sound of her voice faded, I whipped up the gun and fired a "shot" at her chest. In a zigzagging movement too fast for me to react to—a movement I never learned well, as Joy would tell me on a fateful day, far in our future together

she appeared beside me and executed a simulated karate chop to the wrist of my hand that held the gun.

“I could also have killed you,” Joy said, “with a chop to the base of your nose, between your eyes, to drive the soft bone there into your brain; or to the switch in your neck that controls the blood through your carotid arteries to your brain. The point of this is to show you that human beings have slow reaction times to unexpected stimuli. Let me show you again.”

Joy now positioned me a foot behind her with the gun pointed at her back. “Tell me to get my hands up.”

I waited a full minute as she stood in front of me, her hands hanging loosely at her sides. I was ready to shoot the laser at the slightest movement. Finally I said, “Hands up.”

I sensed her moving immediately, but before I could pull the trigger, she had twisted her torso out and down, while her leg kicked backwards to tickle my throat.

“I’m impressed,” I said. “If I ever run across someone like you, I’ll use a machine gun at one hundred feet.”

Joy smiled and said demurely, “You won’t need to. I’ll be there.”
Her damn ego again.

Chapter 18

Assassinations, bribery, frame-ups, buy-offs, and lobbying. Such was the Society's idea of how to create a peaceful universe. We all called it The Plan. I didn't like the idea of assassination then. Now I hate the word, fervently. We should have been honest and called it what it is—murder.

Even at the height of my mad desire for Joy, I couldn't forget about the mission. How could I, with my obscene 5 AM to 9 PM workout and training schedule? As the training progressed, we frequently met with Tor and other members of the Society to draw up a tentative plan of action. As they pointed out, it was better to do the planning now, with the historical resources presently available, than to try to when we arrived in the distant past.

When the Society realized that a time machine was possible and when they knew Joy would be one of the two going back in time, they began work on The Plan. Gu told me, "This was a list of major events and episodes related to your mission, the major people involved, and those you will have to support, bribe, or assassinate."

I felt the Society naively put too much emphasis on assassinations. I tried to reason with them. I argued, "Much could be accomplished without murdering people."

"No, John," Laurent insisted, with Ludger nodding at his side. "You will have to assassinate these people. You cannot doubt their ability to achieve power and kill, as we've seen them do in this universe. Anyway," he added dismissively, "they don't deserve to live."

Tor insisted also. Gu tried to put it logically: "If you assassinate them, John, and you're wrong, nothing is lost except their evil lives. But if you don't assassinate them and they go on to take power and kill tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, and maybe millions, you have defeated the mission."

I didn't push it after that. In the end, once we went back in time, that question was in our hands and not the Society's. It would be between Joy and I, and I could handle her.

Ha. Now who had the ego?

The hardest decision was where in time, exactly, we should travel. I learned that the planners had first wanted to go back many centuries, but they were dreaming. The world then was not ready, the conditions not ripe; we would kill people for naught. For after we dutifully fulfilled our mission, history would close in after we died. It would be like sticking one's finger in a puddle. Pull it out and the water closes in where the finger had been as though it was never there.

The question was, then, when? At that time I was twenty-six and Joy, twenty-five. We were limited by our normal life span, if we survived to old age—a relatively short time in which to change a whole world. We had to decide on the period of time that would allow us to be most effective.

We agreed that the twentieth century, close to its beginning, was the best. That would enable us to start with Mexico. I went through the great mass of historical material that the Society had collected for these early years and suggested 1905 or 1906. This would give us a couple of years to build up our proposed company, establish offices in the relevant countries, and set up an infrastructure to do what we intended.

To facilitate The Plan, we would land in the past with gold, gems, and old currency worth two billion in year 2003 dollars. In 1906 this wealth would be worth about 38 billion dollars that we could use for bribery and other purposes. Such money had to be distributed carefully if we were to avoid discovery and arrest. I felt that the Society was overly optimistic in many respects and whenever I had time available between training sessions, I worked on The Plan.

The Society finally chose San Francisco after the great earthquake and fire of April 1906. Through contemporary street maps and real estate and court documents that had survived the fire, they found an old warehouse near the corner of 8th and Hooper Street whose owner had gone bankrupt because of the fire. The warehouse remained unoccupied until 1908, when a court had it torn down. We would send our supply capsules through time to arrive inside the warehouse with plenty of lead-time, and Joy and I would follow to land there in November. We could then buy the warehouse and use it as a temporary office until we established our company and rented or bought office space. This part of the plan worked flawlessly, with one glitch no one had imagined.

“Why San Francisco and not New York?” I asked at one point.

Gu gave me the answer. “Joy is not Caucasian. She is Asian, and would be conspicuous in New York. Her ethnicity could cause problems for both of you. San Francisco was more of a cosmopolitan city, even in 1906.”

The Society had done insufficient research on this. In 1906, top San Francisco politicians, labor unions, and the mayor were adamantly anti-oriental. At the center of this was a corrupt city administration that used in particular the fear of Japanese and oriental immigration to divert criticism from their own activities.

When I brought this up, Gu replied, “Fortunately, Joy does not look Japanese.”

I wondered how many Caucasians would make that distinction.

Joy shrugged over the whole question.

Gu added, “Anyway, it would be unwise even there for you to behave as a married couple. We thought of making Joy your servant, which the upper class and politicians you will be dealing with would immediately understand, but Joy would have none of it.”

I looked at her and said laughingly, “Hey, that would be great.”

“In your dreams,” she said, laughing also.

Gu joined the laughter. “Your mother didn’t think it would fly, either,” she said. “The best solution to many problems you will have initially, including Joy’s lack of a good Asian girl’s deference to men, is the import and export company you will create. It will allow you to hire people from many countries. You’ll establish overseas contacts around the world, and Joy can be explained as your translator and assistant. If you need a formal title for Joy, you can make her your assistant for Asian trade. Those who get to know you two will make of your relationship what they will, given your similar ages and clear . . . friendship . . . but such relationships were not unheard of during that age.”

With the date of our arrival settled, the Society started filling the supply capsules with what we would need so that they could send them as soon as possible, rather than wait for a time close to our departure date. Then they would be in 1906 and ready for us if we had to suddenly depart early.

Joy and I studied the manners and customs of the time. Despite its importance in women’s fashions in 1906, she absolutely refused to wear a corset. At one point she said to Tor quite firmly, “Look, Mom, I will wear a long dress down to my shoes, and I’ll wear those ugly pointed shoes, pile my hair on top of my head, and wear a ridiculous hat. I will carry an umbrella to protect my delicate female skin from the awful sun. But, I will not wear a corset.”

“Since you and John will often be seen together, they might think you are an Asian prostitute or concubine,” Tor said.

“Especially with your stomach flopping around,” I stupidly added.

Joy punched me in the shoulder and warned, “That is just a foretaste of what I’m gong to do to you later, when my mother is not here to restrain me.”

Faking fear, I put my hands up and pulled back.

Ignoring this, Joy asked me, “Would my not wearing a corset affect our mission?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “That’s an imponderable that could work either way. I suggest you dress the way you want.” And as her face lit up I added, “Within the parameters of the age.” And I couldn’t help adding, “Woman, you will have to show me the deference I merit as a male. It’s the custom of the time.”

Joy scowled, and gave me raspberry. It was another of her looks. I decided to start tabulating them, just to keep track. I would need a huge spreadsheet.

Chapter 19

Three months of extensive training, the Society planned for me. Ha! What a laugh. In five incredibly short weeks, hardly enough time for me to learn which end of a rifle to shoot from—I didn't, Joy would claim—the world ended. Abruptly. Forever.

By then, Joy had worked on my basics enough to her utter frustration that she decided to try teaching me something different—specific techniques such as the “back elbow strike” and “circular knife-hand strike.” On that impossible day, she had thrown me on the mat for the thousandth time. I had just bounced up in an excellent position to make my butterfly kick when the gym phone rang, interrupting her laughter. It emitted two short, piercing beeps followed by one long one—the first two signaling an intrusion into the building, and the long beep instructing us to go to the room next to the time travel machine.

Joy swallowed her laugh abruptly, looked at me with worried eyes to make sure I understood the alarm, and, posthaste, headed for the door with me an inch from her heels. We rushed down the hallway to the indicated room, and met Tor at its door. I was shocked at her appearance. The wrinkles in her face were now deep, obvious, and downcast; her eyes were wide and wet; her lips trembled.

“I'm sorry, my dearest.” She spoke to Joy so quickly that her words ran together. “I wanted to give you such a send off that we would never forget. I'm sorry. You must leave now.”

Tears began flowing down her cheeks. She swiftly brushed them away and fought to compose herself. She swallowed, took a fast breath, and battled her emotions to slow down her words. “The FBI has a warrant to search our building; they claim we're hiding unregistered weapons here, and manufacturing dope. Our contact at FBI headquarters said that a fully armed SWAT team is on its way. They are really after our time machine. We will not fight them. So go. Go now!”

Tears again streaked down her face.

“Won't they get the time machine equipment and specifications anyway?” I blurted, as though there was time for a question and answer session.

“No,” Tor snapped, violently waving us into the room. “Everything will self-destruct the moment you land in the past.”

Suddenly, banging and loud shouts echoed down the hallway. We rushed into the time machine room, which was really just a huge space with thick black cables snaking from one bulky machine to another. All this resembled the layout for the old-fashioned mainframe computers of the 1970s, except for the vault-like cubicle in the center and the recessed, glass-enclosed operating booths around the perimeter. In them, scientists stood behind their equipment consoles, frantically waving us into the cubicle. Inside it, we could see our time capsule with its small door open. Beyond that door lay darkness; a past world waiting for our entry.

“Go, my dearest, go.” Tor pushed us, stumbling, across the cable-strewn floor toward the cubicle.

At the open door of the capsule, I grabbed Tor by the shoulders and kissed her wet cheek. “Thanks,” I said, wanting to express what I felt so intensely in spite of my growing fear, “I will always remember you.” Then I rushed into the capsule to leave Joy her very last moment with her mother.

They hugged each other tightly, swaying back and forth, Tor kissing Joy’s cheeks and forehead, smoothing her hair with one hand. Tor cried openly; Joy shook with sobs.

The outer door flew open. Black-clad men wearing helmets and bulletproof vests rushed into the outer room, yelling, “Freeze! Nobody move!” They swung the muzzles of their rifles back and forth, covering the whole area.

Tor threw her arms aside to release Joy from her hug. I reached out and grabbed Joy’s uwagi and jerked her into the capsule.

“Goodbye, Mom, I will never forget you! I love you,” she screamed.

Tor yelled, “Safe journey, my daughter,” and slammed the capsule door.

Before it closed, I saw something fly into the capsule, but it was forgotten as I lunged to lock the door from the inside. A light went on in the capsule. Joy was leaning against the door, almost doubled over with wrenching sobs. I took hold of her shaking shoulders and gently guided her onto the capsule’s narrow seat. She sat with her head almost between her knees, sobbing into her cupped hands.

Before I could seat myself, however, the capsule made a sound like a sports car starting up in first gear, pedal to the floor. I instinctively

braced myself with my hands against the ceiling and one wall. The sound soon verged on being painful, and I knew, were we able to see outside, that we'd see the sun moving from west to east, the moon reversing its course, water running up the mountain streams, people walking backwards, cars extricating themselves from accidents, airplanes seeming to land tail first, rats shooting out of cat's mouths as the cat leapt backwards and the rat scurried away in reverse, and lovers, their eyes blazing with desire, moving apart and putting on their clothes. All this, moving faster and faster until the day spun into night and then the days flickered by as light, dark, light, dark, and light dark lightdark, lightdarklightdark . . . light dark, light, dark, and the roar dropped to a whine and then gradually disappeared, just like a sports car coming to a slow stop.

I now heard only Joy's anguished weeping and my heart beating rapidly in my ears.

We had arrived. Somewhere. Sometime.

Except for my racing heart, I felt nothing amiss. I put my hands to my cheeks and rubbed my eyes. I felt my clothes and moved my toes. I hadn't changed. I hadn't turned into a lizard. I wondered if, in spite of the sound, the machine really hadn't worked, that I had only imagined that it did, and we were still back in Silicone Valley with the FBI SWAT team waiting for us to open the door.

I looked at Joy. She still had her face buried in her hands; her whole body shuddered with her sobs. I was about to console her and try to prepare her to face the guns that would be pointed at us upon opening the door, when I glanced at the display panel that recorded the reverse passage of time. I gaped at the words.

San Francisco. November 14, 1906, 2:51 AM

Chapter 20

*M*y God, spun out of my whirling thoughts. *We have made it. Just like that.* My breath hung in my throat. I unconsciously reached out and banged the display with my hand. It didn't change. *Holy shit, we're really, really in the past.*

An oxygen supply fed into the capsule from a grate in the wall; this was good for thirty-six hours, in case of an unexpected delay. We also had water and synthetic food for five days, and a little workman's toilet behind another door. The Society had tried to think of everything.

They'd missed one thing, however—how the permanent separation from her mother would affect Joy.

Joy had seemed so strong, so controlled, so certain, and so emotionally prepared that I could not believe the Joy I saw now. As cramped as the capsule was, I tried to kneel before her and hug her. I felt her pain, and Tor's. I had gotten to know Tor and her profound love for her dead husband, and now Tor had just lost a daughter she loved no less. As a person, there were few who could match her commitment, her deep, abiding love, and her humanity. I, too, grieved over the loss of this amazing woman from my life. But my grief was infinitesimal compared to Joy's.

"I knew I . . . would lose her . . . forever," she said between shuddering sobs. "I knew it would be worse . . . than . . . death between us. I prepared myself; I tried to cry the loss out beforehand, so I could do this cold. But, I . . . didn't know. John, I didn't know it would really feel like this!"

Joy threw her arms about me and I held her tight, unsuccessfully trying to blink back the tears in my own eyes. I held her head to my chest; I stroked her back and caressed her head. I didn't care for how long. We were in no hurry.

My love for Joy deepened in the years that followed. There were many times when I felt very close to her, when she filled my heart to bursting with love for her. Yet, at that time, in the capsule when we first arrived, I felt a tenderness, a capacity for caring and gentleness that I've never again felt to such a degree. Gone from my mind were

the steely look, the warrior, the hard-driving sensei—all those sides of her. Here she was simply a devastated young woman, a woman in emotional pain, my woman, my love. My own tears dripped off my chin and onto her head and shoulder. I cried at the loss of Tor from my own life, but mainly I cried for Joy.

Her sobs gradually abated and she finally sat up, sniffled, pulled up my uwagi—still sweaty from our martial arts session—and wiped her face and eyes. She looked up at me and wiped away my own tears with her hand. “Okay, John,” she managed to say, “I’m okay now. We have arrived in . . . the New Universe . . . haven’t we?”

“Yes,” I replied. “Are you ready to see it?”

“Let’s go,” she said, and she pushed herself out of my arms and stood up.

I reached over to the door, but my hand paused halfway. I’d just seen the locket lying on the floor.

“Wait,” I said, and reached down and picked it up. I thought it was Tor’s locket, but then I realized that the gold chain was much finer, with delicate, interlocking links, and the locket itself was heart-shaped instead of oval. I handed it to her. “This must be for you.”

Joy took it in both hands, held it to her heart, and then opened the locket. Inside, her smiling mother sent a kiss with her hand. On the other side was a group picture of the Society members, with her mother in the middle, and Gu standing next to her. She kissed both pictures, closed the locket, and put the chain around her neck. And started sobbing again. I held her, stroked her back and hair, and waited.

She soon got control of herself, and this time used her own uwagi to wipe her red eyes. Then she looked at me with her chin up, though her eyes were still teary, and said in a firm voice, waving at the door, “Shall we?”



I unlocked the door and opened it. It was dark outside, the only illumination the light from inside the capsule that spilled out onto a dirty wooden floor. I wrinkled my nose at the sudden smell of rotted and burnt wood mixed with a hint of ozone. Smoke from the San Francisco fire must have permeated these old buildings. The air felt heavy, as though weighed down with dust. I got the two flashlights that were hooked on the wall next to the display, handed one to Joy, and stepped out.

“Here we are,” I said to Joy. “Shouldn’t we say something dramatic, like ‘One step for mankind’?”

Her grieving eyes turned toward me. “You said it,” she said.

“I said what?”

“Something for the ages.”

“What?”

She was beginning to put her anguish behind her. I saw the barest hint of a grin at the corner of her mouth. “You said, ‘Here we are.’ That’s as dramatic as you get.”

“Oh, yeah, “ I responded, feeling my own mood lightening, “those are words for the ages, aren’t they? Too bad they’ll never go into a new edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.”

From details highlighted in the flashlight’s beam, I could see we were in the deserted warehouse we had targeted. As I moved the beam around I spotted much smaller capsules across the floor from us. “Thank God, the Society was able to send all the capsules before the emergency. Jesus, it would have been horrible without those supplies.”

I shivered. I think it was from the chilly air. It was November, after all.

As I continued shifting the light around, I caught sudden motion in one corner. I focused the beam there and saw small eyes reflecting back the light. Rats. Funny, with all the planning, no one had thought of rats greeting our arrival. Then I looked closer at the distant capsules and saw old, broken chairs, a table, rumpled blankets, and piles of clothes next to one of them. There were also empty boxes and various objects strewn about. *Probably some stuff left here when the place was vacated*, I thought.

I barely whispered, “KK, testing,” to see whether our communicators worked.

“Got you,” she whispered in return.

“Great. We’ve got to get some sleep before dawn. If we keep using the flashlights, the light may spill outside through some opening and attract attention.”

“Okay. KK,” she whispered in return, toggling the communicator off.

I took Joy’s hand and we ambled over to the supply capsules. We had all the time in the world. The capsules were all color coded, so we knew which ones to look for to get warm blankets, a little tent, and an air mattress—all sent to us for our first nights here. I punched in the proper code to unlock the capsule door, then I reached inside to switch off the hidden self-destruct device before it got to its ten second limit

and activated. We pulled out what we needed, and I set up the small tent to keep the rats away from us. I put two blankets inside along with the air mattress, and tugged the tab that inflated it.

I pulled Joy inside the tent and down onto the mattress beside me. She snuggled against me, and finally said, "Hello, my dearest. Here we are."

"Here we are sweetheart, to use those most memorable words for the ages again."

I heard scurrying sounds in the warehouse, and muffled clanking from outside. I knew from my study of the old San Francisco maps that nearby Hooper Street connected with busy 7th Avenue. It led north to Market Street, and from streets leading off it to the city's devastated market and financial centers now under reconstruction. Maybe farmers were starting to bring their produce to the markets before they opened. The sounds helped me grasp this new reality, as did the smell and uncomfortable feel to the air. We were in 1906. Here, in San Francisco. In 1906. I pinched myself, and it hurt. I smelled my underarms and they stunk from sweat. I wasn't dreaming. This had to be real. But I still couldn't believe it. *I'll have to go along with this fantasy*, I told myself, *and see what happens*.

Joy had been deep in her own thoughts. Her brow furrowed with sudden worry, she broke into mine to ask, "What do you think happened to my mother and the others?"

I rested my hand on her shoulder and squeezed it tenderly to give her reassurance. "From what I know, there were no illegal drugs in the building and no weapons other than the registered ones we used for training. The Society suspected this might happen. Remember? After the Society loaded and sent the supply capsules, they would have removed from the building or destroyed anything illegal or questionable. The FBI will find nothing incriminating. It's not illegal for the Society to destroy its own equipment, such as the time machine and everything associated with it."

"So you think they're okay?" she asked, her lower lip beginning to tremble.

I nodded, took her chin in my fingers, and tilted her head so I could peer directly into her eyes. "I'd guess that, within twenty-four hours, they will have a hundred lawyers—no, a thousand—working on taking the government to court on this, and fighting any arrests. Not even the Justice Department—especially with all the demands on its budget—can match the single-minded application of resources that the Society

has at its disposal. It would make the suit against Microsoft by the Justice Department look like a suit against a Mom and Pop corner store. So don't worry, honey. Tor, Gu, and all the others will do fine."

Joy took my hand from her chin and held it in both of hers for a moment while looking at me. Her face had firmed, but her eyes now held a deeper sadness. She idly caressed the back of my hand and said softly, her words almost floating in the heavy, still air, "It is so sad that they will never know whether we were successful or not. All that planning, all that preparation, all that wealth, all that hope, all that dedication and love, and they will never know. My mom will never know. She will never know whether I lived or died. That's worse than knowing I had died."

Her eyes were wet again and she was choking up. I gently caressed her cheeks with the back of my fingers. Even as focused as I was on her sadness, I felt pleasure at the smooth feel of her warm skin, and her scent. She'd never worn perfume again, after her mother's dinner party. No need. She had reeled me in, gaffed me, and hauled me into her boat. I hadn't even flopped around or gasped for air. I happily accepted my capture. She didn't need perfume anyway. When we were close, I discovered she had her own arousing, womanly aroma.

I was still focused, but only with the right side of my brain. As usual, my logical and rational left side was paralyzed around Joy. I moved to rub her back, and pointed out, my right brain speaking, "Neither will the people here in this New Universe ever know what they missed. We will succeed, you know. Our mission will be successful."

I had to pump her up. But now that we were here, actually in the past, I didn't believe it. At all. Awed by the strange warehouse, the new smell of history, the sleeping presence outside of San Francisco of old, and by the immeasurably huge, global mission we were about to undertake, I thought we would fail miserably and soon be dead trying. I began to shiver again and this time I knew it was not from the air. I hastily removed my hand from Joy, and finally said in a low voice that surprised me with its steadiness, "Well, it's up to us now to do a good job."

Joy nodded, but I saw that her eyes were falling closed. Only one small tear had escaped. My eyelids felt heavy, too. Although our body clocks, tuned to the world we'd left, would put us at late afternoon, we were emotionally exhausted. I lifted one end of the blanket and covered both of us, then left my arm around Joy. I buried my head in her hair, breathing in its life. I let my eyelids fall shut. As I drifted off, my last

thought was, *I'm going to wake up safe and sound in Bloomington, Indiana. Joy, my wife and former student, will be making breakfast, and I'll have to eat hurriedly to make my classes.*

Soon, we both slept.

The world was about to change, radically, irrevocably, forever. And we both with it.

Chapter 21

I would never have guessed what the new day of this New Universe would bring.

I woke with a start. I felt Joy snuggled into my shoulder, her arm around my arm, her leg tightly wrapped around my leg. I raised my head and looked around. We were in a tent, and dim light showed through the tent opening.

Yes. By God. We were in a tent! No. It can't be. I must have dreamed it. We can't be here.

I slowly unwound myself from Joy and she murmured something without waking up. I let her sleep while I crept out of the tent and looked around. The light was filtering through broken boards and holes in the upper reaches of the warehouse to fall in bars over the roof of our tent. There, over to one side was our time capsule, and near the tent were the supply capsules. *God damn, we actually are here. It was not a dream.*

Stunned by the truth of this, I sat down on the dirty floor and looked from tent to capsules to time machine and back. *Well, so we're here. Now what? We have the world before us, a world to revolutionize, and how do I start? I guess the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Hey, maybe in this new world people will remember that as one of my originals.*

I glanced at my watch. It was still set on the Old Universe's time. I'd have to check our capsule to see what time it was here, now. Then I remembered. My Omega watch was too advanced for this age—men didn't even wear wristwatches. They considered them sissy.

I took the first step of our new life. And a second. A third. *See, it's easy. Only 997 steps to go,* I thought when I stood before our supply capsule. We had left it open. I consulted the diagram on the inside of the door, then searched the capsule for toiletries, some clothes for me, and other personal stuff. I found my 1905 Hamilton pocket watch on a 14-karat solid gold chain, wound it up, and changed the time to match that on the capsule's time locator panel.

There was so much to do just to fit into this age, I knew, and we had so much time to do it in—years before we embarked on the activities and murders that would put us at risk—that I let my mind wander. I felt dirty; I still had on my clothes from our training session. I wanted to shower. I understood, however, that people never bathed here more than once a week or two, and some just once a month. Bathing was more work here than it had been in my Old Universe. There would rarely be running hot water available. Possibly we would have to heat pots of hot water over a wood burning range, and then pour a pot at a time into a cast iron tub. I sighed and shrugged. If we smelled, it would hardly draw attention.

Except from Joy. She always sniffed my shirts and said, “It smells. Change your shirt,” or simply, “You smell.”

I kept telling her, “Me man. Me smell.”

And she would respond, “Me woman. Take a bath, and we’ll see how manly you are. Not before.”

There in the warehouse, I looked through my new 1906 wardrobe. The Society had put much thought into how we should dress before we became publicly rich and successful. They’d decided that lower middle-class would probably draw the least attention. So, soon enough, I had out a blue Irish wool sweater, wool dickey, cassimere pants, and a golf cap—much the contemporary rage—that would identify me as just above the working class.

As I got into my trousers, I heard a door squeak open, and a ray of sunlight fell across the floor. I froze.

Three young men sauntered in the side door, carrying boxes in their hands. They immediately saw me. They stopped, talked excitedly among themselves for several seconds, then slowly swaggered toward me, the biggest of them in the lead.

“Hey,” he said when he was about ten feet away, “who are you? Whatcha doing in our building?”

Then one of the others pointed to the open door on the capsule, and exclaimed, “Look, he got it open. How’d he do that?” He turned a speculative eye on me. “We tried everything. Not even a sledge hammer would make a dent in it.”

“What’s inside?” the big man asked, and strode towards the capsule.

Before he reached the opening, I slammed the capsule door shut.

“What’s the big idea?” he yelled, and motioned the other two to circle to either side of me.

They had paid no attention to the tent, but Joy had been awakened by the voices and surely guessed what was going on. She stuck her head out of the tent with a friendly greeting: “Hi guys, want to have some fun?” She spoke seductively.

Oh boy, I'm going to enjoy this, I thought.

Joy's hair was tussled, much of it hanging across her face in strands, and she still had on her martial arts practice clothes. Even so, she looked beautiful, and all three of the men stopped dead to stare at her.

“What have we here?” the big man drawled. “You've been having a good time, eh?” He leered at me.

“Come on, boys.” Joy motioned to them. “I'm yours. Who's first?” She scrambled out of the tent, stood up, and shoved her locket inside her uwagi. Then she spread and slightly bent her legs, the left one forward. She sought the perfect balance with her toes and let her hands hang loosely on her sides.

This was new. I had not seen this ready stance in our practice sessions. Now, though, she was deadly serious, and not about to give any warning by taking a more conventional stance.

All three of the men converged on her, the big one a little in front, his arms reaching for her. When they were about five feet away, Joy moved. In one swift, continuous motion, she stepped toward the one on her right and chopped his temple, and as he went down headfirst, she pivoted on her left foot and swung her right foot up into the throat of the big man; and with her back thus partly turned to the man on the left, she chopped backward into his groin.

Three seconds. Maybe less. I was awed. I had never seen her in serious action before.

The three men writhed on the ground, groaning. One lay doubled over with both hands on his groin. The big one made strangled noises and his mouth gaped open like that of a goldfish as he tried to catch his breath. The third one held his head. Blood trickled from his nose.

“Now, will you guys behave?” Joy asked pleasantly, brushing her hair back with her hand.

By way of an answer, the one with the bleeding nose yelled, “Bitch.” He slid a knife from his sock, jumped to his feet, and lunged for Joy, swinging the knife in an upward thrust.

I had been enjoying the entertainment, but when I saw the knife I tried to body block the man from the side. I was too far away, and missed. I did a shoulder roll off the floor to a crouching ready position, as Joy had taught me. I needn't have bothered.

Joy simply waited until the thrusting knife almost reached her, then swept it to the side with a left handed swipe block, and with a front snap kick she knocked him to the floor. As he snarled at her and tried to get up with the knife, she chopped his wrist, forcing him to drop it. She swiftly moved around him, straddled his back, grabbed the wrist she had chopped, and twisted it way up behind his back. She grasped his thumb and bent it toward his abused wrist until he screamed.

“Give up?” Joy asked nicely.

“Bitch,” he snarled again.

“Say that again and I will break your thumb and wrist. Now, give up?”

The man muttered something in Spanish.

Joy applied more pressure. He screeched, “*Si*, okay, okay!”

The two other men on the floor had not made a move. They watched the whole episode, eyes huge, mouths gaping open. The smaller of the two licked his lips.

“Jesus, who are you?” the big man said in a strangled voice.

Joy let up on the knife wielder’s thumb, but still held his arm behind him as he stood up. She pushed him over to the two men on the floor as she released him and said sweetly, “Join your friends.”

He had no choice.



As Joy watched over them, I retrieved a rope from one of the capsules. I cut the rope into short sections with the knife that had ended up on the floor, and loosely tied the hands of the three guys behind them, and their feet together. We had a little struggle with the one she had kicked in the groin. He was still doubled over and refused to remove his hands from his groin, but we finally persuaded him to let us sit him up and tie his hands behind his back.

I could see that they were getting even more scared. One of them finally asked, “What are you going to do with us?”

“Well now,” I said, “that depends on you, doesn’t it? We can kill you. We can cut your tongues out and let you die here from starvation and thirst. Or, you can cooperate with us and tell us about yourselves. If we think you’re lying, we can inflict a little pain. My assistant, here, loves to do that to men, don’t you?” I cocked a brow at Joy, and handed the knife to her.

“Yes,” she said, and demonstrated by gliding over and pressing the point of the knife against the big guy’s crotch, “and this is my favorite spot.” A horrified expression flashed across the man’s face, and he tried to squirm backwards.

My God, I thought, you have as many sides as a diamond. Aloud I said, “Tell us, men, one at a time. Who are you and what are you doing here?”

The one Joy had chopped in the groin seemed to be in less pain. He responded first. “I’m Dolphy Docker. I’ve been out of work since the fire. So many horses died that nobody needs a stableman anymore. My mother died from something she caught during the fire. I got no father. He left my mother when I was four years old.”

“Dolphy? What kind of name is that?”

“My friends call me that. I don’t like people using my first name.”

“Which is?” I prompted.

“Adolph,” he muttered.

“Where were your parents from?”

“Germany.”

“*Sie sprechen Deutsch*—you speak German?”

“*Ja*,” he responded in German, “my mother hardly knew any English.”

“What part of Germany?” I asked in German.

“Munich.”

“How old are you?”

“*Neunzehn*—Nineteen,” he replied.

I returned to English. “What are you doing in our warehouse?”

He looked surprised. “You own this?”

“Yes,” I said. It was only a partial lie, since we would be buying the building.

“We live here.” His gaze wandered to the capsules. “What are those things?” he asked, nodding to the capsules.

“We import and export goods, and those are where we store them. They are constructed to be extremely strong, so that people like you can’t get into them.”

Dolphy looked satisfied with that.

I turned to the big man. “Your turn,” I said.

His throat was still hurting him, but he eyed me belligerently and croaked faintly, “Who is that Chink?” He indicated Joy by tipping his head towards her, eyes still on me.

Not for the first time, I saw Joy angry. Her eyes glittered dangerously, and I'd seen that look before, directed at me. I held up my hand to her to forestall whatever she had in mind, not that it would make much difference.

"You know," I said to the fellow, "you just called this young assistant of mine a bad name."

"She is a Chink, isn't she?"

"No. To you, she is Miss Phim. Let me hear you ask the question properly."

He began to look stubborn, and then he stared at the knife Joy moved through the air in a little circle, its point toward him. She glared malevolently as though eager to emasculate him.

"Who is that . . . Miss . . . Phim?" he stammered, eyes still on the tip of the knife.

"Very good. She is my translator and assistant. Now you will say, 'Nice to meet you, Miss Phim.'"

His friends were smirking. He scowled up at me, shot a look back at Joy and the knife, and finally growled, "Nice to meet you . . . Miss Phim."

Joy bowed slightly and responded sweetly, "My pleasure."

"Why are you dressed like a boy?" he asked her, curiosity obviously overcoming any prejudices.

I answered before she could respond. "I work my assistants. She sometimes has to carry or load boxes, and she can do so more easily dressed like that. Okay, tell us about yourself."

"Alex Reeves. My friends call me Hands because I'm good at catching a baseball. I played for the San Francisco Seals as a catcher, you know. It's a minor-league team in the Pacific Coast League, but I would have made the big leagues if I hadn't broken my arm when a horse threw me. It didn't set right. Had to give up baseball, but that's all I know. No more jobs here for people like me."

"Can't your parents help you?" I asked.

"You kidding?" He chuckled sardonically. "They're in Chicago. They were always beating me up. When I was thirteen I ran away from home, and rode the rails to here."

"Where were your parents from?" I asked.

"My father was part Cherokee. My mother? I don't know. She never talked about it." Then, anticipating me, he said, "I'm twenty-two"

I turned to the third fellow, the knife wielder, whose nose had stopped bleeding. Blood glittered in his little mustache, and he was developing a greenish-blue bruise on his temple over one beady eye, which still watered. He had a long, thin face that matched the rest of him. His black hair, which had been neatly slicked back when he entered the warehouse, had fallen forward over his forehead in one long clump.

"My name is Sal Garcia," he supplied quickly. "I live with my uncle. My family is from Mexico."

"Your uncle? What about your parents?"

"My mother was a whore, okay?" he said defensively. "She got sick and died when I was eight, and I don't know who my father was. I was born here in a cardboard box; my uncle told me. I do odd jobs. Got something you want done, you see me. You understand?"

"Yes," I said. "You speak Spanish?"

"*Sí*—Yes," and he added in Spanish, "I am twenty years old."

"You fellows relax now," I said. "Don't go anywhere. My assistant and I need to talk."



We walked over to one of the capsules, out of earshot.

"We have three choices," I said. "We can kill them. We can let them go free but try to frighten them into silence about this warehouse and us, first. Or we can hire them." I added, "Now, clearly, we can't trust them." Then I insisted, "But killing them is really not an option, either. If we start killing helpless young men, then we are on a slippery slide. You know how I feel about this. We'll be killing enough people as it is. And please, none of your warrior cr . . . stuff, okay?"

Joy opened her eyes wide in astonishment, and then narrowed them and pursed her lips, and I thought we were going to have another argument about it. She was insulted. "John—"

Oh, oh, I thought. *When she starts with 'John,' it's bad.*

"Do you really think my warrior code would dictate murdering these helpless young men? Is that what you think of me? Even if they were a risk to our mission, do you think I would murder them? And how? Stomp over and slice off their heads with a samurai sword?" She folded her arms across her chest, stuck her chin out, and her glare turned to molten steel.

"We don't have a samurai sword."

“John!”

I was wrong and I was really sorry. “I’m wrong and I’m really sorry, sweetheart. I know you wouldn’t murder them. It’s just that the knowledge that you’re a warrior sometimes short-circuits my mind.” I took her hand. “You are a very honorable woman and I love that as a part of you.”

She looked at me, the lines of her face shifted, and her eyes began to sparkle. I could see the molten steel flowing away. She squeezed my hand.

I wisely moved on. “Two of these guys speak a second language, and the big one looks useful. I’d like to hire them, but we really can’t trust them, can we?” I looked back at the guys, and added, “I have an idea. Laurent gave us a variety of drugs, medicine, and medical solutions. We can inject them with a harmless saline solution, and then tell them it’s a slow-acting poison that lodges in their thyroid and, to prevent it from finally killing them, they need a pill once every month. No pill, they die. We can make the pill one of our vitamins. Vitamin C should be harmless enough.”

“Clever,” Joy said, now relaxed enough to banter. “Did you think of that yourself?”

“My usual brilliance,” I responded, smiling. “One thing, though. Since they will look on me as the boss—which I am,” I grinned at her sudden frown, “I can’t let them think I’m weaker than you. I’ve got to challenge them. This is a manly thing, especially during this age.” My grin widened. “You stand back and don’t interfere. Do I have to tie you down to assure that?”

Joy laughed. “You’re on your own, big boy.”

She headed for the capsule that contained our medical supplies, while I retrieved some of our counterfeit pre-1906 American currency. Soon, she came back with three syringes and antiseptic pads, and I had a pocket full of fake money. We walked over to the three men, who had been closely watching us.

I stood in front of them, hands behind my back, back straight, rocking slightly back and forth. I had a mental image of a drill sergeant I had seen in some movie. I narrowed my eyes, pursed my lips, and looked at each of them one by one. That put them in their place. Having established the scene, I snarled, “Now, we want to keep everything here a secret, and that makes what we should do with you three a difficult question. We can kill you.”

At that, the guys looked at Joy, who still held the knife. Dolphy began to shake, and opened his mouth to plead with me, but I held up my hand toward Joy as though warning back an attack dog, and switched to a normal voice. "Or, we can hire you. We need workers. Our business used to be in New York, and we are new to San Francisco. Will you work for us?"

"Yes," Hands said immediately.

"How much we get paid?" asked Sal.

Ed Wilson, the Society's banker, had carefully looked into all aspects of the 1906 economy, and especially that on the West Coast. He'd told me that the average wage per week was about thirteen dollars. "We start you off at two dollars per day," I replied. "And we want you to start today."

Hands asked, "How many hours a week? Fifty-five? Sixty?"

"No, eight hours a day, five days a week," I said, as I broke out of my stance, took out my roll of bills, and flipped off the fake money. "Here is your day's pay." I laid two dollars in front of each of them, and then stepped back. "Okay?"

Hands said "Yes" again, and Sal said, "Sí."

"Wow," Dolphy said, that's a good wage for so few hours."

I at first thought he was sarcastic, and then recalled from Ed's briefing that the average worker labored 59 hours a week. Moving on, I pointed to Joy and said, "You are now working for me. As our new workers, you will allow Miss Phim to give each of you an inoculation.

I untied their hands, and as they rubbed their wrists I commanded, "Take off your coats and shirts and bare your left shoulder."

After they did so with some difficulty, their ankles still being tied, Joy stepped over, handed me the knife, and approached the young men. She swabbed their shoulders with antiseptic, and injected each with the saline solution, pausing to clean off the needle with alcohol each time. Although the guys looked concerned as they watched what she did, they didn't resist.

"What is this for?" Hands asked.

Returning to my stance, I answered, "You can hardly expect us to trust you until we get to know you, right? You might take off with our costly imports when we're not looking, and spread the word about what we have here. So . . ." I let that hang there for a few moments while rocking on my feet. Then I continued. "We have given you a very slow-acting poison. It will kill you unless we give you an antidote in one

month. Until we can trust you, each antidote will also contain a new infusion of the poison.”

This is silly, I thought, but what do they know?

“Until we can trust you fully, you will have to come to Miss Phim or me every month for your antidote. This is a secret poison from China, so don’t think you can find a doctor here who will have an antidote.”

I stopped and smiled at them. They looked sick.

Sal rubbed at the injection site. “Why did you do this? We did nothing to you.”

“Didn’t you try to knife my assistant?” I reminded him. Raising my voice, I added, “Haven’t you been using my warehouse and perhaps stealing things to bring here? Our trust will have to be earned.” I looked at them expectantly. “Any questions about the poison?”

They just stared at me. Dolphy looked as though he wanted to vomit.

Now I had one more thing to do with them.



“Untie their feet,” I ordered Joy, which earned a surreptitious evil-eye glance from her as she walked over with the knife and cut off the ropes.

They rose shakily to their feet.

“I want you to do a few exercises to get your blood moving and stretch your muscles. Now, remember, you are working for me. So do what I say, which is to do as I do.”

I bent over and touched my toes, did some jumping jacks and several other exercises, until I felt that they’d had enough and could not complain that they weren’t ready. I took out a counterfeit one hundred dollar bill and waved it in front of them. They gawked at it. They’d probably never seen a bill that large before.

I placed it on the floor between my feet and said, “The first one of you that picks up that bill can keep it. But, you’ve got to get past me first.”

“KK. John, what are you doing?” Joy whispered over our communicator.

“Don’t you dare interfere,” I whispered into the communicator.

At that moment, all three of the guys lunged for the bill between my feet. The training Joy had given me immediately kicked in. Time

slowed down. It was almost as though I were play-acting as I kicked Dolphy in the groin, causing him to double up, and almost simultaneously ducked inside Sal's reaching arm, grabbed his shirt with one hand and yanked him to me while stepping to the right to trip him; he fell headfirst away from me as Hands, who had hung back until he saw me occupied with the other two, threw himself headlong at the money, as though he was sliding into home base; and I kicked back with the foot I'd used to trip Sal and connected with Hand's outstretched right arm, knocking it away, and he twisted and landed on his shoulder. I grabbed his outflung left arm with both hands and twisted it behind his back and up. I held it there for a minute, and then released it, pushing Hands away. With a flourish I couldn't help, I reached underneath my foot for the bill.

I waved the bill at the three sprawled on the floor, and warned, "I could have killed each of you, but I went lightly so as not to injure you. Do you now understand what I mean when I say I'm your boss?"

Gripping or rubbing their painful spots, they grimaced and glowered, but nodded.



I looked at my pocket watch and saw that it was mid-morning. "Okay, fellows," I said, "Now you start earning your income. We have a lot of things to do and you can help us. But first, we have to get into some decent clothes. Relax for a few minutes."

Joy and I retrieved the toiletry bags that the Society had thoughtfully prepared for us. I was already dressed, but she said, "You going like that? Given what we will be doing, shouldn't you look a little more respectable?"

I frowned at her for a moment, but my clothing sheriff had spoken. Only because I knew she had good clothes sense, I chose a new set of clothes from the selection in the supply capsule. As for Joy, she might well be arrested, were she to appear on the streets in her uwagi and hakama. We went behind the capsule to dress.

I changed into all-wool, gray hairline pants, black boots, and a long-sleeved white cotton shirt with a bow tie. I covered it with a diagonally-worsted blue coat and a cocky looking Fedora. I looked into the two by three foot mirror we took out of the capsule, and smiled at myself. *Hey, hey, I thought, these clothes don't look bad at all.*

But apparently Joy didn't agree. As we dressed she kept chuckling at the way I looked, and seemed to be holding back outright laughter. When I finished I watched her dress. She put on what was called a "lady's white satin waist," really a shirt with wide collars held tight at the throat with an imitation silk bow. She tucked the waist into a blue, mixed cotton and wool "short lady's walking skirt" that fell to her ankles and had a flounced bottom.

She held the shoes that she had to wear out to me and said, "Look at these stupid, awful, pointed, flat-heeled shoes." She looked disgusted when she put them on. She also undid her ponytail and, using a million pins, redid her hair into a large, stylish bun on top of her head. I could tell she hated it. She glowered at what she had to do to her beautiful hair.

As she put on a lady's cloth cape, she looked at me and said, "You know, I'm astounded that the total cost of all these upper or middle class clothes would be about six dollars."

Waiting for the right moment, I said not a word as I held a mirror for Joy. She straightened out her clothes and added the final touch. The hat was a towering affair, a so-called lawn hat, with a wide brim, lace, bows, and imitation flower buds and blossoms. I still said not a word.

She took the hat off and asked me to hold her 1906 cosmetics bag while she put on a touch of rouge and powder, the current fashion, and lipstick. It wasn't easy holding both the mirror and cosmetics bag out to her, but I said not a word. Finally she was satisfied, and my patience was rewarded.

She donned the hat again, and asked me, "How do I look?"

Now, I'm no braver than the next man, and I knew what this warrior princess could do to me. And she had let me know in the past that there was a line I couldn't cross without endangering life and limb or experiencing what life at the North Pole would be like. But we were in a new world, a new time, and I felt adventurous. *What the hell?*

I looked her slowly up and down and then stared at her stomach. "Where's your corset? You don't want your stomach bouncing indecently around, do you?" I swear I kept a straight face.

Joy stared at me, her eyebrows lodged at her hairline, her eyes incredulous, her mouth puckered into an O. She couldn't have been more surprised, had I peed on her foot. Finally she tilted her head to look at me out of the side of her almond eyes. The top-heavy hat, none too stable even flat on her head, almost slid off. She had to put up her hand to steady it.

It was all too much. Her expression of disbelief, her hat sitting crookedly atop her huge bun, and her very prim blouse and cape gathered tight her throat—well, I let out a huge guffaw, which then broke into uncontrollable chuckling.

Joy grabbed her hat and hit me with it, knocking off some buds and beads, and then punched me hard in the shoulder. Wagging her finger, she said, “One more comment like that, mister, and you’ll have to cut a hole in your hat to eat.” Then, lucky for me, she smiled, chuckled, then joined me in stomach shaking laughter.

I lived through it. We were almost ready. Joy took out of the capsule a Ladies’ open face chatelain watch, put it in her purse, and helped me put the mirror and other stuff away.

We nonchalantly stepped from behind the capsule and strolled over to the guys, the afterglow of our laughter still on our faces. We had no idea what they thought from the snatches of our conversation and laughter they may have heard. Nor did we give any thought to what was most intriguing to them—we had dressed in front of each other.

As we approached the guys, they wouldn’t take their eyes off Joy. Finally she had to wave her hand in front of them and say, “Hello, there. Is my ankle showing?”

The three got red, and Hands stuttered, “You’re beautiful.”

“Thanks,” Joy responded, and started to say, “that’s nice . . .” when I interrupted.

“Let’s go, shall we?”

I was happy to have Joy as my partner and lover, of course, but she created problems that could interfere with our mission. She knew she was beautiful and used it like a carpenter uses his saw. She had used it on me, and that was one reason I was here. But jealousy and lust can overcome us all, and I’m afraid she seldom took into account the repercussions of her teasing men. Her martial arts skills and knowledge of weapons made her too confident that she could handle any situation her beauty or her use of it created. It would cause much trouble between us.



These young men we hired were actually a lucky break for us. They knew their way around San Francisco. The Society had given us a detailed map of 1906 San Francisco, including areas destroyed by the earthquake and fire. But the guys knew San Francisco’s streets and cul-

tures in a way that no map could show. *Between them and our map, we should easily find the addresses of the real estate firm and the court handling the warehouse*, I thought.

We all left the warehouse together. I was immediately struck by the smell of manure on 8th Street that fronted our building and Hooper Street nearby. The air thrummed with the buzzing of flies. The street was a rutted, pot-holed, gravel street, lined with all kinds of tall poles supporting wire upon wire, some hanging in loose loops, others bundled around cables, all obscuring the sky. The wires presumably carried telephone messages and electricity. There were no automobiles or trucks on the street at the moment, only men on horseback and horse-drawn carriages, loaded farm wagons, surreys, and carts. There were a few bicycles. Not a woman was in sight.

I pointed this out to Joy. "Look, no women around. Must all be in their place at home."

She refused to acknowledge my comment. No sense of humor.

In some places a wooden boardwalk, raised about six inches, ran along the side of the road, but here and there the boards were missing or had rotted through, their remains sticking out of the hole they'd left. Pedestrians walked at their own risk, it seemed.

From the moment we left the warehouse, we were at the mercy of our new employees. They asked if we wanted to pay for a ride, to which we readily agreed. Dolphy went out into the road and stopped a blue horse-drawn buggy painted with green stripes. At a word from Dolphy, the driver waved all of us into the buggy. Apparently, it was a taxi.

I got in next to Joy and sat down with no sense of relief. We were here. This was our first day. We had our first three employees. We were on our way. And already fear lay heavy on my stomach.

Chapter 22

Not until the summer of 1908 would the time be ripe for our first intervention and, if Joy had her way, murders. She had a nicer term for that—*just executions*. As I've said before, I never really accepted it. Murder is murder, whatever whipped cream topping is put on it.

We thus had two years to learn more about each other and prepare for our mission, for my fear of Joy's death or my own to fester, and to learn even more about each other. The first thing we had to do was start our company. We had our fake incorporation documents for the Tor Import & Export Company of New York, and it proved no problem to open up a "branch" in San Francisco. When someone asked Joy what "Tor" meant, she claimed it was the name of the originator of the company. We bought the warehouse with cash, no questions asked.

The Society had also studied San Francisco brokerage houses and found the best of them—Leman Brothers. We opened an account with them and, using the old *The Wall Street Journal* stock reports the Society had put on a CD for us, we were soon bringing in large sums. At one point, the brokerage house even wanted to contract me as a stock adviser, but I told them it was a matter of luck that would surely turn on me eventually. I started doing just that, purposely making a few poor choices so that, while on balance our account continued to grow sharply, we also showed large losses now and then.

We groomed our three new employees in the business of exporting and importing goods, and as their experience and confidence grew, we put each in charge of trade with a particular region. Understandably, Sal became our South American man; Dolphy, our European one. By 1908 we had a large, well-run company with 430 employees and, on paper, fourteen million dollars in assets. This did not count the huge hidden reserve we had brought with us from the Old Universe. We would not let that lie idle for long.

Oh yes, about the poison pills we were supposedly giving our first three employees. After a year with us, they had become prosperous in

their own right. We had grown to trust them. When we gave them their final antidote, we told them that it was the last one they needed.

We'd built up an executive staff that could competently run the company in our absence when we did our work abroad. We developed many contacts in almost every major country in the world. In this age, long distance communication was difficult. The telephone had not yet spread widely in most of the world, nor was intercontinental telephone conversation possible. There was the telegraph, but it was often best to travel to make contacts and speak with them in person. We became world travelers.

The only way to travel any distance was by ship and train. Not even the automobile had much of a presence yet in San Francisco. There were only about eleven thousand in the whole country. In our first month, however, for about 3,000 dollars, we bought a new Ford Model K. "Wow!", I exclaimed, as we drove away. "For this money we get six cylinders and a 40-horse engine that will drive this delight to a max of 35 miles per hour. Fantastic. And for only about 60,000 in year 2002 dollars.

Joy yelled above the noisy rattle of the car, "Don't forget, we also got the options—canvas top and headlamps—for our money."

We, rather Joy I should say, discovered the delight of bouncing around in the Ford and honking the horse-drawn buggies out of the way. She was a wild driver and sometimes had me bracing myself as best I could so I wouldn't be thrown out.

Her greatest glee came when accelerating the Ford to its maximum speed of an incredible thirty-five miles on level streets. Now, the gas tank was under the seat, and gas flowed to the engine by gravity. So, the engine would run out of gas going up a steep hill. No problem. Joy would back up as fast as the Ford would crawl up some hill, top it and turn about, and scream "Whoopee!" as we flew down the other side popping backfires and enveloped in gas fumes. One of her favorite hills was on Nineteenth Avenue. She would race down it to Sloat Boulevard bouncing back and forth over ruts and potholes; or zigzag down another favorite, Vermont Street; or even down that stretch of Filbert that was one of the steepest in the city with a near 32 percent grade.

"You're going to destroy the Ford," I would yell, gripping the windshield and the folded canvas top and curling my toes in my shoes.

"So, we buy another one," she'd holler back as we approached another hill.

She wore out three sets of brakes and eight tires in six months. I was surprised she used the brakes at all.

During these early years, Joy and I were usually together, even when we had to establish a contact or office in another country. My love for her continued to grow as I came to know and fully appreciate her inner self. After all, I had known her for less than two months when we'd suddenly had to flee the Old Universe. I came to appreciate her warmth, her wit, and her delightful femininity, and I could live with her temper, fastidiousness, bossiness, obsession with jewelry, and her exploitation of her beauty. I believe she came to love me more as well, as she got to know me better and—ahem—saw my perfection.

We fought frequently during our first months here, as we had to adjust to this primitive life and to each other. Partly due to the almost lifelong martial arts training Joy had received, she handled big problems with calm and assurance. If San Francisco were to experience another disaster, I'm sure that she would calmly do what was necessary to live through it and help others. If she were tied to a stake and a fire lit under her feet, she would no doubt look inside herself to her core, or whatever her sensei called that essence, and go serenely to her death. But if I spilled a bottle of milk, she became stratospheric about my clumsiness, demanding, "Can't you be more careful?" and bouncing things around in our office, kitchen, or wherever for half a day.

I gather that her warrior training never encompassed how to handle minor irritations. Perhaps there was no room inside a warrior's core for such trivial things. Simply put, she was intolerant of the minor mistakes and errors people commonly make, which made her a bad teacher, a sensitive topic I've mentioned once and will return to later.

For now, describing the time I left the toilet seat up should demonstrate her intolerance. Aside from teaching me karate and judo tricks, she seldom used her skills on me. But when she didn't turn the light on when she had to pee early one morning and landed deep in the toilet, backside first, her sensei-student code of ethics went out the window.

Now, these old-fashioned toilets were big and deep. I'm sure she must have looked like somebody that fell ass first in a garbage can, with legs, arms, and head sticking out. Oh, for the photo.

After she managed to extricate herself and wash her bottom, she stormed into the bedroom and angrily woke me up. "Damn it, John, you left the toilet seat up!" she screeched.

I was reasonable about it, as *I* could take such a minor irritation, and calmly asked her, "Don't you look? And why are you letting such a little thing make you angry? You should learn to control yourself."

“You bastard,” Joy hissed, and pulled me out of the bed. Although I tried to scuttle away (I didn’t want to risk hurting her), she grabbed my arm, got under me, and threw me hard onto the bed. Then she stomped out. She didn’t sleep with me for two nights after that.

I knew that she had forgiven me, however, when she cooked pork chops and mashed potatoes for dinner. She preferred Chinese and Japanese food, and always rice. That she would make me mashed potatoes was her hint that all was well again.

I hasten to add that I’m not trying to run Joy down. With all her skills and beauty, these very faults were what made her human and a woman I could partner and live with. Who can live with a person who is a constant reminder of how imperfect one is? In part I think I loved her *because* this human side balanced her heart-stopping beauty and superb warrior skills.

Anyway, small things never bothered me. I never complained when Joy left the lights on, the radio blaring, the cap off the toothpaste, or charred my toast. If she had a headache when I was romantic, I could deal with it. It was the big things that got to me, worried me, and left me biting my nails or inner cheek while Joy took our mission and plans with equanimity.

I don’t think I spent a really calm day in this new universe from the time we arrived. Even after all our talk and planning, even after all her logical reasoning, I could not accept the idea of murdering people. But I knew I would go through with it. I had to. That, in part, was why I was here. That was why the Society sent us. I had no idea then of the horror that would eventually destroy us because if it.



As our Tor Import & Export Company grew, we naturally became a source of much gossip. We were unmarried and never seen in public alone with others of the opposite sex. People soon assumed that we were intimate, engaged, or deadly dull workaholics who could tolerate no one but each other. One rumor we both heard was that Joy had gained control over me with her Asian sexual wiles and tricks. Another rumor was that she was a sex slave I had bought on the Chinese black market, and who happened to be intelligent enough for me to also exploit as an assistant. She told me that one woman had thought she was a lesbian and had invited her to visit her apartment, which Joy could never quite find the time to do.

A pretty, curly-headed blonde secretary in our accounting department, who was also the courier between my office and accounting, took a great interest in me. She took care to wear the most fashionable dresses for working girls, and made sure they were very tight at the hips. I paid no attention to her. Her tactics grew more blatant. She finally dropped some papers on my floor and bent over to pick them up in a way that let me see down her intentionally loose bodice. She didn't get the reaction from me that she'd hoped, but I made some calls. The next morning she got a job offer from San Francisco's Piedmont Fashions that she couldn't refuse.

When I told Joy about it, she had only two questions: "What took you so long? You sure you didn't invite that?" Over "that," she went into a deep Siberian freeze. It really didn't bother me. There was much in this world I didn't understand, and women were one. As I say, little things I could take.

Just to help Joy realize how stupid she was being, I simply yelled at her things like, "You're being stupid!" or, not to waste words, "You're stupid!" None of these reasonable arguments broke through the ice. But in two days I usually had my meal of chicken and mashed potatoes.

As for Joy, initially, men came at her like dogs around a bitch in heat; in part, I'm sure, because of her flirting. She liked the attention. She usually declined their many invitations politely, but one particularly bold fellow wouldn't take no for an answer. Finally, in front of about a dozen people in our reception room, Joy said loudly enough for everyone to hear, "Let's get one thing—or rather, a second thing—straight. I'm not interested in going out with you now. I won't be interested next week. And I won't be interested next year. Other than that, we can work together." She turned and left the bore gaping after her, probably wondering if he had some socially unacceptable disease.

This happened soon after her freeze over the blonde secretary, so I thought this was a golden opportunity to teach her a lesson. Not to get even, to be sure. I really didn't care that other men hit on her. This was just another small thing that didn't bother me. But, when I heard from Hands what happened in the reception room, I thought I would show her what it was like, being on the receiving end of such stupid jealousy.

So when I knew Joy was alone, I burst into her office and demanded to know, "How come you're leading these men on? You must be inviting this attention. Ain't I good enough for you?"

Her face flushed red and her eyes narrowed to slits. As she put both hands on her colonial desk and started to push herself off her swivel chair, I stalked out of her office and slammed the door.

That'll teach her, I thought. Humming to myself, I waited in my office for Joy's submission. One hour later my secretary brought in a note from her. I opened it expecting an explanation and something like, "I'm sorry, dearest, that you got the wrong impression. You are the only man for me." What the note actually said was, "Screw you."

I tried to put the freeze on Joy that night, but how can one put the freeze on a woman who is doing that to you?

It was worse this time. It was four days before she made me mashed potatoes, but when I smirked and said, "I forgive you," I got the mashed potatoes on my lap, and the start of another cycle of northern Siberian winter. I took the afternoon off and drove our poor, beat-up Ford to Yamashiro's Oriental Grocery Store in New Chinatown. I bought a bag of the best imported Japanese rice they had. It was called Imperial Rice, and Yamashiro insisted that it was the same rice served to the Japanese emperor. I doubted it, although the cost of the rice made his story credible.

When I got back to our apartment, I washed and prepared the rice as Joy had taught me, turned on our Wehrle gas range, fried two lamb chops, and made a vegetable salad to go with the meal. She was like a robot as far as time was concerned and I knew almost precisely when she would be home.

She came in, immediately smelled the food, and came into the kitchen. I had the plates out and loaded with the cooked lamb chops and steaming rice. She looked at the rice, the rice bag, my smug expression, glanced again at the chops and at me, and threw her hands up with a loud laugh. "Okay, okay, it's better than flowers."

Yes, she also won that round, but no biggie.

During just our first two years in this New Universe, she bought perhaps \$100,000 worth of rings, bracelets, pendants, necklaces, you name it. We could afford it, of course. She could buy several jewelry stores without making much of a dent in what the Society had given us and what I was making on the stock market.

Most surprising, she hardly wore any of it. Joy would try it on at home, ask me how I liked it, to which I had learned always to say, "You make it beautiful," and then she would put it away in one of her many jewelry boxes.

During our first months together, after she showed me still another expensive ring she'd bought, I lost patience. "Did your mother convince the Society to send so much money with us to compensate for your spending on jewelry?"

The air may have gotten thinner; I wasn't sure. I definitely felt it freeze as Joy gave me that look I had learned to fear. She threw the ring at me, yelling, "Here, take the damned thing back, why don't you?" She missed me.

"Ah-hah, you missed," I said, grinning. Stupid.

In a flash, she grabbed my arm and threw me over her hip onto the couch. She slammed the door as she left, even though I had said nicely from my upside-down angle, "Temper, temper."

It was months before she showed me any more of the jewelry she bought. But for entertainment, I would occasionally look for new items in her crowded jewelry boxes.

We had no friends. We could not afford that luxury, nor did we relish the constant lying we would have to do to people who would trust us. Truth to tell, our work and each other filled our lives through these early years, as we prepared ourselves for what we must do.

We built a gym for ourselves. It enabled us to jog in the morning, continue our weightlifting, and allowed Joy to practice her martial arts and continue to train me. For weapons practice, we had a rifle range and weapons test facility built on twenty-five acres in the foothills. It had cost us almost twenty thousand dollars, very big money in those days, but cost was not a problem. I explained to our real estate agent and the builders that I was also a weapons merchant, and wanted to test what I sold.

In our weapons capsule we had knives, explosives, stun and fragmentation grenades, and various kinds of guns and rifles. We also had night vision scopes, laser targeting rifles, and machine pistols. In short, we had a two-person armory. Our mission depended on our weapons, so the Society had sent the most advanced ones available. They were meant for us to kill with and defend ourselves, when the time came. And they would.

Joy had to train me to use them. It's a good thing our love for each other was the stable center of our relationship. Even our mission became secondary to our love, I must say now with some embarrassment, since I had taught and intellectually committed myself to the democratic peace. Its drive was almost all-consuming, once we arrived in this New Universe. Yes, almost all consuming

Yet, that said, while my training in martial arts had certainly strained our love, weapons training put it on a rack and tried mightily to wrench its joints out.

Chapter 23

Weapons training? Ah, sweet memories. As I practiced with a pistol, Joy stood alongside me and yelled, “Jesus, use two hands, not one” or “Don’t jerk the friggin trigger. It’s like my nipple, damn it. Caress it.” On the range, it was hard for me to believe this was the beautiful, feminine woman I loved, rather than the Sergeant Phim who was testing my incredible self-control.

For over two years after our arrival, Joy methodically trained me on our range in the use of one weapon after another. I began to feel less uncomfortable with many of them. At fifty feet I even could hit seven out of ten times a sketch of Hitler’s face she had drawn on cardboard. I thought I was good until she told me that I had graduated to only the “this a gun” level. Joy carried over to my weapons training the teaching methods of the Japanese senseis who had trained her in karate and judo. All, I’m sure, learned from the Marine drill sergeants at Quantico, Virginia.

Once she picked up a broken branch as we walked to the range, and while I practiced with a short-barreled shotgun, she stood near me, holding the branch in one hand and tapping it onto the palm of the other. Then she pointed out, “You’re still aiming the damn thing. You won’t have time for that. Just point it in the general direction of your target and shoot from the hip.”

I tried again. Bang, flame, smoke, and *swat!* Joy hit me on the head with the branch.

“Faster, faster!” Joy yelled a split second before I grabbed the branch and hit her over the head with it. Hard. I’m sure that never in Asian history has a student swatted his sensei with her own stick. Joy stood there with the shocked expression of someone whose pet dog has bitten their hand.

I told her nicely (she claimed later that I screamed it), “You’re not one of those fucking monks teaching me judo,” and I stormed off to the car. I waited, my arms crossed over my chest, staring at the car’s speedometer. It defied my glare, and didn’t melt. I heard Joy practic-

ing her own shooting. This was one of the few times when I actually thought seriously about putting a spider under the sheets on her side of the bed.

After an hour or so, she came down the dirt path to the car, dragging the burlap bag containing the weapons and ammunition. It was too heavy for her to carry alone. I refused to help her load it all into the back seat and trunk.

Joy then got into the car and closed the door. She didn't slam it. I felt then that this round went to me. She made me mashed potatoes for supper while I worked on our budget for our first intervention in a country's history. No easy task, since I anticipated spending perhaps twenty million dollars.

During these years, Joy usually did the cooking. I kept our gas range clean, and washed the dishes. I tried cooking for her in the beginning, but she found my overdone hamburger patties and tough omelets not fit for a cockroach, as she told me. Joy often claimed that this was a clever trick on my part.

"No way," was my pat response. I'd been a short order cook for one of the years I worked my way through college; I felt her opinion of my cooking was a matter of taste. Her tastes were just more delicate than mine. I did cook sometimes, usually preparing for her a special rice dish to show my forgiveness for something stupid she'd done, just as she apologized to me with mashed potatoes.

When Joy kicked on the open kitchen door to announce mealtime and I saw the mashed potatoes, I gloated over one of my rare victories, and sat down at the table. Maybe I looked smug, I don't know. Maybe I wore a little grin. Not triumphant; just a little indication of my victory over her, the warrior, which I deserved. But I should have been suspicious when she remained standing, for as soon as I was seated, she picked up the plate of sausages and mashed potatoes and flipped it upside down onto my lap.

Now, this was not a small thing. I was angry all over again. But I have incredible self-control, and I sat there using my fork to put as much of the mess as I could back on the plate. Then I gently scraped the rest off my lap and ate it. And I ate what was on my plate except for two or three particularly buttery spoonfuls.

Joy was in the living room, sitting on the sofa in her favorite position, leaning against its arm with her feet drawn up under her. She seemed to be reading a book on Mexico, but I knew she was waiting for my apology.

I walked up behind her and dumped the leftover potatoes on the top of her head, on her beautiful black hair. It was obscene, but I had to do it to teach her a lesson. I even stood there making sure I scraped off all that was on the plate. Well, her hair was no longer black. The potatoes sat on her crown for a moment, trying to decide what to do, and then a portion of them fell over her face.

I couldn't see her look, of course, and I didn't wait. I went into the kitchen and, humming loudly to myself, I washed the dishes, angling my body so that I could throw a glass of water at her if she rushed in.

I heard no sound, and when I finished and cautiously entered the living room, Joy was gone. She had left some potato stains on the sofa, which I cleaned up with a rag. I then completed what I was doing on the budget. I expected an iceberg the rest of the evening, but I didn't see her at all. She wasn't in the bathroom. She wasn't in our bedroom. She wasn't anywhere.

I tried to read in bed that night, but I really couldn't. I didn't sleep until early morning, and then only fitfully, waiting for the sound of her coming to bed. Joy was gone all night. I was frantic with worry. We hadn't spent a night apart since I agreed to join her on this time travel mission, so many months ago. I feared the worst. *She went out to walk out her anger, and has been kidnapped.* I didn't stop to think of how ridiculous this was—Joy, my warrior, kidnapped. Pity the kidnappers. *She had an accident. She's left me. She thought I was too incompetent with weapons and thus too much of a danger to her and the mission and she plans to find somebody else.*

I finally got out of bed and went down to the living room, where I could pace back and forth, back and forth, back and forth . . . *Why doesn't she come home? What happened to her? How could she do this?* The thousandth time I paced past the budget I'd completed the night before, I picked it up and threw it across the room. Nice sound, that. And then I saw on the sofa the book on Mexico that she had been reading, and it made a beautiful arc as it ricocheted off the ceiling into a light fixture. I liked the cascade of glass.

I didn't eat breakfast and went to my office early. With hope. I wanted to run there, but had to grit my teeth and walk as fast as I could without looking ridiculous. This was 1908. People running on the streets were thought to have committed a crime somewhere. We never took the Ford to work, since our company was only a mile away and we treated this walk as good exercise.

When I got to our company, I immediately went to her office and saw the door was shut. So, I calmly strolled—I don't know why our security guard asked me if something was wrong—out of the building and around to where I could see her window. Yes, she was there. The light was on.

It took an hour or so to find a florist. I bought a dozen pink roses and a beautiful vase for them. When I returned to our company, I put the flowers in the vase and carefully arranged them, Banks style, in an even circle. I knocked on Joy's office door, and when she said, "Come in," I walked in with the roses and put them on her desk.

"I'm so happy to see you, baby," I said, then walked around her desk and kissed her on the lips. She hesitated, and then slowly put her arm around me and returned the kiss with increasing passion. I may have shown the first tears, but they were soon not alone.

Well, Joy won again, but I didn't care. She had taught me something else. I loved her too deeply to let our little games get out of hand.

Joy told me later that she had slept in the Ford that night, which explained why she needed me to massage the kinks and knots out of her neck and back.

Oh yes, when she saw what I did to the living room, she put her hands on her hips, turned and looked at me with a serious expression, but she couldn't hide the twinkle in her eyes. "You should learn to control your temper," she instructed me.



Joy never brought a stick to our firing range again, and she toned down her barking criticisms and orders, even when I accidentally shot a bird out of the sky (it really wasn't far from the target).

"You killed it," she exclaimed in a horrified voice. Joy was sad for the rest of the day and kept mumbling, "Poor thing. I hope it didn't have little ones to feed."

Still, Joy remained a demanding teacher. Although she had demoted herself from drill sergeant to corporal, she still did her best to make sure Private Banks was ready for the battles ahead.

One of the things Joy made me do was learn how to crawl. Anybody can crawl, I thought. Not true. There is crawling, and craawliiing. The first time I tried it, she handed me a bolt operated sniper rifle equipped with a scope and said, "Lay this across your arms like this," and she showed me. She then pointed to the inevitable

sketch of Hitler about five hundred feet away, and said, "You are going to crawl through the high grass until you are about three hundred feet away, and then shoot at the target while still on your stomach."

No problem. I was wearing my double-strength, blue farmer's dungarees. I got down and started to crawl.

"No," she said, stopping me. Notice how simply she put things now. But she still insisted on colorful descriptions. "Are you showing off your buns? Rub the ground with your . . . jewels . . . as you crawl."

I tried again—successfully, I thought.

"No, no." Two negatives a positive do not make, in her mathematics. Joy sounded a little exasperated. "Are you trying to persuade the target that two pigs are humping in the grass? I know what you need."

Joy sat on my ass and put her feet on my shoulders. Having added 130 pounds to my load, she commanded, "Now, crawl. Two demerits if I fall off."

I slithered, tore the dungarees, scraped my elbows raw, and wondered if the French Foreign Legion was still accepting volunteers. From then on, however, when I crawled I just imagined she was on top of me and I did a fair imitation of a worm.



Most of our problems occurred during the first months of our training here. I got better and better, and within a year, I was almost as accurate as she was, although never even near as fast. We had only one incident during the last year, during fast draw practice. I had constructed a pulley system that drew a cardboard figure rapidly toward me when she pulled on a rope. Presumably, this simulated someone pulling a gun on me. Joy had even tried to draw a gun on the target, its barrel pointed toward me. It was amusing. I told her that the rendering bore a striking resemblance to the male anatomy.

"Yes," she told me dryly, "it helps my aim."

I didn't think it was funny.

For the drill, I had on a suit with a shoulder holster and a .45 caliber semiautomatic. I was to stand relaxed and wait until she pulled the target toward me and yelled "Gun," when I was to go into a partial crouch while pulling the gun out of my holster. Using two hands, I would then shoot the enemy in the chest. The first time I tried it, I thought I did pretty good. I got him in the stomach.

Joy said, "Too slow. Again."

I tried again and killed his shoulder.

“Elbow up,” she said. “Faster.”

Another try. Another “Faster.”

I said, “Time me.”

Joy took her track timer out, reset it, and when I was ready, she yanked on the rope to pull the target toward me. She held the timer in her other hand with a finger on the start button. She waited a second or two, and then yelled, “Gun.”

I shot the target in the hip.

She looked at her timer and said unhappily, “three point six seconds.” She shook her head. She could never hide her feelings well.

I was getting tired, and I felt I was being as fast as humanly possible. “Here,” I said, and twisted toward her. I was going to say, “Take the gun and let me time you,” but the gun I had been holding in my hand came with me and ended up pointed at her chest.

Joy’s training immediately clicked in. She did a falling corkscrew and knocked the gun out of my hand with a flying foot. The gun landed ten feet away. She rolled and was off the ground in a flash, her hands and legs in a you’re-dead-meat stance, I’m sure. I stood there just beginning to rub my hand as I felt the pain in my finger. When her mind was able to function again and she realized I couldn’t be serious, she relaxed her body.

I’m sure I responded to this attack in a level voice. “I was just testing your reflexes. Not bad.”

Thump! She hit me in the shoulder. “Just testing yours,” she said. And then in a voice not yet as relaxed as her body, she explained to me what every gun trainer has told every recruit since these things were invented. “You never, but never, absolutely never, like never, point a weapon at someone you don’t intend to shoot dead unless you have emptied the chambers, opened the cartridge chamber in case of a stray or forgotten cartridge, and taken out the clip or magazine if it has one. And, what else?” She tilted her head and looked at me like I was a pup that again had peed on the rug.

“Put the safety on, if it has one.”

“Yes,” Joy said breathlessly, and came over and kissed me on the cheek.

I guess I was a cute puppy.

“Now, what were you going to say,” she asked, “before your . . . accident?”

“Accident? I’m not a puppy.”

“Well, what do you want me to call it? A stupid move? What about dumb?”

“Okay, I’ll accept accident. I was going to ask you to show me how fast you could draw. After all, I have no one to compare myself against. As far as I know, I might be as fast as Wyatt Erp, or Billy the Kid.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

I groaned at that, and then went over to retrieve the .45 caliber, took out the clip, checked to make sure nothing was in the chamber, and flipped the safety on with my thumb. Then I pointed it toward the sky and handed it to her that way, smiling.

Joy had brought along one of her holster purses and had been practicing her own draw from it. She had her gun already in it, so she laid the .45 caliber aside. She got into position, and relaxed. I just loved the look she would get on her face in these situations, whether weapons or martial arts practice. She had large almond eyes to begin with, and they would become larger, while her face took on a peaceful look, her full lips slightly parted. Except for her eyes, it was almost as though she were asleep, happily dreaming. I knew that she was then getting in touch with her inner strength—centering herself, she told me. And I learned she could do this in a split second.

I pulled on the target, and waited until the last moment before it reached the stop before I yelled, “Gun.”

Bang bang bang—three shots, right through the heart. I looked at my timer. “Three point eight seconds,” I said. “You lose.”

“Let me see that,” she hollered and grabbed the timer out of my hand before I could hit the reset.

“Hah, 1.8 seconds. I knew it. Now, shall we continue your practice, slow poke?”

Well, I did pretty well eventually. I got it down to 2.5 seconds.

By the middle of 1908 I was good enough with the gun that Joy, in a moment of weakness, admitted, “You’re not bad.”

Well, her training may have helped save our lives, but at the time it did nothing for my nerves. As our first intervention approached, our weapons might as well have been spitballs. I was scared.

Chapter 24

As a professor of history, the world we were about to enter was as alien to me as the surface of Venus, only known to me before through shoot-'em-up action movies.

In one week, we would be off to Mexico. Finally, after two years of preparation, we would be truly fulfilling our purpose in coming to this primitive era. Our final preparations came down to deciding how we would arm ourselves for the long trip to Mexico City and what we had to do there. We had to keep in mind not only our purpose, but also that during one part of our trip or another we might well be attacked by one of the many bandit gangs that infected Mexico at this time.

So, we were standing at our weapons capsule, deciding among all the weapons the Society sent with us. Rather, Joy was deciding. All my weapons and martial arts training was now complete. Our partnership, our love, had survived. I was as ready as I would ever be, and I loved Joy more than I ever had.

As we stood there, this appeared to me as the capstone moment in our existence here. It was really the dividing line; from November 1906 until this moment had been preparation, training, speculation, planning, anticipation. Safety and security. Now, as we were about to take out our weapons, perhaps for the rest of our lives, we were crossing into another existence.

I looked at Joy. Really looked at her. She was bent over in the light coming from the capsule, looking for something. She was serene, as though she were humming to herself. Maybe for her it was like being an artist standing around paint, oil, and canvases, or a musician in a musical instrument shop.

I was never comfortable with guns, however, even after the practice she put me through. When I had a gun in my hand it was an alien extension, an unhappy tool. I was like a plumber given a violin to play. Oh, I got a kick out of shooting holes in things at a distance. What man wouldn't? But then, I thought of the gun as part of a game. Now that we were about to get serious with them, the psychic separation between me and what I would have in my hand was even greater.

I don't know why I suddenly felt so close to Joy at this moment while I stood in front all these inventions for killing people. I think it was because she could be the weapons' victim, either as their power went to her head, or when similar weapons in the hands of others could mean her death. Despite what she thought, I knew she bled. When it came out of her cuts it was red like mine. I knew others might be faster than she was, and I knew, as a warrior, she would allow no risk to stand in the way of our mission. I knew also that she would protect me to the death. That if someone was about to shoot me, she would wave and yell, "Hey, over here."

Joy was like one of those warriors seen in the samurai movies. She lived by that code. In a fight, I know metaphorically she would calmly step up to her enemy and say, "My name is Joy Phim. I am a Sino-Vietnamese from Vietnam." And she would bow, and put her weapon at the ready.

A storm of emotion seized me. I felt an overwhelming warmth and tenderness towards this woman. Its always surprised me how tears would come to my eyes at certain moments, and standing here in front of our weapons capsule was the most surprising of all. My mind was lost to my heart. I reached out to Joy and pulled her to me. She was startled and even more surprised when she saw my wet eyes.

"What's the matter, dearest?"

"I can't explain, " I said lamely. "Just let me hold you for a few minutes, okay?" I put my face in her hair, cropped in her newly adopted Gibson girl look, and smelled its natural perfume. I held her tight.

After a few minutes, I released her and took her hand. Kissing it, I told her, "I love you, sweetheart. Please don't let anything happen to you. I couldn't live without you."

Then she knew what caused this emotional outburst. She put her arms around me and gave me a passionate kiss. "My dearest, those are my words also. I love you."

I know this seems stupid, but what can I say. The Mexican intervention was now so close; I wanted this moment between us to never end. I told Joy not to move, and went to another of our capsules and took out a large beach towel. I put it on the concrete floor next to the weapons capsule, and as she stood there knowing what I was preparing for, I slowly undressed her. A major job in this era, and even more stimulating.

Joy did the same for me, and we lay down on the towel. We caressed and hugged and kissed and kissed and made slow, passionate love. It was not the lovemaking of mad, unbridled passion, or that of sheer lust. It was intimate love, the melding of our two bodies, our spirits, and our souls. I'm not a religious man, but at that moment I felt that if there were a God, this is what he meant love and sex to be. Afterwards we continued to caress each other, and we cried together, and I would have died there and then for her.

Hours must have passed. Finally I got up and pulled her to her feet. With a final hug, we turned back naked to the weapons capsule to take out our weapons and ammunition.

Now I felt different about these weapons. In some way, together, we had neutralized for me the evil emanations from the capsule. Now arming myself for battle with these weapons was not bad after all, but somehow, a defense of what I loved.

Joy began by taking a more substantial lizard grain holster purse from the capsule and putting in it a Ruger SP101 .357 Magnum 5 shot. She liked this weapon for its balance and power, and it was perfect for a woman of her finger and hand strength. She believed in stopping power, and wanted to take no chance that her attacker would keep charging and shooting even though already shot. So her ammunition was .357 hollow points. Even a shoulder hit with one of these would blast a man down and blow a fist-sized hole in his back.

Joy put a knife sheath around her hips and slid a very thin five inch tactical knife into it. It hung at a slight angle just to the right of her pubic bone. She attached another sheath to her lower right leg for a six inch throwing knife. She wanted to wear them now to get her skin used to the sheaths, she told me. She would be wearing light, loose dresses and no petticoats when we started our trip to Mexico.

"Watch this," she said, and slipped on her skirt. Then she drew in her breath and rapidly reached inside her waistband for the knife on her hip, and whipped it out in a defensive position.

Finally, Joy took her armor out of the capsule. This had been molded to her body by the Society and fit her well, except it tended to compress her pert breasts. I squelched what I was about to suggest, which was falsies; even I knew this was not the time for my great wit. Her armored vest was light and had cardiac trauma protection. It would stop even a machine gun bullet. Done, she got dressed.

I put on my shorts, pants, and a shirt and took out my favorite pistol for my shoulder holster. It was the one I did the best with in

practice, and that I could draw the fastest: a light H&K USP .45 caliber semiautomatic. I especially liked the number of cartridges it held in its magazine—ten rounds, with one round in the chamber. I knew when I got in a firefight, I would need every one of them. For stopping power, I followed Joy's suggestion of 235-grain hollow points.

I was no good with a knife, and she didn't have to tell me that. I would only cut myself. So in place of a knife I had her pick out for me something I could carry loose in my coat pocket. Joy selected a 40 S&W double-action handgun. I finished arming myself by putting on my molded armored vest.

Even armed and armored as I was, I felt like no gunslinger. I was just a professor who had been turned into a killer. No, that was too harsh. I had been turned into a soldier, and my sergeant next to me was itching for battle.

Chapter 25

Everyone has a fear. Joy's could mean her death. After we armed ourselves, we went to our company offices and conducted our normal business—or rather, tried to. We—rather I—had to get used to the extra weight of my guns and the movement this required, and especially my self-consciousness. I felt as though everyone could see through my clothes. I kept waiting for someone to walk up to me and say, “Aren't you being silly?” But in time I got so used to them that I felt naked without my shoulder holster and the weight of the pistol in my pocket.

Our apartment had hot water, one of its selling points, and we bathed that night as soon as we got home. We always bathed together no matter how small the tub, and enjoyed the logistical challenge this sometimes created.

After the bath it was her turn to be soft and misty-eyed. Before I was even through drying myself with the towel, she caressed my cheeks with the back of her hands, kissed me, and told me, “I love you, big guy.” Then she took my hand and led me into the bedroom, where she told me, “Just lay down and be good.” She made love to me, and when she was done she lay on me and wept quietly. I only knew she was crying because she was getting my chest wet.

Still savoring our—her—lovemaking, I asked, “What's the matter, baby?” Until I knew, I could only rub her back, completely lost.

“I'm scared, dearest. I don't want to leave here. I don't want to go to Mexico. I'm afraid. Please put your arms around me and hold me tight.”

When I did, I could feel Joy trembling. I had never seen her this way before. I couldn't believe it—my calm, controlled, warrior, my first sergeant, was scared. And if she was scared, I should have been petrified with fear, terrified. But I felt protective, close, compassionate. I had seen her cry a lot, especially when she suddenly had to leave her mom forever, but I had never seen her scared before, except for the spider episode. I held her tight with my arm around her and held her head on my chest with the other, softly cooing words of comfort. “It's all right, baby. I'm here. We're together.”

“We can’t possibly do what we plan!” she cried. “We are only two people among billions. We’re up against incredibly powerful forces, armies galore with millions of soldiers. We’ll fail in Mexico, and after Mexico we’ll fail, and after that, more failure. So much depends on us, but I’m afraid I’m not up to it. I think of Mom, of Gu, of all the others in the Society, and I can’t bear the thought of failing them. I will die of shame.”

I held and squeezed her and caressed her head. I still couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Joy was afraid? My warrior was afraid?

I puzzled over that while I rubbed her back. Then it struck me. Joy would calmly go to her death. She would walk into bullets, chin up. It was shame she feared. Suddenly I understood.

I had read about this. The bravest and most fearsome samurai sometimes committed suicide because of the real or imagined shame they suffered, such as imperial criticism of their lord, or a lost battle by their clan. Joy would be shamed if, after all the faith the Society put in us, after all they had done to make our mission a success, after her mom had sacrificed her only child for our mission, we failed. To fail was her horror. I realized at that moment that she would not survive failure. She would kill herself. And I knew, as I knew how much I loved her, I would join her. Not out of shame, but out of love.

I wasn’t far wrong. It was only that we would fail at our mission that was conceivable during those early years. We didn’t even consider the possibility of what did happen.

I naively tried to tell her, “I’ll do my damndest to make sure we don’t fail.” Then I lied. I told her, “I know we can’t fail, baby. I know my history, and I have what we have to do down pat. Your fears are for nothing.”

And I stupidly prattled on like that. Soon I felt her even and deep breathing and realized she was asleep. I slid from under her and got a blanket out and put it over her. She moved into a fetal position; perhaps her fears were still alive in her dreams. I got in beside her and snuggled against her back.

I lay sleepless in wonder at Joy’s many facets. If we had just become acquainted when she was displaying one of them, I would not have believed any of the others. Gorgeous. No way she could be a warrior, not and look like that. Warrior? Impossible—she was so feminine. But warrior she was. Feminine? Then how could she be so bossy—a side I got to know well. Sweet? Then where did that temper come from? And so on. It was hard for me to believe these facets were all balanced together in the same woman. And here I was, still making new discoveries about her. My beautiful warrior woman was afraid. Of failure. Of shame.

Chapter 26

*Bloody chaos sweeps Mexico again
... Revolution now in fifth year ... mil-
lions feared dead ... Bandits loot and
rape, have free rein.*

■ *La Jornada*, September 6, 1915 Old Universe

Now, so many years later, I can see I should have known better. But then, I had no idea what would happen and from where the deadly danger to us would come.

Finally we were on our way to Mexico City. Sal had gone well ahead of us and had made the initial contacts and set up the appointments for our work. He warned us to expect a long and tiring trip, and he was right. Mexico City lies about 1,891 miles from San Francisco. It's about five thousand miles, I swear, when one takes into account all the curves, detours, transfers, and reversed directions on the trains, buses, and carriages we had to take. It took us over a week. Oh, for the passenger jet airplane of the future.

Fully armed against bandits, we had caught the Mexican train in Mexicali. I remember my amazement at seeing the train for the first time, in the station. It was straight out of a B-grade Western movie, down to the huge cone-like smokestack on the engine that puffed out incredible billows of black smoke. Even standing still it clanked and wheezed and hissed. It must have been awesome when it first puffed out of the Pittsburgh construction yards just after the American Civil War.

We thought it would be cool enough in October to make the trip, but as we crossed the desert a couple of hours after we pulled out of Mexicali, the air grew hot and sticky. Unbearable. I wore my armored vest, coat over the vest, and my shoulder holster. I felt the sweat running down my sides and the fan I waved vigorously in front of me seemed just to add to the heat. I'm sure I was sweating under my fin-

gernails. The heavy air I fanned up my nostrils stank of all the sweaty, unwashed bodies that had used these seats. The fan was useless. I soon tossed it on the seat next to me.

Finally, I turned from the *History of Mexico* I had been trying to read to refresh my memory, and just listened to the clickity-clack, clickity-clack of the train wheels as they sped over the breaks between the rail segments. I gazed at Joy. She was asleep on the first class seat opposite me, her head resting against a small, hard pillow she had propped against the train window, her feet and legs pulled up next to her on the seat. Her body bounced and swayed with the motion of the train and her face glistened with sweat.

Joy looked so peaceful. Since the week before when she had confessed her fear to me and broken down over it, she had not said a word about it. Indeed, she seemed confident of our success. But now I knew that it was a facade manufactured by her training. A warrior going into battle had to show confidence.

I let my head loll back against the smelly seat and move with the motion of the train. I wondered how much she had really succeeded in training me. There was that incident in the warehouse on our arrival in this archaic age, when, not to be shown up by Joy, I had proved to the three guys that I could handle myself. Since then I had not been seriously tested. She had continued to train me, and she did say I was now at least a first-degree black belt in karate. Me? I thought she was being kind.

Clickity-clack, clickity clack. . . .

With each mile closer to Mexico City my fear grew as I thought about what we would try to do, and the risks involved. I looked again at Joy, peacefully asleep, her body shaking back and forth with the movement of the train, and my stomach started to knot up.

I was only an assistant professor. I'd led a civilized life. No dope, no drunken brawls. I hadn't had a fist fight since I was eleven, and I'd been beaten up badly then. With the exception of the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Centers, I had never seen a bloody accident. Never a dead person, not even in a funeral home. I hated violence in movies and on television. Whenever there were car chases and strangers were driven off the road or into crashes, I always felt sorry for the invisible people inside the cars. I was very sentimental; I'd turn a one-handkerchief movie into three. I'd never been in the military.

I can't be doing this, I thought. Not me. Not with this warrior across from me. The Society should have selected a Green Beret, or a Navy Seal.

I poured tepid water out of a thermos onto my handkerchief, spun the handkerchief around and around in the air to cool it, put my head back, and spread the handkerchief on my face.

Would only one of us make this trip back? Would we both die? That was the better alternative. We could also be imprisoned in a Mexican jail, beaten, tortured to death, sold as slaves to a hacienda, or badly injured. In this whole world, we were on our own to do what we intended. Not even our country would protect us. And indeed, if the American embassy found out what we intended to do, they would send the Marines after us and we would spend most of our remaining years in a federal prison.

Joy never knew how worried I was. I think my joking around fooled her. And I wasn't going to quake in front of her. After all, me man, she woman. But inside I was one scared bunny rabbit. And yes, I was ashamed about hiding my fear. Joy, who cared so much about her warrior abilities and code of ethics, had told me honestly how scared she was of failure, and cried over it.

If I was going to worry about one thing, why not everything? What about all the other things we planned to do? Would we survive them also? I knew my probabilities. Although the risk of death or some other personal disaster may be the same, when one took into account all the risky things we would do, then the probability was high that we would get creamed. On each toss of a coin, the probability of heads is the same, but in ten or twenty tosses, it is very unlikely that one will get heads for every toss—that we would survive each risk-filled intervention.

But it was not the interventions that destroyed us in the end.

On our way to Mexico City, as I thought of all the bad things that might happen to us, I tried to put it all away in a mental drawer and let the motion of the train do its work. I heaved a big sigh and made myself more comfortable. I told myself the motion of the train was making me shake, that I was not shivering, despite the heat. The wet handkerchief on my head felt good, and pretty soon the clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity. . . clack, clickity . . .

Chapter 27

Life is always throwing curves. Something that we could never predict, never anticipate, can drop on us like a two ton safe. In my case, it was a broken heart.

We arrived at Mexico City on a Sunday, dirty, tired, and irritable. Never knowing whether and how long our train and other conveyances might be delayed, Sal had given us four days before our first appointment. At the previous train stop we had telegraphed him our arrival time, so he met us at the station. He had turned into a handsome, suave executive in the two years he had been with us. In his light, summer-white suit, he was the best looking gentleman on the platform, I swear. Joy recognized him before I did.

Sal had made reservations for us at the Gran Hotel Ciudad de Mexico. In spite of his clothes, Sal was Sal. Looking at me mischievously, he said, "I made separate room reservations for you and Joy." We had been on a first name basis for over a year. Neither of us could stand hearing "Miss Phim" and "Mr. Banks" after a while, particularly from our top executives. He hesitated, his eyes twinkling even more, then added, "I hope that's all right. " Sal was always testing our public stance that Joy was just my assistant and translator.

"Of course," I responded. "I can't imagine why it would be otherwise. Can you, Sal?"

Joy smirked.

Sal looked embarrassed for a moment, then smiled. "Well, she might have a lot of dictation to take down."

We invited Sal to join us for supper at the hotel, and he responded, "Yeah. Er . . . can I bring a friend?"

"Sure," I said.

We arrived at the hotel by carriage, had our suitcases taken to our separate rooms, and as soon as the bellboys disappeared down the hallway, Joy joined me in my room. Sal had located one of the only two hotels in all of Mexico City that had hot running water, and this one catered mainly to foreigners. So we bathed.

As I luxuriated in the bathtub, I kept imagining the poor Indians,

stripped to their loincloths, sweat pouring off them, who must be shoveling coal into the boiler in the oven-hot basement of the hotel. Surely Indians. Who else would be doing that here?

Sal had told us that the hotel had bought an old paddle wheel ship's boiler and used that to produce the hot water. But with all the hot water pipes throughout the hotel and their poor insulation, the boiler constantly had to be fed coal to keep the water sufficiently heated.

But my pity for the stokers was abstract. The bath was real. And it was heaven to get the days of accumulated trip grime and sweat off my body. One can do only so much with cold water and sponge bathing. We had starved ourselves of lovemaking during the trip as well, although it had been conceivable in our private, first class berths. We'd felt no more romantic than if we'd been in a car caught in stalled city traffic on a hot August afternoon. Now, with ten pounds of grime washed off and "hot" buttons pressed by the sight of each other's naked body and our flesh to flesh contact in the small tub, we made good use of the emperor-sized bed in my room. Awful springs.

When we arrived at the hotel restaurant, we spotted Sal and his friend, a young Mexican woman, already at a table. When we pointed to the table, the headwaiter looked at Joy disapprovingly and said in Spanish, "We do not serve Indians here."

I wasn't surprised. I knew about the third class status of native Indians in Mexico and should have realized that with her coloring, eyes, lips, and black hair, Joy might be mistaken for an Indian. I had learned the proper response to such prejudice from the civil rights movement of the Sixties, but thought better of pointing out that "We don't eat Indians." This was 1908 Mexico; I didn't think the headwaiter would understand the sarcasm. Fighting such prejudice here was futile.

This was an international hotel and I was sure the headwaiter spoke English. But I wanted to protect him from Joy's wrath, so I replied in Spanish, "This woman here is my assistant, and Chinese."

He looked at her more carefully, and then replied, "I'm sorry sir. Right this way, please."

Joy looked at me curiously. I stayed between her and the headwaiter until we got to our table. I didn't want to risk that she might understand a word or two.

After Sal introduced us to his vivacious friend Alicia Cardenas, for the first time ever, I pulled out Joy's high backed reed chair. "Is that for me?" she asked, grinning from ear to ear.

I pointed to the chair and commanded, "Sit."

She gave me a slight bow and, in a most ladylike way, slid onto the chair, crossed her ankles, put her hands on her lap, and sat primly, back straight. It was so unlike my image of her, like a wild tiger trying to act like a domesticated cat, that I only barely stifled a guffaw. Her way of being sarcastic.

I plopped into the chair next to her and told an amused Sal, "You had better explain our humor to Alicia. He did so in Spanish, in effect telling her we were incurable jokesters.

She replied in Spanish, "Really. I thought John was such a gentleman and Joy so much a lady."

I could tell Sal was struggling to suppress his own snicker.

Before I could translate Alicia's response for Joy, she nodded in the headwaiter's direction and asked, "What was all that Spanish about?"

"He wanted to know where I got such a beautiful creature."

"Sure," she whispered, "and I'm a humpback whale." But she let it go.

It was a little difficult carrying on a conversation when Alicia didn't understand English and Joy didn't know Spanish, but Sal and I kept the translations humming. At one point in our conversation, Sal pointed out to Alicia, "Joy is our company's translator."

I translated that for Joy, and we all laughed at the irony.

Sal happily told us, "Alicia is from the famous Cardosa family. Big political wheels, and they have a huge hacienda. It takes a train half a day to cross it."

"How did you meet?" Joy asked.

"We both tried to catch the same one-horse hansom cab. When I saw that she also had hailed it, I offered it to her. She offered it to me. And we smiled at each other and both of us got in."

Alicia was lovely and Sal seemed happy with her. But we were poor company. We were tired, and after our meal we excused ourselves. Yes, I pulled out Joy's chair for her to get up. She did so with dignity, and we went to my room. She waited for me to open the door, which I did with a slight bow, and then followed her in.

I gave her a mock punch on the shoulder, pushed her onto the bed with my hip, and exclaimed, "Don't let that go to your head, my lady."

We both laughed, and she moved over so that I could join her on the bed. In the time it took for me to close my eyes, I was asleep. Joy beat me to it, and we had a nice, long nap.



We woke up about midnight. Joy went to her room and unpacked, and fixed her bed so that it looked as if she'd slept in it. She then suggested we stroll around the city. So, we dressed in comfortable middle-class clothes, armed ourselves as usual, and donned our armored vests. They were now as intrinsic to our clothing as underwear.

We left the hotel and on Av 16 de Septiembre headed towards the brightest city lights. The hotel was located in the commercial, business district of Mexico City; really what I would call the rich downtown area. The entertainment area was several blocks away. The avenue in front of the hotel was made of some hard material that, in the dim streetlights, looked like concrete. The raised sidewalk was made of the same material. As in San Francisco, the usual wire-strung poles lined the street. Surprisingly, there was virtually no stench from horses. I saw why in a few minutes, when we passed a hunched-over old man with a pooper-scooper and a broom. I wondered what he did when he filled his scooper, until I saw him dump it into a barrel with a flat wooden cover on it, farther down the street.

Buildings of all descriptions and colors, some typically Mexican red, green, and blue, came right up to the walk. This was no different than the downtown of every major city. Nothing grew anywhere, except for a few trees with the sidewalk circling around their trunks, their tops pruned to make way for the wires. I guess the trees were there first, along with a few ramshackle houses with huge verandas that were hemmed in by larger buildings.

This was Sunday night, a holy night in Mexico, and hours away from the workweek. There were few carriages and cabs on the road, and no automobiles. We occasionally encountered other pedestrians, but they always seemed in a hurry. We enjoyed the walk, our first since we got on that miserable train. The air had cooled and we strolled hand in hand. I was able to forget why we were here.

We dimly saw four men ambling toward us. As they approached, I could see that they were young, maybe in their middle or late teens. They dressed in ordinary worker's thick, dark pants with colorful shirts hanging out of them. One wore a sombrero and another had a vividly colored scarf draped over his shoulder. They were none too steady on their feet, and they were laughing and pushing each other.

They stopped when they saw Joy, and after making some jokes I could not understand in their dialect, they spread a little apart and approached. The bigger one yelled at me, “¿Usted [something] Yankee?”

I couldn't understand him, except that he was asking if I was a Yankee.

“*Si*,” I replied.

I understood what he said next. “What are you doing with the Indian whore?”

Then they got dangerous.

One of the others growled at me in Spanish, “Go home Yankee. She is ours.”

I didn’t know where the knives came from, but they suddenly had them in hand. One boldly advanced toward me with his, while the other three threatened Joy. To cover our backs, we cautiously stepped backwards to the picture window of the store behind us. Joy kept room for action between us. I knew exactly what she was doing. We were amazingly in tune, and moved together.

All her training kicked in. After all my worries, all my fears, I realized thankfully that I felt only the expectation of combat. Now, with the real thing looming before us, I was as calm as if this was just another practice session with Joy.

The big one yelled out something that I took to mean, “I get her cunt first.” Now there was no doubt this was a fight. Just to be sure Joy understood, in a voice so calm I could’ve been telling her the time of day, I said, “They want to rape you.”

“Oh. Fun,” is all she said.

I never forgot that reply. I have agonized over it; I became obsessed with it. It tore at my emotions. It devastated my thoughts.

The boy in front of me was about five feet away, holding his knife menacingly toward me while glancing at Joy. The light was a little better where we were standing, and he commented to his friends, “Beautiful. I’m next.”

Joy took two quick steps toward the surprised boy, snaked her hand over the crook in the elbow of his knife arm and swiftly shifted her body to the outside, trapping the arm against her side. She then clasped her hands in front of her body and using his body mass and getting the right alignment, she pulled upward on his elbow and dislocated his shoulder. I heard a loud pop as the knife fell from his paralyzed hand. She flung him screaming in pain at the feet of the others.

They stood back, shocked, but only for a moment. She was still a woman. I hadn’t moved. They simply ignored what they could make no sense out of, which is what just happened to their friend, and moved on Joy with their knives pointed forward, but evidently not with the intention to stab her. They just hoped to scare her, perform their workaday rape, leave us crying on the street, and help their buddy, who somehow had got himself injured, off to wherever.

What I hadn't seen was Joy drawing her tactical knife out of her hip sheath. Distracted by their friend landing at their feet, the boys hadn't seen, either. She calmly allowed the three to approach, her face serene, eyes large and tracking the boys' every slight movement, mouth slightly parted, chin forward, feet precisely located for her attack or defense.

Just as I was going to do a jumping side kick on the one nearest to me, she yelled, "Hihaiii," and took a large step forward. She thrust her knife into the genitals of one, backhanded the second on the nose, jerked her bloody knife free, and thrust it straight-armed into the third boy's heart.

One boy was dead, two wounded and screaming, and the one whose nose she had broken was bleeding profusely. He staggered to his feet, crying in pain, and tried to flee down the street. Joy whipped out her throwing knife and pitched it deep into his back. He fell face forward.

What I had just seen Joy do hit me like a sledge hammer in the face. I was quaking so hard I couldn't stand. I leaned and then flopped against the store window, disbelieving my eyes, unable to say a word.

Joy strode to where the boy lay with the knife quivering in his back. He was trying to creep away. She wrenched her knife out and, as the boy screamed in pain, she grabbed his hair, jerked his head back, and cut his throat expertly, so that the gushing blood would miss her.

The one with a dislocated arm saw this and started to beg for mercy. He tried to push himself backwards away from her. She came and hovered over him. She showed him the bloody knife and asked pleasantly, "Do you still want to rape me?"

He didn't understand the words. He could only stare wide-eyed at the knife tip inches from his face. He screamed and then gurgled as Joy thrust the knife underneath his chin and into his brain.

The one whose genitals had been cut wide open lay completely curled around his groin, sobbing in pain, and, I think, calling for his mother and the Virgin Mary to save him. Joy was just about to cut his throat too, when I finally got my voice back and screamed at her, "No! No! For Christ's sake, don't kill him."

Joy cut his throat.

What I saw combined with the awful stench of human blood and waste—one or more of the boys had crapped and urinated in their pants—took my breath away. I sank back against the window, so weak with shock that all I could do was stare and gasp for breath, like a freshly caught fish thrown into a boat. I felt as though I were watching

one of those explicitly bloody and graphic horror movies: In silence, one watches the horror. One wants to shrink from it, hide one's eyes, leave the theater. But, one sits there mesmerized by the horror of it all.

I gawked as Joy rolled two of the boys over to make sure they were dead. The other two were so obviously dead she didn't bother with them. I gawked as she cleaned off both of her knives on the unbloodied parts of their shirts. I gawked as she put her knives back in their sheaths. I gawked as she checked her dress for spattered blood. I gawked as she took off her dress and turned it inside out and put it back on.

I cringed as she came close to me and bent over and asked, "Are you okay, dearest?"

I vomited, missing her by inches. The thought burst into my devastated mind: *Thank God. She would have killed me.*

Yes, I know. She wouldn't have done anything. But my mind was a train wreck.

Joy put out her hand to help me stand up, pointing out, "We had better get moving in case someone comes along."

I slithered away from her hand and pushed myself up. I looked for the last time at the four bodies. There was nothing I could do now to save them.

Her first words exploded in my mind. "Oh. Fun." *Fun. She was anticipating fun. To her it was . . . fun.*

I realized long after that this was just an expression, a way of diffusing the seriousness of the threat. But at that time, in that context, those words hung like plaques on the images of what I had seen her do to those boys. With those words and her actions, Joy wrote in blood on my mind that she was an utterly bloodthirsty and deadly warrior.



I nodded my head in the direction of the hotel, and started to stagger in that direction. Getting my legs to work in coordination with my arms and upper body proved difficult. But it got better as the minutes passed. Joy strolled along beside me, saying nothing. I glanced at her face several times, but could not see her expression well in the darkness.

When we got to my room, I motioned her in before me, gently closed the door, and went into the bathroom. I looked at my face. I was as white as a fish belly in the moonlight. The only color was in my red-

rimmed and bulging eyes. It looked as though there was an incredible buildup of pressure behind them. There was.

Joy came into the bathroom to see what I was doing. She tried to rub my back as I dashed cold water on my face. I shrugged off her hand. Then I spun to face her directly. In a quavering, strangled voice, I asked, "Have you ever killed someone before?"

Her brow furrowed, her expression one of quizzical concern, she answered quickly, "No, dearest."

I hissed, "Don't you dare call me 'dearest,' you hear?"

She stepped back, her surprise just beginning to turn into anger.

Then beyond any control, I pounded on the sink with my fist and roared, spittle flying from my mouth, "Why the holy fuck did you *kill* those boys? You could have incapacitated them. You could have knocked them unconscious. You could have just broken their arms. Then we could have called the police and turned them over." I leaned forward and thrust my face an inch from her nose. "But you *MURDERED THEM.*"

For a moment, I shocked the anger out of her. She had never seen me like this. She stuttered defensively, "T-t-they w-w-would have raped me." Then she got control of herself and her face hardened and turned gray. Her eyes narrowed to slits, and in a voice that had firmed into cold steel, she threw back at me, "You don't know who else they raped. And whom they would rape in the future. I probably saved many women the degradation and misery, if not the resulting suicide, of being raped, you asshole."

"So," I screamed even louder, "*You* are judge, jury and executioner. Not of what they did, but of what they might have done."

Her hands kept flexing and I knew she wanted to slap my face. I could see the struggle in her eyes. She could have no doubt I would slap her back. And, warrior that she was, she could not trust her superbly trained reflexes if I really tried to hit her.

She put her fists on her hips and leaned into my face and hurled at it, "*Fuck you, you bastard!* You don't care that I would have been raped, or that *I* saved *you* from a knifing."

She stormed out of the bathroom and bounced off the closet door as she headed out of my room. She slammed the door so hard I saw the wall shake.



I'd had a psychic body blow I could not absorb. I did not sleep that

night; I did not cry; I did nothing but lie on my bed looking at the shadows on the ceiling. And try, try to deal with what I had seen and come to know about the woman I loved. The woman who found murder “fun.”

I didn’t go down for breakfast or lunch. I stayed in my room with a “*No Disturbe*” sign on the door. Finally, I was ravenous enough to eat something for supper, and joined Sal, who was sitting at a restaurant table alone. I didn’t feel like talking to him, but he’d seen me come in and I couldn’t turn around.

I must have looked awful, for after greeting me, he asked, “Are you okay?”

“I’m not feeling well,” I responded. I tried to make conversation. “What have you been doing with yourself?”

“Alicia has been showing me around the city. Tomorrow night she is going to introduce me to her father. I don’t know whether I want to make that big a deal out of our dating. Say, where’s Joy? I haven’t seen you two apart outside of the company building before.”

“She’s been shopping.”

“Well, you two be careful about walking around here at night. Alicia told me that there was a gang killing last night. Four boys were knifed to death a short distance from the hotel. She didn’t know them, but read in the newspaper that it was two brothers and their friends. She’s afraid to come near the ho—”

I vomited on the table.

I put my handkerchief over mouth, waved Sal off, and almost ran out of the restaurant to my hotel room. I again dashed water on my face, and finally dumped my head in the water. When I pulled it out to take a breath, I hardly recognized myself in the mirror. My face was drained of blood, my cheeks were gaunt, and my eyes were bloodshot. Gray bags had formed under them. I needed a shave.

I left the bathroom with my head dripping, but I didn’t care. I sat on the side of the bed, my head in my hands, and finally I cried, and then sobbed, and then my whole body shook as I bawled uncontrollably.

Hours later, I fell asleep from exhaustion and a broken heart.

I never wanted to see Joy again.

Chapter 28

There was a knock at my door.

I ignored it.

Again, the knock on my door.

I still refused to answer it.

I had a “*No disturbe*” sign on the door, but I didn’t realize I’d left it unlocked. The door opened and Joy stuck her head in. In a voice choked up with such misery that I hadn’t heard from her since she gave up her mother forever to come to this age, she asked, “Can I come in . . . please?”

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak, and taken aback by the way Joy looked. Her eyes were puffy and red-rimmed. Her face was sallow, lined as though she had aged ten years. She had scratched her cheek somehow, and there was blood smeared around it. She had done nothing to her hair since we returned to the hotel, and it was half in a bun, with strands hanging loosely down the side of her head, and a large strand swept over her forehead. She usually took great care of her appearance; she must not have looked in the mirror at all. Or now just didn’t care.

Joy sat in the easy chair by the Spanish chest of drawers and looked at me. She was going to say something, but then her lower lip started trembling, and tears began to roll out of her eyes, and she lost control and started sobbing. This was no get-him-with-tears-trick. She never used that trick on me. She was actually miserable.

No matter. When I looked at her I kept seeing her calm murder of the four boys. I tried to shove it deep into my mind, out of the way. It kept coming back.

I didn’t move. My mouth was locked tight.

Visibly struggling, Joy soon got a grip on herself. She looked at me, almost as she had in the time machine when she’d finally cried out the loss of her mother. “I love you, John”

Her lip began to tremble again, and she pulled up the bottom of her dress and wiped her eyes and face.

I realized then that Joy hadn’t changed her clothes and still had that bloody dress on.

“I would die for you,” she said, and then added very hesitantly, “my dearest.”

My mouth like a vise, I looked away.

Now she rushed on with, “If you want to leave me and forget about our mission, I understand.”

My room's window was open and I could hear the faint rustling of the heavy curtains in the breeze. There was no sound of horses or automobiles from the street. Nor any noise from the rooms around me. We were alone in this universe of our misery.

I continued to look away.

Joy reached down and took her throwing knife out of its sheath. My heart jumped when I saw it out of the corner of my eye. I was about to roll off the bed and try to defend myself, when she tossed it on the end of the bed, grip first. She pulled in her stomach, reached under her waistband, and pulled out her other knife and threw that on bed also. She had brought in her holster purse, probably without thinking. She lobbed that onto the bed, too. She waved dejectedly at the weapons. “Here. I’ll never use them again.”

Then she let out a miserable scream, followed immediately with, “Kill me, please! I can’t live without you. Now. Don’t draw it out. Please. This is your justice. And then you can live with yourself over what I’ve done.”

This was so sudden, so unexpected, so unlike Joy, that my whole body suddenly jumped as though kicked by a horse. My heart beat so rapidly that I shook with it.

Those were the magic words. Everything about the murders disappeared from my mind and vision in a blast. I looked at Joy, now actually *looked*. I could not forgive her. I could not leave her. I still very much loved her. She needed me. She loved me. Really loved me.

My world had changed again. I shakily rose from the bed and, in a daze, I went to Joy. I put my arm around her and gently lifted her off the chair, then sat her down on the bed. I sat next to her and put an arm around her shoulder and with my hand I pulled her head onto my shoulder.

She was crying quietly now, and I caressed her head and said my first words of this new world between us. “I will never leave you. I love you, baby.”

She was still in my heart, but I didn't fool myself. There was now a part of my heart that was apart from her, a part that expressed caution in how I would now feel about her.

I pulled my shirt out of my pants and wiped her swollen eyes with it.

Joy put her arms around me and squeezed me to her. Soon, she sniffled, "I must explain. I know you hate what I did, and you hate me for it, but I must explain. Please."

Her lower lip quivering, she gave me a pleading look I had never seen before, and I nodded.

Her voice strengthened as she talked. "You must understand what rape means to a woman, especially in a Catholic country like Mexico. It can mean the loss of purity, the inability to ever marry and have children, a life of severe psychological problems, including the inability to ever know love or true lovemaking. It often means suicide, John. In Muslim countries the shame of the family can be felt so deeply by the parents that they disown their raped daughter.

"Think of that, John. The daughter suffers the rape, and it is she who is disowned. But more. Sometimes they kill her. Nothing is done illegally. She has committed the evil of letting herself, under the sharp blade of a knife or with a gun pointed at her, be raped."

Her voice remained shaky, but there was an intensity in her words that I hadn't heard since she told me what happened to her mother in Cambodia. "I have never been raped. No matter. When women are raped elsewhere, I am raped also."

Now Joy did raise her voice. "If I had my way, all rapists would be executed. What they do to women—or men, for that matter—is often worse than murder. At least murder is usually quick. Rape usually means lifelong misery. Do you understand, John?"

I didn't reply.

"Those teenagers—they were men as far as their equipment and lust were concerned—would have raped me if I couldn't defend myself. While holding their knives at my throat. And they might have had fun killing me afterwards, and you, John, you as well. After all, you are a hated Yankee, you know."

She was rushing now, trying to get all the words out, as though she thought I would stop them by kicking her out of the room. "We don't know how many they had already raped. We don't know how many they would have raped in the future. Is a rapist less a rapist just because he happens to be stopped before he acts, by chance or by the victim defending herself?"

I was emotionally exhausted and my body was weak from lack of food. My brain was operating on one cylinder, and my mind was muddled by what must have been a dozen of the chemicals nature gave us

to protect us against just such emotional catastrophes. But, at that moment, I again saw vividly Joy throwing a knife into the back of the boy trying to flee from her. I fought the image again. I pushed it back down. I knew it would never be gone. Just temporarily out of the way.

It was moments before I could speak. Finally, softly, I said, "I don't agree that you should be judge and executioner. There are courts in Mexico for such crimes, and the punishment is harsh, although it's not death."

Her confidence grew. "Yes, but not if you're well connected. Not if you rape an Indian. Even foreign women may have no protection."

Enough! I couldn't stand any more. How torn apart can one be?

I gripped her tear-washed face in my two hands, brought her wet lips to mine, and gently kissed her. She put her hand on my head and crushed my lips to hers. She started weeping again.

"I love you, my darling," she exclaimed, and tried to kiss me even harder.

We spent an hour or so in each other's arms. Then I got up, pulled Joy up with me, and took her into the bathroom. While we stood by the tub, I ran the hot water and took the remaining pins out of her hair. She stood limply while I undressed her and then undressed myself. I hugged her until the water was ready, and then helped her into the tub and followed her in. We washed each other's bodies and dried each other off afterwards, then went back to the bed and lay in each other's arms. There was no need now for more words. All had been said. The past could not be undone. My life partner, my mission collaborator, my love, was a murderess.

Chapter 29

In 1908, Francisco Madero published "La Sucesión Presidencial En 1910" ("The Presidential Succession in 1910.") . . . Calls for honest democratic election of president . . . Sparks political firestorm of pro-Madero presidential sentiment . . . Madero arrested and bailed out of jail by family, flees country . . . Revolution begins.

"2 Million Dead: The Revolution of 1910-1920," *El Independiente*, November 20, 1947 Old Universe

Too soon, all the scientific work on time travel, all the costs, all the hopes, all the waiting, all the training, all the worry would come down to maybe less than one crucial hour. I was scared shitless.

In the days before our first appointment, we got our relationship back on an even keel, if not quite as it was before. It was like floating a ship after it had gone to the bottom of the sea. Ours was floating and seaworthy again. But never quite the same.

We went shopping during the daytime, and, of course, Joy bought tons of Mexican jewelry. We socialized with Sal and Alicia and we actually laughed, perhaps too heartily. We held hands more than we ever had before. But all this was cover. Beneath it all lay what I now knew about Joy. And deeper still, where all my emotions came together like gases swirling around a new sun aborning, I was terrified of what was to come.

We didn't make love yet—I couldn't have if I wanted to, not even with a whole bottle of Viagra. There was something else that was different about our new relationship. I finally put my finger on it when I got distracted by my fear and left the water running in the bathroom

sink. And then when Joy put on her new women's-style Mariachi sombrero hat. Backwards. I was not making jokes and she was not showing irritation over my little mistakes.

Sigh. Truth to tell, I missed them both, and needed them.

The morning of our appointment, we had a good breakfast—rather, Joy had a good breakfast. I was too nervous to eat more than half a pancake and drink two cups of coffee. We took one of the carriages that always waited for paying riders outside the hotel, and we were on our way. Joy gripped my hand, not because she was nervous, I was sure. She knew my stomach was knotted up with tension, and she wanted to share her warrior's strength with me.

I looked at Joy out of the corner of my eye. Her face showed calm composure, but there was something different in the lift at the corner of her lips, and the thrust of her chin. Joy glanced at me and gave me a little smile. Ah, I recognized what was different in her face. Beneath the composure lay eagerness, anticipation of a greatly desired event. The signs were subtle, yet I knew I was not mistaken.

I had seen that particular blend in her expression before. Was it just before we started on this trip to Mexico? No, then I'd seen outright eagerness. Was it before our time travel? No, then it was steady, unwavering anticipation.

The carriage bounced over a rut in the road, and the horses missed a step, and she looked at me again. There was that look. That did it. I knew where I had seen that look before—on the last day of my class at Indiana University, the last one I would ever teach anywhere. She'd worn that expression when she came up to me after class and invited me to attend her mother's dinner party.

I would never forget that class; I tried to distract myself with its memory. It was the first time I saw Joy up close, the first time she ever spoke to me. What a different world that was! Or rather, would be. What a different person I'd been. And I had so much, so incredibly much to learn about her.



Our coach arrived at the Riojais Building. It was in a beautiful part of Mexico City, a block from the Palacio de la Inquisicion (The Palace of the Inquisition) located on Republica de Brasil and Venezuela streets. It had been built in the eighteenth century and had belonged to the Inquisition.

Joy was dressed as a proper lady, with a long, white dress loosely laced and belted at the waist so she could get to her knife, if necessary. Pointed gray shoes peeked from below the skirt, and her hair was pulled up in a tight bun covered by a wide-brimmed hat with a white egret feather sticking out of it. No corset. I'd told her she could put the sheath for her knife around a corset, so the hip knife sheath was no excuse for not wearing one. She looked at me like I had suggested she put on ice skates.

I wore a long waistcoat and tight pants, with a fedora hat. Each of us carried all our concealed weapons and wore our armored vests.

The question of Joy's weapons almost occasioned our first fight since what I now called "the incident," much as a small war between nations is sometimes called an incident. Joy had promised me never to arm herself again.

I told her, "We should take no chances, and if we are going to carry out our mission, it's stupid for you to go unarmed."

"I have my hands and feet," she countered, her chin thrust at me.

"What are you going to do," I said, waving my hands at her, "throw them at somebody with a gun at fifty feet? I trust you. Now, arm yourself, damn it."

She threw a few hisses my way in response to my commanding tone, but she did take her weapons. It was almost for naught.

Madero's offices were in a corner of the second floor with a view toward the Palacio. When I announced our presence for the appointment to the secretary in the reception area, she called in two husky men in civilian clothes. One frisked me, and took the guns from my shoulder holster and my pocket with a sharp look. The other one looked in Joy's purse, barked something in Spanish, and handed the purse to the secretary along with my two guns. They never thought she would also have two knives. Or, perhaps, frisking a woman was too sensitive a matter.

The two guards—that was what they must have been—ushered us into Madero's office. As one of them whispered in the ear of the middle-aged man seated at a handsome antique desk, I looked around at the paintings on the walls. One depicted the Catholic priest, Miguel Hidalgo, calling for Mexican independence in 1810. Another painting was of Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico. There must have been a million medals on his chest.

It was hot, humid, and stuffy in the office, and I began to sweat. I had to rub my nose; I was on the verge of sneezing. Joy told me later that the humid heat made the skin beneath her knife sheaths itchy; her

urge to scratch was almost too much to bear. Air conditioning had been invented, but had yet to be commercially developed enough to reach Mexico. For the millionth time, I sighed over the loss of the modern comforts I'd left behind in the Old Universe.

When Madero's guard completed his whispered report, Madero reached into his desk, pulled out a pistol, and put it on his antique desk in easy reach of his hand, with the muzzle pointed toward us. Both the guards gave us stony looks. I'm sure Joy was as alert as a cat that had mistakenly jumped into a dog kennel. They left, doubtlessly no further than the doorknob on the other side of the door.

Madero stared at us, his teardrop-shaped face watchful, and finally motioned for us to sit at the two Douglas office chairs pulled up to his desk. He greeted us cautiously; I barely saw his mouth move behind the large mustache that hung down over his mouth to his pointed goatee.

I asked him, "*¿Podríamos hablar inglés*—Could we speak English?"

"Yes," he said. Then he frowned at Joy and said something in a local Indian dialect.

She smiled. "I am Sino-Vietnamese, not Indian."

I jumped in and told him, "She is my partner."

I could feel Joy radiating happiness at that admission.

Madero looked at her admiringly for a long moment, and then reluctantly turned his eyes on me. He placed both hands on his desk and, in a businesslike tone, said, "Mr. Sal Garcia passed on through my secretary your ten thousand dollars for thirty minutes of my time this morning."

I nodded.

He asked, "What can I do for you that is worth such money?"

"Can I speak freely?" I waved my hand at the door and the certainty of ears on the other side. I said as softly as I could, "I have a message, possibly dangerous to you."

"Not a problem," he responded gruffly, almost smiling. "One is my son-in-law, the other my cousin. My secretary is my granddaughter."

He pursed his lips, reached into his coat, and scratched under his armpit. Then he put both arms on his desk and leaned forward to repeat his question. "What do you want, Mr. Banks?"

Keeping eye contact, I also leaned forward. Gesturing with one hand for emphasis, I said bluntly, "I understand that you want to be president and bring about true democracy. I hear that you are planning a revolution to do this, and have strong support among the Indians and

peons and certain hacienda owners who also want democracy. I hear that President Díaz can be bribed to resign, call for an early election, and point to you as his successor. All if the price is right.”

Madero jumped to his feet and put his hand on the gun, and yelled in Spanish, “Who do you think—”

Joy’s hand shot toward her leg, I went into cardiac arrest, and barely managed to hold up my hand, palm out, to motion him to sit down. I wasn’t cut out for this. My heart was now making up for lost time, racing the three-minute mile, and I could hardly breathe. It was somebody else, I swear, who said in a strong voice, “I am on a secret mission, but money speaks louder than words. How much do you need to influence Díaz and those surrounding him who might stand in his way? How much to gather the support of the middle class and the most important hacienda owners?” I raised my voice. “How much, Mr. Madero?”

Madero sat down, took his hand off his gun, and just studied me. He was distracted for a moment by Joy, who seemed to be scratching her lower leg, very unladylike. He again put me under a visual microscope, taking in my pants, my coat, my hands, my face. And then he locked his gaze on my eyes. I looked back, unblinking, and hoped that my fear didn’t show. He wasn’t going to beat me, eye to eye. I had a technique. I thought of the way fish look at each other with round, unblinking eyes, and focused on that image, imagining I was one.

He blinked, the test over and, I gather, successful. *Maybe I’m cut out for this stuff after all*, I thought.

“It is a crime to bribe officials,” he snapped.

“Of course,” I agreed. “Did I say bribe? I said influence, and there are many legal ways to do that.”

“The things you say are all lies. Who is telling you this?”

“My government has very good contacts,” I responded, trying to act nonchalant about it, as James Bond would have done in one of the 007 spy movies. My confidence was growing as I went along. “And there is no point in denying what both of us know to be the truth. How much?”

Minutes went by. Madero stared at me again, eyes shrewd. He scratched his head and thrummed his fingers on the desktop for a few seconds. He glanced at the picture of Díaz, then gazed back at me with raised eyebrows.

Come on, damn it. Say it. I felt as if the whole mission, our final success or failure, rested on his response. I could hear my heart thumping in my ears. My hands were sweating so bad I could have floated a

toy boat on them. I didn't dare steal a glance at Joy. That would indicate weakness to Madero. I hadn't breathed in minutes. One of my legs wound itself around the chair leg; my toes curled inside my shoe. My other foot was on its way around the other chair leg when, horrified by the thought of a leg cramp and its devastating effect on this meeting, I planted it solidly on the floor, where it no doubt left its imprint for eternity. My toes could do what they wished. The other leg was hopelessly entwined. *Jesus, what is Madero doing, going into hibernation?*

Suddenly, firmly, he said, "Twenty million American dollars."

We did it!

I almost fell apart with the release of tension. I hid the deep breath I took, and uncrossed my mental fingers. I uncurled my toes and slowly, like a cobra releasing its dead prey to eat, I unwound my leg from the chair leg.

It was clear to me that the absurd figure was a test and, if I were serious, a very high figure from which to start negotiations.

"Fine," I said. "Please give my partner the name of your local bank and your account number, and the bank official to whom the New York City Bank check is to be telegraphed by Western Union."

His eyes widened and his mouth fell open. Then he recovered himself. "This is all a joke. Yes?"

"You asked for twenty million. You will get twenty million. I believe you will have it in your account in four days."

Now he crossed his arms and regarded me through narrowed eyes. "How do I know you are what you say?"

I gave him a tight smile. "When you get the money, you will know."

He still suspected a trick; I could hear it in his tone of voice. "What government do you represent?"

"We are secret agents, Mr. Madero. I can say no more."

Madero studied me for a long moment. This was a cautious man. Then, apparently willing to play along in the hope that this was legitimate, he pulled his records from a locked drawer and read Joy the numbers and the name of the bank official we should contact.

With that, the meeting ended. We stood and I said, "Good day, sir, and our best wishes for your success."

Now it was Joy's turn. In one swift motion, before Madero could respond, Joy pulled in her stomach, reached behind her waistband, and pulled out her tactical knife. She stabbed it into his desk, and released it. It stood there, quivering. Madero's eyes focused on it as though the Devil's hand had arisen from the desktop.

She said nicely, “Oh yes—if you try to leave the country with that money or use it for personal gain, our government—and there are many secret agents like me—will track you down and kill you. You have heard of the *la muerte de mil tormentos*, I assume.”

At that, Madero’s head jerked up to stare incredulously at her.

I had taught Joy that term on the way to Madero’s office. A natural linguist, she pronounced it beautifully.

Joy made sure he understood, and roughened her tone. “Once my government finds you, it will drop you on a cactus from some second floor balcony and leave you pinned there in the sun to die slowly. I understand it sometimes takes three or four days for victims to die.”

Joy jerked her knife out of the desk, rubbed the point against her finger to clean and temporarily protect it with her body oil, then, as Madero gaped, she slid it back into her sheath.

I guessed that two of Madero’s relatives were going to have their asses reamed for overlooking that weapon. And in the future female visitors were going to be very embarrassed at how intimately they were searched. With that thought in mind, I nodded to Madero and we turned to leave

I glanced back at him as we went out the door. He was half standing, leaning on his desk with both hands, a bulky man dressed in a rumpled suit, sweating profusely and scowling at us as though we were stark raving mad.

We picked up our guns from the secretary.

Our carriage was waiting for us as I’d requested. We went immediately back to the hotel. I was so happy at the apparent success of this, our very first intervention, that I was on a high. Another bath would make it even better.



Refreshed, with a good lunch of chicken quesadillas in my stomach, I was still flying high. We had two hours before our appointment with the Labastida Detective Agency. We had secretly hired them to locate Pancho Villa, as he became known. “Whose real name was Doroteo Arango,” I informed Joy, just to refresh her memory.

“I knew that,” she intoned.

We were relaxing in my room before leaving, discussing what we had to do.

“Yes, well,” and I adopted my lecturing tone, “he was a former cattle rustler and bandit chief who became a general in Madero’s rebellion in the Old Universe. He won several important victories for him. After Madero took over the presidency, Villa became a major source of instability. Worse, he was responsible for the murder of tens of thousands during the Revolution.”

“I know,” Joy said again, almost automatically, I was sure.

Now. The moment I had been working toward. “He particularly hated Chinese, and would kill them wherever he found them.”

She hadn’t known that fact, and I watched her face. I was rewarded; there would be no “I know.” But my secret glee turned to dismay as a blazing nova of anger spread over her face from ear to ear, chin to hairline. I swear, even her hair began to frizzle. I would rather have all my teeth pulled without Novocain than have that look directed at me.

Stupid.

I saw my mistake immediately. Now I was sure she would want to kill Villa with her fingernails, scratch by scratch.

My best recourse was to turn her mind away from that. I continued lecturing, a little louder than before. “During the Revolution, Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico, and killed eight American soldiers and nine civilians. The American government sent General John J. Pershing with a force of several thousand men into Mexico after Villa, but couldn’t catch him. Partly because of this, Villa became a hero to many Mexicans.”

I reminded her, “When the Society proposed that he be one of those we assassinate, I agreed that he was important, but not important enough to kill. I told them, ‘I don’t want to go about assassinating all the small-time murderers like him. No doubt Villa was a major revolutionary figure. His importance lay in his influence among the native people and the peasants, which he used to seek dictatorial power. He could not be trusted to support any constitutional democracy for long.’ I agreed that he had to be removed—in some way.”

Joy looked a little more merciful toward Villa, like she was now willing to chop him up here and there with her hands before the final coup to the neck.

I had screwed this up, but we still had to come to a decision. “Now, it’s up to you and me, sweetheart. I want to bribe him.”

Her eyebrows disappeared into her hairline as her mouth fell open. She shook her head as though she couldn’t believe what she’d heard. “You want to bribe him—*bribe* him. Jesus, John, we have to kill that

damn mass murderer.” To persuade me, she decided to show some mercy. “I suggest dropping him on a cactus and leaving him there to die. Then the problem is nicely solved—forever.”

I was morose, and probably looked it. My shoulders slumped. I picked at a scab on the back of my hand, not meeting her eyes. Joy cooled down and studied my face. I’m sure she was thinking of what the “incident” had done to our relationship. She got out of her chair and sat next to me on the bed. She put a hand on my knee.

“You know that Villa murdered thousands of innocent people. You know that in any civilized country in the world he would have been sentenced to death and executed—”

“Wrong.” I interrupted. “Many countries now have laws against capital punishment. You and the Society always use that argument,”

Joy decided to appeal to reason. “Anyway, Villa would probably just take our money and ignore any promise he made, and laugh at our threat to kill him.”

Unconsciously, I picked more vigorously at my scab, already having succeeded in removing part of it. The little cut underneath was beginning to hurt. I could smell my own sweat in the heat.

Joy gently poked me in the side. “Yes?”

I turned my head to look at her, and brushed aside a tuft of hair that had fallen over her forehead. “Okay.” I very reluctantly agreed to make Villa our first assassination.

Then, stroking her hair, I sadly pointed out, “I know, sweetheart. I agreed to assassinations in the abstract before we traveled to this age, but now I’m confronted with an actual living human being. Besides your persuasive arguments, I will comfort myself with the thought that in the Old Universe we came from, someone actually did assassinate him, but not until he organized a rebellion and committed more mass murder.”

Joy answered, “Good. One down, one more to go.”

I got up and went to the bathroom to get a drink of water. It was tepid, but my body demanded it. I came back and took the only chair and faced Joy sitting on the bed. “You mean Emiliana Zapata, I’m sure. He was also assassinated in the Old Universe, but not before he led his own revolution and many rebellions that cost many lives.”

“I know,” she said, but I ignored it.

I wanted to be sure she remembered the history of this man, and I easily fell back into my lecture tone. “After one rebellion he set himself up as a local warlord. He thus was a potential danger to a new democ-

matic government, and, like Villa, was a mass murderer. He and his forces were not just content with killing those they did not like or their political enemies; they often subjected them to death by excruciating torture. They liked to tie their prisoners over the maguey cactus, which would grow a foot or more at night and kill the victim, inch by inch.”

“I know.”

I was on a roll, but her tolerant expression stopped me cold. “Okay,” I ended lamely, “do we assassinate Zapata also?”

Joy didn’t answer; she didn’t need to. Her expression said it all.

I threw up my hands and admitted unhappily, “If we do in Villa, it makes no sense to let Zapata live.” I was almost shocked at that sentence. We were acting like gods.

“And we know where they are,” Joy pointed out.

My chance, and I didn’t say “I know.”

Joy got up and went to her holster purse on the chest of drawers. She took out a neatly typed sheet of paper bearing a grotesque caricature of Sherlock Holmes smoking a pipe and underneath, in Old English script, “*La Agencia Detective De Labastida*—The Labastida Detective Agency.” We had paid the agency an absurd sum for this report. They had delivered it to the hotel several days ago.

She ignored the introductory part of the report and read aloud, “Villa is located some thirty miles southeast of the city of Queretaro; in San Juan del Rio, Durango State, where he is visiting a nephew. This is located in Mexico’s central region. He is expected to stay for two more weeks. We also found Zapata, who is currently a small landowner in Anenecuilco, Morelos State”

Joy tossed the paper on the bed and said cheerily, “There they are. Let’s go get them.”

Her cheer instantly reminded me of her “Oh. Fun” exclamation during the “incident.” I fought the sudden explosion of hot emotion. My face must have paled with the struggle. I put my head in my hands and gradually pushed the image of the murdered boys down and back. Sweat dripped from my nose. I looked up at her from under my brows and replied weakly, “You mean *you* want to kill them?”

She knew what was going through my mind. She dropped off the bed onto her knees in front of me, took my sweat-damp hands, and replied softly, “I thought that was what *we* were about.”

The incident, the incident—I had to keep fighting it, to keep it down, out of my mind. I stood up and pulled my hands free. I said as evenly as I could, “Give me a few moments to think about it.”

I went into the bathroom again, filled the sink with water, and dunked my head into it, splashing water over my hair. I took off my shirt and wiped my torso with a washcloth. I brushed a towel over me a couple of times, then returned to the bedroom, still damp.

Joy hadn't moved from the floor. She had one arm draped across the chair seat with her head resting on it. She looked up at me as I sat next to her on the floor and leaned against the bed. Her eyes were wet; she had been crying.

I had partially succeeded in my own emotional battle and I could think again. I put my arm around her and, as though nothing had intervened, I continued our discussion of what to do. I tried to be reasonable. "Villa and Zapata are very dangerous men. They no doubt have many armed men around them, are armed themselves, and would shoot you if they didn't like your laughter. And, my darling, we are conspicuous. Even if we got in range through some subterfuge, whether we would get out is another question."

Joy turned her sad, wet eyes on me. I had carried the towel with me and tried to wipe her eyes and face. She reached up and moved my hand away, not taking her eyes away from mine. Her eyes narrowed slightly as they bored into mine; she was using her eyes to communicate her sincerity and depth of feeling. I understood. I would have had to be blind, not to.

Her strained voice broke the silence. "Villa murders Chinese just because they are Chinese. I want to see the look on his goddamn face before I kill him. When I tell him sweetly that I am Chinese. Tell me, dearest. Am I bad or evil for wanting to do that—for wanting to kill this mass murderer?"

"No. And I understand. But, you would have to do it without me. That would most likely mean your death without someone to cover your ass, but I think you're wrong—not evil or bad, just wrong—and I'm not going to participate. And you aren't going, either. I agree that they should be killed. That's it. We will contract with someone to do it."

She stiffened and her face hardened. Lightning fast, her eyes threw daggers at me. She snapped, "What? You don't trust me? Are you afraid I'll kill some little children as well? You're not going to tell me what I can and cannot do."

The "incident" again. It will always be there between us, I thought. I pushed it to the back of my mind again.

As she scowled at me, I gently rested my hand on her shoulder and tried to do what she had done to me. I locked my eyes on hers and peered into them. I tried to use them as a tunnel through which my feeling could flow into her heart. My mind was useless at things like this; I wanted to touch her love for me, and all that surrounded it. Speaking just above a whisper, I told her, “Please understand, sweetheart. I love you. I couldn’t stand it if you were killed. It would kill me also, whether I lived or not.”

I sighed, and continued. “These guys are dangerous. I know you’re trained to handle such people, but nothing can protect you from being shot by a sniper or from men rushing you on horses with their guns blazing. There are those whose business is assassination, at the right price. Baby, we can hire the *acordada*; they’re a group of professional assassins attached to each Mexican state. Governors and police often pay them to kill personal enemies and political opponents.”

She was melting. I had to end this just right. “Why endanger yourself and our whole loving life together, when money will do the trick?”

Her anger had evaporated. She broke eye contact and looked down at nothing, fidgeting with the ruffles on her sleeve as though seeking an errant thread with her fingers. She exhaled noisily. “Okay.”

I couldn’t believe how that one word affected me emotionally. I felt exhilarated. I knew we weren’t playing one of our games. I knew that this was not a win-lose competition between us—so much more was at stake. Yet, I couldn’t convince my emotions of that. I felt I had served the winning point in the Wimbledon tennis championship.

We could surmount the “incident.” Our love was stronger than that; so strong it bound Joy to me, even to the extent that she would not take personal revenge on a mass killer who murdered Chinese on sight.

I fell against her. I buried my face in her hair. I felt it on my face and smelled its rich aroma. I stroked her back. I was so happy. Everything came down to three words. “I love you.”

“I love you too, my dearest.” She moved her head so she could take my face in her two hands and give me a long, tender kiss.



That afternoon, we kept our appointment at the Labastida Agency. After contracting with us for the information on Villa and Zapata, they knew how much we were willing to spend, and that we were very accommodating. They had no idea why we wanted to meet. I did when I

had Sal set it up. Joy didn't at the time, but I think she thought it had to do with precisely identifying Villa and Zapata before we killed them.

We met with Labastida himself in his cramped and dirty office, which was so hot we had to constantly fan ourselves. It had the sour smell of a men's gym locker room after summer football practice. A bare, dim bulb hung from the ceiling, and stronger light came from an accountant's lamp on his scratched desk, which was overflowing with papers. My first reaction was to wonder, *Why the hell did Sal contract for us with this company?* Then I remembered their report to us, which had been fast and well done.

Labastida was a fat old man with a gray thatch of hair on top of his head. He wore a poor-fitting dark blue suit. He didn't get up from his desk. After introductions in Spanish, he told me to call him Jose. Our small talk—during which he ignored Joy entirely—may have set a record for brevity.

Afterwards, he asked me in English so perfect that I would have thought he was an American, "What do you want?"

I delicately expressed *our* interest in having the criminal Villa and the troublemaker Zapata "disappear permanently." I handed him his company's report on their locations.

He knit his brow and gave me a cold, calculating frown. "Why?"

"It is the secret business of our government."

He eyed me shrewdly. "Why doesn't your government do it, then?"

"They are, through us. That's why we are here. Now, how much do you want to do this?"

"Ten thousand," he said firmly.

"If we give you this money, how will you assure us that you have carried out our contract?" I asked him.

He smiled slowly. "We will send you their teeth. All of them."

"Okay, we will give you ten thousand dollars now, and when we receive the teeth and have checked them out through other Mexican . . . contacts, we will telegraph another ten thousand dollars to your bank's address with the deposit details you give my *partner*, here. You will mail the teeth to this address." I gave him a post office box address in San Francisco.

Fortunately, he had no way of knowing that we knew nothing about the men's teeth and had no other contacts.

I knew Joy was insulted by this man's rudeness. It was her turn, and she put special vigor into it. Silently, her eyes like hot coals, she whipped out her tactical knife and thrust its unwavering point a foot

from Jose's Adam's apple. He had started to reach into his desk drawer, but stopped when he saw her deadly eyes and the way she shook her head. At that moment, her eyes would have stopped a speeding Mack truck.

Intentionally injecting a touch of hopefulness into her voice, Joy spoke softly what would become our standard threat: "If *I* find out that you have falsified the teeth or if either of these men later shows his face anywhere, our government will have others like *me* track you down and kill you by *la muerte de mil tormentos*—death of a million torments—by tying you over an ant colony."

He hesitated, obviously shaken. Finally, scowling, he wrote down the information we needed and tried to hand it to me without looking at Joy's face or knife. She intercepted it, and with a slow flourish, put it in her purse.

I opened my traveling bag and took out a roll of bogus thousand-dollar bills, counted them off, and handed them to Jose. I wished we had planned for Joy to do this. I was also irritated by his treatment of her.

He looked at me, glanced at Joy out of the corner of his eye, then swiftly shifted his gaze back to me. "These men are nothing. Stupid peons. Why are they so important?"

I thought he'd keep wondering if I didn't answer, and that would not be good. "Villa has insulted a high official of my government," I told him, "and Zapata has raped the daughter of another official's sister."

Gee, I'm good.

"Oh, of course," Jose said.

And we got up and left without another word.



We had one last appointment the next day, and I suggested to Joy that we go back to our hotel so I could take another bath. She wanted one also.

The fight over the assassinations still haunted me, but it faded with the bath we took together and the sweet kiss she gave me when we dried each other off.

I had flown high with our morning success, was brought down with our fight, and again soared with its conclusion. That was emotionally. Intellectually, I bluntly recognized that my sweetheart, my mission and life partner, my soul mate, was bloodthirsty.

After we ate supper and talked about how well things had gone in our mission, I told Joy, "I want to go to sleep early. Will you join me?"

She replied, "No, I have some things I want to do on my laptop. I'll join you later."

"Fine." I went to bed and fell sleep without difficulty.

I had not the slightest suspicion, not the minutest inkling, that Joy had lied to me.

Chapter 30

One more appointment to go. It was the most dangerous. We would either succeed or die. I was even more terrified. We had been so successful; Joy and I had surmounted my worst nightmare about us, and I knew how fate worked. Now was the time for it all to end.

Our appointment was with General Victoriano Huerta. Again, to aid Joy's memory, I gave her a mini briefing, this time on Huerta's background in the Old Universe: "As President Madero's general in military command of Mexico City, he rebelled in 1913, and forced Madero to resign. He then seized the presidency himself, soon after someone assassinated Madero."

"I know," she said laconically, looking at a fingernail.

General Huerta was on leave and staying in a lavish apartment a block away from Labastida's office. An armed military guard showed us into his apartment. No frisking. I was surprised. But with an armed guard carrying an American Army 1903 Springfield rifle (Joy later informed me) and fixed bayonet, Huerta must have felt secure, especially since I was alone. Women didn't count. I bet he also kept a gun or two on him, in easy reach.

Huerta awaited us in the middle of his living room. He immediately walked up to Joy and, taking her hand, kissed it, and purred in Spanish, "My pleasure in meeting you," he said, looking earnestly into her eyes, his small mustache twitching. Dropping her hand with seeming reluctance, he focused on me, shook my hand vigorously, and greeted me warmly as well. I guessed that as far as women were concerned, Labastida and Huerta embodied two sides of Latin American culture.

"Please sit down." He gestured at the leather covered divan. Huerta sat in a loosely cushioned, leather arm chair opposite it. His guard remained inside, stationed at the door, rifle held across his chest.

"Can I get you something to drink?" he asked. "I have a bottle of American cola. We now get it here."

I declined, and Huerta engaged me in Spanish small talk, although his eyes slid often to Joy. After a few minutes spent discussing how hot

the weather was in Mexico City; Javier's Restaurant that, he claimed, had the finest food in Mexico; and other mundane topics, he finally asked in English, "Why do you want to see me? I understand you have a proposal I will find very interesting?"

I was wary of this man. I knew his violent history and I would not trust him to pet a puppy. I sat back and rested my chin on my hand in such a way that I had fast access to my shoulder holstered H&K. I glanced at Joy's right hand, which she'd crossed over her lap. It was only inches away from the waist of her dress and her knife. We were ready.

"How much money do you need to take up permanent residence in Spain?" I responded frankly.

He frowned. "What are you talking about?"

I saw his hand slide to the edge of the cushion he was sitting on.

I swallowed, took a breath, and answered calmly, "My government knows that someone will assassinate you if you stay here. Therefore, it is willing to help you move to a home in a new country, and to make it worth your bother."

"Sergeant, arrest them," Huerta commanded in Spanish, and the guard leveled his rifle, pointed it at me, and stepped toward us from Joy's side of the divan. Huerta also pulled out a gun that he'd had hidden under his chair cushion. He held it loosely in his hand as he snarled, "Which of my enemies sent you?"

Joy had worn a feminine pink satin-weave skirt and a white lady's blouse, and had been sitting in her usual and deceptive proper ladylike posture: back straight, hands neatly overlapping on her lap, legs crossed daintily at the ankles. Perhaps for these reasons, the guard ignored her.

So fast it would make a lightning bolt jealous, Joy launched herself off the divan in a blur of pink and white. Flashing under the sergeant's gun hand, she grabbed it and pushed it slightly up in case the rifle discharged. Then she paralyzed his arm with an overhead twist that sent the rifle flying out of his hand and onto the divan.

Not bad. I'd make that two seconds, I thought stupidly as the bayonet barely missed me. I flung myself onto Huerta's gun at an angle, just in case he pulled the trigger, and wrenched it from his hand. He was old and slow.

Okay. So it took me three seconds.

Joy grabbed the guard's rifle off the divan and pointed it at the guard, the bayonet pricking his stomach. "Turn around and put your hands on the wall," she commanded.

Without thinking, I yelled at her, “Don’t kill him!” I needed no psychoanalysis to understand where that came from.

Joy shot a perplexed glance at me over her shoulder, then immediately looked back at the soldier. He hadn’t moved, so I translated her order into Spanish. He did what she ordered.

I sat back down, put Huerta’s gun on my lap, and looked at him. I hoped he couldn’t tell how rapid my heart was pulsating. My calm voice amazed me. “We represent no one in Mexico. We are secret agents of a government that has your best interests in mind. Stay here, and you will die. Leave Mexico with the money we will give you within one month, and you will live—in luxury. What is your price?”

Huerta rubbed his hand over the bald front of his head, removed his round, metal rimmed glasses, and glowered at Joy, thrusting his chin at her. He finally asked what I would hear often. “Who is that . . . woman?”

“She is like me—a secret agent. And my partner. Name your price.”

Huerta stared at us in bewilderment at first, his narrow lips clamped together, his mustache seeming to weigh down their corners. Then a calculating expression slowly formed on his square face. He nodded in the direction of his sergeant, still facing the wall, and put his finger on his lips.

Joy saw this. She put down the gun, placed one hand on the sergeant’s upper neck, and dug her fingers into the switch on his carotid artery. He collapsed onto the floor, unconscious.

Huerta looked down at his sergeant, then at Joy, and shook his head, throwing off a few drops of sweat. I could smell them. Then he eyed me, still looking skeptical. “Five hundred thousand dollars?” he threw out, his shoulders seeming to tense over this impossible wealth he expected us to reject immediately—but he had to start at some figure.

“Agreed,” I said without hesitation.

Huerta’s hunched shoulders jerked upwards. His eyes widened as his eyebrows rose, and his thin lips parted. Gesturing with both hands to display his amazement, he blurted, “You will pay me that much to leave?”

We have him. James Bond, move over.

“Yes,” I responded. I told him we would transfer the money into his account, and then asked for the details.

He moved dreamily to a cabinet, took out a leather-covered record book, and wrote on a sheet of paper what we needed to know. He tried

to give it to me, but Joy, now holding her own gun, reached over with her free hand and took the paper. She slipped it into her purse.

“That ends our business,” I said.

We rose, and Joy varied her routine. Holding her gun in her left hand, she swiftly pulled her throwing knife from her leg sheath and threw it across the room into the portrait of President Díaz. It embedded itself in the middle of his nose.

As Huerta stood gaping, I commented, “That normally would have been right between the eyes, but she’s a little off today.”

Joy ignored me as she calmly strolled over, pulled the knife out, and let him see her put it in her sheath after cleaning the point. She then made sure he understood the consequences of remaining in Mexico. “If you don’t go, *we’ll* assassinate you. And it won’t be pleasant, or quick.”

Huerta’s eyes bulged. He stared at us as though we had sprouted devil’s horns from our heads. We took the rifle’s cartridges and Huerta’s gun with us when we left.

We decided to make the hour’s walk back to our hotel. This was the worst part of downtown and we soon regretted our decision. The streets were dirty, rutted, potholed, and thick with horse dung and urine. The air was filled with the flies the excrement drew. Even the bodies of passing horses and their drivers seemed to add to the stench. The usual million wires obscured the sky. Here and there, we passed a plot of dirt overgrown with weeds and littered with rubbish. A few blocks away from Huerta’s apartment, we threw the cartridges and his gun into one of them.



That night, as we lay naked and without blankets or sheets under the mosquito netting in our hotel room, Joy asked, “Why did you yell at me not to kill the soldier? Did you really believe I would kill him with his back to me and his hands up?”

She was tensing up and again the image of her throwing her knife into the back of the boy flashed into my mind and I had to stomp on it and kick it away. I was getting better at doing that.

Lamely, I responded, “I don’t know why. I think it was just a natural response from somebody as scared as I was.”

Joy chewed on that for a moment and then changed the subject. “How much have we spent on this trip?”

"I would say about twenty-one million dollars," I replied after some mental calculation.

"Cheap, cheap," she giggled, "so cheap!"

My smile was so wide, its ends tickled my earlobes. "In the Old Universe, about two million people were killed or murdered in the Mexican Revolution alone. It cost us about ten dollars a head to save all those lives, if we've succeeded. Cheap, indeed."

"Mom would be so happy to know about what we've done," she murmured, and she touched her locket.

"And Gu, and Ludger, and all the others," I added.

"Yes," she whispered.

It was too hot and humid to make love, which still gave me the excuse I needed. Not enough time had passed. But we held hands and I fell into an almost happy sleep.

For the first time since this all started, I dreamed of giving my lecture on war and democide in my history class. As usual, Joy sat at the back of the class. When I ended my lecture, Joy stood up and waved her hand to get my attention. She had on an early twentieth century dress and a ridiculously wide brimmed hat piled high with silk flowers. Her beautiful eyes peeked out at me from under the brim as she asked, "Professor, what about the Mexican Revolution?"

"What revolution?" I asked. "Mexico has been a full-fledged democracy since 1909."

Then I saw her mother and Gu in the class. They stood up and began to clap. And the other students all stood up to applaud, as well. It got louder and louder, and cheers broke out.

I woke up with a start to the fire gong alarm of our brass alarm clock. Not even a deaf person would sleep through it. We had an hour in which to catch the buggy to the train station for our trip home. Sal had already left for Vera Cruz to conduct more of our business there. We were done, and I should have been the happiest I'd been since arriving in 1906. I wasn't.

Chapter 31

*Hirobumi assassinated in Korea . . .
military demand annexation, more power
. . . politicians overshadowed.*

Asahi Shinbun, October 26, 1909
Old Universe

We headed for home, what passed for our home in this New Universe, the apartment in San Francisco, the city of dark alleys and poorly lit streets. I was so ignorant. So dumb.

The return train trip from Mexico was better than the trip down. This time our first class tickets got us a compartment in a newly added sleeping car, complete with two bunks that pulled from the wall when we were ready for them, and a water stand, sink, and makeup mirror. What didn't change was the humid heat, the smoke from the engine when we left the window open and the wind blew into our compartment, and the infernal rush to shut the window when we entered a tunnel. Above all, there was the monotonous clickity-clack of the wheels.

Since we had the privacy of our compartment, Joy and I tried to sleep together, hugging each other, the first night on the train, but the bunk was just too narrow, even for a contortionist like her. Not many fat people in this country or age, I suggested to her.

So, being the gentleman I am, I gave her the bottom berth and took the top one. As I lay in my bunk that first night on the train, the success of the whole Mexican experience still fresh in my mind, I couldn't help thinking again of the Society and my decision to join Joy on this mission. Yes, they all would be happy about what we had accomplished so far. We had done what we planned and the future here looked rosy, but this was still 1908 and the Revolution broke out in 1910, the year of the next Mexican presidential election. Much could happen before then, and to be honest, we might have actually made things worse.

But so far, the Society would be pleased. Some of them might even support Joy's murderous obsession with rape. But we'd straightened that out between us. Joy now knew how I felt, which she really hadn't known before. It was done; we could move on. Right? That's what I thought.

I think I actually had moved on. I felt happy that first night on the train. Almost giddy. My mind relaxed, and pretty soon the clickity-clack, clickity-clack put me to sleep. I might even have been smiling.



During the one week of train trips and transfers from Mexico City to Mexicali, we had a chance to review the Society's Plan for our next action, and my revision of it.

"It has to be Japan," Joy pronounced.

Joy should know. She had been with me throughout the planning, ready to replace me in carrying through our plans if something should happen to me. I had the mission notebook, though, and I don't think she had looked at it since we arrived in 1906. There was much she didn't know or had by now forgotten.

Finally, I thought at the time, now, with my incredible knowledge of history and Asian Studies, with my awesome research, I'm the expert. Joy's the student. All that I suffered under Sergeant Phim has now passed. My turn. Move over, student Phim, for Professor Banks. None of these happy thoughts showed on my face, or in my manner, of course. I'm too nice.

"Yes," I said serenely. "Intervening to avoid the Mexican Revolution and the many years of authoritarian rule that brought it on was one thing, but with Japan, we face a series of events that led into the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, and her attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The first of these events will occur soon, if we don't intervene there also." I leaned forward. "Now, we have a company office in Tokyo, with eleven Japanese employees engaging in import/export affairs for us. We have also secured Japanese bureaucratic permission to establish a similar office in Korea."

"Dearest, I know all that," she said, then added to prove that she did, "Most of the employees in the Korean office are Japanese—part of the bureaucratic agreement."

Of course. My runaway mouth. She made the trip to Japan to set up those offices.

Her response got me off track. “Yes, and I still remember your complaints about the horrible boat trip both ways, to set up our offices. How many men propositioned you? And the Captain! Sweetheart, are you sure you weren’t wiggling your behind too much?”

Oh-oh. I thought I was joking, but then I remembered flirting was to her as meowing is to a cat. She didn’t think I was kidding at all.

Joy crossed her arms, then she crossed her legs. Her eyes flared. “Why, you bastard! Do you think I go around trying to screw any man within reach? Don’t you think I have more pride than that? How do you get off anyway, suggesting it?”

Smoke began to come in the train window (*How appropriate*, I thought) and Joy got up and slammed the window down with all her might. The coach car lurched.

Bad track, I hoped.

Then Joy dropped roughly down on the seat and crossed her arms again. “You should talk. Hands told me how the women in Vienna flocked around you like park pigeons wanting to be fed. *You* must have been wagging your joy rod.”

Then both of us realized what she had said. I burst out laughing, perhaps a little louder than called for. Her face softened gradually, and she began to giggle.

My chance. “Sorry, baby. I was joking. Anyway, as far as I’m concerned, no one comes close to matching your attractiveness.”

I was getting good at this.

Quickly, I shifted forward again and consulted my mission notebook to change the subject. She was sitting across from me, so I got up and sat next to her.

“Here.” I showed her the first page. “This is the outline that I made. Note the rise and fall of Japanese governments, parties, and the military figures that were significant in the growth of Japanese militarism and right-wing nationalism. And all these figures played a role in the final Japanese invasion of China and the later attack on Pearl Harbor. Note that many moderate and opposition politicians and military leaders were assassinated in the years 1908 to 1937.”

Joy still was having trouble getting over my joke. She clamped her mouth shut for a few minutes and didn’t even look at my outline. She stared out the window at the smoke swirling by. Finally she decided to drop it and go along with what I was talking about. She uncrossed her arms, looked at me, and asked rhetorically, “We’ve got to start with Korea, right?”

Whew.

“Yes, Korea is it,” I said. “By now, 1908, Japan has turned Korea into a protectorate. No one has protested this except the Koreans, and in 1910 Old Universe, Korea becomes a Japanese colony.”

“Let’s see,” she mused. “Japan now is very sensitive to the world, and particularly to American opinion. In the Old Universe, however, European powers and especially the United States ignored what Japan was doing in Korea. So, one of our tasks is to foment elite American opinion hostile to a Korean takeover.”

I nodded. *I thought she would have forgotten that.* I got more detailed. “Ito Hirobumi is a historical pivot. He is the venerable Japanese statesman and oligarch who negotiated a modified protectorate status for Korea in 1905, and became its first Japanese Resident General. He strongly opposed outright annexation by the military, and finally resigned his post in 1909. In October, on a trip to Manchuria to confer with the Russians, he was assassinated at Harbin as he was getting off a train.”

“I know.” She added, “General Ahn Choong-kun of the anti-Japanese Korean Righteous Army did it.”

Damn, she remembered that also. “Still my best student.” I smiled at her.

I added, “The Japanese captured, tortured, and finally executed him. The assassination provided the pretext for annexation of Korea. Here, I have in my notes a headline translated from the Old Universe *Asahi Shinbun* of October 26, 1909.”

I waited for Joy’s eager “Hey, I want to hear that,” but she only scratched her nose and waited slack-eyed for what she knew would come even if she took out her gun and shot a hole in the notebook.

Professor’s lot. I read it anyway. “Hirobumi assassinated in Korea—military demand annexation, more power—politicians overshadowed.”

Joy absently watched the cactus-littered desert slip by the window, and responded, “So, we prevent Hirobumi’s assassination. We give aid to the Korean Righteous Army that is fighting a guerrilla war for Korean independence. And then they can recruit abroad and buy weapons.”

“Right. Both actions will defeat the demands of the Japanese military and nationalists for the annexation of Korea. Which will help weaken, if not deter outright, Japan’s imperial desire for Manchuria and China.”

I consulted the notebook again. “Another political pivot in Japan during this period was the elections of 1908, in which the political party of the moderate prime minister, Saionji Kinmochi—”

“Dearest,” she interrupted, and held up her finger, “you pronounce Japanese like you’re sneezing. Don’t embarrass me in Japan. Its sa-e-own-gee keen-mo-che—as in cheese—without emphasis on any syllable.”

“—Prime Minister what’s-his-name. His party was formerly headed by Ito Hirobumi.” I waited, but she said nothing about my pronunciation of Ito’s name. She’d obviously embarrassed herself by interrupting me before.

I went on, “The party gained control of the lower house of parliament. But, the most powerful oligarchs, who actually controlled the government for the emperor, wanted a prime minister who was more supportive of the military. Sa-e-own-gee Keen-mo-che—as in cheese—resigned this month in the Old Universe, but here in this New Universe he has been hanging on with the fifteen million dollars you secretly sent him to garner support.” I was laughing so hard I could hardly continue. “Even the old oligarchs are susceptible to pretty young women and bribes, if they’re large enough.”

Joy kept a straight face, and responded wryly, “I know.”

No sense of humor.

She asked, “Didn’t the Society’s banker, Ed, say that the best plan for Japan is virtually no plan?”

“Yes,” I replied, leaving the laughter behind. “Japanese politics are full of factions, bureaucrats, oligarchs, secret societies, and the military, all entwined within their unique culture like threads in an oriental rug.”

I looked at her. No smile or groan.

“Oriental rug,” I repeated.

Joy lifted an eyebrow. Well, I got some reaction.

I resumed. “We’ll do what we can about events upcoming in about a year or two, and then wait to see the results. And then, if it looks like Japan is moving to invade Manchuria, we intervene at that point. And we also wait and see regarding Japan’s potential invasion of China. What we are now doing to help Prime Minister Saionji . . .” Now, I did pronounce that well, if I do say so myself, “. . . and what we will do about Korea may be enough to weaken the oligarchs, control the military, and get democracy on its way. We’ll see.”

We had many such mission-oriented conversations, often interspersed with Joy’s “I know.”



When we returned to our office in San Francisco, we made sure all the funds we promised to send to Mexico had been sent as we'd telegraphed. We also secretly sent another ten million dollars to our office in Japan to support Prime Minister Saionji's party and to bribe the oligarchs.

We continued to build up our business and our offices in Europe. I spent most of my time signing papers, monitoring our business, and making sure our executives knew what we wanted done, while Joy concentrated on overseeing the mechanics of our true mission. Our Tor Import & Export Company had a good staff, and this type of business was thriving with the growth in communications and new ships that speeded up international travel. People were becoming more interested in foreign cultures and other ways of life.

Utilizing our business profits, my stock trades, and the Society's jewels and gold—we rarely used the counterfeit money now—we were growing rapidly as a company and beginning to attract public attention. In the time we had been gone in Mexico alone, I had made eleven million dollars on the New York Stock Exchange, but I lost four million on purpose. Since then, counting both company profits and profits from my stock trading, we had made many millions more than we had so far spent in Mexico and Asia combined.

The memory of the rape attempt on Joy in Mexico and the associated horrible images rarely intruded into my thoughts anymore. Between Joy's constant love, a resumption of our lovemaking, and the effect of returning to our apartment, I came to accept what she'd done and what she was as one comes to accept many bad things about their loved one that in isolation one would condemn. I had faced it and realized that she was my love and my partner, and we had a job to do together.

I never questioned why she now sometimes seemed moody, nor did I wonder why she spent an unusual amount of time on her laptop computer after I had gone to sleep.



We boarded the *Oakland* at San Francisco's Pier 7 in September 1909, and soon we were on our way to Japan via Shanghai. I hated traveling this way. This trip would take about two weeks each way and

was without modern communications except the wireless telegraph, which we sent messages on as often as the captain allowed. That was not often enough, even with a special surcharge we paid him.

Our Japanese office telegraphed us that they had arranged our meeting with Ito Hirobumi, who must have accepted our offer of two thousand dollars for the appointment. A buxom Japanese girl of nineteen, Joy told me, delivered the money, and let Ito know in the usual Japanese shadow play that she was part of the deal. Joy exclaimed, "You men!"

"Excuse me," I responded, "but wasn't she a woman?"

Damn, what a dirty look.

About halfway between China and Hawaii, we ran into increasingly strong winds and high waves. Soon, the wind reached over a hundred miles per hour and drove the rain horizontally. The wind tore at the ship, blowing overboard anything that was loose. When we ventured on deck, the rain felt as though it was sandblasting our skin. We tried to protect ourselves against the rain and raging torrents of spray and spume by clinging to handrails in an open passageway that ran between both sides of the deck at the stern.

Although midday, everything merged into a dark, watery gray and we could not see from one end of the ship to the other. The captain had steered the ship head-on into the waves and wind when it was obvious there would be a big blow. At the stern, we had the bulk of the ship protecting us against the fantastic wind, rain, and charging sea, but as the waves rose into towering, white-capped mountains, even this was not safe. But we were not going to retreat into any closed passageway that would be a coffin if the ship suddenly sank.

The ship twisted and lunged, and sometimes seemed to be hanging in air. For hours, it shuddered and shook and groaned like a huge beast attacked by a pride of lions trying to claw and bite it down. It would rise almost straight up on a raging forty or fifty foot wave, then plunge like a roller coaster down the other side, burying its bow deep into the frothy sea. There it hesitated, groaning and screeching throughout. We could feel the shuddering in the deck plates beneath our feet and whatever we were gripping for dear life—each time, we thought we would sink. Then the ship would shake off the tons of seawater and begin its heavy climb up the next mountain of foaming sea.

The captain was in the fight of his life just to keep the ship centered on the oncoming waves. One slight deviation to left or right, a small granting of the ship's sides to the lethal waves and deadly wind, and we

were fish food. We would be rolled over under the waves like a barrel over Niagara Falls, never to come up again.

I was certain this would happen.

We refused to go to our cabins when ordered, and stayed close to the lifeboats. They surely could not be launched in these waves and wind, but they were floatable and we hoped that with our life preservers on, we could stay afloat long enough to find either the debris of the lifeboats or other wooden debris from the ship that we could use for support. I would do anything I could to make sure Joy survived.

All I could do was hope. But living through the hell of wild rain, wind, and waves, hope was only a mental surcease. I thought we both were going to die.

It was all I could do to hold to the railing, or whatever was bolted down. When the ship was at the bottom of its plunge and there was a moment of shuddering grace, I kissed Joy's streaming wet face and screamed into the wind, "I love you!" and gloried in her telling me how much she loved me, and what a great life we'd had together.

Our noses and mouths filled with salt-laden air and water, and we vomited standing up, holding onto the railing and each other. The wind-driven spray pulled the vomit away from our mouths and washed it from our bodies. We gagged constantly. There was no such thing as dry heaves—everything was wet.

The ship did almost sink. When the waves calmed five hours later, the ship was taking on so much water that the pumps barely kept up. The freight had also shifted and we were low at the bow and only three feet above water amidships. Everyone available formed a human chain from cargo hold to railing, throwing overboard everything that could be lifted. The wind and waves had carried away parts of the superstructure and a freight crane, and a damaged engine limited us to no more than six knots. The captain said we had lived through a typhoon; another hour in it and we would all be at the bottom.

We had been blown far off course. Almost wallowing, we were met by an American warship twenty-five miles outside of Aparri, Philippines, the nearest port, and watched over as we slowly chugged toward dock.

This near-death experience was a lesson for us. We were exhausted by our fight for survival and from helping to keep the ship afloat, and too weary to do anything but eat and sleep. When we could finally sit together on the scarred deck, our backs to the ship's structure, and gaze at the peaceful ocean, I said aloud what we both knew.

“You know, sweetheart, the Society has invested so much in our success, and too much depends on at least one of us surviving the next twenty or thirty years. We could potentially save hundreds of millions of lives and be the creators of a global structure of human rights and welfare. I’m almost sick at what we have risked by taking this trip together. Everything, including our great love for each other, is secondary to the mission, to humanity.”

Joy changed her position so that she could put her head on my shoulder. She put one arm around me and ran her other hand through my hair. “I know, dearest.”

I caressed her back, and pressed on. “The storm drove this home to me in a way I hadn’t appreciated before. For my first two years in this New Universe, the mission was in the future and I became preoccupied with my love for you, my practice and training, and our games and fights. Mexico was successful as far as I know; nothing there really threatened the mission’s future. We were incredibly lucky to escape death this time. If we’d died, the mission would have ended before we could even deal with the biggies—World War I and II, and the growth of communism. We must recenter our lives and put the focus back on the mission. All else now seems trivial.” I didn’t want to do more than hint at the “incident.”

“I agree,” Joy responded, her soft, sad voice rising from my shoulder. She raised her head and gave me a long, moist-eyed look. She kissed me on the cheek, and pointed out, “When a mission is risky, including risk due to natural hazards, one of us has to do it alone. I did take one trip to Japan and China without you, to set up our offices there. I didn’t enjoy it, but traveling alone is something we will have to get used to.”

I was about to say something, but she put a finger on my lips. “Now, every trip we take by train or ship has to be alone.”

Tears streamed down her face. We both realized one of us might board a ship one day, and never come back. I barely got out my response before choking up. “Yes, sweetheart. That’s what we’ve got to do.”

It would take one more day for our ship to limp into Aparri, and we spent part of this time discussing how we would handle our separate trips regarding the mission and our growing and demanding import and export company. For sure, we would take separate ships to return to San Francisco. Even our trip to Japan should be completed on separate ships.

In Aparri, Joy purchased a ticket for one of the two passenger cabins on a Japanese freighter returning with lumber to Japan, and I paid double for a ticket on one of the four passenger cabins on an American freighter that would be unloading goods in Manila before sailing to Tokyo.

We had three days before Joy's ship would leave, and we spent them as though on a honeymoon. We found a comfortable hotel, got one room as Mr. and Mrs. Banks, had food delivered to our room, put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on our door, and lived the three days in each other's arms. There is nothing like an acceptance of death and subsequent reprieve to create an appreciation of what one has. As well, we now knew that our mission would separate us for months at a time, and that our days alone together would be too few. So we did not waste this precious time together, not one second. We even neglected the jogging and exercises that we'd done without fail every morning on the trip here, except during the typhoon and its aftermath.

Those three days were the happiest of my life.

Joy almost missed her ship as we hugged on the dock and whispered sweet words to each other. Only as the dockworkers started hauling back the gangplank did we separate. With a wave, she rushed up the gangplank and I next saw her at the ship's railing, waving. I waved and waved and watched her slowly recede as the tug pushed the ship into deeper water. I watched until she disappeared into the distance on the horizon.

We still kept in constant contact through our communication devices. It was not the same, though. I now missed her more than I'd ever believed I could miss another human being, and hearing her voice through my implant only made my arms yearn to hold her.

My world had changed again.



We got to Japan three days apart. When my ship docked, our frantic office chief, Shinseki Watanabe, met me as soon as I left the ship. Joy stood a little behind him—publicly, she was only an assistant and translator. A welcoming smile lit up her face.

"Hurry, hurry," Watanabe insisted in flawless, Yale-taught English, after a rapid bow to me. "We had to change your appointment time. The meeting is in two hours."

"I'm all prepared," I responded, trying to calm his agitation. Joy had informed me of the problem, but I had to put on a show. "Watanabe-san, thank you for the wireless message you sent yesterday. The ship's wireless man didn't know how to handle it, since he had never received a communication for a passenger before. He had to ask the captain what to do. Anyway, as you might have noticed, I'm all dressed for the appointment." I tipped my fedora.

"Got my documents?" I asked Joy. When she pointed to her own large bag, I said, "Okay, let's go."

I wanted to gather Joy in my arms and lift her off her feet and twirl around with her in my arms, madly kissing her. But all Watanabe knew was that she was unmarried and my employee. We had to keep up appearances, especially in Japan, where appearances—keeping face—meant so much.

When I finally got my luggage an hour later, I was beginning to worry, myself. But Watanabe got a fast buggy with two horses, and we sped along the streets to the Daiichi Building across from the moat surrounding the Emperor's Castle. We arrived with only minutes to spare.

With Watanabe in the lead, we jumped out of the buggy and rushed into the building. In a huge reception office, Watanabe bowed to a very thin man in a tailored Western suit, and they barked back and forth. I checked my pocket watch. We made our appointment with two minutes to spare.

I passed this on to Joy in a hushed voice. She shook her head. "That's another close call."

For a man of Ito's eminence, being late was as bad as missing the appointment; it would have been cancelled. Ito probably would only reschedule another one after returning from his trip to Korea and Manchuria. But he'd be dead by then.

"What if we offered him tens of thousands of dollars and a castle in Kyoto, or some such, for an appointment before he left for Korea?" I asked hypothetically.

"He would have turned it down. Our being late would have been an insult, a matter of face. To recover face he'd have to deny the appointment we obviously desired so much."

"Jesus," I said, still trying to keep my voice low. "Two minutes. Two bloody minutes." I sighed. "We can't always be so lucky."

We had another minute to wait before the receptionist, secretary, whatever he was, motioned for me to follow him. Joy was a woman; in Japan, it was up to me to motion to Joy to follow us. I had already

asked Watanabe to wait for us in the outer office. With Joy following me, I was led into a spacious, high-ceilinged office overlooking the lawn, with a view of the palace and its moat across the street.

A very rigid-looking, bespectacled man with a mustache and graying hair had spurned the large roll top curtain desk against one wall, and sat at the head of a massive black lacquered conference table in the middle of the room. On one wall was a huge photograph of Emperor Mutsuhito, and another wall held photos of bemedaled generals and admirals, including famous Admiral Tojo, who sank nearly the entire Russian Baltic fleet in the 1905 battle of Tsushima Straits. No politicians.

Ito Hirobumi rose and stepped away from the table to await our approach. He was tall by Japanese standards, and carried himself with a military bearing.

As Joy had taught me for this occasion, I joined her in giving him the deep bow one of his rank expected, and he gave us a small, condescending bow in return.

“Hajimemashita—How do you do,” he greeted us stiffly, his trailing mustache wiggling with the effort.

Joy returned the greeting and I offered my “Nice to meet you” and put out my hand. He took it and gave it two swift shakes.

Having studied Japanese as one of her Asian languages in preparation for our mission, for the first time Joy lived up to her job title as interpreter. Japanese of Ito’s status were now required to learn English. Japan had committed itself to modernization, and for many the United States was their technological and scientific model. Diplomatic relations with Great Britain also played a large part in this decision. Despite this, many high Japanese preferred to have English translated for them, to give them time to think of a reply, or as a way of delaying the undesirable.

Ito sat stiffly at the head of the table and motioned for us to sit down in one of a dozen red-lacquered, softly cushioned chairs around it. Then he waited, stroking his gray goatee, and I let a few minutes go by.

Through Joy, I finally said, “I am a secret agent for a certain government, and my government’s spies have irrefutable proof that a Korean plans to assassinate you as you get off a train in Harbin, Manchuria.”

I hate idle conversation. Perhaps because I was never good at it.

He just looked at me. Only his nostrils moved. Now I could see why Westerners called Japanese inscrutable.

“Here are the details.” And I gave them. As I waited for Joy to translate, I watched his face transform. His nostrils flared first, then his eyes seemed to disappear as he narrowed them to slits. His heavy brows drew down, his mouth turned into a thin line, and his chin advanced. At one point, I half expected his ears to wiggle. All this as his face metamorphosed from inscrutability to amusement to amazement to anger. It was like watching an animation of the change in the earth’s landforms over billions of years.

“*Haaah. Baka shii,*” Ito finally growled at me, his normally narrow eyes still slits. Then he barked even louder a long response, sounding as though he were giving commands to a company of soldiers.

Joy translated, trying to capture in English his commanding and staccato way of speaking. “He says you’re ‘Silly, absurd. My inspection trip to Manchuria and negotiations with the Russian Finance Minister, not to mention my stop at Harbin, are state secrets.’” She consulted her notes and continued. “‘Only the emperor and two people in the Privy Council know of it. We will find and punish the traitor who told you this.’”

“There is no traitor,” I responded. “We have sources of information that you would not believe. Anyway, your potential assassin found out somehow that you would be in Harbin on October 26, so your trip is not as secret as you suppose. All we are asking is that you change your schedule in secret, to frustrate your assassin.”

His face returned to inscrutability. He sat rigidly upright and stared at me while Joy translated.

Silence followed. I listened to a grandfather clock ticking somewhere in the room, and the muffled sound of a weed whacker.

Weed whacker? Impossible in 1908.

I stole a glance out the window and saw a steam-driven, three wheeled truck on the street between the building and the imperial moat.

“However,” I said, after enough silence had passed to underline my words, “my government recognizes that you will be inconvenienced by this change of schedule and that your government will incur some costs. To cover this, we are willing to reimburse you whatever you feel is reasonable.”

Joy translated and Ito responded to her gruffly, which began a back and forth between the two of them. Her voice always sounded calm and very feminine, especially in Japanese. Finally she turned to me and said, “He wants to make sure that we give him the money so that he can adequately reimburse his government.”

“How much?”

Ito now responded directly to me in English. “Twenty-five thousand American dollars. *Doi shi masu ka*—Do you agree?” he asked, tacking on the Japanese, which Joy instantly translated.

“Agreed,” I said, and put out my hand to shake his.

He looked at it for a long moment as he brushed his other hand over his receding hairline, and then he took my hand in his and gave it two big shakes.

We cleared up the details of how we would transfer the money, and then as we were about to leave, he asked me in Japanese to be his guest later for drinks in the “famous Shinjuku Dancing Swan geisha house.” Joy translated, looking at me sweetly from beneath her long black lashes.

Then Ito added, “Pretty geisha . Plenty like you—*kurabu* you.”

Joy got a flinty look. I raised my eyebrows questioningly.

“I don’t have to translate that, do I? You don’t need me,” she said in a tone that made my nose feel frostbitten. “I’m just your assistant and translator here.”

Oh-oh. I hastened to answer Ito with, “I’m terribly sorry, but since we were delayed in getting here, I have too much business to do before I leave Japan tomorrow. I hope, however, that you will be my honored guest when either I come to Japan next, or you visit the United States.”

Joy didn’t bother to translate.

He stood up, and Joy and I followed. I bowed deeply to him while she gave him a curt bow, about half as deep as mine. He ignored her and stiffly acknowledged mine with his own slight bow. Then I said “*Sayo nara,*” as Joy had taught me, and we left.

We picked up Watanabe in the outer office, exited the building in silence, and climbed up into the buggy that had been waiting for us to go to our own office. On the way Joy asked me in a warm tone that did nothing to melt what her voice had inflicted on my nose already, “Why didn’t you accept Ito’s invitation? It’s traditional for Japanese men and their guests to go out after business and drink themselves into the gutter while whoring around. I’m sure he would have shown you a memorable time. You wouldn’t mind a little Japanese . . . tradition, would you?”

Where did she learn to do this—to stick a verbal knife in my gut and twist it, all in such a sweet voice? It’s part of the female package, I bet. Anyway, time for repair operations.

I put on the most innocent, honest, angelic look I had in my emergency kit. “Baby, I’m not Japanese. I think the way Japanese men treat women is abominable, detestable. I don’t whore around.” And my final bit of honey: “You more than satisfy me, and fill my heart to overflowing with love to boot.”

We jolted along for several minutes in the dusty traffic of horse riders, wagons, carriages, and carts. I was about to comment on how the modern city smog of the Old Universe had replaced the city stench, flies, and dirt of this age when Joy looked at me out of the corner of her eye, smiled, and said, “Dearest, you’re full of it.”

Chapter 32

I should have known she would betray me.

Joy and I had to change our ticketing in Japan, since we now would travel separately. Because she also spoke Chinese, she would travel to Peking to meet with General Jung Il Han, the Korean Righteous Army general who was seeking arms and money from China to fight the Japanese. I would head home.

We each left on our different ships the next day. I got back to San Francisco eight days later. Through our communicators, Joy informed me that she had arrived in Peking two days before and made arrangements to secretly meet with General Han. We agreed to offer him ten million dollars in gold and another twenty million in American dollars, with the usual threat.

I heard nothing from Joy for two days after the meeting, however, and was getting very worried. We had never been out of contact with each other in one way or another for more than ten hours when awake. I was about to telegraph our contact in Peking to investigate, when she finally contacted me.

“KK. Hello dearest, all arranged. Make the transfer of money and send the gold. The details are as follows.”

I wrote everything down, and then asked quite simply, “What the hell happened to you?”

“I’ll explain everything when I get home. Nothing to worry about, dearest. I’m sailing tomorrow on the *China*. Love and miss you.” We stayed in contact while she sailed, but she would not explain why she had not communicated with me for two days.

After her ship docked in San Francisco, we had to clean up some business together at our headquarters. When we were alone in our apartment at last, and had made up for the hugs and kisses the trips had denied us, she took me by the hand and sat me down on the couch.

“Now,” Joy said, “I want to tell you what happened. There must always be truth between us, not only because it is right for us, my love, but because it is important to our mission.”

Now, in retrospect, I have to say that she was the one full of it. It was another outright lie. But I was still blinded by love at the time.

After she said that, she stopped, looked down for a moment, then added, "Please listen and don't say anything until I finish. Okay?"

I couldn't say anything even if I wanted to, I was so concerned about what had happened.

She started, "I met with Han—a real bastard, but we've dealt with his kind before, and it's part of our mission. I made our offer, but he would not believe I was a secret agent and thought I was trying to entrap him for the Japanese. He finally asked me whether my government had trained me as a secret agent, and I said yes. Without a pause, he called in two of his Korean guards and said, 'Tie her up.'

"I put both of the men on the floor in minutes."

Minutes. You took minutes. I thought that it would take that long only if you had a broken leg and a paralyzed arm. Then out of the mental depths where my horrors lay hidden came *What, you didn't kill them?*

But I held my tongue, and realized that what I had thought sunk forever by the typhoon and buried under a mile of sentiment by our subsequent "honeymoon"—the murder of the boys in Mexico—was not.

Joy was wound up and didn't notice the fleeting pain on my face, how my hands balled into fists so tight my knuckles turned white. She continued with, "Han accepted what I said from then on, but he kept trying to find out what country I worked for. He finally agreed to accept the money and our stipulations about how he was to spend it. When I pulled my knife on him and made my usual threat if he stole the money, he simply laughed at me. But I'm sure he also understood our threat."

Joy suddenly leaned forward and put her hand on my arm. "However, John, he said that his cooperation depended on one thing. I would have to sleep with him for three days. I said no without hesitation, and he said, 'Goodbye.' I couldn't believe he would give up all we promised just to sleep with me. I tested him by getting up, going to the door to leave, and opening it. He said nothing, and I left. When I got back to my Peking Hotel room, there were no messages for me. I waited until the last minute, just before I was scheduled to leave Peking, and then I sent a rickshaw driver to him at the Palace Hotel with two words: 'one day.' The rickshaw driver returned with the reply, 'Two days,' and a time and place. After changing my schedule, I went to that place."

“WHAT!” I jerked to my feet, ready to outdo the Vesuvius eruption that buried Pompeii, when Joy gently pulled me back down. It was her gentleness and pleading expression that temporarily capped the volcano. Not what she said.

“Our mission, dearest—think of our mission. It has to come above all else.”

More bullshit, but how was I to know then?

She went on. “Han is from a culture where men are everything and women are only for procreation and men’s pleasure. He saw me as another Asian woman, although I made it clear I was not Asian by culture. You have to realize that, while for some men money and power are everything, for others it is women, power, and money, in that order. He was being very stupid. There was so much at stake for his country, and as a Korean nationalist he should have seen this. But when it comes to women, men will be very stupid.”

At the time, I didn’t realize how really true that was. I sat there, my stomach twisted into a knot, my heart thudding, and my brain blasted by an anger I had not felt before. I sat on my hands. I didn’t trust them. “You fucked him for two days? Did you enjoy your taste of Korean ‘tradition’?” I bellowed.

Joy’s eyes opened wide as she stiffened and clasped her hands. “It was nothing to me. It was only physical, a meaningless exercise. I did nothing but lie in his bed, faked nothing, and refused to look at him. He would have done better paying a prostitute. Even screwing a knothole in a barrel. But I satisfied him, and after two days I left with his agreement to fight the Japanese with new vigor. He gave me a present, but I don’t know what it was. I gave it to my rickshaw driver. Han also gave me some advice. He said I had much to learn about making love.” A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth.

Without pausing, Joy unclasped her hands and continued in a voice a little firmer, a little louder, “I am like a female secret agent in an enemy country during a war, dearest. We are at war with mass murder and needless death, and I must do what I must do as a woman. I was prepared for this. I took the anti-venereal pills that Gu made sure the Society sent in a capsule, and which I packed in my bag, just in case.”

I don’t think I really heard anything of this after I knew Joy had fucked the man for two days. I don’t think I even caught the meaning of her taking those pills with her. I was so angry I lost control. Vesuvius finally erupted and I spewed ash all over San Francisco. I jumped off the couch, kicked a saddle seat chair and broke its leg, and then threw a

book against a wall. I kicked the broken chair again, stomped it, and gladly hurt my foot. My breath came in gasps. I picked up a cushion and beat on it with my fist. I finally rushed into the bedroom, slammed the door, and sat on the bed in utter misery. I had lost all reason. I felt betrayed by what Joy, my beautiful love, had done.

This was different than when she had murdered the boys. Then, it was moral disgust, a blunt hatchet taken to the ethics I thought we both shared. Now I envisioned a fat, old, bald, decrepit, ugly, leering pig fucking her luscious naked body. The image filled my mind and like a fire robbing a room of oxygen, it stole all my thoughts. Only utter, vile, green jealousy remained.

I must have sat there for fifteen minutes before I slowly cooled down and my ability to think snuck frightened back into a corner of my mind. I began to see the necessity of her actions. Yes, yes, it was for our mission. Yes, yes, this New Universe depended on us, and untold millions of lives were at stake. Yes, yes, and all that shit, but I loved her so deeply that the jealousy still remained, screaming and kicking at my thoughts. I still found it impossible to emotionally accept what Joy had done.

The bedroom door opened a crack and Joy stuck her head in, her long black hair hiding part of her face and falling straight down in front of her. Her almond eyes were wide with worry. "Can I come in?"

As stunningly beautiful as she was, she never looked more beautiful to me than at that moment. I could not trust myself to speak, and motioned her in. She entered and sat beside me, took my stiff, cold hand, and simply shared her calming presence with me. I leaned over my knees, propped my other elbow on a knee, and put my forehead in my hand.

The shadows on the wall slowly changed their configuration and school let out and I could hear children laughing and chattering as they walked down Haight Street nearby and there was a world out there and I didn't give a shit.

I began to feel the pain in the foot I'd used to kick the chair, and my hands hurt from being balled into fists for so long. My stomach was living its own life in one of those bubbling mud pools in Yellowstone National Park. I lifted my head from my hand just enough to blather out my heart's misery into it. "I hate this. I want to marry you, spend my life with you, have children with you, raise our family, get old together, share our love. That cannot be, and I'm miserable about it."

Joy was intelligent and knew I meant her and not my hand. I snatched a quick glance at her out of the corner of one red eye as she just nodded at me, understanding and love in her eyes.

After more minutes, I said lamely to my faithful hand, "I know, the mission must come first. We can save the world, as stupid and corny as that sounds, but it's true, we can. And in this my love, our love, cannot interfere."

Then I took back my other hand from her and covered my face with both of them and cried, and Joy put her arm around me and cried with me. That evening we slept hugging each other. It would be weeks, however, before I could make love to her—months before a certain image of her and Han mercifully disappeared.

One evening much later, when I thought I could talk about it calmly, I asked her why she didn't get in contact with me during those two days.

"I couldn't," Joy replied, looking down at her hands as we sat on the couch in our apartment. She fiddled with a long stand of her hair and absentmindedly started winding it around one finger. "I didn't want those two days to be any part of our life. I knew I worried you, but to have talked to you then would have made you part of it. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I think so," I said with a sigh, and we never talked about those two days again.

Years later I found out how successful our efforts for Japan had been. Joy had been keeping up with events in Japan through our Tokyo office and the *Asahi Shimbun* to which she subscribed. She briefed me: "Our money bought a tremendous uproar in the Western press and among politicians, and then in Congress, over the Japanese-imposed Korean protectorate. It bought support for the Korean Righteous Army, which won some surprising victories against the Japanese. Because of this and world opinion, there was an upwelling of opposition among the Japanese people against the military, and Prime Minister Saionji's party won a startling victory by gaining an overwhelming majority of the seats in the Lower House. He grew so powerful that the real rulers of Japan, the oligarchs, were afraid to interfere with his policies. The next year's budget showed a marked decline in proposed military expenditures, and the legislature passed a bill that, with the oligarch's surprising consent—perhaps due to pressure from the emperor—made military membership in the prime minister's cabinet attainable only by the prime minister's nomination and the approval of the Lower House."

Joy was very happy at our success and I joined her in cheers, though my own were a sham. I only noted this victory as a figure to be jotted down in a ledger. I didn't feel proud. I didn't feel like celebrating. I was preoccupied with what I was finding out about Joy. I didn't tell her. Yet.

Chapter 33

Marriage? We did consider it. Would it have made a difference? I think so.

From the end of our Japanese and Korean mission to the New Year of 1911 in this New Universe, we concentrated on building up our business, establishing offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Paris, and other potentially important cities in Europe. We continued to keep a close eye on events there as they exactly followed the Old Universe political chronology prepared by the Society. It was still too early for us to directly intervene, but we continued to pump millions into an anti-war propaganda campaign.

I continued to add to my stock portfolio, which was now too large for even the biggest brokerages to handle. Overall, it was now worth about 600 million dollars. This would have been—would be, that is—about 11 billion in 2002 money. On her laptop computer, Joy did a weekly comparison of the Old Universe's *The Wall Street Journal* stock prices and the same day's stock prices in our New Universe. Since we'd arrived, they matched 100 percent, implying that we hadn't changed the financial sector of this universe yet.

Then in December 1910, Joy came into the kitchen where I was cleaning the burners on our gas range before she prepared dinner, and announced, "It's happened, love. We finally are significantly influencing global events. We have created a New Universe. The correlation over all the New York exchange stocks is down from 100 to 96 percent."

"What caused this?" I asked with a big smile, putting the steel wool I had in a tin bucket on the linoleum floor.

Joy's smile was even bigger. "I tracked this down to companies that had investments or sales in northeast Asia and Mexico."

It was a happy day. She didn't even mind my smudging her shirt with my dirty hands when we kissed each other.



Our company was now the largest import & export firm in the western part of the United States, and we employed throughout the world about thirteen hundred people. Our first three employees were now the leading executives in our firm, and we finally made Hands Executive Vice-president.

When we once had him and the other guys over for a little party, after a couple of Anchor Steam beers he asked me, "Where does all your money come from? You sometimes seem to conjure up much more than our company income justifies. Especially in setting up all those offices in other countries. I know you are not borrowing from banks."

I was careful in my response. "Nothing illegal, I assure you. I dipped into my inheritance left by my very wealthy, aristocratic, European forebears. Then there's my stock portfolio."

He seemed satisfied with that.

As far as Hands and the others in the company were concerned, Joy remained simply my assistant and translator. No one knew for sure that we lived together, although by this time our top employees took our intimate relationship for granted.

Dolphy, his brows knitted, asked me once, "For Christ's sake, why don't you propose to her, boss?" He said this in the same tone he would use to ask, "You're so dumb, how do you manage to cross the street?"

Taken aback, I grabbed the first thing that occurred to me. "Bosses don't marry employees."

"Then promote her," he said. "Jesus, boss, that woman should be your vice-president. Even Hands thinks so."

"She wouldn't take it," I unintentionally replied a little testily. "She thinks her present position gives her all the money she needs, and she enjoys the freedom. She wants to avoid the command on her time an executive position would involve."

He seemed to accept that and never raised the question again. I think he recognized my irritation over it.

But Joy and I did wonder whether we should get married. We always agreed that we might eventually, if our mission worked out well and there was no longer a need for us to intervene. Then we would retire from it all, get married, buy a house, and enjoy each other and the New Universe for the rest of our lives. We might even adopt one or two children if we were not too old.

Anyway, to everyone other than those at the top in our business, we were simply the handsome, brilliant, and savoir-faire boss and his beautiful assistant. As I put it to Joy when she wondered about our getting married, “This relationship makes situations in which we both will be involved easier to handle. You being my wife would call for certain responses from those we deal with, and it also would be a perceived vulnerability that enemies could exploit.”

“Yes,” Joy responded, looking at me through her long lashes, “It wouldn’t have invited you to a geisha house in front of your wife, would he?”

I hastened to move on. “But we could have a secret marriage, you know.”

She sighed and responded, “I know, I know, but it’s unnecessary, dearest. As far as I’m concerned, we’ve been secretly husband and wife since we arrived.”

I kissed her.

The worst problem, of course, was the constant attention men lavished on Joy on her solo trips, sometimes, I’m sure, brought on by her flirting. I had come to accept it as simply the second nature of a woman who knew she was desirable. The older men were the worst. This was solved at my suggestion—I wouldn’t dare demand it (playing a woman demands the expertise of a concert pianist)—by Joy wearing a very large and gaudy wedding ring outside our business offices when I was not around. She varied the ring, usually buying a new one in whatever city she was visiting. She knew I could hardly object to this new jewelry. Also, when she was away from San Francisco visiting one of our offices without me, I paid one of our older female employees to be her chaperone.

We fought over this chaperone thing at first. “What are you scared of?” Joy demanded.

“I’m not scared of you going to bed with some guy. I’m scared of the risk you’re taking by flirting.” I was also jealous, but that was not an argument to make, nor did it make my arguments less valid.

Her eyebrows went up, she put her hands on her hips, and responded in disbelief, “Are you telling me that I can’t take care of myself?”

Sure. Like saying Arnold Schwarzenegger couldn’t handle the neighborhood bully.

“Baby. Even some very frustrated, lovesick eighteen-year-old who doesn’t know martial arts from roller skating could knock at your hotel room door, wherever you are, and shoot you dead when you open it.”

I won that one.

I was getting worried about her health, especially over the last year. She seemed unusually fatigued some days and slept in, canceling whatever morning appointments she had. Although we continued our exercises, she sometimes seemed exhausted afterwards. Her moodiness also increased. So, I asked her how she felt and wondered whether she should consult a doctor. She wouldn’t hear of it. “In this day and age,” she replied, “they might give me a lobotomy for what is merely the flu.”

If only I had known what I do now. I would have preferred a lobotomy.

Chapter 34

China Revolt Growing Fast . . . Aims at republic in place of Manchu Empire . . . Hankow and Han-Yang, with Imperial arsenals, taken . . . Capitals of other provinces in revolt.

■ *The New York Times*, October 13, 1911 Old Universe

As it turned out, Mexico and Japan had been relatively easy. China was the most difficult, and a trap for the unwary. Irony of ironies, I saved Joy's life there.

Joy and I kept our eyes on China. We often discussed when to intervene to encourage its democratic movement. Finally I pointed out to her, "Revolutionary fervor and the democratic movement are peaking. Sun Yat-sen is leading it from Hawaii, where he fled to avoid arrest, and the Manchu Dynasty is tottering."

"I know," she said, a little annoyed. "China is my special area and I do read its major newspapers in Chinese—in Chinese, love—although a month or so late. And let me tell you, since the old empress died in 1908 leaving the throne to two-year-old P'u Yi, his father, as regent, has been weak and unable to control the dynasty and prevent its further decay."

So what if China is her specialty. I am the professor here, I thought stubbornly. I used my lecture voice, which I know always annoyed her, and with a sweep of my hand, I informed her, "The regent's weakness allowed a popular outcry against the dynasty, and to stem this . . ." I smiled at the depth of my knowledge ". . . the regent convened a half elected, half appointed Provisional National Assembly. While not democratic, it was nonetheless a break with centuries-old tradition."

"So what else is new," Joy said, dismissing me. She went back to her perusal of the women's clothes section in the *1911 Sears, Roebuck Catalogue*.

Months later, I rushed to her office. When I opened the door, however, I nonchalantly entered and strolled to her desk. "I just got the wire from our Peking office," I said, shoving it under her nose. "The dynasty has crumbled. There was just one rebellion too many. It called upon the most powerful military leader in China—"

"Let me guess," Joy responded quickly. "It's General Yüan Shih-k'ai, head of the Northern Army."

"Right. The dynasty called upon Yüan to defend it, and appointed him as governor-general of Hunan and Hupeh, two provinces the dynasty still controlled; the National Assembly in Beijing appointed him prime minister. But now, instead of fighting the revolutionaries, he has negotiated with them. He kept his forces motionless while many provinces declared independence."

"I know," Joy said smugly. She picked up a paper from her colonial desk and held it up in front of my face with the thumbs and forefingers of her two hands. It was a wire from our office in Shanghai translating an October 13, 1911 headline in the *Shen Pao* newspaper. It read "China Revolt Growing Fast—Aims At Republic In Place Of Manchu Empire—Hankow And Han-Yang, With Imperial Arsenal, Taken—Capitals Of Other Provinces In Revolt."

"I know" had become one of her favorite expressions. It had become an irritating tick in our discussions. I had been greatly tempted to set her up—to tell her I had to go home early to do some work on the apartment, rent a horse, lead it into our apartment, tie it in the bathtub, and close the bathroom door. Then when she came home, I would nonchalantly say, "Sweetheart, there's a horse in your bathtub." No way was she going to say "I know" to that! Sigh. Never got around to it.

Just to rub it in, weeks later she came into my office with a wire from Shanghai. "He's done it!" Her cryptic comment neatly destroyed any possibility of my saying "I know."

I had to ask, "Who has done what?"

Joy answered, "Dr. Sun Yat-sen has returned to China. And various revolutionary and progressive leaders have elected him president of a new republic. Hooray, love. Democracy is moving forward."

I was so enthused I celebrated with her. I forgot to say, "I know."

On February 12, 1912, I got the wire we had been fervently hoping and waiting for. When our courier gave it to me and I read it, I whooped and actually rushed out of my office to Joy's. She was rushing to my office. We met in front of my secretary's desk, both holding up our wires, hers from Shanghai.

We said it simultaneously: “He’s abdicated.”

Centuries of Manchu rule had ended. Imperial rule was over for China. It happened on February 13, 1912 (China is a day ahead of us), as it did in the Old Universe. Absolutely incredible from an historian’s viewpoint. As far back as the dim past had been recorded, there had been imperial rule of some kind.

We knew the date it occurred in the Old Universe, of course. But this was the New Universe and we couldn’t be sure it would happen on time or in the same way. It was such a dramatic event when it did happen that we did a little dance together in front of my secretary. She must have been embarrassed over our public display and the confirmation of her suspicion. It was a rather intimate thing to do in 1912 between a boss and his assistant. But hell, by then those who worked close to us would have had to have the IQ of a sea slug not to know we were intimate.



We had to leave on the next ships for China; Joy’s the following day and mine the day after. In anticipation, we had already bought our tickets and packed our suitcases.

Now, before leaving, we put aside our little games. That evening, we made sure we both understood what was going on and what we would do. I reviewed what I thought was happening, not to inform Joy, but to get her insights. I consulted my mission notebook just to be sure.

“The pivot of these events is General Yüan. He has the power, and he has already used it to put his generals in charge of local forces within each province. As agreed in negotiations with General Yüan in the Old Universe, Sun Yat-sen will soon resign as president, and Yüan will be elected provisional president.”

Joy nodded, looked at the notebook, and added, “In the next years, if we do nothing, Yüan will have assassinated Sung Chiao-jen, the leader of the most powerful parliamentary party and the democratic movement, next only to Sun Yat-sen in power. He will then try to restore the monarchy with himself as the new emperor.”

I didn’t even notice her dropping of “I know.”

“But,” I noted in response, “the most critical ‘but.’ The military governors would not back him. In 1916 in the Old Universe, they declared each province independent of the central government. This

began the bloody warlord period in China in which these generals fought hundreds of wars and killed and murdered hundreds of thousands of Chinese.”

“So we assassinate Yüan and aid Sun Yat-sen,” Joy said, without any doubt in her voice.

“No!” I said. She had forgotten. “Sun is not a democrat. He believed that the people had to be guided and tutored in democratic rule by enlightened leaders, presumably by him. As leader of the democratic parliamentary movement, Sung Chiao-jen is the real democrat. He leads the strongest parliamentary party, the Kuomintang. But Yüan will have him assassinated, as I mentioned. So General Chiang Kai-shek would eventually take over the Kuomintang and lead it down the fascist road.”

“Didn’t you say in your class and your Ph.D. dissertation—I did read it, you know—that Chiang was responsible for the democide of about ten million Chinese?”

“Yes!” I answered emphatically. I was now so serious my teeth ached with the strain. “Now that the dynasty has abdicated, we assassinate Yüan after Sun resigns the presidency, and support Sung Chiao-jen for president. We also assassinate Chiang, Mao Tse-tung, and Chou En-lai, who would become Mao’s second in command and premier of communist China.”

Joy leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, narrowed her eyes, and tightened her lips into a line. In a cool voice, enough to harden butter, she said, “Now you’re going to tell me,” and she changed her voice to mock mine and swiftly leaned back to imitate the way I gestured, “Baby, it’s too risky. You might be killed. You’re such an incredible creature, the best thing that has happened to man since the invention of fire—”

“Sliced bread, baby.”

“—I cannot let you die.” Then she resumed her normal voice. “Like a Mafia don, you want to contract it out.”

“You got that right,” I replied with some asperity.

She threw up her hands, but didn’t argue it.

I tried to make my case anyway. “As to the assassinations, we now have a large office in Peking and another in Shanghai; we have the resources. We’ll be meeting in Shanghai, where our office can set up an appointment with the secret Green Lotus Society to arrange the contracts. Then we can go together by train to Peking to meet with Sung.

We should have Yüan assassinated right away, as I mentioned. Then we have to persuade Sun to keep the provisional presidency until the 1913 elections, when he should abdicate in favor of Sung.”

Then I stopped talking as I realized what I had proposed. I, Professor John Banks, was going to put out a contract on the head of one famous general who was the ruler of China, and other contracts on two still unknown future mass-murderers and leaders of China—Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Tse-tung, and Chou En-lai. Human beings, nonetheless. I shrugged it off.

There was something else here that I didn't notice at the time. I had fought doing our first assassinations in Mexico. Now, several years later, I didn't even question assassinations. The salient question was who would do them, and that was a utilitarian and not a moral question. I don't puzzle now over why this happened. It was due to our past success in our mission and my feeling that we were on a roll, and I didn't want anything to stop it. It was the result of our growing wealth and influence and my feeling of power. Joy had nothing to do with it. I had profoundly changed.

Joy's thoughts turned elsewhere also. Finally she looked at me and asked in a low voice, “Dearest, why are you coming along? I know this culture and language and you do not. Are you afraid of my doing this alone?”

I didn't know whether I was lying to myself or not, but I responded with, “We will be dealing with the worst of the Chinese underworld, who would be happy to skin you just to enjoy seeing your pain. This has to be done together, not only for the success of the mission, but for your safety.”

Joy saw my point. And I was right.



We took our separate ships, had uneventful voyages, and arrived three days apart in Shanghai. I arrived first and used that time to make the necessary arrangements for our plans through our company office, and to give the appearance of conducting our company business.

Our China mission was more complex than any of the other ones we had or would carry out. We were successful in contracting the Green Lotus Society to assassinate General Yüan for one million dollars, and we got to Sung, who felt the fifteen million he asked for would be enough to cement his power. Sun was the real problem,

though. He finally agreed to resign in favor of Sung and leave China when the Kuomintang won the next election, but only because we indirectly made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Thanks to our secret endowment to Harvard, he received a telegram from its President A. Lawrence Lowell offering him a lifetime chair. He would teach a Chinese politics and history seminar for one of the highest salaries then offered to professors in the United States—ten thousand dollars per year.

But it was the Green Lotus Society that almost ended our lives and our mission. Their leader learned of our wealth during our office's initial discussion with him. He correctly thought we were incredibly rich, but mistakenly believed we carried loads of money and jewelry with us. He knew almost nothing about how money could be transferred from a bank account by telegram.

Once he found out what we were willing to pay for his help, he strong-armed a lowly employee in our company office to keep him informed of our movements. When he found out we intended to take in a play at the Shanghai Ritz in the foreign sector, he set up a trap.

We stupidly missed all the clues. We didn't notice our rickshaw man had almost knocked another rickshaw man over in his eagerness to pick us up when we waved at the crowd of rickshaws outside Peace Hotel where we were staying. We didn't notice how he kept his head up and looking around as he pulled us along Zhongshan Road, unlike most rickshaw men who bent forward, head down, as they jogged along pulling their riders. Nor did we question why he pulled us off the main street into Hankou Lu, and then into a narrow side street. But we were immediately alert when he pulled into a dead-end alley, dropped his pull bars, and ran back out of the alley.

And we were not that stupid about going out. We had our weapons and armored vests.

Three men filled in the space behind us. Three more came out of a door in front of the rickshaw, one of them the size of a sumo wrestler. Two carried what looked like curved scimitars, one had a gun, and the rest had knives whose long blades reflected the dim light. Joy didn't have to ask in Chinese what they wanted.

The men slowly approached, looking as though they expected us to turn over whatever we had in trembling fear. Then they would probably kill me, rape Joy, and then, if they didn't kidnap her for future fun, kill her as well. If we resisted, they would just change the order of things

and take our possessions after they killed me and raped her. These were not like the young boys in Mexico. These were experienced and hardened killers.

I was scared. Now, in retrospect, I don't know why I didn't soil my pants. But I was not petrified, and slowly got down from the rickshaw while Joy got out on her side. The only rational thought I had at that moment was, *Your show, baby. You should have "fun."*

The men stopped moving towards us and carefully looked us over. They were in no hurry. This was their territory and no one was going to intervene, no matter how loud or horrifying the screams. They were enjoying this, looking forward to seeing our fear and hearing us begging for mercy, anticipating the woman's terror as they ripped her clothes off.

Joy shifted her back to the wall five feet away from me so there would be enough room between us for action. I made sure the wall was behind me as well. As the men were in no hurry, neither was Joy. She kicked off her shoes, unbuttoned her skirt, dropped it, and kicked it out of the way. She took off her ridiculous hat and tossed it into the rickshaw. She patted her hair, making sure the side combs and pins holding the bun were secure. She certainly made a show of it.

Joy now stood there in a lady's pink evening blouse closed tightly at the neck, with ruffled sleeves down to her wrists. The blouse hung half over the light blue silk panties she'd brought from the Old Universe. Her leg and hip knives were now obvious.

I couldn't help think what a movie scene this would have made. Probably in our time it would have been an R-rated movie, in which the actress playing Joy took off all her clothes and stupidly let all her hair down. She might even have growled and shown her white teeth. Of course, I would have been leaning against the wall, one foot propped against it, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette.

My mind jerked back to reality when one of the men moved. Joy reached into her holster purse and pulled out her magnum. To my surprise she also took out the red headband she always wore during our practice and kept in her purse. She put it over her head with one hand, twisted it inside out for some reason, and threw her purse into the rickshaw. She now stood staring at the three men on her side, gun held in one hand pointed at an angle and resting on her other hand.

I had my own gun out, holding it in two hands, facing the three men on my side. I pointed at the big one. I swear, I gave another meaning to the term knock-kneed. Yet, it was extraordinary how my mind seemed

independent of my body. It closed in on Joy and the six thugs so absolutely that I would not have been aware of a plane crashing into a building at the end of the alley.

We were ready. Joy sweetly asked the man closest to her in Chinese, “Shi—Yes?”

These men were not going to be deterred by the sight of our guns. They must have confronted foreigners with guns before, and found out how shaky they were with them. And they must have known what Joy had tried to teach me—that the reaction time of someone holding a gun was inferior to the sudden movements of an attacker.

The tall skinny one on my side must have been the leader. He yelled something that surely was the order to attack. Suddenly, zigzagging back and forth as Joy had also tried to teach me to do when confronting someone with a gun, they rushed us.

They simply didn’t know how fast and accurately Joy could shoot with her modern weapon.

Everything now moved in slow motion—each second stretched into a minute as Joy shot the man with the gun, who, deciding to save her for some fun, was aiming at me and got a reflex shot off as his head exploded from her bullet; and particles of brick from the wall to my left sprayed my back and I jerked my trigger an instant later, but nothing; flicked the safety off, fired, missed, missed again, hit one, missed again, while as Joy immediately shot a second one, ducked a thrown knife, stepped aside when the man pulled a second knife, and shot him in the face as he lunged at her with it; and in a split second she spun toward my attackers while one man dodged toward me and I missed again, and Joy shot him just before he sliced me in half with his large scimitar; I saw a glint in the air from the side and ducked down and forward automatically and heard Joy give a hissing grunt just after I shot the one who threw the knife.

That horrible sound from her was the first sound I heard since all this started, only seconds ago. There must have been screams, yells, grunts of pain, gunshots, but I was oblivious. Now I could hear the moans and cries in Chinese from the wounded men.

I did it. We did it. It must have taken only two, maybe three seconds for all that action. Less time than it took to say it, for sure. My whole body shook from the stress of combat and being so close to death. I turned to Joy to give a loud yell of triumph—really a cry of relief. Instead, I gave a horrified cry: “Oh my God!”

The knife I'd ducked had caught Joy by surprise. It was deeply imbedded in her upper thigh. Blood coursed around it. An artery must have been nicked or cut. She hopped on one leg over to her skirt and dropped down on her good side.

Just as I realized what I saw and rushed toward her, she pulled out the knife with a little screech, and then tried to use her skirt to compress the wound. Three of the men were moving on the ground, but I ignored them. I got to her, pulled the gun out of her hand, ran to the rickshaw and threw it into her purse, tossed the purse strap over my head, and rushed back to Joy to pick her up in my arms. Even in this dim light she looked white, almost silver. I knew shock was setting in and that it would kill her before loss of blood did.

Joy tried to resist me, but she no longer had the strength. She yelled in a weak voice, "Kill them, goddamn it! John, shoot . . . them. Kill . . ." I couldn't hear her anymore, and I think she fell unconscious from the shock. Not a good sign. I had to get to the emergency medical store we'd placed in each of our major offices, just for such contingencies.

She was no longer pressing the skirt against the wound; blood streamed out. I got down on one knee and moved her around in my arms so that I could hold her while pressing her skirt against the wound with one hand, and also keep my gun in the other. I stood up with her and ran. Oh God, did I run with her; I could have done so holding a Model T above my head, with the adrenaline saturating my body.

I darted out of the alley, dashed down the street and into the Hankou Lu and right into the chaotic street traffic. I stood in front of a horse and buggy and displayed my gun. The horse abruptly stopped at the sight of this strange, double-headed animal in front of it and stamped its hoofs and neighed and snorted in fright. When the driver saw the blood on Joy, he tried to be helpful. I lifted Joy into the buggy, got in and cradled her on my lap, pressed her dress against the wound, and shouted Ningbo Lu, the name of the street our company office was on. When we reached it, I gestured with my head the directions he had to go and yelled for him to stop when we got to our office.

I can still feel Joy's weight in my arms, her head jostling against my shoulder as I carried her frantically into our office. I still see my blood-slick hand pressing down her skirt, compressing the wound, trembling from the effort.

I can still describe the expressions of shock on the faces of our office staff as they turned and saw all the blood. I hadn't cared what they'd seen then; let them be amazed at my equipment—all that mat-

tered was Joy, still bleeding, whose blood pressure must have been rapidly falling, her pulse increasing and getting weaker, her life disappearing.

I couldn't take her to a hospital. Medical science still had much to learn about shock, as it finally did from treating wounded soldiers in World War I in the Old Universe. Nor did they have the medicine available to me.

I ran into the small supply room, kicked some boxes out of the way, put Joy on the floor, and with the pillows I had shouted for, I got her body inclined with her feet about a foot above her head so that blood would more easily flow to her brain. I turned her head in case she vomited. It was cool in the room, so I tore down a curtain and put that over her to keep her heat in. I hooked her up to a blood pressure monitor, and all I could say when I saw the figures was, "Holy shit." Her systolic was 78; her pulse rate 124.

I tore out the medical instructions from the first aid book in our large kit and did what it said to the deep bleeding. I upset the kit and dumped its contents on the floor and fumbled for the package of surgical gloves. I tried to put them on but couldn't get my fingers in the right places. I had to stop and take a deep breath, slow down and try to read-just my fingers in them. Got them on.

"Apply thrombin-fabrin bandage," the book instructed. I ripped the bandage covering open to release what looked like Styrofoam and as instructed I pressed that into Joy's bleeding wound. On contact with the blood it almost immediately melted and took on the shape of the surrounding tissue. The bleeding began to slow.

I had to treat her shock. I ripped a page on shock from the book. Joy's was due to loss of blood and possibly tissue damage from the knife. "Treat for loss of blood," it screamed at me in red. Use the IV package. And it proceeded with the instructions. Shit, so much to do, so detailed. I could hardly read it, nonetheless find her vein in her lower arm for the intravenous solution. But then there was a reference to another page on what to do under battlefield conditions.

I found that page and ripped that out along with a handful of other pages and tried to focus on the words. ". . . package for intraosseous infusion 250 ml bag 7.5 percent hypertonic saline intraosseous needle sternum (breast bone) or tibia." I had to wipe the sweat out of my eyes. "Shit, she's going to die."

I yelled at Chan Chi, "Quick. Get me something to hang this from above her head. While he set up a hanger tied to a tall lamp, I ripped

open Joy's blouse and pulled apart her armor. I opened a packet containing a povidone-iodine impregnated cotton pad and wiped her chest with it. Then I grabbed my right wrist to stop the shaking of my hand, took the intraosseous needle out of its package, and yelled at Chan Chi, "Wipe my face." He ran out and back in seconds with a towel and wiped my sweat away.

I hung the fluid bag from the hanger, leaned over Joy, and told her, "I'm sorry, baby," and stuck the needle in the center of her chest and into her breast bone."

"Please let me get it into the marrow," I prayed.

I released the needle and it seemed to be firmly stuck in the bone. I opened the clamp on the bag's tubing. I looked at the instructions again. "Check if the skin around the needle is ballooning out or there was leakage on the skin's surface." Nothing. The solution seemed to be going into her marrow to be rapidly absorbed into her blood.

I asked Chan Chin to wipe my face again.

Infection? That knife probably had every kind of bacteria in China on it. What to do about possible infection? I looked in my first aid book, and then through the pages I had ripped out. The Society had planned to train me in first aid, as they had done Joy, but we had to flee before they got to it.

There it is: "Treating actual or potential infection from a wound"—shoot her with 2 mu benzylpenicillin. More packages. Small bottle of benzylpenicillin. Hypodermic. What's a mu? Good, the hypodermic has mu divisions. Fill it to 2 mu. Test it like they do in movies. Wipe her shoulder with another povidone-iodine impregnated cotton pad. My hand was shaking again, too much to give her a careful shot. I almost flung the hypodermic like a dart into her shoulder, and slowly pushed the plunger in.

She was still bleeding. I put a sterile compress over the thrombin-fibrin bandage. I then wrapped my belt around it and her thighs and tightened it to hold the compress against the bandage.

I could do no more. I removed my surgical gloves and my sweat dripped out of them.

Utterly exhausted, I sat on the floor next to Joy with my pocket watch on the floor so that I could release my belt every ten minutes just in case it was stopping the flow of blood to her leg. After a few minutes, I would then retighten it.

Chan Chi had kept everyone else out of the storeroom while he stayed in case I needed more help. I continued to sweat so much that it

dripped off my nose and I asked him for his towel so that I could keep wiping my face. Eventually he had someone bring me water to drink. I couldn't.

I released my belt around her thighs for a few minutes and redid it.

I was beyond exhaustion as I watched the heart monitor. What do you do when you've done all you can to save your loved one, and you are left sitting and watching a damn machine measure the slow disappearance of their life? I couldn't cry. I couldn't scream. I couldn't leave. I couldn't take my eyes off the monitor except when I relieved the pressure on her compress.

Her pulse was up to 131; her systolic was down to 75.

I released my belt and after a few minutes retightened it.

I took her hand in mine. It was clammy, lifeless. I felt for her pulse. It was so weak I couldn't find it. I put her hand in both of mine and watched the monitor. No images of our life together flashed across my mind; no thoughts of things past. Everything was the monitor. I watched her life ebb away and begged the machine to change. I pleaded with it to make her heart beat slower and her blood pressure rise. I gently put her hand down and made lifting motions toward the systolic digits with my hands, trying to help. I prayed, yes, I prayed to God for help.

I released my belt and checked the compress. It was getting saturated with blood. I put another compress on top of it, and redid my belt around both.

I didn't know when night came and Chan was alone in the building with us. Although I kept track of the ten-minute intervals on my pocket watch, I didn't really know what time it was.

Finally there was almost no new bleeding when I released the pressure on my belt and checked the top compress. I left the belt on with only minor pressure after that.

My legs were cramping badly from sitting on the floor in one position for so long and my back was protesting with pain. I beat the muscles in my leg with my fist and ignored my back, and stared at the monitor. Now I knew each of its red digits as they appeared and transformed into another red digit better than I knew my fingernails. Each fall of the systolic digits were a red guillotine in my mind, each rise in pulse rate a possible knife thrust into my love's heart, I stared at them so intensely my eyes hurt and my head ached—down one systolic red digit-up one red digit-down two red digits, down one red digit-up one

red digit-down two red digits—I was losing her. I was so miserable that I was ready for the one horrible red zero to come up for her heart beat. I was ready to give her a last kiss, say my last loving words to her, hold her cold hand, and shoot myself.

The intraosseous bag was empty. I removed the needle from her chest bone, and knowing in my heart it all was hopeless, I put Betadine on an adhesive bandage anyway over the needle hole. I pulled her armor together and her blouse over that. I wanted her to look her best in death.

It was still night when the systolic's red digits began a pattern of one up and one down, and then, as I stared and stared and my breath lodged in my stomach, agonizingly slowly, the systolic climbed a single red digit at a time. Her pulse rate decreased. I released my breath in a gush of air.

Soon, her cheeks gained some color. Her pulse was at 120 and her systolic at 83. I pounded the floor with my fist and shouted at her, "You'll live, baby. You made it." For the first time, I cried.

I tried to lean over her and put my arms around her and kiss her and tell her how much she meant to me and how I loved her and would have died if she hadn't pulled through. I couldn't move. The cramps and long hours in one position left my legs and back no longer functional. I fell over on my side and tried to stretch. With Chan's help, I was able to get some control over them. The muscles in my back began to untwist and relax as Chan massaged them.

Moving on my knees, I leaned over Joy and kissed her cheeks and lips, then put my arm around her and lay next to her. I was more exhausted than I had ever been in my life and, my absolute focus on Joy gone, fatigue took over. One arm still about Joy, I collapsed into the sleep of the dead—rather, I should say, the near-dead.

I woke up, still weary, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I was under a blanket with a pillow under my head. Joy was trying to wake me up.

In a weak, tired voice, she asked, "You got us kicked out of our hotel, huh? I'm not sure I like the accommodations you found us." Her attempt to smile barely succeeded. She put her hand on my cheek and caressed it. "How can a decent woman get a drink around here?"

A day after she regained consciousness, she asked me if I had made sure our attackers were all dead. I said her life came before that. She didn't bring it up again.

The Triads heard of our little skirmish. They were impressed by our skills, and so asked to talk to us. Our negotiation with them was successful. That was the only good thing to come of the ambush, and not nearly worth it, if Joy had died.

She eventually had a vivid white scar that, with bathing suits what they were in this age, only I would ever see. We stayed an additional month in China while she healed, and we had a second honeymoon, or a third. And to hell with the risks, I sailed home from China with her, not wanting to leave her health to any primitive ship's doctor. On this I was adamant, absolutely adamant, regardless of her protests.



On March 1, 1913, a trusted guard assassinated General Yüan in his sleep. With no one of comparable stature and political power to step into his military shoes, the resulting indecision and lack of leadership paralyzed the Northern Army. Sun Yat-sen filled the vacuum of power before it could suck in another general and asserted his authority as the provisional president. He proceeded, as we had advised him, to appoint civilian governors of the provinces from the Kuomintang Party and other pro-democratic revolutionary movements. In the 1913 elections the Kuomintang won an overwhelming victory, winning a 72-seat majority in parliament. With one of the greatest resignation speeches I ever read, Sun stepped down for the good of the country in favor of the Kuomintang leader Sung, and departed China for Boston and Harvard.

Joy no longer disputed my, as she put it, "Mafia-like contracts." Truth to tell, after the attack on us, I was even more inclined to use murder to further our mission in China. Our payments of ten thousand dollars each for the Triad to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Tse-tung, and Chou En-lai were successful. For each we asked for the full set of teeth to prove their assassination, with the usual threats if we ever saw or heard that these men still lived. As a gift to us, the Triad also assassinated the leader of the Green Lotus Society, and brought us his head in an ornate box. I told them they could keep it, although I must confess I did for a moment imagine mounting the head in our Shanghai office reception room.

The Triad also informed us that we had killed all six of the thugs that attacked us—either on the scene, or they had died shortly afterward. Our hollow point bullets did it.

While we focused our attention on China, we continued our preparatory moves in Europe and pumped into the region tens of millions of dollars to forestall World War I. Furthering democracy in Japan and China and preventing World War I were a big part of our mission. But we also did some things that were not exactly part of The Plan.

Chapter 35

Titanic sinks four hours after hitting iceberg; 866 rescued by Carpathia, probably 1,250 perish . . . Ismay safe, Mrs. Astor maybe, noted names missing.

■ *The New York Times*, April 16,
1912 Old Universe

Yes, she was a murderess. But a compassionate one. Late one night, Joy mentioned something near and dear to her heart, and after some discussion, we decided it would do no harm to our mission, and take little effort. A few days later our London office wired us that they had located the person we'd been seeking. I sent the following telegram to Mr. T. Lewis, the president of the British Seafarers' Union:

I have long been a supporter of your union and was shocked to recently discover through my company contacts that The White Star Line is planning to hire in Southampton non-union immigrants from the colonies at half union pay to replace union workers on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*.

As a strong union supporter, I urge you to do something about this. I am wiring \$5,000 to you to help with the expenses of a strike against this dastardly violation of your contract with The White Star Line.

With Very Best Wishes,
John Banks
President and Owner
Tor Import & Export Company

I then also arranged with our office that they hire a dozen blacks and Indian immigrants to stroll and loll around the *Titanic's* berth 44 as though they were expecting to work on the ship.

In spite of the company's denial, the union called a strike and delayed until the 15th of April the sail date of the *Titanic*. Only then did P. E. Curry, the local manager of the White Star Line, persuade Lewis that the allegation about the company hiring non-union immigrants was false.

I telegraphed my apology and included another five thousand dollars to show my sincerity.

Two weeks later, Joy ran gleefully into my office, waving a newspaper. "Look!" she said, and slapped the Society Page of *The New York Times* on top of the inventory I had been studying. I looked down at what she had circled with a red pencil.

First-class passengers John Jacob Astor and his wife Madeleine Force returned on the *Titanic* from an extended honeymoon in Egypt and Paris. When a reporter asked Mrs. Astor how she enjoyed the trip, she responded, "Oh, it was pleasant being on such a great ship and everyone was so nice to us, but it grew boring after a while. There was nothing to see but water."

Joy then took out the front section and pointed to an item below the fold under the headline, "*Titanic* Sets Record."

The *Titanic* set an Atlantic crossing record yesterday of five days, 2 hours and 24 minutes. Her Captain, Edward J. Smith, was hailed and feted in New York. The whole maritime community declared the ship the harbinger of a new class of unsinkable liners. A spokesman for the White Star Line said that

"We did it, darling," she exclaimed happily. We saved 1,503 men, women, and children. Hurray!"

I was pretty happy myself. It cost us almost nothing compared to our other expenditures. It was just something small among the great events we were trying to change. But for once we knew who and how many lives we had saved within weeks of our intervention. We had the names of those who would now live because of us. It was not easy winding my mind around this thought—they would live because of what Joy and I *had done*. Over fifteen hundred breathing, loving human beings. Because of us. A shudder of pleasure went through me and the

hair on my arms stood up. *Over fifteen hundred people are now alive because of us.* At that moment, all I had sacrificed to come to this primitive era, all I had gone through in preparation, all the terror and unhappy moments, all were worth it.

Joy and I celebrated with bottles of champagne. We had so many happy times together. That was one of our best. We got drunk.

Chapter 36

I was adamant: I wasn't going to kill these men. I reluctantly agreed to bribe or frame them. It had nothing to do with their being white Europeans.

After China we had to direct our full attention to Europe. World War I was on the horizon, and we had to prevent it. In the Old Universe, this war had killed about nine million people and was possibly the genesis of the 1918 Influenza pandemic that killed another twenty to forty million. We knew the war provoked the coup in Russia that gave the communists control over the largest country in the world for the next seventy-four years, during which Lenin, Stalin, and his successors would murder something like sixty-two million people. If we prevented only this war, our mission would be a glorious success, worth all the personal horror about to arise in my own life.

Well before 1912, while we were relaxing on our antique brass bed one day, I brought up the subject of World War I. I told Joy that, "In the Old Universe there was an incredible amount of European mass murder, revolution, and war in the ten years between 1914 and 1924. Moreover, the outbreak of World War II also grew out of these events and was really World War I, Phase II. So, we've got to send every last million we can spare to change the pivot events and atmosphere of the time."

"I know," she said while clipping her toenails, "I sat in on your class. Remember?"

I was not to be deterred. "We've got to focus our propaganda efforts on the four major countries whose entangled animosities, loyalties, and fears provided the tinder for the spark that ignited the war—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Serbia."

"I know, my loving professor," she said, this time with slight irritation. I was sure she aimed a half-moon cutting in my direction. "Are you lecturing me?"

I knew I should have tied that horse in her bathtub.

In 1908 we did start trying to influence popular opinion in Europe, building on an existing and widespread revulsion toward war. After

that date in the Old Universe, common attitudes had begun to change. Nationalism, the philosophical ideas of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and the challenge-and-response theory of Darwinism began to create contempt for compromise, and, among some, a cult of violence.

From 1908 to 1914, we spread around almost 600 million dollars to influence public sentiment, paying for newspapers and popular magazines in the four countries to extol the benefits of peace, to describe the destruction and deaths that occurred in war, and to stress the need for negotiation and compromise in crises. We had a huge, dedicated staff of peace activists working on this, many present or former college students, and we cultivated hundreds of political contacts. When our executives and European insiders asked why we were doing all this, we said that war was bad for our business and peace was profitable.

We secretly formed international organizations whose members hailed from the major countries that would fight World War I. Among these were the Veterans for European Peace, Mothers Against War, Peace International, and Christians for Peace. We also covertly funded institutes and centers to put out peace-oriented position papers, such as the International Negotiation Institute and the Center of European Affairs. Our best hope was the lobbying organizations we put together to work on the politicians—the German Committee of Concerned Businesses, the Russian Orthodox Christian Union, and others. I was amazed at what one could do with tons of money and a precise knowledge of the future events one was trying to prevent.

I was once concerned about how two people could ever influence grand historical events. Now I was growing concerned at how much two people could influence such events.

We had learned much about how modern interest groups and lobbyists operated in democracies in the Old Universe. Such lobbying was still not widely known in this New Universe. Money and appeals for peace and profit did wonders, but we could not underestimate the appeal of nationalism and the heavy role of pervasive historical grievances.

As our campaign got underway, I confessed, displaying to Joy my usual caution, “We really have no hope of stopping the small wars in Eastern Europe that will soon break out and involve the Ottoman Empire, such as the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 and the First Balkan War of 1912-1913. My hope is that avoiding World War I and promoting democracy in the region, especially in Turkey, will end or gradually reduce the causes of those minor wars.”

“I know,” she responded.

I had her. “I didn’t say any substantive fact, Miss Know-it-all.”

“No, dearest, you told me what a pessimist you are, Professor Half-empty-bottle. And I know that.”

What could I say?

By 1914, our efforts in Europe showed some success. David Lloyd George, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, turned decidedly dovish and negotiated several agreements with Germany over contentious issues, such as a railway to Baghdad, and declared that Anglo-German hostility was at an end. Happily, I showed Joy my wire from our London office. “British chancellor says ‘A war against Germany is less likely than snow in the Sahara.’” The House of Commons had already cut the Naval shipbuilding budget by 12 percent.

She was equally joyful over the wire she showed me from our Paris office. “A conscription law put to French voters was defeated, while voters elected an anti-militarist majority to the Chamber of Deputies. Immediately, the new Chamber debated cutting the military budget by 18 percent.”

Our efforts were working.

In 1912 and 1913, we turned specifically to nonviolently removing from power the major statesmen and politicians we knew would be pro-war if a crisis happened and deepened sufficiently, and replacing them with more moderate men. Through our new offices in all four countries, we had cultivated political figures and power brokers, and we went into action through them. We knew the emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary and the Czar of Russia were not the war hawks. Their foreign ministers and military advisors were the ones who either persuaded or manipulated their monarchs into war.

In the Old Universe, the excuse and tool for their actions was the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand, presumptive heir to the monarchy. Fanatic Serbian nationalists known as the Black Hand secret society did this in Sarajevo.



After sailing to Europe separately, we made our plan to remove from government influence the worst of the top pro-war leaders. I had another fight with Joy over this. I thought we should try to bribe them, and thus leave them with their dignity and family life intact, at least as a first try. If that didn’t work, try plan B.

Joy wanted to go to plan C directly: “Assassinate them.”

I said, “No way.”

She crossed her arms over her chest, stuck her chin out, and verbally punched me below the belt. “You had Asians and Hispanics assassinated. Is it because these bastards are white Europeans that you say ‘no’?”

I was hurt by the unwarranted accusation. I retorted huffily, “This is different. While largely responsible for the war, these men killed no one themselves. They often operated in good faith, doing what they thought was right for the interests and security of their countries. They were also generally good family men who respected their wives and children and treated them well.”

This is when I got the hand on the hip look. “Oh, is that right. What about General Yüan Shih-k'ai and Chiang Kai-shek? They were not like Mao, and were responsible for war and deaths only by virtue of the decisions they made. Like these Europeans.”

Joy was now trampling on my historical expertise again. “Not the same. Both were actually fascists and ruled China. They were directly responsible for democide and war. The European leaders we are talking about never ruled a country.”

Her eyes got steely; her lips thinned. “Did not the decisions of these Europeans, my historian, result in a war killing millions and millions of people? By getting rid of them, won't we save millions and millions of lives?”

On this I would not budge. I didn't see the point. I was no longer morally opposed to assassinations, as I mentioned before. But I just saw them in these cases as . . . a waste. With one exception—but more on that later.

I told her, “I am not going to kill them. I'm not going to put a contract out on them. I'm going to bribe them.”

And so it went. Joy finally persuaded me that an attempted bribe might well fail, and we would get no second chance aside from assassination. So, I agreed to compromise on the approach we finally took for some of these leaders.



Within a month of our arrival in Austria, photographs of the Austrian Chief of General Staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, in bed with an eighteen-year-old Russian girl started circulating in Vienna. Von

Hötzendorf claimed at first that the photos were fakes, but then the girl went public with the tale we prepared, and said that she'd had a long affair with him and that he wanted to marry her.

Conrad first denied it all, and then finally admitted to spending a night with her. He claimed he thought she was German, since she spoke the language fluently. For men of his stature, a quiet one-nighter was acceptable. But an innocent-looking girl of eighteen, and especially a *Russian* girl, was too much. Under pressure from deeply embarrassed Emperor Francis Joseph, Conrad resigned and sank into obscurity. The emperor replaced him with someone who happened to be more moderate towards Serbia.

The girl took a train to Switzerland and soon bought a little chalet with the money we promised her.

Within a week, Count Leopold von Berchtold, Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, suddenly surprised everyone by resigning for unknown reasons. He left Austria for Switzerland, where he bought a chateau and a hotel on Lake Geneva with money no one had known he'd possessed. No one knew, either, that Berchtold's only other choice to being obscenely wealthy was public disgrace as a homosexual. This was our bluff. We had no photographs or letters, just rumors. But in this time and place, such threats were very credible.

In Russia, Foreign Minister S.D. Sazonov's aides rushed him to the hospital with a serious illness. His doctors could not diagnose it, and it appeared to be getting worse. He was in delirium most of the time, and even when conscious he seemed confused. Czar Nicholas II had to replace him with Prince Vasili Alexandrovich Dolgorukii, known for his caution in military matters and his leanings toward peace. Sazonov's health returned with surprising speed after the Czar appointed a new foreign minister, but he declined any future role in the government.

In Germany, after a tip, police found Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow drunk and passed out in an alley. He was in the arms of a young boy. When the boy saw the police he yelled, "He forced me to suck his cock. I didn't want to. I never did this before." Then he ran away.

As planned, a reporter with a camera was passing by, heard the accusation, and took a photograph. When the photograph somehow appeared in several newspaper and magazine offices, government efforts to prevent publication were unsuccessful. Von Jagow retired from service the day after the photos and story appeared, and committed suicide a week later.

I was very saddened by his death. I had not intended it. I had not expected it. And I was responsible for it. I hated what I was doing to these people.

Jagow's death would be seen as an admission of guilt in a culture that saw suicide and its repercussions in the afterlife as retribution for one's sins, gross errors, or public embarrassments in life. But setting up Jagow with a young girl, or in a financial frame up, would not have worked, and this man was subject to neither bribe nor threat.

Joy felt no remorse. She loved life and humanity in the abstract, to be sure, but particular lives and members of humanity, she could not abide. She saw Jagow's suicide as tantamount to the assassination we should have carried out.

This left me with some moral doubt about our mission for the first time in many years. That night, after finding out about Jagow's suicide, I lay sleepless in bed. I battled my conscience with the memory of what Jimmy Wilson, Ed's father and the founder of the Society, had told him about the battle of the Somme, about all the lives snuffed out in minutes. I tried to imagine its images and terror as though I were there:



Half squatting, Jimmy leaned against the side of the muddy trench, the toes of his boots invisible in the muck at the bottom. Jimmy was a short, skinny fellow, with a frame on which not even his military training could put muscle. His baggy uniform now rippled like a sail in a crosswind. His helmet hid his short brown hair, except when his shaking tipped it forward over his eyes and a few strands escaped.

Jimmy had grown up in Bristol, England. Before joining the army, he had spent most of his evenings drinking with his buddies at the local pub, or going to the new silent movies with them. That was his entertainment. Even at eighteen years of age, Jimmy had never gone out on a date and was shy of girls. His friends constantly ribbed him about being too embarrassed to participate when they'd dragged him off to a French bordello.

Once Jimmy had thought of going to college, and teachers had told him that he had the intelligence for it, but his father had never paid the family bills and later, he disappeared altogether, leaving Jimmy to support his mother and two sisters. He could read up and learn on his own, Jimmy told himself, and he did enjoy the rough and tumble of a warehouseman's job.

Jimmy was part of the Army's plan to create new volunteer divisions to fight alongside the regulars. The Army kept together as units all those volunteering from a particular company, town, or city neighborhood. This meant that Jimmy knew most of the soldiers around him, who in civilian life had drunk with him, sold him goods, or delivered ice or milk to his small home. Many had been his good friends. All but a few were now dead, as were his two best friends and his cousin. Jimmy had cried for hours after he had helped drag the upper half of his cousin's body to the rear—all that remained of someone Jimmy had grown up with, played with, eaten many meals with, and, as boys do, argued with. Half his body gone!

As Jimmy waited for the scheduled cessation of seven days of shelling on the German trenches, he thought about dying. Despite his captain's assurance that this next attack would be an easy victory, that Jimmy could walk over to the German lines and simply shove all the dead Germans out of the way, he knew he would die, as his friends had died. So he trembled as he awaited the silence that would follow the end of the shelling, and the captain's whistle that would send him climbing out of the trench, to his death. He only hoped it would be quick and painless.

George Finch, crouched next to him in the trench, poked him in the side and leaned over to shout in his ear, "Jimmy, could you do me a favor?"

"What?" Jimmy yelled back.

"If I'm killed, will you give this to my mother?" George held out a small piece of dirty packaging from their rations. He had scrawled a few words on it with a blunt pencil. "You can read it," George said.

It was easy to read in the dawning light, and said simply, "My Dearest Mom—I love you. Sonny."

George lived several houses down from Jimmy on Bloy Street; Jimmy knew George's mother. "Come on," Jimmy said, "you won't die."

"Please!"

Jimmy shrugged and tucked the wrapper into his pocket. "Okay."

At least this will make him feel better, Jimmy thought, *although I'm the one that's going to die.*

Minutes later, there it was: The awful silence as the shelling stopped. Immediately, the officers came down the trench, getting them ready to move out. Jimmy heard the shrill whistle and then the yelling, and he scrambled out of the trench with all the others up and down the line and advanced on the Germans.

Jimmy's jitters vanished. He focused everything on the trenches in the distance and unconsciously switched to automatic motion. Carrying sixty pounds of ammunition, food, water, and gear, he doglegged along the paths through their own barbed wire, moving at a slow walk through the mud.

"Please, God," Jimmy kept murmuring, "no pain. Please, God, make it sudden."

Jimmy was one in a line of men slowly walking almost shoulder to shoulder toward the German trenches, their bayoneted rifles held diagonally across their chests, their officers out in front, unarmed and waving their troops on with swagger sticks.

The Germans had been deeply entrenched and almost all had survived the shelling. As soon as they heard the British whistles, they scrambled up to their trench parapets and machine guns. German artillery had already zeroed in on the thousand or more yards between the trenches. It began a bloody barrage as the German soldiers also started shooting. The soldiers with rifles had only to point and shoot; the machine gunners only needed to swing their guns from side to side.

Some British made it to the German barbed wire that the British generals had thought shelling would destroy, but as the soldiers tried to get through the wire the barbs hung them up, making them easy targets for the Germans. Along the barbed wire, bodies hung at all angles, like so many sacks thrown randomly on the wire. Sometimes the British tried to push through where shelling had created a gap in the wire, but the German gunners just kept their machine guns aimed at those gaps and the dead piled up. The huge mounds of bodies resembled piles of discarded clothing, equipment, and kits.

Jimmy couldn't believe he was still alive. He looked to his left and saw those next to him outlined in the smoke and the flash of explosions. They leaned forward as they walked, as though into a stiff wind, and Jimmy realized he was doing the same thing.

He heard a scream. Beside him, George fell backwards. Then the man in front of him simply disappeared, and another flew into the air as though he was a rag doll thrown by a child.

Jimmy hardly had time to react. Something pinged off his helmet. Another projectile thumped into his right arm with the force of a hammer blow and spun him around; and as he collapsed, he saw, as if through a fog, the uneven line of British soldiers still plodding forward. Then nothingness.



An explosion nearby jerked Jimmy back to consciousness. He lay on his back, helmet gone, bare head thrown back into the mud. A body lay next to his head, shielding him from the German trenches. A spattering of tracers flew overhead, accompanied by the whizzing sound of bullets.

Jimmy tried to feel his body. He knew he was wounded, but where? Yes, his feet would move, and his legs. He could move his head slightly; the mud sucked at it as he twisted it from one side to the other. His left arm moved. But his right arm was numb and wouldn't respond. At least he could move something.

Raising his head out of the slime, careful to keep the corpse between him and the Germans, Jimmy slithered feet-first to the shell hole just made by the explosion, and slid over the edge. Then he stopped with a gasp of horror. At the bottom lay Stewart, Jimmy's sergeant, with one leg blown off. Stewart held his intestines in his hands, as though making an offering to Jimmy.

Jimmy vomited into the mud, and could move no further. He knew he should offer Stewart water and soothing words, but he could do neither. Within minutes, Stewart's eyes closed, his body shuddered, and he died. Jimmy heaved again and again, until nothing more would come up.

Exhausted, Jimmy finally looked at the arm he had let drag behind him as he approached the shell hole. The muscle on his lower arm had been sheared to the bone as though with a cleaver. What remained hung at an odd angle, surely broken. As best he could see through the mud that had collected around his hand, part of his palm and three fingers were missing. Oddly, there was not much blood, probably because the red-hot shrapnel had cauterized the wounds and the mud had caked into and around them.

For hours, Jimmy stayed on the edge of the crater. An occasional figure would loom up in the smoke, only to fall. There was another British charge at the German trenches, but this got no farther than the others, and only heaped up thousands of new bodies before the German trenches.

An explosion nearby shook the ground and blew another corpse into his shell hole, and Jimmy scrambled away from it. With nightfall the fighting and shelling stopped. Now he heard the screams and moans of the wounded, and the dying crying for their mothers.

German marksmen were still trying to shoot anything they saw moving, but Jimmy knew that he had to get back to his lines, and medical aid. He crawled over the heaped dirt on the edge of the shell hole. As he turned onto his right side to flip onto his back, sudden, excruciating pain in his right arm all but knocked him out. He screamed, attracting a flurry of bullets that plowed furrows in the mud near him. Now sweating profusely, he waited for what seemed hours and developed a headache that sent arrows of pain through his head with every gunshot he heard.

Finally, fearing he would soon die, Jimmy bit his lip against the pain and gently lifted his right arm with his left. He placed it on his stomach, and straightened it. He drew several deep breaths, then inched backward toward his trench, pushing with his legs and slithering in the mud. Several times, partly buried shrapnel cut him. One razor sharp piece sliced his scalp open. He automatically put his hand on the wound to check it, and it came away wet. Even more anxious to return to his trench and safety, he changed direction and slid around the shrapnel.

Finally, Jimmy made it to the British barbed wire. Holding up the bottom wire with his good hand, he carefully pushed himself under and then continued the slow slither toward his trench.

Two British soldiers crawled over their parapet and grabbed him. He screamed in pain. They dragged him rapidly into the trench as bullets whizzed overhead. As rough, friendly hands lowered him to safety, he whispered, "Jimmy; I'm Jimmy Wilson. Help."

Fortunately, stretcher-bearers were nearby. They carried him unconscious to the rear and medical treatment. His arm had to be amputated, and he had a mild concussion. He had many other wounds, one needing fifty-three stitches.

The Battle of the Somme was over for Jimmy Wilson, but the fighting continued for three more months, killing around 600,000 British and German soldiers. The day Jimmy was wounded, some twenty-five thousand British officers and men died, all to gain a few hundred yards of French soil. The generals wasted those lives. The Battle of the Somme achieved nothing.



For one week, Jimmy lay on a cot at a rear hospital until the Army could transport him to England. As he lay there, he saw the wounded

brought in and the dead removed. He heard the moans, the muffled cries of the men thrashing in the grips of nightmare, the soft words of the nurses trying to comfort them all, and he knew he could never return to his former life.

Jimmy would still have his mother to take care of, but now with his sisters graduating from school, he could work part-time, even with one arm, and attend college. Drinking with friends and movies now seemed a trivial waste of time. With a single-mindedness he had never felt before, he vowed to study the reasons why human obscenities like this war could ever happen. On this he was clear, and determined, as though pushed by a great force of nature; as though God had descended and had said to him, "This you will do."

When Jimmy was transferred to a hospital in England, he walked down the line of wounded men, some in pitiful condition, some still in shock or suffering from battle fatigue or mustard gas, and with his left hand he shook the hands of those who could, saying to each, "I promise you that I will spend my life trying to make sure that this never happens to anyone again."

The nurses had heard all this before, usually from the soldiers. The officers were too educated and sophisticated to be so naive.

Not having learned the academic truths about history and international relations, Jimmy's pledge and dedication to it preceded his education. And overrode it when he went to college in the United States and got his degrees in business. He worked hard, saved all he could, and planned. He made his first million by the age of thirty-four. Then he secretly created the Survivor's Benevolent Society.

Chapter 37

One of our greatest moments ever was yet to come. We would celebrate by getting stupefyingly crocked. But during that sleepless night I remembered Jimmy Wilson's horrible experience in World War I, not as an historian, but as though I lived through it myself. Afterward, I felt less uncomfortable about von Jagow's suicide. After all, he'd been one of the major instigators of the war.

I looked over at Joy, sleeping so soundly next to me, her hand resting on my shoulder. All she was unhappy about was that she hadn't killed him herself. Well, I never told her I was able to push my feeling of sadness over his suicide away and accept that *our* end did justify these means.

I still didn't sleep, though. I finally slid out of bed and found my mission notebook in the dark. In it, under "World War I," I had recorded two historic headlines. I went into the bathroom, closed the door so as not to awaken Joy, and turned on the light to read the two headlines.

*Austria Formally Declares War On
Serbia—Peace Of Europe Now In Kai-
ser's Hands*

— *The New York Times*, July 29,
1914 Old Universe

*Germany Declares War On Russia,
First Shots Are Fired—France Is Mobi-
lizing—England Hesitates*

— *The New York Times*, August 2,
1914 Old Universe

I thought of the millions killed. I shook my head over this history, sighed, and said to myself, "It's up to us. You've done it right and you've done it well. Now, finish it likewise." I shut my notebook with a snap and went back to bed. In minutes I was asleep.



Once we had gotten von Jagow out of office, we also had to deal with German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg. He was another central official whose actions, supposedly on behalf of Kaiser Wilhelm II, led to the war. We had bribed several close officials to tell us about the skeletons in his closet, and discovered that forcing him out of power would be easier than we'd thought. At first, though, we had great difficulty setting up an appointment with him. His aides repeatedly told us that he was a very busy man and that, unless we had very important—"extrem wichtig"—business of state, he would not see us.

We had our wedge. We had hired as a consultant Franz Kleinsteu-ber, a German businessman and chairman of the German Business Council, and paid him an indecent retainer. We hired him because he occasionally sailed and played cards with the Kaiser, a relationship we thought we might exploit. He knew our import & export business well and we greatly impressed him with the size of our company and its success. He was constantly angling for us to appoint him director of our German office. We dangled this possibility in front of him as we asked him to intervene with the Kaiser to get us an appointment with Bethmann.

Within a week the appointment came through, and at the specified time, Joy and I appeared at the Chancellery. A straight-backed, mustached male secretary ushered us efficiently into Bethmann's office.

Bethmann did not rise from behind his huge desk, or offer his hand. As we approached him, he scrutinized me as though I was a soldier on parade who had dropped his rifle. His face was framed by close-cropped gray hair, almost flat on top, and a pointed beard. He had a full mustache, however, darker than the rest of his hair. The combination made him look like a white terrier whose food had discolored his muzzle over the years. His eyebrows were still black and almost straight across his brow, and he had prominent black eyelashes. "Formidable" was the first word that came to mind to describe him.

Without a greeting, he finally asked in German, "Why did the Kaiser instruct me to see you?"

I answer in German, "Because my government has an offer that you can't refuse."

Bethmann spoke little English, so we continued in German. He asked, "What government?"

“We are secret agents. I’m sure you understand the reasons why we cannot divulge that.”

He nodded. “Yes; get on with it.”

I took a photograph from my case and gave it to him, saying, “This is a photograph of your child in the Christian Sister’s Orphanage.”

He stared at it.

Reaching into my case again, I took out several folded documents with official seals, and handed them to him one at a time. I described each. “This is the child’s birth certificate, father unknown. This one identifies the mother as a seventeen-year-old Berlin girl, who died in childbirth. This one is a certificate of authenticity for the attached statements of two nurses. They were present when the girl identified you as the father before her death. And this last document is a statement from the orphanage that you have not provided any support for the child.”

I waited. Bethmann had turned a sickly white, except for his lips, which he pressed tightly together in a dark line that fell sharply toward his chin at the ends. As he continued to stare at the documents, he visibly slouched lower in his high backed leather chair. His hands gripped the desk, white-knuckled.

Finally, he looked at me—jaw slack, eyes frightened, a sheen of perspiration on his high forehead. He’d aged in minutes before our eyes. His whole world had just crashed down around him.

He said in a low but controlled voice, “Does the Kaiser know about this?”

“No, and he need not. If you resign, we will destroy these documents and the originals. There is no further purpose to them. My government is sure that you can invent a persuasive reason for resigning. If you do, we will provide you with secret funds in Switzerland that you will find more than adequate to keep you and your family in luxury for as long as you live.”

“How much do you want to find in a Swiss account upon your resignation?” I asked him.

“Nothing. What I am doing is for the German State. My child would embarrass Germany at a crucial time in foreign affairs. I cannot stay on, but I will not take a bribe to leave. My family and I will survive.”

He paused and glanced down at the documents. When he looked up, he had full command of his voice again. “Do you have any further business?”

“No,” I answered. “You may destroy those documents on the desk. We will destroy the originals when we read about your resignation.”

“Go.” He pointed to the door. As I opened it, he said, “I will resign in one week.”

And we left. Joy had not spoken, and Bethmann acted as though she wasn't there.

Bethmann did resign in a week, and the Kaiser expressed much grief over his resignation, and explained that it was because of his constant and distracting gallbladder pain, as his doctor certified, which made him increasingly unable to attend meetings for any length of time. I thought it was a lame excuse, but Bethmann knew the High German culture and what was acceptable better than I did.



Our final intervention was dangerous, and involved the fanatical Black Hand Society of Serbia. To be sure that Joy was up on this, I typed a message on my laptop while she was napping, and taped it on the bathroom mirror. I wrote: “Attention: The Black Hand Society will assassinate the heir to the Austrian throne on June 28, 1914 when the archduke and his wife are on a state visit to Serajevo. This triggered World War I in the Old Universe. The Black Hand Society has members in the Serbian Army and supporters throughout the Serbian government. Apis, the alias of Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic, leads it, and as head of Serbian military intelligence he is beyond our influence. We could assassinate him, but someone else might well take his place and arrange the assassination of the archduke.

“In the Old Universe, Apis organized the assassination on his own, without any government approval. Indeed, the research of your Society uncovered the fact that Apis and the Serbian prime minister, Nicola Pasic, were enemies and that Alexander, the prince regent of Serbia, sided with the prime minister. Your Society also discovered that the Austrian court intensely disliked the archduke of Austria, and the emperor hardly spoke to him. Against the emperor's expressed wishes, the archduke had married a Czech countess. The emperor was so unhappy with this marriage that he even forbade the archduke from appearing in public with her.”

I joined Joy for a nap.

When I awoke, Joy was sitting at our little teak desk with her laptop, and I went into the bathroom to splash water on my face. My note was

gone. In its place, Joy had written on the mirror in lipstick, “I know. Cheers for the countess/screw the emperor.”

So, we worked both sides of this equation. On May 11, acting on a tip from a trusted government official, Serbian police raided the home of Apis and found what we had planted: forged secret government documents and wireless communications with the German General Staff. The Serbian police immediately arrested Apis. With the backing of Alexander, Pasic demanded that supporters of Apis be rooted out of the Army and government.

As for the archduke, we decided to be very careful with so much at stake. We would try to make sure many years passed before—if ever—he made a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina. I brought in Hands to lead a special group of our employees and Austrian contacts to ensure this. Hands was intimate with a well-known German actress, and she provided an unusual entry for him into high Austrian society. On June 1, after a formal dinner party attended by Hands and the actress, the archduke came down with what appeared to be a horrible illness. He was feverish, vomiting constantly, and looked as though he would die. Despite his doctor’s medicines, the illness continued for several weeks, and the archduke only gradually recovered.

June 28, 1914 passed without notice.

I had spent two days calling newsrooms and making a pest of myself by asking if there were anything important on the wires. I was told with increasing irritation, “Nothing is happening; do you expect the end of the world or something?”

On the evening of June 29, Joy and I stashed all our weapons in our suitcase, pushed that under the bed, and I ordered German Franziskaner beer, the best, delivered to our hotel room. We sang, swinging our beer steins. We made toasts to her mother, to Gu, Jimmy Wilson, and to his son Ed and everyone else in the Society. We tried to dance, and knocked over a lamp and broke it. We lurched against the window curtain and pulled that down on ourselves, laughing. We cried with happiness. Joy vomited in the bathtub; I missed the toilet. I vaguely remember her saying something like, “Your aim was never worth shit.” Then I wet a towel in the toilet and threw it at her. And missed. I don’t know what happened after that.

We eventually passed out and woke up in the morning, huddled together, when the hotel maid opened the door, gaped at us, and slammed the door. It was cold on the rug. Joy wore only her Old Universe pink silk panties; I was clad only in my undershirt. The second time drunk for both of us. We were sick all that next day.

How better to celebrate saving nine million lives?

The archduke did not visit Sarajevo until nine years later, and without incident.

Although war did not break out, this part of Europe remained a tinderbox ready for some other spark. Therefore, we worked on the governments themselves, trying to push or pull them in a democratic direction. Monarchy was the rule, and although there were parliaments with power, monarchs still dominated, especially in foreign relations. But democracy was in the air, and in Germany and Russia there were strong democratic movements, as well as contending socialist revolutionary ones.

Interlarded with our antiwar media and lobbying campaign, we worked hard trying to get the democratic peace message across. Through the German parliament, we secretly subsidized the building of a huge statue of Immanuel Kant as the first democratic peace philosopher and proponent. The parliament placed it on the plaza in front of their building, and with our help the Germans turned its unveiling into a great international event. Prime ministers, politicians, and well-known actors were in attendance, and President Wilson of the United States delivered a speech there on democracy. The Kaiser himself gave the keynote address, honoring Kant and democracy. Our German office later told us that, when the parliament suggested to the Kaiser that he make the speech if he wanted his budget passed, he had said, "If you can't beat them, lead them."

In 1917, an upsurge of protests and demonstrations broke out against the Kaiser's power. The people demanded that he abdicate in favor of a German republic. There were street fights between socialists and democrats, fights involving both against monarchists, and several buildings were burned down. The sympathetic police stood by and refused to act, and the army remained in its barracks. Finally, on October 14, 1917, in front of the statue of Kant, 300,000 people demanded abdication and full democracy, socialists among them. The Kaiser abdicated the next day, and the chancellor resigned. The parliament made the leader of the nonviolent social democratic forces, Friedrich Ebert, provisional president of the new republic until they could organize general elections.

We knew the history of the democratic movement in Germany in the Old Universe, and had to supply little money and motivation to achieve its victory.

But that was still in the future. Back in 1914, I had my own murder to commit.

Chapter 38

We had one more thing to do regarding the history of western Europe.

Throughout, I'd been adamant: I was not going to commit murder with my own hand. But there was one exception—really two, but the other one I can't touch yet.

Tracking our quarry down was difficult, and we had to hire a detective agency to do so. They found him in a small, one-room apartment in Munich's artistic colony, in the part of town where Hans Hofmann School for Modern Art was built in 1915, Old Universe. Many of the leaders of Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism and German Expressionism did their painting there. He just barely supported himself by painting famous landmarks and selling them to tourists in local shops.

There were many ways we could eliminate him. I thought the most direct way involved the least risk and greatest possibility of success. We went into the old apartment building and up the dirty stairs to the second floor. The whole place reeked of alcohol, turpentine, paint, and urine. His apartment, #29, was on the right at the top of the stairs.

Joy flattened herself against the peeling paint on the plaster wall next to the scarred and scratched door, her hand in her holster purse. We knew he was there. We had knocked before and nobody answered. We had then waited across the street until someone fitting his description entered the building.

We had not fought over this one. In a firm voice, Joy started telling me what she was going to do. "I don't care what you say, I'm going to—"

"I'm doing it. Period."

Taken aback, she stared at me a moment and saw the stubborn look in my eyes that she knew was impossible to cross. She nodded, and relaxed. "I'm your backup."

As I stood beneath the naked bulb that provided the hall's light, my hand ready to knock on the grimy white door, I saw cannons beginning their cannonade across the border into Poland. I saw lines of German troops crossing the border into Poland, some riding tanks, some in

trucks, some marching. I saw Polish corpses strewn across a field along with their dead and dying horses. I saw houses aflame and refugees carrying all they had left in suitcases and bags, some to be run down by German tanks and trucks. I saw on the door a line of women leading their children by the hand to be gassed. I saw another line of men and women standing in front of a trench, waiting with resignation to be machine-gunned. I saw it all, and I let my shaking hand come down to knock on the door.

He opened it. There he stood, just as I'd imagined him—a creature with huge red eyes, canine teeth protruding from an evil smile, horns growing out of his head, and a tail wrapped around one hooped leg. He held the scythe of death in his hand. I felt his molten breath and heard the horrible hiss of burning bodies as the red fires of Hell leaped out around him and billowed toward me in clouds of red and yellow smoke that carried the acrid, horrible smell of death.

The image receded from my mind and I saw an ordinary young man standing in his doorway, a paintbrush in one hand and a paint-spattered apron protecting his old clothes. He stunk of paint and turpentine. His rather common eyebrows lifted and his large handlebar mustache twitched at me as he asked in Viennese German, "*Wahnt wünschens Sie—What do you want?*"

I could barely speak. My German must have sounded like my mouth was full of egg shells. I tried to say, "I have a gift for you, but must make sure you are the right man."

My voice cracked on "man," but I pressed on. "Were you born in Braunau on the Inn, Austria, in 1889?"

"*Ja.*"

"Did you come here last year from Vienna?"

"*Ja.*"

I tried to get the next question out, and coughed to clear my throat. I felt my eyes getting wet, and finally threw out in a rush, clearly startling him, "Are you Adolph Hitler?"

"*Ja.*"

I shot him between the eyes.

I could hardly hold my gun steady enough to remove the specially made suppressor from the H&K with my sweat-soaked hand. I got it off and put the gun back into my holster and the suppressor in my coat pocket, stepped over the body, and dragged it into the stinking room. I didn't look around. I didn't want to see what he'd been doing. I left the room and closed the door.

DONE. Done. Everything went out of me. I leaned my back against the wall next to the door, my heart thudding, my whole body shaking, I slide down it.

Joy looked at me wide-eyed, approval in her eyes. She opened the door I had closed and went into Hitler's room. I heard thudding and cracking sounds and in minutes she came out with a bag she put into her purse. She stopped to wipe the bottom of her pistol grip with a rag, then tossed the rag into the room, closed the door, and returned her magnum to her holster purse.

I pointed to her purse with a trembling finger and raised my eyebrows. I couldn't trust my voice yet.

"His teeth," Joy said, with a morbid smile.

I still couldn't move from the wall. I was still shaking violently. I leaned over and vomited next to it.

I, John Banks, once assistant professor at Indiana University, Ph.D. in history from Yale, steeped in the history of World War II and Hitler's genocides, the Holocaust, and his crimes against humanity, had just killed Hitler. It was September 1, 1914—the month and day that he launched the German invasion of Poland in 1939, instigating the war in Europe that would kill some ten million people in combat, and perhaps another twenty million in the Nazi democide.

I had killed Hitler. I had killed Hitler with my own hands. It was not murder. It was a just execution.

No one in the Old Universe would ever know. No one in this universe would ever care. Except for Joy. She knew. She cared. And she applauded me.

I had killed another human being and that night I cried with happiness.

Chapter 39

Revolutionists seize Petrograd; Kerensky flees; ministers under arrest . . . Winter Palace is taken after fierce defense by women soldiers—Washington reserves judgment, hoping revolt is only local.

■ *The New York Times*, November 9, 1917 Old Universe

So far, we'd succeeded in our mission beyond our hopes. We'd also had many happy and beautiful moments and my love for Joy had deepened. But inside our relationship was a growing cancer. The symptoms were there; I noticed but ignored them. Love and loving were infinitely easier than recognizing this awful disease.

We made the long and separate trips back to San Francisco in late October 1914 with relief. But not all our time in Europe was spend on our business or for our mission. With our new Mercedes 22/50 Touring car we bought in Germany and sold in Cherbourg when we were done, we toured castles, famous art museums, listened to famous symphonies, and frolicked like young tourists. We saw Paris, Rome, and Athens, of course. Historian that I am, I was delirious with pleasure at visiting with Joy these and other places that were so much a part of the history I'd studied. We also danced, walked hand in hand, and laughed; and we made love.

All that said, it was good being back in San Francisco again, in our apartment.

We spent the next three years continuing to build up our flourishing business, which took larger chunks of our time, but added to our wealth. I was spending an increasing amount of my time writing a history of the Old Universe twentieth century, with all its wars and democides, but no one, of course, would believe it was the real history of an alternate universe. I thought I would get it published as an alter-

native history—what might have been, had events transpired differently—but when I finished, no publisher or agent would touch it. Not plausible, they said. I could have used our funds to publish it, but . . . what the hell. Our troubles soon took center stage and I didn't care then. No one would believe the Old Universe could ever have existed, anyway.

Through the newspaper, Joy had discovered a home for Chinese girls. A former Chinese missionary, Barbara Atherton, had started taking in homeless Chinese girls, those disowned by their families, or those who were in trouble or needed a foster home. She covered her costs through public donations.

Joy visited the home, was very impressed by her talk with Barbara, and started making contributions to her. Soon Joy was gifting tens of thousands of dollars to her. She became the home's primary supporter.

Her charity soon branched out to several San Francisco orphanages. She spent an afternoon every other day at one orphanage or another, or at Barbara's home. I went with her many times and I don't think I ever saw her happier than when she was playing with the children or teaching the young Chinese girls one thing or another. Whether orphanage or the home, the children all greeted her enthusiastically, yelling out, "Miss Phim is here. Come play with us, Miss Phim."

Joy and I had many happy times, but when I saw her with these children there was a special look on her face. Her eyes shone, her face glowed, and she wore a perpetual smile. She was so beautiful and so happy my heart swelled with my own happiness at seeing her this way.

It does now, at the memory.

Joy would have made a great mother.

But, there was also this: In Europe she had always seemed energetic and alert. Now, back in San Francisco, her strange lethargy returned. Not often, not one day after another. Weeks would go by when she was normal. But often enough for me to notice it, she would seem tired, drowsy, and moody. I didn't understand the moodiness at all. It was unlike her. But then, it wasn't that often that I was going to make an issue of it.

Our fights had all but disappeared. We had worked out virtually all the kinks in our relationship and we each knew what would press the other's hot buttons. Because of the life we led together, we knew each other better than couples married for thirty years or more.

So I thought.



In 1917 we had to travel to Europe again, this time in even longer and more tortuous train trips to Moscow and the Russian capital of St. Petersburg to intervene. This was actually more important than World War I. This is because out of the Russian Revolution came Lenin and Stalin, and over seventy years of totalitarian communism, with all the wars and democides that it entailed.

Now, Russian Czar Nicholas II had put down a rebellion in 1905, but the antimonarchical and pro-democratic forces had only grown stronger since. We provided as much support as possible to the democrats, and funneled tens of millions of dollars into the hands of Prince Georgi Y. Lvov and moderate lawyer Aleksandr F. Kerensky. We also arranged with a secret pro-monarchy society two assassinations: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in Switzerland and Leon Trotsky at a train station while returning to Russia from forced exile. These assassinations were not difficult to arrange at all, since these future mass murderers were well known revolutionaries and enemies of the monarchists.

Joseph Stalin was the greatest mass murderer of the twentieth century, perhaps of all time. The new provisional government has released him from exile in Turukhansk, and he would be arriving on March 12 in what was still called St. Petersburg in this new universe. I also planned his assassination without compunction. Agreeing on who was to do it, however, caused one of the biggest fights between Joy and me since our European trips.

She exclaimed, "He's mine. You did Hitler. I do Stalin."

"Hitler was easy," I told her. I spoke the language, knew something about the culture, and Munich was an international city, easy for foreigners to travel around in without attracting attention. Stalin was becoming very influential among radical revolutionaries, and would be surrounded by supporters. Since assassinations were a well-used political tool here, there might also be bodyguards.

"So?" Joy asked angrily.

In my usually nice manner, I pointed out, "You'll stick out as you would sheetless at a Ku Klux Klan meeting."

"So?"

"You'll be killed or spend many years in prison. Most important, you will lose all those future years when you could hear me coo in your ear my love for you, when you could feel my arms about you, and see the love in my eyes and heart."

Her anger evaporating, she looked at me from under her long lashes and said, "Let me get this straight. You don't want me to die because I would no longer have the absolutely incredible, world-shaking, universe-exploding experience of your love for me? Is that it?"

"Precisely."

Joy started laughing. "Dearest. You're so compassionate you break me up."

Anything that works, I thought.

Stalin's assassination cost us ten thousand dollars. We made the contract. Five thousand on agreement. Five thousand when we received the teeth.

We played tourists until Joy got sick and stayed in our hotel room for a couple of days. After doing all I could to make her comfortable, she insisted that I stop annoying her with my mothering and go out and make use of our time here. I did. I ambled east along the great street known as Nevsky Prospekt, and visited the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Kazan Cathedral, and Church of Our Savior of the Spilled Blood, among other places. The street was the nucleus of Peter the Great's original city.

When I read in the English edition of *Pravda* that Stalin and three others had been killed in a gunfight at the Petrograd train station, I was very happy, as was Joy. I waited a day for the package with the teeth inside to be delivered to my room. She was in the bathroom when it arrived, and after tipping the delivery boy, I opened it to assure myself that it contained the teeth. Yes, they were there, wrapped in wax paper, and with a little note:

What you gave us is payment enough. Somebody beat us to him, but we got this present for you from the morgue.

Joy! My mind yelled at me. Sick? What a crock of shit.

I had to think. Storming mad, I shoved the note in my pocket and, trying to control my voice, I yelled at her through the bathroom door, "I'm going to the lobby for a short while." Without waiting for a reply, I left. I do remember closing the door quietly. I don't know why people in the hallway turned around and stared at me.

I stomped down the stairs, found myself a well cushioned easy chair in a corner of the lobby where no one was likely to bother me, and stewed.

What to do about Joy? I had absolutely no doubt that she'd murdered—executed—Stalin. That's not what so upset me. What upset me was that she'd done it without telling me. She purposely deceived me. She coolly and calmly lied to me. Without any backup from me, she'd put herself in great danger. That really got me.

She must have killed the others besides Stalin. Perhaps innocents. I didn't know.

I must have been quite a scene, sitting, livid, in the corner. I wouldn't have been surprised if black smoke had billowed from the top of my head, like that from the smokestacks of an old steamer. But no one noticed; no firemen were called.

I finally damped the boilers and cooled down enough to decide what to do. I'm sure that I made an entirely rational decision and my great love for Joy had nothing to do with it.

There was now nothing to be gained by confronting her. Stalin was dead. I couldn't change the past about the others. So it was simple; I would do nothing. But now I would be on guard. I no longer could trust her completely.

I got up to go to my room and swayed for a moment, dizzy from the strain I had been under. I tried to move calmly up the stairs. When I entered my room, Joy was looking out the window.

When she heard me enter, she turned from the window and exclaimed, "We got his teeth. Isn't it great?"

What I wanted to say was, "Yeah, great. You celebrate." What I did say with forced glee was, "What a day. I'll never forget it."



We were done here; we left for Moscow to play tourist and from there took the amazing, once in a lifetime, 5,785 mile train trip east to Vladivostok on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. We visiting many small Russian cities and towns, held hands as we explored, and finally, toward the end of the trip, I was able to make love to her, just like old times. I didn't realize when we planned that trip how necessary it would be for us. For I soon was able to put aside what she had done.

One month later we took separate ships out of Vladivostok to San Francisco, via Tokyo for me and Manila for Joy.

Travel by sea was no longer fun, exciting, or informative. I no longer cared to experience how people got around in this primitive age. It was boring, tedious—an awful waste of time.

Chapter 40

What's important about a human monster's teeth? That, absent his body, they are his evil incarnate. And can be treated thusly.

We had the teeth of Mao and Hitler, Lenin and Stalin. And we did something we had not done before with the teeth we collected. We celebrated.

It may seem terribly morbid, perhaps even perverted, but to us, saving tens of millions of lives was reason for celebration. We'd put each set of teeth in a jar, and labeled each jar with the name of the owner. Now we lined the jars up on a half moon table against the wall of the living room, in order according to their vast murders in the Old Universe—STALIN, MAO, HITLER, and LENIN. We had other sets of teeth—Trotsky's, and those of many lesser murderers—but we wanted to focus just on the greatest mega-murderers of all time. The true human monsters.

We sat on a large pillow before the table, heads level with the jars, and stared at the names and the teeth. Joy got up and took her laptop computer out of its hiding place and put a music CD into it. As she again sat next to me, the first notes of Beethoven's Symphony #5 filled the room. We now had the best and the worst of humanity.

This was not a happy moment for either of us. We could feel no glory or exultation over these teeth. The weight of the dead human beings, and the tears, misery, and heartbreak of many times more, all caused or ordered by the owners of these teeth, bore down on us. As we stared at the jars, tears trickled down Joy's cheeks, and I wordlessly put an arm around her shoulders and drew her close. With my free hand, I lifted the champagne bottle waiting next to the pillow, poured a glass for each of us, and returned the bottle to the floor. Joy pulled away and wiped her cheeks before accepting her glass.

I stood, for I could not say this sitting, and raised my glass. Joy stood as well, and raised hers to touch mine.

“This is for the over 100 million people you four alone are responsible for murdering in the Old Universe. This is for the souls of those

dead. We wish those souls could transcend universes and join us now. We wish they could see into these jars and know their murderers are dead. We hope, in this New Universe, we have saved all their lives. May all their souls now be at peace.”

We clicked our glasses again and drank, tears pouring unabashedly down our faces. I refilled our glasses.

Joy now spoke. “Mom, Gu, Ed, Laurent, and the rest of you loving members of the Society, this is for you all. Humanity of this space and time will never know what they owe you. But we do. Thanks, Mom.”

We toasted them, and when her glass was empty she reached over and lifted a thick black rag from the couch. With Beethoven still playing softly in the background, she slowly draped it over the jars. I tucked the rag around the jars and carried them out the back door of our apartment to the garage we had built for our Buick B25 Touring car. I placed the bundle on the floor, tied the open ends together to secure the contents, and motioned for her to get the small sledgehammer leaning against the wall.

When Joy brought it over I took it, held it upright for a long moment, then swung it down on the rag and its contents. Glass shattered; the fragments of broken glass and teeth ground together with a sound that was loud and satisfying. I handed the sledgehammer to Joy, and she took a solid two-handed whack at the rag. We alternated back and forth until there was nothing inside the rag but a jumbled mass of glass splinters and crumbled enamel.

Lifting the rag carefully to prevent its contents from spilling out, I led Joy out onto Fillmore Street. We walked until I saw several stinking garbage cans standing in a corroded and rusted line in an alley next to a restaurant. We went up to them and I waited while she took the lid off one after another, seeking the smelliest one that was still half empty. Then, both gripping the bundle, we opened it and dropped its smashed contents into the garbage can, and tossed the rag in after them. We put the lid back on and pushed it firmly down.

As we walked away, I had this strange feeling that the day was suddenly sunnier, that birds sang louder in the trees, that everyone on the street seemed, somehow, happier.

Chapter 41

Should I go into my personal horror? Why not stop here, and do now what I must? I can't help it. I've got to go on. It's all I have to hold onto, the only compensation for what I did.

By the late 1920s the mission no longer was at the center of my life. I no longer had the same dedication, the same missionary zeal. My life fell apart and that's all I really cared about. But still, I remain proud of what we accomplished. Maybe a few, just a few words about it might help my despair.



Many of the events we had set in motion in our trips abroad, and by funneling huge amounts of money into peace and democratically oriented groups and parties, were bearing fruit in the 1920s. In this New Universe, the Czar of Russia abdicated on February 25, 1924, and Kerensky became president of the Russian Republic. Social revolutionaries tried a coup in St. Petersburg, but were easily defeated.

Turkey had been a major problem in the Old Universe. Its ally Germany, along with its enemies Great Britain and France, were too distracted by the war to worry about what Turkey was doing to its people. A million or more Armenians and Greeks were murdered. The excuse given for this genocide was World War I and the invasion of eastern Turkey by the Russians. Since we'd ensured that no war or invasion occurred in this New Universe, those Armenians and Greeks did not suffer.

We were afraid, however, that this was only temporary, and that this genocide was inevitable. But the Young Turk rulers were assassinated during a democratic rebellion—quite without our intervention—and replaced by a provisional regime more sympathetic to Britain. In 1923 the Turks elected a pro-democratic majority to their Grand National Assembly, and 15 percent of those were Armenians. The new Minister of Finance was also Armenian, and within two months of the

election Greece and Turkey signed a treaty governing the voluntary immigration of Muslims and Greeks between the two countries.

And in one of the most dangerous of all countries for peace in the Old Universe, Japan, a well planned rebellion of younger military officers failed. By good luck. The police accidentally uncovered the plot when one of the plotters got drunk and leaked it to a geisha, who informed the head of her house, who then went to the police. The government expelled the officers from the military, and the courts gave them ten year prison sentences. The government executed no one. There were no assassinations. The oligarchs still had the power to defeat important legislation, but with the death of former Prime Minister Hara Kei and the ascension of the more liberal-minded Kato Komei, the oligarchs allowed most bills approved by the parliament to pass into laws. Thus, the famous Civil Authority Statute of 1935, which placed the military under Civil Authority, became law. And the Minister of Military Affairs would henceforth be a civilian appointed by the prime minister with the approval of the legislature.

Enough of this. I simply can't generate the interest to say more about the mission. I can no longer avoid it; I have to face what started killing me.



I was getting older and age was beginning to take its toll. For the first time in what would eventually become a pattern, I had to get up during the night to pee. Joy was not in bed. I assumed she was either doing some work on her computer or playing one of the computer games she programmed that often occupied her for hours. So it appeared.

Since I was up, I thought I would give her a little kiss and see what she was doing. I looked for her in the living room. No Joy. No Joy in the kitchen, either. Maybe in the garage we had built for our cars (Joy had a new LaSalle coup now, to my new Mercedes Touring Sedan). No Joy. And her car was gone.

Now wide awake, I waited in bed for her to come home. Maybe she had to go to our company for something. Or perhaps she wanted something from our supply capsules and had driven to where we had them secured. I ran down and up and sideways though all the possibilities. And I waited.

I left the bedroom light off so she wouldn't see it when she came home. I don't know what time it was when I heard her in the living room. Soon she was in our bathroom, and then next to me in bed.

I rolled in her direction, put my hand on her hip, which I often did, and found it cold to my touch. I acted as though just awakened, and asked, "Did'ya win?"

She was startled. "Win? What?"

"Your computer game."

"Oh. No. I've got to reprogram the weapons to make it less difficult."

"Well, good luck next time. Good night." I almost choked over the words and hoped she thought I was just sleepy.

Soon she was breathing deeply, while a tornado twisted my emotions into a maelstrom, making it almost impossible for me to think. *Joy had lied. Again! She was out somewhere in the middle of the night. She was sneaking around. She was having an affair. Pure and simple. Who? Sal, Dolphy, Hands. They were all married, but so what? And she especially liked Hands. He will be the first one I'll check.*

Joy had her own secretary by now and both our secretaries kept a log of all our appointment times, telephone calls, and arrivals and departures. I could find out on what dates Joy had been late in the morning, which usually was when she slept in after a late night on the computer or catching up on some work—so she said. I'd never questioned this before. And now I knew that when she slept in it may have been because she was whoring around.

I may have caught some sleep toward early morning, but I was awake when light filled the bedroom. Joy slept in that morning, as I expected she would, and I drove off to our company. When my secretary came in I asked her to cancel all my appointments, and get the daily record Joy's secretary kept of her activities. I also asked her to get the records of all the times Hands, Dolphy, and Sal were out of town for any reason from their own secretaries.

I was stupid and I didn't care. By lunch, I'm sure, the secretaries had all whispered to each other around the water cooler, and thereafter gossip would pass through the company with the speed of sound.

As soon as I received the records, I went to work.

Joy didn't come into her office late in the morning very often. Maybe about once in six weeks. When I correlated that with when the three guys were in town, there was no match. Sometimes one or the other would be here; sometimes not. No one stood out consistently with her lateness. Twice when she'd been late, all three were out of town.

I was frustrated. It must be somebody else in the company or someone she had met elsewhere, I decided, maybe someone associated with her charity work. I wasn't going to use a private detective agency on this, given our many secrets. I would track this down myself.

My mind now says I should have let it go. So she was having an affair. We weren't married, she was her own boss, and I had the best years of her love and devotion, and the envy of other men wherever we went. But then, my jealous heart screamed at me, *Joy is with another man. She is kissing him. She is purring and caressing him. She is making love to him. He has the whole tour of her body.*

It was a knockout in two seconds. My heart took over.

I would wait. No problem when Joy went to bed with me and I could hear her sleeping. But when she stayed up at her desk in the living room, doing something on the laptop, I also stayed awake, listening for her to leave the apartment. Many times I snuck out of bed to make sure she was still there.

Weeks went by and nothing happened and I got sloppy. The seventh week, she stayed up at the laptop when I went to bed, and while waiting for her to leave—if she was going to—I fell asleep. I woke up with a start and quietly looked into the living room to see if she was there. No.

She was gone from the house and her car was gone as well.

“Shit, shit!” I yelled at myself.

I waited in bed. Hours later she came home. This time I said nothing and acted as though I was asleep. I was going to have to take a different approach to this.



When Joy arrived late at the company the next day, I told my secretary that I had forgotten something at home, and left. At the apartment I thoroughly searched through everything, including in, under, and behind her drawers, closets, many jewelry boxes, and the pockets of our clothes in the closet. Several times, I passed by the dress she was soaking in a bucket placed in the bathtub. This was the way she removed or softened stains from food and drinks before taking her dress to the Chinese laundry with our other clothes.

Not getting anywhere, almost as a last resort, I pulled the dress out of the bucket, thinking that there might be semen on it. If there were, it would only confirm what I knew to be true. But I checked anyway.

When I held it up high, letting the water flow off it into the bucket and tub, I saw something near the hem. It looked like . . . I looked closer. It is . . . I blotted the area with toilet paper. “It is . . . Jesus Christ!”

I dropped the dress into the pail and dropped down on the floor and put my head in my hands.

I now knew what she was doing and it blew my mind. Everything fell together. I was positive what I was going to do the rest of the day would prove it.

Mechanically, I made sure that the bucket and the dress soaking in it looked as I’d found it. I cleaned water off the floor, and washed my face in the sink to cool it. My heart beat so hard that my whole body jerked with each pulse.

I went to my office and picked up the record of when Joy had been late to her office and then drove to the offices of the *San Francisco Courier*. After I explained that I was doing some research on China for my company, they let me into their archives.

Hours later I emerged from the archives in a daze. I said something to the editor when I left, which I hope was a “Thank you,” and drove home.

I now had an explanation for her moods. For her fucking tiredness. For her late night trips. I didn’t even need to follow her to make sure. I was sure.

I sat at the kitchen table with nothing in front of me but my pocket watch lying on the waxed floral tablecloth, and I waited. I was more heartbroken than I would have been if I’d been right about her whoring around. I was ready to leave her, and screw the mission.

I stared at nothing. I physically felt nothing except a boiling hot ball in my stomach. I could have been lying sidewise on the chair, as far as I knew. My hands were somewhere, doing something. They could have been peeling back the skin of my face or gripping one or both of my guns. I didn’t care.

All the time I waited, my entire consciousness was twisted around one bloody, all-destroying fact.

At 5:33 Joy came in the back door from the garage, saw me sitting at the table, and gave me a cheery “Hi love.”

Why waste time? I spit it at her: “How many have you killed on the street in the last year?”

Joy dropped her dangerous purse on the table between us and collapsed on the dining room chair across from me. I grabbed the heavy purse and threw it over my shoulder.

I waited.

Her eyes got soft and wet.

I screamed at her, “Go ahead. Cry! I don’t give a fuck. I want to know how many you murdered!”

Tears ran down her cheeks. How can I explain the look that now came over her? Her face flushed, her brows knitted, the corners of her mouth turned down and I thought she was biting her lip. She kept rubbing one hand up and down the sleeve of her other arm. She slumped over the table. Tears dripped off her chin onto the tablecloth. She stared aimlessly at the table, blinking, her wet eyelashes combing through her tears.

This was where, in the past, I would have gone to her, put my arms around her, pressed her head onto my shoulder, and caressed her back. I might even have cried with her.

I knew she wasn’t acting. It didn’t matter. “Cut the crap,” I yelled. “How many?”

I could barely hear her. “Maybe . . . four . . . or five.” The last word came out in a gasp.

I jumped to my feet, grabbed my chair, and bought it down on the sink with all my might. It broke into pieces. I still held onto part of the back and I threw that at the window, which showered broken glass onto the garage area.

“You fucking murderer. It’s eleven. In one goddamn year. You must have killed a hundred or more since you started.”

My hands balled into fists. I stood over her and roared, spewing spittle at her, “And you deceived me every second, every hour, every day, every month, every year since the first one.”

I hit the table with my fist so hard that Joy jumped and the table bounced a foot away from her.

I couldn’t stand her anymore. I rushed out, jumped into my car, and tried to burn rubber. These cars didn’t burn rubber yet. I stalled my Mercedes several times, until I was able to gain some semblance of control over my devastating anger—like trying to redirect a blowtorch with a paper towel—and let up on the accelerator.

I drove anywhere and nowhere, just to be away.

I slept in my office that night, and my secretary brought me a Danish and coffee when she saw how I looked the next day. Joy did not come in to the office and her secretary asked me what to do about an appointment she had scheduled.

“Cancel it,” I said. I’m sure my anger showed. I also cancelled my appointments and drove to Golden Gate Park. I paced around the park. Turned inside out by my anger, exhausted and brokenhearted, I finally plopped down on a familiar shaded bench on a grassy knoll.

Elbows on my knees, my head often in my shaking hands, I stewed and grieved there for hours. A policeman passed me two or three times and finally stopped and asked for identification. I gave it to him; it had my picture on it.

He studied it and my face—it hardly looked like me, in my current condition—and asked, “You look like one of those bums we get in here. You having a problem?”

“The woman I love died.”

I didn’t tell him it had happened years ago.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Mr. Banks. You stay here as long as you like. Lay down on the bench if it will help. I’ll keep people away.” With a tip of his cap he strode off, but he occasionally reappeared to give me a sympathetic nod.

My mind was in chaos, except for one banner-like thought that kept streaming through it: *My love is a serial murderer.*

Not past love. I still loved her, even then. I loved so much about her. But what do you do when you love a serial murderer? I couldn’t turn her over to the police. I couldn’t abide her murdering people. I began to think seriously of suicide, I was so torn, so heartbroken, so desolate.

Joy found me there and sat down next to me. She knew what I would do when I was this depressed. I had come here alone before, and we had come here together.

She’d dressed for the age, but crazily. She had on the required long dress, but its blue clashed with the brown of her sloppy sweatshirt from the future. She wore no hat, and had let her messy hair fall loose around her shoulders. She looked like a gypsy.

The policeman happened to be nearby and started over, but I waved him off. He must have thought I was either being propositioned or pan-handled.

She had bitten her lip and it was swelling. It trembled. Her voice wavered as though pushing against a powerful wind, but I could feel the force of will she was imposing on her anguish so she could explain, “It started with the boys who attacked me in Mexico. I was sorry they were boys, but they were still rapists and maybe murderers. Before we left, I went out by myself to see if I would be attacked again. Nothing

happened. When we got home I wondered if I would be attacked here if I walked down a downtown street at night. I was. By two thugs with knives. I killed them both. Then it occurred to me that, using myself as bait, I could help clear the city of these scum. It was another kind of mission, but not entirely different.”

She broke eye contact, and looked unseeingly down at her hands, which seemed to be clasping and unclasping of their own will. She took a deep breath and let it out in a gust. “So, about every five or six weeks—”

She hesitated and cast a dejected glance my way when I shook my head and dropped it into my hands. *Holy mother of God, every five or six weeks.*

“—I would go out on the street, and if I were attacked, so much for them. And so much the better for the city and women. I didn’t dress sexily. I didn’t act provocative. I just dressed as would a working woman or a wife on some late night errand.

“Many men would pass me without a word or threatening movement. The vast majority, as a matter of fact. A few stopped to warn me about being out alone and offered to pay for a taxi to take me home. They were sweet. Only a small number of thugs thought they had free pussy, and I was happy to send them to hell.”

I tunneled my head further into my hands. *Joy was “happy,” like “Oh. Fun.”*

“I think I did a public service, John. I helped clean up the streets, and I went to bed afterwards happy that I had saved some women from a fate worse than death.”

If I hear “happy” one more fucking time, I’m going to staple her goddamn lips together.

“I know I hid this from you. I lied to you. I know you now hate me. I expect you to leave me. I am simply a murderess to you. For the sake of the mission, we’ve—”

“Fuck the goddamn mission.”

“We’ve got to sort out things between us and . . . Oh God, John, I love you so much. I’m sorry. Terribly sorry.” She broke down, her head in both hands, bawling.

I scurried away.

Joy didn’t come home that night and she wasn’t at work the next day. Now I was afraid she was on the verge of suicide, if she hadn’t already killed herself—after all, she had grown up with that warrior code—and I started searching all over for her. I found her at the home

for Chinese girls. Barbara had given her a bed, support, and comfort in what she thought was a lovers' quarrel. When I asked Barbara if Joy was there, she nodded. When I asked if I could see Joy, she glared at me so coldly that the moisture in my breath turned into a pale cloud, I'm sure.

"That is up to that poor woman. I'll ask," she declared.

She came back, gave me a "you are a bastard" look, and said Joy would see me, in a voice that conveyed her thoughts: *I don't know why*. She led me to Joy's door, gave me a final dirty look, and stomped away.

I knocked hard. Joy opened the door and slouched against it, one hand on the knob. Her eyes were red and swollen, her face wet, her hair a mess. Dried vomit was splattered on her sweatshirt, and her dress was twisted and wrinkled. I twitched my nose at the smell of her.

I picked her up. "Where's your purse?"

She pointed to it, and I carried her over to it and said, "Grab it." Then I carried her down the hallway as girls began to pop out of doors to look at us. Barbara opened the front door with an "I'll kill you if you hurt her again" stare, and I carried Joy to my car and plopped her in the front seat. I drove her home without a word between us, and carried her into our apartment.

I put Joy down to sit on the side of our bed. I got down on my knee in front of her, took her locket from around her neck, and held it over my heart. I took her right hand in my left and gently placed it over my hand, her locket, and my heart.

I looked into her eyes, those beautiful eyes now so anguished, and I tried to speak. My lips trembled. Tears almost blinded me. I just managed to get it out, "Now . . . pledge to me . . . tell me that . . . you will never, never . . . go out on the street . . . to murder thugs . . . scum, rapists, whatever, again."

"I do, my dearest, I do," she moaned.

"So help you God."

"So help me God."

I took her hands and I cried like a baby.

What else could I do?

Chapter 42

Joy was more loving, more accepting of my faults, but I think she knew, as I did, that even though the sunken ship of our relationship was refloated a second time, it now sailed still lower in the water. It would not survive another torpedo. It didn't.

Joy's moodiness and understandable tiredness ended, along with her staying up beyond the time I went to bed. I think she now made it a point to put everything away, shut down her laptop, and join me when I went off to bed, even to read.

As I come to this part of our history and the years that went by after I discovered Joy's street murders, I feel a special need to update our success. Not for my sake. For hers. She would've wanted this said, and I envision the happiness on her face and the kiss she would've sent to her mother along with something like, "Look Mom, we did it!"

By 1933 our firm had become the third largest such company in the world. This placed a tremendous load on Joy and me, but we managed it by delegating all but emergencies to Hands, and through him, to Dophy and Sal. They in turn had built excellent executive staffs. We had no board of directors. All legal authority was in my hands, which in practice meant Joy and me, and we kept it that way. My estimated wealth in stocks alone was now at two billion dollars, and I was a major mover on the stock exchange.

My success in this was ending, however. The last analysis that Joy calculated of closing values on the New York Stock Exchange in comparison to those in the Old Universe on the same day showed only a low correlation. The financial world had been revolutionized by our interventions, and this New Universe avoided the Great Depression that had started in October 1929 in the Old. New companies not seen in the Old Universe were now big players in the economy and companies that had done very well in the Old Universe were not even on the New York Stock Exchange now.

The major reason for this was the lack of war and the democratization of the Big Powers. Wars always favor some companies over others, and we were now seeing their loss or lack of growth in the New Universe.

An unexpected result of the global democratization taking place, the lack of world wars, and the diminishing local wars was a corresponding retreat of government power and nationalism. When governments go to war, they become garrison states for the duration, and afterward seldom give up more than a fraction of the power they held during the war. This took place even in democracies in the Old Universe. But now, without that threat and actuality of war, the pressure of democratic voters and opinion was forcing a retreat of power.

This retreat involved the willingness of many democracies to consider, debate, and negotiate for the independence of minority groups or colonies that desired such status. Impossible from the perspective of the Old Universe, now Hawaii, Alaska, and California were on the road to independence. In Great Britain, there were glimmerings of thought about the possible independence of Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Québec was now independent of the rest of Canada.

By 1936, we could travel to most places in the world by air. Lacking the great impetus of World War I, airline companies still saw the profit in developing passenger airline service.

But there were still a few things to be done. Our company office in Spain had warned us about a pending military revolt led by General Franco against the socialist-leaning democratic government. Some things from the Old Universe had not changed. Joy was monitoring a possible bloody insurgency in the British colony of India and wanted to be available to travel there if the need arose, so I flew to Spain to handle Franco by myself.

Unfortunately—and I mean unfortunately—calm heads prevailed in India and Joy didn't need to travel there after all. I communicated to her that a pro-government mutiny I had nudged had removed General Franco from power, my contract for his assassination was successful, and democracy had been preserved. I was headed back home.

It was still risky flying across the Atlantic to New York and then jumping to Chicago, Denver, and finally San Francisco. But it was infinitely preferable to those damn trains and ships we had to take years before.

Joy picked me up at the airport in her new Wilson Speedster, and I gave her a leisurely account of the people I'd met, the parties I had to go to, and the so-called antiques that people tried to sell our company. When we got home I hugged and kissed her again, but now more intimately than I had at the airport. We made love, then went to sleep in each other's arms.

If only we could know the future. Not the documented future that time travelers still think of as history even while living in the past, but *our* future in a new universe we created and in which we were trapped. Had I known the special significance of that night, had I known what would follow, had I known . . . But we humans, time travelers or not, are locked in our own time-bound shell, open to our past, closed to our future. What tomorrow will bring for our personal lives, we never know. And thus, we may unknowingly drink our last champagne, see the sunset for the last time, hear Tchaikovsky for the last time, and make love for the last time. Unknowingly.

If I had only known.

And this brings me to what I find almost impossible to relate.

Chapter 43

I want to go back to the early years again. I want relive them, add things I now recall. But I must soon emerge from this long tunnel of remembrance. Time is running out.

I got up late the next morning and Joy had already left for the company. She left me a note: “Good morning, sleepy-head. Coffee made; pancakes in the oven. Will be at one of the orphanages part of the day. Love, Me.”

I had taken with me to Spain two grenades and a lot of ammunition, and had left them hidden in a false bottom of my suitcase when I came home. Now I thought I had better put the grenades and ammunition back into our weapons capsule.

We had purchased adjacent apartments over the years and turned one into storage for, among other things, our heavy capsules. The apartment had a concrete subfloor over which wood flooring had been laid, so we saw no problem in this. We just told the governing committee of owners that ran the apartment building that we kept there the company supplies that we needed handy.

But I had a number of other things to do first. As I pattered around the apartment and straightened out my personal effects, I listened to the local radio station, which reported that the Democratic candidate for president, Norman Thomas, would be giving a speech here this very morning. San Francisco was a Democratic Party bastion. The town buzzed with excitement.

Joy was a strong democrat and gave a contribution of a thousand dollars every year to the national party, and another thousand dollars to the local party. We had agreed that we would never use our mission’s funds for partisan political purposes in the United States, but we gave ourselves salaries of twenty thousand dollars a year from the company that we could treat as private income to do with what we wanted.

Joy hated Norman Thomas. I remember her rant over the choice of Thomas at the Party convention. “He’s a closet communist,” Joy spit out. “He’s an utterly stupid choice. Have the Party bosses no sense? He’ll put his ideological cronies in the cabinet, and they will do the

same in their departments. As they appoint more and more of their kind, they'll load up the government and the courts with those dedicated to revolution."

She wagged her finger at me. "I'm telling you, by the end of his four year term, he will have carried out a silent and legal coup. I'm voting Republican this time, although I don't think it will do a damn bit of good."

And on and on.

I thought she was exaggerating, and I listened with half a mind. I ranted myself from time to time, over some stupid politician or policy. I should have paid more attention.

When I finally went to the weapons capsule, I leaned in to put the ammunition and grenades away, and noticed it was missing. At first I just looked. Then I looked more carefully. Then I searched in rising panic. It was gone. She was gone. I slammed the capsule door shut, rushed into our apartment, and searched the whole apartment as fast as I could.

What time was it? I looked at my watch. It was 10:03. God, I had twenty-seven minutes.

I ran out the door without even closing it and dashed into the garage. Joy had left the garage door open when she had driven out. I jumped into my Mercedes Roadster, shoved the key into the starter, and prayed, "Please start."

It did. I screeched the tires as I backed out, and shoved the gearshift into first even while it was still moving backwards. In this car I could burn rubber, and I did as I headed out of our alley and turned onto Fillmore Street fronting our apartment. The car's back end skewed around and I almost lost control. Then I was on my way to the large bandshell at Golden Gate Park.

I drove as fast as I could, bouncing over potholes, passing cars and trucks, driving on the wrong side of the road, missing cars by inches, scattering pedestrians, topping hills and flying through the air to come down the other side with a screeching bounce. I didn't care. I would gladly spend my life in jail, if only I could get there in time. I side-swiped a truck; one of my fenders flew into the air and I almost lost control. To get around a crowd of cars I drove off the road and through bushes and cans in a spray of broken branches and can lids and garbage. I almost flipped when I made the turn into the park at Lincoln and 9th Avenue and kept going until I crashed through a wooden bar-

rier and onto the grass of the park, the back of the car skidding left and right. I kept going until blocked by trees.

I jumped out and dashed through the trees. I knew precisely where to go. We had discussed it during our walks around the park, and she had commented on how effectively the hidden knoll could be used.

I glanced at my watch. Only four minutes left. I jumped a little stream and strained my foot. Fuck the pain; I kept going.

And there she was.

She lay on her stomach, clutching her prized British Accuracy International sniper rifle. She had set up a solid support of rocks and a large branch for the rifle, and she was sighting it through the sniper's telescopic sight. I looked far down the park toward the speaker's platform, about half a mile away. She wouldn't miss Norman Thomas when he started to speak. There were no secret servicemen around, this far away. Indeed, the protection of the nominees for president and vice-president had become lax by 1936. There had been no attempt to assassinate a president since that of William McKinley in 1901, and the country had not had war or a terrorist bombing or killing since then, either. No one could shoot accurately at this distance with 1936 rifles which, without the stimulus of war, were even less accurate than those in the Old Universe at this time.

I didn't hide the noise I made as I charged her. Joy swung her head toward me. In a flash, she had her magnum in hand, a silencer attached, and it was aimed at my heart. She held it steady, finger on the trigger, her arm extended. I was unarmed and without my armor, but that didn't make a difference. Neither of us said a word. She kept the gun pointed at me, and I was ready to die.

Twenty feet. She didn't shoot. Fifteen. I was still alive. Ten. Surely now she would shoot. Five feet. She didn't. I fell across the sniper rifle and grabbed the barrel. I held it in both hands with all my strength. If she shot me I hoped that she would not be able to wrest the rifle from my dead hands.

Off in the distance I heard clapping and cheering that went on for several minutes, and then the far voice of someone speaking.

I was beginning to feel the bruises and cuts from hurtling through the woods, and I was at an odd angle on the rifle, which was digging into my side. I had my back to her.

I heard her say, in a voice from Hell, "You never did learn how to zigzag."

Her very last words to me. How ironic.

Soon I felt her head on my back, shaking. I guessed she was crying.

I still held onto the gun barrel with all my strength, but it was waning. I had to do something soon. I tried to roll off the rifle and take it with me. I did. She was not putting up any resistance. I still held it as tightly as I could as I moved away from her. Then, lying on my side, I swung the rifle into the woods.

Finally, I looked at Joy. She was fifty-seven years old. Her hair, now styled shoulder length—more appropriate for her age, and the new fashion—was graying on top and in streaks down the back. She'd still looked much younger than her years, as many Asian women do until in their late sixties. Now, she looked ten years older than she had yesterday. The elegant beauty she had matured into was now ruined by wrinkles and lines in her face I hadn't seen before, and her compressed lips. She had stopped crying and looked at me with eyes that were still her best feature, eyes that, as always, dominated her face. They were flat, almost empty; they had the same look I'd seen in the eyes of the murderers on the "Colombo" television detective series, when Colombo confronted them with the evidence that proved they did it. It was resignation. Acceptance. Death.

I put out my hand, and she listlessly dropped her magnum into it. I threw it into the woods. I put out my hand and Joy took it and I pulled her up. Then, holding her cold, lifeless hand, I led her out of the woods and to the Mercedes.

I opened the door for her and she got in. I drove slowly home.



The door was open at our apartment, and I led her into the bedroom, closed the door, and pointed to the bed. She sat on its edge. I pushed her down onto her back. She didn't look at me at all. She didn't resist.

I had no thought. My mind had been destroyed and would have to be rebuilt. My body was running totally on some instinctual inner drive and my soul was a void.

I jumped on Joy and grabbed a pillow with both hands and shoved it over her face and put all my weight on it. She started to fight me and then stopped. She put her hands over mine and helped me press down. Her warrior body rebelled, automatically fighting both of us. She pressed down on my hands harder. My face was inches from her hands as I bore down. She raised one hand off mine and reached for my face

and caressed my cheek with the back of her fingers. She touched my lips with her forefinger. Then, with a shudder and a full body quiver, her muscles relaxed. Her finger fell from my lips. Her other hand went limp.

I held the pillow on her face for another minute, maybe five minutes, I don't know.

I raised the pillow and looked at her peaceful face. Joy was dead.

Chapter 44

I still had no thoughts. I hadn't had a thought since I took her hand in the park. I was still a robot I didn't know where my directions came from. I just followed them.

Without thinking I had parked the Mercedes in the alley next to our rear apartment door. I got a shovel and pick, and threw them into the car. I carried Joy to the car and laid her down on the rear floor. I had a full gas can for emergencies and emptied it into the gas tank. Then I drove to our weapons range. There was a little hill overlooking the range, which was in poor condition and overgrown. We hadn't used it for many years.

I dug her grave there. Deep. So she would be sitting in it facing the range—her range, really. I fixed her hands in her lap and closed her hands around her locket. I kissed her goodbye, and crawled out of the grave. I filled it in, and placed on top of it what she had bought to plant next to our apartment—a red bougainvillea. In this soil and with the constant sun here, it would flower perpetually with brilliant red bracts. It would be beautiful. Appropriate.

It was evening when I returned to the apartment. I washed myself and changed my clothes.

I drove to the airport and picked up tickets for Joy Phim to fly Pan Pacific the next day to China. I returned and took a cab to where Joy had left her car, drove it back to the apartment, and parked it in the garage, as she would have.

I packed two suitcases with her things, including toiletries and her laptop, and got rocks from outside to further weigh the suitcases down. I drove to the bay and found an overhanging ledge over deep water and threw the suitcases in.

I returned to the apartment again and lay down on the couch. I couldn't touch the bed. My mind was still empty. I think I was in some kind of shock. In absolute denial. I just lay there the whole night. I may have slept some. I don't know.

In the morning I turned on the radio and the news was about the huge crowd that turned out for Thomas's speech. What he'd said was summarized.

I went into the bathroom to pee, and then I saw it. On the glass shelf below the mirror, its soft bristles slightly worn at the ends, its wooden grip toned dark brown by her body oil, it filled my eyes. I had not packed her toothbrush.

Her toothbrush! Joy! Jooyo! The sledgehammer of stark realization finally smashed into me. I'D KILLED JOY!

Everything hit at once. The vision of Joy alive and happy. Her sweet voice when she said she loved me. My love for her. Our arms twined together. Her kisses.

And what I couldn't bear above all—Joy must have thought I hated her when I . . . we . . . murdered her. I didn't. I loved her. I always loved her.

Why go on.

In a flood of tears, I found my H&K and pointed it at my temple. I put my finger on the trigger. And then my mind seemed to slowly emerge from the wreckage. Maybe this was Joy trying to help. Maybe we were partners again, even as we were in her death.

There was still much to do. Regarding the mission and our company, there was much to sort out and close down. Her mission—I never thought it otherwise from then on—had to be ended appropriately. Her death had to be recognized and honored.

I put the gun down, curled up on the couch, and cried myself to exhaustion, until my body demanded rest and sleep. I woke up in late afternoon, washed my face, and spoke a few words aloud, testing my voice to clear it and try to calm it.

I called Hands. I told him Joy was involved in secret negotiations about our business in Asia, and had to fly there to handle it personally. I told him the cover for this was that we'd received an emergency call from our office about the revocation of a large export contract with us, and that's why she'd gone there. I also told Hands to handle the company for the next week. I had much work to do at home since returning from my trip to Spain.

I can't describe the misery I went through in the next two days, and I won't try. At the end of them I was still an emotional ruin, but I was better able to function.

We each had left a note for the other in case of death on one of our trips. I took hers out of our safe with shaking hands and read it. I broke down again. Her words were so beautiful, so sweet. After I recovered, I knew they were just what I needed to do what had to be done.

Joy wanted to be cremated. I could now do this for her. I bought a large metal barrel, and punched holes in its bottom. I also filled a large

gasoline container. I can't describe what I felt when I disinterred her. No words can remotely capture my agony. I couldn't have done it without her last written words to me, giving me enough strength. I can only say that I cleaned her face with a wet rag I brought and kissed her. I put the locket aside and put her in the barrel and cremated her. Her ashes filled the beautiful amber vase she'd bought in China.

I refilled her grave and marked it again with the bougainvillea plant. It may have been her temporary home, but it was now holy to me.



Now, I waited. And waited. Days went by. They turned into weeks. I had finally returned to the company and worked on automatic. I think I conducted business and even held meetings. I was told I looked sick, that I was distracted. I said I was suffering from some Spanish virus I picked up on the trip.

Each night I went home to our apartment, and cried into its emptiness. I was a limp rag. No desire to eat, although I did mechanically. No desire to live, although I had convinced myself I had to for a while.

Finally, the news I waited for came over the radio. On a regularly scheduled flight from Canton to Peking, China's Golden Airlines Flight 37 crashed in a storm. All twenty-one passengers were killed.

I waited two days, the normal amount of time it would take officials to sort out who was aboard, determine their next of kin, and send a telegram to them.

I called Hands. Now I could communicate my emotional devastation. I simply sobbed, "Joy died in a Chinese plane crash."

"Oh NO!"

I waited. I knew he was trying to pull himself together enough to utter what he wanted to say. Choking on the words, he told me, "I'm terribly sorry. You have my deepest sympathy. I'll be there." He hung up without another word.

He came, and listened to me talk about her and our love for each other. He held me and rubbed my back, and he cried with me. "I loved her also," he told me. I knew it was true.

Then, out of sheer exhaustion, I got a few hours of sleep on the floor. I still could not sleep in our bed. Hands slept on the couch.

A week later I searched our storeroom for the best funeral urn I could find. I knew Joy would love it. It was of the finest quality porce-

lain, and decorated with pink flowers in the style of a Japanese kimono. Its handles were done in gold, and the blue base and lid were trimmed in gold. I took it to my apartment and transferred her ashes into it.

I told people I had received her ashes and would hold a little private funeral in my apartment. I asked only Hands, Sal, and Dolphy to attend.

I had made a little altar. On the top I placed the urn containing her ashes. On each side I placed a candle and set photographs of Joy on each side of them. One photo I had taken soon after we arrived in this universe, when she was twenty-five, and the other I had taken last year, when she was fifty-six years old. I had pushed deep into my unconscious what she looked like at the park when I discovered her. In my mind's eye, age had not diminished her beauty; it had merely become more mature, more refined.

On a lower shelf, I placed the throwing knife she'd brought with her from the Old Universe, which I removed from her sheath before cremating her. Next to it, the tattered red headband that she had worn when we first made love, had worn while killing the attacking thugs in China, and had always worn when we practiced martial arts. Next to it I set the folded pants I had been wearing during that training session, and which I'd worn on our flight from the Old Universe.

On the last shelf, just beneath the urn, I put a bowl in which I could place burning incense, and to its right I opened the scrapbook we had made together, filled with photos of the inauguration of President Madero in Mexico, the Titanic as it docked in New York, the unveiling of the statue of Kant in front of the German parliament, transcripts of the speech to parliament by Prime Minister Saionji on his party's great election, and the victory celebration speech of Sung Chiao-jen. On the last page, I knew, was a photograph I'd taken of the jars containing the teeth of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao.

I had placed cushions before the altar, along with glasses and a bottle of cold champagne. When Hands, Dolphy, and Sal arrived, I motioned them to the back three cushions and took the front one myself. I lit the incense that waited in the bowl, knelt, lifted the bottle, and poured the champagne into four glasses. I handed one to each of the three men behind me.

With the others there, I could not say all I wanted to say. I would say those words later, in private, before her altar. Now, I looked at the pictures of my beautiful, brilliant mistress of life, love, martial arts, weapons, and of me, and I lifted my glass and said simply, "You and me, my love, forever."

Each of the others expressed his own love for Joy, drank a toast to her, and paid quiet respects to her, each in his own way.

Finally I stood up, hugged each of them, and thanked them for coming. When they were gone, I draped her locket around the urn so that it hung down the front. I sat for hours before this shrine to my love and the New Universe. I thought of all that she had done, and I knew that her soul would eventually meet with those of the lives she had saved.



At the end of each day, I lit incense on Joy's shrine and told her about what I did during the day and the steps I took in ending our mission. I never told her that Norman Thomas lost to the Republican candidate in a landslide.

In one of my final summaries of our mission, I informed her, "There no longer appears any danger of a world war, nor local war among the major powers. Germany has developed a stable democracy. While Japan still yields considerable authority to the emperor and the oligarchs that act in his name, the country is a partial democracy. Its democratic power is growing and the military is kept in its place. There were rumblings among the elite and another planned rebellion by young officers, but it was unsuccessful. The generals are taking to heart the idea of civil authority. That especially was your doing, baby.

"Democracy in Russia is working well. The country is beginning to compete industrially with Germany, France, and Great Britain. With her resources, economists expect Russia to be second to the United States by 1980 or 1990. Internally, Russia's many minorities and republics that differ in language and custom from Russians are seeking more autonomy, or sometimes outright independence.

"What we didn't expect, sweetheart, was that with no wars and threats of wars, there would be a decline in nationalism. Central governments are now more sympathetic to minorities splitting off, and are granting their colonies independence. People, and especially national elites, now recognize that this is better than fighting them.

"Your favorite, China, is an exception to this and remains a major problem. It is a democracy, to be sure, although civil rights and political liberties are always in question. The large minority groups in the West that always fought for independence still pose a particular problem. Uighuristan, sometimes called East Turkistan, gained its full

independence in 1910. The Chinese central government resisted, as you knew it would, and still resists the independence of any other minorities. But, the latest evidence suggests that this is changing.

“You would also be happy to know that there is much diplomatic talk among the democracies of forming by treaty the United Democracies, the first worldwide international organization in the New Universe. It would be made up of the 110 democracies that now exist, and any new democracy would become an automatic member.

“There apparently is agreement that all remaining colonies still ruled by democratic countries would be transferred to a trustee agency of the United Democracies. Its purpose would be to provide education, training, and economic aid for the people of former colonies until they could sustain democracy on their own. Then their people would be able to vote on independence and sovereignty.

“For reasons you know, baby, my major fear is terrorism. Unlike the Old Universe we knew in 2001, no terrorism is now brewing anywhere in the Islamic world. Without World War II and the Cold War, there will be no catalyst for such terrorism in the future. There are difficulties and conflicts in the Middle East, to be sure, but not one of these newly independent Islamic countries is supporting or giving aid to any terrorist groups.”

In my mind, I heard her cautioning me.

“I know. This is not a perfect universe yet. There are still some local wars and rebellions, and massacres do happen, especially in Africa. Humanity still has to contend with genocide (there still is no word for it in this universe), as one tribe gains democratic power and tries to use it to subdue another tribe. Moreover, there are large areas of the world still sunk in poverty, where life expectancy has hardly improved over what it was when we came to this New Universe. But that is slowly changing and as democratization expands even to these remote areas of the world, so will the growth in welfare and human development.”

I stopped, leaned forward, and put my hand on the side of her urn, where I’m sure her cheek was, and told her, “Be proud, my sweetheart. Be happy. On balance, this New Universe is one hell of an improvement over the Old, with its world wars and mega-murders, and the vast numbers of people living under dictatorships.”



In another talk with Joy I mentioned what I had done to sort out our commitments and wealth. I told her, “I stopped trading on the stock

market. The market no longer resembled that in the Old Universe, and by last year my winnings were approaching my unintentional losses. This measures how much we have changed the world. You and I, baby.

“No matter. I had to cash out anyway. I decided to gradually cash in my whole portfolio so as not to upset the market. I also announced my retirement from business. I know this is sad. You and I created the Tor Import & Export Company, and I saw your spirit in it each time I conducted business. It is a monument to you. But, it is time.

“I called a meeting of Hands, Dolphy, and Sal, and said simply, ‘I’m retiring from the business, and will sell it in whole or in part. I will give each of you 200 million dollars as severance pay and bonus. If you want to use this to buy any part of the conglomerate or combine your bonuses to do so, I will give you a special deal. I intend to spend the rest of my fortune on the creation of the Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute.’

“This was hard, sweetheart. One of the hardest things I had to do since we parted. In the meeting I had to stop to collect myself, and then I finally said, ‘Its purpose will be to promote an understanding of democracy and its contribution to peace and welfare.’”

Dolphy and Sal used their money to purchase regional subsidiaries of the firm, and Sal created a scholarship awarded in the major universities of South America: the Joy Phim scholarship for students in peace or the study of mass murder. Dolphy did the same in Europe. Hands created the Joy Phim Chair of Peace at Harvard University, and gave the rest of his money to the Joy Phim Institute I had set up. He also became its first president.



I know that Joy was surprised by what I told her in our final talk. This time it had to be addressed only to a little Chinese teacup with a spoonful of her ashes that I took from the urn. No matter. Her smiling spirit was there.

I lit incense and candles on what remained of her shrine. With a deep sigh, I let her know that, “We were not as smart hiding our time travel as we thought. Since Hands became head of your—smile, baby—institute, I had to tell Hands about our time travel, if for no other reason than he would have to take over the supply capsules and time machine.

“He said that he, Dolphy, and Sal knew. Dolphy had figured it out. He couldn’t believe it at first, but too much fell into place to confirm it. Besides, Dolphy is a science fiction reader and that made it easy for him to be convinced, and he then persuaded the others.

“Oh yes. I turned over all your jewelry to the Chinese girls’ home, and have endowed them and the orphanages that you helped. The endowment is in your name and I’m sure you will be remembered. I see your happy tears, baby.

“I had a crypt built at the Cypress Lawn Memorial Park. I have endowed it so that it will be taken care of forever, even if the cemetery moves. Our ashes will be combined and placed in an even more beautiful urn in the crypt. I know you will love it.

“I’ve chosen the epitaph for our urn. I did what I now wish we had done when we first arrived. I married us. You were always truly my wife in heart and soul, Joy Phim-Banks. This simply confirms it. No one but you and I will ever understand our epitaph. Too bad we didn’t, right from the beginning.

“Now, my love, all is done. I signed a million documents. I purchased all the apartments in this building and helped the tenants move out of them and find new homes. The mission is over. It is time for me to join you. I have moved your ashes to the crypt and I will be with you in day or so, our souls forever commingled. I have left a will to ensure this will be done.

“Now I’m ready. The flames are approaching, and the smoke is almost too thick to see through. I can hardly breathe. In minutes I will lay down on the bed where I always slept with you. I will hold your photograph on my heart and on top of it, this account of our wonderful life together and our successful mission. It has kept me alive until now.

“I’m so sorry you died believing I hated you. I did not. I always loved you. Now, my sweetheart, my wife, we will be together again. You will know my love again. I’m coming.”

Epilogue

We have been at peace for one hundred years. No major nation threatens us today. No American soldier has died on a foreign battlefield in all that time. Peace has been secured by the United Democracies. I therefore will make it my policy to decommission all but ten of our warships, and reduce the size of our armed forces to 50,000 men and women. I will also recommend to Congress that the funds thus saved go to the United Democracies for their effort at global human and economic development.

President Shirley Morris's Inaugural Speech, *The New York Times*, January 20, 2001, New Universe

Harry Gavino, the old manager of the Cypress Lawn Memorial Park, had a week to go before retiring. Today he was showing his replacement, Derek Kojima, around the grounds. The Park was large and they used a golf cart to get around. He particularly wanted to make sure Derek knew what mausoleum and crypt was where.

In the far reaches of the cemetery, Harry steered the cart down a flowered path to a crypt that stood in relative isolation from the others. It was not very big, but it was solid, squarish, and constructed of beautiful translucent marble. There were no windows, of course. Nor were there decorations or carvings on the outside. But a bed of well cared for variegated roses surrounded the crypt and a trellis of climbing roses framed the entrance. A little granite plaque over the door was engraved with "The Banks' Crypt."

Harry unlocked the door, led Derek inside, and flicked the light switch on. Diffused light emanated from a number of hidden bulbs. The quality of the light made the inside of the crypt appear bathed in a

golden sunrise, with the sun's first rays reflecting off green leaves and verdant plants. Light also shone through the translucent marble. It must have been only an inch or so thick. Derek had never seen anything like this. The veins in the marble took on diverse colors from the outside light as though various hues of rose and green ink had been dropped into a pool of water and then frozen in time before the colors could thoroughly mix.

He stood at the door and looked at the tableau. One large, golden-hued urn rested on one of three Italian white marble shelves on the far wall. On the walls of the crypt hung large framed photographs of a man and an Asian woman in their youth.

Harry pointed to the pictures and said, "They were both cremated and their ashes combined in the urn. They were not married until the end, but lived together for thirty years, maybe more. They are now together here for eternity."

Derek walked up to study a photograph of the couple, hanging above the urn. It was beautifully framed in koa wood. It looked as though it had been retouched with watercolors, for the colors and the woman's beauty seemed to add light to the crypt. The man wore a happy expression as he stood next to the woman with his arm around her shoulder.

There was a locket around the urn that hung down to the shelves below. They contained what must have been the couple's articles of clothing. A red headband and a knife stood out. No way of knowing their meaning anymore. There was an open scrapbook and Derek looked down at the photographs and headlines. What caught his eye was the picture of some liner named the Titanic with a headline about its maiden record-setting voyage. *It must have been a romantic cruise for them*, he thought.

There was a plaque beneath the urn on the edge of its shelf. It said simply:

Joy Phim-Banks—1936 John Banks—1938
THEY LOVED MANKIND
AND EACH OTHER
but
POWER KILLS.

"Why the 'Power kills'?" Derek asked. "I know it applies to dictators and tyrants. This is what my son is learning in Civics. But why as their epitaph? And why the 'but'?"

Harry shrugged.

On the lower shelves there were three other urns, with the ashes of husbands and wives combined. On the walls on both sides were their photographs. One photograph dominated all the rest. It was in black and white of the Banks and the three men when all were obviously in their twenties. They formed a half circle with Joy in the center and their hands joined on top of each other. The plaque read, "The Banks' team."

Derek looked back at the Banks' picture over their urn. There, engraved in the marble wall above, was a poem:

Souls do not disintegrate and die;
Years pass and yet they do not fade away.
Memories are like a distant star
Pouring forth its light across the void.
All our tears and laughter do not lie;
Though we pass like dreams, our spirits stay,
Held fast by love, which is just what we are,
Yet in a form that cannot be destroyed.

Derek noted the red rose in a crystal bud vase next to the top urn. He asked, "Is it in your contract to put a fresh rose in the crypt every day?"

Harry looked puzzled and seemed unwilling to respond. Finally, at Derek's urging, he replied hesitantly, "I don't know how the rose gets there. No one asks for the key, yet each morning there is a fresh rose. My gardener even came to work one morning at dawn, just to see who was putting the rose there. He saw no one, but when he got the key and looked in, a fresh rose was in the vase."

As they turned to leave, Derek waved his hand around the crypt in wonderment. "Who arranged the urns and plaques, and all that? The whole crypt is integrated by a loving hand."

The manager looked even more puzzled. "No one knows. It's like the rose. The caretaker takes an occasional look and maybe once a year or two, something is changed—a picture added, the urn's position changed, something like that. Without the key to the crypt."

For some reason he could not explain, as he was about to follow Harry out, Derek stopped and turned around. He looked slowly around the crypt and then he saluted the urns. He held his salute for a moment, and then said softly, "Rest in peace."

Afterword

While the characters in this story were fictional, the context and background were generally true to life. Considerable social science research has been done on the democratic peace, that democracies do not make war on each other and that globalizing democratic freedom is a solution to war and violence. Indeed, as though John Banks and Joy Phim had advised them, top leaders, such as Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, President Clinton's former National Security Advisor W. Anthony Lake, and former prime minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, have mentioned this power of freedom favorably. And the leaders of ASEAN signed a democratic peace oriented pact in October 2003 of which ASEAN spokesman M.C. Abad pointed out, "The introduction of the notion of democratic peace sets the standard of political norm[s] in the region. It means that member states subscribe to the notion that democratic processes promote regional security."

In spite of this recognition of the power of democratic freedom, the democratic peace has not been the declared focus of American foreign policy until recently. President Clinton came close in the early 1990s by making democracy one of the three pillars of his foreign policy, but it turned out that at best this was a minor one. And regarding Iraq, President George W. Bush has implied a democratic peace: "You see, a free, democratic, peaceful Iraq will not threaten America or our friends with weapons. A free Iraq will not be a training ground for terrorists or funnel money to terrorists or provide weapons to terrorists who would willingly use them to strike our country. A free Iraq will not destabilize the Middle East."

Now it is explicit. In a speech on the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment For Democracy, President Bush proclaimed a Forward Strategy of Freedom. Although focused on the Middle East, it was general in tone. He made the democratic peace a central pillar of American foreign policy, and called it the *Forward Strategy of Freedom*.

However, and this is the however in mind when I undertook this series, while many researchers in international relations and comparative government are convinced of freedom's power for peace, and top American leaders are now basing foreign policy on it, there is a vast ignorance of this solution to violence among the general public. Realizing that entertainment is one of the best ways of conveying knowledge, I hope this *Never Again* series will help fill this void.

In addition, there is also a black hole in general knowledge about how many people have been murdered by governments. Probably about 170,000,000 from 1900 to 1987, as John taught. This is almost five times as many as were killed in combat in all international and domestic wars over the same period. The number murdered would head to toe circle the earth about four times.

There is much about these murders in this first book of the series, and the facts and context surrounding them are as realistic as I could make them: the manner in which victorious guerrillas totally depopulated a capital city in a day, and a teacher is hanged by his little students; the fanatic institute director that reads a book of fiction and then believes a fictional spy in the novel is the real person on his staff, and has him and many others executed; the German auxiliary police trucked to Poland to murder Jews and the way in which they did so; the Rwandan genocide, particularly at a university and hospital; Stalin's intentional Ukrainian famine, and the taking of warm bread off the dinner table and shooting birds out of trees to deprive the peasants of food; and the details of the Battle of the Somme. All happened.

If you wish documentation for these killings and the democratic peace, see my web site at www.hawaii.edu/powerkills.

Above all, I hope that the character driven drama, conflict, struggle, and love in this first novel of the series entertained and moved you. If you also learned something new, so much the better.

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