

# Red Dog



by

James David  
Buchanan

# Red Dog

by

James David Buchanan

Copyright (c)1979 James David Buchanan All rights reserved

e-reads

[www.ereads.com](http://www.ereads.com)

Mystery

NOTICE: This work is copyrighted. It is licensed only for use by the original purchaser. Duplication or distribution of this work by email, floppy disk, network, paper print out, or any other method is a violation of international copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment.

"The upper middle class has an unbelievable degree of educated incapacity to understand very simple issues, like law and order..."

Herman Kahn

# Chapter 1

"What's it gonna be, baby, what's it gonna be?" the red-bearded man in a garish vest challenged, dancing up and down and pounding rhythmically one huge freckled fist into the palm of his other hand.

The men encircling him, their arms around each other's shoulders, stomped in place according to the beat he had laid down and singsonged their response: "I no fucky you, baby, you fucky me!"

"Right, right!" the red-bearded man, whose name was Frederick Munns but who was called Barbarossa by the others, shouted back. "We gonna kill 'em?" he demanded to know. "We gonna blow 'em away?"

"You know we are, you know we are!" a little Chicano, Enrique "Badboy" Solis chanted at the ceiling, his head tipped back like a dancer in ecstasy. "They gonna pay their dues, baby!"

"Freddie D." Diammo looked like a veteran of a long, hard war, but actually he was younger than anyone in the room and had a B.A. in English literature from the University of Washington. It was he who had given Barbarossa his name by way of defending his own identity. Freddie was impatient with the disciplines of rhyme and contented himself with bellowing grace notes of obscenity and threat. It was a skill developed in compensation for his scholarship.

Standing in a corner -- no one sat, no one could sit -- was the man holding singular authority over the others, Connor "Con" Meehan, who treated self-control as a metaphysical idea. He worked off a lamp table at cleaning his carbine, sawed off and rigged for automatic fire. It was already in perfect condition but treating it in this way was simply a part of the same ritual going on around him. Con was not caught up in the romance of weaponry but had a salubrious respect for its function. In the same competent way, he respected the need for the noisier aspects of the ritual.

The phone on the desk rang, creating an instant silence in the room. Roy Jackson, a large blond man with a deceptively mild moon of a face, went to answer it. But first, pausing with his hand on the receiver while it jangled, he turned and looked to Con for permission. He was given it with the slightest tip of the head. Roy's side of the conversation consisted of grunts no more lucid than the signaling of birds, yet the men in the room had been together long enough to perceive that the call was no cause for concern and returned to what they had been doing.

"It's the manager," Roy told Con, "bitchin' about the noise. He wanted to know when we'd be out of here."

"Fuck him!" Badboy said, shuffling by in an eccentric little dance.

"No," Con told him in his soft, measured way, "I don't think we want a lot of gung-ho redneck cops busting in here, do we?"

It sounded like a reasoned argument, but the Chicano knew it was more than that and danced over to the opposite side of the room to tell the others it was time to cool it.

"Shit, I ain't even worked up a sweat," Barbarossa complained. Always the organizer, he reformed the circle and started everybody punching the man next to him, the way kids will hit the one next to them and say, "Pass it on." It was a little less noisy than the dancing.

Badboy circled the circle, singing quietly: "I get no rip from cocaine, mere alcohol don't jazz me at all..." He was too small to get in there and let all those beefy Anglos work it up on him. His sleeves were rolled, revealing East Side L.A. gang tattoos on both forearms. Tough little bastard was still advertising fifteen years after the fact.

Roy came over with a newly opened beer foaming onto the rug. Con gave a glance and Roy put his mouth over the neck until it stopped. "Christ, this waiting," he said, wiping his chin with his sleeve. "You never get used to it, no matter how long you been around."

"You don't want to," Con agreed pro forma. The truth was, he never minded waiting on things like this; what he feared were those gaps in his life when there was nothing comparable for which to wait. He was rare in that he enjoyed action or the lack of it equally -- so long as they were related. It had been the same when he led a platoon in Nam, even though he was only a boy then.

"Want a beer?" Roy asked him.

Con noted that the other man's face was slightly flushed. He was naturally a little florid, but just the same it was probably time to cut off the beer -- Con never allowed anything stronger -- just in case. "Sure, thanks. Everyone have a last one. This thing'll be going down soon."

A certain light came into Roy's eyes. "You know somethin' we don't?"

Con shook his head in the sort of limited response they were all accustomed to. But then he added, "If it doesn't in the next hour, we'll improvise."

Roy ambled over to Freddie D. to tell him, "Tonight's the night, baby. We're going in whether it comes off or not."

Freddie D, who hadn't changed out of his Levi's for weeks except to sleep, and had come to resent his own smell, grinned in relief. Plenty of time later to feel lousy about half a burn if it came to that. Right now he shared an itch with the rest that could only be assuaged by some kind of action. He looked over at the \_jefe,\_ as Badboy called him when he was feeling ethnic, and wondered how he knew when the time had come to scratch.

Con, like the sports managers and coaches he admired, was alone in the crowd; not superior to it, or at least not giving that idea, but not a part of it, either. He was still fooling with the carbine, and would soon celebrate their own special Mass with it.

In a room on the second story of the same motel, a young couple lay sleeping, intertwined. He was twenty-eight, she was twenty-two. Both were nude, their French jeans and monogrammed T-shirts tumbled in a pile at the foot of the bed, as they had made love and fallen asleep directly afterward, the result of a long drive earlier in the day.

The girl was delicate in appearance, with long reddish-blond hair that spread out around her pillow and made a filigree on the sheet she had pulled up over one shoulder. This was Portland, Oregon, in late August, and the air conditioner had over-chilled the room. She had come originally from Victoria, a well-to-do urban background, and he from a relatively poor rural family at the foot of the Cascades. Yet they had driven here in an almost-new Mercedes SL that had been purchased with cash in a paper bag.

In the corner in a portable crib the girl's baby by another man breathed in healthy rhythm, making sucking noises on its pacifier. It was a little boy of eleven months named Jonathan, but called "Free" by the couple in the bed. His natural father was a drummer with a rock group in Spokane.

The young man moaned in his sleep and the young woman, who was used to that without understanding it, reached unconsciously to comfort him. In groping for his face, her hand touched and then jerked away from the grip of the Luger he had placed under the pillow, but without his waking. The young man ceased moaning and the girl rolled over onto her back, her high, firm breasts raising and lowering the sheet. The uneasy sleep might have been due to the fact that they were waiting for an important phone call which was late in coming.

In yet a third room on the second floor, two men were still awake and had no intention of sleeping. They were also waiting for a call, but if it didn't come, they would simply take their empty suitcases down to their Cadillac and start driving in shifts back to San Francisco. One man sat on the toilet with his hat on, a black, narrow-brimmed, wide-banded hat of a type seldom seen west of Bayonne and more typical of Queens or Brooklyn. He was reading the \_New York Daily News\_ or, more accurately, looking at it, and smoking a cigarette.

The other man sprawled on the bed in his underwear and socks, watching television. He drank Canadian Club from a water glass, siphoning it through his gum, and was a little drunk. Next to him on the bed was a .38-caliber Police Special with the safety on. Neither of these Italianate men knew of the presence of the young couple a dozen doors down the second-story exterior walkway, but they wouldn't have been surprised.

Con nursed his beer until it was warm, rationing out each draw at the bottle in such a way as to carry him right up to the moment of action. In his own mind he had settled on 1 A.M. as the best time to move if it was an abort. He rubbed the bottom of the bottle across the palm of each hand, an unaware justification for the moisture already there. Lighting a cigarette and cursing himself because he was trying to quit, he went over and got the Gideon out of the bedside table. Gideons had been one of the few constants in Con's life until lately when a lot of motels had stopped accepting them. He wasn't religious, but still he regretted it.

On Highway 26 fronting the motel, a black Porsche, new and highly polished, cruised past; once at eleven o'clock, in the opposite direction at eleven-thirty, and back quickly once more at eleven forty-five. This last time it moved off the highway onto the surface streets and drove something like a grid pattern in the vicinity of the motel. At last, about twelve-fifteen, the driver settled in a spot two blocks distant from the building to stare at the second story, fixing at a point approximately where the young couple was sleeping.

He sat there as still as a yogi, the only movement a slight jiggle from the idling of the muscular engine. Jerry DeForest had always been known for his self-control, which was genuine in that it was rooted in an adamant self-esteem. He was capable of remaining perfectly still like this and concentrating all of his faculties and energies on a single problem for hours at a time. It was an ability or quality he shared with Con Meehan, a man he had never met.

Jerry, at twenty-nine, was eighteen years younger than the other man. He was three and a half inches taller, over twenty pounds lighter and considerably fairer in coloring. He wore jeans, athletic shoes, an Hawaiian flowered shirt and denim jacket, whereas Con had on worn corduroy pants, a sweatshirt and zippered nylon jacket. There were other differences.

Fifteen minutes passed without sound or movement in the vicinity of the motel. Then Jerry saw two male figures amble along the walkway, watched them disappear around a corner and return again. Both were well set-up, moved with physical ease. He thought he knew who or at least what they might be.

There was some organically grown fruit from his own farm in a plastic bag in the glove compartment; he ate it while he sat and wondered and it helped to pass the time. The Beretta automatic pistol which had been covered by the plastic bag now lay fully exposed and close at hand on the leather seat beside him.

A car turned into the street behind him; Jerry switched off the ignition, gripped the Beretta and slid down out of sight. A four-door gray Chevrolet with two men in it cruised by slowly and went on toward the motel. Something, the way it cruised, the shape of the men in it or the way they sat, or perhaps nothing that concrete but simply an instinct, confirmed for Jerry what he had been thinking.

As soon as they were gone, he turned on the ignition, revved the motor gently and pulled away, each small movement reflecting the smooth economy of that overweening self-control. He drove back onto the highway and then headed north, on U.S. 5, toward the farm, careful not to exceed the speed limit despite a car that longed to pull away. The events of the evening had cost him a cut in five figures, yet he did not feel particularly frustrated or even disappointed. The money would be earned again next month or the month after. He had survived the game, that was enough for now.

The young couple with the baby slept on in the absence of the phone call or visit from a man putatively named Brian Kersey whom they had never seen, and now would never meet. The two men

several doors down were waiting for someone who called himself Michael Cromelin, likewise a man they had never seen. There was no Kersey or Cromelin.

The two hoodlums were less passive, less adaptable than the young couple, men who suffered idle time badly despite the fact that they had served eight and a half years in prison between them. They played gin, quarreled and drank a good deal while listening to late basketball scores on which they had bets riding, coming in from around the country. A man in the next room measured it all with a stethoscope-like device pressed against the wall.

Alec Dineen came out of the bathroom yawning. He was a large man with incipient gray hair. His face was full of tissuey peaks and ridges and the vacant blue eyes seemed to be floating somewhere on an Arctic sea, totally detached from the rest of him. Only recently assigned from another team where he had held command, he moved through these men with assumed authority. Con allowed him that, but there was no love lost between them.

"Shit," Alec complained from an outsized stretch. "What the fuck we waitin' for?"

Con picked up the automatic carbine and cradled it. "We're waiting for me to say what we're going to do." He smiled easily up at Alec from where he sat, although someone else might have preferred to stand.

The walkie-talkie resting on an end table began popping, and Badboy jumped off the couch to grab it and turn it up. "Hey, Irish Leader ... you there?" came through the static.

Badboy looked to Con, who nodded permission. "What's happenin', baby?"

"This is Captain Jack."

"We know who you are, man."

"Where's Irish Leader?"

"He can hear you. Go on."

Alec, Barbarossa, Freddie, and Roy automatically patted down their personal possessions, looked at their watches and checked the chambers and clips of their handguns as they moved closer to the radio. All knew instinctively that whatever was said, the time had come to fulfill their function.

"Well, our guy just heard from your guy. Sorry, but no buy. That fucking Red Dog's a no-show again. Something or somebody spooked him."

The men in the room swore competitively, and banged things around, except for Con, who had hunted Red Dog longer than any of them. He took the walkie-talkie from Badboy.

"Hey," he told Captain Jack, "it's okay, nobody's fault. Probably made some of the local cowboys sniffing around out there. I think I spotted a car myself from the room. Our guy's top of the line, what can I tell you."

"You ever catch the fucker, do me a favor and look up his ass. See if there isn't radar up there."

Con told him the bars were still open, he should go out somewhere and be good to himself. His own people would take care of business.

"Kickoff," Con announced quietly, and everyone gathered around in another ragged huddle. To a man, they were moving on the balls of their feet. Badboy and Alec, who did not like each other, had their arms around their respective shoulders. Roy sucked on a cigar, which was not lit, and flexed his shoulders in a constant loosening motion, like an athlete. Con smoked another cigarette, his second of the night. It was 1:01 A.M.

"Okay, starting with the obvious, the two grownups at the far end are going to be packing, handguns, we didn't see anything else when they checked in, but they are pros. They're boozing but it's only beer and their jackets don't show any instances of real dumb moves when they been collared. At least, not too dumb. That'll be Freddie, Roy, and Alec. Try not to wage World War Three in there, will

you. We're getting all this bitching about costs. Any questions?"

There were no questions -- there never were.

Unless they got some kinda shit in the room, another reason you shouldn't have any grief, unregistered firearms is probably what they'll go up on, and that's, you know, a laugh to a couple of tough guineas like this. On the other hand, don't assume any of this, right? Oh, yeah -- Alec takes the point."

Alec nodded impassively and shifted his ceramic bulletproof vest. He had the seniority and had gone through a lot of doors under these conditions, and his whole attitude conveyed his genuine fatalism at going through one more. If he recognized Con's courtesy in naming him, that didn't show.

The first team, holding their weapons down by their sides, left the room -- gliding, silent hunters who melded familiarly with the night.

Addressing Enrique and Barbarossa, Con went over the problem of the baby and the girl. The listening device indicated that the child was out of the line of fire coming straight through the door. Whatever happened, they must avoid putting any rounds into the area to their left; that is, the south end of the room. The girl would be in the double bed beside the man they were after. She was not armed as far as they could tell, and had no record of violence.

While his own record wasn't much, the young man should be regarded as unpredictable. Con had watched him the day before when he had first come into the area and there was a certain cockiness about him, a suggestion that maybe he had something to prove.

"Any questions?" They followed the first team out onto the walkway.

The only sound was the squeaking of rubber soles as they moved single file down the exterior walkway. When they turned the corner they could see the silhouettes of the others grouped ahead, waiting. Con glanced up at the stars; it was as close to a religious gesture as he ever came, this touching base with the elemental before a crunch. Behind him, Badboy crossed himself surreptitiously.

A woman in a bathrobe, her hair full of curlers, opened the door of her room with every intention of going down to the soft drink machine. Confronted with Barbarossa going by, an outsized Visigoth swinging an automatic pistol, she let out a little yelp and slammed the door. No one smiled. Barbarossa tugged at his earring and muttered: "I'll be glad to get rid of this sonofabitch -- drives me nuts."

The silence deepened, pervaded, restrained the breathing of the men up and down the walkway, until the thought flashed through Con's mind that it would take a great effort of will to violate it. Badboy's reticence, if he had any, was not visible as he moved to slip a pick expertly into the lock. Summer insects murmured in surrounding trees and an occasional car or truck hummed past on the freeway -- Con envied them their innocence -- otherwise, time was suspended. The door edged open with a tiny click and then stopped. Badboy pressed firmly but gently, without success. The chain was on. He listened. No sound from inside. The three men glanced at each other; no one spoke, but Badboy mouthed, "Shit."

Con motioned the others to move aside. He pointed his carbine down at the floor, holding it well out to the side, and backed up against the railing. Looking along the walkway at the other team, he raised his free hand high. His right leg came up and, for one absurd moment, he resembled a wooden soldier on the march. Everyone watched that raised arm.

Con yelled and the hand jerked down. It swung back to the railing and gripped it, helping to lift him off the ground as he launched one foot at the door. There was a cracking sound, but it failed to give. He cursed himself for not having brought a ram.

Badboy began shouting, "Police, police!" in his accented and peculiarly high voice and similar cries were heard from the far end of the walkway, where the first team smashed through without difficulty.

Con reared back and kicked the door again and succeeded only in damaging some ligaments in his foot, which he ignored. By now they were all hollering like maniacs and the din was almost disorienting. Before he could have a third try at it, using his other foot, Barbarossa was past him to hit the door with a great bellow and a shoulder the size of a buffalo's hump, ripping the chain out of the molding with a splintering sound.

The momentum unexpectedly carried him into the room on an angle, stumbling and clawing at black space for balance. He was still hollering but the arc was downward and he found himself utterly helpless in a room as dark as the inside of a stomach. The pistol in his right hand flailed in all directions. He could hear Badboy outside, still at it: "Freeze, motherfuckers! Freeze, goddammit!" but he knew that wouldn't protect him.

Con was into the gap behind Barbarossa almost instantly -- Badboy knew better than to challenge that prerogative -- filling the doorframe with his stocky silhouette and holding it there. Unconsciously, he was going to draw the lightning from Barbarossa, who shouldn't have been in the room before him, anyway. Against his back he could feel the press of Badboy's will, urging him to make way. Ahead of him he heard sounds, but indistinguishable between anger or fear or surprise. Then the bright flash and distinctive snap of the Luger.

If Con hesitated even a fraction of a second, he wasn't aware of it, although later he tried to believe that he had. He brought the carbine up to just above his waist, pointed it at the flash and pulled the trigger. Nine bullets ripped out of the muzzle before his finger left the trigger. He wished immediately it had been seven or five or three, but knew also that such things were instinctive, atavistic; someone had tried to kill him.

Barbarossa was getting his second wind and warming up to a scream. Badboy was still shouting insensibly, things like, "Hold it! Don't move! Police!" Con knew better and his own cries died in his throat; the bullets that had struck walls and furniture had made a distinctive splatting sound, and there were about seven of those -- at least two had penetrated something more yielding. Nevertheless, he lunged to one side and down close to the floor, the gun still pointed. Badboy came into the room behind him in a rush, going the other way, and vanished. There was a truce which no one violated for several seconds, then a moan and the sound of breathing even more rapid and less regular than that of the men who had stormed the room.

Con felt his own breathing become more shallow, knew his heart and belly were sinking away and wished fervently that someone would make the next move for him. Barbarossa hit the light switch, temporarily blinding everyone who could still see. The young man thrashed on the bed, one leg drawn up and held by both hands, as if he feared it would come loose. He looked at the intruders with wildly shifting eyes, pleading or hating. The Luger was on the floor below him; Badboy darted in to grab it.

The girl stared straight up into the glaring light, making spasmodic but very small, diminishing movements. There was already an ugly rattle in her throat and blood billowed up to spread in an ever-growing circle on the covering sheet.

The three officers stared at the couple on the bed as the baby began to wail. Freddie D. came into the room behind them. After a beat, he murmured, "Aw, man."

## Chapter 2

A cruising television news car from one of the Portland stations intercepted a police transmission and arrived at the motel nose to nose with the ambulance. Con was out on the walkway, hands clutching the railing with whitened fingers but otherwise looking on stoically at the scene of gathering confusion in the parking lot below. Barbarossa stood with him. Through the open door of the room they had forced came the moans and cries of the boy with the bullet in his thigh. Badboy was in there, tying off a tourniquet and they heard him hiss: "Shut your fucking mouth, for Christ's sake. \_Babycito!\_"

"Can't take it very well, can they?" Barbarossa muttered. "See a lot of movies and TV. Carry a piece, but they don't ever expect to take one."

Con didn't answer. Behind them a couple of local cops looked into the room and one of them said, "Oh, boy." The other spoke to Enrique. "She dead?"

"Hell, no, man. She's just tryin' on that bloody sheet for a costume and then she's gonna get up and do a dance in it."

The local cop was too young and too awed to take offense; the odds were he had never seen a gunshot victim. The two of them went on to the other room in search of routine police work.

"Fucking circus," Barbarossa said, a little louder. He slammed one fist against the steel railing, making it ring.

"When's it ever been different?" Con said. He looked down at the sound of the news car's screeching brakes and his face evinced emotion for the first time. "The vultures are landing."

Barbarossa needed no more cue than that; he was off at a trot along the walkway and then down the stairs. He met the newsman, a young black in a sports coat and tie, and his even younger bearded, long-haired cameraman, on their way up. He interposed his considerable bulk. "No way!"

The newsman hesitated for only a second, then lowered his head and tried to bull his way around. Barbarossa moved to foil that, his expression going from hard to dangerous.

"Listen, we're going up there to cover a story. Who are you?"

"I'm the elephant that says 'no.'"

"We got a right man. What is this shit?"

The cameraman, balancing the heavy Auricon on his shoulder, was teetering a little and it made him irritable. "You goddamn Feds think you own the fuckin' world. Bunch of fascists."

Barbarossa regarded him with a sinister amusement. He addressed the newsman, "Listen, Charlie, tell this freako clown working with you I'm not a Fed, I'm a Hell's Angel, and he's goin' ass over end down these stairs with that twenty-pound camera, and \_then\_ I'm gonna hurt him."

The newsman wavered and his eyes shifted uncertainly; the push had gone out of him. "We know who you are. There's going to be a big stink over this."

"So what else is new? Move it!" He gave the newsman a shove that forced him to back down a couple of steps.

"All we're trying to do is our jobs. We heard there's a dead girl up there, shot by an agent. Also there was a kid."

"There'll be a wounded suspect down in a minute, lots of blood and he'll cry for you all you want. But you'll have to wait for the coroner to get your corpse shots and that won't be up here."

Con watched them with detachment. He heard the retreating newsman raise his voice to say something about "the public's right to know." Just looking at Barbarossa most people would have surmised that he might not be impressed by media-speak.

Behind Con, the ambulance attendants went out with the wounded kid lying handcuffed on a gurney, passing the coroner going in. Badboy appeared and stood beside him, wise enough in his street way not to say anything. Soon the first team wandered down, having given over their two Italian pros to the locals for transportation.

"Two tough, small-time guinea bastards," Roy reported, "but no trouble at all. I like that. In fact, I love Italians."

Another news team joined the first below but there was nothing to photograph nor anyone to talk to except the familiar police officials who were probably on the Portland tube with painful frequency. Both below and along the walkway the ranks of the curious had thinned. The motel manager still lurked around; he was hoping for a chance to get in and gauge the damage to his rooms and was afraid to ask. Orion slipped toward the horizon and even the highway grew tranquil, with only the occasional whoosh of a passing truck or car. The radio on a squad car squawked to remind everyone what world they were in.

Freddie mentioned to Con, "That sergeant down there wanted me to give him your carbine, but I told him he had a better chance of getting a seven-foot hard-on."

"Right," was all Con said. None of them had seen him quite like this; his stone-dead black eyes gave back nothing of what was going on inside. No muscle twitched in the rigid structure of his heavy-boned face; the mouth was tight but unmoving.

Badboy thought maybe it was carrying "being your own man" a little far and risked an emotional violation. "Hey, man, you gonna stand here all night? I mean, shit, you had to do it. Right? The point man through that door had to do it. It's our franchise, right?"

"I know what my job is, for Christ's sake. And I know what I did in there. Quit smoking me."

"Then quit looking like that. Jesus!" Freddie D. told him with some vehemence. "You just blew away a dealer, Con, that's all. The papers are gonna say she was somebody's golden-haired daughter and everybody in her graduating class loved her and all that shit, and they're gonna give the color of her eyes and say she was unarmed and her baby was sleeping in the room, okay? But the asshole with her had that cute little Luger and thought he was Jesse James. And they were both dealers. How much they have, Badboy?"

"About forty thou. Buyin' for somebody else." He turned to Con. "And the broad had some tracks on her upper left arm. Not much, but it'll help."

"What about coke? They find any?"

The Chicano smiled, even if the news wasn't that good; the fact that Con would ask a question predicated on his self-interest was an encouraging sign. "Couple of yellows and a half-dozen reds in the same n.d. bottle is all, but you know they don't have any prescriptions. Ash and a couple of roach butts in the tray next to the bed. Also in the ashtray of the car. Nothin' hard, though."

Con wished there had been more of a stash, that the young couple had had even small quantities of heroin or cocaine or LSD or angel dust in their possession -- the easily identifiable drugs for a coroner's jury. Several doors down, the two hoodlums had been entirely clean of narcotics, but then nobody had been killed in there.

"If only that fuckin' Red Dog had shown," Roy lamented, "we'd be in hog heaven right now."

There was a perceptible tug at Con's gut upon hearing the name; for the first time since he had pulled the trigger of the carbine he could think of something else besides the terrifying flashes in the darkness, the moans, the red-crested white wave rising up slowly off the bed and the ugly sibilant sounds of life leaving a young girl's body.

The door of the room in back of them opened as the coroner and an assistant brought out the victim wrapped like a mummy in the usual tarpaulin. All six turned to look and followed the gurney with their

eyes along the walkway and bobbing down the stairs, where there was a sudden antlike stirring among the police and news people. Brilliant lights flashed on and a whirring sound indicated cameras were in use. A couple of the locals looked up at the group of federals above them as if to say, "How do you feel about this?" Whatever they were thinking, it served to point up the isolation of the narc team as aliens and guerrillas.

Barbarossa answered for them while watching the girl's body descend: "I no fucky you, baby, you fucky me."

Badboy said, "Amen."

Con looked on bleakly.

Later in the parking lot, Con stood with one foot inside his car, seemingly uncertain as to whether to go or stay. He called Badboy to him. "I want you and Freddie to stick around and deal with all the shit. Shouldn't take you more than a day or two. Anything gets stuck, call the old man. Or, hell, I'll be in the office in a day or two."

"Sure. No sweat."

"Look, don't be so easy on me, will you? I hate like hell to stick you with it when I'm the cause, but I got to get back. I'm gonna drive through."

"Hey, man, you deserve a rest, you know. It's cool."

"That's not it." He took a deep breath. "It's that fuckin' Red Dog, Ricky. Keeps doing these things to us-he's in my nightmares. I want him worse than I ever wanted anything or anyone in my life." Again he paused and looked out beyond Badboy's head; Red Dog was out there somewhere. "I'm gonna kill the sonofabitch."

Swallowing that, Badboy hung his head and scuffed at the ground. "You're the boss."

Con lightened his tone. "Goddamn straight, and my next order is forget what I just said. Don't tell 'em even when they yank you down to hell."

Badboy grinned. "I'm not goin', my sister's a nun and she's got an in with the Man's mother."

Con punched him on the arm, climbed in and started the motor. As he pulled away he shouted out the window, "Real reason I'm takin' off is the Raiders on Saturday."

Badboy gave him a raised fist.

Con's vintage Mustang cruised carefully through the remaining vehicles in the motel parking lot, then touched hard pavement and roared off with visible relief, accelerating rapidly. In his wake as the sound of the motor faded, men spoke in increasingly indifferent tones as they went about the task of cleaning up one more mess. The death of the girl and the whole expensive drama that had gone with it was routinely, matter-of-factly exiting the present and being transmuted into that underworld where past lives were hoarded in file cabinets and computers.

The black Porsche had gone up the same highway northward toward Seattle two hours ahead of Con. Because it contained a large stash of cocaine hidden beneath the seat, its driver continued at precisely the speed limit. The powerful motor sounded irritated at the restraints placed upon it.

He popped an upper for purely functional reasons; he had not slept in over twenty-four hours and had a long way to go. Turning up the volume on his tape deck to ensure that he didn't fall asleep, he ran a Rolling Stones album through repeatedly. There was some fruit left in the glove compartment, enough so that he wouldn't have to stop to eat.

In reflection, separated by two hours and a hundred and twenty-five miles from the danger, he was a little less grateful for simply escaping with his skin; the profit margin on this particular deal, twenty-five thousand, had been important to his hopes, and the many complicated features of the connection had required almost six weeks of work and waiting to put together. The only positive was that he could

pretty much take it for granted that no one would be able to implicate him; he operated entirely alone, dependent upon no one.

Con drove for an hour at high speeds before allowing himself to slow, although he wasn't aware of either the speeding or the slowing. He often drove fast and, as a federal officer, he could get away with it. Fifty miles north of Portland he remembered the bullet fired by the Luger. Someone would have found it by now, of course, unless it went out the door. This last prospect was of serious concern, given the wrong jury on the wrong day it could cost a man a career.

There was also the question, if it was in the wall, of what shape it was in and who had it -- the local police or the Federals. His hope was that it would be sufficiently intact to provide an unequivocal ballistic match-up with the defendant's gun. Chances were Badboy had it, or maybe Freddie D. They had known he was sick about the girl and would be especially alert in his stead. You could never count on things like the trajectory or health of a bullet but could, if you deserved it and were lucky, depend upon the skill and loyalty of your team. Con knew he was lucky and suspected he was deserving.

Jerry turned off U.S. 5 on the outskirts of Tacoma, ninety minutes before Con reached that same point and continued on. Jerry was headed for his farm, which lay in the wooded, mountainous country northeast of Seattle. He greeted the dawn with chemically inspired elan, turned off the tape deck, and sang Dylan tunes all the way in. His mind was clear and highly charged; he could think through the failure of the last hours and its effect upon the master plan that had been germinating in his mind.

Jerry had never heard of his code designation as Red Dog, was only marginally aware of a federal narcotics agent named Con Meehan, but he would read about the shoot-out and fatality in the Portland papers tomorrow and evaluate the repercussions, if any. There would be nothing about Meehan or his anguish, however, and no way Jerry could predict what it would mean.

Two miles before he got to the farm and already on a rutted dirt road, he turned off onto an almost impassable track and bulldozed the Porsche several hundred yards up into the mountains. When it became quite literally a trail, he stopped, turned the car around so it was pointed down for a fast takeoff if one became necessary, and piled some heavy brush around and over it. The only real concern as far as being spotted up here came from the Forest Service helicopter looking for marijuana plots.

He went ahead on foot, carrying the metal container sealed with tape he had secreted beneath the front seat. All this might be hard on the Porsche, but it had to be done, and fortunately he could afford to change cars often.

The climb was increasingly difficult and a callous morning sun had freed itself from the tops of the pines to the east, speckling his bleached jeans dark with sweat. As much as he loved this landscape and valued exercise, the long night's run had enervated him. It was the measure of Jerry's uncommon thoroughness that he came up here before every run, and afterward, too, if he had anything to return.

The reason was that this was state forest land, and he made it a firm rule never to allow any hard -- that is, prosecutable -- drugs on the farm. His few friends, who had no idea what business he was in, understood the rule and respected it. Any people passing through and accepting his hospitality soon learned it or were summarily packed off.

A hundred yards from the top of the small mountain he dug into a crevice in some rocks and found a small shovel hidden behind climbing vines. Taking it with him, he picked up his pace. In a stand of pines at the top, he sought out a spot that was hidden by natural debris but could be found by triangulating between easily identifiable trees.

Exposed, it was a small gravel pit shored and contained by larger rocks and logs, all materials close at hand. The gravel had the advantage of shoveling easily and draining quickly to retard damage from dampness. It had taken Jerry several backbreaking hours to construct but had proved its worth since in minimizing his exposure on the hill. He took great secret pride in it.

When the cocaine was under a foot of gravel and a half-inch of hard-pressed dirt, he meticulously returned the look of the place to what it had been, spreading leaves, pine needles, and branches. Next he tucked away the shovel. All the way down to his car he wielded a heavy bush to eradicate footprints or any other sign of passage. It was something he had seen the Indians do in John Ford films when he was a film student, a functional as well as aesthetic tribute. The Porsche dropped down off the mountain like a glider, without the use of the noisy motor, but gunned back into joyful life when it hit the road.

Whatever rationalizations Con had for driving all night at dangerous speeds in order to get home quickly, all he did when he got to his tiny apartment on the northwest side of Seattle was to go in, drop onto the bed fully clothed and sleep ten hours. Then he awoke, noted through crusted eyes that the day was waning, thought about calling his boss but decided against it, consumed some cold cuts and a bottle of beer sitting up in a trance, took the phone off the hook, undressed and went back to bed to sleep until morning. For him it was a typical homecoming. Mercifully, the depth of his fatigue precluded dreaming.

Jerry crested the last hill blocking him off from the farm and cruised for a moment in neutral, racing the motor as a signal of homecoming. Then he slipped it into gear and thrust forward with an enormous burst of speed.

The farm spun out below him, glowing in afternoon sunlight, as pristine, isolated, bucolic and downright American as anything in John Ford films. The white wooden house, the veranda with a swing on it, the barn, perhaps a little dilapidated because he hadn't had the time lately, but in any event containing only two horses, the goat and the cow. The outhouse, tool shed, and chicken coop and the remains of a decorative fence, that neither he nor Suzanne gave a damn about and which would be turned into firewood one of these days anyway. Open fields broken only by an orchard spread out for almost a mile in every direction from the spoke of the house, uncultivated but relatively flat and rich enough for planting.

His hands knew the road and his eyes were free to pick out each feature in loving detail. The large vegetable and herb garden -- Suzanne was a vegetarian, although he occasionally ate meat himself -- the woodpile he had built up with his own sweat, the apple orchard which produced and the one cherry tree which did not, the area they had cleared for a pigpen. He reminded himself for the hundredth time that they ought to get going on a more diversified orchard because it was something that took a long time starting, even when you could afford to buy fully grown trees.

Suzanne came out holding their nearly two-year-old son, Kahlil, on one hip. She was barefoot and wearing only the simple bright-yellow shift she had made herself. Her long straight hair, a softer yellow than the dress, hung free but tended to group itself into a natural ponytail. She was slim with small breasts, pretty, with neat, small, even features, a long waist, and surprisingly substantial, though still shapely legs. Her eyes were hugely green and the mouth more than ample for such a delicate face.

She came forward over rough ground but padding along as easily as any native woman with years of calluses on the bottoms of her feet, and in fact the only footwear she owned were two pair of thong sandals which were seldom worn. The naked boy bouncing on that undulating hip was large and chunky, yet she carried him with amazing ease.

They always came out to greet him like this and it was a sight which never failed to affect him emotionally. He yanked the Porsche off the driveway and shortcutted across the rough open field to where they were. Suzanne stopped and waited, putting the weight on one leg and hip like a posed showgirl, although she had no artifice and it was simply to balance the weight.

Jerry pulled up close, jumped out and went to take the boy, who was calling to him and extending his arms. Kahlil had his father's fair skin and was burned almost black by the constant sun, making him look like some marvelously healthy aboriginal child. He wrapped himself around Jerry's torso, a fat

monkey, chattering largely gibberish. Jerry hugged him, kissed him, swung him around, and tossed him, laughing delightedly, into the air several times while Suzanne waited to one side with her perennial half smile.

"How'd it go?" she asked matter-of-factly.

"He put the boy down and urged him to run and meet the Great Dane, which was galloping in their direction from the vicinity of the barn.

Jerry had been awake for forty-eight hours but, as tired as he was, he had no intention of sleeping until he had made love. Suzanne and he came together with urgency on both their parts, in the open on a landscape whitened by the unopposed stare of the sun, while the boy and dog raced in crazed circles around them.

They pressed hard against each other with Jerry grinding the inside of one thigh against the outside of hers, lips caressing, then driving their tongues into each other's mouths, her hands pulling up his denim shirt and caressing his back and nipples, his one hand spreading until the thumb and little fingertip touched the point of each of her own breasts through the thin material of the shift while the other pressed against the base of her spine, urging her hips to meld with his, in pain if necessary. After a while she made the small submissive moans that he expected from her, and which excited him more than any of the great passionate outcries or convulsive movements he had experienced with other women.

Jerry had an erection struggling against his tight jeans, which made it difficult to walk comfortably and gave them cause to laugh as they went to the house in a crablike sideways embrace. On the porch Suzanne paused for an instant to slip her shift over her head and drop it on the glider swing. In a bedroom without curtains or blinds and almost no furniture, simple enough for a Mennonite, she undressed him and they sank onto the bed in an attitude already close to consummation.

Jerry's fatigue and a long separation dictated that they forgo the usual accoutrements to their coupling such as wine, marijuana or whiffs of amyl nitrate. The door and window were open and Kahlil's primal joy mixed with the excited barking of the dog floated in on a new breeze to mingle with the extravagance of the rutting.

Half an hour later, Jerry was beginning a long and very deep sleep while Suzanne sat, still naked, at her loom in the sun-dappled living room. No one knew where the boy was, he had disappeared across the fields in a northerly direction with the dog, but Suzanne was comfortable in the knowledge that he was experiencing the purity of nature in absolute freedom.

## Chapter 3

The only thing Irish about Con Meehan was his name. That was his own view of it, although a cynic might have pointed out that he loved sports, was uncomfortable with women, drank heavily, and had a priest for a friend, albeit not an Irish priest. His mother had been Greek and Con took his general build and coloring from her, being dark-eyed with thick hair and heavy brows and a construction akin to a refrigerator. Too stocky to be a quarterback and too smart to play any other position.

His father had been a taciturn man who worked his way up doggedly from the assembly line to a blue-collar executive position in an auto plant just outside of Chicago, taking twenty-five years to do it and dying as soon as he had. His side of the family, as the surname would indicate, was Irish in lineage but had been here for several generations. Con had come by his Celtic Christian name, Connor, only because his father had a wealthy relative called that who, it was hoped, would leave his patrimony to the boy someday. Actually, it went to a pet hospital, but Con liked his name so nothing was lost.

Con had been fond of his dour father even though he had come along late in the old man's life and had never been on the receiving end of any conspicuous affection, or even attention, for that matter. He was never sure how he felt about his mother, who was loud and excitable, careening wildly between passionate overprotection, a 'Jewish' supermother, and a coldness that bordered on hostility.

He had always suspected that she found being a wife and mother emotionally limiting and compensated for it by having affairs, which seemed to carry concomitants of magnificent guilt and grief. There had been a much-loved older brother, George, who had enlisted nine months earlier than Con, arrived in Nam six months after him and been killed by a motor shell at Da Nang after only twenty-one days in the country.

Their father, when he was not doing the things that traditionally constitute the social life of a factory worker -- drinking, bowling, playing cards, attending ball games, watching television -- had been known to read a book. In fact, on any assembly line before the sixties' influx of neo-Luddites fallen from middle-class grace, he would have been considered the resident scholar. Con had always been enormously impressed by all the things the old man knew and thought about. He had, as a result, done what no other member of their family had ever done -- gone beyond high school. Shortly after returning from Nam he had spent four years at a small college in Ohio with the help of the G.I. Bill, starting in mechanical engineering but ending up with a degree in criminology.

After graduation, he put in two years with the Cook County Sheriff's Department before switching to a federal job with the Alcohol and Tax Division of the Treasury Department, which was considered something of a miraculous promotion. From there to the fairly new organization called the DEA where he considered himself to be a career officer. Along the way he had married, had two children, loved them and separated from them.

That had been his life up until the night he shot the young mother with the long hair while hunting an unidentified narcotics dealer called Red Dog, one of thousands in the country of the blessed.

Jerry slept through the warm rest of the day on the rumpled bed and awoke in late afternoon. Naked, he strolled through the house and out onto the porch. The sun was well down toward the Pacific. He leaned against a pillar, liking the feel of the wood along the bare skin of his back, the evening breeze and last of the sun on the front of him, and languorously examined the world he had created for himself. As far as his eye could roam it was controlled by him, and anything brought in from that outer world that he and Suzanne so despised was by their choice only. They shared a consuming dream of expanding and purifying the farm, pushing back ever further a plastic society of war, pollution, alienation and materialism.

Suzanne, dressed again in the shift, was working in the vegetable garden. Everything was grown

organically and without the use of pesticides. Kahlil was still breast feeding but someday his milk would come directly from the cow and goat. They had a few vines on a far hillside and had made wine, as well as brewing some of their own beer, but neither in sufficient quantity for even their own use, and the wine in particular was of poor quality. Suzanne had bought some books on winegrowing and was experimenting to find out what was wrong.

Actually, none of the farm's products, excepting perhaps apples and milk, and the latter because the adults drank very little of it, were enough to make them self-sufficient in comestibles, although it was part of the dream. Indeed, in the long run it was hoped the farm would produce cash crops to make them economically self-sufficient as well. Right now there never seemed to be enough time.

He strolled out to the garden, loving the feeling of his bare feet in the dirt. Suzanne gave over her weeding, leaving the hoe and rake in the furrow, and they went down to the barn with their arms around each other.

"I haven't seen Kahlil for awhile. He can sure travel on those chubby little legs," she said without concern. "The dog at least knows enough to come back."

"We'll ride out and find him. He's okay. Where's Dennis -- he still here?"

"Oh, yeah. He says he really connects here. He's got some songs in his head and they're, you know, from his being a part of what we've got here. If he had to go, maybe he'd lose them. They're major, he sang some for me, pieces of them. You don't care if he hangs around for a while longer, do you?"

"No, Dennis is cool, I don't care. As long as he keeps out of the business."

"I'm glad, 'cause sometimes it gets a little lonely, you know. Especially when you're gone a long time. And he plays a lot with Kahlil, which is good, too."

They took the horses out of the barn without saddling them and rode bareback out toward the hilly western boundaries of the farm where the vineyard caught the down sweep of moist wind from the Pacific. The slanting rays of the sun lost their strength and Jerry felt the cold, but he loved the feeling of being astride a horse while naked, imagining himself a primal huntsman or warrior such as he had seen on bas-reliefs.

"You never said. Where is Dennis, anyway?"

"He said he felt like he needed to purify himself, so he's fasting. I think he went up on the Round Top to meditate. I haven't seen him since before you got home."

They found the boy sleeping on the ground almost a mile from the house. The dog, contrary to sentiment, had gone off and left him. Jerry put Kahlil up on the horse in front of him and they went back to the house at a trot.

Jerry built a fire and they ate dinner by candlelight, since there was no electricity on the farm except for an occasionally used generator. Refrigeration and cooking were dependent upon butane, which was purchasable in the nearby town of Carlton and transported in their pickup truck. They did have a gasoline-powered pump, which provided running water, and a septic tank to take care of the sewage. In the living room the child went to sleep again on the giant hooked rug which Suzanne had made. His sleeping and eating were unstructured and in a little while he would toddle into the dining room, be placated by his mother with a large piece of Monterey Jack and a breast. They would put him in his bed when he was too tired to walk.

Dinner was vegetarian because Suzanne had not anticipated Jerry's return, but it was accompanied by a bottle of California Cabernet and followed by the smoking of two joints on the same hooked rug in front of the fireplace. Dennis had not returned, but they made love where they were; if he came in, he could be counted upon to pass through quietly to his room without comment. They would have assumed that about anyone they allowed on the farm.

Later, Suzanne lay staring into the fire, hallucinating gently but not totally detached, as much from

post sexual aphasia as from the drug, for which she carried a high tolerance. There was no doubt she was feeling mellow but something nagged. Suzanne had a single unifying idea in her life -- the farm. Even more than Jerry it was the focus of her life, an inclusive idea, which held her husband and child as irreducible elements.

When she had attended Bennington College, she had done a broken-field run through a series of dreams, beginning in her freshman year with the law and ending with art. Painting with oils had been the one that had carried the longest and contained the promise of a certain passion, but finally she had rejected it as the world's vanity and contented herself with the making of functional things for the enclosed world of the farm -- rugs, her dresses, curtains, tablecloths. Sometimes she sold the rugs at craft fairs in the area, not because they needed that kind of money or for any ego satisfaction, but to further the sacred concept of self-containment.

A spoiled priest who was now on the road had stayed with them for a while. His obsession was the imminence of Armageddon through a thermonuclear war. He had retained the capacity for high-verbal confrontation that was his Jesuitical heritage, but Suzanne confounded him simply by refusing to be terrified. She said flatly that the farm would survive any nuclear exchange. Since her conviction was rooted in a subjective, highly abstract conception of purity, the ex-priest had resorted to ridicule, drawing a complicated analogy to what he called "the absurdity of the Immaculate Conception." Suzanne was unaffected; she believed in the Immaculate Conception equally with the divinity of Buddha, Mohammed, the Lord Krishna, and a great many others. They all had a place in the unity of the farm.

Once, in addition to art, she had been interested in classical music and literature, but now, except for occasional works of mysticism, she had ceased to read at all. Jerry would often read by a special battery-operated lamp he had at his desk, but she would be content to watch him, watch the sleeping baby, candlelight shadows, the trees bending in the wind outside ... watch the idea of the farm take shape in her microcosmic vision.

"Jerry ... ?"

"What?" He rolled over onto his back and looked down lengthwise along his own naked body, wondering if in the play of firelight he would see another assertion of his admittedly spectacular ego rise up in hurrah.

"On this last trip ... I mean, are we going to be able to buy that piece, the four hundred acres that are detached?"

Jerry was secure in the knowledge that she cared nothing about the business, and in any event would accept his word on anything. "No, not for now, we can't."

"You didn't make the connection?"

"No. There was heat all over the place." She was lying on her belly and her head came up an inch off the floor. "What do you mean? What went down?"

"How do I know-somebody ratted. It was a trap. I'll find out." The tone was languid and gave a measure of reassurance. Her head lowered, burying itself in a blond sea of its own making. She reached one hand down and trailed it along the inside of his thigh. She liked his body immensely; it was lean and angular, a masculine equivalent of her own, and she was well-pleased with her own. The hair on his legs was sparse and delicate, the skin tanned from the naked riding and swimming in a nearby creek, and the thighs were tightly muscled from what Jerry said was a youthful passion for basketball.

Sometimes, looking at her little boy in his gleaming, sun-blessed sturdiness, she felt turned on sexually. It didn't bother her; she understood that he was simply a surrogate for the loins she had worshiped at for five years. The touch of the real thing now helped to calm her. She said, "I guess from the way you sound you're not worried about them getting on to you."

"No way, babe."

That, as little as it was, was enough for her. She tilted her head at an angle and glanced back to see the erection alongside where her fingers went on tracing in the same hypnotic rhythm.

"And I've got this big plan coming down, you know..."

She giggled at the unconscious double entendre. "You sure do."

"No, you know what I mean. This deal's gonna be the greatest ever, honey. The biggest in the whole Northwest. Maybe the whole fucking country. We'll buy land in all directions until we've got the largest farm in the state. It's going to be beautiful. Nobody'll ever be able to touch us. We'll be like those early cattle barons in the movies. Like kings, you know, only we'll bring the sixties back and keep the flame alive here. Anybody we want to protect, anything we want to do, we'll do it here and fuck the world. Nobody'll ever tell us anything."

She had brought his arousal with her touch and proximity, now he brought hers with words. She rose up and slid atop him like a serpent as he lay on his back. Making a soft humming noise, she moved in circles against him. Sensing the liquidity between her own thighs, she straightened up, becoming perpendicular until she could guide him inside of her, then lay down full against him, stretched out heavily with her cheek resting on his shoulder. They began the long, slow, steady undulation that would last for fifteen minutes or more, if it could be measured, and end in a prolonged unendurable shuddering.

Somewhere in the middle of it, the wandering Dennis returned. He was on the small side and skinny, with unwashed long blond hair and a large gnomish forehead that made him look either cerebral or misshapen. Hours of fasting and meditation might well have affected his metabolic rate, but he was not indifferent to what he saw on the floor in front of the fireplace. Jerry looked at him out of his erotic trance with half-lidded eyes and smiled. Dennis thought it was probably mockery. He moved quickly to get out of there and into his own room.

Con Meehan woke up feeling like someone who had had a wonderful time at the party but also with the gnawing idea that he might have done something that would keep him from ever being invited again. It was not until he saw his own ravaged face in the mirror that he remembered the killing of the girl. He did the only thing he could do -- shaved, showered, soaked his sore foot in Epsom salts and went to work. Unconsciously, he gave up the Raiders exhibition game that afternoon in penance.

First he called Marie. He had some trouble understanding that she was home and not at work, even though he himself had initiated the call, and it occurred to him that he was perhaps disoriented. Maybe it was the fact that pro games were seldom played on Saturday except during the exhibition season in the late summer and fall. That was it: he had muddled almost an entire season in the tracking of Red Dog. One day was like another in motels, bars, all-night movies, all-night stakeouts; on the streets there were no weekends and you made no plans.

"How are you, Con?" Marie's voice was always flat where he was concerned, but it also had a certain dignity which he admired.

"Well, I been out on a job. You know how it is. I don't know too well myself how I am, I guess."

"I imagine you want to see the kids?"

"Sure. If you don't mind."

"What if I did?"

"Jesus, Marie, don't do that. You never held the book on me before."

"No ... I guess not. It's just that, Con, I got a fella. He was coming over this afternoon. Gonna take the kids and me out. The zoo or somewhere, I don't know. But knowing you, you wouldn't want to meet him face to face."

"Well, we been separated over a year, now. We oughta get over our self-consciousness about it."

"We ought to, but you never will."

Con's subconscious said "Amen" to that without approving it. There were not many things he disapproved of in himself, but the jealousy over his wife who was not his wife did seem unmanly. "I couldn't argue with you."

The deference seemed to soften her. "Listen, my date's only for the afternoon. You want to come for dinner, it's okay. You can stay overnight, too, if you want. The usual conditions, of course."

She often let him sleep on the couch, which opened into quite a decent bed, to facilitate his relationship with the children, and Con was grateful for it. It was that kind of simple nobility about Marie that confused him, obscuring the reasons for their breakup. "I'd like to take you up on dinner if we could make it about six-thirty. I can't stay over, though."

"All right," was all she said, but her tone made him wonder if she sensed why. Con believed that women possessed intuitions that men did not.

The office was always at least half full on Saturdays; not necessarily because it was ordered that way but people came in anyway, maybe out of a kind of unconscious empathy with the agents in the field who had no hours, had in fact no personal lives at all. As witness their almost eighty percent divorce rate, he reflected, still thinking of Marie as he came in the door and looked around. Several people called out to him in greeting and he could detect no off-shading that had to do with the dead girl. He went into his own office, which Freddie D. had once described as a "plain brown wrapper," and found his secretary, Joanie, brewing tea on the hot plate in anticipation.

"You're limping."

"It's okay. How'd you know I was coming in?"

"Instinct. And the telephone. Alec called Clyde. Badboy called me from Portland. He said you'd come on back Thursday night but the way you looked I shouldn't expect to see or hear from you till today at the earliest. Freddie called from where he's snuck home for the day to see his parents, some little dinky town in the Cascades. Roy called about twenty minutes ago to see if you were in yet. Don't any of the guys on your team ever talk to each other?" She gave him a cup of English Breakfast tea from a box labeled "Assorted Teas of the World," which she had given him as a Christmas present. "Oh, and Marie called a couple of days ago, something about your keeping up the insurance."

"I'll be seeing her tonight."

"Good," Joanie said, managing to sound perfunctory while actually editorializing. She liked Marie, disapproved of Con's separation from her. Joanie herself was too old to have an "-ie" on the end of her name, had never had a family of her own and wouldn't now, so lived the office's collective home life, chaotic as it was, vicariously. She was tall and plain, crisp and accustomed to gore, rage, tragedy and bad language, simply letting them roll off as though she were deaf and blind. "Then there was a garage that said you hadn't paid their bill. I told them they should be ashamed for encouraging you to go on driving that terrible wreck."

Con sipped the tea leaning against his desk, his back to the obscene mounds of forms and reports that had piled up there. But he was also studying Joanie, who was talking and moving a little faster than usual. "The only one I'm interested in is Alec's call to Clyde."

"Right. Clyde's waiting to see you."

"All the golf courses filled up?"

She forced a laugh and kept her head down as she straightened the stacks of papers.

"I guess you heard what happened?"

"Oh, sure. We all know." She dropped the casual tone. "I am sorry, Con. I know how you must

feel."

He shrugged, looked away. "Part of the shit that goes with the job. Clyde in his office now?"

She nodded and he left, to the relief of both of them.

Clyde Warner wasn't playing golf, but he was sitting with his feet propped up on the desk reading a golf magazine, in front of him a bottle of Gelusils. He also had on a golf cap, but that was only to hide his bald spot and was worn every day there wasn't some big shot in town or he didn't have to attend a luncheon. He failed to look up as Con strolled in, deliberately casual, with his tea.

"What do you come in for on Saturday if you got nothing to do?"

"Well, I got an agent who doesn't come in on Fridays, that's why. Even after he's been out for weeks."

"Why didn't you call me at home?"

"You were sleeping." He threw the magazine into the wastebasket across the room and sucked on some cold muddy coffee. "Jesus H. Christ, your crap sheet was heavy. I can hardly wait for the last few days. Don't any of your people know it's an election year and the taxpayers are hollering 'Rape!' over every fuckin' nickel?"

"You should have stayed on the course, Clyde. Easier on the stomach lining."

"I got to account for it someday, might as well be a Saturday."

"Well, for one thing, these kids today got expensive tastes. They all got those fancy foreign cars and they like to move around, good restaurants, expensive motels."

He nodded. "Goddamn rich punks got it all over us for knowing about the good life."

"You got more on your mind than that."

"The dealer got away, I hear. What's he called -- 'Red Dog'?"

"I'm gonna get him. He operates around here and he's on a roll, so he won't leave. And neither will I."

"You got some buyers. We can use the statistics, although I understand the two wops aren't much of a bust."

"I don't think I'll bother to file a report. You got it all already."

"And of course there's the girl business," Clyde said, studying his cuticles.

Con sighed. "Yep. There's that. Dineen told you what? -- I stood her against a wall and blew her head off when she wouldn't make it with me?"

"No, just that you killed her. How and why."

"I'd love to hear the how and why." He sat on a hard-backed chair holding the teacup aloft.

"He thought you should have waited. Maybe not bothered to bust the buyers at all. Maybe they'd of hung in and Red Dog would have come back the next night or something. And there was some other chickenshit stuff. But he agreed you had to shoot once you went in."

"Oh, that's beautiful. I should be grateful to the cocksucker. I gave him the guineas to run up his score, took the one with the baby myself. I shot the wrong person, I'll give him that -- it shoulda been him."

"Okay, but let's not start that, huh. I got enough troubles."

Con put the teacup on the desk. "What's that mean, Clyde? I'm supposed to let the backstabbing sonofabitch get away with it? He gave me grief the whole way and I put up with it 'cause he was new. But that's it. You better transfer him the fuck outta here -- back to Treasury or wherever he came from -- but so I don't ever see him again, or I swear to God I'll tear his fuckin' head off." When he paused, he was surprised at his own vehemence.

So, apparently, was Clyde. "I don't think I ever saw you get so steamed before. Over nothing. The guy's here a month and he's bucking for your job is all. Nothing new about that. So what I conclude is you're more torn-up than I figured. Want a few days off?"

"That would look good, wouldn't it?"

"Listen, there's nothing wrong with it, admitting it, bending a little. Civilization would still be here when you got back, although I know you find that hard to believe." He paused, looked up from the job he was doing with his fingernail clippers and added: "Might be good to rest up before the inquest."

"Inquest?"

"You didn't think there'd be one? A citizen got blown away -- remember? The coroner in Portland isn't gonna miss a chance for a box-office hit like this. The girl was naked, wasn't she?"

"Yeah, I guess she was," Con said dully.

"Well, 'See the fascist pigs shoot the naked hippie dopers in the middle of an orgy while the victim's baby watches!' All right? Irresistible. They'll probably do specials on it."

Con stood. "Clyde, I don't want a rest. I want to get back in the field, like tomorrow."

Clyde grunted. "Couldn't you take up golf instead?" He didn't expect an answer and he didn't get one. "As a matter of fact, I had something else for you. Some beaners down in Salem getting high-quality smack from somewhere."

"How about putting Alec on that? Shows a lot of initiative and drive. Ambitious. Took those two dangerous Mafiosi like nothin'. Without bloodshed," he added with a trace of bitterness he did not intend.

Clyde also stood, whipped his golf cap off his head, smoothed his bald spot, and slammed it back on again. "Okay, I'm gonna let you do it. Red Dog's a pain in the ass and this other thing can be handled by anyone, even Dineen." He stared hard at Con. "Only don't let it be a vendetta, you understand? I don't want to hear he's been cowboy'd or anything. I mean it."

Con refused to respond. "I need one more thing -- Captain Jack. I just want to talk to him, that's all."

"And I'd like to be Prince William. That's the best, highest paid CI in the district. I am absolutely forbidden to give out anything on him."

"Who the hell runs him, then?"

"It's been a long day, when you consider this is Saturday. For everyone but a fanatic like you." He was pushing past Con on his way out. "Be sure to fill out the usual eight hundred reports before you leave town again so I'll have something to do while you're gone."

Con followed him across the office. "Wait a minute, will you? I talked to Jack on our walkie-talkies, I must have been within a couple of blocks of him all through this operation. He knows someone Red Dog knows. All I want's a couple minutes with him. It could save me weeks."

"No Captain Jack. Forget it!"

"What is he, the CIA, for Christ's sake?" When he realized he wasn't going to get what he needed, he began begging for crumbs. "Just give me something off the record, bits and pieces. Is he an undercover agent or a snitch? Is he an Indian -- someone told me he was an Indian. Captain Jack was a famous Modoc chief way back, I heard."

Clyde paused in the doorway to the outer hall. "Don't get so wrapped up you forget that inquest."

Con acquiesced; after all, he was holding back himself in hiding the depth of a passion that went far beyond any bureaucratic accountability.

However, Clyde remained where he was for a moment, pensive, and Con waited him out. Finally:

"I was part of a stakeout almost thirty years ago, and shot a kid once. Didn't kill him, but it messed him up pretty good -- cost him an arm. Little kid. Suspect was using him for a shield and blasting away at us and there wasn't any cover and I guess we came unglued. I ... tossed my guts afterwards. Got the shakes.

"I was just a rookie myself, you know, and he was screaming-I can still hear that sometimes. But I got hate mail and calls for months after some paper -- this was in St. Louis -- printed our names and addresses. Somebody tried to sabotage the brakes on my car. Set fire to my dog. Worst of it was, I got the shits. Colitis, they call it. Lost twenty-five pounds, bled all the time. Sent me to a shrink and everything, and all this asshole said was I wanted to get something out of my system. But it went on for a whole goddamn year. Dumb, huh?"

Con didn't think so; he was grateful for hearing about it even if the whole thing was an invention. "It happens in war. I saw it."

"Damn straight," Clyde said, cracking a lopsided grin, "and what I'm telling you is don't get the shits, get Red Dog." He went out into the hall, his lanky frame and sure movements belying his almost sixty years.

Joanie had a second cup of tea waiting for Con when he returned and scolded him for leaving his previous cup in Warner's office.

"I hope you didn't have anything to do this afternoon, honey," he told her, "because I've got to get all the paperwork done today. I'm going hunting again tomorrow."

## Chapter 4

In the middle of the afternoon, Con slipped out of the office to a pay phone and called the woman with whom he was having an affair. It made him feel ridiculous, but he was afraid that Joanie would overhear. Gail was there for him. He had been apprehensive all day that she wouldn't be or that she couldn't see him if she was; as usual, he'd given her no warning that he was coming into town. Like a sailor, he had to rediscover his women after long absences. And this woman was more important than sexual release or social relaxation; she was his touchstone with emotions that were rich in other people and denied to him. They made a dinner date for eight-thirty.

There was always a twinge of regret for the house itself in going home, a bulky old near-Victorian place on a tree-lined street, made of the green wood indigenous to the area, having a huge fireplace in the living room and another in the dining room, and a long porch fronting the street which had put him in touch with some good neighbors. He had not been able to afford a location right on the water, but it wasn't far away. You could smell it through any open window. Most of all, it was a house in harmony with its rainy, misty, bright-aired and blue-watered environment.

His eight-year-old daughter, Caroline, ran down the steps to greet him warmly. Timmy, who was ten, hung back silently as always. Even Marie thought it was strange. "If ever I saw a man who ought to get along with sons, it's you," she had told him. Con had tried hard to have a good relationship with the boy, and Timmy did share his enthusiasm for sports, yet the gap seemed to widen with each visit. He supposed the boy was protective of his mother and the more resentful about the breakup. Boys were like that sometimes. Now, as he came into the large, old-fashioned kitchen with Caroline wrapped around his middle and Timmy trailing behind, deliberately detached, Marie could see how it was going to be in years ahead. She had enough feeling left for Con to share his regret.

Later, while cooking dinner, she asked him, "How did this last assignment go?"

Con replied, "Routine."

He had never answered any other way, she pointed out to him.

"Well, you know it's an ugly business sometimes. Why bring it home. I'm not ashamed but ... you know, women and kids."

"Women and kids, huh?" Marie said in that competent, skeptical way of hers. She was a handsome woman, given to tweed skirts, cardigan sweaters, and sensible shoes; their problems had not been specifically sexual and even now, with all that had happened, he still found her attractive. Yet it would never have occurred to him that he might try to make love to her. His own code wouldn't have allowed it.

She picked up a plate in each hand and started for the dining room. "You know, Con, that was your mistake. It meant you never brought yourself home, either."

After dinner he chatted and played hearts and spit-in-the-ocean with the children for a while but he caught himself glancing at his watch. It made him feel guilty and he stayed half an hour later than he should. Marie, as she had so many times before, got him off the hook and sent him on his way with a promise that he would make some repairs around the house at the first opportunity.

At nine he was in a French restaurant in Seattle's resurrected Pioneer Square, a semi-basement made of tiles and marble, decorated with hanging brass pans, ferns, and lithographs. It was too expensive and really too chic for him, but the kind of setting he wanted for the one night in perhaps six weeks he would spend with Gail. She understood that it was too expensive and with any other man would have either refused to go or offered to pay half, but not with this guy's pride. It was the price, she had once teased him on a similar occasion, of having a blue-collar lover, and Con didn't seem to mind.

"I am one of them," was all he said.

He ordered a full dinner for Gail, a bowl of onion soup and a salad for himself, and a bottle of Canadian wine for both of them. He had been told a dozen times that Canadian wine was terrible but he liked it, perhaps for no other reason than he loved Canada. Gail suffered it in silence because she was conscious of his income. She had never come close to suffering as much for or deferring to another man as she did with Con, and on the whole, she liked it.

"Bowl of soup and a salad isn't much dinner for a hundred-and-ninety-pounder."

"I'm not too hungry."

"You have dinner with Marie and the kids?"

"How did you know?"

"And you're supposed to be the detective. First of all, it's nine and you usually like to eat about seven. It's your first day in town, if, as you said, you slept all day yesterday, and since you love the kids, and God knows even if you didn't there's nobody in the world who's more duty-bound. World War III or the Super Bowl couldn't keep you from doing anything else."

"Pretty good."

"Also," she went on, "you usually need a couple of drinks before you go out with me, and I don't believe you've had a one."

He seemed a little hurt. "What do you mean, I have to get up my nerve to go out with you? What kind of thing is that to say?"

She smiled and reached across to touch his hand for emphasis. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. You're the ... well, the most ferocious man I've ever been around, much less in love with. The fact that there's anything you're ... you know, shy about, or at least not tough about, is nice. It's kind of reassuring."

"Okay." He managed an uncertain smile of his own.

"Why do I have the feeling something's bugging you?"

"Christ, do you have to have to know every goddamn thing that goes on in a person's head? If you did that to your husband, it explains a lot."

"Sorry."

"Me, too," he said. "That was a cheap shot."

"It was, but I forgive you. And await your explanation. Although I don't think I'll baste my breath."

Once Con, who was normally reticent about such things, had surprised her by asking about her marriage. She had been careful about answering because she wanted it to sound right for him. "The most important thing about it," she decided, "is that it just wasn't anything, good or bad. No highs, no lows, no love or hate. Brian lives within a couple of miles of here and I haven't seen him in a year. No alimony or children, so there's no reason to. I close my eyes and I can't see him. I can't even remember why we wanted to get married in the first place."

"How about sex?"

"Can't remember that, either."

"Did you ... both mess around?"

"You mean did I have any affairs? Honest to God! Men! You're so damned possessive you even want a woman's past."

That had been the end of that discussion, but he had felt better knowing she had no residual affection for her husband, no ambivalence about the breakup. He might have added, unlike himself.

After dinner they headed for Gail's apartment. There was a desultory attempt at small talk in the

car, which unexpectedly turned serious.

"How's law school?"

"Routine, taking forever. How's being a narc?"

"Like always, them or us."

"I'll say one thing for you, Meehan -- you don't pussyfoot."

"No other way to see it. It's a war, always has been and it won't ever end, either. I read a lot of history when I was in college. It was just a dumb little college but the history department was pretty cool and if I could have made half a living at it ... Anyway, I got hooked reading about the Romans."

"Why? Because they were conquerors?"

"No ... because they were so much like us. They fought a lot of wars, I admit that, but who didn't in those days? There weren't any pacifists around that I heard of. They were just better at it than the other countries and tribes, that's all. But there wasn't anywhere they went that people weren't better off for it, because they brought law."

She was watching him as he drove. They had known each other six months, been lovers for three months, but because of the exigencies of their two lives, they had not been together enough to preclude surprises.

"The law they had protected individuals," she pointed out. "Both from fellow citizens and the state. That's what made Roman law so important."

She immediately regretted the courtroom intonation, but Con countered mildly, "That's not how I see it. The rights of individuals get protection occasionally in history, but that's just a bonus and there've been a lot of great civilizations without it. Look at your street here..."

He pulled up in front of Gail's apartment building. The street, like most Seattle streets, was rich in trees and shrubbery and darkly lit, composed largely of multiunit dwellings. Con went around and helped her out of the car, a gesture she resented from other men but accepted from this one.

"The main thing, the real reason to have the law is, if I walk down this street here and see a guy coming toward me or hear him behind me, I gotta believe he won't try to kill me." He put his arm around her as if to reassure. They were both staring down the street as if there was something lurking there.

"If I don't, if I can't even close my eyes at night without being afraid of being attacked, then it'll affect all my behavior. I get paranoid, right? Then, if there's enough people feel like that, it'll affect all the other institutions of the society. You don't even have a civilization then, honey, much less the rights of the individual."

They went inside and up the stairs to her second-story apartment. "Listen," she asked him on the stairs, "do you guys sit around and talk about this kind of stuff when you're on a stakeout, for God's sake?"

"No, mostly women and sports. But everybody's got to have some reason for doing what they do. Especially if it's dangerous and ... you have the responsibility where you might have to kill somebody else. You never asked me before, but that's why I do it. Besides a decent salary and a hell of a pension plan."

She let him in and went to the kitchen for some brandy without turning on the lights. Con sat on the couch and watched her, amazed because he had never known anyone, and certainly not a woman with what he believed was their instinctual drive toward light and warmth, who could bring themselves to do that.

The apartment, too, was different from his experience. Gail had a flair for decorating. It was an old brick building but the rooms had high ceilings, wood moldings, and large casement windows. Starting

with that, she had filled it with ferns, prints, delicate Mediterranean furniture and bright colors everywhere. All this with very little money, because she was working as a law clerk while attending school. None of his friends or relatives had ever had anything like it.

She came back, gave him the brandy in a snifter that he assumed to be part of the table service from her marriage because he didn't know anything about those things, and sat beside him. He put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her closer, needing the feel of her body and its warmth more than he had realized. So much so that he experienced a slight shudder and hoped she hadn't noticed.

"You know, I don't agree with you one damn bit."

"Oh, that's okay," he said absently. His mind had gone from the conversation about ends and means.

"It bothers me, Con, when you do that kind of rationalization number with authoritarian ideas. I'm sorry, but it really does. To me, it's flirting with fascism."

He could feel the sudden shift in her emotional gravity even though physically she had not moved an inch. "Look, honey, you name a single time in history when law and order broke down completely that people didn't get right down on their knees and beg some hard-nosed sonofabitch to take over for them. How much freedom and democracy is there in the world, anyway? How much has there ever been?"

"But you don't really care an awful lot about them, do you? I mean, compared to law and order, they're way the hell down on your list of priorities."

"Well, I've been in some kind of service all my life and I guess I'm more used to living with authority than you. Or most people. But that doesn't mean I want to live under Hitler or Stalin or somebody, does it? Or my kids, either. What all this crap comes down to -- since you brought it up, and then I'd sure as hell like to knock it off -- is I think basically the law means protection. That's the bottom line, and after you have it, you build any goddamn thing you want. But you've got to have that, minimal."

She gave it up and lightened her tone. They had not seen each other for weeks and she wanted to make love. "Hey, I'm the one who's supposed to be a lawyer, or going to be. Where does a cop get off thinking about this stuff, anyway?"

"I don't know a lot, but I know that -- or I couldn't get up in the morning."

"You really are a strange one, Meehan, you know that? Maybe that's why I love you. In spite of God knows how many reasons why I shouldn't." Her face, turned to him, was serious, concerned in spite of herself. "And I do love you. But there's things about you that I don't get and doubt I ever will. Tell you the truth, that just scares the shit out of me sometimes." More softly, she said, "Especially when you're not close."

Con had nothing he could afford to give in return. They sat in silence for a long time, and eventually went to bed without words.

Making love to Gail was for Con another surprise in their relationship, one endlessly repeated. Her body was a feminine equivalent of his in many ways; she was neither tall nor fashionably thin, she had broad hips and sizable breasts with enormous nipples and her legs were almost muscular, a kind of Slavic build. With her large mouth, large round dark eyes and dense black hair, he thought her not only beautiful, but the most sexually desirable woman he had ever known. It confused him in that he categorized women rigidly and it seemed as though it should be a body in contradiction to a keen intellect. Also, she made love as actively as a man, always pushing into and against him from the first moment of contact, and lingering well beyond what exhausted most women.

Tonight Con had to work at the lovemaking until he could pull satiation and his own physical and emotional exhaustion over his head like a child's blanket and sink away. Eventually they both fell

asleep with no more words than they had used before they began. Gail was aware that there had been a little less tenderness than usual between them. She wisely assumed it was because he had not been able to tell her what was bothering him.

At about two in the morning she sensed something on the periphery of her dreaming sleep. After what seemed like an eternity of indecision, she began to fight herself up to consciousness out of fear. The thing concretized first as a sound. Someone crying softly, but trying to strangle the sound. It was not like any crying she had ever heard, in that it was masculine. Her eyes snapped open, then. Con sat on the edge of the bed, his shoulders trembling from the effort at restraint.

With anyone else, she would have reacted instinctively and thrown her arms around him, but Con was different. If you had heard his children had died, you would have to make a judgment as to whether or not you should commiserate with him. It was hard, but she turned away and closed her eyes again.

Con, when he had some control, got up, dressed silently, and left the apartment. He went down to his car and drove slowly out to the Ballard Bridge. He stopped halfway across, got out, opened the trunk, and took out the automatic carbine in its carrying bag. Moving to the railing, he stood for several minutes looking across the water at the city lights glowing in the early morning mist. There was enough moisture on the streets to make a squishing sound behind him as passing cars pulled around his. A chilly wind had come up to contest the fog and he should have been uncomfortable standing there without a jacket or sweater, but he felt nothing.

It wasn't indecision that kept him, he knew what he had come to do, but rather a feeling that he wanted to impress the moment upon his mind. He could not remember ever having done anything so self-destructive or irrational in his life, so this seemed worth commemorating. He lifted the carbine over his head and threw it far out over the black water. It was a long time falling and when it hit made a sound as distant and wistful as childhood. There was a strong temptation to follow it.

He got back into his car and drove toward his own apartment. Gail would understand; she would have to.

He had a couple of weeks' grace before he would have to explain to a coroner's jury why he had gratuitously thrown away the weapon that had killed the girl. And of course he couldn't explain it, because he didn't know himself. It would look suspicious, but he knew he would never regret it.



## Chapter 5

With the single-mindedness he brought to everything, Con spent Sunday preparing himself. He stoked the fires by fixing himself a typical breakfast of orange juice, hotcakes, two fried eggs, hash brown potatoes, ham, two pieces of toast, milk and coffee. In the second cup he put a shot of sour mash. While he ate, he read over the case file, beginning with the first appearance of the man code-named Red Dog two years before.

There was a predictable and not very illuminating similarity to the notations; they were almost all based on information supplied by junkies or snitches and described him as a comparatively young man, well educated, unusually cautious and resourceful. Sometimes his hair was dark, other times blond. He was occasionally bearded or mustachioed, but always neat and modishly dressed. Rare among his kind, he seldom sold anything but the best, had never been known to adulterate or shortcut. Commercially, he seemed to carry on in the best tradition of prideful bourgeois tradesmen. Violence: one suspected killing, a suspected shooting, and he was known to have been armed on several occasions. He operated strictly alone, wore disguises and avoided all the known areas in the cities of the Northwest where the dope trade flourished.

There was one oddity that had always stood-out for Con, his quarry was said to have a passionate affection for the decade of the sixties as a failed dream of paradise. Dealers seldom had dreams much less ideologies. He had never dealt with one quite like this.

There was so little to begin with, he had no choice but to contact or recontact everyone who had had even the most tangential relationship with the man. Geography and time would require that he split up the team and send them around. He put in a call to Badboy after noon, knowing his sleeping habits, and instructed him as to whom to call and where to launch them. After that, he went out and spent the afternoon at a police pistol range.

Throwing away the carbine meant a loss of firepower and he would have to compensate for that. The weapon he chose for himself was a Luger nine-shot automatic, which fired .22-caliber Long Rifle shells. Basically it was a target pistol, highly accurate and easy to handle, although most officers would have found it short on stopping power. Con was willing to accept that limitation; he didn't want a gun that would take away pieces of people or blast through walls, he preferred to pick his shots and know exactly what would happen when he pulled the trigger. A view heightened by the events of the last few days.

Jerry's Sunday, by contrast, was benign. He got up at ten, went out to squat on the porch where he breakfasted on fresh fruit, raw cereal topped with honey, and lemon verbena tea. Suzanne was out riding with Dennis and the boy led the goat around in front of the house, where he tried to ride him in turn. Jerry stopped to play with him for a few minutes on the way to pick up the Harley-Davidson he kept under a tarpaulin in the barn. Wearing only a pair of jeans and boots, he rode twelve miles into a little town called Belvedere. At the pay phone in the single pharmacy there, he called the message service he maintained in Seattle. He had only one message waiting; a George Kleinschmidt said he would like to see him for lunch the following day, Monday, at the usual place.

Jerry knew "George Kleinschmidt" to be a young attorney in Seattle whose real name was Marvin Waldo. The banality of the message disguised considerable import; the simple fact that a meet was called for was confirmation that the deal on which he had been pinning all his hopes for months now was finally going down. Jerry allowed himself a rare buoyancy. He bought an ice cream cone, went out and walked the several blocks that constituted Belvedere back and forth, running the deal through his head lovingly. When at last he took off for home, he hit eighty-five miles an hour. That was rare, considering all the professional reasons that mitigated against being arrested for anything.

Dennis was sunning himself on the front porch when Jerry rode into the valley. Pale despite everything the sun could do, looking the bushy-haired peon he sat cross-legged under a serape, face turned to the sky. He waved a small greeting without opening his eyes. Jerry felt some kind of tug at his otherwise high spirits and was surprised at himself when he realized what it was; he had been relieved to see that Dennis wasn't naked. Normally he felt himself above jealousy and it was the idea of his own fallibility rather than his wife's that bothered him.

He slowed the bike as if the insight called for it. His eyes locked on the boy on the porch and stayed there all the way in. Dennis had been here for how many weeks? It wasn't that unusual, there was always someone drifting through. As long as they were "natural people," in tune with the farm and all that went with it, Suzanne found them good company during the long periods he was away. If they stayed out of his business, they were welcome. Dennis was certainly an unlikely narc. For no logical reason perhaps, Jerry found something about him disturbing.

Dennis, his head tipped back, watched Jerry in turn through slitted eyes. He hoped his own observation was surreptitious because he was aware of being studied and something about Jerry frightened him. What he saw was simply a slim, tall, handsome young man, stripped to the waist, with a two-day beard and astride a motorcycle with professional nonchalance. Jerry was not particularly muscular but he looked strong, or at least physical. He made Dennis regard his own painfully thin, peaked body with dissatisfaction, fingering his corrugated ribs under the serape.

He had been on the road for three years now and there had been enough unpleasant incidents along the way to hone his instinct for trouble. He told himself that he ought to set to work to find out what it was about Jerry that caused disquiet, but he was naturally indolent and adverse to anything unpleasant. Tomorrow, tomorrow he would think hard about it.

It should have been easy to just drift on; he had done that often enough and he didn't require a guarantee or even an objective. In truth, it was Suzanne. She was as fascinating to him as her husband was nervous-making.

The motorcycle skidded to a stop in a plume of dust close by the porch. Jerry removed his shades and ran his forearm across his face to clear a way through the dirt and sweat. "Where's Suzanne?"

Dennis wondered if his host had been reading his mind. "They went into town to do some shopping. Took the pickup," he added, then felt self-conscious about the obviousness of that, because the truck always sat in plain sight within a few yards of the house.

Jerry dismounted and came up onto the porch. "How come you didn't go with them?"

"I don't know. I had some ideas for a song and I just kind of wanted to sit here and think about them."

Jerry stood on the porch behind Dennis, leaning against a pillar, and stared out over his hegemony. "How can you write music without something to play on?"

It was said casually enough, but to Dennis, everything Jerry asked bore a waft of the interrogatory. "I can hear things. I got a terrific ear, you know. And then I remember the tunes when I get an instrument. I had the mother of all guitars just before I came here but it got ripped off down in Grants Pass just as I was going through there by some people I trusted. Like when I was coming up from L.A. Had it since I was a kid." He went on with the tale until he looked up and saw that Jerry was chewing on a handful of sunflower seeds and spitting them out; presumably he had stepped into the house to get them while Dennis was talking. It was hard to believe a man could move that silently in boots.

"I got an old guitar in a trunk in there you could use. Not good enough for performance, but you ought to be able to use it for composition. I don't know why Suzanne hasn't shown it to you."

"She did," Dennis blurted without thinking, then tried to suck the words back into his mouth. He wondered if Jerry was staring down at him but was afraid to look. Jerry's eyes were dark and unusually

deep-set, which made the pupils remote and difficult to see; Dennis had never been able to meet them with equanimity.

He wished that he had not admitted to seeing the guitar, because it was kept in a locked closet which also contained some terrifying-looking weapons. His glimpse had been brief and he knew almost nothing about guns, but they had not appeared to be for hunting or home protection. They were rifles or shotguns that seemed shorter than usual or had clips on them along with piles of ammunition boxes and even what he thought were belts of cartridges.

Suzanne had closed the door quickly but otherwise without self-consciousness. Of course Suzanne would meet the end of the world with her faint earth-mother smile. Dennis began to pray to Gautama Buddha and the Lord Krishna, silently and simultaneously and in his own special way-since he had only an indistinct idea as to who they were-that the man who loomed behind him and owned all those things in the closet had not asked the question about the guitar out of guile.

"Beautiful, isn't it? Far as you can see."

"What?" Dennis asked, momentarily disoriented.

"My farm. You like it, Dennis?"

"Sure, man. You know I do. I been here how long -- six weeks?"

"How long you gonna stay?"

"I dunno. You want me to split?"

"You don't have anywhere else to go, do you?"

"No, I guess not. I'm just drifting, man. You know, till I get things together. I been thinking about getting me a little group, maybe in Seattle or somewheres, and work up some of these songs came to me while I was moving around. Or I got an uncle in Tacoma I could go see. Or maybe I'll just go back down to Mexico and smoke a lot of dope. I dig peyote a lot -- buttons down there are cheaper than real buttons." He looked up and forced a smile to go with the forced joke, but Jerry was as unreachable as ever, looking off at his hills. Somehow Dennis felt more like a prisoner now that he had been invited to stay.

"Suzanne likes someone around when I'm away."

"Yeah. You sure go away a lot, man."

There was a tactile silence after that. Dennis thought that all his life, even in the most perfunctory moments of conversation, he had invariably managed to say the wrong thing. Probably it was the reason he had taken up music.

"I have to. But I don't like it. This is our country here. This is sacred to us, and we're going to build it. It's going to get bigger and bigger until the fucking bourgeois world is just a bad dream out there somewhere you can forget about. Do that right here."

Dennis was a high school dropout, not used to grappling with the grandiose or expansive and in awe of anyone who could. Not knowing what to say, he mumbled, "That would be cool."

"How many out there"-Jerry's arm swept wide enough to include most of the world-"ever know anything like this? The heads of the biggest corporations in America don't have a place where they can be anything they say they are or do anything they want and nobody can stop them. If I want to say the sun's not going to come up tomorrow, who's going to deny my reality?"

Dennis's disquiet took a quantum leap within the confines of his heart, constricting his chest for a moment.

"I'd do anything to protect it. Anything you could think of."

Dennis forced himself to look up and back. The midday sun stung and blurred his vision so that the two recessed eyes bearing down on him took a moment to materialize. It reminded Dennis of some of

his worst moments in Baptist Sunday school.

On Monday morning, after a restless night, Con took a commuter flight up to Victoria without telling anyone in the Agency. He wanted to get this part of the investigation over with quickly; it had to be done before the coroner's inquest in Portland, and though it was the least dangerous it was the most unpleasant of all the moves he had to make. While he could have obtained a car from his Canadian counterparts, he chose to take a cab in order to avoid any possibility of a leak.

The dead girl's surname was Depew. Her parents lived in a particularly lovely and graceful section on the east side of Victoria, characterized by large verdant lawns, English gardens surrounded by stone walls, wide white driveways curving through enormous trees, often to porticoes of Tudor, Norman, and Victorian homes. The Depews' residence was a compendium of all this, leaning toward the Tudor, with the added touch of a little cast-iron black jockey out front extending a hitching ring to any errant horseman. Con thought this must be one of the last places in the world where you would see one of those.

Charlotte Depew, a tall, lean, white-haired woman who must have had her daughter very late in life, met him at the door with no more enthusiasm than she had evinced when he called asking for the interview. Con introduced himself as an FBI man named Martin Gilbert and produced papers to prove it. Mrs. Depew took the time to examine them, then asked that he follow her. She wore a high-necked long dress and walked very straight, consistent with her mandarin appearance. Con wondered how long it had been since she had smiled.

Mrs. Depew opened the double doors to a paneled game room and said, "Charles, this is Agent Gilbert, who called. He wants to talk to us about Jenny."

Charles Depew, who complemented his wife physically except for a florid complexion, seemed strangely indifferent to Con's presence. He was bent over a sand table like those used in the working out of military problems. In this case, the sand had been scraped flat to represent the sea and was dotted with small models of warships, circa World War II. Between the ships lay flat wooden arrows bearing hen scratching that had to do with the weight and trajectory of shells. Depew himself had a T-square in one hand and a pocket calculator in the other.

"Charles," Mrs. Depew repeated.

Her husband straightened slowly, unapologetic, and regarded Con with eyes that had been used for command. "Were you in the war?"

"Which one?"

"Korean?"

"No,"

"You were in a war, though."

"Yeah, Nam."

"Did you command?"

"Well, I tried to give that impression. I was just a kid, though."

"This..." Depew said, waving at the sand table, and then seemed to lose his train of thought.

Con looked at Mrs. Depew standing by the door. She looked a little embarrassed, but fought it off to maintain her sangfroid.

"The officer would like to talk about Jenny, dear," she said quietly.

"I know." He focused on Con again. "I was a general, although I don't use the title. Pretentious. You probably think it's strange I'm working out naval problems, but the truth is, that's my real passion. For twenty-five years, I was in the wrong service. Now that I'm retired, I can have it any way I want..."

Con shifted from one foot to the other; he was inclined to be tolerant of people when he had killed

their daughter.

"...This is the Battle of the Java Sea. A small combined task force of the Dutch, British, and American navies was wiped out by the Japanese almost without striking a blow in return. Early in the war. Cost us the whole of the Dutch East Indies, as they were called then. But theoretically our side should have done better. We had some good ships; the problems were demoralization and confusion in a multinational command structure. Tactics were all wrong." A slight tremolo came into his voice. "I was working on this battle when we heard about Jenny, trying to make it come out better for our side." He shook his head and paused for a moment. "I've worked the problems through over and over again. It always comes out the same."

Con wasn't certain what he should make of all that, but he had an idea. His host indicated that he should sit in a large leather chair and he complied. Mrs. Depew remained standing across the room, still as straight as a cadet.

The general sat opposite Con on the matching leather couch and poured them each a cognac without asking. "What I was trying to say, I suppose, is ... life and war ... no matter how you try you can't bend fate. You can't. Logic and will don't mean a damned thing. The first night we heard about Jenny, I fought this battle over a dozen times. Couldn't sleep a wink, you see, but more than that, I had this idea that if I could win it for our side just once, my daughter wouldn't be dead. I know that sounds crazy now."

Con sneaked a glance at Mrs. Depew, whose mask at last was beginning to show strain along the seams. "I don't think it sounds crazy, General. I'm part Greek, on my mother's side, and those people, the women especially, they really go wild with grief. Tear their faces and everything. Everyone has their own way of dealing with it."

"Like me, you must have seen a lot of people die."

"Yeah, I guess so," Con said without enthusiasm. He was finally growing impatient.

"We have three other children, a boy and two girls. All turned out fine. She was the last. The one..." He looked at his wife for an answer but nothing was forthcoming.

"What I'd really like is any information, anything at all, that might lead us to your daughter's killers."

There was a bleak silence before the father answered. "Our daughter was killed by an American law officer..."

Mrs. Depew added, "They haven't even let us have the body."

Con took a slug of cognac and stared at the coffee table before raising his eyes to meet theirs. "It's true an officer pulled the trigger, but your daughter was with a man who was shooting at them. They were waiting for a dope delivery. The man who was supposed to deliver it never showed up but he's a big dealer with a lot of blood on his hands, and we'd like to get him. He's the only one who got away clean."

The general cleared his throat. "We don't believe the part about the dope. There wasn't any large amount found in their room. A little marijuana, perhaps, the way all the young people have it nowadays."

"They were armed and they had the money for a major dope buy. We found that in the room. Our informants told us what was going down and on the evidence, they were right."

"Were you there?" Mrs. Depew asked.

"I'm very familiar with the case."

"Informants," Mrs. Depew said with eloquent distaste.

"The young man who was with your daughter when she was killed, Paul Berry ... did you ever

meet him?"

The parents looked at each other unhappily. Whatever passed between them, Mrs. Depew admitted that they had -- once. "They drove up here. About two months ago. He had a very nice car."

"I know," Con said with a touch of astringency. He had never met a successful dealer who didn't. It was their badge of office. "How long did they stay?"

Another glance between the parents. "Not long," the mother said, "just really an afternoon. They were in a hurry to get somewhere on business."

"Mrs. Depew, this is an island. To get here with a car takes hours on a ferry. And they didn't even stay the night?"

"My wife didn't want to say. The truth is, I wouldn't let them stay in the same room. Because they weren't married, you see. That, well, it led to words."

"She was an adult, Charles."

"I know," the general said evenly. Then he turned back to Con. "What would you do if you had a daughter who presented you with that problem?"

Con shifted uncomfortably. "I don't know, General. I'm a law officer, not a psychologist or social worker."

"Do you have children?"

"Yeah, but they're younger. Since you ask, I guess I'd tell them do what you want in your house but follow my rules in mine." Lose the mother, gain the father, Con thought. "What I really want to know is if you ever heard the names of any of their friends or business associates."

"By 'business,' are you talking about that dope thing again?" Mrs. Depew demanded.

"It's the only business we know of, Mrs. Depew. Paul Berry had no known means of support. Did you hear any names in any connection at all?"

"Only one that I can remember," the father said. "A name that sounded like 'Sten.' They talked, after we argued, that they would go over to Vancouver and stay with someone with a name like that. I remembered it because it was so unusual and the British army has a weapon by that name, the Sten gun. I was with the Canadian forces in Korea."

Con kept after them but it was obvious there had been minimal contact between parents and daughter since she was seventeen. The father saw him to the door and Mrs. Depew stayed behind to begin cleaning up, the cognac glasses, a cigarette butt, even plumping the pillows as if she wished to eliminate every reminder of Con's presence.

"We thought when we got the children through their teens -- that was when we moved up here, America's such a mess ... everything that was going on..." He trailed off.

"Things can always happen any place," Con said, recognizing his own lack of eloquence and stumbling over it a little. "...things like what happened to your daughter." Con was remembering that he would probably have to face them in court eventually. Another reckoning to look forward to.

In the doorway, Mrs. Depew caught up with them. "The officer who shot our daughter, do you know him?"

"More or less." He suddenly realized that he was backing down the walk and felt pathetically awkward.

"We're going down there with our lawyer, you know," she told him.

"That's your right, ma'am."

The father was staring off beyond Con somewhere. "That was the last time we saw her. If only I'd bent things a little. Or if they'd have given up staying in the same room for just one night..."

"It wouldn't have mattered" Con said, and went down the long drive, hiking to a taxi stand. He thought it was odd that no one had mentioned the baby, but it was none of his business.

Con took another commuter flight to Vancouver because the airport at the latter was capable of handling larger planes for longer flights. He went into the terminal and called Badboy, who had gone back down to Portland at Con's behest.

"Hey, man, how you doin', huh? You okay?" Enrique's voice echoed back from the confines of a room in the same motel where the raid had taken place.

"You talked to me yesterday. What makes you think I'd be any different today?"

"I didn't ask you yesterday. Hey, Roy and Barbarossa got in to see Berry, which wasn't easy 'cause everyone's acting like there was somethin' there to get -- the locals, the feebies, Treasury, those TV fucks, but the kid's nothin'. Just a punk. And he won't talk anyway. Why should he? All we maybe got on him's the pot and unregistered gun. He already told Roy he woke up out of a sound sleep and thought we were \_bandidos\_ come to rape his old lady and sell the kid for adoption. Fucking asshole!"

"That's the price we pay for shooting them, Ricky. The judges love 'em once they get those holes in them."

"I ran into an assistant DA down here. He says the parents gonna bring in a lawyer and really try to stick it to you at the inquest."

"I know. I just came from seeing the parents over on Victoria."

"What?! They knew who you were?"

"No, I used a fake ID. I'd never have got anything out of them if they'd known."

"Hey, man, you're the boss, you know, but I think you're fucking crazy. They'll go bananas when they see you up there on the stand. They'll have your balls in a jar."

"I know."

"I hope it was worth it. You find out anything?"

"Only a name, 'Sten.' Doesn't mean anything to me now. What about the two guinea hoods?"

"Aw, they're gone already. Back in Frisco. Livin' better than you or me, count on it."

"You got addresses?"

"Sure. Their cousin Carmine, Uncle Nino, the local YMCA."

"We ever determine who they job for down there?"

"Well, you know how Frisco is. A hood's gotta freelance and keep hustling to make a buck. This last little errand was for a guy named Vigiano -- Joseph Vigiano."

"I've heard of him."

"I never did, but they tell me he's in the grease business."

"You mean he's a fixer or what?"

Badboy gave a low chuckle. "Not that kind of grease, man, the other. You know, recycled. 'Grease-rendering' they call it. Like they pick it up in trucks from restaurants and hospitals and places.

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

"You goin' down to talk to these two?"

"I'm looking at a plane right now's got its nose pointed in that direction."

"You want me to bring the guys?"

"No, I'm just gonna talk to them. Ricky, they're gonna find me easier to deal with than a car hustler on TV. Red Dog's not mobbed up and he's sure as hell no guinea, so how are they gonna get hurt?"

"Hey, \_patron,\_ I'm not worrying about them getting hurt. Let me come down there with you."

Hoods like that are dumb, man ... or so loco they don't always know what's the cool thing to do."

Con smiled to himself. "They knew what to do when we busted them, but okay, mother, come protect me. I'm leaving right now."

"You going into the office down there?"

"I'll let them know where I am."

Con hung up, bought an Agatha Christie and a copy of The Sporting News and ran to catch his plane. Actually, he didn't hope for a great deal from the two hoods and expected that he would be through with them before Badboy showed up. He just wanted the company.

As Con's plane passed over Seattle, Jerry was sitting at the revolving bar six hundred feet high in the Space Needle. He enjoyed the irony of dressing like a straight and coming here, to this relentlessly bourgeois tourist trap, to consummate a deal which could make him one of the largest and richest dealers on the West Coast.

## Chapter 6

When Jerry had appeared that morning wearing a well-creased pair of dark pants, a conservative plaid sports coat and a lightweight turtleneck sweater, it bewildered Dennis. No one he knew had ever owned anything like that. Suzanne didn't seem to think it was strange, either, that he had dyed his hair, wore glasses and a fake mustache.

Wherever he was going, the prospect had made Jerry sanguine over breakfast, which, in turn, made Dennis feel a little easier. The bad vibes coming off his host since his return had almost convinced him he had better leave the farm, although he dreaded the idea.

"Dennis is going to help me fix the chicken coop today and do some cleaning up around the orchard."

Dennis beamed like a good boy.

"It needs a of a lot of work around here. I'm away so much. We ought to take on help, but I don't like the idea of hiring strangers."

Dennis didn't know if that was aimed at him or not.

"I'm glad to help," he assured him. It wasn't quite true, he didn't really like farm work, wasn't constituted for physical work generally, but he hoped it would sound ingratiating.

"All right. We'll pay you for it."

"No, man," Dennis protested, "I owe you the moon already. I can pay you back this way. For all the meals and everything." He felt unnerved in that he had been here several weeks and at this late date his working had become an issue. Fortunately, they were distracted as Kahlil toddled round and round the dining room table, bleating for more food and trying to get at his mother's breast. She gave him a hunk of Jack cheese to quiet him.

"Where you going today?" Dennis asked, trying to sound as small-talky as possible.

"Seattle. On business." Dennis should have caught the edge in it, but he didn't.

"What do you do? I mean, what kind of business?"

"I have to see a lawyer. My father left me some investments -- no war stocks or anything exploitive, of course -- but this dude looks after them for me."

"I thought -- " Dennis looked down at his breakfast of granola and dried apples, trying to read in the whorls he had made with his spoon the answer or excuse for his stupidity. As he had been doing for close to twenty years, he rationalized it as curiosity. His mother's simpering voice: "Curiosity killed the cat, Denny."

He had almost reminded Jerry that in discussion earlier he had described his father as being alive, in fact a practicing doctor in Indianapolis. He sneaked a look at his host and saw nothing alarming.

Jerry was looking through the sun-stream slanting in the big dining room window. "Something I'd like to start up here is a fish farm. Doesn't take up much room and it's a high yield, food wise. They've always been very big in Asia. We'd be independent in a whole 'nother area and it would be a terrifically salable crop." His tone changed slightly. "Eventually, as the world's protein supply shrinks, it would become a power factor."

They were still talking about it when they went out to the car. "But more and more people are coming to vegetarianism and animal rights," Suzanne maintained.

"So, a lot of vegetarians eat fish. Don't think fish are animals." He didn't like being crossed this morning, too much on his mind."

Left out of the planning, Dennis, who only went as far as the porch, thought the idea might be okay

but sounded like a lot of work and worry, and he wondered especially if you'd have to wade around in the ponds and clean out a lot of fish shit. He'd rather write a song, himself.

"Everyone in on this," the pudgy young lawyer told Jerry, "is a professional man. Almost everyone, anyway. But you can imagine what a high credibility factor it gives us when we're dealing with officials down there."

Jerry doubted that. "What kind of professionals are we talking about?"

Around them, tourists from all over the world chattered lightheartedly about their lunch, places they'd visited, the city of Seattle six hundred feet below the Space Needle, revealing itself by inches in the turning of the restaurant. Ladies in baggy pants, in too-tight pants, wearing garish scarves over curlers, kids with bowl haircuts and obnoxious manners, fathers in shorts, oxford shoes, and patterned socks, cameras and junk gifts piled on the tables. Jerry watched them with a contempt that was as definitive as anything in his life.

"Doctors, several fellow shysters, a professor," the lawyer was saying. "Guy that started it all is a dentist. Likes to take flying vacations. Couple of years ago he decided to take a month off and do Latin America. He flew into this area of Bolivia, town called Boca Blanca, White Mouth. Terrifically remote. They're growing it in the flower boxes, for Christ's sake, and everybody's a little stoned all the time, even the kids. I guess it's high up and cold and kind of dreary. Anyway, the doc -- the dentist who had the original idea -- he came back and formed a bunch of friends into a kind of syndicate.

One of the first guys was a chemist from a big corporation. He took some time off and went down to get things started. Had a good job and all, but he's just like everybody else, he's having trouble making it. Like the rest of us. Taxes, the fucking inflation, the cockamamie market, busting your balls to keep the old lady happy..."

"It's all right, Marv," Jerry told him dryly, "I'm in the business myself, remember? Everybody's got their own reasons." Jerry was used to listening to this kind of rationalization from this kind of person. It bored him.

"Okay, well, anyway, we all put some money into developing the business down there. Would you believe we even sent an agricultural expert. The insane thing is he didn't seem to realize the end product was going to be cocaine -- he thought we were trying to wean the natives away from all that. Got us confused with the Peace Corps or something."

Marvin giggled and Jerry could imagine him as a fat, precocious school kid that the other kids hated and the teachers used. A perfect background for a lawyer. "We don't have to worry about him, though. He got in a hassle with one of the local growers over a woman and got shot about a hundred times. I don't know what we would have done about him if that hadn't happened."

"Marvin, enough bullshit. How much stuff have you got?"

Marvin looked a little hurt. "Huge. First quality."

"How much?"

"I don't really know, Jerry, honest to God." His eyes pleaded for understanding. "I'm not sure anybody does. But we've been schlepping it into Canada for almost six months now and it's starting to pile up. There's millions worth and it's coming in all the time.

"One word I haven't heard, 'cartel.' You gotta know you're sticking it to the most dangerous people on earth. \_They\_ gotta know."

"They don't. Not a sign so far. But, sure, everyone's getting antsy about not moving it. We've put in so much and come so far."

"You mean I'm the first one you've contacted about handling it?" His tone was more than skeptical, it was assertively contradictory.

"You want another drink? Why don't you try one of these, a blended stinger on the rocks. Terrific!"

"I only drink wine which is a food. I hope you're not defending anyone in a capital case this afternoon."

Marvin giggled again. Jerry knew he was a little tougher than that, but not as tough as he would end up pretending to be.

"You didn't answer my question."

"Well, there was one attempt, I guess. Some petty hoodlum. I didn't have anything to do with it, believe me. He ripped us off. It wasn't much, and fortunately he was a real \_gonif.\_ He just took what we gave him and disappeared. Dumb, because he could have played out the string for a hell of a lot more. But..."

"Okay, you screwed around with some loser and got burned. Why? If you've got half of what you say you've got, man, you don't need to suck-up to anybody. Write your own deal. So then what do you need me for? Why me?"

His tone was so hard it set Marvin back a little. Somehow it seemed unsuited to the innocuous surroundings, which actually was a tribute to Jerry's stagecraft. "Well, I'm the one who suggested you in the first place, Jerry, and now they see I was right. You know how these things are, man." He took off his glasses and rubbed away tracings of blended stinger. Unconsciously, it was a long-used gesture intended to win sympathy and trust.

"You're a lawyer, Marvin, so you know a lot of people who aren't exactly kosher. People who know people, anyway."

"Maybe, sure, but the thing is, somebody like yourself, well, you're college-educated, you're more like us, as opposed to some hood we might find. Also, really pure, high-quality cocaine like this would seem to call for ... more of a class distribution."

Jerry had noticed him glancing around when he mentioned the word "cocaine," and it irritated him. "You're jacking off when you talk about dumping millions of dollars' worth of coke on the market and selling it exclusively to the rich and well-educated. We're talking about a hell of a big street market. Has to be.

"But, shit, that's okay. A lot more people can pay for it these days than you'd think. Everyone from burglars to housewives, construction workers to ... lawyers. Christ, we've had kids crash at our place who can make a bill a day panhandling in a good-sized city, and they're just left-over little hippies. But something you'd better goddamn well understand, there's going to be a hell of a lot of very hard guys in on this by the time it gets down to moving it on the street."

"Well, sure, we know that. I knew you didn't have any organization or anything. But that's on your end. We won't have anything to do with that."

"It's good you know it, because it's going to cost you a lot."

Marvin's face clouded at that easy shot and Jerry revised his respect downward. He was beginning to feel very good about the whole affair.

"What do you mean?" Marvin asked in a voice redolent of fear and suspicion.

Jerry ignored the question. "You going to tell me who else is in this 'professional syndicate,' Marvin?"

"Jerry, you know I shouldn't ... I mean, I can't. You ought to understand that. Christ, I don't even know where \_you\_ live."

"What about how you get it into Canada in bulk? Who's in on that and where do you keep it? Also, exactly how many kilos have you got and how many coming?"

"Shit, man, c'mon."

"I know that everything you don't tell me raises the risk, and that raises the price."

"How much?" Marvin was glowering at his blended stinger as a surrogate for Jerry.

"Sixty-forty. I get sixty of what I turn it over for, give you forty back."

Marvin tried to make his snorting laugh sound genuine. "You got to be kidding. Look, this is Marvin, baby. We go back." In a sporting gesture out of a Clark Gable movie on television, he offered his opponent an Havana cigar at the moment of highest conflict.

"I don't smoke and I doubt any of these other people do." He indicated the diners. It was only partially true, but it had the proper effect on Marvin.

"Oh, sorry." He left his own cigar unlit, chewing on it nervously.

"It's because we 'go back' I know exactly what kind of deal we're going to make, Marvin."

"Hey, buddy, let's talk about you. What are you putting up? Like how much have you got for the initial buy? And when you sell it, how are we going to know what you got for it? I mean, forty percent of what?"

"I can tell this is your first go at dealing."

"It's a syndicate. I don't have to know everything myself. Some of these people are very experienced. And some of them -- they're not \_all\_ professional men, you know -- are pretty rough, Jerry. I wouldn't lose sight of that entirely."

"I'll remember that," Jerry replied, in a tone that implied the opposite. "But let's stick to the deal, huh? I don't have any cash right now, not enough for this big a thing, anyway." In truth, he was as land-poor as some fading aristocrat, but he didn't want to have to explain that.

"I thought you were doing so well. That's what I heard, what you led me to believe."

"Don't worry about it, I do okay. The problem is, my wife's brother fucked-up bigtime back east. I had to pay for a lot of juice. Almost everything I had for dealing." Suzanne didn't have a brother.

"What you mean is, you don't have a pot to piss in, right?" The lawyer seemed pleased with himself. "That should lower your price right there."

Jerry stared at him coldly until the other man broke his gaze. "Don't be a cunt, Marvin."

"Well, I mean, Christ, Jerry, you've put me in a very awkward position. I'm the one recommended you. I told the others you were not only the smartest young dealer in the Northwest but one of the most successful. In any kind of business, confidence is important. Here I try to put an old buddy into one of the biggest, richest dope deals in this country and I'm made to look like a schmuck."

"Why don't you just cut out all the PR shit and tell me what's the bottom line."

Marvin snapped off his answer: "You pay us a hundred-thousand to get it moving. That's for like a bond or security. After that, you can just run it through the pipe, from us to your distributors, and take your cut as it passes through. Only it can't be sixty-forty."

"That it?"

"We'd want you to move it across the border the first time. Getting it out of Bolivia into Canada's nothing, but that border is a bitch."

"Marvin, California, Mexico, even Texas, that's the Berlin Wall. Canada is a pussy. I'll move it, but I'll need a couple of weeks."

Marvin shook his head like a man who regretted his trust. "Boy, my people are really getting impatient. I hope it isn't any longer than that."

"Your people have been sitting around with their fingers up their ass for two years. They need me, and two more weeks won't mean shit."

"I can't do anywhere near sixty-forty. Listen, you want another drink? 'Cause I do." There was no

contrivance in his voice this time, he needed the drink for himself and didn't care what Jerry did. The bartender was called over, but Jerry stuck with his original glass of wine, the one that had sat in front of him for over an hour now.

His old 'friend,' Jerry noticed, was beginning to get a little ripped. No telling what else he had consumed that morning. It worried him, dealing with heads. On the other hand, he was used to people who were hard and dangerous, sometimes observably psychotic. Here, for the first time since he had entered the life, Jerry faced the almost sensuously joyful prospect of himself being the wolf among the sheep. That, with the money, made him willing to face lots of risks which would have been unthinkable before.

"Okay, I'll take forty, you sixty."

Marvin couldn't believe his ears and leaped at it, but it was only what Jerry had counted upon, having intended it from the beginning.

"Here," the lawyer said eagerly, digging into the inside pocket of his suit coat, "you want to see the quality of the stuff you were so damned difficult about?" He stuck out his jaw as part of the challenge and slammed an ornate snuffbox onto the bar.

"You out of your fucking mind?" Jerry hissed at him, covering the snuffbox with his hand like a bird striking.

"Snort a little, why don't you? People'll think you got an allergy, is all."

Jerry snaked the box into his own coat pocket without looking at it or glancing around. He kept his voice low and measured. "Marvin, when it comes to assholes, you're in a class of your own." He leaned close enough to smell the other's breath. "listen to me. I'm never careless and I don't take chances. Now I'm going to have to break my own rules and carry this shit out of here and on the streets because I can't trust you with it. So whatever you're doing, go sweat it off, but don't ever be this stupid with me again."

Marvin felt a lot braver than when he had started. "Listen, Jerry, you said before that I was a lawyer and oughta know a lot of heavyweights. Well, I do, so quit ... pushing me around."

Jerry stood and surprised him by smiling, showing the edges of his teeth. "Aaaah, Marvin, there's something beautiful about your inadequacy, the way there is about any archetype. I research all my deals, I looked into you. Don't try to scare me." He started away. "Couple of days, I'll get back."

Marvin watched his new partner head for the elevator through a haze that seemed to be increasing alarmingly. He realized he was sitting there alone at the table with his mouth slackly open. It needed a touch of the fingers to press his face, which felt a lot like silly putty, into shape again. "Holy shit," he murmured dolefully. "How did I get into this?"

A waitress came over and asked, "Anything else?"

Marvin wiped his dripping nose and said, "Get me another blended fucking stinger. Please."

## Chapter 7

Con arrived at San Francisco International shortly after six o'clock. The local office of the Drug Enforcement Administration would be largely emptied but he didn't care; he had never intended to go there anyway. If Enrique came along later, he would have to wait until morning to tie in with him.

As soon as he had checked into the airport motel, he did call a San Francisco P.D. officer on the Organized Crime unit to find out what he could about Joe Vigiano. There was very little worth knowing, as it turned out, in a fifty-year record stretching back to his youth in New Jersey. Not quite old enough to have been a venerable, a "mustache," never quite vigorous or smart enough to be a man of importance among their successors. Now in his late sixties, he had been into everything from vending machines to this current flirtation with the amenities of grease. Always with mediocre success.

There was no doubt that Vigiano was doing a little dope business on the side, nothing special but enough to confirm that he might have sent the two younger hoodlums up to Portland to make a buy. They were dependent upon him for at least part of their income and one of them, Richie Pennisi, was thought to be his nephew.

The thing that interested Con was that Joe had a lot of domestic trouble. His wife was described as younger than him and meaner than hell, and even his kids didn't like him. The officer who gave Con the information expressed a hope that they might turn a member of the family when the domestic situation finally blew.

Con thought that a husband with so much grief at home might be expected to stay at work or maybe the neighborhood bar later than most men. He decided to get a car and go up to Daly City, where the grease-rendering plant was located.

On the Bayside Freeway he got the idea that his rented nondescript Chevrolet was being tagged by a nondescript Ford. It was as much instinct as anything, since the Ford hung a long ways back and car movements lacked individuation on the freeway. He wasn't particularly worried but it made him curious; no one but Badboy had known he was coming down here and he hadn't been operating against any big-time organizations lately. Leaving the freeway he used parallel surface streets for a while without spotting the Ford again.

It was getting dark by the time he entered the grimy industrial suburb which helped to support all that cosmopolitan beauty a few miles farther north. He had no trouble finding Vigiano's place of business; his nose homed in on it from two blocks away. The building itself was on the order of a warehouse, large and square, made of cinder block, which was atypical for the area and suggested it had been around awhile. Sitting complacently in its shadow was the Ford.

Con took his automatic out of the shoulder holster and laid it on the seat beside him. He slowed and angled for a three-quarter approach, which would give him maximum visibility. He didn't expect trouble, but he was always careful. There was a lone man in the car and the back of his head looked familiar. As Con came alongside, the man turned and grinned. It was Badboy. He gave the clenched-fist salute.

Con returned the automatic to its holster, parked in front of the Ford and came back as Badboy climbed out. "What the hell do you think you're doing, *mano loco*?"

"Such words are music to my ears, baby. Now I know you got your *\_cojones\_* back after that girl."

"I still wanna know how you got here."

"Hey, the wildest thing. Like, I'm just cruising out of the airport in my little rented *caballo*, see, and there you are on the same goddamn freeway. So I hung back and practiced a little, you know."

"I saw you," Con told him flatly.

Badboy looked disappointed. "Naw, you couldn't, maaaaan." Con just shook his head. "Okay, see, I called the same dude on the S.F.P.D. you did. I figured you wouldn't waste any time. To get here, I chartered a plane in Portland." Immediately he looked as though he regretted the last admission.

"Holy Christ -- chartered a plane! How much did that cost?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Don't you ever go into the office? Talk to Clyde? They're screaming their heads off in D.C. The budget's shot for the whole fucking year already."

Enrique gave him a sly look. "Hey, jefe, it's a war on drugs, didn't you ever hear that? Think what it could cost the Agency for your death benefits if I hadn't got here in time."

"Oh, hell, let's go lean on these \_paisanos\_." He put his arm around Badboy's shoulder momentarily in a rare gesture of affection. It was a need he had felt with some intensity the last few days.

The front door was unlocked and unguarded. "Who'd wanna steal grease?" Badboy asked rhetorically.

They cursed the stench as they went past the huge vats inside, slipping on grease-covered cement floors. The employees had evidently all gone home and there was no one in the office bearing Vigiano's name, either. Threading through to the back, they heard voices and followed them outside to a little grass-covered courtyard behind the plant. It was well lit, revealing three elderly Italians playing bocce. There was a bottle of Chivas and some glasses on a decrepit ping-pong table. Badboy said the shortest, fattest and baldest was Joe Vig.

The Italians watched them come with a suspicion sharpened over several centuries. Vigiano stared into Con's face and, when he was sure, made an almost imperceptible gesture that dismissed the other two men. They went past Con and Badboy, their own eyes straight ahead, and disappeared into the factory. Con showed Vigiano his identification.

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

"You knew we were narcotics officers?"

"I knew you were somethin'?"

"Let's go in the office."

"You could bring the bottle, if you want," Enrique suggested.

Vigiano snorted, but he brought it.

The office was almost as shabby as the rest of the plant, the fecal brown paint peeling from the walls, a battered old desk covered with cigar burns, hard wooden guest chairs, pool-hall lighting and a spittoon in the corner that smelled worse than the grease vats. Con didn't ask, he went over and turned on the portable air conditioner in the window. Vigiano settled behind his desk on a chair whose three pillows enabled him to show three quarters of his chest. He pulled a Di Nobile out of the top drawer without offering one.

"Listen," Con told him, "we're not here to bust your balls. \_capisce?\_"

"I speak English okay," Vigiano said with dignified acerbity. He blew the cigar smoke in the general direction of his interrogators, little knowing that they were grateful for any kind of olfactory distraction.

"You don't want this to go easy, that's okay, it doesn't have to. But you better understand. I want something real bad, not as a cop but as a man -- \_capisce?\_ Vendetta! You understand that?"

Vigiano tugged at one of the hairs coming out of his nostrils but his expression gave nothing. Con thought he had a certain amount of "belly" for a strictly marginal Mafioso.

"If you don't cooperate, tell you the truth, you're gonna have grief." Con was watching those pinched eyes for belief or the lack of it. They were also opaque, as if chosen by the god of genetics for

his profession. "See, I want you to know the measure of what I feel." He tapped his chest.

Badboy poured his second Scotch. He was watching Con's adaptation to the Italian style with amusement.

"What the fuck you want from me?" Vigiano said blandly.

"You sent two boys up to Portland to make a buy. High-class powder." Con noted that a lot of guys would have started protesting but this one didn't. "We're not gonna try and make you on that, or your boys, either. But I want to talk to them. I want the dealer. We killed a young girl up there -- I killed her. Capisce? My vendetta is with the dealer. When I got his head in a basket, then I can forget about the girl. And you."

"I read about it."

For the first time, Con began to feel optimistic. "If you can tell me where the two boys can be found -- I know one of them's family -- I might be able to return the favor and tell you something about your own situation."

"What do you know about me?"

"Where can I find your boys?"

Vigiano didn't answer, but he leaned forward and wrote something on a piece of paper. He handed it across the desk to Con, who noticed that it had grease on it. "They don't only work for me, you know, these boys, they move around a lot. I want 'em, I call this joint. Bartender gets me in touch. You tell him I sent you, he believe you. You tell 'em, you find 'em, I said it's okay. Maybe they talk to you, maybe not. I can't do no more. Capisce? M"

Badboy leaned over Con's shoulder and read the address. "Listen," he said cheerfully to the Italian, "if it doesn't work, it isn't that far for us to come back here, so don't worry about it, old man." He threw in his Pancho Villa smile.

Vigiano gave him a wintry look but turned back on Con to ask, "What is it you know about me?"

"Your wife and children hate you. They're helping the cops make trouble for you."

"That's all?"

"Could put you in 'Q' if you're not careful," Con said with maximum indifference. He stood up.

Vigiano dismissed it and them with a small flick of one hand. "Show me someone who don't have trouble with his family."

Con said "You got that right," as they left the office and headed out through the darkened plant.

"Hey," Badboy queried, "This sucker could go home and blow away his whole familia. I know how you feel about Red Dog and the girl and all that, but man!"

"You become a bleeder? You ever hear of a guinea who killed his old lady? Much less his kids? Blacks will -- the Panthers knocked off each other's wives all the time. Your people been known-but not Italians. I read Genovese's wife practically stopped people on the street to tell them every time Don Vito ever dipped his wick. And she made old bones. It's either their weakness or their strength, depending on how you look at it."

Outside, it was decided to return Badboy's car to a rental facility in downtown San Francisco and continue together in Con's. The address they had been given was near the Embarcadero, not necessarily a mob hangout but with its share of marginal clientele.

They sat at the badly scarred bar and ordered Chivas Regal out of the habit of passing, it being the de rigueur mob drink. The bartender made no attempt to disguise his interest or suspicion, but they ignored him.

Badboy turned slowly on his stool and looked the place over through the murk, meeting a half-

dozen pairs of eyes, half of which turned away. "Funny how they make you sometimes, other times it's cool."

"I notice. I think maybe it's because we don't care."

"Yeah, but shit, we look the same, don't we?"

Con smiled. "Not in the eyes. Undercover's not not being something, it's being something aggressively."

"Hey, thanks for tellin' me, homie." Badboy said. "It's not not being something. I'll remember that."

"You just won't learn from the master, will you?" Con traced his fingers through somebody's carved initials.

"Watch out, you're starting to relax."

"C'mon, let's get it on with these pricks."

The bartender had a thin, hard face and a bald head with a wen protruding from it. He didn't particularly look Italian and his name was Bill. Neither did he look particularly friendly nor trustful. "How do I know Richie and Dave wanna see you?" he demanded.

"You know Joe Vig wants us to see them, that's all you got to know," Con told him flatly.

"I'm gonna check it out anyways."

"Forget it," Badboy told him. "Just do what Joe Vig asks, huh?" He showed his badge.

"You're cops?"

"Not really. We're stockbrokers moonlighting, is what we're doin'."

The bartender cracked a bad-toothed grin, which he may have thought was winning. "Tell the truth, I thought you had somethin' else on your mind. You know? Maybe Vig was goin' into a new business -- mine. And this was just the preliminaries, you know?"

"Aw, c'mon," Badboy pleaded.

Con sounded bored. "The address!"

The bartender went over to the cash register, where he had a note pad, and wrote something out.

"These assholes are all doing a number lately," the Chicano grumbled.

"They see it on TV or the movies."

The bartender came back with an address, which he said was only two blocks away. Con and Badboy went out, stood on the sidewalk for a count of ten, and then Badboy went back in. He returned to report to Con that the bartender had not been on the phone. Nevertheless, they covered the two blocks at a trot. On the move, Badboy worried that they should have picked up a shotgun somewhere, but it was too late for that and Con probably wouldn't have gone for it anyway.

They arrived at a shabby brick-faced apartment hotel and Con ordered Badboy to go around to the alley in back. "You gonna take that door alone, man?"

"Like a thousand others, for Christ's sake. Go on."

Badboy drew the police service revolver he favored -- it was good for only six shots, but he kept a smaller .25-caliber on his belt at the small of his back -- and disappeared around the side of the building. Con waited until he was inside on the stairs leading up to the second-story apartment, which was their objective, before he pulled his automatic and held it down flat against his thigh. He wasn't expecting any trouble because he was carrying Joe Vig's cachet and they were small-time hoodlums who had already more-or-less beaten the count in Portland, but he knew better than to take that for granted.

The walls of the hallway were stained, the carpet worn through to the underlying linoleum in spots and the atmosphere smelled like everything that had ever been fried, which somehow always coalesced

as the perfume of boiled cabbage. Con knocked on the door of the apartment and waited, listening to his own shallow breathing.

Finally, a grating, tentative voice from inside: "Who is it?"

Con kept his own voice down. "Richie, Dave -- Joe Vig sent me."

"Who are you?" the voice demanded.

An old lady carrying a cat shuffled down the hallway, regarding him fearfully, and Con stalled before speaking again. "Listen, I just want to talk to you. Joe Vig okayed it. Call him if you don't believe me."

This time he discerned movement that suggested panic and maybe flight. He reared up, gave the door a sharp kick without cracking it, then lunged sideways to hug the wall. No shot came, but there was an increase in scrambling sounds and he heard someone hiss, "Move it!" Con spun, bounced off the wall and made his charge, going through the door, this time low and at a slant with the gun thrust way out in front, a talisman as well as a defense.

There was a man in the open window and some kind of confusion out beyond him -- that would be Badboy. The man in the window Con recognized from the raid in Portland. It was Richie Pennisi, the nephew, a pale, sharp-faced punk who probably didn't have a lot of guts. Right now, though, there was something far more dangerous than courage on his face -- fear. Otherwise, he would have appeared ludicrous, because he was wearing pants, an old-fashioned undershirt, socks but no shoes, and was balanced on his testicles as he straddled the windowsill awkwardly, unable to decide.

Richie, in his panic, reached into the pocket of his narrow pants and tried to draw a small pistol, but couldn't get it out of those tight quarters. Con screamed, "Don't, motherfucker!" and fired a shot past his head, blowing out the window. It was the first time in his life he had not aimed to kill when a man showed a gun and later he would worry whether what had happened in Portland hadn't crippled his sense of self-preservation.

It had the right effect on Richie, however, as he let go of the gun and threw himself onto the floor, palms down, already spread-eagled by the time Con got there. The pistol was still in and out of his pocket at a dangerous crotchward angle, and Richie was lucky to still be a man.

Con was furious; he crossed the room in three strides and kicked the hoodlum in the side. "You dumb bastard, you stupid fuck, I could have blown your head off ... !" Only by an immense effort of will did he hold himself back from destroying ribs in multiples. Richie had doubled into the fetal position, moaning, Con thought, louder than was called for. He reached down and tugged the gun out of the pocket, flipped the safety on and slipped it into his own. "Stay there, don't move a finger, you prick." He pressed the man flat again by jamming the automatic against the back of his head. The blood was still slamming at his temples, driving his heart and for a rare moment Con had lost his fabled control.

He was saved when Badboy came in the window from the fire escape, pushing the other one ahead of him at gunpoint. "You okay? What happened, man?"

Con shook himself and backed away from his suspect, who might as well have been dead, so paralyzed was he by fear. Slowly, he eased his gun back into the holster. "Jesus Christ, it was nothing, and they almost turned it into a goddamn war! And it was nothing." His tone drifted from anger to something like sadness.

Enrique handcuffed his more tractable prisoner to Con's and got them both on their feet, ordering them to remain standing there in the middle of the room. He went to the door and looked up and down the corridor. "Can you believe it?" he muttered. One old man peered out from his room several doors down; otherwise, no one had come to inquire. The Chicano gave the old man a shooing gesture and he disappeared, his expression suggesting it was out of fear of the agent's appearance. "Getting more like

L.A. every day," Badboy said disgustedly.

Con had recovered his vectors and begun to work, staring hard at the two men standing in front of him. The other one, Dave Parma, was stronger and bolder-looking than Richie, also too smart to waste time in a stare-down, which is what most petty hoodlums would have tried. Con wondered about this one; the surname was probably chosen from the city in Italy, maybe an alias. Yet he didn't look Italian. The complexion was coppery, the nose too flat and the eyes slightly Mongoloid.

"Why?" he asked of either one.

They didn't respond, but then no one expected them to. Not yet. Badboy told them they were going to stand there until they answered some questions or dropped. And if they chose the latter, he would get them up the hard way. There was an element of ritual on both sides, and both sides knew that normally there were limits to what could happen. But this time one side didn't know what was in Con's heart.

He asked them again why they had acted the way they did. Richie snarled and swore unconvincingly, while Dave stared off at some world of his own. Con took his gun out of its holster again, checked it out, taking his time, and then pointed it at Richie. He flashed a peculiar smile which worried even Badboy. He extended his arms as though on the target range and kept it that way. Time passed and the sound of four men breathing in various rhythms grew a certain intensity. In the distance a horn honked and a woman gave a high, shrill laugh. Con's arm never wavered. Richie broke into a sweat, which was like the manifestation of a disease. Dave shifted on his feet and made a guttural sound in his throat before resuming his sentinel pose. Badboy's eyes moved from one to the other.

Ultimately, nature asserted itself, muscle fatigue caught up with the cantilevered arm. Richie seemed aware of the implications. The black muzzle bobbed and weaved in front of his eyes like the tongue of a snake.

Con broke the silence; he was almost gentle. "No one's coming. No one cares enough."

Richie snorted, or tried to, it coming out more like a whinny. "You ain't gonna kill nobody, man. Not here." His voice almost cracked but he recovered for a last TV-inspired sally: "Not with that little peashooter."

"It's small, but it can get through your eye okay. Think about your brain, Richie. Think about what it'll do when it gets in there and plows around in all that soft tissue. I do, every day I work. It keeps me honest. Separates me out from punks like you who don't have the imagination."

"Richie, tell him before you barf," the other one said with obvious contempt. His eyes were still off somewhere and he barely moved his lips. "Shit, man, it's not that big a deal. They're gonna bust us anyway, you know that. I mean, you had to carry a goddamn piece, it's gonna happen, man. Fuck it!"

"Yeah, Richie," Badboy spoke up, "you're gonna go downtown anyway after we get through with you -- maybe it's just gonna be you and not your head -- but you can make it a little easier on yourself. Shit, man, it's all a big fuck-up anyway. We come here with the Vig's okay, you know, to ask you questions you could answer without any harm to yourself. Believe it, man. But you gotta be an asshole punk and make it complicated for us."

Con never moved; he was busy being the Angel of Death. In his own mind he wasn't sure what he would do if they refused to believe him and let it go on too long.

Finally, Richie broke. His lips quivered and the words came staggering out in a long wail. It seems he was wanted on a charge of possessing a silencer down in Santa Rosa; he had skipped bail on it.

Con looked at Badboy, who met his gaze with cosmic cynicism equal to his own. He lowered the gun slowly, in the way of a comment, and turned his back for a moment. The problem was to keep from laughing.

"Afraid you'd get the needle for that?" Badboy asked scornfully.

"I got priors, man," Richie lamented. "And then there was that shit up in Portland you guys were in

on."

"So now you got resisting arrest, felonious assault, assault on a federal officer, you name it," Con reminded him. "That mean little Chicano bastard there who looks like he'd cut his mother's throat for a deuce -- well, he's the 'good cop.' That leaves me the 'bad cop.' I don't mind being the bad cop with a pimple dumb as you are, but on the other hand I don't have to be. Just tell us about that supplier up there in Portland. The one you were waiting for."

Richie admitted that he had provided the line on the buy and taken the proposition to his uncle for financing. The dealer was supposed to be in possession of some high-grade coke, quality that would be a very big seller in the city. "Vig staked me, and Dave and me was hangin' and doin' a little business -- and Dave here, he can handle himself, which is good 'cause there's a lot of pricks handlin' that shit'd just as soon blow your head off as do business -- and anyway, we went up there. But then you showed instead of him. Which I guess was lucky in the long run, or we'd be in the joint by now."

"Richie," Dave said, "tell them some names. You know they gotta have names, so why don't you quit wastin' our time?"

Richie shrugged and asked for a cigarette. Badboy gave it to him and he went on. "I never seen this dealer, you know. I just heard a lot about him up there around Seattle and Portland an' like that. Got a rep but he's kind of a mysterious guy. Name he was usin' was Mike Cromelin or somethin' -- I'm not sure I could spell that for you."

Con said that was all right, it was one of many names the man used and they already knew it."

"Hey, could we get to some bottom line here?" Enrique asked impatiently. "We know the dude never got there 'cause we were there. And we'll take your word you never met him up front, 'cause that's the way the dude operates, but why don't you just tell us where to find the cutout, huh? The middle man? Nobody stuck a message up your ass, you had to meet somebody to set all this up."

"Bighead," Dave said.

Con and Enrique waited to see if that was a name or a criticism. The laconic Dave nodded to Richie, indicating the explanation was up to him.

"Yeah," Richie said, looking philosophical. "That asshole. I never shoulda had nothin' to do with him. He's a junkie. But he's tied in pretty good and it was him called me from Portland about the deal. His name's Frank Stenbauer. I got it written down there in the drawer with a phone number. You'd find it anyway. Fat mother, acts nuts all the time, always laughin' over nothin'."

Con thought for a moment and asked, "You ever hear him called 'Sten'?"

"Naw, I don't think so. Just Bighead, or Frank, you know."

"When was the last time you talked to him -- Bighead?"

Dave shifted uneasily. "I guess it was me. Up in Portland there. I called him just before you guys busted in."

"We didn't hear you," Con told him flatly.

"You had it tapped, huh?"

"Us, no!" Badboy broke in. "And you can tell your fuckin' lawyer we would never consider such an abominable thing 'cause we never had no court order."

Con signaled for him to knock it off.

"Well," Richie said, "we may not be much to you, but Dave and me don't make it a practice of just usin' any goddamn phone for, you know, our private business."

Badboy gave him some applause.. "You never hearda cell phones?"

Dave spoke up. "There coulda been a wire in the room. I went out to a phone booth."

"We saw you leave," Con said.

Dave shrugged. "Okay. You know."

"Why did you call him then?" Con asked.

"Well ... just to say where the fuck is he, the dealer."

"What'd he answer?"

"He said he might not be comin', not that night. He said wait, though."

"Did he say why Cromelin might not come?"

"Naw, just wait. He'd get back. But he knew!"

"He knew!" Richie said with bitterness this time. "He knew we was burned. He just didn't want us goin' anywheres drawin' flak 'till that dealer was clear. You can't trust a fuckin' junkie -- I hate 'em."

"Yeah, well, but a flea can't afford to hate a dog," Con said.

## Chapter 8

Dennis, sitting in the lotus position on the porch earlier that morning, had watched Jerry drive off to his meeting in Seattle with a mixture of relief and anxiety. The throbbing of that sinewy engine echoed back through the hills for a long time and the natural sounds of birds and insects didn't resume until it was gone. Inside the house, Suzanne went about her morning chores humming E\_leanor Rigby\_ from that revered decade. Dennis wished it was one of his tunes but, after all, he had not written any of them down and she had heard them only in fragments and those in passing.

The dog came out and leaned against him, both wallowing in the autumnal sun. He could feel a buzz emitted from the beast's viscera. The little boy chattered in his bedroom and his mother broke off humming to talk to him, playing and teasing from the sound of it. The fact that Suzanne was a mother was something Dennis found enormously exciting. He had no idea why.

Off to the northwest, against the hill honeycombed with rabbit warrens and the holes of chipmunks and groundhogs, a predatory hawk circled low, and it sent something across the intervening space that caused a rustling in Dennis. To tamp it down he drew a cigarette paper and tobacco pouch containing marijuana out of his pocket and occupied himself with the meticulous ritual of rolling a joint.

He began to feel very good after a few draws, capable even of thinking about Jerry. He aimed a cloud of yellowish smoke in the direction in which the Porsche had disappeared and tried to invoke a vision of its driver's face through it, one he might study safely. He realized for the first time the palpable thing that happened whenever Jerry left -- it was the passing of a fierce energy. Jerry moved easily and with none of the apparent tension that comes with powerful drives, but the reflected heat could always be felt lurking somewhere around him like the penumbra of a star.

Now that he was gone, it was peaceful again, as it never was when he was here. Dennis couldn't verbalize it even for himself, but he felt it keenly. He was lacking in that sort of energy and loved the peace that enabled his own bulb-beneath-the-earth kind of stirrings to find passage.

A half hour went by with increasing lack of clarity and finally Suzanne, barefoot, wearing her tiny shift and with her hair pulled back under a scarf, came out to announce it was time to go to the orchard. She looked at the tiny butt of the joint still smoking in his enervated hand where it rested across the dog. She smiled at him beatifically, reached down and took it, toked and gently placed it back between his lax fingers.

She had placed her mouth on something that had touched his. Dennis, in his haze, confused her momentarily with the Virgin Mary. He struggled to his feet and followed her in the general direction of the barn.

They picked up some tools and marched, Suzanne leading with her long-legged native-woman's stride, to the apple orchard. Dennis, dragging a rake on the ground, stumbled a couple of times on the way and was hard put to keep up. Once when he stumbled, she turned and smiled at him again. Dennis didn't care if there was pity in it; he had often gained things he needed through exacting pity. His own eyes could hardly find time to come up and meet hers; they were busy trying to focus on the point where one strong brown thigh rubbed against the other as she walked.

It was comparatively cool in the orchard and Dennis immediately flopped down to lean against a tree. He was hot and a little dizzy. A fly buzzed around his head but he was too mellow to threaten it. Suzanne began to work with the same grace she brought to the simplest movements.

The orchard had been badly neglected, the trees covered with atrophied limbs, the ground beneath uncultivated and deep in residue. She sawed off dead wood and painted the stumps with a black tarlike substance from a coffee can. Dennis watched her reaches and stretches with longing. They had exchanged only a few words all morning but they seldom talked anyway. After an hour, he got up and

bundled the dead wood for a while, but then sat down again.

"I wish we'd brought some wine," he said. The idea caused him to run his tongue around a gravelly mouth, result of the smoking but also nervousness. "I feel like drinking something."

"We can. We can have some for lunch. I have to go back to the house to feed Kahlil and I'll bring it."

"I wish we had it now. I'm real thirsty. Mouth tastes like dirt."

"Take your mind off it by raking up some of this shit." It was not sarcasm, she was sincere in the suggestion that work would distract him. In fact, Suzanne was incapable of criticizing someone for not doing his part. Everyone should do what he/she felt like doing at any given moment in time.

"I don't really dig this, you know -- screwing around with nature like this. God made these trees like this. The Lord Krishna, if he wants to make the limbs die and be still attached on the tree, we should let it alone. And this stuff on the ground, it's natural to be here."

"Jerry says we've got to make the farm produce. It's our world. We've got to make it self-sufficient." She sounded unsure.

"That sounds like fascism," Dennis mumbled with a thick tongue.

"How could it? Didn't you hear what I said? I was quoting Jerry." Without emotion, she added, "Don't talk bullshit, Dennis," and went back to work.

Dennis moaned softly, anguished by his own clumsiness; he had blown it, he was as far from touching her as he had ever been and yet his desire was becoming intolerable with their isolation and proximity, with the effects of heat, marijuana and the way she looked, and because of a puzzling, almost indistinguishable sense of abandon exuded by Suzanne when Jerry was gone from her.

He thought of rape but it was neither practicable nor his natural inclination. His preferred position was with the woman on top and that was difficult to achieve in rape. He thought of it in the context of a romance in which he would take her by force but to her liking, throw her over his saddle and light out over the mountains as a fugitive, free as an Irish bandit in places where Jerry's Porsche could never follow. That would be exciting; unfortunately she was faster and stronger than he.

This fantasy merged with the more realistic dreams of sleep. When he awoke, the sun had passed its zenith and was slanting into his eyes painfully. He blinked them to clear the floating islands and was startled to find Suzanne sitting next to him, her back against a tree, sucking on a bottle of California Riesling. His mouth was gaping and she reached down playfully to pop the nozzle into it. He sputtered at first but then drew evenly and sensually. She seemed to enjoy watching him.

The rich symmetry of one of her thighs lay within inches of his hand and he knew that if it was not now, it would never happen. He reached out and touched it without looking at her; the thigh was warm from the sun and very firm against his trembling fingertips and it made not the slightest movement. Finally he got up the nerve to meet the green-eyed gaze he knew was waiting for him. It was quizzical, sober.

She put her hand over his, holding it there with surprising ease and strength, and Dennis didn't know whether it was a gesture of tolerance, affection, or to prevent his going further. As she continued to stare into his eyes he felt himself beginning to lose control, felt the bottom of his belly yawning in panic, felt himself frail, skinny, pale, ugly, stupid. This girl was beautiful, she had been to college and always seemed so natural, even powerful, and she was married to a man who was her equivalent in every way, plus a quality he was afraid to name.

It was in Dennis's nature to accept Jerry's view of himself and his wife as something akin to a king and queen of this remote valley, and yet here he was, toying with death by reaching out for the queen. It was his Karma, he thought to himself, and sighed with resignation, prepared for anything.

Finally, in a tone to match her gaze: "You want to fuck me, don't you, Dennis?"

He managed to mumble, "Yeah ... I always did. Ever since I came here."

"You've never said anything to me."

"I ... I was scared to."

"Of what? I'd say no?" She never broke her stare while his own eyes were fluttering like caged birds and his heart thudded dangerously.

"You're married to" -- he tried to say the name and literally choked on it -- "him." He indicated the house with his free hand in case there was any doubt.

She teased. "That sounds pretty bourgeois." Dennis blushed and, marking his confusion, she went on reassuringly. "Look, Dennis, Jerry loves me too much to be possessive. You should know that. If you really love somebody you don't try to own them, to possess them, like the straight world does. The piggish culture. Jerry is a very giving person, a loving person. Shit, what else are we building this world here for? I mean, when he's here is maybe one thing, but, really, jealousy is just bullshit. I'm surprised you don't understand that."

Dennis's eyes filled with tears; this was the way it should be, was supposed to be. This was the evocation of everything he had heard and believed since he first went on the road at sixteen, the spirit of the legendary Haight reborn. She saw the tears and talked on soothingly. She spoke to him as if he was a child and she the concerned mother, but Dennis didn't mind at all. In fact, he felt himself growing hard and had to reach inside his jeans in order to straighten himself out. He would have given several years of life for some cocaine.

"...Not here, though," she was saying. "Out in the field, in the grass with the sun on us."

"No one can see us in here, though. And it's cool."

"It's also kind of scratchy for me," she said lightly. "Besides, there's no one to see, if that bothers you." She put her hand on his erection and rubbed it gently through the constraining denim. Dennis's mind ceased functioning in the tidal wash of feeling that surged up from his loins. "Let's do it out in the field," she went on, "like they did in the time of the Mother. Fertilize the earth -- it's actually just about harvest time. It'll be really symbolic. C'mon."

Dennis had heard of the Lord Krishna, the Lord Buddha, of Christ, and especially the Virgin Mary, his favorite. They had been talked about on the Sunset Strip and at the beach down there, in the leftover communes he had visited or the occult shops in Oregon. Although Jesus was primarily a legacy of the First Baptist Church Sunday school back in Bakersfield. One coven in Portland had also added to his knowledge of God's partner, Satan. But he had never heard any more of the Mother or her worshipers than the name.

Suzanne told him about that ancient Mediterranean religion, its rituals, its mysteries and of how women ruled it, as she led him out into the open fields. They were the most exciting words he had ever heard and brought him close to orgasm even as he moved along.

Suzanne chose the place, a small knoll redolent of clover, and slipped out of her shift in a single movement. The bright sunlight on her blond hair created an aura. Her eyes became heavy-lidded, trancelike, and her breathing quickened. She stretched out her arms, infinitely patient, uncritical. Dennis ripped off his serape with difficulty and staggered around getting out of his jeans. His head was reeling and he was almost blind. Pelvis pumping the air until he reached her, he lunged forward. Together they reached the ground safely and formed the two-backed beast which is indifferent to consequences.

Freddie D. regarded his pinkish hamburger with hostility. He was a pretty good cook himself, liked good food, and knew his wines. "What am I doing here?" he asked of no one in particular.

"Asking me questions, last I knew," said the sergeant. He was an outsized, large-featured, red-faced man who put away hamburgers a gulp at a time. "This is a good place. Not much business."

"No, I mean eating this crap. This thing's a goddamn trichinosis factory." He held the hamburger up to the neon lights for further study.

"Aw, that's only in pork."

"It's got pork in it, man, along with soybeans, cereal, chitlins, sawdust and high-class garbage. I been out on a case for weeks and I don't mind eating jazz like this when I'm working, comes with the territory, but here I am right back at it." He put the burger back into its paper sack and whacked it against the side of the car a couple of times. "There -- you hear that? It's got a sick sound to it. You guys oughta clean up this fuckin' town."

"Listen, buddy, this drive-in's the best restaurant on this side of town. Close it and we eat Spam in a can."

Freddie grinned and pushed his French fries over for the sergeant. "You say you talked to Captain Jack yourself."

"Talked to him. But I never seen him. Nobody on the stakeout did that I know of."

"What are you talking about? He called us on a walkie-talkie."

The sergeant shrugged, tilted his head back, and dropped French fries into his mouth like grapes.

"Sergeant, this gentleman was using one of your police radios to contact us. So how can you tell me none of you saw him?"

The sergeant suddenly slouched below the level of the window. "Watch out! There's the watch commander's car. Slump down, goddammit, he'll see you!"

Freddie glanced over at the highway, where a squad car was cruising indifferently past the drive-in. He was not impressed. "Last time any of your guys saw me I had all that scuzz on -- he's not gonna recognize me. Anyway, he's gone. Sit up, you look like a kid skipping school."

The sergeant came up cautiously. "It's not your ass if we get caught. You're doing what your boss wants."

"Listen, you chose this grease pit for a meet. I don't know what the hell was wrong with my motel room."

The sergeant grunted and started the car.

"Hey, hey, wait a minute," Freddie snapped. "You haven't answered the question yet, Sarge, and we're buying you a hat, remember?"

"How big a hat is that?" he asked sourly, bumping over a curb out onto the highway.

"This is a five hundred-dollar one," Freddie said, raising it over his intentions on the spot. Answer the fucking question."

"We never none of us saw the sonofabitch because he called the dispatcher at headquarters on the telephone and they patched it into the radio."

"Shit! He could have been anywhere."

"He was close enough to know all what was going down, wasn't he?"

"How come this dude just calls up and says he's Captain Jack, you know, Super Snitch, and you guys let him do anything he wants?"

"How do I know? Ask the chief. That's where it come from."

"If we could ask him, would we be paying you?"

"Well, he's some kind of Fed, I guess, and somebody in D.C. musta leaned on the brass here and says don't give him up to nobody. Maybe he's even one of you guys."

"You expect five bills for that? I'll give you one for your time." The Sergeant just shrugged and looked sullen. "You taking me back to my motel?"

"What else? You're the feds, you call it. You're all alike."

"Why is it nobody ever thinks about being on the same side?"

They drove in silence to the motel, Freddie smoking a cigarette to drown the taste of the food and the sergeant belching a lot. Freddie handed over a hundred in twenty-dollar bills, which were accepted without comment.

Freddie got out but hesitated with the door still open, oblivious to the gunning of the motor, which testified to the other man's reluctance to spend any more time in his company. "One more thing. You know a scuzz called Bighead? Last name's Stenbauer. I think, Frank."

"Yeah, yeah, I seen him around. User. Big guy, rides a hog. Turns up in a lot of stuff. Sells some of it to us. Real shithead."

"Know where I can find him?"

The motor was gunned a couple more times. "No, and if he was in on that deal out there at the motel, we never knew it. I suppose you want us to pick him up for you."

"God forbid, Sarge. I already checked him out on my own. He's left town. It was probably the food here."

Freddie slammed the door and watched the sergeant's car disappear in the direction of downtown. He stood for awhile in the motel parking lot, trying to decide whether or not he ought to go back to Seattle tonight. It was almost eleven-thirty. Con and Enrique were probably on the way there from San Francisco right now and the boss called meetings at all hours.

His eyes drifted up the street to a liquor store. \_The Treasure of the Sierra Madre\_ was being shown on a local television channel at midnight and he had been a Bogart buff since college. He opted for a six-pack and Bogey. It wasn't a bad life if you thought about yourself once in a while. The war would wait.

After his meeting with Marvin in the bar of the Space Needle, Jerry drove around Seattle for a half hour, sorting out options. He liked what hills and traffic brought out of the Porsche. He had the idea that his mind was stimulated by the sound and rhythms of that aggressive motor. When he had made his decision, he went into a supermarket and got several dollars' worth of change at the courtesy counter {he never used a credit card and had no phone at the farm, although he occasionally used a poortable in the car}.

Cruising around until he found a phone in a relatively quiet area, he parked a block away, got an "out of order" sign from the glove compartment and went to a booth behind a gas station. He had the number in his head because he made it a rule never to write them down. At an Indian jewelry store in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a voice answered in Spanish. Jerry spoke some Spanish but didn't trust himself in that language where business was concerned. He gave his own name as Mike Cromelin and asked to talk to "Victor." Then he gave the phone number of the booth he was in.

The voice at the other end said Victor would return the call within ten minutes. Jerry knew better -- Victor was a Cuban. He attached the sign, left the door open so he could hear the ring and went back to his car to wait.

Twenty-five minutes later Victor returned the call from a phone booth in Santa Fe. His voice was soft and almost musical, but there was iron in it.

"Mike, I'm glad you called. We don't hear from you, we worry."

"I'm sorry, Victor, but I couldn't make the connection in Portland. It didn't go down."

"Why?"

"I don't know. The buyers were there but they were staked out. I smelled it, so I didn't even get close."

"You must have done something wrong. You better find out what."

"I didn't do anything wrong, Victor. Somebody sold us on the other end. I talked to my man, the one who set it up, on the phone, and he claimed he didn't slip up anywhere, but I don't know."

"What you going to do about him?"

"I probably won't see him for a while. Hiding's the thing he does best."

"He know anything can hurt you?"

"Nothing."

"I don't like it. Where is our money?"

"How could I have the money when I told you I had to abort?"

"What?"

"Bug out."

"You don't have the money, then you had better have something."

"I've still got it. I got it stashed. But, listen, I don't want to turn it back just yet. I've got a use for it."

Victor's voice coarsened in a way that Jerry recognized as dangerous. "No, I don't think so. I think you had better bring it here."

"C'mon, Victor, for Christ's sake, listen to me. I'm in on something very big. High-quality coke piling up in Canada and nobody to handle it. They want me to. If it works out, I want to reverse our deal. I sell to you for distribution."

"How much is there?"

"I don't know yet, I've got to go see. Could be hundreds of kilos. It's pure Bolivian. I told you, a really big score."

The voice in Santa Fe was silent for a moment, signifying, at the very least, interest. Finally Victor asked, "How long do you need?" He was impressed.

"Two, three weeks maybe." He considered explaining that the suppliers in Canada were amateurs and thus unpredictable, but decided against doing anything to enlarge the Cuban's doubts or suspicions. "Hey, look, I can tell you a lot more when I find out myself. What do you say?"

"Why do you need our stuff if you have got all this other coming in?"

"I need it to prime the pump. I mean, they want money, as like, well, surety from me. It's like my capital in this deal. You can take the price out of the first shipment I bring you." He took a breath. "Trust me, Victor, I've never given you any bullshit."

"No, that's true. Okay. Call me every week without fail."

"Right." Jerry hung up quickly by way of firing the last shot in the laconic exchange. Victor talked with more constraint than any Latino he had ever known; it was one of his strengths.

Jerry got back into his car and drove north across the Lake Washington Ship Canal Bridge. He was taking more chances than he was accustomed to and it worried him a little. While he had enormous confidence in himself, he had begun to break his own rules in this affair. Rules, which had served him well through several years of dealing. Victor and his people were important in the business, actually dominant in the Southwest, but they were also unpredictable and ruthless. He mollified that concern by making plans for the farm.

His destination was an old house near the university, occupied by three male students. It was rare in the Northwest in that it had a basement. The students, two in chemistry and one in sociology, had installed a highly efficient laboratory in that basement, which served as a factory for the production of angel dust, an inexpensive hallucinogenic favored by the less discriminating street people. Its legitimate use was as a horse tranquilizer. Jerry, who would never have a laboratory on the farm, used

their facilities periodically on a paying basis.

He had tasted and snorted a little of Marvin's sampler on the way over and he was convinced, as he had told Victor, that it was of high quality, but he wanted it validated scientifically. Telling Victor it was pure before he knew himself was something he now regretted.

One of the three students was home because one of them was always at home and armed. It was a rule of the house and everybody understood that it had little to do with the threat from law officers. In fact, the three had agreed never to actively resist a raid from a police agency. It was dangerous and not worth the risk, considering their chances in the courts.

But they had to be prepared to fight off any depredation that might come from customers or competitors or else they couldn't have lasted a month in the trade. They had even scheduled their classes to overlap. Occasionally they would have to go out and hire someone to ride shotgun. Jerry had been of help by putting them in touch with a man named Hurley that he used sometimes on runs.

He was admitted by the one called Zeke, but only after a careful examination from an adjacent window.

The fact that they knew him did not preclude the possibility that he had sold them out to one enemy or another. Finally, the several bolts and locks on the door were manipulated, the guard dog, a Doberman, was silenced and he went in. Zeke took him to a high-ceilinged library where he was apparently studying for one of his courses at an antique desk. He offered Jerry a cup of espresso, suggesting that by the time he finished it the testing of the cocaine could be finished. Jerry declined -- he didn't want to stay on the premises any longer than necessary -- saying he would call for the analysis. Zeke expressed the hope that it would turn out to be very high grade; he would use whatever was left over to get through a test in comparative statistics in the morning. Jerry gave him his blessing and added to the sample; it was good business.

An hour later, he called and was told in coded language that the cocaine was as pure as anything going. "I know," Jerry said and hung up.

## Chapter 9

Freddie D.'s Northwest Airlines plane arrived in Seattle at eleven the next morning and he went directly to Con's apartment for a gathering of the team. Enrique and Barbarossa were there but Roy had been reassigned. Temporarily, it was said, although Con felt it might represent the bureaucracy's chipping away at the operation. He trusted Clyde to understand what this meant to him but he had been in trouble with the Agency before and knew he was regarded with trepidation by certain functionaries all the way back to D.C. This was the way they usually confronted you, with salami-slicing tactics.

The other three settled in with their notes, dossiers, and reports while Con fixed lunch, scrambled eggs with Italian sausage. The beverage was beer, Olympia, out of regional loyalty. Freddie had been in the apartment before but its austerity always fascinated him; his own tendencies in decoration, even though he was single, were elegant and artistic.

"Hey, Con," he asked, standing in the kitchen door tossing a football, "what order do you belong to?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The average monastery looks like a cathouse compared to this place. I've never seen an apartment that didn't have a single goddamn thing on the walls."

"You didn't look good -- there's a Raiders' schedule pasted over my bed."

"Doesn't it ever get to you? I mean, it's ... bleak, man."

"It didn't come furnished and I haven't got around to fixing it up. Hell, I'm never home, anyway."

"What happens when you bring ladies here, though? Don't they find it depressing or anything?"

Con looked around his own apartment as if seeing it with fresh eyes. "Yeah, I guess they would. I never bring any up here. I guess if I was your age ... The only lady I see, or saw maybe, I go to her place. Her place is beautiful."

"What is it, you don't deserve aesthetic things or what? Punishing yourself for leaving that pretty home?"

"Come on, don't give me that Freudian horseshit. It's probably just that I've always been in some kind of service, and barracks look natural to me. All I need's a bed, a TV for sports, and some books to read. You gotta admit I got a few books."

Freddie grinned tolerantly. "I work for a weirdo."

They ate on a card table in the living room, sitting on four mismatched, stiff-backed chairs.

Barbarossa gave his report first. He had spent the last two days at the telephone company, going through books for all of the medium to large cities in the Northwest. It was Con's hypothesis that criminals generally took their pseudonyms from telephone books, mixing first and last names. Since they now had several of Red Dog's pseudonyms, it was hoped they might narrow in on his hometown. Barbarossa thought he had a make on Seattle -- four surnames and two first names interchanged. Most of the cities had had one or two of the pseudonyms but it was agreed that four might be statistically telling. Con was pleased; they had at least some reason to start leaning on the Seattle underworld.

Next, Con and Enrique reviewed their roust of the two hoodlums in San Francisco. Con thought he saw something in Freddie's eyes when they went over some of the specifics but the latter withheld comment.

"What drives me nuts," Con went on, "was nothing on the snitch. Captain Jack's harder to find than half the crooks in the country, for Christ's sake, and he's supposed to be on our side."

Freddie described how, in response to their phone call, he had tried to track down Stenbauer in

Portland without success. Con, listening to him, again sensed that Freddie was self-conscious. The reason for it surfaced when Freddie got to the part about Captain Jack being patched into the Portland police radio system from a phone call.

"You mean none of them ever saw him?" Con asked with rising expectations. "He talked to us from a telephone?"

"That's right," Freddie said uneasily.

Con slammed his considerable fist down on the shaky card table, bouncing plates and silverware and overturning Freddie's beer. Freddie seemed to take it as deserved punishment. Enrique and Barbarossa were a little behind and bewildered.

"You know what this means?" Con demanded of Freddie.

"I think so."

"You never called us last night. You take your goddamned time and tell us over lunch. Jesus, man!"

"When you called me you never told me anything about either of them making phone calls," Freddie replied, raising his voice. "I never knew either of them was out of the room that night. How was I to know?"

"Okay, okay, forget it. Shit."

Con rubbed his face hard with both hands. Freddie, looking flushed, chewed on his mustache. Badboy decided that what they all needed was four more beers and got them from the refrigerator without asking.

Barbarossa broke the silence. "What are we worrying about? You put this guy -- what's his name, 'Dave' -- in custody, right?"

"Boy, are you an optimist," Con told him. "That was the night before last. All we had was 'Flight to Avoid' -- 'He wasn't carrying and didn't resist. He's gonna get himself bailed while you're takin' a leak.'"

"Only way to know," Badboy said, "is get on the horn. Let's get to it, men, and quit fuckin' around about who screwed up."

"Hey," Con said to him, "you got yourself promoted, huh? You're running this team now?"

Badboy ignored that. "C'mon, Patron, you're the only one has grease with the Frisco P.D."

Con relaxed. "Yeah, I guess."

It took about half an hour to reach the same detective that had told him about Joe Vig two nights before. He confirmed that Dave had been bailed out, although Richie was still inside.

"That doesn't do us any good," Con complained. "Who bailed Parma?"

"Law clerk," the detective said.

"Works for who?"

"We're not supposed to give it out."

"What? Hey, this could be important."

"Sorry."

"You do remember when I gave you Harry Kurnitz."

"Yeah, but--"

"And there was another time, joint operation up in North Beach, where I gave a statement." That was enough pressure, he segued to persuasion. "It's only a name and I give you my word no one will ever know."

"Lawrence, Samuel."

"Good."

"Say, you remember me telling you about how Joe Vig had trouble with his old lady and kids?" the detective said. "That same night he went home and beat the hell out of her. She came in screamin' and now we got him on Felonious Assault. Coincidence, huh?"

Con allowed as how it sure was and hung up. He felt a little bad about the wife.

"We won't find that mother easy," Barbarossa said, meaning Dave Parma.

"Well, I'm not so sure." Con couldn't repress a grin. "The attorney who bailed him, I know him. Or I know \_about\_ him. He does a lot of work for that other bureau."

Badboy let out a whoop: "Captain Jack of the FBI!"

When Jerry had returned to the farm that night, Suzanne greeted him with her usual equanimity. Dennis had been out in the meadow behind the barn, meditating until long after dark. However, since they were eating a late dinner, he joined them, albeit only at Suzanne's gentle urging.

"You sure as hell meditate a lot," Jerry said casually in the course of the meal.

"Yeah. I like it."

"Why?"

To Dennis's way of thinking, no one should ever ask anything like that. And even though Jerry went on eating matter-of-factly, his body relaxed and his voice soft, he possessed that strange penetrating gaze which accompanied the most innocuous questions. Dennis's appetite, such as it was, vanished. He began forming signs and letters in the groats with his fork. "I dunno," he answered grudgingly, but then, as always, kept answering because Jerry kept staring. "I like it because it's nothing. I don't have to be anybody."

"The absence of self," Suzanne offered helpfully.

Dennis had to fight back tears of gratitude -- tears that Jerry would certainly have noted and probably interpreted. He wondered how she could be so utterly composed after this afternoon. His own heart had galloped like cavalry through his hopeless attempt to meditate, leaving him sweaty and exhausted.

What he couldn't have known was that the lovemaking had been of such little consequence to Suzanne that she scarcely remembered it. In the warm aftermath, he had summoned the courage to ask her why she had allowed him, and the answer had been: "I just felt soulful." She meant by that at one with nature and sympathetic to Dennis. Nothing more.

Jerry, watching them, sensed that there was something strange and new pervading this self-contained world of his. He said nothing. Dennis disappeared early, and he and Suzanne made love out on the porch, wrapped in a quilt. She was, as always, marvelously adroit and responsive. Still, Jerry suspected.

He arose early the next morning, went up to where he kept his stash and returned with some of the cocaine he had been unable to deliver in Portland. After a breakfast at which Dennis did not appear, he told Suzanne they would be going away overnight, to Pernell College, a small, progressive school in the center of the state where they had a number of friends on the teaching staff.

They would take the boy, and Dennis would remain to look after the farm. Suzanne, as usual, assented without question. Jerry seemed optimistic about the prospects of pulling off the monster deal he had been talking about and from what she gathered this trip had something to do with it.

Jerry prepared by dying his hair black, putting on a pair of round glasses and applying a fake mustache, because they were going to see people who had never seen him any other way (although formerly the mustache had been genuine). They headed southeast in the Porsche with the setting sun at

their back.

Fifty miles along the way, Suzanne interrupted her humming of a Jefferson Airplane song and said calmly, "I made it with Dennis yesterday. Out by the orchard."

"What?" His response was so small and distant as to sound detached, even from the geography of the car.

"I said I fucked Dennis."

"Why?"

"Well ... I don't know." She shrugged, looking mildly perplexed. "You were away. It was beautiful, you know, all around, the sky, the earth, mountains, trees. And he's kind of pitiful in a way, somehow. But nice. Are you pissed?"

Jerry's voice was narrow and pinched, but had the concentrated intensity of a laser. "He's not much, that's all."

"I know -- he could never be my man." She looked at him curiously. "He was scared you would be ... mad. I told him you weren't possessive. We didn't try to own each other. We didn't believe in it."

If there was a question inherent, it went begging. Jerry had a way of assuming isolation which was instantly communicable. Suzanne knew it well; she began humming again, picking the tune up cleanly at the point where she had broken off. Neither spoke the rest of the way.

Con paced one end of Clyde's office and Clyde paced the other, and the office wasn't that large. Clyde moved some of the furniture against the wall to give them room. "I've had complaints before -- hell, you always been a cowboy -- but nothing like this." He started to kick his putter out of the way but stooped and moved it by hand. "Christ, any other officer of your experience, with the grief you got, would know enough to lay low without my saying anything. I just don't understand you lately."

"In case you haven't noticed, Clyde, the animals are winning. As they get a little tougher, so do we. What kind of grief have I got, anyway?" Con stopped to look at his boss defiantly. "Except you took one of my people away from me."

Clyde stared back. "Do I have to say it? The girl you blew away down in Portland."

"That's plain talk," Con allowed, turning away.

"Listen, to hell with your feelings! You're gonna take your team down with you. Not to mention me."

"I'm not too worried about you, Clyde. If anybody's going to land on their bureaucratic feet, it's you, buddy. And if you get dumped, you can always make a fortune on the Pro-Am."

"Cut out the wiseass. Frisco P.D. says you told some hood down there his wife was ratting on him and he went home and beat hell out of her. Which blew something of theirs, I don't know. Then I hear you went up and saw the parents of the dead girl under a cover name, for the love of God!"

"How'd you find that out?!"

"None of your business. It wasn't one of your boys."

"I sure as hell hope not."

"Let's get back to your crimes, okay? You've been leaning on every FBI agent you can find -- "

"That's right," Con interrupted, "and I'm going after the Director next!"

"The hell you are!"

"Unless you wanna do it through channels, Clyde."

"No channels; leave the Bureau out of this. That's an order!"

"The Bureau -- what about us, for Christ's sake?! I thought when Hoover bought it they'd lose their divinity. It's guys like you, Clyde, been around since those days when they were sacred. That bunch of

CPAs in those square suits in those dumb gray cars -- they don't take half the chances we take. They never busted a big-time mob guy since Al Capone, and that was Treasury."

"Dillinger. They got Dillinger."

"Yeah, and they've been living off the carcass ever since."

"Hey," Clyde almost shouted, "what's got into you? I've never seen you so goddamned unreasonable, so worked up, so unfair."

"Okay, some of them are good guys and have got as much guts and smarts as anybody in law enforcement, but I still want to know why we all gotta be afraid of them. All we're asking is to talk to one of their snitches or undercover guys or whatever he is. We know his cover name, we've met him, even, we know he could tell us a lot of what we need. We know everything about Captain Jack except whether he's got a mole on his dick and where the hell he is."

"No."

"I won't accept that."

"You'd better. I'm telling you, Con. You're raising a hell of a bigger stink than one prick like Red Dog is worth." Clyde sucked in his breath. He was fond of Con and in no way a cruel or unfair man, which Con knew well enough, but he added: "And you're risking your career." He felt he had to get through and made it as blunt as he could. "What are you going to do at your age -- plant security?"

"I want him," Con said quietly. "If it screws my career, so be it. And nobody, nobody better get in my way." He added, "Even you, Clyde," and went out.

"Christ almighty!" Clyde said to the picture of the President on the wall. "The sonofabitch's on a toboggan and thinks it's an airplane."

Pernell had originally been a small Presbyterian college and maintained that identity for the first forty years of its existence. In the nineteen-thirties, it had secularized and begun to specialize in such hardheaded curricula as forestry, agriculture, and police science. Thirty years later, consistent with the perversity unleashed in the sixties, it changed in style and form yet again with the influx of a generation of young counter cultural instructors.

In a sense, they were drawn by its very innocence, although the usual stated reason was the isolation. By the end of that decade, it had already carved out a toy reputation in academic circles as one of the most educationally experimental and socially progressive schools in the country.

Jerry and Suzanne were to be guests at a party given by an English instructor named Med Clark and the girl who lived with him, a student dropout, Marge Neely. The party had actually been requested by Jerry himself through a phone call from the same booth he had used to call Victor in Santa Fe. Specific people were to be invited, some known to Jerry from previous visits and others, suggested by Med, who might meet their purposes.

The campus and its surroundings would appear to the eye of anyone who was uninterested in flora as unrelentingly Midwestern in appearance. An economy-minded movie company had once filmed it as such, a fact attested to by many still photographs of the production on the walls of the town's one curio and souvenir shop.

The black Porsche cruised gently winding streets where the first leaves were falling from a richness of trees. Lawns were a warm, dark green, checkered with well-cared-for shrubs and reassuring in their neatness and symmetry. The houses were almost all modest, wood-frame largely, with eaves and gables. Even fraternity and sorority houses, or those few which had survived the social change, were carefully manicured.

True, there were a couple of bars and dance clubs downtown where bourgeois values were rejected more openly, and several structures in outlying areas whose thematic decor was given over to Mao or marijuana, but these were not in sufficient number to give an appearance different from that of any

other small college town.

Most of the guests had brought food, which was served up informally and consumed the same way, sitting on the hardwood floors propped on cushions, or off any piece of eclectic furniture. The menu was heavy in things like eggplant, zucchini, grains, natural cheeses, dark breads, and occasionally chicken, along with California wines and herbal teas. Favored desserts were carrot cake, carob ice cream, and hashish brownies, which had actually been made with the more prosaic marijuana.

Jerry, carrying the baby, and Suzanne came in at the end of dinner. He was aware of the effect of their entrance. She was wearing a long green velvet dress with heeled sandals, a little lipstick and eye shadow, unusual for her but very effective against the clear, sun-browned skin, a silver clasp to hold back her luxuriant hair in which she had scattered some silver flecks, and large metal earrings as the only other jewelry.

Jerry willed himself to look like some lean predator and was helped over six feet by his boots. His intense dark eyes, which swept the room and went on searching as long as he was in the house, were both part of the stagecraft and the self-image that pleased him most. They were a popular and admired young couple among these people, not the least reason being that Jerry customarily brought along a gift of a few grams of cocaine.

"Hey, the snow man!" called out a graduate student in biochemistry who read a lot of detective fiction and was already a little drunk. It earned him a scowl.

Med's greeting was more piquant, "Well, if it isn't Scott and Zelda!" All heads turned to look at the couple framed in the doorway.

Marge, her hand in the back pocket of Med's corduroy Levi's, got a few laughs by adding, "And they've brought little Scotty," referring to Kahlil.

"You've got the wrong sex," Med corrected.

"I usually do," she said with a languid intonation, which got her a better laugh.

The little boy was put down to sleep on a large quilt-covered bed in a back room and some dinner was put together for his parents in the primitively furnished kitchen.

George LeFlor, an anthropology professor in his late forties who wore a lot of leather and dyed his graying Afro black, sidled up to Jerry. "Bring any stuff, buddy?"

"I always do," Jerry told him without smiling. He felt contempt for George and, since he wanted something from him, made certain that it showed. He gave an almost imperceptible glance at where the older man's paunch strained against his wide studded belt, and was rewarded by seeing it sucked in to the point where it must have been painful.

"Great! You really get great stuff. It's been an angst-ridden week for me and I feel like shit, you know. Alma, too. She's been locked in the library all week trying to do a monograph on one of her Brazilian tribes, with nothing but a little toke around the house. The kids been driving us out of our minds. And this fucking Nazi administration we got..."

"You still trying to get out of here?"

"You know it! The pits, academically. I mean, the people are okay, the school people, but this dumb little redneck town! I've had it. And the administration! You know, we tried to get the Lenny Bruce bio as a part of the campus film series -- there's nothing but Disney-ite crap at that dump in town -- but the vice-chancellor refused. He said to me, and I quote, 'We're tired of having all that foul-mouthed stuff in our films here.' As you can see, he's got the linguistic chic of a garage mechanic.

"Anyway, I tried to tell him that Bruce used all that so-called dirty language as a purgative, not as prurience. You know, as a way to reveal us to ourselves. But I was just jerking off." He sighed for Philistines everywhere.

Jerry was bored and tried to alleviate it by putting him on. "Maybe you just aren't seeing the opportunities in this thing, George. Maybe you've got an issue here. Something you could organize around. It could have a good centrist appeal for a free speech issue."

"I don't know. Everybody's so apathetic without a war. Coca-Cola culture's riding the wave. You can get a few people out on gay issues -- mostly gays -- but even blacks are looking forward to jobs with IBM these days. Fuck, the Latinos already got 'em"

"You can't fight apathy with apathy, George. Sounds like you're having trouble getting it up yourself."

"Jesus, I loved activism. It must have been great, the sixties. Everything was so exciting, so other-directed and life-giving." He paused and squinted at Jerry as he rolled a marijuana cigarette out of little flowered papers. "You surprise me sometimes. I forget how politically sophisticated you are." He forced a small laugh. "It's almost sinister."

Jerry shrugged it off. "I was into politics bigtime in school. It got boring, though."

"I know what you mean. I'd settle for a good snort right now, myself." He leered.

"In a little while, George. But don't get too freaked, I've got something important I want to talk to you about. You and some others here."

"Really?" George's eyes took on a glitter. "What's happening?"

"I'll tell you later. Maybe we can hype your metabolism a little." He added, "So you can get it up."

George's eyes began to reflect a little ambivalence. He was saved from asking a question he didn't want to ask by the appearance of his wife Alma, also an anthropologist. "What kind of bullshit is he giving you, lover?" she asked cheerily of Jerry, putting her arm around him.

Her husband didn't wait to hear the answer. He made an excuse and fled.

Jerry smiled at the obviousness of her cruelty and asked, "How's your tribe, Alma?"

"Sexy. They're the sexiest tribe in Brazil. All they do is fuck and suck." She gave him a squeeze. "That's why I chose them for monitoring."

"Knowing you, love, I can't figure out what you're doing up here."

"You mean with old bilious George? I can't, either, except I can't get a goddamn big enough grant to stay down there."

She slid one hand down onto his hip and gripped it at the same point she liked to hold while encouraging lovers during intercourse, as Jerry well knew. Soon her other hand followed to his other hip, displacing and creeping under the hundred-dollar Irish cable-knit sweater he wore over his jeans. Her strong, sharp fingers became talons as they kneaded the muscles of his hips while she smiled straight into his face. Jerry smiled back, though his was laced with irony.

He looked around the kitchen; dinner was over and most of the people had moved into the front of the house. Suzanne was gone, probably because she knew, or rather sensed, that he had to operate. Across the room next to the huge old refrigerator, a professor of communications argued with a history instructor as to whether McLuhan would be remembered as a real prophet or minor footnote in the history of the twentieth century. They wouldn't have cared if Alma had opened his pants.

"Feeling a little turned on tonight, huh, babe?" Jerry said.

"I haven't seen you in a while. Why do we have to wait? Why don't we just go into the back yard and get it off?"

"It's cold out there, honey. And damp."

Her tongue made its first appearance of the evening. "I'll warm you up."

"Spoken like a real teenager, Alma. Jesus!" He grinned when he said it, but the contempt was there and he knew it would only make her want him more. Like her husband. He considered for a moment why he had ever allowed himself to become involved, such as it was. Alma was thirty-five plus, she wore old-fashioned black-rimmed glasses, she was wearing a slightly frumpy tweed suit at the moment, her face was plain and the short brown hair nondescript. Her body was on the thin side, but did have a tight muscular intensity about it that translated as sexuality.

What it came down to was that her mind had the same intense vocation for sensuality. She was the most aggressive, committed woman during the act of love he had ever known, a woman who seemed to literally lose her mind. And then he had always known he would have to use her someday. That's what he decided to tell her now, that the time had come.

From the living room came the high-fidelity sound of a Stones record, excited talk and a yellowish drifting haze. The host came out to get a gallon of Colombard-sweet, to go with drugs from the refrigerator and winked at Jerry in passing. Alma was indifferent to him, she was busy mating her pelvis with Jerry's. Her eyes were slitting in a way that reminded him of a cat in heat. He supposed it had something to do with a decade of observing the sexual conduct of savages.

"Hey," he said, "don't you care that Suzanne is right in the next room and could walk in here anytime?"

Her voice whirled from the effort at restraint. "I don't care. She doesn't care. Nobody cares. Let's go in the bedroom, then, and lock the door for the rest of the evening. I feel like wall-climbing."

Jerry couldn't help himself, he laughed. "Listen, I didn't come here tonight to get laid. This party was set up by Med at my request because I've got business to do, lover. Some other time. Soon."

She looked pouty. "Oh, shit," she said with scorn. "What is this crap? I heard you telling my idiot husband you'd brought some coke for later on, didn't I?"

"That's just part of the business, honey," he told her patiently. "Part of the manipulation. I'm here to manipulate these people, your husband included -- including you, as a matter of fact -- in order to get something from them. If I get it, I'll make a lot of them rich. You included. Want to have enough dollars to go down and watch your Brazilian Hottentots humping their brains into jelly? Anytime you want, for as long as you want?"

"What are you talking about?" she asked in a voice suddenly acute, more vulpine than feline.

Jerry, amused by it, remarked, "I always said the real American aphrodisiac was money. I notice I've got your attention, as well as your number."

"Don't be a smartass. What are you talking about?"

"I heard your husband's been keeping company with some record people who have access to really big bucks."

"He has one guy comes all the way up from L.A. to guest-lecture in his classes about the literary value in rap lyrics or some such shit. I know George thinks it's the new poetry, the only viable poetry. But anyway, it must be some kind of ego trip for this guy because the fucked-up cheap college won't even pay his pitiful expenses. He's also paid to have George come down there as a consultant or something a couple times. God knows what it all has to do with anthropology."

Jerry explained what he wanted from her and what the rewards might be if they carried it off. It was predictable that her husband would react timidly. It would be her job to instill testosterone, the choice of means to be hers. Alma thought the idea was terrific; her natural energy and inclination to power bubbled to the surface and she went off to begin operations.

Jerry, biding his time, or rather measuring it out cunningly the way he did when he was dealing, strolled through the party. Suzanne was dancing in the living room. She had kicked off her sandals and removed the silver clasp from her hair, which foamed about her head like an angry, sun-struck surf. She

was so lost in her passion, so transported by the rhythm of her own movement, she was unaware of his presence ten feet away.

Jerry could not even tell with whom she was dancing among the half dozen or so bumping into each other while gyrating in the center of the room. There were no rugs and very little furniture. Watchers and talkers rested on hooked rugs or the floor cushions. They were all connected with the college in some way, mostly in the social sciences and arts; the townspeople were categorically referred to as "rednecks," with acceptance to match.

Jerry noted that several of the men in the room were fixed on Suzanne. It wasn't the first time and he had always enjoyed it in the past, but tonight it bothered him. He was a proud man, he wasn't going to do or say anything that exposed his vulnerability, so he moved away through the house.

In the dining room a man and woman were examining a large oil canvas propped against the wall. Apparently it had been executed by a student of the woman's. Jerry didn't know her or what she taught. "...the most multifaceted student I've ever had. This is just one part of his magnum opus -- he calls it 'Apocalypse something' ... I think it's 'Thursday.' 'Apocalypse Thursday.' Or something like that."

"Shouldn't that be 'Apocalyp\_tic\_'? 'Apocalyp\_tic\_ Thursday'?"

"No, I remember -- it's not called that anyway, it's called 'Apocalypse Dreamed.' Anyway, its theme is Armageddon, as you can see. Definitely Dantesque; the whole work is."

"I would say Bosch-esque, if one can coin such a phrase," the man offered.

"No, that's very accurate." She indicated things in the painting with her stubby fingers. "Actually, you know, it's a multimedia creation, started as a poem, expanded to a novel, then went into this painting and now he's making a flick of it. He knows that's where it's really at -- films."

"Who do you figure's winning the battle?" the man asked with a laugh.

The woman responded with the same cynical good cheer. "Oh, the reactionaries, I suppose. Don't they always?"

They both turned to smile at Jerry, but he ignored them, went on into Med's study, which was the place where he prepared his lectures, corrected papers and worked interminably on a first novel about the transfiguration of an ancient Indian peyote seer into a modern-day Christ figure who led some people to form a perfect society in the Oregon woods, only to die a gratuitous death. It was to be a long novel, Med had told him, and very mystical.

There were two faculty wives in earnest conversation before some banners and posters of the feminist movement, which either Med or Marge, both of whom were activists, had spread on the wall. Jerry had met them before and remembered one as a promising poet. He asked her about it but she said she had given it up for the movement against international corporations and NAFTA.

Her friend seemed tepid about that particular cause. She was bored by conventional politics, she said, now that she was into the "assassination thing."

"You know," she explained, "Martin, the Kennedys, Wallace, the pornographer, what's his name-Flynt. It's all one, a whole world once you open it up. You could make a life study of it." Jerry said he didn't know much about it. They both giggled and asked him when he was going to "make it snow." Jerry said now was as good a time as any.

He went out to the car to get some of Victor's cocaine out of the spare tire, brought it in and gave it to the host for distribution. Since most of the guests were using, the tempo of the party shifted immediately. Jerry abstained but he noticed Suzanne taking a hit. He was surprised; she seldom used any drugs other than marijuana, and, of course, wine, although he knew she had taken psychedelics in college.

Her dancing got a little wilder. Her partner, a young graduate student, was obviously getting very stoned and his dancing was increasingly sexual. Jerry glanced at his watch and decided to give it a little

longer. Moving away restlessly through the party again, he realized that the aggressive graduate student and the pathetic, totally uneducated little hippie back on the farm were as one in his thoughts, and it annoyed him.

It was getting warm in the house and someone had opened a window in the dining room. The record of the moment was a particularly frenzied, Nine Inch Nails, and the sound seemed like something palpable, exiting in a great bruising column aimed next door. Jerry went to the window quickly and closed it.

A psychologist who worked at the Student Health Center complained good-naturedly. Jerry pointed out that a lot of busts resulted from complaints by neighbors about noisy parties. The man accepted the wisdom of that and went outside to get some air.

Being here was a calculated risk on Jerry's part. More than that, he realized he no longer liked these people, in fact, had contempt for them. Lately he had found that the excitement of dealing was enormously satisfying to him and felt a kind of symbiotic attachment to everyone in that world, the punks, junkies, rip-off artists, and even the cops who were out to bust him or, if they could, kill him. Dealing and the farm were everything he cared about, needed, or respected. It was an insight that pleased him and he felt it made him strong. The time had come. He marched among the guests, selected those who could help him and in effect ordered them into the library.

George was there, as his wife had promised he would be. The psychologist was wanted because he had a private practice as well as his college job and therefore was relatively well off. Everybody, and there were ten of them, had access to money somehow, either through grants or connections, such as George with the record company executive, good salaries or wealthy families. Jerry made his presentation like a general planning a campaign, including the inference that slackers would not be tolerated. He knew he could count upon a certain amount of cocaine-induced fantasy in the direction of megalomania.

He told them about the opportunity he had been offered by an old friend whose name he could not reveal. Now he was offering the same to them, a literally once-in-an-academic-lifetime opportunity, a chance to become wealthy in a couple of years. Only two things were required, a considerable sum of money to be raised by them and a little help, initially, in getting some drugs across the border. After that, he could guarantee, they would be free of obligation and risk, free to go anywhere in the world and live off their investment.

Jerry, who was clearheaded, was still amazed at the speed and totality of his own success. The eight men and two women in the room agreed by acclamation to support him fully. Everyone wanted out of central Washington with its "redneck value system" and many were looking for a more significant place in the sun.

George said that with an independent income he might hope to get a position at one of the Southern California universities where they had television comedy writers on retainers to help you enliven your lectures. His wife could go to the Brazilian wilderness indefinitely and that would make at least two people happy, although God knows what it would mean for the Indians. He got a round of applause for that and was elected as the group coordinator who would be the main contact with Jerry, or 'Mike Cromelin,' as they knew him.

Jerry left them still talking over details, returned to the living room and grasped his wife firmly by the wrist. They were not staying overnight, he told her coldly, but returning to the farm. Suzanne, bewildered, nevertheless went along without complaint. They bundled up Kahlil and took off through a back door without saying good-bye to anyone.

Once in the course of the long night's ride she roused herself to ask him why they had left so precipitously. He told her he had something to do at home that couldn't be put off. That seemed to satisfy her and she went back to sleep.

## Chapter 10

\*The morning after Jerry put together his consortium, Con Meehan fulfilled his promise, or threat, and went to the office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Seattle, also in the Federal Building. There he asked to see the agent in charge, "Tommy" Thompson. Con was expected; he had warned them he was coming, but more than that, they knew what had happened and suspected what was about to happen. Meehan was known as a good and effective agent for his people, but was also suspect as a man with his own passions and proclivities. Actually, the federal narcs were thought of collectively as something a little romantic and unstable.

Thompson, a red-headed Scot, played with his pen set beneath a color portrait of the long-deceased but deified Director who resembled a constipated bulldog, and considered whether or not he should admit this wahoo Meehan. Narcotics had not played a large part in the history of the Bureau, and they all thought of narcotics as a little declasse. Thompson himself had spent the Cold War tracking communist agents all over the world at the personal behest of the Director.

That had been a proper world, or would have been except for the existence of the hated Central Intelligence Agency. Among the other things that were wrong with the modern world was the proliferation of agencies, each with some kind of trashy specialty. He could think of no positive reason to see Con, but several negative ones -- the man was troublesome anytime, and now he was in a particularly reckless state of mind.

Con took the decision away from him by appearing in the doorway. He was on the balls of his feet, ever the dreamed quarterback. Thompson, who didn't know him well, noted how gracefully he moved for a stocky man. Con's jaw looked like the prow of a ship about to ram. He sat without waiting to be asked and leaned forward on Thompson's desk.

"He's not worth it. It's not like he ran an organization or something. He's a loner. And where do you get off coming in here without being asked, anyway?"

"He moves a lot of dope," Con said stubbornly.

"For a solo, but what's that amount to? And here you are, burning the ground in every direction. Risking your career. For what? What the hell's got into you, Meehan? You used to be a good agent. Or so they tell me."

"Well, I keep telling people it's personal, and it doesn't make much impression on them, but it's all I got."

"I heard about the accident with the girl."

"Isn't anyone west of the Mississippi hasn't."

"I'm sorry, but we don't allow anything personal like that in the Bureau, so we're certainly not going out on a limb for someone from another organization."

"How much you paying this guy?" Thompson regarded him stonily. "Must be one of those I heard about on retainers. I heard like they can make a hundred big ones a year. More than me, anyway. Wonder there isn't some college giving courses in snitching."

Thompson started to rise. "I've got better things to do."

"Goddammit, Tommy, sit down!"

"Who the hell you think you're talking to, Meehan?!"

"Look, I've already met the sonofabitch. Talked to him, although I didn't know at the time. I know what he looks like, sounds like, how he thinks -- he's very cool, probably worth every goddamn dollar. I almost blew him away, in fact, and he hung right in there with his cover. All I want is fifteen minutes'

conversation, \_mano a mano\_. No telephone games. Is that exactly asking for J. Edgar Hoover's balls in a pickle jar?"

Thompson's expression livened in reaction to an upward rush of blood. He didn't often raise his voice, it wasn't the style of the Bureau, but that kind of reference directed toward the deceased founder brought him close to a shout. "No, goddammit, no! You've been told. He's ours. No cooperation with cowboys! Now get out of here!"

Con threw him off-stride by settling slowly back and smiling. "Okay, we've both had our shot. Now I'm telling you I'm going to blow something very big for you. You'd better believe it."

Thompson hesitated; he was rapidly becoming convinced that he was dealing with someone over the line. "If you're talking about burning Captain Jack," he said carefully, "we've already moved him out of Frisco."

Con's smile turned downward. "I wouldn't do that, get your man capped. You ought to know better. But I can do something a lot worse. There's a certain operation called Phoenix-Two where you've had a sleeper in there for over a year. Involves a congressman, from what I understand, and when it pops -- "

Thompson never let him finish. "How do you know about that?" he hissed out of a livid Scot's face.

"You said I was a good agent, didn't you? The way it works, always has worked, is you've got to watch your friends when you're not watching the enemy. Anyway, I know." He stood up; he looked grave now, almost sad. "Don't bother telling me about the great FBI or how I'm going to flush my career and all that kind of shit. I know it, and I'm willing," He added, pushing into the other man's eyes, "And by now you know it."

Con seemed to relax as he went to the door, because the tension disappeared from his face and voice. Mildly, he commented, "Tommy, sometimes you got to shake yourself up just to remember that they're the bad guys out there and we're all that's holding them back. All of us together. I'll expect to hear from you." He shut the door gently behind him and went out through the greater office, where people who had heard the raised voices inside sat and followed him with their eyes.

Thompson remained immobile for a moment and then buzzed his secretary, demanding to speak to the deputy director in Washington.

There was nothing left but to wait, something Con was good at. He didn't want to do it at the office, however, so he went home, put on heavy-duty clothes and took his children out to the shore where they spent the afternoon collecting things washed up by the sea. He accepted his wife's dinner invitation and later called his priest friend and asked him to come out for a drink.

Con had met Father Santucci ten years before, when he was a police chaplain. They respected each other and had remained occasional friends even though Con was not a Catholic. They shared an interest in history and both were sports buffs. Both were ready drinkers. Santucci complained that he had "a ton of bureaucratic church crap" weighing him down but Con told him his own immortal soul was in danger and the priest thought he recognized kidding-on-the-square when he heard it.

They went to a working-class bar in the neighborhood of Santucci's church, Saint Martin's, on Seattle's South Side. The priest, who considered it hypocritical to remove his collar when going into a bar, was well known. With his broken nose, knit cap and pea jacket, the collar was the only thing that separated him from the roughest customer. Amid the bleating of country and western music on the jukebox and the clacking of a shuffleboard game, they drank bourbon and talked sports. Con was wont to fantasize plans for his beloved Raiders, shuffling players around on a blackboard of the mind, while the priest's constant theme was how to get and keep major-league sports franchises.

Half an hour of that and three bourbons later, Santucci abruptly said, "Okay, I'm calling you." He caught Con with a pair of thorny, relentless eyes worthy of Savonarola.

Con, usually direct, wasted the next few minutes denying he had anything on his mind except friendship. He'd only been kidding about his "immortal soul." The priest was quietly persistent. Con finally told him of the events in Portland with more emotion than he had anticipated. He ended by blurting that he was going to execute a man code-named Red Dog and wanted expiation.

"What kind of half-ass ploy is this?" Santucci demanded. "You're not even Catholic. And I wouldn't or couldn't do that, even if you were."

"He's part of the scum that's overrunning everything. I hold him responsible for the girl. That bastard's finger was on the trigger as sure as mine."

"Ah, come on, that's bullshit. You're responsible. You may not be guilty, but you're responsible. You know a priest is going to tell you that."

Con tried to bargain; if not expiation, at least he wanted to be judged. He needed something, he insisted, for a steady hand and cool head, even if it was only something to bounce off of emotionally.

The priest laughed and rejected him. "I know you, Meehan," he said, "and you're going to do what you want to do, no matter what I say. But as a practical matter, people who get the blood lust often get blooded. Is this bastard worth it? You don't even know who he is, much less what he's capable of. I'm getting a little relativistic for a priest but, my God, man, you've got to keep some perspective. This is just another dealer -- you've chased dozens, maybe hundreds of them. Even allowing for the girl -- and it does you credit -- why, at your age, are you willing to risk everything?"

"I don't know," Con said. "I thought a priest would be the one to tell me."

"You've got us confused with somebody else."

The morning after the party at Pernell College, Jerry and Suzanne slept late, having returned at four-thirty. The little boy had slept through the loudest moments at the house and all the way back in the tiny back seat of the Porsche, so he was awake relatively early. Suzanne got up momentarily, suffering the after-effects of drug use, and asked Dennis to change and feed Kahlil. He was delighted, wanting to feel useful as an antidote to the anxiety that had built up while he was alone. When there was nothing to think of but his "violation" of the Lady of this place.

Actually, while Dennis didn't have any particular skills for their care, he did feel comfortable in the company of children and animals. Suzanne was in no shape to communicate but Dennis observed her closely, searching for any indication that she had let her husband know what had happened. He didn't think she would deliberately, even allowing for her philosophical commitment to an open, nonpossessive view of love, because she knew he was frightened by the prospect. He kept reminding himself how she identified with this Mother god, and that sounded protective to him.

Jerry rose around noon and treated Dennis with a civility that was almost kindness. While it was only a change in tone, the effect was considerable. Dennis was so desperate for reassurance it made him practically giddy. Jerry could have asked anything of him at that moment.

After his usual frugal breakfast, Jerry drove to a neighboring town and placed a phone call to Marvin in Seattle. He told the lawyer he would have the money in two weeks and they made arrangements for bringing the first shipment over the border. When he hung up, Jerry considered calling Victor in Santa Fe, but determined against it; with a man like Victor, optimism could be a dangerous indulgence. Still, Jerry thought, things were going well; there was only one problem outstanding.

Dennis was sitting in his favorite cross-legged posture on his favorite spot on the porch watching Kahlil playing with the goat. The child was wildly active, and in his constant attempts to board the goat the creature was getting the worst of it. Dennis had called to him from his sanctuary on the porch, telling him that he should be gentle and kind to the animal, who was one of God's creations and therefore sacred, however ugly. Kahlil was not amenable to verbal arguments, particularly to anything

as abstract and unnatural as conscience. Dennis was afraid to do anything more than gently remonstrate; this was the golden child of the Lord of this place.

When Jerry drove into the valley, Dennis felt quixotic relief, in that he would at least be free of responsibility for Kahlil's infantile cruelty. Jerry drove right up to the porch and called, "Hey, man, come on. Get in the car. I want to show you something."

Dennis was amazed; he had never been invited into the magnificent Porsche, or anywhere else with Jerry. Still, he hesitated, and Jerry again urged him to join him. "What about Kahlil?" he called back. "Suzanne's still sleeping."

Jerry said the boy would be all right, there was nothing here that could harm him, and even as he spoke, his tone changed to one of adamancy, of command. He ended by saying, "Dennis, would you quit jacking off and get the fuck in the car?"

Dennis had only two possible responses to the command; flee or obey. There was no place or any means to flee. He got up and went to the car, scuffing his bare feet in the dust all the way. Jerry pushed the door open and beckoned, gunning the motor into a frenzy.

Dennis settled back in the racer's seat and tried to smile. Jerry did it for him beguilingly. "I want to take you up and show you something. I didn't know you well enough before, man, but now I'm going to trust you." His attitude suggested that no response was necessary or expected. He hit the accelerator hard and they took off, squealing and roaring amid a cone of spurting gravel. Dennis was forced back against the seat during lift-off.

Suzanne rose from her bed, attracted by the sound, and looked out the window in time to see the Porsche starting to climb out of the valley. She couldn't see at that distance, but something told her Dennis was in the car. That would be very strange if it was true. She called out to Kahlil but only the dog's barking answered her. She laid down again, wondering who had cared for the animals that day. The snarl of the German motor faded and the farm was as quiet as a desert.

Jerry hit the county road and maintained the same speed. There was no traffic. Within minutes they reached the turnoff and headed up the trail. The acute angle of ascent caused the motor to whine as it warmed. Dennis was once again held tight to his seat. He was dazed but also excited by the effrontery of this headlong charge of an automobile against a mountain. Neither man had said anything after leaving the farm.

At the usual hiding place, Jerry jammed on the brakes and spun the wheel, moving the rear end around almost a hundred and eighty degrees. The car was poised like a bobsled at the top of a run and Dennis thought there was no force in the world that could keep it from getting to the bottom of the mountain when it was ready to go there.

"Wow, man, what a great ride! You ever do that before?"

Jerry grunted that he had and urged him to get out. Dennis went around to the front of the car, glanced back, and noticed Jerry either take something from or put something into the glove compartment before following.

"What are we gonna do up here?"

"I'll show you in a minute. Right now help me cover the traces."

Dennis wasn't sure what he was doing or why, but pitched in enthusiastically, imitating Jerry, because he was afraid not to. Wouldn't the branches scratch that beautiful finish?

When he was satisfied, Jerry pointed upwards. "Keep going." He indicated the trail. Dennis, predictably, did as he was told, but something made him increasingly uneasy and it emboldened him to ask, "Why we goin' way up here, you know? You ought to tell me, Jerry." When the other man trudged ahead without making any reply, Dennis turned to pleading and eventually whining. "C'mon, man, please..."

Jerry paused to claim the shovel. Dennis looked on, breathing heavily, his eyes darting all over the mountain.

"What's that for?"

"I've got a stash up here. More dope than you've ever seen before. I keep it buried. C'mon." He again led the way upward.

"Why you showin' it to me, man? Now, I mean. You never told me 'bout this before." He was talking to Jerry's ascending back and his voice rose and then cracked trying to reach it. "I don't get this! Why won't you talk to me, man? Shit," he murmured to himself, and trudged after his tormentor.

Jerry paused and gestured for Dennis to go ahead. As soon as he was behind him, he commented casually, "Suzanne told me about you two yesterday."

"Oh," was all Dennis could get out, and even that was tight and barely audible.

"You fucked my wife, Dennis. When I was away. Didn't you?" He remained offhand, bereft of emotion.

Dennis actually walked a little faster, even though it was by all odds the wrong direction. He didn't dare look back. His legs and voice were liquefying rapidly. "She said you wouldn't care. You weren't into that kind of possessive riff, you know? You aren't pissed, are you, man?"

"I gave you shelter. And, okay, you dug my wife. That's fine, a lot of guys admire Suzanne. They've got damned good taste. But you waited. You couldn't come out and be open about it. Where's the love in that, huh?"

Dennis was thoroughly confused; he wasn't equipped to debate or even defend what he had done on any grounds other than the ethos of an antique counterculture. If Jerry didn't accept that, he was helpless to do anything else but beg. "I didn't know. I thought you'd be cool about it, you know? She said you were."

They had reached the level clearing at the top. Jerry handed Dennis the shovel and indicated a spot without making any attempt to triangulate with the trees. Dennis stood there, holding it limply, appealing with his eyes. "Why are you doing this?"

"There's a lot of dope a few feet down there. Coke. Very pure. More than you've ever seen in your life. I'm giving you some of it, asshole. Take it. You can live in Mexico for years on it. Now start digging." Jerry pointed an extended finger at a spot on the ground with enough authority to bring forth water.

Dennis went slack, his shoulders hunched and head tipped. He stared at the ground as he scraped away leaves and pine needles with the tip of the shovel, as though cleaning it before he dug. His movements were slow, desultory. Tears ran down both cheeks.

Jerry circled the clearing slowly, looking off across the mountains. His voice was low, confiding, almost reassuring. "I don't need this dope here anymore. I've got a terrific shipment coming in. A lot of shipments, in fact." His voice began to take on an urgency, punctuated by staccato breathing. "This is just a way of kind of protecting the flanks, the rear, when a general's starting a new campaign. You know what I'm saying? See, I've almost got an empire in the farm. That's what you shouldn't have done, man -- violated the farm. That was dumb, really dumb. Shit-for-brains..."

"It was her idea. It was a religious thing. The Mother ... you can ask her."

Dennis tried to dig in order to channel whatever energy he had left away from his brain. Silently he chanted his mantra in order to block off any vagrant thought or memory that might try to form. At the furthest extension of his will, the spade chipped at ground hardened by a warm fall sun and recent lack of moisture. Muscles jerked and cringed all over his body. The earth resisted such flabby effort and tiny mounds measured in ounces spread and grew in the long silence.

"You could ask her ... Jerry ... please..."

Jerry had run out of his own need for speech but continued to circle. It soon became apparent that Dennis would take a dangerously -- dangerous from the standpoint of emotional dynamics -- long time to dig a hole sufficient for his purposes. As he circled behind the small, sloping, seemingly automated figure a last time his hand slipped into the jacket of his denim windbreaker and came out holding the automatic. As part of the same efficient gesture, it went up in an arc until his arm extended straight out from his body. The muzzle was leveled three feet from its target when he pulled the trigger with a smooth, continuous squeeze.

Something in the back of Dennis's head saw the few grams of lead come hurtling and brought a small animal's instinctual whimper. Then, as it did in the beginning, the universe expanded until it exploded in a great vapor of flame. The gods of the American road came through it to claim him: the Lord Krishna, Buddha, Jesus the Redeemer, Satan, Nostradamus, Gibran, Jim Morrison ... while his cry lingered in the air and the sound of the shot echoed down the mountain. As the small puff of acrid smoke evaporated in the wind, they reassured him that no one would ever miss him, he had no past or future, nothing to mourn. The top of his head flew off and struck the tree directly in front before the rest of him could follow.

It took Jerry an unpleasant hour and a half to dispose of the considerable mess, but he felt better when he had finished. The future looked very good. When he returned to the farm he told Suzanne that Dennis had moved on, probably to Mexico or Canada, and she accepted it, as she accepted everything.

## Chapter 11

The call came, as Con knew it would, within a few days. He was having dinner in front of the television set, watching a Monday night exhibition football game. He had taken his pants off in order to save the crease and was sitting in his shorts, socks, and a sweater, there being a slight chill in the air. Dinner, set on a small fold-up "TV table," consisted of an abstinent rare steak, cottage cheese, and iced tea, an attempt to undo all the motel sitting and beer drinking he had done on the last hunt.

"You know who this is, Meehan?" the man on the phone asked.

Con, who was good on voices, recognized it despite the loss of the street accents that had characterized it previously. "Captain Jack."

"Is your phone clean?"

"How the hell do I know? Anybody's on it, it's probably your guys."

"I'll be flying into Seattle-Tacoma International there in about an hour and a half. See you in the bar." He hung up.

Con swore, although it was perfunctory. He would have time to finish both dinner and the game -- what more could a working man ask?

Captain Jack was growing a beard on his angular dark face and had changed his style of dress to a conservative, buttoned-down look. He was even carrying a briefcase and Con thought he was probably the most elegant CI he had ever seen, looking more like an Arab oil diplomat. Con settled next to him at a corner table and called for the beer he had denied himself at dinner.

"You don't look much like you did last time," Con told him. "You joined the CIA or something?"

Captain Jack smiled easily. "As you can imagine, I had to be given a new assignment after you burned me down in Frisco."

"Shit, we didn't do anything to burn you. We didn't send that goddamn Bureau lawyer around to get you out, did we?"

"That's how you made me?"

"That's how."

"My turn to say shit. Fuckin' Bureau. I wish I was with the CIA. Maybe I should come over to you guys."

"We're no better."

Captain Jack grinned across his Chivas Regal. "You're sure as hell honest. That's already better."

"No. You'd be expendable to me just like you are with them. The minute I needed to bust a major dealer you'd be right up there on the stand with a million people looking at you. I didn't make up the lousy court system, but I didn't make you take up this line of work, either."

Captain Jack looked a little uneasy. "Well," he pointed out, "they're not giving me up yet. All I got for orders is to come in here for an hour and let you fuck me over."

"I hope they said something about letting me have the information I want. Because at this point you aren't leaving this bar, much less this town, without that."

Jack relaxed again; this was the kind of talk you expected in his business. "No, I'll give you what I got. Whatever you said to my people when you leaned on them, it sure as hell raised a mammoth stink. They'll have your ass, you know."

"I don't give a fuck. That's why they were afraid not to give me you."

Both men stared at their glasses in a silence, which carried the idea that the time had come. Captain

Jack tossed down his drink, banged the glass down and said, "I've never seen the dealer."

"You know where to find him."

"Nope."

"You're running out of negatives with me."

"Just so you believe those two." They stared into each other's eyes, two icy professionals on the prod. "The cutout on that deal there in Portland, dude called Stenbauer, him I can deliver. What I don't know is how much he can tell you about Red Dog, who's just about as good at covering himself as anyone I've ever seen."

"Just tell me."

"He's still here in Washington. In the bin over at Walla Walla."

Con clenched and unclenched his hands. "You mean he's nuts? Shit!"

Captain Jack grinned with satisfaction. "No, he's crazy in his own way like all of them, but he's cool. If you can make him talk, he can. This is just his thing he does. Every time he gets squeezed, he has himself committed to some state facility somewhere. Easy for a junkie. And not so dumb, either, when you think of it. When you commit yourself, you get the best of it. They put you in an adjustment wing so you don't have to associate with the real loonies, you get a lot of freedom, and you can split pretty much whenever you want. I'm surprised more assholes haven't thought of it..."

"Thanks," Con said, as he rose abruptly and walked out.

Captain Jack, watching his retreating figure, shook his head. He had met a lot of strange ones in his line of work, but put in a pitch to the God of Informants that he would like to avoid dealing with this one again.

A few days later, Jerry drove north to the Canadian border, leaving Suzanne and the boy at the farm. There were no narcotics, nor any weapon in the car. Crossing over, he contacted several of the people he had recruited at the party, who were waiting at prearranged motels on the Canadian side. Jerry stopped and collected the money they had raised, gave them further instructions as to where to meet him for the return, and went on into Vancouver.

A jittery Marvin was waiting in a bar near the statue of "Gassy Jack," the center of Vancouver's waterfront Greenwich Village. The lawyer said he hadn't wanted to come but his "associates" had insisted, because he was the only one who could authenticate Jerry.

"Am I going to get to meet the rest of the boys, Marvin?"

"No," the lawyer said too quickly, preempting. The sweat on his hands stuck to the glass of vodka as he tried to put it down, and it spilled. He cursed and began wiping it up in spasmodic gestures. Jerry watched, making no attempt to disguise the expression on his face. Marvin went on, "You never even let me know where you live, how I can get hold of you.. Later, maybe after it gets going good. We got a kind of board meeting up in ... well, next month. We'll see then."

Jerry shook his head disgustedly. "Let's get it on."

They went out and walked through throngs of shoppers and tourists peppered with the local equivalent of hippies, freaks, and street people. Marvin had left his car in a lot two blocks from the bar, not because he couldn't find anything closer, but rather out of an unexamined idea of what constituted security. The car itself was a white Cadillac and Jerry asked him if it represented a step in his training to become a gangster.

They drove about twenty blocks to a dentist's office in a commercial district. The dentist was not in, but Marvin had a key. He was careful to lock the door behind them. Marvin said dentists had a lot of drugs on hand anyway, so it had seemed like a natural place to use as a pickup. Jerry said doctors had a lot more drugs on hand, so why not a doctor? Marvin ignored him and pulled a package out of a

cupboard that had required another key to enter. The package was wrapped as if for mailing but Jerry insisted on tearing it open and having a look, despite the fact that Marvin didn't even want to see it. The cocaine was packed in dozens of tiny glassine bags. Jerry expressed surprise.

"That's the way the pros do it, isn't it?" Marvin said defensively. "In the movies they always got it in glassine bags. I had a client doing scag that way."

"Before you go any further, I'd like to know if you got him off."

Marvin started to answer in the negative, decided he was being put on and indicated the package with an irritated thrust of his finger. "There's your shipment. Get it over the border and we're in business."

"Just so long as you understand. After this, you're responsible for getting it over. Right? No screwing around."

"That's already been agreed to. Can't we get going?"

"You don't want your surety?" Jerry handed over an envelope containing sixty thousand dollars in cash.

Marvin put it into the inside pocket of his suit coat and hurried out the door, waiting for Jerry to follow. He locked the door behind them and went ahead of Jerry down the stairs to the street. Both men were silent in the car. Marvin let him off in front of the statue.

Jerry had brought along a shopping bag from one of the chic stores on the street and carried the cocaine in it to his own car. Marvin was gone before Jerry had taken three steps, squealing his tires like a teenager, which caused the latter to curse him silently and, for the thousandth time, led him to question whether it was worth the risk of being involved with these people. Himself, he drove out of the area like a nun.

George and Alma were waiting in a motel near the ferry dock where they had spent the night. George looked very nervous and on the down side, but his wife's eyes, in contrast, were feverish with excitement. You could tell, Jerry thought upon entering the room, who had spent time in the jungles of Brazil and who had spent time bitching in faculty lounges. George had pulled the blinds and the room was fetid with the smell of the cheap pipe tobacco he smoked.

Snapping open the blinds, Jerry said cheerfully, "The idea's to do everything naturally, George. Easy and natural -- right?"

"That's okay if you've done it before. I've never done anything like this before. You can't expect me to act like Bruce Willis or something, can you?"

Jerry was soothing. "That's okay, man, don't sweat it. Be cool. We're all gonna be okay. We'll take it nice and easy." In his own mind he had already decided to exclude George from any active part.

"Don't soil your pants, George," his wife said with deadly casualness, and turned to Jerry with an eager smile. "I think it's just goddamn terrific. I'm so excited I'm afraid I'll come. I've smuggled some things in and out of Brazil and New Guinea and places, but nothing as dangerous as this."

"I'm glad you're having fun," her husband said gloomily.

"You got a turtleneck sweater with you, George?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Why?"

"The more I tell you to act natural, the more flaky you're going to act. But we can compensate. These customs agents operate ninety-nine percent on instinct. They call it that. Actually they're very acute observers and kinetic psychologists. They watch the carotid artery or the Adam's apple. The turtleneck will help that. If you don't have any dark glasses, get some."

"Won't that make me look sinister?"

"Better than looking scared shitless." He said it buoyantly and Alma giggled. "Smoke your pipe,

George," he went on. "Everyone trusts a pipe smoker. Be sure it's tobacco."

"Where do I put the dope?"

"You don't. Alma will hide it." He smiled, a very boyish, ingratiating smile directed at her. "In her cunt."

George gaped, slack-jawed, before sputtering, "You're kidding."

"No, he isn't, and I think it's marvelous." To Jerry she said, "Can we get enough in there to make it worthwhile?" She leered in anticipation of his answer.

"I'd say only you, and maybe George, could answer that, honey."

"My God, what's going on here? This is getting just too goddamn weird -- I'm not going along with this. Jesus!"

Jerry's characteristic directness returned to his voice and eyes. "What's going on is business. Very serious business, George. And you're in it up to your balls now, so let's cut out the crap. You only have to do it once, then you're home free and all you got to do is sit back and clip coupons. Think about that and be cool. Okay?"

In the sober atmosphere that followed, he gave them explicit instructions as to which ferry to take and how to catch it. Others were waiting and he had to move quickly. When he went outside, Alma went with him to his car while George remained to pack up.

She put her hand on the door as he started the engine. It was necessary to raise her voice. "Why are you doing this this way? I mean, why take the risk with a jellyfish like George and some of the others?"

"If he gets too antsy, go through separately. But George and your friends put up the down payment I had to have, so I wanted to make damn sure they were in it as much as I was. After they move this stuff across the border, I own them."

"One forgets, because you're so bright and well educated and everything, but you really are an incredibly ruthless bastard, Jerry. I guess that's an idea none of us wants to face. I never met a savage could hold a candle to you." She smiled in her own predatory way.

He patted her hand affectionately. "Fuck civilization," he said, and drove away.

Jerry drove south and east to the border crossing on Canadian Highway 1 at Abbotsford, where Marge and Med were waiting in another motel. The fact that they were younger than George and Alma and practitioners of a looser lifestyle didn't make them any easier about what they were doing. On the contrary, they were pacing a tiny room littered with cigarette butts in and out of ashtrays.

Jerry, because he was closer to them personally, found it easier to be reassuring. He chatted casually for a few minutes, kidding around, showing them how loose he was, before he got down to plans and prohibitions. They had dressed conservatively, as he had requested, and he complimented them on that.

Marge, who was wearing borrowed heels and a suit, glanced at herself in the mirror and said, "Pretty nifty. I might get to like this kind of stuff," in an attempt to sound lighthearted.

"You ever moved any dope before, Marge?" Jerry asked.

Her tone dropped immediately. "No. I brought a couple of joints' worth across from Mexico, but that's no big deal and you can bribe those guys if you have to. I'm scared, Jerry."

"Shit, yes," Med put in, kneading his neck as he paced. "That was nothing. With this we could get ten years or more federal. And even if we didn't, it would be down the toilet with my academic career. I don't know about this. I really don't." He crumpled a cigarette package angrily and threw it into a corner of the room.

In answer, Jerry mellowed his eyes and gentled his voice until his persona was about that of a movie priest. "If you get away with it, you could be a very wealthy man. You could give up your career

-- say 'fuck you!' to all the pedants and reactionary bastards you ever had to kiss ass to. That's not nothing, Med. You could write your novels on the beaches of Mexico or Europe and write them exactly the way you want them to be. Now that's real freedom, buddy. But freedom always entails a certain amount of risk. Right?"

Med broke into spasmodic laughter. "Spoken like a true federalist, like a disciple of Edmund Burke, for Christ's sake. I remember somebody saying that criminals are the most conservative people in the world. That's you, man! The Jesse Holmes of dope!" He continued to be amused by his own insight and Marge joined in out of nervousness.

Jerry tried to smile but he didn't feel it and it showed, which jerked the other two, somewhat diminished, back to reality. When Jerry spoke, his voice was even and reasonable but the priest was gone from it. "Okay, I've decided this first time over will be a dry run for you. If it works, and you feel all right about it, then we'll go for the real thing later."

He opened his briefcase and extracted a thin box of Havana cigars. "Here, I bought these up in Vancouver. You know they're illegal in the States, so you're technically breaking the law by bringing them in, especially if you hide them. But obviously it's no big deal. They won't do any more than confiscate them. You hide them, try to nonchalant your way through. If you're busted, no sweat. If you're not, you gain confidence. Okay?"

The enormous relief evident on their faces confirmed for Jerry that he had chosen the right ploy with these two.

Jerry went immediately to the border and crossed over. The customs official who stuck his face into the open window of the Porsche was a shrewd-looking man with an easy smile but small, salient eyes. Jerry watched those eyes working with amusement; he had the advantage in that they were both pros but he was the only one who knew it. Also, he could afford the game; he wasn't carrying any narcotics.

He went on down the highway a few miles to a grimy little truck stop restaurant and went inside to wait. The coffee looked as though it came out of an irrigation ditch and tasted like alkali, but Jerry's attention was focused on the parking area directly outside and the dream beyond it. If he got these first shipments across today, he believed he could carry off the whole deal, at least at this end. Victor and his people remained to be dealt with at the other. He stared at the hills to the north, narrowing his eyes in an attempt to make Med's Renault materialize. He was surprised to find his own stomach was a little tight, gave up the coffee and ordered a cup of tea.

When at last the Renault appeared, it could be seen coming from a long way off at considerable speed, which clouded Jerry's relief for a moment. He put down some money and moved to the parking area at his own deliberately measured pace. The car and Jerry arrived at the same place at the same time. Med and Marge bounced out looking cheerful and self-satisfied.

"Piece of cake, man!" Med shouted before he had the car door closed.

Marge brought the box of Havanas, holding them out toward Jerry like an offering, with an outsized smile on her face. "It was just like you said!" she cried. "We put it right on the back seat in plain sight with my jacket over it and they didn't give us any shit at all. We were so relaxed it was beautiful."

Jerry declined to accept the cigars. Instead, he took off his suede jacket, laid it over the trunk of the Renault, and looked around, casually but carefully.

"What the hell's going on, man?" Med asked, glancing at Marge, who returned the look.

Again Jerry failed to respond. He knelt and studied the under chassis of the car. Suddenly, with the alacrity of a snake, he slid beneath it, remained for only an instant, and was back up again. In his hands, as he straightened to a standing position, was a lightweight metal container. The triumphant glint in his

eyes suggested its importance.

"I said what the fuck's goin' on, Jerry? Jesus, man, talk to me! What kind of bullshit is this?"

Jerry was almost serene. "Congratulations! You've been used as what's called a mule. You brought at least fifty grand worth of coke across the border. If you're cool, it'll make you an incredible amount of money. If you're not, it'll get you ten years hard. Be cool." He gave them the priest's smile now.

Med understood; he flushed and slammed his hand down on the fender of the car. Marge stared at the men, unattractively slack-jawed.

Jerry went on, "I had to get it across and, to tell the truth, I didn't trust you. Emotionally. So when I met you at the motel, before I came in I put this in the frame underneath. It has a magnet." He demonstrated like a house wares salesman. "The cigars were just a psychological gimmick. If you think about it, doing it this way was for your own good."

"And yours," Med said bitterly.

"You fucked us over, Jerry," the girl said.

"Yeah, just forget about us for friends, pal."

"That's okay," Jerry said, sounding friendly himself, or at least unoffended. "We're in business together. We don't have to be friends. You don't have the stuff in your possession anymore so you're home free. You can't be busted for anything. I've made you rich. Go home and think about that." He turned away and headed for his own car.

"What do you mean?" Med called after him. "Is this it? What do we do now?"

Jerry kept going, his step almost jaunty. "Pray for my forgiveness," he hollered over his shoulder.

## Chapter 12

Con was feeling easy as he drove the Mustang toward Walla Walla. The fields smoked with an early morning vapor that smelled of hay and clover. He hummed a tune from an old swing band that had appeared in a collector's album.

Badboy, sitting next to him, asked, "How come you feel so good? It's not like you."

"We're gonna get him."

"How do you know?" Barbarossa asked from the back.

"Instinct. I'm psychic. I don't know. I can smell his spoor. Before the month's out."

Freddie, all dressed up in a suit and tie, stared out a back window at the passing countryside and said absently, "I can hardly wait myself, so we can get on to the next one, and the next one, and the next one..."

"What else do you expect?" Con growled.

"I don't know. I wonder if cops in ancient Egypt felt the way I do sometimes. We're supposed to be approaching an era of scarcity, small world, big population, but so far there's no sign of a shortage of assholes."

"The answer," Barbarossa said, "is hatred. If you got to get it up like we do over and over again, you really got to hate with a lot of passion, you know. Like Con hates Red Dog. Sometimes it takes a lot of hate for me just to get up in the morning and put on the old shoulder holster."

Badboy said, "I'll bet you wear it in the shower, too."

"I keep telling you, Freddie," Con said, turning around, "that it's like a religious idea. The priest or minister or rabbi or what have you, does he ever expect to win, really? I know there's that crap about the Second Coming and all that, but that's just symbolic. They know the same goddamned citizens are going to come back every week just as screwed up as they've always been, but it's the fight itself that counts. As long as somebody's willing to keep piling on the sandbags, everybody else can get through a life."

"I wish," Freddie said mordantly, "the guys who are getting through would be a little more grateful to the sandbaggers."

"That'll be the day," Barbarossa growled. "I don't expect civies to respect me, I just want them to stay out of my way when I'm chasin' the scuzz. Otherwise, I might not be able to tell them apart."

Freddie punched him on the shoulder. "Hey, you're the real thing. A killer cop."

"Listen," Badboy complained, "I'm a Catholic, see, and it's bad enough I gotta go to church every Sunday and hear about Original Sin and all that crap without sitting around listening to a bunch of narcs talk about it. Talk about what you know, huh? Like hitting on babes or feetsball or something."

"You're okay, Mex," Barbarossa told him. "You got the right deal there. What we need is to get big dumb Roy back to keep us on the straight and narrow. That's all he can talk about."

"We score on Red Dog and we will," Con said. "They won't be able to deny us anything. We'll have the whole team back together."

"The 'up-country team' rides again," Freddie said, "defenestrating criminals."

"Jesus Christ!" Barbarossa said.

They had no difficulty getting into the asylum, which was a state facility, although the assistant director obviously regarded them with either suspicion or disapproval as he led them to the building where Stenbauer was lodged.

"I wish you'd called ahead," he complained as they crossed the huge lawn around which the residential buildings were grouped. Patients, dotted around at intervals like whitecaps on a green sea, stared at them or insensibly ignored them, talked to them or themselves, moved arms and heads in aimless or very private gestures. A few were vacant and drooling; a couple were frozen in bizarre attitudes.

Barbarossa, bringing up the rear with Freddie, said sotto voce, "I never much liked these places. Fuckin' dings give me the creeps."

"At least it smells okay. As long as we're confessing, I'll tell you, I never get used to morgues."

"Poor baby," Barbarossa said, and pointed to a hulking building on their left that had heavily screened windows, which seemed to glower at them as they passed. "You want stink, go in there. That's where they got the bigtime loons and it's really the basement of hell, man. They can't do anything else, so they piss on you and laugh."

A few paces ahead, Con was asking the official where they kept the violent patients. It was pointed out to him and described simply as "C Building." The assistant director had a few questions of his own, such as why there were four of them and why the large, red-bearded member of their party was carrying a valise. Con told him it contained a lot of papers and other evidence that they wanted to go over with the patient, Stenbauer.

Badboy lived up to his name by saying that there were four of them because they were afraid to come to this place in any lesser number. The official gave him the look he deserved.

At a more ordinary-looking three-story building of yellowing stucco, they were handed over to a male nurse who showed them to Stenbauer's room. His perfunctory manner suggested that he didn't care why they had come or what they did. Barbarossa and Freddie remained outside in the hall when Con and Badboy entered.

The room itself was austere but not unpleasant, with sun slanting in through a barless window. Stenbauer was seated on a hard wooden chair, tipped back to allow him the full effect of the sunlight, reading a motorcycle magazine. He was a big man with a scarred, lumpy face and tattoos on his forearms that could be seen only dimly through the matted hair which seemed to characterize his body generally. On top it was thinning, he needed a shave, and a considerable paunch showed above his wide jeweled belt. He was wearing a plaid wool shirt hanging open and out over jeans and bedroom slippers. His head turned when the agents entered, but that was all.

Con and Badboy flashed their buzzers simultaneously, separating in the usual encircling maneuver. Neither spoke, both were cold and skeptical in their demeanor. Stenbauer looked as though it would take a lot to impress him. Con noted that the eyes contained a certain bright cunning but he doubted it went as far as intelligence.

"What do you want?" Stenbauer asked finally.

Badboy put an end to that; with the moves of a mongoose, he stepped in, hooked his foot behind one leg of the tipped-back chair and dumped Stenbauer violently onto the floor. He hit with an agonized grunt and rolled away as though he was afraid he was going to be stomped. The agents merely stared down at him as if he was something growing in a culture.

"That establishes the ground rules, Sten," Con told him.

"Yeah," Badboy threw in. "Look mad, happy, or scared when we come into the room, baby, but don't look indifferent."

Stenbauer, picking himself up, grumbled, "You can't come in here and work me. This is a state facility," but he didn't sound as though he believed it himself.

"It's a pretty good gimmick you got going for yourself here," Con said. "I'm going to look for more of you guys in the bins from now on."

Stenbauer stood and leaned against the wall, affecting a fatalistic look, which was not far from what he felt. "Why don't we start, huh? Who'm I supposed to give you?"

"We want the dealer who was in on that Portland thing where the girl got killed," Badboy told him.

"Oh, yeah, I read about it or saw it on TV or somethin'."

"You were the cutout," Con said. "You know that dealer's name."

"You got told wrong by somebody." He shook his head as if that would add verisimilitude.

"We know, man, don't waste our time," Badboy told him. "We really know, so you gotta tell us."

"Look, I would if I could. I don't want no more trouble than I got. But what am I gonna do?"

Badboy stepped to the door, opened it a crack and looked out. Freddie and Barbarossa were not there. He shut it again gently.

Con began to stare at Stenbauer, right into his eyes, from close in front of him. He noticed that the man's ear piercings had closed. Stenbauer tried to meet the gaze for awhile, but then he turned to see what Badboy was doing behind him, using it as an excuse to break it. After that he hung his head sullenly and glowered at the linoleum floor.

Con lowered his voice to just above a whisper. "It's not like we were asking you to deliver some mob guy or some crazy biker. Our man works alone, he's very cool and he doesn't hang around your kinda people, so he's not going to find you, much less hurt you. You don't have to worry about him, right? No, what you'd better worry about is me, Sten. I'm the one killed the girl on that bust. I'm the one who's a little crazy."

Stenbauer risked a shift of eyes, moving quickly past Con's to a point somewhere beyond the window. He bobbed his head a couple of times, saying, "I figured you probably were."

"How'd you know?"

"I heard somethin' about it on the street. You put things together."

"Then you know I'm not kidding."

"You still ain't gonna work me in here. The stink if it got on TV or something would blow you right off the fuckin' world." He tossed his head defiantly. "Everybody hates you shit-eatin' narcs, anyway, even the straights."

Badboy moved to the door again and opened it silently. Freddie and Barbarossa edged in. The former wore a well-trimmed beard in addition to the suit and he also had on a pair of fake black-rimmed glasses, a little touch of his own. Barbarossa loomed a step behind him, wearing a white attendant's uniform. His own clothes were in the valise in the men's room.

Con, who still had Stenbauer's attention, said wearily, "We're not going to hurt you, asshole. I'd be afraid you'd like it. Let me tell you what is going to happen. You're going to get violent while we're talking to you. So Dr. Nicholson here is going to have you transferred -- to where the other violent people are."

Stenbauer whirled around and looked, then back to Con. That he understood the implications was clearly registered in the dilation of his eyes. His mouth went a little slack. "You can't do that. I committed myself in here. I got a habit, is all." His voice went up half an octave. "And nervous exhaustion. They said so -- it's down on my file. I seen it there myself, so fuck you!"

They had waited him out as if with an excited child and now Badboy said, "He's starting to get violent, all right."

"It'll be hard to make a connection over there, Sten. Especially in a straitjacket," Con told him.

Sten turned again to confront Freddie, his voice now shrill, "You're not puttin' me over in the birdcage with all them psychos! You can't, just 'cause these shiteaten' cops want it. I haven't been

certified! What the fuck's goin' on here?"

Freddie was as pompous as a doctor in a soap opera. Con thought he was overacting. "I'm certifying you now, Mr. Stenbauer. I'm Dr. Nicholson."

"I never seen you before."

"That's because my work is in C Building where the totally dysfunctional and violent patients are. But you'll be seeing a lot of me from now on." He gave a convincingly professional smile.

Stenbauer's voice rose to a near scream. Badboy quickly checked the door to make sure it was tightly closed, glancing anxiously at Con to see if they hadn't better silence the man. "I know what you're doin'!" Stenbauer accused. "You're usin' this to torture me. I was in one of them shitholes once. It was the worst thing I ever seen. You can't sleep with all the screamin' and yellin' and somebody tryin' to cornhole you all the time. You can't trust nobody. They try and kill you when they're grinnin' at you, for Christ's sake. I'm not goin'."

Freddie addressed Con, "You're right, officer, he is getting violent." To Barbarossa: "Better take him over. We'll have to defenestrate him."

Stenbauer let out a cry of inarticulate rage and lunged for the door. All four men were on him instantly. Freddie forgot about the dignity consistent with his role and piled in. Stenbauer was strong and a veteran of a hundred brawls, and he was terrified. He flailed his fists and elbows, brought up his knees -- catching Badboy just slightly off-center in the crotch -- and even tried to butt.

Con kicked one of his kneecaps, which put that leg out of action and cost him any mobility. Badboy, furious, danced around trying to return the kick to the groin. Freddie boxed with his "patient," distracting his arms and fists, and finally Barbarossa got a chokehold on him. Even then, Stenbauer tried to bite the encircling arm, but Barbarossa used his other hand to pull his head back by the hair.

All that remained for a semblance of equilibrium was for Con to restrain Badboy, who didn't want to quit yet. "Knock it off, Ricky, Jesus!" He pushed him aside and thrust his own face close to the now bug-eyed Stenbauer. "You don't want to go over, you got yourself one chance. Right now. This is it!"

He waited and Stenbauer nodded, or strained to nod, his head, his mouth working like a fish. Con indicated for Barbarossa to release him. Stenbauer clutched his wooden chair and eased himself down on it, gasping for breath. Con pointed a finger at the door, meeting Freddie and Barbarossa with his eyes, and they slipped quietly out of the room and down the hall to the men's room. They passed one orderly on the way who looked at them with considerable curiosity, but they maintained severe expressions and a dogged pace.

Back in the room, Badboy, businesslike now that it was clear they had won, turned on a portable tape recorder and slammed it on the table. He also leaned his back against the door; nobody was going to come through it and spoil things at this point.

Stenbauer still insisted that he didn't know Red Dog's real name and Con was inclined to believe him. They didn't need a physical description, they already had several, each somewhat different, to go with their long list of pseudonyms.

"One thing I can give you. He's got a message thing in Seattle. That's how you contact. If you're tight with him, you know? He used that 'Cromelin' name with me. I don't remember the number but I think it starts with, like, 800, like those big stores and stuff where you order things and it don't cost you nothin'."

He rambled for awhile but the only other piece of real information came at the end and was introduced by: "Oh, yeah, there's one more thing. He uses this dude I know, or I heard of, when he wants someone to ride shotgun on a heavy deal. Name's Hurley, I think. 'Hurley?' That sounds right. Got different street names.

"You heard what about him?" Con asked.

"He should be in here instead of me. Stand-up guy but major wacko, like all them guys."

"What the fuck are you talkin' about?" Babdboy asked, screwing up his face as if at a bad odor.

Paratroopers, Green Berets, those kinda shitheads. No respect you're mobbed-up or nothin'. He don't care you're the queen of England. You don't wanna fool with him."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. I think he's got some kinda security job. But I give you a hell of a lot, didn't I?" He sat back and smiled, pleased with himself.

Con and Badboy ignored him. They were grinning at each other.

Jerry drove to the farm as soon as he had collected from everyone who had helped him bring the cocaine across. The stash was considerable and he wasted little time in getting it buried at his hiding place on the mountain. It was necessary to move a little gingerly around the place where Dennis was buried and he began to regret having brought him up here. He kicked some more leaves and pine needles over the grave in a perfunctory manner, worrying it a little.

The reason for killing him here had been security, but even as he stood contemplating the wisdom of that, he heard shots from hunters' guns echoing off some not too distant mountain. There was no perfect security; the world was too crowded. Still, he studied it and could not detect any objective signs of a grave, and the thought of digging up the body to move it filled him with distaste. Perhaps later, in the spring, after nature had settled the question of decay. Anyway, it was a small and theoretical problem at this point and he had so many practical reasons to feel good he went back to the car singing out loud.

He liked to shift the small towns he used for business around in order not to draw undue attention. In this case there were some long-distance calls to make, so he drove twenty miles over back roads to a place called Rigdon, where there were several stores and two or three phone booths. Since he was no longer carrying, he allowed himself to speed, luxuriating in the distraction of taking wild turns on rough terrain and imagining himself at Sebring or Le Mans.

The first call was to Marvin to give him the good news. He said he would go and see his Cubans in a day or two to set up distribution and would expect a steady flow from the Canadian end from now on. Marvin was ecstatic.

The second call, or series of calls, was to try and find Victor alternately at his travel agency, his dry-cleaning plant, or his jewelry store, where finally he caught up with him. They went through the usual routine of utilizing phone booths on both ends. When he called back, Victor was as pleased at the news as Victor ever got.

"You didn't forget that you owe us our own stuff back? From the Portland deal."

"Yeah, I know that." Jerry struggled to mask the impatience in his voice. "The point of this call is that I'm bringing you a key of top grade coke. And it's just a pump-primer. These people in Canada don't even know how much they've got or what to do with it."

"Okay, let's see it," was all Victor said.

"I'm driving down. I'll be there in three days."

"You are going to drive?" Victor asked with some surprise. "From Seattle? Why don't you have someone bring it?"

"I don't trust anyone except myself. That's why you ought to trust \_me\_, Victor."

"Okay. Bring it. If it's as good quality as you say, we could do a lot of business." He hung up.

Jerry, left with a dead phone in his hand, swore. He had wanted to talk price before he made that long run, although he knew Victor was the best for what he needed and he didn't really have any choice but to deal with him.

Half an hour later Jerry was in a real-estate office five miles from the farm, talking to the old woman who ran it. He had brought with him a map of his own farm and several miles on every side of it.

"That part there," the old lady said, jabbing it with a skeletal finger, "that's owned by the Fieldhammer family. It's over two hundred ... I think two hundred and forty acres."

"I know," Jerry said, smiling in a way that was instinctually intended to remind the old lady of front-porch coasters and dandelion wine. He had only a distant remembrance of his grandmother, so there was no accounting for it, but Jerry had a compulsion to play to old ladies even beyond his usual keen awareness of self-interest. And they always responded, always loved him for it. He had often thought to himself that if he was ever busted he ought to try for a jury full of them.

This one asked, "Can you afford it? Forgive me, young man, I didn't mean that to be impolite, but you do look young."

Jerry gave a little laugh. "I don't mind. I've always looked younger than I am. But I can afford it. I have an inheritance."

She smiled, opening all the fissures of an age-desiccated face, but so warmly that for a moment Jerry lost touch with his manipulation. "Putting it back into land for farming. That's certainly unusual nowadays. Don't you want to build condominiums?"

"No, ma'am," Jerry said. "Just farming."

Jerry had gentrified his appearance for the border crossings, and as the old lady looked up at him, six feet, rangy, easy but determined, he reminded the old lady of the movie stars of her youth. She wondered for the moment what it must be like to be him, then shook it off as a senseless question. They were not even of the same species. "You know," she said, "this Fieldhammer place doesn't even touch yours. There's this other strip separating you. That belongs to ... let me see..." She began consulting various books and papers on and in her desk.

Jerry helped her. "That's owned by a speculator. Car dealer down in Oregon. He won't sell to me now -- I've talked to him -- but he will someday. Or I'll get it some way." Jerry hated the man and it was difficult to keep that sentiment out of his voice. He had thought that someday, when he had things together, he would pay to have him hit, maybe Hurley, in the hope that his heirs might prove more malleable. "Anyway, I'm willing to buy this Fieldhammer farm right now and wait to connect them."

"My, you're determined. What do you raise on your farm?"

"We're just getting it started. We've only been there a short while. I mean, right on the land, full-time." He was irritated with himself for dissembling with this innocuous old lady. Actually, they had been on the nucleus of what was now the farm three years. "We have a lot of plans, though. Orchards and truck farming, crops like soybeans..."

"Soybeans? I don't know of anyone around here growing those." She sounded genuinely perplexed.

"Well," he said quickly, "they're good for so many different things, very high protein. Our main idea is self-sufficiency. We're even planning a fish farm. Although we both have a lot to learn about farming generally, I admit."

"Oh, sure, but you'll catch on. Thing is, this Fieldhammer place is mighty rocky and hilly, most of it. Not much good for farming of any kind." She chuckled. "I don't know much about 'fish farming.' That idea seemed to amuse her.

"It's land, space, nature, that's all we care about," he said with a little more acerbity than he had intended. "Maybe vineyards, we'll worry about the rest later."

"Well, in that case, let me tell you. They're asking a thousand, two hundred dollars an acre. But don't you pay it. I'll speak to them, I have some influence over them. We'll get it for at least nine or nine-fifty, maybe less."

Jerry knew the area, knew local land values, and knew even more about people in commerce; she wasn't practicing salesmanship, she was responding to his charm. He managed to sound sixteen years old when he said, "That would be terrific. No kidding. We'd really be grateful, my wife and I." He added with a disingenuous laugh, "Even the baby."

"My, you sure are out to own a lot of land, I'll tell you." She shook her head and chuckled again. "What is it you want, young man? To have your own country or something?"

"Yes, ma'am."

## Chapter 13

Upon leaving Walla Walla, the team drove straight back to Seattle. Clyde had left the office by the time they returned. Con called him at home and gave him a report. It would be near-impossible to get a warrant to go through the Seattle telephone company records and plain impossible to start tapping phones on no more information than they had. Another problem arose when Con asked for help in finding and watching the 'shotgun,' Hurley. After awhile it turned heated and Con hung up.

Later he sat alone in his office, high up in the musty old Federal Building, drinking the sour mash he kept in his desk. Even in autumn the Seattle night came late and a residue of pink light glowed in the upper windows of the taller buildings strung across the city. There was a freighter getting up steam in the harbor, its bow pointed toward Asia. Con thought about getting some binoculars and trying to ascertain its name and nationality, but he was too comfortable.

He heard the monorail on its way back out to the Seattle Center, the former World's Fair grounds. Lighting a cigarette, and glorying in the depravity, he sighed deeply and slumped as far down as he could get in the swivel chair. Since his separation from his family, this had become his favorite moment in the day. He was considering getting a book out of his desk and staying here until it was time to go home to bed when the phone rang.

Clyde's voice was dry, almost wispy. "You still there?"

"Would you like to ask a different question?"

"Listen, you have to go down to Portland next Thursday for the inquest."

Con didn't respond immediately and both men listened to the other breathe. Finally: "You just talked to me an hour ago and you didn't mention it. Why the hell not?"

"I don't know. Just be there, that's all. And be damned careful how you conduct yourself."

"You been hearing anything about me I haven't heard myself?"

"\_Everything\_ I've heard about you lately makes me nervous."

"The Bureau been talking to you?"

"No names, please. I've got to go."

"Clyde, I'm close. This is gonna screw me up. Let me get that mother first and I'll kiss ass from here to D.C."

"I don't have anything to say about it, you know that. It's not federal, it's Oregon."

Con sighed again -- twice in one night. He was getting old. "Okay, if the goddamn Hooverites want to get me bad enough, I know what can happen. Just promise me that if the flak is that heavy, you'll tip me. Because you're right, I've been burning a hell of a lot of bridges."

"Don't tell me about it, I want to be properly horrified when the time comes to can you."

"Thanks."

"You still have to go to Oregon."

Con resumed staring across the city. He thought about his secret dream, so presumptuous he had never told anybody about it except his wife: to teach history in college. Of course it would mean going back to school, and a bigger, more prestigious school, for at least a master's and probably a Ph.D. How he might manage that with two children who would have their own educational needs and a job that moved him around constantly was a mystery he had not been able to confront, much less solve, but he knew the dream by its very durability had some substance at his core. He got drunk and fell asleep thinking about it.

Jerry and Suzanne spent an idyllic two days together, loving, playing with their boy, roaming the farm and planning its aggrandizement. Dennis was never mentioned. On the third day, Jerry drove off, headed down to Santa Fe. Suzanne didn't ask where he was going.

She had placed nuts, dried soybeans, raisins, fresh fruit, home-baked bread, and a thermos of tea on the seat next to him. His gun was under the seat with several ounces of cocaine. To compensate for the necessity of obeying all the traffic laws, he drove well into the night, stopping only for gasoline and elimination. It was not difficult; Jerry had always possessed great stamina.

Two and a half days later he met Victor for lunch in Santa Fe. The place chosen, Victor's choice, was an haute cuisine restaurant with an art gallery for a lobby and filled with odd pieces of antique European furniture. It was situated in narrow, twisting Canyon Road northeast of town, which constitutes the heart of Santa Fe's art colony. Jerry was wearing a denim shirt, jeans, and dusty boots, but Victor seemed able to command special dispensation and got them in without a fuss. Jerry didn't know he was a part owner.

He had met Victor only once before and was still unsure as to what he thought of the man. He prided himself upon his ability to see into people and make keen judgments about them, but Victor had so far eluded him. The Cuban had a lean, ascetic face; he actually looked more like a French doctor in a movie or a character from Chekhov than a big-time dealer. He was tall, graying, wore a neatly trimmed beard. His features were aquiline and the hands long and white. At the moment he was wearing a white linen suit that suggested plantations and a time of radically different sensibilities. Yet there was nothing soft about him, that much was apparent from the bleak, tightly controlled mouth and eyes that were as indifferent as the sea.

"I wasn't ready for this," Jerry said as they were led to their table. It was small talk; he was neither impressed nor intimidated by elegance or status.

Victor said, "I like to do business where government agents do not feel comfortable."

He had brought a Number One with him, or maybe he was only a bodyguard. Jerry wasn't sure. Anselmo was small, dark, and unprepossessing physically but his flat gaze roamed the restaurant the way hoodlums do and when it met Jerry's it did so without apology. Jerry didn't like him; in his childhood neighborhood in Indianapolis, Anselmo would have been labeled a greaser, spic, beaner. Jerry might have rejected most of the values of Indianapolis, but he thought, without irony, the description apt. Something told him that Anselmo returned the feeling, whereas Victor had no feelings at all.

"Why do you come to us?" Victor asked over a pitcher of sangria.

"We've done business before. You were straight with me. That's rare."

"Still, there are many people doing business these days. Our business has become more competitive than used cars." He allowed himself a glacial smile. "And it is fifteen hundred miles from Seattle to Santa Fe."

"I don't trust anybody I know in Frisco or L.A. to move the quantity I'm going to bring in."

"And how are you bringing it in?" Victor asked, studying the menu.

Jerry laughed and the silent Anselmo scowled. Victor drummed arrhythmically on the arm of his chair.

"Victor," Jerry asked him, "what kind of a beginning is this? You know I'm not going to get into that kind of stuff with you."

"What you are saying is you don't trust us, man," Anselmo asserted in a peculiarly high, abrasive voice. So he wasn't a bodyguard. He leaned forward on the table, his coat bulked open, and Jerry could see the holstered automatic inside. He was surprised, although not necessarily intimidated. "You think we are liars, huh? We gonna rip you off?"

"C'mon," was all Jerry said, but it implied that he had seen better at the movies.

Victor made an unpleasant sound approximating a laugh and placed his fingers lightly on the man's arm where it rested on the table. It was enough; Anselmo sat back in his chair and his face went blank.

Jerry did his best to save face all around. "I said I brought the deal to you because I trusted you more than anyone else. And I mean that. But I also believe people, everybody, act out of basic self-interest. If you knew everything about my end that I know, you wouldn't need me. So with all your muscle and organization, I'd be out on my ass like that -- " He snapped his fingers. "I'd expect it. You'd be acting on your basic self-interest."

"Of course," Victor said mildly. "Shall we order?" He signaled the waiter. Before the man could get there, he asked, "Where do you have the material you have brought us?"

"In my car. Under the front seat."

"Where?" Anselmo asked.

Jerry offered up his keys. "Black Porsche with Washington plates up the street a block to the right."

Anselmo took the keys and slipped away like a dancer leaving the stage.

"We won't wait for him," Victor said. The waiter arrived and he ordered for both of them with obvious relish. When the man had gone, he sighed happily. "One thing I don't regret about Cuba, perhaps the only thing, is the food. It was always detestable. For some reason it's better here."

Con had an idea of how he might get around a warrant. He went to the billing office of the phone company. He had shaved, cleaned himself up and left the rest of his crew at home lest they frighten anyone. The clerk at the front desk was a pleasant young African-American woman with glasses. Con always felt more confident questioning or deceiving people with glasses.

He claimed that he wanted to establish an 800 number for his hardware business. How many did they have functioning? She tried to send him to 'New Accounts' but he fended it off in a manner so chatty he might have been in a village store. She was patient while he asked innocuous questions by way of circling the target. But when he got to, "Tell me, do you have many 800 customers who pay with cash without fail every month?" her expression changed, first clouding over and then opening to a slight smile.

"Ahhh, sir, I don't think you're being honest with me?"

Con fessed-up with a laugh, saying he was really a private detective and showed her his I.D., having never yet encountered anyone who read it sufficiently to challenge it. He was, he claimed, working for a poor woman who had been brutally treated by her husband, and now the rat was using this number for assignments. That plus a hundred dollar bill bought all the cooperation in the world. Unfortunately, since the envelopes mailed out to every user insisted that no cash be sent, customers didn't. At least not regularly.

"Have you considered any of the answering services?" she asked him.

"People still use those when everybody's got answering machines?"

"A few do. Professional people who want it to sound like a secretary, I suppose. Also, it removes them one more step from the caller, if you're talking about somebody who's trying to hide something. You see, they're paid directly and then they send us a check."

Con liked the sound of that. She gave him three addresses and he, altogether uncharacteristically, leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek.

"Thank you, sir."

The Straight-line Answering Service turned out to be the largest and busiest in Seattle. But since it was a fading, marginal business even at best, it was housed in an old stone building whose cornices

bore eighty years of grime that gave it a greenish patina. There was a cage elevator at the other end of a dank lobby but Con, his footsteps echoing on the floor tiles, thought it looked sufficiently rickety to justify taking the stairs.

Behind a pebbled glass door he found a large switchboard with three operators, all male gays, whose piping garrulousness with their customers seemed nevertheless to be carried on with briskness and efficiency. There were a couple of magazine cutouts, one he could see was of Bette Midler, taped to the wall but otherwise the room was depressingly spare with scuffed wood floors, steel furniture and plaster showing through the paint.

The queen bee of all this was a fat, middle-aged woman with a male haircut, mannish glasses and the butt of a cigarette jutting from the corner of her mouth. Behind her were a half-dozen battered metal filing cabinets where Con might hope to find the answer to everything he needed to know.

But all this was cursory; his attention was on a slim young blond girl who was apparently paying her bill at the desk. She was wearing hip-huggers, a tank top, and sandals. Her hair was tied back in a single pigtail with three small flowers intertwined in it. There was a sturdy two-year-old boy hanging onto one of her legs. He turned his head and stared at Con with huge blue-green eyes. His face was smeared with the remains of an ice cream cone and he was barefoot. Con guessed he would probably pick up splinters off this floor, although there was something tough and wild about him for a toddler. He thought of Romulus and Remus, raised by the wolf.

When she was finished, the girl hiked the boy onto one hip and went out past him with a gliding walk that was perhaps not wolf like, but did suggest something primitive. She was so lovely Con found it a generous moment out of war.

He stepped up to the desk and waited while the fat lady entered some figures into a ledger. "Well?" she grunted, without looking at him.

He was surprised to hear himself say, "Looked like the sixties."

The woman looked up sharply. "What?"

"That girl."

"Oh." She put some money stacked beside the window into a cash drawer and made a point of locking it. "What can I do you for?" she said with even less interest.

"I'm looking for information about one of your customers." He had her attention; her small eyes seemed to withdraw even farther from her glasses, fading away into a plaster face. Con showed his colorss.

"Oh," she said again. "Do I have to help you? I mean, that the law?" She withdrew the cigarette from the corner of her mouth, a small soggy thing, and placed it in an ashtray where she seemed determined to study it.

"No." Con stared down into a tangle of gray, thinning hair. "No," he repeated in his usual low-key style, "but I'm like everybody else. When I want something real bad I resent being frustrated for no good reason. You better have a goddamned good reason, lady." He had lowered his voice for this last, but could sense that the operators behind him had overheard and were watching. He smelled anxiety.

"What about the First Amendment for a reason?"

"Lady, I wouldn't interfere with your right to say anything, including calling me a sonofabitch, so long as you give me what I want."

She looked up at him finally and he figured she must have been husbanding her ray because it burned into him without wavering. "You can't do those kinds of things to us anymore. Just 'cause we're a gay business." she said with great precision, "so fuck off!" She jammed the butt back into the corner of her mouth.

Con heard one of the operators snicker and it filled him with ennui. "Look, I'm a narc, I couldn't care less about which end you put it in so long as you don't marry my daughter, okay. But you sure as hell better give it up or I'll shut this birdcage down on a charge of Obstructing A Federal Investigation. Maybe somebody will bail you out of it later, but in the meantime, a lot of messages aren't going to get delivered. If nothing else, you'll lose all your bookies."

He was bluffing, but he could see in her eyes that she believed him.

"Who do you want to know about?"

"Anyone who pays their bill in cash only. Might use the name 'Cromelin.'"

"If they're paying with cash they're not gonna give me their real name, are they? Or an address." She began to thumb through some torn, dirty file folders. "Here's one." Nearsighted, she strained forward and looked close, smoke from the not quite dead cigarette enveloping her eyes, covering the red with water. Straining to read, her speech went to musing, "Always pays cash. Not 'Cromelin,' though. Looks like ... 'Kersey.'"

Con's face colored. "'Brian' Kersey?"

"Leonard B."

"No indication what the 'B' stands for?" Con prodded, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice. Fugitives often made up their various pseudonyms by mixing bits and pieces from reality, if not their own name that of someone or some thing close.

"No." She gave Con a mock-weary look, weary of him. "Can I get back to work now?"

"If you don't have an address to send a bill to, how would they know how much to send in?"

"We'd probably put in on their message tape."

It didn't matter, he knew. He felt it on his skin. The woman suddenly hesitated in mid-moment, even mid expression, for a moment pursing her brow, and then broke into a harsh, phlegmy laugh. She spat out the cigarette and ended in a fit of coughing. Con waited it out; he had put up with so much already.

Finally the woman waggled a yellowish finger toward the door. With some glee she told him, "We don't have an address or phone for that account. It's always mailed in." After a stage wait she added, "Except for this month's. It was paid by that little blond bitch you thought was so cute a few minutes ago."

Con roared and slammed the wall in his rage, and at last succeeded in scaring the hell out of everyone in the room. A couple of the young men actually ducked. He was beyond caring about them as he spun around and ran down the stairs, taking two at a time and bounding over the last several to the lobby floor. He hit the street still on the run and some passersby looked at him. He hurried first to one corner and then the other without any sign of the blond girl. When he slowed and allowed himself to think, he realized that he had never had a chance.

He tried asking people on the street if they had noticed her but without any luck until he got to a newsstand vendor on one corner. "She was a good-looking' broad an' I never miss one. Ever' job's got it's compensations, right?" He hadn't even seen the baby and all he could contribute was that she was driving a dirty pickup, and 'no' he didn't know the make. "Hey, if I was looking' at the truck I'd be a fag, you know what I mean?"

Con returned inside and confiscated Suzanne's money, not without a fight, and the envelope that had contained it.

Jerry returned immediately to Washington. There was good reason to hurry; a call to Marvin had brought the news that on his end they had procured the services of an experienced dope pilot who had agreed to bring in a load of several K's that would be worth millions within the week. Jerry

immediately conveyed the news to Victor and they had agreed on a buy in two weeks at a place of Jerry's choosing. Victor would send Anselmo with some people, all the way to Seattle if necessary, out of deference to the fact that Jerry operated alone and had no way to move it safely over long distances.

Jerry loved it all except Anselmo. He continued to think about that little man, dark and sinister as a pinstriped Sicilian. Victor he trusted on the assumption that he was too big, too institutional to indulge in a simple drug rip-off. And while he would not admit it to himself, he was also impressed by the manners, the style. But Anselmo might choose to leave his employ in a violent yet profitable rending. Crossing the pink wedding-cake desert of northeastern Arizona, he decided he would hire a 'shotgun' for that big delivery. When he got home he would look up Hurley.

## Chapter 14

Con got up very early in order to drive to Portland on the same day as the inquest. He had thought he would sleep better in his own bed the night before; in that he was wrong. It was necessary to take along a thermos of black coffee. His consolation was that the rawness of fatigue often gave his wits an extra acuity. He attributed it to a lifetime of combat.

There was plenty to worry about. The coroner had asked for the testimony of the entire team and Con had refused, insisting that their identities had to be protected. The court had also requested that he turn over the carbine. Since that wasn't possible, he wouldn't let himself worry about it. No doubt they thought he was bringing the gun with him.

Furthermore, Clyde had told him that the dead girl's parents had procured the services of a tough, aggressive attorney. The one thing he dreaded was that moment when either Charles or Charlotte Depew recognized him as the man who had represented himself as an agent named Martin Gilbert and leaned over to whisper the news to that attorney. His stomach would feel a cold wind blowing through it any time he let it come into his mind.

He reported to the district attorney's office and a lawyer representing the Agency briefed him, telling him nothing he didn't already know, and then took him over to a waiting room in the courthouse. The building was old and cavernous, the hallways mildewed by fear and soured hopes. It was just what Con was used to.

He put in a couple of hours reading a paperback of Josephus's *The Jewish War*. He had read it before but always with a feeling of incompleteness. Beyond his interest in military history, he wanted to understand Josephus himself, who seemed so much like a modern man, like people he had met in his own wars, and on the street. As with everything, he hoped eventually to overcome the book by sheer force and perseverance.

When he was called to testify, Con ran into the Depews in the corridor, taking advantage of a brief recess. They looked at him in their austere, aggrieved way but without understanding who he was. Con decided to put himself out of that misery and went directly to them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Depew, I'm Con Meehan, the agent who shot your daughter." It was as hard as anything he had ever had to say so he spat each word out as though he was getting rid of a mouthful of brass shell casings. "I'm sorry I had to misrepresent myself when I came to see you up in Victoria. I thought it was necessary. We want the same thing." He turned on his heels like a British sergeant major and retreated into the hearing room. The Depews had not said a word but their eyes had reflected first shock and then the hope of a gallows.

Con had testified at inquests where he was less personally involved and this was not that different up to a point. He admitted that he was the man who had fired the fatal round and also the bullet which wounded her companion. In fact, he described the raid in most details without suffering any hard questioning and came to the happy conclusion that neither Portland nor Oregon could see self-interest in pillorying him. That sickly optimism came to an abrupt end with the rising of the Depews' attorney, who requested and was granted the right to cross-examine.

His name was Brandon Wilde, he was on the young side of middle age, blue-eyed, elegantly tailored, and he had a great deal of hair in the grand tradition, fully half of it in his eyebrows and only a little of it grayish. Plenty of time for the Supreme Court, right now he had a lucrative practice and devoted a great deal of time to the ACLU. It was a Spencer Tracy image, basically, that he worked for, Con thought. On the other hand, did anyone remember Spencer Tracy?

He had to admit that he didn't admire attorneys in general. He had struggled through Cicero and had an idea as to what the practice of law should be about, and also what happened to it in a decadent

society. He knew that a lot of police were corrupt, but most professional criminals felt that they were less so than lawyers and journalists. And who would know better?

"...You have said, Agent Meehan, that the other members of your team that night are out of state and working undercover. Don't you think that by not calling them you might be putting yourself at a disadvantage? Denying yourself their testimony?"

"Can't be helped. I won't put their lives in danger. And the coroner's office didn't insist on it."

"So the only people who were actually there and can testify to what happened are yourself and the surviving victim -- "

Con cut him off, "A 'victim' who has been indicted for the attempted murder of a federal officer. Me."

The attorney turned to the bench and opened his hands in frustration. The acting judge told Con not to interrupt and editorialize but to answer the questions as posed.

"I'm sorry Counselor," Con said, without being the least bit sorry, "but if the purpose of this inquest is to determine the circumstances of the girl's death, I am certainly the one who shot her. No one else. And all the physical evidence as well as the testimony of the local investigators who were there confirms that I'm the one."

He felt his face growing warm and his eyes twisting away from the parents as autonomously as if someone were trying to insert a foreign object in them. He also found himself talking a little faster than usual, or was good for the occasion.

The attorney didn't waste any time responding, "Thank you for defining the purposes of the inquest, Agent Meehan. Are you also an attorney?"

"I am not now nor have I ever been one of them." It got a titter from some spectators, but as soon as he had said it, he regretted it. The attorney for the Agency winced.

Wilde hadn't shown anything, which was what made him Wilde. "Isn't it possible, for instance," he went on, "that we might want to examine the question here as to who fired the first shot? I grant that ballistic evidence proves that the young man in the room at the time fired once in the direction of the door. But in the confusion and excitement, I'm sure you'll agree, people can sometimes be mistaken as to little details, such as who fired a split second before whom. Members of your group might have had something to say about that."

"I don't see it as a 'little detail,' sir." but the truth is, if I saw a weapon I had every right to shoot And we had a warrant. We had all the probable cause in the world -- "

The attorney interjected, "If you saw a weapon in that dark room?"

Con plowed ahead, "The shade was up and there was a moon that night." Con had checked those things on the night of the tragedy after the fact. "I saw the glint off the metal." He lied.

"A black pistol, a Luger?"

"Light reflects off black metal, especially in a dark room, Counselor. "Those are the things we have to know to stay alive. But the fact is, this kid, the suspect, fired the first shot at officers of the law acting in pursuance of their duties. It's a heavy responsibility, but even if he points a gun at me I have every right to shoot first."

"Are you certain you're not an attorney?" This time Wilde got the laugh and he even encouraged it with a little smile.

Con said, "I've given a lot of testimony."

"I'm sure you have. Tell me something, though. In your statement you testified that it was very dark in the room and you couldn't see anything except the muzzle flash."

Con sighed inwardly. This kind of twisting and obfuscating as part of the psychological warfare

that passed for courtroom law wearied and depressed him. Not only that, he had blundered. "I probably did."

"Oh, I assure you you did," the attorney said, brandishing some papers that may or may not have been Con's statement but made an effective prop.

"I gave that first statement to the local detectives on the scene right after the ... 'incident.'" Bureaucratic-speak, he had almost choked on it. "I had just killed a young girl. Do you know what that feels like? I was sick. I didn't know how I could go on living much less fill out a report. I gave what in my over-heated mind were the essential facts. He fired, I fired back into the dark room. At the flash. I had the open door behind me, the light behind me, do you understand. It was hard for him to miss. It's always that way for us."

He took a deep breath and hoped that that hadn't sounded like self-pity. "Now, you have sworn depositions from all of my men and a lot of other officers, if they don't convince you I don't know how can."

"Very eloquent statement of the dangers and pressures of your profession, Agent Meehan." He took a breath. "Would you then say that it is at least possible that under such extreme tension one might make the kind of error, entirely unintentionally, of course, that we are discussing here. That is, firing too soon, thinking you saw something when you didn't, overestimating a threat when it's a question of perception involving mere seconds?"

"Of course it's possible. But that isn't what happened. We get scared, we make mistakes, you couldn't do the job if you weren't and if you didn't. And somebody's got to. But we didn't. I fired at a flash in a dark room and missed. And I'll regret it, think about it, dream about it the rest of my life."

The room was quiet for a moment. Wilde broke into it by asking softly, "How many rounds?"

"Nine. My gun was rigged for automatic."

"Rigged?" You mean it isn't usually an automatic weapon?"

"Not usually. It's a standard issue carbine. It's light, not as destructive as a sub-machine gun, I like the feel of it."

"Does your Agency authorize you carry this unorthodox weapon?"

"We're authorized to use automatic weapons of several kinds. What's the difference what the shape is?"

"If it was an unauthorized weapon I think the court should know that, don't you?"

"It wasn't standard issue but it wasn't illegal, either."

"You knew the male suspect was armed, did you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Observation. Informants."

"What informants?"

"I meant one. But you know I can't tell you anything about that."

"There's such a thing as a court order, Agent Meehan."

"Wouldn't make any difference."

"We'll see. What about the baby? Did you know about that?"

"Of course. We had them under observation from the time they arrived."

"Did you have reservations about breaking into the room with a baby in it?"

"You always have reservations."

"I meant other than about your own safety."

"We knew the baby was sleeping in a portable crib against the south wall. That was out of the line of fire as we came through the door."

"How did you know that?"

"A listening device. Placed against the wall from an adjoining room."

Wilde looked quizzical. "How could you tell exactly where it was sleeping?"

"We could hear it breathing. And you know, making sounds like babies make when they're asleep." The silence that pervaded the room was telling. Con felt it coming through his pores like an invading organism. There was no way to win points as long as the baby was on the scale and he could only wait it out, hope to get onto something else. The really disquieting aspect was that the idea of the child was so strong symbolically its very mention had made him doubt himself after the fact.

He had to work to remember how he had felt at the time; he had known he would go through the door first and made a silent promise that no circumstance, including a threat to his own life, would make him fire in the direction where the child was sleeping. He had felt absolute confidence in his ability to control the situation to that extent. Even if he was hit. But emotional attrition was lessening that conviction.

"Remarkable you could be that certain," Wilde murmured, as if reading his mind. "How many shots was that again that you fired ... ?"

"Nine, Con said wearily. Here it comes, he thought.

"Could you estimate for me how many seconds it took to get off that many rounds?"

"No, sir, not with any accuracy. I use guns, but I'm no ordnance expert." He was lying, but he knew it wouldn't do any good; the outcome was inevitable. The overwhelming, and perhaps healthiest, impulse was to throw himself on the spears and hope to be admired for courage or stubbornness.

The attorney drifted to his table and fingered some files as if drawing knowledge kinetically. He knew what he had to know. "With all your time in various branches of the service, in peace and war, surely you know something about the timing on a weapon like this."

"I'm afraid not."

The Agency attorney registered an objection, the witness had already answered that question to the best of his ability.

The attorney started to take up his questioning again but Con went on the offensive, "People shoot at us. Sooner or later they win. A lot of police officers resent having to face heavier weaponry on the other side and they put in hot loads, things like that. Try facing double-ought coming out of two big barrels with a thirty-eight in your hand." He added wistfully. "Also, I was used to carbines from the service."

For the first time the attorney raised his voice and bored in hard. "You mean, don't you, that it gave added killing power when you burst through that door, into the room with the woman and her baby in it?"

Con didn't dare bite his lip but he bit something deep down. "It gave me the edge over the dope dealer who was in the same room and trying to kill me." Each word was articulated and it was not a tone that would endear him to anyone in the courtroom.

"Where is that weapon now?" Wilde snapped.

"I threw it away."

The surprise and disbelief in the courtroom was audible. Con had once made a parachute jump and the freefall felt much like this. Wilde obviously felt he had just been handed a hunting license and dropped all pretense to subtlety or even civility.

"You did what?"

"I said I threw it away. Off a bridge. Up in Seattle where I'm stationed."

"Agent Meehan, the only word I can think of to describe how I feel is 'flabbergasted.' I scarcely know what to ask next. You are telling us that you took your weapon, or the government's weapon issued to you, a weapon that had been used in the killing of a young girl within the last few weeks and just ... threw it away, off a bridge?"

"Yes." Con felt relatively calm now that he had gone over the falls; he had the singular consolation that as far as this hearing went, he had done all the harm to himself he could possibly do.

"Was this with the approval of your superiors?"

"Of course not. They didn't even know about it. They don't yet."

"I imagine when you get back to your office you'll tell them now?"

Con understood that no response was called for. He stared ahead without seeing anyone. There remained one source of disquiet; his problems in dealing with his own emotions openly made it difficult to come to grips with the most irrational thing he had ever done. If only he had been drunk when it happened, that would have been very serviceable.

"You knew that weapon was evidence. You must have known that you, who are sworn to uphold the law, were ... well, confounding it, if not openly breaking it."

"I guess I would have if I'd thought about it."

"You didn't think about it? You were not, as people say, in your right mind? You were not in control of your self?"

Con hesitated. "No ... not at that moment, maybe. In the sense that what I did will hurt me in the long run. Maybe hurt the Agency. I can't say I regret it. I felt I had to at the time, and I did it."

"Perhaps you regretted that you had used an automatic weapon. Maybe you regretted how you had used it and what that had led to."

"No. I don't agree to that."

"Since you are currently on duty, are you still using an automatic carbine, another automatic carbine?"

"No. I haven't had occasion to use any weapon. It's not like television. We don't use our guns from one year to the next."

"How many times have you used yours, Mr. Meehan?"

"Three..." he corrected himself, "...no, four."

"How many people have you hit?"

The Department's attorney objected strenuously but the acting judge denied it, ruling that Con's history and propensities were relevant and particularly in that this was an inquest.

"Outside of military service," Con complied, "I've shot three men, all armed. I don't exactly enjoy talking about it, but you asked. The girl wasn't armed, but the man lying within inches of her was. That made the fourth."

"Have you ever missed before?"

"No."

"You're proud of that?"

"I'm ... alive."

"And they're not."

"One is. The one with the girl." He couldn't bring himself to say her name.

Wilde turned his back and paced for a moment. It was a gesture, however calculated, that made him appear lofty and troubled. He came back, seemingly having dealt with his demons, and softened his attitude again. "We've been getting a little afield, Agent Meehan. I'm trying to understand. Why did you do this strange thing -- throw your weapon away? Why?"

Con would have preferred hostility. He was in pain. "Look," he said, addressing the ceiling, "I don't regret what I did, I regret what happened. Can't you get that? The girl was in there with a dealer, a kid who was willing to take my life either because he wanted to make a lot of money or he hated authority or he'd seen too many movies or he was just plain bored. That's what some of them are, just bored. They don't care if they die. I do. I've got two kids. But this was a young girl with a baby, and she was just in the wrong place with the wrong people. I felt lousy about that."

"You felt guilty."

"Sure. Who wouldn't? But the point is, I felt guilty, not wrong."

"I'm afraid I don't understand the distinction."

Con, in his mind, groaned, but no sound escaped and he ran his hand over his face in what appeared to be a gesture of fatigue rather than shame. "Maybe I don't, either," he admitted in a voice that sank away.

He had struck one of those notes that fill some people with horror, some with great empathy and yet others tittered, like the sound from diseased lungs.

When finally Con was dismissed, he walked through the courtroom and right on out of the building without consulting anyone. The same single-minded drive took him to his car and put him on the highway headed north. No matter what had happened here, it was behind him and he desperately needed to work.

It was like times remembered from the war when the cowardice, greed, and red tape in back areas actually made combat with its crazy kind of camaraderie seem almost pure and innocent. He consoled himself on the long trip that no matter what they did to him, he would still have time to kill his enemy.

## Chapter 15

On the way in, forty-five miles south of the farm, Jerry passed through the small town of Arwyn. Across the main street, posters in store windows proclaimed a fall festival tied to the "Tri-Counties World Series of Baseball" coming up in two weeks. There was also going to be a rodeo, some kind of parade, and a carnival for children. It struck Jerry that this might provide a good cover for the connection with Victor's people. No big-time law enforcement to worry about, and yet enough population density to inhibit a rip-off. Out-of-towners would be accepted without question. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed ideal.

Con returned to Seattle on the same day Jerry reached his farm. He avoided the office and operated out of his apartment where, for once, good news awaited him. The crew had sent the envelope and bills to the lab in Spokane and been promised an immediate check on the prints. As it happened, Freddie D. had a cousin working there. Better yet, with a certain amount of lying, or as Badboy insisted, 'exaggeration,' they had obtained a warrant for a tap and trace on Red Dog's message service number.

The next day Jerry called in for his messages and his voice was recorded for the first time. The call was traced to a phone booth thirty miles outside of Seattle and much too late to act upon. The only message waiting for him was to "call Mr. Kleinschmidt at the usual number."

Con asked for the tape to be brought over and the whole team sat around his apartment at midnight drinking and listening to Jerry's resonant, confident tones and crisp manner. They were fascinated, filled with a kind of awe.

Freddie said, "I've listened to a lot of intercepts but I never felt so spooked as I do about this one. To actually hear this guy..." He got up and went to the one window with a view. "He could still be anybody out there. We know his old lady's a blonde with a great body -- according to our leader here who's got an eye -- and she has a kid, maybe his." His own tone began to slide, lacking confidence. "At least we think it's his old lady. We don't even know that."

"Right age," Badboy pointed out.

"Also," Con said, "we know our guy doesn't run with a pack -- not his style."

"Okay, it's his old lady. And maybe she'll be back in three to five weeks to pay the bill again."

"No, the woman there said this was the first time they hadn't mailed it in. Look, we heard the guy, like a lot of educated idiots, has this fascination for the sixties. The girl I saw was 'Ms. Sixties in the flesh. You know, 'flower child' had 'em in her hair, for Christ's sake. Take my word. And the baby, about two, something about the way he was handled and dressed, no shoes. On these sidewalks?"

Freddie studied the city beyond the window where it was raining hard, yet somehow looked inviting. Maybe by contrast. "You said she was driving a pickup and it was dirty. Sounds like a country gal to me."

"You think you look hard enough you'll see 'im?" Badboy asked him."

Barbarossa, nursing on the beer bottle, took it away long enough to speak up, "Not that far away. Would you drive a hundred miles to pay a bill? And she wasn't dressed for no long trips, baby, except maybe over the moon."

"Fifty miles," Con said, if the purpose was to buy big city goods like videos or tapes, maybe of sixties' bands, for instance. Something you couldn't buy in the country stores or little towns. And you happened to be passing here so instead of mailing the charge you just drop by."

"Your old man sure as hell isn't there. Not our boy, he operates like the fucking CIA. He'd kill her if he knew."

Barbarossa pointed a finger at Badboy, "See, it's always the pussy does the job on you. How many

times have I warned you?"

Badboy simply rolled his eyes at his large friend.

"We can wait and see if there's a pattern to these calls, narrow the search area by triangulation and all that shit, but that could take months and I don't have the belly for it. And we might not have the time, anyway."

"I suppose somebody's gone for the prints on the phone in that booth," Barbarossa said.

Badboy got up from the floor with a grunt and headed for the refrigerator; he didn't particularly like beer but as long as these gavachos were going to make it a social occasion, he would put up with it out of loyalty. On the way he said, "There were more prints on that receiver than a Tijuana whore." He veered off from the beer and headed toward the toilet. "All lousy. Jesus and his mother, that beer..."

"You don't buy beer, you just rent it," Barbarossa told him, and since they had all heard it when they were adolescents, nobody bothered to laugh. He turned to Con. "Is it worth getting a voiceprint?" He indicated the tape, which Meehan was holding in his hands.

"I don't think so. There aren't any on record to match it with and they don't seem to be doing much good with them in court, anyway."

Freddie patted Barbarossa on his rhino's shoulder. "Good try, big thinker."

"Wiseass!" He took an outsized swipe at Freddie without connecting.

"What about Hurley?" Badboy asked.

Freddie said, "I called every security company in the book, using the lawyer inheritance gag, but no employees named Hurley except one, and he was seventy. I figure tomorrow we'll start going around and get up close and personal. There's a lot of those goddamn businesses now so I'm gonna need help."

"Take Redbeard to scare 'em," Badboy said, but then felt a need to be sensible. "'Kleinschmidt' could be Hurley for all we know."

Con nodded. "Go for it, Freddie-Kleinschmidt. You never know. If he's the muscle he's probably not as careful as Red Dog."

Freddie stretched, "I'm going home. Or at least out where there's normal people. Hopefully female people." He pulled his collar up around his neck and put on his tweed cap.

"Hey, Freddie," Barbarossa asked, standing to join him, "you ever tell women you're a narc?"

"Sure. They love to hate you. Turns them on. See, they're desperate for authority figures out there, Red. You been missing out on all that?"

"I shoulda gone to college. I'd know stuff like that." Smoothing his beard, he went out the door with Freddie. He didn't have a raincoat; he thought they were sissy.

Badboy soon followed and Con was alone. He listened to the tape of Red Dog's voice one more time, trying to grasp something; he wasn't sure if it was a clue or a simple bond of humanity. Eventually he got drunk on beer, which was an embarrassment according to his tradition.

He turned out the lights and staggered to the window with the view of the city, sitting on the sill in distinct danger of falling out. Freddie was right, there was something eerie about connecting this way. Usually when you listened you knew a great deal about the men whose lives you were shadowing, and that gave it at least a perverse decency. This was as remote as a chance intercept between two alien planets. He longed to somehow let Red Dog know he was coming. That would complete the circle for both of them.

The next morning Clyde called and informed him that he was suspended. The dead girl's family had gone to the Federal Attorney and demanded a more thorough investigation. Con didn't argue, just thanked him and hung up.

Five days later Jerry drove a couple of hundred miles northeast to a little airport in the Cascades not far from the Canadian border. It looked like something out of a thirties movie about crop dusters or mail pilots with corrugated iron sheds and dust devils whipping across the single runway. To complete things, there was a two-seater biplane nestled in at the far end of the field where the woods intruded piquantly close to the landing strip. The nearest town, Beldin, was seven miles away and had no police force of its own.

Jerry, by design, was never punctual. He believed in keeping everyone, friend or enemy, off-balance all the time. The man he approached at the coffee pot in the field's only hangar didn't look as though it would bother him.

He was blond, curly-haired, wore a greasy lambs wool flying jacket and had a polka-dot bandanna around his forehead. He watched Jerry come through weathered eyes brought down to slits, as though he was looking forward to a sky full of MIG's. His face was so leathery he might have been flying the bi-wing, although his own plane turned out to be a spanking-new Beechcraft parked over by the administration shed.

"You give flying lessons?" Jerry asked him.

"Oh, yeah."

"How much an hour?"

"Bloody fortune. I'm that goddamn good. You won't need a plane to fly after I get through with you, doctor. Want some Drano? Chemical cream?"

Jerry took some in a Styrofoam cup and they strolled out across the tarp.

"You're awful fuckin' late." It was casual, without rancor.

Jerry liked to let people know with whom they were dealing. "I make a point of it."

"Smart."

"Where do we connect?"

"Right here. Got it in the plane."

"You mean you brought it right into the airport?"

"Look, doctor, they told me you were some fuckin' pro. Well, so am I. I was a pro in Nam, in Thailand, in Meh-hi-co. I never been busted. Can you say the same?"

"Yeah. I can say that." Jerry kept it in the same astringent tones, denying feeling.

"Okay, 'cause that bunch up there" -- he vaguely indicated a northerly direction -- "are something else. They buddies of yours, wettin' their pants?"

"Lot of dentists in suede? Veterinarians reading Rolling Stone so they know what to say at a buy..."

He got a laugh for his effort; it broke through the instinctive suspicion that came with the trade and would move things along a little quicker.

"Okay ... okay..." the pilot murmured by way of expressing that they understood each other. "They sure as hell pay good. You ought to be doing all right yourself -- I got enough candy in the bird to melt the nose of every fucking actress in Beverly Hills. Coulda brought a lot more but they were kinda pussy about that. Feelin' their way, I guess."

"I still don't like your bringing it right into the airport."

They stopped out in the middle of the field, the wind snapping around them and no living thing in sight. The pilot gave Jerry a genuine Havana and lit a Balkan Sobranie cigarette himself. "Listen, let me tell you how I work. I do my homework. My staff work. The service is good for some things. I was a chopper pilot out there. Then I flew light recon. That's how I got into flying stuff around. Thailand,

Burma, Cambodia. Lot of big people in it out there. Lot of officers. Anyway, I learned to be thorough, okay?"

"You got something to light this thing?" Matches didn't have a chance, but the pilot had a lighter with a wind guard, saying he liked to fly with the windows open. Which came as no surprise.

"Yeah, well, I've come over that border there maybe fifty times with nothing in the bird. Once, some mother must have spotted me along the way because they went over the plane when I got back. But strictly routine. That was thirty trips ago.

Come on, let's get over and get the stuff and I'll convince you by the time we get there. Actually, a man like you, you wouldn't even been seen with me this long if you didn't think it was cool. Anyway, I also bought me a little business over in Beldin there as a cover. I must have taken everybody in town for a plane ride and now they're naming their kids after me. All in a couple months.

"Now, I also smuggle some very respectable goodies -- like that Cuban cigar you're smoking and Canadian whisky and like that -- and everybody including the state troopers or the provincial cops up there thinks it's terrific. They also figure, or anyone would figure, that no dope pilot is gonna risk smuggling chickenshit like that." He smirked at Jerry like a proud member of the chamber of commerce. "Impressed with my business acumen, doctor?"

"Let's get the stuff."

It was handed over in more of those shopping bags from prominent Vancouver stores. "I don't believe in screwing around with false bottoms in luggage and body packs and all that shit. They get the scent and they tear apart everything in sight, anyway. Including you. So what the fuck, right out in plain sight's the thing if you got any goddamn smarts at all."

"We do it the same way." Jerry packed the last of the bags in the trunk of the Porsche.

The pilot had a handshake like a Jaycee, too. "Listen, it's always nice to deal with a pro. It's the fuckin' amateurs screwing up the world. I respect a stand-up cop more than a thief who's a punk, that's how much I hate it. Amateurism!" He ground out his cigarette for emphasis. "See you around, doctor."

He was very chipper as he went back to the plane. Jerry didn't stay to see him take off, but he got a silvery glimpse of the plane making a northward turn as he headed down the gravel road to the highway. Poor sonofabitch, he thought, to have missed a wonderful occasion like World War II.

Con's friends argued and Clyde advised that he hire private counsel, but he refused. He also refused to come into the office to meet with his boss, and patient, long-suffering Clyde had to go to a bar near the Federal Building in order to thrash things out with his prodigal agent. The bar was a hangout for press people and the local pols, a place where a city councilman was treated with all the deference of an international celebrity. His choice of a meeting place suggested that Con felt less than publicly disgraced.

The lights were dim by popular fiat and Clyde had trouble finding his man. Con was in the back, taking advantage of the nearly free "lunch" which was spread out along a counter in tribute to a lost political tradition. "That your lunch or your dinner?" Clyde asked him.

"Both. After all, I'm unemployed."

"Boy, you must be hard up to eat that garbage," Clyde said, dourly regarding piles of pale salami and even paler stacks of processed American cheese. "Hell, you're still getting paid."

"I never exactly been a gourmet, anyway." Con led the way to a relatively isolated booth.

Clyde ordered a vodka on the rocks and got Con a Jack Daniels with which to wash down the "garbage." "I guess you want something or I wouldn't be here risking my career by being seen with the greatest pariah in the history of law enforcement. Jesus Christ, the things you've done..." He shook his head.

"Whatever that thing was you said I am, I believe it. That's why I won't come in and get raked over the coals officially or on your guys' turf. I can't win, I know that. Not in time to get me what I want."

"So what am I supposed to do? What am I here for? And the phrase I really want to hear explained is 'what I want.'"

"What I always wanted, for Christ's sake. To get the shooter of the girl."

"Con-you're the shooter of the girl. You may not be responsible, and you may feel this dealer is, but let's not screw up the facts so bad we end up screwing ourselves. I don't blame you, no one does--well, some people do, obviously. Anyway -- "

"Clyde, I know you can't do anything for me officially, but keep the guys on the hunt for Red Dog. Give them a long leash and we'll bust him for you."

"We'll?"

"What do you think I'm going to do -- take up golf? I hate golf. Build model trains. This suspension is just one more ... I gotta get him or I'll go nuts."

"You take any action while you're on suspension and you'll be subject to criminal charges. You know that. If you kill somebody, it's murder. Why don't we for God's sakes knock this off?" His voice was thin, hoarse, hopeless. "Never mind, you're determined to self-destruct. You went down to Portland to commit suicide, that's the only possible explanation, and when you get your head down it never comes up till you've put it through a wall."

"Does all that mean you'll give me what I want?"

"No. Pragmatically, if this guy was a huge dealer with a big organization, it might pay to break the rules. But he's not, he's just something in your craw at a certain time in your life. He's a symbol that's got all out of proportion, but of what I don't know."

Con weighed that for a moment. "I've got a feeling that explaining it to you wouldn't help."

"I got the same feeling." Clyde stood up. "I hope you've got the decency not to drag the whole goddamned office down with you."

Con could only shrug. He stared into his drink. Clyde went back to the office and started work on reorganizing and reassigning Con's team. All stakeouts were canceled. The file on Red Dog was moved from "Active" to "Outstanding."

On the way up the mountain, Jerry noted that, despite all his precautions, there were signs of his constant passage. The frequent rains didn't help as the earth so easily hardened in forms indicating human presence, sometimes right after you had left. The Porsche had made the worst of it but it continued beyond that point with broken branches, trampled grass and displaced rocks and earth. He thought that he would look for another hiding place after he had dealt this shipment.

It was a hard climb; the humidity was high under a muddy cloud layer and it brought him to a sweat. As he grew closer to the top, he was aware of an odor he assumed was mold or mildew, not unusual for wooded country in that climate. By the time he reached the clearing and stuck the shovel in the ground he was increasingly less able to delude himself; the smell was cloying, overpowering, and it had nothing to do with vegetable matter.

Jerry experienced something very rare for him -- panic. He tried moving around to get away from it, but it followed him everywhere. Standing at the far side of the clearing where it dropped off for several hundred feet, he tried to fix his eyes and mind on the distant prospect of Mount Rainier until he got control. For a full minute his stomach threatened to erupt, but then he got a hold of himself, took off his shirt and wrapped it around his face, forcing himself to breathe through his mouth, and went to work with the shovel.

He piled two or three feet of earth over the spot where he had buried Dennis, in defiance of all his

painstaking security precautions heretofore. By the time exhaustion forced him to quit, it looked like an Indian burial mound. And the odor still pervaded.

"Control ... control," he kept whispering to himself aloud. It had to be an illusion, he thought, neurasthenia, maybe it \_was\_ vegetable matter decaying. In swamps you could see the gas, you could light it. How many people had been terrified by swamp fire or, say, St. Elmo's Fire. Nothing more than selective perception on his part. A little strung out, was all. Sure, or even a dead deer or badger or something animal. A problem to be solved-rationally. That's all. Hypothesis-experimentation-proof-theory. There was nothing else to pray to.

It was getting late and would soon be dark; time was running out along with his energy. He whacked off some branches with the point of the shovel and spread them over and around the mound. Then he took the container with the cocaine and drove back to the farm. He didn't want to, but he couldn't bear the thought of coming back up here to retrieve it.

For the first time in his life as a dealer, Jerry was truly spooked, and he didn't like it. On the drive home he thought about it and it seemed that things had been working differently for him ever since that aborted connection in Portland where the narc had killed girl. He could think of no logical reason for it, there was no sign of outside intervention in his dealing, but there was a feeling.

## Chapter 16

It had been eight days since Con's suspension. The team had not been dispersed as yet, but nothing was being done to save them, either. In fact, Con was staying close to the apartment and, in Badboy's mind, drinking too much. There were other disquieting signs: irascibility, a disinterest in things that normally pleased him and, most importantly, a refusal to deal with the reality of the situation.

Enrique returned to his own apartment feeling depressed after a visit with Con. He lived with his sister and her three children. She had been deserted by her husband because, she believed, she had a junior college education and he had none at all. Badboy had moved them up from Los Angeles so they could function as an economic unit with himself as a surrogate father. It had worked out well. Of course it was tough living up to his street name while functioning as a secret paterfamilias.

"What's for dinner?" he asked his sister coming in, slapping her on the bottom as he went by.

"Hey, Ricky, cut that out." She was working at the stove and turned to give him a mock scowl.

The mere sight of her or the kids always made him feel good, no matter what was happening at work. "You got no man, and things like that cheer a woman up."

"There's a limit to what you can do. Dinner is \_chili verde,\_ beans, rice, and all that stuff. Los Angeles style."

He picked up the newspaper and started perusing it. "What the hell's 'Los Angeles style'? How's that different from Sonora or Seattle?"

"Los Angeles style's when \_I\_ make it. Oh, you had a phone call."

"Who from?"

"Wouldn't say. Latino. Number's by the phone."

All Badboy had to hear was "wouldn't say" and he started sniffing the air. The phone was kept in his bedroom so he could have privacy for business. Lately, with his oldest niece at twelve, that was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

He recognized the area code immediately; the call was from New Mexico. He sat on the bed and punched it up. His sister brought him a vodka on the rocks, the usual before-dinner unwinder. He went and locked the door behind her before completing the call. When someone answered at the other end they were told that Ojos Blancos was calling. Someone murmured, "Bueno," and hung up. Badboy waited on the bed sipping his vodka for ten minutes until his man returned the call.

"Hey, Esseeeee." The voice was from \_La Vida Loca,\_ a fellow member of the White Fence gang in Badboy's East L.A. past. "I have something very big, mano."

"I'll tell \_you\_ that, Carbon."

"No, it is. Let me tell you, you are going to make a real score, mano. You want Victor?"

"The Department sure as hell does. I don't know what's in it for us, a thousand miles away. And you, what are you doin' this for?"

"I don't know, man, Victor's lookin' at me kinda funny lately. I know that look. I seen it before and I don't like it."

"Okay."

"Listen, the connection's going down thirty-forty miles from you. Less, maybe. Now you are interested?"

"Is Victor coming up here?" Enrique was beginning to feel the tug of real excitement.

"I don't know that, but it's the kind of thing you could bust him up good, anyway. It's bigtime,

baby."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Coke. Pure as baby milk. We got the distribution."

"How much is involved?"

"Who knows, shit? He says it's like all the white in the world. Brings it from Canada. Five keys to start."

"Who says? Victor?"

"No, the dealer. He's all alone. Young guy, drives a Porsche.."

Badboy remembered that someone had said there was a Porsche with a man sitting in it a block or two away from that motel in Portland. At the time they hadn't given it much credence. The assumption had always been that Red Dog simply hadn't shown up, not that that he was there watching them. Even Captain Jack hadn't known that.

"..Very cool dude," the informant went on. "Too much cool, you know, like Anglo, cold, like a dead fish. I don't like him, but Victor says he's smart. He don't look tough to me, neither, but Victor says he's real tough. Victor knows."

Badboy was beginning to hope again. "No name on the dealer?"

"Not yet. I'll try to get it."

"When does it go down?"

"Soon. I call you. But I want twenty-five big ones, five for each key, man. If we are going out of business here, I got to have something good."

"Tax-free, baby."

"I don't testify."

"No way. Not if we can get 'em holding. If Victor doesn't come, we'll turn someone who does. I promise you."

"It might be me, so watch who you shoot, eh? We got a deal?"

"You know we do. It's a fuckin' fiesta, man, but I'll tell you somethin'-we want that dealer more."

"No shit? Hokay, you got him. I call you."

"So long, baby. Stay cool. I can taste this one."

Anselmo hung up before he did. A good thing, in a minute he would have been telling the informer exactly how much they did want this dealer and that would have been bad business. His sister called him to dinner but he didn't answer. He could hear the kids yelling in the dining room. He dialed Freddie D.'s message service and started a trace on him, picked up the vodka and took it with him as he headed through the kitchen.

"Hey, where you going? Dinner's on the table."

"Jesus, you sound more like a wife every day."

"I'm beginning to remember what it feels like, too."

"I'm sorry, honey..." And he was gone.

Freddie was having dinner with a girl in an elegant rooftop restaurant in downtown Seattle, a lovely clear evening, only slightly cool so that the heat lamps were on. A bright red and orange sunset for entertainment. Enrique was underdressed for the establishment and had to show his ID to get in. Freddie's date, a sleek and coppery black girl who looked as if she might be a model or an actress, was even less happy to see him than the maitre d'. Badboy laid on a lot of Latin courtliness, even if it didn't go with his face, in making his excuses. It didn't wash. Freddie excused himself and they went to the

bar, his arm around Badboy's shoulders.

"Hey, you know, this gorgeous thing is always bitchin' about how my work interferes with our relationship -- whatever the hell that is -- and here you come. And it costs a week's salary to garbage up in this joint, man. Shit."

"I think I got 'im, Freddie. Put Con right back in the saddle."

They sat at the bar and ordered. Freddie glanced wistfully at where his girlfriend was glaring at them over her Kir, then turned back to Enrique. "Yeah? Well, life's been kind of peaceful for a couple of weeks."

"C'mon, man. I never worked with better and neither did you."

"What have you got up your ass?"

Badboy described the phone call from New Mexico.

"Who the hell is this guy?" Freddie asked, surprised. "Since when have you been running informants on your own?"

"He's an old companero, a bodyguard mostly, and odd-job man for this big organization in Santa Fe. You've heard of Victor? They move a lot of junk. This Anselmo, he was given to me a few months ago and I remembered we were together as kids in L.A. He was busted on something heavy and he's got priors, so he was going up for like life plus twenty, you know. Anyway, somebody turned him and handed him over to the Agency to run.

They sent me down for a meet 'cause I'm Latino. I mean, I'm Chicano and he's Salvadoran or Cuban or somethin' but we all eat the same beans, right? Anyhow, this dude and me got 'rapport'-how do you like that?-and I end up runnin' him. All of a sudden, an hour ago, like there was a God, he offers to hand us Victor on a big rock candy mountain."

"You interrupted my dinner for that?"

"No, man, the dealer who's delivering, I got a good feeling it's Red Dog."

"A 'feeling'? You got a 'feeling'?"

"No, somebody told me, inside." He tapped his chest. "Maybe there is a God and I haven't wasted all this time as a Catholic, but it all sounded like him."

"What you have got is diarrhea of the mouth. What the hell do you want me to do between the soup course and the entree, you crazy beaner?"

"The Bureau chief for the Southwest, he wants Victor as much as we want Red Dog. Victor's a very classy dude, see, and the chief down there he saw Victor eating in a restaurant he couldn't afford himself, most expensive stuff on the menu, and it gave him heartburn. The chief, I mean. That's the story I got, anyway."

"You still haven't told me what I'm supposed to do. And that girl over there, she's bigger than you, she's going to take you apart."

Badboy smiled, looking at her. "Oh, man, I should be so lucky. But what I want is you should call that Bureau chief, name's Dunbar, and tell him how we're going to give him Victor's head on a platter, with a fuckin' apple in the mouth, man, and all he's got to do is fix it with D.C. to get Con back on duty and the team all together."

"When?"

"Now. When did you think? Con's dying, man. He's sitting around all day taxiderming himself. Now."

"Why me call him?" Freddie's voice was taking on a rising querulousness. "Why don't you call him? Or go down there. You're the one with the snitch who knows the whole story."

"Because I can't talk like you can. You're such a beautiful talker, Freddie. You can do it, man."

Freddie groaned and started digging for change. The girl got up and left while he was in the phone booth but he was beyond caring.

It was memories of Anselmo, what he saw as his hostile carriage and rapacious eyes that, ironically, suggested to Jerry that he had better hire a shotgun. If he was ripped off for five keys it would finish him as a dealer, always assuming the unlikely, that he lived. Of course there was no way of knowing how many Cubans might show up, but at least there would be someone covering his back who was dependable and had not the slightest aversion to killing.

He met Hurley, heavyset, late forties-early fifties, in a little coffee shop within sight of the electrified fence that surrounded the man's place of business. You could occasionally hear one of his guard dogs snarling through the glass. He was the only person in Jerry's whole wide experience of the last few years who had a brush cut, stiff back, wore a suit and tie and carried himself generally with a certain probity. He always reminded Jerry of something left over from the Nixon inner circle. However, you would never think of pointing this out to the man since he had zip humor.

What he would like to have known was why the man did it, because it was rumored that he sometimes took on jobs for various mobsters which were less gentle and more direct than riding shotgun. If it was for the money, his lifestyle didn't reflect it; he wore cheap, ill-fitting suits, drove an old Chevrolet. Only his watch was expensive, and it was probably for field purposes. Excitement? He never showed any. Did he have motives, prejudices, beliefs, like other people? Did he have something like the farm? He wouldn't say. The little American flag pin in his lapel wasn't much help in sorting it out.

"How much is it this run? I mean, how much for me?"

"Five big ones if there's no trouble. If there is, the survivors will negotiate." If Jerry expected to loosen him up with that, he failed.

Hurley's voice was as gray and turbid as the sky that hung over Seattle on this late September day. "How much dope and what kind?"

No use kidding a pro, Jerry thought. "Five kilos of high-grade coke."

"Ten. Ten grand."

"Hey, we're talking about a day's work. A day and a night. I've had no threats, no heat, probably just routine."

"Then what do you need me for, Cromelin? Buy a punk. Never any shortage of them."

"No, wait a minute, let's go back. I wasn't trying to con you, Hurley. Just trying to establish a little perspective. It's a bunch of Cubans coming for the pickup. I don't trust Cubans. Anyway, I want you."

"I never bargain. You know me. I have to take a day away from the shop."

Jerry didn't know what that had to do with it, but he nodded agreement. He made himself feel better about the extra five grand by remembering that Hurley's square appearance was a bonus when you were carrying.

"Give me twenty-four hours' notice. I bring my own equipment, like always." He stood and went out without saying good-bye.

Jerry watched him, wondering if he had any way of looking around for a tail without looking around for a tail. As far as he could see, Hurley had not even checked out the half-dozen people in the coffee shop. Maybe it was something you learned in the totally hostile jungle environment of Vietnam. Jerry took his own look, obvious but thorough, before he drove away from that place. There was no one.

There was something Hurley had not told him, mainly because intrusions into his life by the

authorities had no more impact on him than if the gooks had lobbed a grenade at him and missed. The point being, they missed and he had lived. Lived to get them another time. Unless they got him first. In other words he planned nothing and lived only for the moment and was happy that way. There was no future for Hurley, that was his strength and his weakness.

A few days before two federal narcs had come to his place of business and asked if he had an employee named 'Hurley.' When he said no he was telling the truth because he wasn't an employee, he owned the place. Under another name, of course, 'Kleinschmidt,' but the only place that appeared was in the Department of Records where he had gotten his business license. They had asked to see his employee records and he gladly cooperated. He had carried out the whole subterfuge with supreme confidence because, the truth was, he didn't deal narcotics.

Con had received the news sitting in his kitchen with his bare feet up on the table, wearing only shorts, a sweatshirt, and a three-day growth of beard. He was drinking bourbon straight and reading a detective novel. His front door had been unlocked and the apartment was a mess when Enrique and Freddie bustled in some forty-eight hours after the latter's phone call to the FBI's Southwest regional director.

The jefe listened attentively to their account and when they had finished swung his bare feet to the floor heavily. "Good," he said. "Maybe I should shave."

The two looked at each other. "I thought you'd be excited, go through the roof," Freddie said.

Con poured the rest of his whiskey into a dish-filled sink. Then he scooped up the dirty dishes and dumped them into the trash container. Enrique and Freddie shared another, darker look.

"Hey, you okay?" Badboy asked. "We're back in business!"

Freddie, watching him throwing away the crockery, muttered, "I liked him better as a drunk. At least I understood him."

Con grinned. "You bastards think you pulled me out of this, don't you? You think I would have stayed drunk and stupid the rest of my life and let it all go down the toilet. Well, you're full of shit."

Freddie said, "This Con I understand."

"I always wanted to build a fireplace in here."

"In the kitchen?" she asked without interest.

"Sure. I love that. It's already old-fashioned, and that would make it complete. A fireplace big enough so you could cook in it."

"Oh, great. Wild boar, maybe."

"No, I mean it. I'd love to have a fireplace in every room. In this climate, why not?"

"Con, you don't live here anymore, remember?"

"I'd still be willing to do it."

"That wouldn't be a good idea. You'd be around ... more than you ought to be around."

"Well, it was just an idea."

"Not a very good one." She addressed herself to the dinner for a moment, but Con could see that she had something she wanted to ask. In a moment she turned back. "Did you just come over here for dinner?"

"What's so funny about that? I come here for dinner a lot." He sounded irritated and wished he didn't.

"I don't believe you. We were married a long time. You're in a real good mood, but there's something else, too."

"I don't know." He whistled between his teeth for a minute. "If there is, let's save it for after

dinner."

Later, on the front porch, with the kids watching television in the living room, Con told her what it had been like for him the last few weeks. "But we're getting close. We'll get him now."

"How can you be so sure?"

"You just know in your gut. Certain things come together, certain other things have to happen." He sucked on a bottle of Oly, having put himself on a beer-only diet.

Marie, who scarcely drank, was allowing herself a rare brandy and soda. Somehow, in Con's mind, it added intimacy to the moment. He went on to tell her with contrived casualness that he intended to kill this dealer when he caught up with him. Then he sat back and waited for her outrage.

"Is that what you wanted to tell me? It's funny, I never knew you to go around asking people what to do."

"Is that what I'm doing?" He was thoughtful for a while and she waited him out. He confessed, "I told Father Santucci, too."

"Your buddy, the boozier priest. What did he say?"

"Well, you know, he didn't exactly approve."

"No wonder. What did you think I'd do?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I forget what you're like. But I still wanted to know. I guess you could say I care what you think, even if I don't have the right."

"Con ... he might kill you instead."

"What would that mean to you?"

"Oh, come on!"

"Yeah, I guess it was kind of sneaky."

"Never mind whatever feeling there still is between us, there are two children in there who love you. And they need a father. So please ... be careful."

"What about the dealer?"

She turned and looked him in the eyes. Her voice was calm and carried a sense of continuity, as if she had never had any doubts about what she was about to say. "I don't care what happens to him. I don't care if you kill him as long as you don't get caught at it. Maybe I've been a policeman's wife too long."

"What about the law? I've always been a part of it, supported it. Now I'm going to take it into my own hands. You know, vigilante stuff."

"Well, why?"

He thought a minute. Inside, he could hear the kids laughing at something on the television and found himself wondering if it was a suitable program. But Marie would know, she had always been on top of things like that. "I guess the main thing is, I know he can never be tried for the girl I killed. Somebody has to take the fall for that."

"You already have," she said, not unkindly.

He grunted, turned away and looked off, the thousand yard stare.

"He's a narcotics dealer, you say. A big one. I've got two kids in that room there that I love more than anything, more than any principles. If the law was working, okay, fine. But it isn't anymore. I don't care about a narcotics dealer, I can't see any reason why he should go on living. I don't have any religious or moral feelings about that. He's evil. Everybody goes around saying that nobody's really evil anymore, they're just misunderstood or maladjusted or something, but I still think some things are evil. That certainly is. So I don't care if you kill him, I just don't want you or anyone innocent to be hurt,

that's all. And I'll bet most women, who have children at least, would feel the same way."

"Yeah, it's tribal. But I never heard you express anything like this."

"You never asked before, did you?"

The phone rang in the kitchen and Marie went to answer it. It was Enrique for Con. He had received word from Anselmo that they were on their way, four of them, but without Victor, heavily armed, in a van, and would arrive in the town of Arwyn the following night.

Jerry sat on the front porch, studying an AAA map of Arwyn and its surroundings and sipping Vouvray from a bottle. He marked off the roads he wanted with a felt pen. His usual thoroughness would be nothing compared to the precautions he would take this time. Another advantage of using Hurley as shotgun was that the man's patience and caution matched his own. He looked up at the morose sky hanging over the valley and wondered if it would rain and if it did what that would do to his game plan.

Suzanne came out onto the porch carrying the boy. She pointed him toward the barn and launched him, calling out, "Don't go too far now, babe. We're going to town. I'll buy you an ice cream."

The child gave no indication of having heard; as always, his legs churned in the direction of the animals.

Suzanne came back. Jerry was aware of some unusual lines in her face and thought it denoted concern. "What's happening with you?"

"Nothing. I think I'll go into Seattle. What time are you going?"

"After lunch. I have to pick up -- I'm taking some protection."

"I'm glad."

"What's that mean?"

"I just have bad vibes, Jerry. About this one, even though I don't know that much about it. I can't figure why I'm worried. Should I be?"

"Just another deal, babe. Takin' care of business, is all. There's a lot more at stake this time, but the procedure's the same. So take it easy, huh?" He gave her arm a pat, which belied the words.

"Is it really that big?"

"It's the pay-off and beginning on our dream." He shot her a smile that was intended to be reassuring. "Start thinking of a new name for the capital when we buy the state of Washington. Maybe we'll call it 'Suzanne.'"

"How long will you be gone?"

"Late tonight or early tomorrow. Why?"

"I don't know. I guess I got used to having Dennis here while you were away. I miss him."

Jerry looked off at the hills, his hills. Then he shifted his gaze to the boy playing by the barn. He did not look in the direction of the mountain where Dennis was buried.

## Chapter 17

"You've tidied up your cell," Freddie noted, looking around.

Barbarossa, coming in behind him, asked, "What's for breakfast?"

Enrique, behind him, answered, "What do you think? Scrambled eggs with sausage, and beer."

"If you don't like it," Con told him from the stove where he was cutting up the sausage, "bring your own \_huevos rancheros\_."

Roy had rejoined the team. He hulked in like a great dimpled bear, puffing on a cigar that would have killed most people if smoked before breakfast. "Listen, I missed these breakfast meetings. Where I been, over in Fargo, the man was serving cocoa and herb tea during briefings. He couldn't drink the tea himself 'cause he was a Mormon, so he thought he was doing us a big favor. I was warned to not even use 'rough language,' he didn't like it. I thought I was dead and gone to hell."

"Hey, wait a minute," Con said, "aren't you supposed to be covering the phone service?"

"There's someone there. City cop named Geller. I know him, he's competent."

Con frowned. "Hey, Ricky, watch these eggs for a second." He came over to Roy and in effect took him aside, although there was no actual attempt to disguise what he was saying. "Listen, I have a reason for wanting to know where Red Dog lives before we bust him. God knows, it's a little late for that -- we're down to the last day, probably. But I'd feel a hell of a lot better if you were the guy there."

Roy shrugged. "Sure, Con, if you feel strong about it. Any chance I can get down there and get in on the kill tonight?"

"Maybe. We've got a chopper to work with. Anyway, stay for breakfast. It beats cocoa."

Con had some news: He had gone down to the City Clerk's office and gone through the licensing records for security firms-and found a small one owned by a man named Kleinschmidt. Cursing mightily, Barbarossa smacked the table and spilled everything on it, the guys jumping away. Freddie D. actually blushed. They had interviewed the owner. Con said that without a description there was no way they could have recognized the man.

Badboy jumped up and pumped the air in his enthusiasm, "We got all the pricks in a row, men, how 'bout we go bust their chops!"

"He's not there," Sean said matter-of-factly. "Didn't come in this morning. Be gone awhile, he said."

"Aw shit, I could feel my hands 'round that motherfucker's throat, Badboy said. What now?"

"We may not know where he is, but we sure as hell know where he's going. But don't get careless with this bastard. He's a pro, been in combat, and he's a real banana, too, and he'll be heavily armed. I don't see him doing time. He'll go down first."

"And there's four fuckin' Cubans coming, man," Barbarossa said. "They do love our weapons, they'll have enough ordinance for an army."

"Knives between their teeth?" Freddie speculated.

"Listen," Badboy warned, one of 'em is my \_companionero\_, okay? Try not to blow him away before the trial."

"How will I know him? You all look alike."

"He'll have 'snitch' written across his forehead, asshole."

"Is this 'Victor' coming?" Barbarossa wanted to know.

"Probably not," Enrique answered him, "so we'll just have to take his dope down to New Mexico

and ram it up his ass. If you cowboys leave any witnesses alive."

Con said, "I don't care about Victor."

"He's big, man. He's a trophy. We nail him down and you got no more problems. I mean, Clyde's got an order in for divers to find your goddamn carbine, that's how much the fences are mending."

"Ricky, I appreciate what you did for me, you know I do. Now that we got here, I want you all to understand something. You play it straight, the way it ought to be done, strictly regulation. There's no point in blowing it for yourselves, so if I'm brought up on charges for anything I won't have you lying for me. In fact, I expect you to deny me, to turn your backs on whatever I've done."

There was a lot of complaint and demurral but Con raised his voice over it, "I mean it, goddammit. It's an order and I'll kick the shit out of any sonofabitch who disobeys it. Nobody's going down with me if that's what happens. And nobody gets between me and my man, understood??"

Freddie and Barbarossa took an old van belonging to the Department. Con and Badboy went down in the Mustang. Con insisted on stopping at the office.

"I'll come up with you," Badboy said. "There's somethin' I want to get in my desk."

"I'll get it for you."

"I want to use the john..."

"We need gas. You can go there. What is it you want out of your desk?"

Badboy got the idea and said to forget it. Con went into the building carrying an athletic tote bag. He didn't go into his office, but into the vault instead. As an officer, he had access to stocks of confiscated narcotics. He made certain there was no one around and then withdrew six ounces of high-grade cocaine without signing it out. It had been seized originally on a Panamanian freighter in the harbor. Now it went to Arwyn in the tote bag and Badboy asked no more questions.

When Roy saw the slim blond girl with a little boy in a carrying chair on her back going into the building, he lost several moments because of his inability to believe in that kind of luck or coincidence.

His viscera billowing with excitement, he went in and took the stairs three at a time. Outside the office, he hesitated again; he didn't know the geography inside, didn't know anything about his quarry. If it was tiny, forcing them together and she was savvy, it could blow the surveillance before they even got out of the building. While he was juggling his choices in his mind, the door opened and the blonde came out. Roy stepped around a corner and waited until she was out of sight. He didn't expect any cooperation from the people inside, and in that he wasn't disappointed.

He had to hurry, the girl moved better than some animals he had hunted and she was parked nearby. He slammed through the door as if it was a raid. All the heads at the switchboard spun around in panic. When the door hit the wall, it was with sufficient force to crack the window in it, making a sound like a rifle shot. The heads spun again to look for the danger in this new quarter. The manager behind the desk was just putting a card back into the file when Roy grabbed at it.

"Gimme that!"

"Who the hell are you?" she snarled.

"Federal agent."

She waved it around in the air, evading his grasp like a butterfly. Roy grabbed hold of the iron grille that comprised the top half of her window, sundered the plaster in which it was set and ripped it loose with a horrible explosive sound, then threw it clanging onto the floor.

The gentlemen inside were all screaming by now and diving under desks or running into the back. The manager stood paralyzed by the violence in front of her, until Roy's other hand—he had pulled out the grille with his right—came across the counter top and darted in to catch the butterfly by the wrist. His grip was instantly tight enough to pop the card out of her hand. He ignored her scream and caught it

before it fluttered to the counter, and read it. Fifty-seven dollars and thirty-five cents for service during the month of September had been paid on this day to the Kersey account.

"You know who she is, don't you?"

"Blow it out your ass!"

She had another little stub of a cigarette in her mouth. Roy yanked it out with his free hand, threw it past her head, and with the other twisted her wrist, bringing her halfway out of her chair. "I don't have any time -- tell me!"

She told him because she had to, or lose some physical part of herself. She was too angry, too venomous to cry out now and there wasn't anyone to help her, anyway. "Yes! That little blond bitch, yes! Suzanne something. Lives out of town with her old man, I think on a farm."

Roy let go of her and showed a surprisingly amiable smile all around. "Thanks, darling," he said as he went out the door.

Behind him, he heard the usual imprecations about fascism and Gestapo and storm troopers and the like. He thought this time he might have earned them.

When he hit the street, he had an awful moment when he was sure he had missed her; she was nowhere in sight. Then, by sheer luck, she drove past him in the pickup on her way out. Roy ran to his car and followed. Within three blocks, he had her well in view.

Con and Badboy were almost to Arwyn when they received the relay of Roy's first message that he was tagging the suspect, Red Dog's woman, into the countryside northeast of Seattle. Not wanting to leave it to the imperfections of cell phones they had arranged to utilize the State police transmitters.

"Irish Leader to Zed-King-Forty. I want anything on those transmissions from R-King-Twenty immediately. Most urgent. Over."

"Wilco, Irish Leader."

"Any word on that chopper?"

"Ah ... yeah. Affirmative. In place at the station in Linden. Five minutes' ETA from your operational area."

"Ten-four."

Badboy was driving so Con put his head back on the rest and closed his eyes. His blood was running high but he still bore some of the ravages of the two-week drunk.

"Why you so interested in Roy and Red Dog's cooze? We're gonna burn him right here in Arwyn. Unless you figure my man's smokin' us. In which case there's gonna be a dead snitch on the streets of old Santa Fe some morning."

"Naw, it'll happen. Arwyn's Red Dog's style, out in the countryside, some big scene going that'll give him cover. You watch, he'll hand it off to these dudes right out in front of everyone. That's also his style. He's probably worrying about Victor's boys ripping him off."

"Smart gringo. But you still haven't answered me."

"I don't know the answer myself. I just figure as good as he is, we could lose him. Only I don't intend to lose him -- ever. I want to be able to go wherever he goes to ground."

"When I called you at Marie's the other night, I got a feeling. I don't know what, but is it possible you and your old lady might get back together? She's a good woman, man."

"I'm sure she appreciates the endorsement. I don't hate her myself, but I doubt she'd want to go the course again."

"That other broad you're going with, that lawyer, what's her story?"

"Christ, you're such a Latin. They're either Madonnas or whores to you. But to answer your

question, no, she's not the problem. In fact, that's 'Dear John' time."

"Oh, yeah? No kidding?"

"She's a very bright woman. Very sexy, too. And I like her. But we don't think alike. For one thing, she hates cops. They're animals to her. She doesn't say that, too polite, maybe doesn't even know it, but it's like in her blood. The same way she's got to love criminals." He rubbed his face. "I don't know, Ricky. Why? My old man worked on an assembly line all his life. Obey the law, love your country, and all that stuff. Maybe some of it's garbage, but not all of it. And these people in the movies or lawyers or journalists, hate us for it. Down underneath. They think we're racists and sadists and fascists and all that shit."

"You told me, man, we ain't never going to be popular. Especially narcs. Everybody's shooting something in this fucking country."

"Look, some asshole caps six people, takes three hostages, holes up. The SWAT squad gets called in. First thing these highly educated people want to know is why don't they just go in and get him. They've seen that on TV, right? They say they're cowards if they don't. If a citizen gets hurt or killed, they say the SWAT guys don't know their business, they're reckless or whatever and ought to be done away with. If the asshole comes out shooting and they cancel his ticket, they're Gestapo. Should have shot the gun out of his hands. I read in New York, some guy's got a gun to a hostage's head. Cop pretends he's a lawyer or priest or something, gets in close, blows the bastard away, saves the hostage. ACLU lodges a complaint. How do you figure it?"

"How long's this stuff been eating at you?"

"Long time, I guess."

"All that boozing you were doing there. That wasn't just the suspension, was it? Or even the girl."

"It was everything." They were entering Arwyn and both men showed a professional curiosity about the terrain. After a while, Con tied it off. "You know what we are, Ricky? We're the new niggers."

Roy backed the car off the crest of the hill, out of sight of anyone in the valley below. Reaching into the glove compartment, he took out a pair of binoculars and a backup gun, which he stuck into his belt under his coat. Maybe Red Dog was over in Arwyn and maybe he wasn't. He could have friends, could have some way of guarding this place. It was remote enough to suggest an inclination to self-defense.

He got out, looked around carefully, listened for a while and then moved to the crest, hiding himself in a stand of pines. Suzanne had gone into the house, but the boy, naked now, was playing near the barn. It seemed chilly to Roy and there was something between a fog and an overcast settling into the valley; he wondered about the child, thinking he would have had his own zippered into a heavy jacket.

He squatted, had a cigarette and waited. No one came up the road in either direction. The only vehicle in sight was the pickup truck he had followed all the way from Seattle. Suzanne came out and collected some heavy logs for a fire; in Roy's experience that meant there was no man around, although, he reminded himself, with these people that didn't necessarily follow.

It was almost five o'clock, and with these weather conditions, the light was starting to slip away. He made his decision, called the Highway Patrol, and asked them to notify his crew in Arwyn that he had found Red Dog's home and the woman was there, probably alone.

The dusty Volkswagen van carrying Anselmo, a Cuban, and two Chicanos came into Arwyn from the south, moving fast, shortly after four o'clock. Freddie and Barbarossa, who had been cruising the town for half an hour, had stopped their own van for gas and were standing by the Coke machine when they spotted their quarry passing.

"Gotta be," Freddie said. "Van's the right color, two Latinos inside -- can't be many Latinos around here."

"Sure there are. Farm workers for the orchards and stuff, lots of them. And I only saw two, anyway."

"How many do you expect to see in the driver's seat, for Christ's sake. Did you get a read the license?"

"Nope." Barbarossa tossed the empty Coke bottle into a trash container and went for another one. "I wish they had cream soda. Dr. Brown's. You can't get it out here."

"You get any bigger, you'll need mooring lines."

They were in no hurry. Arwyn was small; it wouldn't do to start tagging Victor's people this early in the game, not when one of them was an informant. The station attendant, watching them surreptitiously from inside, had his own reasons for wanting them to be on their way; both were passing as scuzzes, Barbarossa favoring the motorcycle gang member persona that went well with his plethora of hair and bulging pectorals (albeit the tattoos were decals) and Freddie, angular and ill-fed, looking more comfortable as a street freak.

"You know something," Barbarossa commented, "we both got the same-colored vans, them and us."

"Oh, shit, you know you're right. I didn't have to get brown, they had a green one and a black one in the pool."

"That college you went to, what did they teach?"

"They had a course in van selection, but how could I know? I'm sorry, big fella."

"If things get crazy, I hope our buddies blow up the right brown van."

"We'd better give Con a call and let them know we've spotted these gentlemen."

The Santa Fe contingent drove straight into town and found themselves in the middle of a civic parade, complete with high school bands and the ladies of the Eastern Star. They had nothing else to do so they got out and watched it, leaving their weapons in the vehicles in case of a roust. At six they would wait at a particular phone booth in the center of town for a call from Jerry that would set up the rendezvous. Freddie and Barbarossa caught up with them at the parade and ended by watching it from the other side of the street.

"All I know is he said a black Porsche, Washington plates."

"Why the hell couldn't he get the license plate?" Con complained, increasingly irritable as they approached crunch time. "What kind of half-ass CI is he?"

"Maybe he didn't know he was going to snitch. Or maybe he figured it was stolen or dummied anyway. How the hell do I know -- he didn't, that's all."

"He's your snitch."

"We wouldn't be here without him, boss."

They had been cruising the town in a grid pattern for two hours, widening the perimeters gradually. And now the parade was slashing through the pattern and tying them up on little side streets full of small stores and garages. Both men were over-stimulated and showing it.

"I don't know, man, I hope he's coming." Badboy said. Con didn't answer. Badboy looked at a photograph of Hurley, trying to evoke something from it.

"We haven't even seen a black Porsche," Con reminded him.

"How many people in this dumb little town you think's gonna own one?" Badboy said. "Maybe he brought the family car. Which is a pickup and there's a couple hundred of those."

They pulled over to the curb and Con announced he would work the shops on the block. Enrique stayed in the car with the radio. Con went into a hardware store and chatted with the owner about what kind of fishing lures worked best for local conditions, which was a reasonable approach since both Badboy and he were dressed for the sport and they had a car full of rods and tackle.

"I guess you must know most everybody in town."

"Yeah, I guess most of them."

"I bet you've had a lot of strangers in here today."

"Nope. Just you." The shopkeeper narrowed his eyes in a caricature of shrewdness. "Who you lookin' for? You the Fish and Game warden?"

"Forget it," Con said on the way out.

When he got out on the street, he was surprised to see Enrique coming toward him. "Hey, what about the radio?"

The Chicano's eyes were gleaming with excitement. "Roy's got her. He followed her. It's a farm in the hills about forty-five miles from here. It's real hidden, nobody around."

"Who's there now?"

"Just the girl and the kid."

"No sign of Red Dog?"

"He doesn't think so."

"Why doesn't he know?" Con demanded.

"Because he's sitting on a mountain in the fog with a pair of binoculars. Jesus, \_jefe!\_"

"Okay, okay -- no sign at all?"

"Tire tracks around the place. Small, could be from a Porsche. Give him his orders and he'll go down there and bust her ass and then we'll know."

Con thought a minute, looking off in the direction of the parade, drawn perhaps by four trombones earnestly playing "Seventy-six Trombones" on the march. "No, I don't want that. Tell him to get some backup, if he hasn't already, and then wait for ... I don't know, but wait for orders."

"Why wait? C'mon, man, let's go in there. Maybe Red Dog's hiding in the cellar. Maybe we'll find something about what's going down here that we ought to know."

Con's voice took on a certain edge. "Tell him what I told you to tell him. He's to let anybody go in there, but nobody comes out. Also, have somebody check the titles on that land and find out everything there is to know about it. Construction permits, the whole thing."

"He's already got it started. But it's getting late in the day. Everybody's closed."

"You know something? He's going to have a name. A real name. No more Red Dog. Funny..."

"I'll miss him," Badboy said.

Jerry and Hurley had been in to reconnoiter Arwyn briefly earlier in the day, leaving twenty minutes before Con and Enrique's arrival. Then they doubled back three miles northwest of town to a motel consisting of clapboard cabins that suggested the Great Depression. They took their weapons inside to clean them. Hurley had brought an Army .45-caliber Colt automatic pistol and an Uzi he said he had bought from a Secret Service man. Jerry read an old paperback copy of Future Shock stretched out on a soiled patchwork bedspread and Hurley watched television, soap operas and news shows, for the better part of four hours.

Jerry was grateful for Hurley's cool professionalism, admired it as companion to his own. If he had hired some ordinary hoodlum as shotgun, the man would probably have spent a long gloomy afternoon like this getting drunk or shooting up. He settled down to concentrate on the book but it was difficult.

He thought about asking Hurley to turn off the TV, but he decided it might sound as if he was nervy. Meditation had helped him wait in the past, but he rejected that for the same reason. Also, Hurley having spent time in Vietnam, it might have negative connotations for him and Jerry needed the man's total respect going into the next few hours.

"You don't mind waiting, do you?" he asked casually.

"Huh-uh. I been in places, I waited in places you wouldn't believe. Jungle, for instance, where you were gonna bushwhack guys with a lot of savvy. Jungle rot's like mother's milk to them, tough little bastards. But anyway, you couldn't move for hours. The heat and the stink and things crawling on you and flying in your eyes and you couldn't move even if an arm was cramped till you thought it was gonna fall off. That's waitin'."

Jerry thought for a while before he asked, "Tell me something. Why do you hire yourself out to dealers? You fought in Vietnam, you were in an elite group -- you must know people like me were back here waving Cong flags. You wear a flag pin in your lapel. I figure that means something."

Hurley turned to him slowly, in a way that was intended to drive home his point. "Listen, would I ever ask you why you were dealing? I can't believe you go around asking questions like that." He turned back to a game show, but added, "Anyways, what's more American than making a pile?"

Jerry's face flushed; he couldn't remember when he had laid himself open to anyone or when he had been spoken to like that. But he had broken with his own style, his code, and had deserved it. His real regret was that he didn't know why.

He had that oppressive feeling again, not unlike claustrophobia, and wished he didn't believe in instincts. A longing for the farm set in, for safety, for his family, but he fought against it and beat it back with sheer hatred for the idea of his own vulnerability. At six he was free to go out to the phone booth in the parking lot and call Anselmo on his car phone.

The phone rang several times without anyone answering and Jerry felt his neck muscles tighten. Perhaps he had dialed incorrectly. He tried again. This time Anselmo jumped back in the van and snapped it up instantly, "Bueno."

"There's a place called Samuel Taylor Park just east of downtown. There's a baseball field there with stands and everything. In fact, there'll be a game on tonight. On the far side of it, away from the field, is a street called Olive. Park in the middle of it on the north side, on the park side. Nine o'clock sharp -- Yankee time. On the nose. And we'll come to you. Any questions?" The "we'll" was calculated to raise the specter of phantom guards out in the dark somewhere.

"Why don't we get us a motel and make the hand-off without a million fuckin' civilians looking at us?"

"It's safer this way. For all of us." He knew Anselmo would draw the correct conclusion -- that his real concern was for a rip-off and a public setting for the exchange would mitigate against it. "Wait an hour for us, pretend to watch the game." He hung up.

Jerry stood in the parking lot for a few moments, looking around, weighing an idea that had tempted him for the last few anxious hours. He made his decision on the way back to the cabin.

The office of the State Police in the nearby town of Linden received a call at six-thirty. A Spanish-accented voice singsonged, "Message for Badboy. Meet's nine o'clock. Place, Taylor Park on Olive Street. You understand?"

The operator, who had been briefed and was waiting for the call, said she did and handed off the message to her watch commander. Within a few minutes Con got it on the car radio. That was followed almost immediately by word that Roy was in place with four State Police, the situation at the farm was unchanged and Red Dog's real name was probably Gerald M. DeForest.

Suzanne had built a fire against the dampness insinuating itself into the valley. She and the boy had

dinner on the rug in front of it; goat cheese, apples, three kinds of nuts, dates dipped in honey, black bread and rose hip tea, which the boy had been drinking since he was a few months old. Linda Ronstadt was appropriately bucolic on the generator-operated tape machine. Suzanne wanted to feel, to use one of her favorite words, "peaceful," but that state eluded her. She thought she might smoke a joint after dinner, perhaps read one of the Zen masters.

The boy fell asleep midway through dinner and she decided to leave him where he lay huddled. She moved away to light an oil lamp when the dog began to howl out in front of the house. She went to the door and called to it to stop but it went on. Moving farther onto the porch, she could make out the dog's silhouette; it was pointing toward the top of the hill where the road entered the valley.

There was nothing there for human eyes, save the appearance of an early star. The lights of the Porsche, distinctive to her, were longed for but the engine would have been heard preceding them and there was no sound beyond the crickets and frogs. The dog went on howling and Suzanne shut the door. She leaned against it and her eyes filled with tears remembering little Dennis and how strangely comforting it had been to have him there.

## Chapter 18

Driving into town at eight-thirty, Jerry made his move. "Hurley, I want to change how we're going to do this thing."

The other man looked at him suspiciously but said nothing.

Jerry was grateful for the fact that he was driving; he didn't have to meet that gaze. The idea disturbed him, though, because he had probably never before in his life had a thought like that. "I got a problem. I found out one of these Cubans ... well, it would be good if he didn't see me, didn't know who they were doing business with."

"Why's that?"

"I don't want to go into it."

"What do you want to do?"

"I want you to deliver the stuff, pick up the money. By yourself."

"You want me to walk down that street with a suitcase full of dope, to meet you don't know how many gooks. But you don't want me to know why they can't see you."

Jerry took a deep breath. "Maybe I can make it sound better to you. If one of them sees me, the deal might be off, or it could mean trouble next time around. But I don't expect you to walk down the street, you can have the car. Drop me off a couple of blocks away."

"That's a lot of money. How do you know I'll come back for you? I got places all over the world I could go with that big a score."

"I'm asking you to trust me, no reason why I shouldn't trust you."

"I don't know..."

"This deal means a lot to me. Especially for futures. I didn't expect to ask you to do more than you were contracted for without paying for it. I'll give you another five thousand for making the connection."

Hurley thought awhile and then offered his slightly mad smile. "Why not?"

Jerry stopped the car immediately and let the other man take over the wheel.

At eight-fifteen, Con and Badboy had made a survey of the park and surrounding area. The ball game was just getting ready to start. People were pouring in from all over. The agents had not been aware of it and now, as they skirted the outfield on foot, Con lamented the crowds.

"You think he knew about this game?" Enrique asked him.

"Probably. He doesn't miss many bets. It tells me he's definitely afraid of a rip-off."

"It also figures he isn't too worried about our side."

"That's right. And that's good. But this mob scene here..." He gestured around just as the primitive lighting system went on, illuminating the field in shades of gray. They walked on toward the area where the meet would take place. "I don't know," he murmured to himself.

"We got no choice, \_jefe\_, and you know it. Bust them right when they're making the connection, that's pure gold in court -- both sides got the dope right there. Beautiful."

"Yeah, surrounded by a thousand citizens, women and kids."

"It's a lot of junk and a lot of bad guys. If it doesn't go down here and they get away, or the shit gets on the streets, a couple of citizens could get offed that way, too."

"I hope we can remember that when this is over."

Con led the way across Olive Street toward a modest house in the middle of the block where an old man was sitting on the porch. Behind them a roar went up as the first batter, a sixteen-year-old center fielder and pull hitter, went up to the plate.

The old man took his eyes off the distant spectacle and watched them warily as they came toward him. Con got out his ID and held it up in front of him like a talisman going up the steps. "Excuse me, sir," he said loudly from a few yards out, "but we're federal officers."

"Oh? You are?" He squinted hard to see the mysterious object bobbing in Con's hand. "Where from?"

Con knew he couldn't see it at all. "Drug Enforcement Administration."

"Never heard of it. What do you want me for?" He was looking around Con at Badboy, who had had the good sense to hang back.

"We're working undercover. Watching out for some people who ought to be coming along here, and I just wondered if you'd mind if we sat on this porch with you for a while."

"Oh? No, I guess not. I was just watching all the excitement over there. Sit down, sit down. I like to see all the lights and people. When I know they're going to have a game over there, I look forward to it all day. The wife's inside. She likes her TV, but I like the excitement better."

Con and Badboy sat. The latter put the carrying bag down as carefully as possible, but the weapons and radios still clanked. Con asked the old man, "You ever go over there for a closer look?"

The old man gave him a quizzical smile. "Naw, that would spoil it."

"Listen, when these fellas come along, I'm going to have to ask you to go way back inside for a few minutes and stay away from windows, just in case. That going to be all right with you?"

"Sure. I told you, I like excitement."

At eight fifty-five, the van with New Mexico license plates came down Olive, slowed but kept going. Con sent the old man inside while Badboy dug out a walkie-talkie and his sawed-off shotgun. Both men pinned their ID cards to the lapels of their jackets. Con reached for the radio and called in Freddie and Barbarossa. "...They kept going. Around your way. I don't know what it means yet..."

Through the crowd noise and a lot of institutional static came Freddie's voice, tiny and broken. "I see them. I think they're checking it out." The agents were parked in their own van on the other side of the park, close to the ball game. "They're turning right ... coming around."

Con used his binoculars. "I got 'em. Hang in." He switched off and they sat back to wait. The van double-parked two houses down from them.

"They turned off the motor," Badboy pointed out.

Con stared ruefully across the park at the mist settling in, threatening to turn to drizzle. The lights above the field took on bluish auras. "The visibility's turning lousy. Going to make it tough for the chopper if we need it."

"This sucker always has had things go his way."

"Not after tonight."

"You want something heavier than that twenty-two?"

"No."

Anselmo looked at his watch that was expensive and glowed in the dark. A quarter after nine. "Sonofabitch!" he said to Jesus, the Cuban beside him. He was feeling increasingly jumpy and trying hard not to let his placid companion see it. He had some fondness for Jesus and didn't want to have to kill him. The two Chicanos in back, local hoodlums from Albuquerque, he didn't give a damn about. But they were tough. One carried two pistols and the other a sawed-off .30-caliber rifle, and that also

worried him. "Sonofabitch," he repeated, and Jesus yawned.

Con heard Jerry's car before he saw it. They both knew they couldn't be seen up on that dark porch but they ducked instinctively. Con flicked his radio on and it emitted an alarmingly loud whine. Cursing softly, he turned it down and began trying to reach the other half of the team, urging them to start their move. When Freddie finally responded, he said they were already on their way.

"What's going on here?" Badboy wondered. He was squinting hard at the Porsche as it pulled up behind the van. "There's only one guy in there. Where the hell's the shotgun? Where's Hurley?"

"I don't know. Maybe he didn't come with him after all."

"Well, fuck it! We got Red Dog, we finally got the mother in our sights." He hit Con on the arm exultantly.

Con was worried but he managed a smile and went back on the radio to tell the two State Police patrol cars, each six blocks away in opposite directions, to stand on alert. While he was talking they watched the man in the Porsche get out and walk to the van. Two men got out of the front of it and engaged in conversation. Badboy thought he recognized one as Anselmo and warned Con.

The young left fielder for the Arwyn Rangers was surprised to find two ominous-looking men traversing the outfield directly behind him. The outsized one with the red beard held his sawed-off shotgun down alongside his leg where it couldn't be seen. The tall thin one with the Zapata had his .45-caliber automatic stuck in his belt under his jacket, and that couldn't be seen either, but still it took a certain amount of bravado for the kid to yell at them: "Hey, get out of the outfield! What do you think you're doing?"

Barbarossa gave him a bored look as he plowed along, but Freddie grinned and called, "Play ball kid." They continued on, passing out of the lights and into the mist. From the stands their passage looked like the errant bad manners of two street hoodlums. Somebody hit the ball and they were forgotten.

The back of the van was opened and two more men got out. "Jesus Christ, there \_are\_ four of them," Badboy whispered.

"One of them's neutral, remember."

"I hope he remembers."

"I'll bet he's pissing in his pants right now."

The driver of the Porsche reached back into the car and took out a suitcase. One of the men who had been inside the van brought over a satchel and the exchange was made. Both sides glanced inside their respective luggage.

"You talk about guts, man," Badboy said. "Right out in the open. I never seen anything like it."

Con was preoccupied; he had caught a glimpse of the face of the Porsche driver and the disappointment went all the way to the bone. That was Hurley down there making the connection. He started to tell Enrique, but somehow it stuck in his throat; he would find out soon enough. In rapid succession and with increasingly less concern for secrecy, he barked orders to the Highway Patrol cars asking them to retransmit a message to the chopper waiting at the station over in Linden, telling them to get it up in the air, then for the cars themselves to start their move, but without lights or sirens. To Freddie and Barbarossa, who could be seen approaching behind the screen of parked cars, he simply said, "Let's hit 'em!"

They split like fighter planes peeling off and came on at a trot. It wasn't necessary to say anything to Badboy, who was already pushing past him to pound down the steps. Con dropped the radio, yanked out his automatic and jumped over the railing in order to regain the lead.

In the stands, the crowd leaped to its feet in a collective howl as a muscular little shortstop drove

one over the center fielder's head and barreled around the bases on flailing, stumpy legs. One of that multitude of berserks, a large florid man in a baseball cap and Pendleton shirt, suddenly stiffened, opened his eyes wide and toppled into a wilderness of feet. In the tumult, it went unnoticed for several seconds and then the reaction was confusion and bewilderment. Finally a woman screamed, high and shrill above the rest, but still people stood and gawked. From a distance came a number of staccato pops -- perceived by the few who heard it as a string of exploding firecrackers.

Con had been the first to shout the litany of police apprehension while still on the run: "Freeze! Federal officers. Don't move!"

Freddie, coming from the other side, was screaming, "Up against the wall, you fuckers!" even though there wasn't any wall.

Anselmo was holding the suitcase full of cocaine and, at the instant the agents revealed themselves, threw it, or rather heaved it because it was so heavy, out into the middle of the street. It was instinctual, in that he knew he would not be charged, but he couldn't bear to have it in his possession during a bust. If it had not been for that involuntary distraction, he might have been alert to the madness in the soulful brown eyes of his friend Jesus and the violence that followed from it.

That quiet man pulled a .38 out of his jacket pocket the way you would extract a package of cigarettes and aimed it with amazing calm, extending his arm as if reaching out to light one for a lady. When he fired it at Con without comment, the world fell in.

Con was running straight for them, his gun out in front but not in a firing position, yelling. He saw Jesus extend that arm, saw the muzzle loom vast and lethal and threw himself to the pavement, twisting to land hard on his left shoulder. The pain was startling, darting all through his body even as he rolled, rolling over his own gun, and kept rolling. Jesus got off another shot at him when he was on the ground, which blew sparks out of the asphalt, but Enrique had dropped to one knee and brought up the sawed-off shotgun.

He fired simultaneously with Jesus's second shot and caught the Cuban full in the chest, blowing him back against the side of the van. The gun fell from his limp, slowly descending hand, his eyes lost their calmness and were only surprised now, and perhaps sad that life was ending so suddenly in an alien land. He remained up against the van an inordinate time, as if stuck there by his own blood, and by the time he slid to the ground, the war had passed him by. There was a large greasy red smear where he had been, trailing down to the ground.

Anselmo had also thrown himself to the pavement, otherwise he would have caught at least some of the spreading blast of double-ought that blew Jesus apart above the waist. He slithered back under the van and through it, discarding his own gun, a Mauser pistol, as he went.

One of the two Chicanos riding shotgun in the back of the van, a small man with a rural appearance, simply panicked, and the form it took was remaining upright in the middle of the firefight, his hands over his head, doing a little dance from one foot to the other while screaming entreaties in Spanish that no one shoot him. He had a .357 Magnum revolver in his belt but made no move to either fire it or get rid of it.

The other Chicano, a large man with a stubble of beard and a red bandana tied around his long, ragged hair, was more resolute and less sane. He had been looking in the direction of the park, toward the oncharging Freddie and Barbarossa, when he heard Con's voice over his shoulder. He heard the sound but not the words; in his street-induced paranoia it was some kind of rip-off, a rival gang. He dove into the van for his rifle. It lay on the floor, unwrapped, the clip in and the safety off.

Barbarossa saw the dive and fired at him with his shotgun. The pellets rattled against the side of the van and sieved the open door, but somehow missed the man. The other Chicano, still standing supinely, took a ricocheting pellet in the shoulder. He bellowed with pain, adding to the cacophony, but maintained his absurdly vulnerable position in the middle of it all. His partner came out of the van

shooting rapidly and accurately. One shot cut through the side of Barbarossa's neck, severing muscles but missing both the jugular and the spinal cord. Another shot caught his left forearm as it came up to protect the damaged neck, breaking the bone.

Freddie saw his friend spreading and falling out of the corner of his eye, saw the blood spurting, and it infuriated him. He stopped behind a parked Chevrolet and reached over the hood to aim. He squeezed off his shots one after another with all the control and patience required by a .45 automatic. The big gun jumped, was brought level again in a split second and exploded again. The man with the rifle was concentrating on Barbarossa and never saw the shot fired that took away the lower half of his face. Freddie kept firing until the target fell out of view, the sound booming and echoing across the park.

Con had taken a few seconds to get untangled from the disorientation that came with the painful roll on the pavement. At first, his attention was fixed on Jesus, who after all was trying to kill him, but when it was clear that Badboy had blown that one away, his attention shifted, belatedly, to Hurley. The bodyguard had quickly demonstrated his jungle-honed instinct for survival.

Rather than shoot it out with unknown numbers of armed men closing in from two sides, he left his automatic in its shoulder holster and ran, bobbing and weaving commando style, back to the Porsche. The submachine gun was behind the seat, but he wasn't thinking about that. He managed to get in without ever straightening and started the motor while lying across the seat. By this time Con took him as his target and began firing at the car itself, since he couldn't see the driver.

Hurley had to come up a little in order to work the clutch and shift the gears, but Con only managed to shatter the window on the passenger side as the car began to back up. The fugitive would have made it all the way to the corner and freedom, but he saw the State Police car coming up behind him in the rearview mirror. Slamming the car into first, he found an opening between two parked cars, hit the curb and bounced over it into the park.

Barbarossa was down by this time, his shotgun lying three feet away on the grass, but Freddie shifted fire to the Porsche as it went past. Badboy darted around the front of the van and, reaching the edge of the park, put one foot up on the curb to fire another blast from his shotgun into its motor as it fishtailed away. Con, a few feet to one side of him, was firing his last two rounds as Badboy started screaming, "It's Red Dog! Get the bastard! Kill him, kill him!" Con knew better, but he was no less anxious to stop it.

The car careened on, its rear tires shredding and the engine vomiting smoke and oil from the tail like a falling plane. It staggered on across the park, out of control, with a great roaring, causing panic ahead of it, escalating the panic already at the ball game, as people screamed and ran in all directions to get ahead of it. Finally it slid sideways into a tree and expired, hissing and bleeding dark fluids. Hurley didn't waste any time; he leaped out and threw himself upon the ground spread-eagled. He remained there alone for a while because the agents were too busy to come and get him.

Sometimes Con, as he would have been happy to admit, was wrong.

When the firing stopped, he told Badboy that it was Hurley out there, Red Dog wasn't anywhere around. Ricky couldn't bring himself to believe it and stood looking across the park. Con went to take care of business. Jesus was dead, or soon would be, and the large Chicano would probably die, too, or wish he had, in light of the damage Freddie's big gun had effected. Freddie himself was trying to stop the bleeding from Barbarossa's neck wound. With Con's help they placed him in one of the police cars, which headed for the hospital with the siren blaring. Freddie went with them.

The pacifistic Chicano gunman was handcuffed and put into the back of the other cop car and it wasn't until then that they missed Anselmo. "Where is that sonofabitch?" Enrique demanded. "If he's split on us, I'll kill him."

They were turning, looking in all directions, guns out and safeties off. "Did you promise him he

wouldn't have to testify?"

"Of course I did. And he knew damned well he'd have to testify."

"Don't shoot ... I give myself up ... don't shoot..." It came from under the van in advance of Victor's Numero Uno, twisting out on his belly. Since the rules provided that he should be treated like everyone else on the bust, Badboy kicked and punched the hell out of him all the way to the squad car, enjoying himself immensely.

In the comparative calm that followed the departure of the last prisoner and before the arrival of the coroner's people from nearby Linden, the crew took stock. Badboy began his idea of a discussion by slamming his hand against the side of their van, spraining his thumb and two fingers. Con said, "Terrific, that goes nicely with my busted shoulder."

Badboy sucked on the injured fingers, scowling. "I don't care! I'm gonna go crazy if we don't get this motherfucker." He was shouting and Con didn't need that.

"Hey, will you cool it! We know where he lives, remember? Roy's sitting right on top of it."

"He won't go home -- we got his car."

"Will you calm down, for Christ's sake?! I'm supposed to be the one who's screwy about this. Now listen to me." He tried to reach out and take Enrique's shoulders with both hands, but his left arm wouldn't work and he settled for gripping the man's shirt tightly with his right. "It's because he's so smart he'll go home. The car might be traceable through soil samples and it might not. Anyway, that could take weeks or months. You know he's bought it from some hot-car ring, everything filed off or maybe replaced. The license'll be registered to some dummy address." He let go of the shirt.

Renewed hope crept into Enrique's eyes. "Hey, listen, we're excitable, warmhearted people. What can I tell you?"

Jerry had gotten out of the Porsche on Olive Street three blocks from the park. He had sat on the fender of a parked car as if it was his and smoked the pipe he used to make himself look disarming. When the first shots rang out, he remained where he was, watching calmly, puffing on the pipe. He had to know whether it was a police action or a rip-off. The instant response of the Highway Patrol car that raced by gave him his answer.

He got up and walked away from the park, along the curb, looking into the cars casually. A Chevrolet convertible was unlocked. He got in, had it hot-wired within seconds and headed for the farm. The only thing he could find to feel good about was the farm. As Con had predicted, he was certain they would never be able to trace the Porsche.

The helicopter pilot was less than dashing, with his slopped belly, baggy uniform, drinker's nose and glasses, but he was mordantly cheerful under wretched flying conditions.

"You must fly in nights like this a lot, huh?" Badboy shouted hopefully over his mike.

The pilot chuckled. "Hell, no! Not in fog and drizzle like this. Wouldn't even be up here if it wasn't an emergency. Or you boys didn't have so much muscle." He gave Con a sly, sideways glance that in the glaucous light from the instrument panel looked like something from a horror movie.

Con and Enrique exchanged a glance, then both turned to stare hard into the murk on the other side of the Plexiglas. Occasionally a vagrant light would break through below, but they were flying over rough and sparsely populated terrain. Con, who had flown in a lot of helicopters, knew their virtues and dangers. He checked the altimeter; it said a thousand feet, but he knew they were highly ineffectual in mountainous country like this where height changed rapidly and often.

"You know the country around here?" he asked.

"Not at all." The chopper banked to the left to avoid some great shape looming up below. "All I ever fly over's the freeways."

Con saw Enrique swallow hard and gave him a thumbs up sign he didn't quite believe himself.

A few minutes later they picked up the voice of one of the Highway Patrol men who was waiting with Roy on the rim of the valley. He said he could hear their engine and tried to coax the chopper in, but there were no specifics in the landscape to give a visual bearing. Con glanced at his watch; Red Dog could be here soon if he had witnessed the firefight at the park.

No telling how he would get here, but he was resourceful and Con still felt certain this was where he would go to ground. He ordered car lights at the tiny landing area someone down there had chosen. It was a gamble, and they were to be turned off the instant the chopper touched down.

Descending abruptly, Badboy closed his eyes and prayed while Con concentrated on making contact with Roy on the ground.

"Hey, Irish Leader, I think there's only the girl and the baby in there. I missed the party, huh?"

"Consider yourself lucky," Con said grimly, begging off for now on telling Roy what had happened. "Has anyone come into the valley?"

"No one in or out."

"Any sign of Red Dog at all?"

"You didn't get him, huh?"

"Any sign of Red Dog?"

"No. Nothing's changed. Lights went out in the farmhouse half an hour ago. You'd think she'd hear your chopper."

"No other way out of that valley?"

"No."

"Okay, I want to be there waiting for him."

"Red Dog's coming here?"

Con didn't answer. They were hovering over the crest of the hill, close enough to see fragments, broken by trees and fog, of the headlights.

"I'm going to have trouble getting in that spot, sir. One tree there's gonna catch the rotors."

Con wondered if the sudden respect was the result of fear. At that moment, Roy's voice came through with the same opinion -- lots of trees, uneven terrain, road too narrow to accommodate the spread, either.

Con asked the pilot, "Can you take it in right next to the house?" He was looking off in the direction he assumed Red Dog would come, straining to see the slightest suggestion of headlights.

"I'll have to use the searchlight. I don't know..."

"Put it down there fast."

"Right next to it? Who's in there? How many?"

"We think a woman and a kid."

"You sure?"

Don't turn on the light until down low. I don't want it seen over the tops of the hills. The chopper swung away and raced to the center of the valley, then settled rapidly. The powerful searchlight was switched on, bulled its way through the fog and drizzle until it found first the barn and then the house.

"Where exactly?"

"Just put it next to the goddamned house."

There was some air movement in the valley from the weather front and the chopper bucked and pitched, its rotors clawing for lift with an anxious whine. Enrique, prepared to meet anything if only he

could get out of that careening Plexiglas chamber of horrors, readied his shotgun. Con checked to make certain that he had inserted a fresh clip in his automatic but waited until they had touched down before releasing the safety catch. The dog wasn't going to be a problem; the roar and prop wash of the chopper sent it yelping into the hills.

Suzanne had smoked two sizable joints of high-quality hashish and taken a couple of ludes in order to tamp down her fear and loneliness. After she had put the boy to bed she fell into a deep sleep on the rug in front of the dying fire. The buzz of the helicopter as it hovered over the distant hill had penetrated her consciousness as something alien but not necessarily threatening, or at least not specifically so. It seemed a part of her dreams, which were always of a mystical nature.

She drifted over the question of distant planets, their exotic civilizations and the hope that they held out for Earth, for a future world of peace and love. She got up once and went outside to look, wearing only her tiny shift, but oblivious of the fine chilling rain. She saw some play of light where there had never been any, far above the tops of the tallest mountains, but she simply incorporated it into the dream.

She returned to the fireside and slept again. She was in Tibet, among the All-Wise, the people of Zen and the pyramids, the people of Atlantis and Mu, the children of Aquarius, the gods and goddesses who would claim the future through the cosmic energy that came with triangular power. Dennis was there, Kahlil was with her, the farm animals were there because they had souls, too. The roar of the helicopter as it settled over her and the brilliant glare of its searchlight which moved the farmhouse out of time were all a natural concomitant, a part of the integrated whole. In this universe ... all was one.

Con and Badboy came in quietly, surprised and wary because the door was unlocked; in fact, was standing ajar. They moved through it on their rubber-soled shoes like phantom commandos, speaking softly to each other. Con rolled Suzanne over to make sure there was no gun beneath her but then he left her where she lay. To Badboy he murmured: "Stoned." Suzanne giggled even though she didn't feel like it; they had ruined her splendid dream.

Enrique found the weapons closet, broke it open and whistled for Con. It took the two of them to carry it all out to the chopper, whose rotors whirled idly in testimony to the pilot's disquiet about this whole weird operation.

"Hey, that stuffs heavy," he complained, looking at the pile they were making on the floor of the chopper.

Con shouted back, "It's okay, we're staying down here."

"Oh," he said, relieved, and tipped a salute.

"Get on the horn and tell the boys up on the hill to send one car down here, fast."

"Then what do I do?"

"Get up out of sight and hang around. Keep an eye on the road. No searchlight."

"Right. I don't have much fuel."

"When you run out, go get some more."

"Ah ... right."

Con reached in and hauled out his carrying bag. He backed off and the helicopter went up.

"They don't see a lot of action, I guess," Con said to Badboy on the way back into the house. In the living room he indicated the girl, who had nodded off again. "Listen, get some blankets around her and the kid in there and get them into the car when it comes down."

"Okay. What are you going to do?"

"Another thing. Once you leave the house, don't come back in here. Understand?"

"What the hell's going on? Where are we going to be?"

"You and I are gonna wait out by the barn. I want Red Dog in here, in his own house sitting right on top of his stash. I want him fat."

"But there isn't any stash. Unless it's under the floor or in the wall or something, for Christ's sake."

Con made no attempt to sound convincing. "Maybe he'll bring it with him."

"What are you talking about? We got it all back there. Must be five K's."

Con's voice took on an edge that Badboy recognized immediately. "Do what you're told, Ricky. Get your ass out of here!"

Enrique did as he was ordered, hoping he was wrong about what he guessed. The car came down, he took the girl, with the boy on her hip, out to meet it. She was somewhat sobered now and showing signs of being difficult but still manageable. The boy slept through everything. Enrique looked back at the house. Con was in there somewhere but he couldn't see him. When the car went back up the road, Enrique went to the barn to wait.

Like everything else that night, Jerry's conduct during his flight was uncharacteristic. Despite the fact that he was driving a stolen car that might be made by any passing Highway Patrol car if it was reported, he stopped at a roadside tavern patronized by people in bib overalls and ordered a Scotch and water. He went on to drink two more without the water, and the third served to steady a left hand that had been shaking badly.

It occurred to him that he ought not return to the farm, perhaps it would be better to go into Canada for a while, until he was absolutely certain there was no lead to him. Yet the farm was his reason for everything he was, everything he had done. He was unwilling to let the enemy frighten him away from it. Although he had to admit that he was more frightened than he had ever been. However, his anger, his hatred, his contempt for the fascists was greater, and that was what took him home in the end. They wouldn't deny him his dream.

When he left the bar he realized he was a little drunk and very tired. He had not slept well the night before -- another first. Pulling off the road into a picnic area, he parked the car in such a way that the license plates couldn't be read in passing and went to sleep. He would stay there until dawn.

## Chapter 19

First light was pushing back the fog on the hills to the east when the brittle sound of the Chevrolet's aging motor came to Roy's ears. His car was the closest to the road and he hadn't slept all night. Fatigue lent a certain sobriety to the occasion and his voice was coolly modulated when he spoke into the mike. "Irish Leader, can you hear me? Over..."

"What's happening, baby?" Badboy asked from somewhere down near the house. The fatigue and boredom in his own voice belying the breeziness.

Roy held back on his answer until the car appeared on the ridge and headed down again. He could just make it out through the pines and probably wouldn't have been able to see it at all if it hadn't been in motion. "Car coming in. Chevy, I think. Blue. Orders?"

There was a long silence on the other end and then Badboy came back on. "Con thinks they've got a stash in the house. Put up a block behind him. Then one car comes down, but real, real slow unless they hear shots fired. And be careful, huh -- elephants make such a big target."

The helicopter had been sent back to base in the wee hours and Roy asked, "You want me to try and get the chopper back?"

Another pause. "No. And stay off now, we can hear the bastard already."

Roy clicked off and went to awaken the four Highway Patrol men, who huddled in their respective cars under the blankets they normally used for accident victims.

Con had finally joined Enrique at the barn; they moved to the door to watch for the first appearance of the Chevy. Ricky's clothes were damp and had bits of straw stuck to them as a result of trying to keep warm in the stalls. Both had reddened eyes and Con's face was flushed along the cheekbones. He rubbed his injured arm.

"We should have both waited in the house, man, I told you that," Badboy complained by way of making small talk to dispel the tightening of the gut.

"There he is."

"I see him."

The car was still a few hundred yards out and coming fast. The motor sounded as if it was being driven to its last effort. Con looked around at the horizon. The sun was breaking through on high and the drizzle had stopped, although there was still fog drifting at ground level. "Going to be a nice day," he said absently, and there was a note of regret in it.

"Here..." Badboy handed Con his shotgun. "You're gonna need that." He drew his own .38 from a belt holster.

Con accepted the shotgun without comment.

Jerry knew something was wrong. He didn't know how he knew, but he accepted the instinct without question. When, closer to the house, he saw tire tracks in the soft earth, he slowed and leaned out the window to study them. He was certain that they weren't from the Porsche or the pickup. He went on to the house anyway; he had nowhere else he wanted to go.

Options were sorted out on the move. His strict policy of never allow hard drugs in the house was going to pay off if the enemy was around there now, waiting somewhere in the fog. He had no record, he did have money and could afford a first-rate lawyer. He was intelligent, he would make a good case and a good appearance in court.

No way of telling what kind of witnesses might come out of the bust back in Arwyn, but it would be damned hard to prove he had even been there. There would be no hard narcotics in his possession no

matter what happened and, in the end, he was sure the ultimate charge would be car theft and possibly possessing illegal weapons, but again not for sale, marijuana or a few pills. The latter was nothing; if he did a year, he would still have the farm when he came out ... still have his own country.

"We gonna take him in the open?" Badboy asked.

"No. I told you. If he's got the stuff in there, that's the way I want him."

"He could also shoot it out from in there." Badboy's voice was harsh and imperative. "Some fuckin' DA's going to ask why we didn't use proper procedures and all that shit. I'm telling you!"

"He won't."

Jerry got out of the car in plain view now. He looked around briefly and went inside. Con was strangely affected by seeing him; he could have made a good guess as to what to expect, but still Jerry's youth and the favor and grace he carried with him was shocking somehow. He only vaguely sensed it but it was the idea of an innate moral privilege embodied in that sleek, lean figure and the imperious way it moved that offended him so deeply. He was so ... \_modern.\_ If nothing else, this one glimpse told him was why he was here.

Jerry stood on the threshold for a moment, looking into the house. He didn't have to call for Suzanne to know that she was no longer there. His gun was still in his jacket pocket and he was careful to keep his hand away from it. Moving through the house, he saw that everything was in its place, too much so.

Gradually he was drawn to his desk by some compass of despair. The instincts tightened a band around his head. When he rolled back the top, there it was -- a pile of several glassine bags of what looked like very good cocaine. No need to test it; he knew what it meant. He stood without moving for several moments, then slowly drew the automatic and checked its functions. His face took on something like a smile, tight like the \_sardonicus\_ of a man who takes huge satisfaction in finding a focus for everything that he hates and despises, regardless of consequences.

He moved to the door and peered out carefully. In the aspect of the farm there was still hope. He looked toward the nearest hills and the mountains beyond. If he could reach them through the remaining fog, he could disappear. He could revert, become primitive, live off the land. He could live out there forever. Another dream.

"He's coming, man. I feel it," Badboy whispered, although there was no need to.

"I see him. In the doorway." Con, for the first time, pronounced Jerry's name by calling out to him. "DeForest!"

Jerry fired three shots at the entrance of the barn in rapid succession and then bolted. Badboy ducked back instinctively but remained visible; it didn't matter. Jerry was strong and fast, he ran well. Con stepped out in the open in front of the barn and for a few seconds he watched his quarry the way you might admire a running deer. Jerry ran twenty yards from the house ... thirty yards across open ground ... forty yards toward the distant hills.

Con brought the shotgun up to his shoulder and sighted, leading the target. At an angle and with a sawed-off shotgun, it was getting difficult. Jerry must have sensed something because he halted abruptly and spun around, bringing up his gun to point at his hunter; actually two now, because Badboy had moved abreast of Con and was crouching, supporting his gun at the elbow with the other hand, aiming carefully.

Jerry never got his shot off. Con fired, adjusting for the suddenly stationary target, and the cluster of shot struck him from the shoulders up, blowing most of his head away. Badboy fired a wild round out of reflex and it was over.

They walked over in the direction of where the still-moving body lay in the wet grass and mud, but only close enough to determine that there was nothing to be done. Con had had his own police reflex;

while the shotgun blast still echoed back and forth between the hills he had thought, there's an injured man, what can I do to save him?

That contradiction was resolved by the hopelessness of what lay in that spreading pool of blood in front of them. They turned away from it and went out across the field. Behind them, the two police cars were just pulling up to the front of the house, parking a respectful distance from the scene of the carnage.

Badboy didn't know, any more than Con, where they were tramping to or why, but he was satisfied to go. They were both still dangling their guns. He saw Con's shoulders heaving with the effort of drawing breath.

"We got the motherfucker," Badboy murmured. Then he added, "Finally."

Con's voice was hoarse with emotion. "God forgive me ... I feel good, Ricky." He turned to Badboy with what might have been a smile, but his lips were drawn back off the teeth and the eyes stared out, inflamed, looking as though they didn't belong to him. A nerve under the jaw jerked spasmodically.

Badboy didn't know what his friend was feeling; he could just as easily have been crying. It would have been a violation of the code to ask.

Hours later, Badboy took it upon himself to go over to the Highway Patrol station in Linden and notify Jerry's wife that her husband was dead. She came out of the lethargy that had characterized her since her arrest and screamed obscenities at him, calling him among other things a fascist flunky; presumably because he was Chicano.

He was tired, sick of her and sick of her husband. "I'm sorry, lady," he said dully, "but it was a war. You lost."

Visit [www.ereads.com](http://www.ereads.com) for information on additional titles by this and other authors.