

Cadet's Dream



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CHAPTER ONE
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Alone in a crowd of people, I found myself in the grand ballroom of Hibernian Hall. The hall was neither light nor dark, but bathed in a pervasive twilight – spectral shades of gray so indistinct that all seemed on the verge of slipping together.

I stood in a circle of gentlemen wearing the most generic of tuxedos. Our jackets were black with narrow collars, our trousers black with narrow stripes down the legs, our cummerbunds black with the creases pointed dutifully upward, our shoes black plain-toe Oxfords, our studs black concave disks within round matte silver frames, and our shirts were white with vertical pleats. In the twilit vagueness of the room, all of this black faded to an indistinct dark gray, and the white to a dull light gray.

Throughout the hall, the constellations of gentlemen's circles were separated from one another by clusters of ladies. Like the gentlemen, the ladies wore generic evening attire. Their dresses were long, sweeping the floor. Their necks were open, adorned with pearl necklaces matching their dangling earrings. Their shoulders were covered with puffs of pleats, stretching slightly down their arms. They wore long evening gloves that matched the pale grayness of the men's shirts, and they clutched small dark handbags. While it was clear that the hair and the dresses of the ladies were of different colors, they all appeared in the twilight as but slight variations of gray.

In my circle of gentlemen, I faced toward the eastern side of the ballroom, just opposite the mid point between the entrance on the left and the corner in the right. The entrance – to my northeast and in the center of the wall – was open, revealing the balcony that ran around the cylindrical space below the rotunda and above the lobby. I recalled that from the black and white checkered floor of the lobby, you could take either of two curved stairways, one north and one south, to reach the grand ballroom. The balcony above was reached by inner stairways, of which I was tentatively aware, although I had never seen them, much less attempted to use them.

While the building was called Hibernian Hall, everything about it was Hellenic. The fluted door frame of the entrance to the ballroom was punctuated in its corners by squares containing concentric circles – just as you would find in the entrance of a Greek temple. The same concentric circles could be seen in the dome, although these were interrupted by vertical lines that continued the dynamic of the space going up through the balconies and meeting at the pinnacle in unity. For me, the most impressive sight in this central space was the columns. Eight per level, the fluted columns culminated in graceful Ionic capitals, like the tall majestic women they were designed to represent.

Of all the objects I could see around me, the Ionic columns just visible through the entrance gave me the most comfort. Their white was the closest thing to real white in the indistinct continuum of grayness. Perhaps because of this, the wavering confusion that seemed to dominate all things gray was least apparent in the columns. They stood erect, providing bearings in a sea of uncertainty and separating the floors into distinct levels.

Far behind me, flanked on either side by double faux columns, was the stage where a small orchestra played music that I could not discern. It struck me that while I could hear a great deal

of music and conversation in the hall, I could perceive nothing aurally. In the multitude of sounds, each interfered with the other. It was like being on a small boat with waves coming in from all directions and causing a confused jumble of crests and troughs, multiplying and canceling each other out. No wave could be distinguished from another. And throughout the hall the noisy silence served to isolate.

At least, it served to isolate me. As I looked around my circle of gentlemen, I was amazed to see them talking casually and apparently understanding each other quite lucidly. Across from me stood two gentlemen who seemed to dominate the discussion in the circle. The one on my left – just north of east and standing with his back to the entrance – was short and round. He held a cigar in this right hand, a drink in his left, and he waved them about as he spoke loudly and jovially to the circle and occasionally up to the ceiling. His speckled complexion led me to believe that he was ruddy and had red hair streaked with white. In the general grayness, though, I could not be certain – of this or of anything. He laughed easily, and whatever he said brought waves of laughter from the circle, especially from the gentleman to his left – just south of east and standing with his back to the corner. This gentleman was tall and thin, with sparse hair over thin-rimmed glasses and a fine aquiline nose. The other five in our circle were of nondescript, average appearance.

The short round man leaned in toward the center of the circle, looked mischievously to his right and left, lifted his glass and shook it slowly to make a point, and said something in feigned confidence that set the circle into an uproar of laughter. I could hear that he said something – and that in a jocular tone of voice – but I had not the faintest idea what the words were. The tall thin man looked over at me with a grand smile and his eyebrows arched high in a gesture that seemed to inquire what my thoughts were on the subject. Flustered and confused, I simply rocked back on my heels, held my drink out in my right hand as though in some formal sort of toast, and lifted it slightly. Both men seemed to take this as the funniest thing that they had ever seen. The small round man bent over in laughter with his elbows nearly touching his knees. The tall thin man arched back and laughed straight at the ceiling. Then he straightened up again and leaned forward, patting his friend on the back.

Rather than making me feel more a part of the circle, the entire episode drove home to me that I was isolated in this noisy silence. It dawned on me, too, that I had no idea how I had come to the grand ballroom of Hibernian Hall and why I was here. The only people who stood out in the crowd of generic gentlemen and ladies were these two opposite me in the circle, and neither of them looked at all familiar – at least, not as individuals, though perhaps as types. Were these two destined to be different from the rest, or had they simply not yet become as generic as the others in the wavering merger of all things gray?

Disoriented and confused, I felt oppressed by this indistinct twilight, in which people and objects grew increasingly difficult to distinguish one from another. Everything in the room seemed to be bent upon slipping together with everything else. I looked through the entrance toward the Ionic columns to try to reestablish my bearings. There in the columns I could see something familiar, something at least relatively constant, something that served the purpose of differentiation – holding the various levels apart.

When I looked away from the columns, however, the confusion returned in an even more distressing form. As I glanced over to my left, I thought I caught the faintest, most cursory images of plants and archways. But when I looked harder, they faded away. Yet, I could feel their presence, whether I could see them or not.

I tried to remember what had happened in Hibernian Hall that drew me to it now. It seemed like an age ago, a world away. There were plants and there were archways on the lower level of the hall. I remembered being in a room on that lower level. Yes, a room with plants and archways. There was color there, too. The plants were a dark green and the arches were a light blue. I was with friends. As I looked back, my friends seemed to be gray, but not the gray that I saw around me in the grand ballroom. My friends were wearing gray uniforms. And there were young ladies in dresses of various refreshingly brilliant colors. Of most importance, it seemed, was one quite near to me. I remembered some shiny green material ... and a sudden feeling of isolation.

It was a different level, a different world – a world of people I had known, of things I had seen and touched. Why did I see the plants and archways up on this level as indistinct shadows of the matter that had once made them up? Could it be that not only was everything on this level slipping together into a single mass of gray, but the lower level was joining in? Were the columns being overpowered by the twilight? Was what remained of distinction on the verge of disappearing, allowing all to become one?

The disorientation was too much for me. I looked down at my feet – at my dark gray shoes blending in with the lighter gray wood-veined floor. As I tried to reassure myself by tracing out the boundaries of my shoes from the floor, I felt aware that right below them were those plants and those archways. They, too, were now encroaching upon my existence on this level, even though they were of a time and of a matter alien to my present role here – whatever that role might be.

As I stared down at my feet, desperately trying to get my bearings and to figure out where I was and what I was doing here, I did not notice the room becoming quiet. Not the hushed quiet that descends upon a crowd of people from time to time, but a significant quiet – the quiet that occurs when one existence is ending and another beginning, the quiet of the void between worlds.

I felt a hand on my right shoulder. It was a firm hand, a strong hand, a hand that held me upright so that I would not fall. Nor could I move. Standing in place, I turned my head to the right. I should have expected to see some generic gentleman uttering a comment I could not hear, but I was inexplicably relieved to meet the man who had his left hand on my shoulder. He was taller than I, but he was leaning forward so that our eyes were level. His curly hair and well-trimmed beard were jet black, and his deep green eyes stared into mine with pride and solemnity, but also with more than a slight glint of mischief. He was wearing the generic tuxedo, but with emerald studs that matched his eyes both in color and in brilliance.

As I looked at him, it occurred to me that I was seeing color. Everything else in the hall was like an old black-and-white photograph that had long ago started to fade and lose its contrast. He, however, was crisp and distinct. He appeared completely at home in the Hellenic-style hall. Indeed, he could have leapt from the scene in an ancient Greek vase – minus, of course, the tuxedo.

Slowly, he raised his right hand palm-downward in a fist – not in a threatening manner, but as though he wanted to give me some sort of sign. On his fourth finger was a massive silver ring. Its sides were unadorned, but on its face was an emblem of gold: A pole standing vertical with a pair of wings at the very top, where a small globe was attached. Around the pole and around each other rose two snakes, each with an eye of shimmering emerald. The gleam of the gold against

the silver made it appear as though the snakes were alive. Oddly, I was relieved and thrilled by the sight.

In an instant, the ring turned green in a veritable explosion of emerald. I had been taking all of this in as reassurance and comfort in the wavering, merging world of the gray ballroom. The emerald explosion, however, threw me once more into a helpless state of disorientation. But the man with the ring smiled knowingly and calmed me, patting me gently on my shoulder. I realized that the ring had not changed color at all, but it was simply reflecting something else – something of the most magnificent green somewhere behind my gaze. Something about the green as it was reflected reminded me of the green that I had remembered from the lower level – from the world of plants and archways. Yet, it was here a fuller, more radiant green. This was a green that was different, somehow purer – a green not affected by any other color. Could it be that color on this level, rare as it be, was somehow fundamentally different from color on the lower level? I wondered.

Slowly, he raised his index finger. He pointed in the direction of the entrance. I wanted to keep my gaze upon the enthralling green reflected in the ring, but I knew that I had to follow my guide. Slowly, I turned my head. And there she was.

The world was still engulfed in absolute silence, as I beheld the Lady in the Shiny Green Dress. She had just entered the grand ballroom, and she was standing between me and the entrance. Through the entrance doorway, I could see the Ionic columns, two of which now framed her with an air of reverence as she stood proud and erect. Although the columns had provided me with bearings in this wavering world of gray, they appeared far less distinct, far less comforting now that she was there to provide ... something. Was it protection? Or was it something deeper, more complex?

She appeared to be about thirty years of age, but age quite clearly did not apply to her. Her dress was a vibrant, radiant green with an open neck and open arms. With her tanned arms thus exposed, she looked athletic and untamed, as though she would be just as comfortable running through the meadows as standing in a ballroom. She wore no jewelry, for her natural beauty did not need baubles to enhance it. Nor did she appear to be wearing any cosmetics. But her glowing smooth tanned skin, her pink cheeks, and her red lips displayed purer color than any substances mortals may have devised. Both in their brilliance and in their intensity, her eyes matched the color of her dress; though as she surveyed the hall and looked upon its inhabitants, I detected a gentle softness in them.

Most curious was her hair. It was the color of ripened wheat blowing in the fields – variegated and shimmering. But it was styled all wrong. It lifted up in front over her forehead and fell down in a smooth curve on either side, curling forward and framing her face. It was an outdated style, by about three decades. As I looked around the hall, though, it may not have been so far out of place here. Yet, for her it was not right – not right at all. For some reason beyond my immediate comprehension, I knew it was supposed to be different, although I could not recollect how it should have looked or why I was so sure.

In silence she shifted around, searching out the crowd with a detached, but benign interest. Others moved around in the hall as well, although I could hear no sound. It was like watching an old silent movie running slowly – almost frame-by-frame. Everything was in shades of gray, but she had been colored in the deepest, most magnificent hues.

I felt the man's hand rise from my shoulder, and in that very instant the oppressive noise returned to the room. Whatever became of him, I did not know. He may simply have moved

away from me, or he may have vanished altogether. All I could see was the Lady in the Shiny Green Dress. She alone was not wavering in the general grayness of the ballroom.

Along with the noise, eight young ladies – her entourage – swept into the room. They were much smaller than she. Indeed, next to her they had the appearance of children. Perhaps they were children; for in that wavering twilight hall, it was difficult to tell. They gathered around her as though they were performing some ancient ritual dance. They wore Southern-style dark saffron dresses with black trim that accented her green, yet blended in with the general gray of the hall. They seemed to be creatures of some in-betweenness.

Thus surrounded, the Lady in the Shiny Green Dress looked here and there among her retinue, as she chatted with them now thoughtfully, now frivolously. It disturbed me that her ladies had thus cordoned her off from the multitude. Once they had danced in around her, she no longer appeared to be even aware of the rest of us, but she seemed content and happy to be isolated. I felt this to be a disturbing, and even a personal loss.

For the first time, I noticed that she was indeed wearing a very peculiar ornament – a large round golden pin just above her left breast. As she spoke with her friends, she would from time to time raise her hand and touch the pin, as though invoking some sacred bond vested in it. In the middle of the pin, I could make out the picture of a man's face. He had very dark, curly hair, a short well-trimmed beard, and deep black eyes. Except for the eyes, he looked rather like the man who had put his hand on my shoulder. The man in the picture, however, was also quite pale; and the contrast between his dark hair and his light skin made it appear as though the picture were in black and white. Indeed, it may well have been.

Around the picture were thickly cut block-style gold letters that allowed the green of her dress to shine through and around them. I marveled at the colorlessness of the picture set off by the brilliant green and gold surrounding it. I stared as hard as I could, and finally I made out what the inscription said: "I am his fiancée."

I was shocked at the inscription. Why was she identifying herself as his fiancée? Why did the letters not spell out that he was her fiancé? Was her self-image really determined by who possessed her? As soon as I asked myself that question, some feeling of unease deep within me struggled to make itself known. I knew there was something there, something buried deep within my soul, but I could not figure out what it was – and I was not sure I wanted to. Certainly, when it came to the lady, I was downright agitated that she would define herself in these terms. She seemed the type of person whom no one could (or would dare try to) possess. She seemed even less the type of person who would relish such a relationship, or deign to allow it.

As I stood there transfixed by this divine sight so fraught with contradiction, the feeling welled up from deep within me that I was somehow a part of her – as though some strand of her being reached down and passed through my soul. Here was a person so majestic that I dared not approach her in any capacity; yet, I seemed to perceive some special kinship on some higher, deeper level.

Meanwhile, the noise of the hall continued: The orchestra continued to play indiscernible music, the short round gentleman continued to amuse his cohorts with exaggeratedly confidential proclamations, and the tall thin gentleman continued to laugh. In the conventionality of this most unconventional setting, it occurred to me that I had been staring at the lady so intently – and for how long? – that it must appear unseemly. So I returned my attention to my circle of gentlemen and pretended to understand the jovial conversation and to appreciate the fine music.

I was so busy pretending to be a part of my circle that I did not notice when the music stopped and the conversation halted. Reflexively, I looked behind me to see if the black-haired man with the bright green eyes and the large silver and gold ring had returned. He was not there, but I saw that everyone in the hall was looking in the direction of the lady.

Thus justified, I once again looked over at her. My heart ached and my soul collapsed, as I beheld her standing with her head bowed, sobbing. The pin that she had worn so proudly, if so curiously, was gone from her dress. In its place were two small holes with some loose threads and wrinkles in between them. In her left hand she was grasping something in despair – the pin. The grand ballroom of Hibernian Hall was silent, as even her sobs produced no sound.

Slowly, she raised her head, her soft green eyes swollen with tears. She arched the inner part of her eyebrows in supplication – to me. The Lady in the Shiny Green Dress was looking to me for something. Words? Actions? I felt lost and afraid. I simply stared back into her eyes like a deer hopelessly cornered by an archer. Then, everyone in the hall slowly turned and faced me. What was I supposed to do?

I opened my eyes wide and awoke, still shaken with distress, compassion, and outright terror. I was in Edwardsville, Illinois, lying on my back and staring up at the ceiling fan that hung motionless above me. I looked over at the clock. It was moments before midnight. It was a crisp, pleasant night, and I had opened the windows to enjoy the gentle breeze. The room was bathed in a glowing light, as the full moon climbed toward her zenith in a cloudless sky.

As I awoke, I thought I heard the distant echo of a feminine voice, whispering in my ear:

χρεόν ἐστὶ
χρεόν ἐστὶ
so múst it be
so múst it be

She spoke the words in an ethereal, lilting tempo with the sole accent on the second syllable of each phrase. The lilt was even more pronounced, as the accent was one of high pitch rather than of heavy stress. The Greek sounded like *khrayón estee* – as it tripped out in a rhythm *dum-dée-dum-dum*. In spite of its lilt, the voice sounded consummately sincere, compassionate, and above all, reassuring. I felt comforted by the presence of the moon, and I felt protected by the feminine voice. The feminine voice? Could this be the voice of the Lady in the Shiny Green Dress?

At once all my concern and disorientation from the dream cascaded back down upon me. She had been in great pain, and she had looked directly into my eyes – she and everyone else. I had to do something, to find the words to say to her, to bring her solace. It was urgent. In my reasoning mind, I was aware that it had been but a dream; in my soul, I knew that what had happened there in the cool glow of the full moon was far more real than anything that might occur under the warm light of the sun.

Taking a deep breath, I calmed down. I could not begin to approach her in her torment unless I could delve back into my own past and find a time when something similar had happened to me, when I had personally experienced the same feelings that she was suffering with right now. Only if I could make this connection through some shared feeling, could I begin to know what it was I was supposed to say and to do.

Immediately, my mind drifted back thirty years. Could it have been thirty years to the very night? Deep within me, I knew what my pain had been – the pain that must now connect with her pain. Using no words, but letting myself be drawn deep within my soul, I drifted – deeper ... deeper ... higher ... higher. Somewhere in the turbulent shallows that swirl between waking and sleeping, my memories and my dreams merged in a long, wearying vision.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DESCENT

A disembodied soul, I found myself floating high over Charleston. The moon was entering into her fullness and was just climbing down from her zenith. She shone with stark splendor as I drifted above the clouds that enshrouded the city. Despite the thick veil of clouds, I knew it was Charleston, for here and there through less dense portions, I could see the moon's slight reflection on the Ashley and the Cooper Rivers, flowing together to form the Atlantic Ocean.

For a time, I hovered, content to bask in the soothing presence of the moon and to gaze out over the soft expanse of clouds below. I am not sure how long I waited or when I started my descent. As I entered the clouds, I felt as though I were passing through some dark tunnel that would take me from the blissful company of the moon to the world of matter below. Down ... down ... down, into the world of matter.

Once I had passed through the clouds, I could see that the city was dark. It was just moments before midnight on 22 April 1967 – a date I seemed all too aware of. Behind me, the moon could barely be seen or felt through the clouds, and she illuminated neither the land below nor its people. As I drifted closer to the ground, I saw a lone figure hurriedly walking beneath the artificial glare of the streetlights.

He was a cadet. His gray dress blouse with its high black collar and its starched white collar-and cuff-inserts sported sergeant's chevrons high on the sleeves and second-class, junior stripes below. He wore stiff white cotton trousers over highly polished plain-toe Oxford shoes. His white cap with its shiny black visor obscured his eyes. High on the front of his cap was the emblem of The Acropolis, The Military Academy of the South.

To me, he looked at once familiar and alien. Everything about him and his uniform seemed to come out of my own memory. But the hat device with its prominent waxing crescent moon and the name of The Acropolis were different from what I had in my memory. No, it had not been The Acropolis – it had been ... something else. What had it been? Suddenly, it struck me that, important as the scene may have been both to me and to this cadet, I could no longer remember.

It was clear, however, that as he walked along Ashley Avenue, he was distressed, for his movements were hesitant and uncertain, and his left hand was oddly closed and shaking, perhaps concealing some wound. I came nearer to him and observed that as he walked from streetlight to streetlight, a shadow hovered behind him and then sped up and passed him, only to wait once more for him to pass in turn. Where had I seen such a shadow before?

Ah yes, now I remembered. When I was a small child, I lay in the back seat of my family's car and stared up at the ceiling. Was I ill? – Perhaps, but I could not recall. There over my feet on the passenger's side I could see a tomahawk form and hover as a distinct shadow just above the rear window. After a time, the tomahawk would speed across to the driver's side, hesitate, and disappear beyond my head. Then another would appear over my feet. This had just been a trick of shadow and streetlight, but for some inexplicable reason it had given me comfort as a child. Looking back on it now with the faintest hint of the Hellenism of Hibernian Hall still clinging to my imagination, I wondered if the strange shadow I had taken to be a tomahawk in my youthful

experience might more appropriately have been a labrys, dispensing death and birth in the cycle of life – the cycle of the moon. For a brief moment, the thought of a fasces crossed my mind, but this made me ill at ease. Shuddering, I purged the fasces from my thoughts in favor of the labrys.

The shadow that accompanied the cadet was far larger and more lumbering. It was like some big, black bear that guarded him from behind and then rushed up to guard him from the front. As I looked down through the eyes of a bird, my perspective grew. I could now see the cadet through the eyes of the bear as well. As I rushed past him and glanced up at his face, I could see tears falling down below the shadow of his visor. This made me all the more determined to protect him from behind and from the front.

I ran forward, waited for him to catch up, and then ran forward again. I marveled that the shadow of a bear would be giving protection to a cadet on the streets of Charleston. But this was not all. I could still see the scene below – including myself as a bear’s shadow – from the eyes of the bird. In that persona as well, I seemed to be lending him some form of protection. I should have been completely disoriented with this double view, but I could feel something or someone with me, deep within me, who made it seem entirely in accord with nature.

Watching the cadet from above and from below, I was soon provided a third view. Gradually, I began to behold the scene through the eyes of the cadet himself. This was indeed disorienting, but only because his tears were obscuring the landscape, at least from my new perspective. Somehow I knew that I had to connect with the soul of this young cadet to learn the answer to what now seemed to me the most pressing question in the universe: “What is wrong?”

With my triple perspective, I took in the entire scene. More and more, though, I concentrated upon the view through the cadet’s eyes, but warily kept watch over him from the bird persona above and the bear persona below – personae that I knew I was only borrowing for a time by the grace of another.

In his left hand, I began to feel an object. The more thoroughly we joined together, the more the object hurt – hurt not only because it was digging into the hand we now shared, but because it was also digging into our heart. I did not need to finger the object with his hand or to see it with his eyes, for I knew all too well what it was. It was a gold vermeil pin with two crossed Acropolis swords, each precisely one and three-quarter inches long and forming a trapezoid one and one-half inches long (points to pommels on the sides) by one inch wide (point to point on the top) and seven-eighths of an inch wide (pommel to pommel on the bottom). In the midst of each hand guard was a tiny ruby. Where the swords crossed was the seal of The Acropolis. Attached to the pin on the back was a chain connected to a smaller pin, with the gold block-style number “68” – our class.

The cadet was walking up Ashley Avenue. The upward direction was evident to me; although, despite the fact that my feelings came through him, I was not sure how well he perceived it. He crossed Congress Street and walked for a short space until he was faced with some construction on the sidewalk in the next block. He hesitated, and I knew he was deciding whether to walk out into the street or turn to the left, in the general direction he needed to go, anyway. He turned left; but as he did so, he looked up at the street sign: South Allan Park. He hesitated, and I was aware that he was not familiar with this street. Nonetheless, it was in the right direction – up and in.

As he walked, I became increasingly aware of his thoughts. He was unfamiliar with the park on his right. He had never seen it from this perspective. It was confusing. He came up to Glenwood Avenue, where South Allan Park ended, and he turned right.

“Yes,” I thought, as though trying to communicate with him. “That’s the way to The Acropolis.” Then the disorientation hit me again, as my memory was fading in and fading out. The *Acropolis*? And why did the word *Academy* strike me as peculiar? Peculiar, and yet ...

Of course, he could not hear me anyway and was unaware of my consternation. The cadet continued on past North Allan Park on the right to Huger Street. Here Glenwood Avenue ended, throwing him into panicky confusion. He looked straight across the street at rickety old houses he had never seen before. His thoughts became more and more discernible to me. “Why didn’t this street go on to Moultrie? Where am I? Am I lost? How will I get back before midnight and the end of general leave?”

We looked around and turned left. We ran now, up to Court Street. But Court Street only led down to the left, and that was the wrong way. Up ahead just a few paces, though, was a T-shaped intersection leading to the right. Sutherland Court – that sounded familiar. We hurried up the street and found ourself on Moultrie Street. Now came tentative relief, rapidly overtaken by anxiety. We were practically in sight of the Main Gate and had to run as fast as our weary legs could carry us up to the gate and then walk as quickly as possible back to the barracks.

As we approached the Main Gate, I realized that I had lost the bird and the bear perspectives and was seeing everything now through the eyes of the cadet. In my last independent gesture, I looked up to where the moon, her light barely visible through the clouds, was beginning her descent over The Acropolis. I offered my thanks for her guidance and protection.

With the gate in view, our souls slipped ever-more completely together. I was amazed, yet comforted to realize just how easily and utterly our souls were joining, as though on some inner, higher level they were and had always been the same. I became aware of his memories; and once again I felt disoriented, for some of his memories seemed to be very similar to my own – or at least to the memories I believed I had possessed up to that moment. Other memories were different, and I found these fascinating and disturbing. But we were joining rapidly now and I knew I had to accept his and somehow speak for both of us, for we were now ... yes ... *one* – I was Cadet.

I – we? No, I – approached the Main Gate and slowed down to an extremely rapid walk. Then, in spite of my hurried movements, for the barest of instants another image of the Main Gate flashed through my mind. I recalled approaching this hallowed portal – the Propylaea – long, long ago. It seemed as though a lifetime had passed. It was 7 September 1964, the day I arrived in Charleston to join the Corps of Cadets of the Military Academy of the South, The Acropolis.

CHAPTER THREE

SERGEANT OF THE PROPYLAEA

Monday, 7 September 1964, Charleston was hot and muggy. Her charm had not yet insinuated itself into my psyche, and I considered the city to be disappointingly dilapidated, compared with my native Washington or my home in the suburb of Bethesda, Maryland. The oppressive humidity, however, was certainly familiar, if not terribly reassuring.

My parents and I were staying at the Francis Marion Hotel in the heart of Charleston. I gazed out my window at Marion Square, with its immense statue of John C. Calhoun. Over on the left of the square, I could see the municipal office building that had once been the original Acropolis. As I waited for my parents to come get me for a reception and speech by the President of the Academy, I thought back to the journey of the day before.

My parents had driven me down to South Carolina. All day, we traveled from north to south as the dark outline of the moon glided on her cross course from east to west. For some odd reason, it struck me that the moon and I formed the quadrants, as though we were taking part in some slow ritual dance.

That day, we made it as far as Florence, where we stayed in a two-story red-brick guest house attached to a dental clinic. My father was measured for dentures at the clinic, which was, to my surprise, opened for him on Sunday. The dentures would be ready for pick-up on Tuesday, the day my parents would leave me off at The Acropolis.

That evening, we were sitting together in the hospitality room of the guest house along with several other, mostly elderly denture-wearing guests. It was a good-sized room, allowing for a wide circle of about a dozen people, all seated in comfortable, overstuffed chairs. The Victorian lamps with their thick shades and tassels provided little light, but I could make out the burgundy and black wallpaper with vertical floral designs interrupted occasionally by reproductions of great art.

At seventy-two years of age, my father was a robust man of my height, though considerably heavier. A civil engineer, he had served for thirty-three years as a Navy officer, retiring with the rank of captain. He still worked as an engineer in Washington and always wore the engineer's uniform – sports jacket or suit, white shirt, and bow tie. He hailed from a small Welsh colony in Dutchess County, New York, where he had still heard the old language spoken in his childhood, especially from an aunt who had difficulties in comprehending English. Indeed, the one phrase in the language he still remembered was her frustrated *Siarad Cymraeg!* 'Speak Welsh!'. He himself spoke little at all; but when he would sit in his chair in the corner of the living room at home and I would sit on the couch to his front right, across the large square entranceway to the dining room, I could always feel his presence in a sort of communion of souls. He was my spiritual connection.

My mother was a short, thin lady fifteen years his junior and full of things to do and the energy with which to do them. While my father was relaxed and quiet, my mother was

outspoken, and her speech was richly peppered with ‘shoulds’, ‘oughts’, and ‘musts’ – every inch the Navy captain’s wife. She made sure that I did my homework, accomplished my household chores, and, most important of all, stood up straight. She was my factual connection.

All of a sudden, and certainly to my surprise, my father spoke up to the other guests, “My son here is enrolling at The Acropolis.” This he uttered with such confidence and pride that I blushed and, typical for a boy of eighteen, wished I could sink through the suddenly uncomfortable chair and disappear. He beamed as the other guests, all from the South, raised their eyebrows, smiled, and chimed in with the universal “Is that so?” This was followed by a rush of information about the importance of the Academy not only in the history of the South and the “Late Great Unpleasantness,” but also of a more personal nature – sons and relatives who had joined the Corps of the Military Academy of the South and how the experience had formed them into men.

One particularly old gentleman smiled in an awkward series of contortions that testified to his dire need of the dental clinic. “The Acropolis,” he proclaimed in a shaky voice filled with nostalgic pride and a thick South Carolina accent. “Wait, wait just a moment,” he gasped urgently as he slowly pushed himself out of his chair and walked bent over and hesitant out of the room.

A few moments later, he reentered, standing straighter and walking with a more assured gait. “The Acropolis,” he once more proclaimed, this time firmly as he held up his right hand to display a massive gold ring with the lunar seal of the Academy.

The room filled with a palpable awe. “Class of 1892.” With every word, decades dropped from his frame. He stood erect and proud.

“That’s the year I was born,” my father said in wonder, and he started an applause that reverberated throughout the whole house and brought the landlady scurrying in. She took a small camera out of a drawer in a little desk in the corner and insisted on taking a picture of my parents and me with the Acropolis Man.

That night, I lay awake in the total darkness of my guest room. In spite of my immediate reaction that evening, I was joyful for my father’s words of confidence and pride. I recalled the chilly evening late in winter when I had wrestled for my high school in the last match of the season. To my surprise, my parents had come to this match – the only athletic event I had taken part in under their eyes. That season, I had wrestled above my weight, as a transfer student had beaten me in my weight class, and I had managed to defeat the boy in the weight class above me.

The three matches before mine had all gone poorly for Walt Whitman, and the drop in morale was rendered audible by the silence in the stands, punctuated only by the occasional groan reverberating off the geodesic roof of the field house. When I stood up from the row of metal chairs beside the mat, though, a cheer could be heard in the gymnasium. Some boys right in front of my parents, but not knowing who they were, clapped loudly. One turned to the other, pointed at me, called out my name, and said with encouragement, “Things are going to turn around now! He’s good!” Fortunately, I won, and our team went on to triumph over the visitors.

When I got home that night, my father was bubbling with an enthusiasm I had never seen from him before. He told me about the boys in front of them and kept repeating “He’s good!” In the darkness of the guest-house room in Florence, I could still hear the pride in his voice. Deep within me, I felt confident that this pride had indeed always been there, even if my father rarely said the words. And I knew with quiet certainty that it always would be.

The wrestling match took place less than a week after I had received my acceptance letter from The Acropolis. The letter, which – in my impatience – had taken its sweet time coming, was dated on Valentine’s Day, a fact that seemed somehow propitious. Just how significant the day was would not be clear to me for some time though. But it would certainly have its effect as my career at The Acropolis took shape.

A month after the letter arrived, I took my first trip to Charleston – my orientation visit. Perhaps “orientation” was not the best choice of words, since I managed to miss my connecting flight out of Charlotte. On the other hand, it probably was an appropriate term after all, since I then took it upon myself, without any phone calls for help, to catch a bus to Charleston and find my way to The Acropolis. The next morning, I arranged to go to the airport to retrieve my bag, and the visit proceeded with no further incident. I was proud of myself for having the tenacity and presence of mind to accomplish this, and I was filled with confidence that night in Florence that I would not only succeed at the Academy, but even excel.

Looking back over my accomplishments, I felt a wave of self-assurance. I had fairly good grades, four varsity athletic letters, the pride and support of my parents, and the will to excel. I also had an older brother who was at the time entering his first-class, senior year at the Naval Academy and who had told me what to expect at a military college. He had even taught me such critical skills as spit-shining shoes to the reflectivity of a mirror – a dark mirror, to be sure, but a mirror nonetheless.

As my mind drifted back from thoughts of home and the night before in Florence, I heard a knock on my door at the Francis Marion. It was time to meet the General.

We entered a large hall with metal folding chairs facing a stage and with white-linen-draped tables covered with hors d’oeuvres along the dark wood-paneled walls. The reception line at the entrance was a gauntlet of high-ranking officers and their wives, culminating in the tall, thin figures of General James Mitchell and his wife Sadie. It was said that General Mitchell would float across campus like a retired God – a feat certainly befitting The Acropolis. In his day, he had been considered a brilliant tactician, known for taking the calculated risk (though his detractors would add that it was a risk with other peoples’ lives). As I shook his hand in the receiving line, he towered over me, and he cast me a grim smile that contrasted with a slight glimmer of hope and pride in his eyes that reminded me of my father. I liked the man and was sad to hear him announce after the short reception that this would be his last year at The Acropolis.

With that announcement, he invited the prospective cadets to leave the room. He had a few things to say to our parents and was sure we would understand. My future classmates and I gathered in the hallway outside the door to eavesdrop on the speech that had been forbidden us. It was, as I would come to learn, the standard speech, full of patriotic references to us as the future standard bearers of our country and the free world, as well as to The Acropolis as the last bastion teaching its young men how to lead armies, businesses, and communities to defeat the threat of Communism.

After a while, the crowd at the door became stifling, and I wormed my way out of it and drifted away down the hall to find relief in isolation. I stood alone and looked back at the crowd of eighteen-year-olds. They all seemed to lose interest in the speech and to start murmuring with each other, striking up friendships, finding out which company their new friends would be joining, but all the while knowing that the next morning would disrupt their lives completely.

As I stood there alone in the crowd of young men, I suddenly felt a firm hand clasp onto my right shoulder. I turned my head to see a tall, thin, but athletic young man with remarkably jet-black curly hair and intense green eyes. A spark of mischief flared up in his eyes as he introduced himself in a strained whisper, “Hi, I’m Herm, Herm Poynter.”

I introduced myself to him, and then I noticed something odd. While I could still hear the General droning on with his increasingly dull speech, I could not hear any murmuring in the hallway. Was everyone so bored by the speech that they had in turn become speechless? Had they suddenly become apprehensive of the reign of terror that would break out the next morning? Or was it something else?

Appearing to take no notice of the silence, Herm continued with the same mischievous, yet intense look, “Let’s get out of here. I’m going to The Acropolis to check it out. I know the way. Would you like to come with me?” Something about him inspired confidence in me, as well as a desire to leave the stifling hallway and travel across the long intervening boundary of Charleston for a secret, unauthorized visit.

We walked out of the building and turned right up Calhoun Street. Herm easily slipped into the role of guide, showing me the various sights along the way. He did not have a South Carolina accent, yet he seemed to know the location and history of every building of note in the city. As we passed along the street, the sun was falling to the horizon and shone upon us as we passed between the buildings.

Approaching Rutledge Avenue, Herm nodded left to a building down the street with a circular porch and columns. “There’s America’s first museum,” he said with authority. “Well, not that particular building. It used to be down in the College of Charleston. And, for that matter, it will eventually move to a larger location, leaving the nice columns behind. It’s nothing like the Smithsonian, of course, but I think you’ll enjoy it.”

Much of what he said seemed cryptic, as though concealing some information that he should not have known and imparting that information to me, who had no idea of what to do with it. But it came across so subtly that it seemed beyond question. Why was he so sure about the fate of the columns? The fact that he compared it with the Smithsonian without my telling him that I was from Washington simply glided past me, not to make me wonder until he was long gone. Perhaps it was merely coincidence. Perhaps everyone was familiar with the Smithsonian whether they visited it regularly or not. I did not know, and that is why his strange little asides – flowing out block-by-block along the way – seemed so mysterious.

We walked up to Lucas Street and turned right. As we came to the end of the block, we saw to our left a large building with two wings going back in a V shape. Facing the intersection, the blunted point had two long stairs going toward the building, then angling in, and finally joining together in front of the door above. We had to walk all along one side of the building and then the other. Just as we turned on Doughty Street in front of it, Herm stopped, faced the building, and put his fists on his hips. “This,” he said smiling broadly but with mock determination, “is the School of Nursing of the Medical College of South Carolina – better known simply as the Nursing College. Don’t worry, you’ll have to deal with them soon enough!” Another cryptic remark to confuse and befuddle me some time down the road.

We turned right up President Street and plodded on in silence for a few blocks. Herm kept looking over to the left, as though trying to find an exact spot in an itinerary he constructed on the fly. As we were walking along a morass-filled empty lot, he stopped and declared, “Here! Let’s cut across this field.”

We slogged through the soaking grass. I was glad to be wearing my civilian shoes and not the plain-toe Oxfords I had been shining up for my report to The Acropolis. The sun had just fallen below the horizon, and I was amazed to see the brand-new moon following him. The sky had been so hazy, and the moon so attenuated that I had not seen her all day. We climbed up a small embankment, where I could behold the moon in all her youthful glory just as she disappeared over the horizon directly in front of us.

I remained there for a moment as Herm walked on. I thought about the new moon – not the new moon as many people call the dark moon, but the gentle sliver of light that calls forth a new month in our lives. Seeing this newness descend in the twilight over the horizon on the way to The Acropolis made me wonder if it might be some kind of omen. If so, of what?

Herm stopped some yards ahead of me and turned with a sympathetic smile. He beckoned me forward and said something that would later stick with me as disturbing or even shocking, although at the time it seemed perfectly natural – a talent he had developed well. “She’s setting now. Come on, I’ll guide you!”

As we trudged across the rest of the field, Herm asked casually, “You’ll be going to H Company, won’t you? I can tell by your size – about five foot seven, I’d say. At The Acropolis, they arrange the sixteen infantry companies by height, so that when everyone is lined up on the parade ground on Friday afternoon, the tallest companies are on the ends and the shortest in the middle. From the reviewing stands, this gives the illusion that the entire Corps is the same height. It’s something like the optical trick in the Parthenon on the real Acropolis – the one that makes the columns look straight by curving them. Be this as it may, the real benefit for you – and for everyone – is that you’ll be able to look your comrades straight in the eyes. No one will feel inferior or superior on account of some genetic accident of height.” He said this with conviction, but then he added playfully, “And, of course, you’ll be able to borrow shirts and trousers when you need to.”

We climbed up out of the morass to Chestnut Street and he added, “And from H Company, you’ll look out over Indian Hill, which is widely thought to be the highest point in Charleston – certainly the highest point west of Ashley Avenue. Sixteen feet above sea level! You probably won’t like it, though. That’s where they put the obstacle course.” How much of this was cryptic and how much of it was simply chatter I could not tell. Herm’s statements were rather unpredictable, but I enjoyed his company and his manner of speaking, with the hint of a British comic tradition that I had always delighted in.

Now we walked up Chestnut Street to the right, and it turned into Hagood Avenue, leading past the football stadium. We were going ever so slightly upward as we closed in on The Acropolis. Just past the stadium, we turned right on Congress Street and then left on Elmwood Avenue for two blocks, to avoid the rather uninteresting locked gate behind the academic buildings. Finally, we saw on our left the narrow end of the humanities building – Philanthropos Hall. And beyond that, the Propylaea – the Main Gate of The Acropolis.

Most cadets referred to the Propylaea with its English equivalent of the Main Gate. When The Acropolis was laid out in its newer setting, Greek words were used for those first structures. So just beyond the Propylaea was Philanthropos Hall for the humanities and Techne Hall for the sciences, and also for the administrative offices. The original barracks building right behind the reviewing stands in the center of the long end of the parade ground was originally called the Epaulis. That term was too foreign for most people’s tastes (not having a convenient cognate in English), and as more barracks were added, they were all given names for famous graduates.

Since there was neither rhyme nor reason for these names, though, everyone simply referred to each by the number of the battalion that lived there.

The best way to get your bearings at The Acropolis was to go around the parade ground. Entering the Propylaea, you could see the Bibliothek (or simply the Library) on your right and Philanthropos Hall on your left. Like all of the buildings on campus, they were of light gray stucco with ample castellations, especially on the round corner turrets, and seemed to fit in nicely with the bumper crop of Spanish moss. Going straight ahead, you would pass a T-intersection on your right at the southeast corner of the parade ground and start up the road along the south (short) end across another T-intersection on your left between Philanthropos Hall and Techné Hall, with its central tower topped by an eagle looking enigmatically to its left. At the southwest corner of the parade ground, you would face an intersection with Fourth Battalion to your front left and Third Battalion to your front right. Turning right on the road along the west (long) end of the parade ground, you would pass Third Battalion, Second Battalion (the original Epaulis, with its high central tower and clock), and First Battalion. At that intersection, the Armory would be to your front left, and the Engineering School to your front right – at that point in the construction of the campus, Greek was seldom taught (and it is doubtful that Mechanopoios Hall would have been at all acceptable, regardless of its English cognate). Turning right down the road from there along the northern end of the parade ground, you would pass the Engineering School, the old Gymnasium, the Business School, and Jasper Hall – the military science building that also housed the Commandant's offices. Turning right again and proceeding along the east end of the parade ground, you would pass the new student union named for General Mitchell and the Chapel, and you would then end up back at the Bibliothek, or Library.

On 7 September 1964, all of that lay beyond the Propylaea, and Herm and I just gazed at the gate itself. While not as elaborate as its namesake in Athens, this Propylaea was still quite impressive. Two massive rectangular columns on either side of the road each held high a flag – American on the left, South Carolinian on the right as we faced them. Beneath each flag was a different seal of the state. The columns anchored massive iron gates that could be closed to seal off the entrance. On the outer side of each was a personnel gate framed in stone and connected to the column, and each gate boasted impressive iron-work featuring a massive iron sword, a replica of the sword carried by an Athenian hoplite. The point of each sword faced in toward the road when the gates were closed, though they seldom were, and they were not on this night.

Through the personal gate on the left, Herm and I spied a small guard house next to the road. In front of the guard house stood a cadet sergeant – the Sergeant of the Propylaea, or the Sergeant of the Main Gate (both renditions abbreviated as SMG). He stood proud and erect, facing the road with detachment bordering on aloofness. Perhaps he was aware that curious prospective cadets would be sneaking by this evening and he wanted to put on a good show for them. Perhaps he had been one of these prospective cadets two years earlier. In any case, his sharp stance of parade-rest in his starched light gray cotton uniform with white web belt, white hat, and white gloves certainly impressed me.

As I gazed at the SMG, I determined that one day I, too, would stand there erect and proud. I would be such a model cadet that my classmates and the Commandant would have no choice but to make me Regimental Commander. I saw myself in a crisp gray cotton uniform with three diamonds on each collar, as I approached the SMG.

“Anything to report, cadet sergeant?” I would ask in a relaxed but official inquiry.

“Only the usual, sir,” he would reply. “A couple prospective cadets sneaking a preview of The Acropolis from outside the gate. We’ll deal with them tomorrow,” he added with a confident smile.

“Indeed we shall, SMG. Indeed we shall. Carry on!”

During my imaginary conversation with the SMG as the future Regimental Commander, I did not notice Herm looking intently at me with more than a hint of amusement.

“You know,” he said quietly and sympathetically, “you may well serve as SMG, but they’ll never make you Regimental Commander.”

“Why not?” I shot back. I was not sure whether I was more perturbed by Herm’s guessing my very thoughts or by his lack of faith in my leadership qualities.

“You’re not tall enough,” he replied as a matter of fact. “General Mitchell has a rule that no Regimental Commander can be shorter than he is. And he’s well over six feet tall. I doubt if the next President will change the standard, or be much shorter himself.”

“That’s ridiculous!” I muttered, thoroughly incensed. “Look at all of the great military leaders who have been no taller than me. Don’t they realize that leadership has nothing to do with height?”

“It’s their preferred expectation,” Herm replied calmly – perhaps a bit too calmly. Noting that this did not quite satisfy me, he continued, “You know, it’s not just them. And it’s not just height. Franklin Roosevelt pulled this country out of the Great Depression and saved the world from Fascism (at least for a time). Do you think for one minute that he would ever have won an election – even in 1944 – had it been generally known that he used a wheelchair and could stand for his famous photographs only with pain and difficulty?”

“So he’d had polio,” I countered. “A lot of people had it in his generation. The fact that he could stand only with pain and difficulty made him that much more admirable for standing. I thought perseverance in the face of adversity was one of the hallmarks of a great man. What kind of people would pass up such a leader just because of a wheelchair?”

Herm smiled at me in a way that combined his wryness with affection. Then a cloud came over his eyes, and he seemed to look out into a distance that I could not perceive. “The same people who condemned Socrates.” He sighed heavily and bowed his head, as though he had known the martyred sage personally.

When he looked back to me again, his green eyes seemed more thoughtful than mischievous. Indeed, after the mention of Socrates, the mood of the evening became more somber, even melancholy. For our trip back from The Acropolis, Herm led us straight down Moultrie Street (the street that comes out of the Propylaea) to King Street.

“This is the usual way downtown. King Street leads right back to the Francis Marion and to most of the places cadets like to visit – from a good shoe repair shop (while you wait in a little booth just high enough to hide your holey socks) to the cinema and places to eat and drink.” He was trying hard to shake off the ghost of Socrates. But the philosopher followed us all the way back to the hotel.

CHAPTER FOUR

8 SEPTEMBER

Whatever desire I may have had to excel, whatever ambitions I may have had for Regimental Commander, height or no height, ran headlong into Thete Week. This was the week before the beginning of the academic year reserved for the intense training of the new fourthclassmen, or freshmen – better known as “thetes.” The name *thete*, which rhymed with *feet*, came from the lowest class of Athenians, those fit only for menial tasks.

Marked by physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion, Thete Week was the first step in becoming an Acropolis cadet. And it was by far the most harrowing. From his reporting for duty to the return of the upperclassmen and the beginning of classes, every thete felt the constant presence of one burning, overriding question: “What madness have I gotten myself into?” After Thete Week, whatever answer may have come made this perhaps more clear, but that hardly provided much comfort.

My parents drove me up to the great entrance arch, or sally port, of the Second Battalion. I kissed my mother’s cheek, shook my father’s hand, lifted up my one suitcase, and strode into the barracks with all the false confidence I could muster. Once inside the sally port, I faced a large quadrangle with a red and white checkerboard design. To my left front, I saw an enclosed stairwell in the corner with a large H painted on the front of it in the light Acropolis blue. Going sun-wise from there, the next corner had G, the one after that F, and then finally E to my left. The two thick columns on either side of the rear sally port facing me held the vertical letters REGT and BAND. The Regimental Band occupied the first level to avoid accidents with the instruments. Each infantry company occupied the next three levels – the three divisions, each corresponding roughly to a platoon.

Determined to make a good first impression, and ignorant of the fact that this was a completely impossible task, I marched up to the desk in front of the H. Seated behind the desk was the company supply sergeant named Stanley Jarmon – MISTER Jarmon to me for the duration of thete year. Behind him was Munro Sinclair, the guidon corporal – the highest ranking sophomore. The company commander Cadet Captain Powell was speaking a few steps back with Cadet First Sergeant Grant Woodward. The two made an interesting study in contrast. Although they were both the same height, Mr Powell was thin and had a slight frame, and this made him look considerably taller than Mr Woodward who was boxy and had a muscular frame.

As I raised my hand in a stiff salute and reported for duty, I noticed several cadet sergeants lurking in the shadows of the stairwell, ready for action. These were all members of the Training Cadre, selected for their military expertise – and their ability to whip the new cadet recruits into shape.

“You don’t salute me, thete!” screamed Mr Jarmon. “You see these stripes!” he bellowed, pointing to the three stripes with the horizontal bar at the bottom on his right collar.

“Yes, sir,” I answered, beginning to get flustered.

“I’m your supply sergeant, not a cadet officer. You only salute officers, thete!”

“What seems to be the problem?” asked Mr Powell, casually walking up to the table, as though on cue.

“Well?” Mr Jarmon slammed his hands on the desk and leaned all the way over until we were practically nose-to-nose. “What do we have here?”

“S-s-sir?” I stammered, now totally confused.

“Do you see what this gentleman is wearing?”

I looked at him and saw that he had a gold band on his black service hat (which, for some reason, was called a garrison hat at The Acropolis), black epaulets on his shoulders, and three circles, or “pips,” on his right collar.

“He’s a cadet captain, sir.”

“Veeery good, thete. And what do we do when we see a cadet captain?”

I executed a sharp half-left turn and saluted as briskly as I could. In the meantime, however, a cadet sergeant had moved swiftly up to my right side, and my elbow made contact with his shoulder.

“He touched me!” the sergeant screeched. “This thete touched me!”

From all sides, cadet sergeants descended upon me, yelling often conflicting commands in my ears.

“Get that stomach in! Get those shoulders back!”

“I wanna see your chin so far in it’s coming out the back of your neck!”

“What are you doing, thete? We haven’t started bracing yet! Put your chin back out!”

“You’re gonna be in a heap of trouble, thete, if you don’t get that chin in!”

“Get that chin out, thete! We haven’t started bracing yet.”

They swarmed around me like angry wasps. Eventually, that’s all I heard – an incessant buzzing in my ears that made no sense whatsoever. All the time, First Sergeant Woodward was observing the operation of his sergeants with grim satisfaction. He leaned over to his right to say something to Captain Powell. Mr Powell kept looking at the show as he nodded in Mr Woodward’s direction.

“Okay, boys. Let’s get this thete registered,” Mr Woodward tersely ordered.

Mr Jarmon handed him a card from the index box in front of him on the desk.

“Well, well, well,” said Mr Woodward bobbing his head forward as he looked at my card and repeated my name over and over, ostentatiously committing it to memory. “So you want to be an Acropolis cadet?”

“Very much so, sir!” I exclaimed with all the enthusiasm I could dredge up after the onslaught of the sergeants.

“What?” he asked, looking closely into my eyes. At this point, Herm’s idea that you could look your comrades straight in the eyes offered me no comfort. I had the distinct feeling that these gentlemen did not view me as a comrade – at least, not yet. “I don’t recognize that answer. A thete has only three answers for an upperclassman: Yes, sir; no, sir; and no excuse, sir. Do you think you’ve got that?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered obediently.

“No, no, no, no,” he replied calmly. “I haven’t given you permission to answer. Wait till I say pop-off. Do you understand now?”

“Y-y-y..” I caught myself before completing a reply.

“Very good, thete.” He leaned forward, stretching out his thick muscular neck and placing his mouth right next to my ear. “Now, pop-off!” he commanded in a booming voice.

“Yes, sir!” I replied in a voice to match his in volume, if not in confidence.

“Excellent!” He turned to his sergeants and proclaimed, “He’s all yours, gentlemen.”

And the grilling continued. Somehow in amongst the yelling, I found myself holding an athletic uniform consisting of dark blue shorts and a white shirt with “The Acropolis” emblazoned across the front in a blue that matched the shorts. I also possessed a card with my white-on-blue name tag and a silvery metal 4 attached to it and a room number written on it.

The sergeants continued yelling in my face, ears, and the back of my neck. Then there was silence and the distinct feeling that one of the orders screamed at me was supposed to be followed. But they had all merged into one loud drone. “Move it!” came back in a chorus, “and get right back down here. You’ve got two minutes. Go! Go! Go!”

I grabbed my bag and ran to the stairwell. Glancing at the card, I saw a number that began with a 4, so I figured that I had to go up to the fourth floor, the third division of H Company.

“Move it! Move it! Move it!” came the command from below. “I wanna see you move like greased lightning!”

I ran up the stairs, taking two or even three stairs at a time in my panicky rush.

“One at a time, thete! One at a time!” bellowed Mr Woodward in his stentorian, but calm voice.

After running up two flights of twisting stairs, each time turning left onto the gallery, left around the corner, and left again onto the next flight, I came to the last flight, feeling slightly dizzy. There was a thin, blond-haired upperclassman on the stairs. As I started up, he shouted out in a thick New England accent, “Halt, thete! I haven’t given you permission to step onto my stairs.”

I stood transfixed for a moment, then I shouted back to him, “May I climb up the stairs, sir?”

“May I climb up the stairs?” he retorted sarcastically. What kind of a request is that? This is the way you say it thete, and don’t you forget it – ‘Sir, Mr Sardis, sir. Cadet Recruit Bozo, U.R., requests permission to drive up the stairs, sir.’ You think you can do that?”

“Yes, sir, Mr Sardis, sir!” I answered in what I gathered to be the complete form of address.

“Have I told you to pop-off?”

“No, sir!” As soon as I said it, I knew what I had done.

He simply smiled menacingly at me, came down the stairs, and put his face right up to mine. “Pop-off!” he screamed.

“No, sir!”

“You mean you don’t get it then?” he asked incredulously.

“No, sir. I mean yes, sir. I mean...”

“Get up those stairs, thete. Move it! One at a time, thete. One at a time!”

Finally, I made it onto the top gallery. I looked at the number on the card and tried to match it to the numbers on the doors to my right. Following the numbers, I turned left and saw in horror that my room number had been skipped. Looking back and forth in confusion, my eyes lighted on a small extension of the gallery going back from the corner. The number on the small room on the right-hand side of the extension matched the number on my card, and I entered through the screen door and then through the heavy, green wooden door, glad to be, at least for the moment, out of the line of fire. I knew, though, that there was not much time left after my encounter with Mr Sardis on the stairs.

The room was on the southwest corner of the building, off the gallery and behind the stairwell (which, although chained off, continued on up to give access to the roof), so it received no morning sunlight and was accordingly dreary. There was a sink just inside the door on the right and a metal bunk bed with ancient thin mattresses beyond it. The bunk was faced by two

large metal presses with dilapidated doors and with shelves on the left and hangers on the right. Beyond the bunk and the presses were two antiquated wooden desks with chairs to match, and beyond them were rickety wooden bookcases. The window was straight ahead, with latticed bars inside the screen and a transom on top (as also over the door). To the right of the window was an old-fashioned heated-water radiator. There were pegs on the wall behind the desks on a plain wooden cornice that surrounded the room, a match for the chair rail beneath. Above it all was a high ceiling with acoustic tile above exposed pipes.

Not being used to an upper bunk, I tossed my suitcase onto the lower. My roommate and I could discuss that later. I hurriedly put my athletic uniform on and dashed out the door.

Approaching the stairwell, I spied Mr Sardis on the second division below me. He had his foot nonchalantly on the lowest step, which I took to be a trap. I popped off smartly, shouting out my request to drive down the stairs, just as he had taught me a minute before. I did not want to take the chance of any further delays, although from the yelling that drifted up from the quadrangle, I could tell that my classmates were arriving and I was probably not being timed terribly precisely at that point.

“Drive on down, thete!” shouted Mr Sardis, with a look of satisfaction – he had performed his duty nicely as keeper of the stairwell. He then went on to inform me, however, that I also had to request permission to “drive around” him, staying always on the row of tiles nearest the quadrangle (except when driving around or when approaching a room or bulletin board). On the stairwell, I was supposed to use only the outermost portion, next to the concrete wall – not the inside with only the black steel railing separating me from a precipitous drop down the stairwell. This gave the thete an extra distance to go, but it also afforded some safety on the dizzying path.

When I arrived at the bottom, I ran out onto the quadrangle to a chorus of shouts, “Who do you think you are, thete? Get off my quadrangle! Stand over there so we can line up a squad.”

I stood at the edge of the gallery facing in toward the quadrangle just to the left of a thick column and with the stairwell further on to my left. This, I would learn, was where we would always form up before running out – yelling – onto the quadrangle in a group.

“Who are you, thete?” Mr Sinclair said in a tone that left no doubt that I had made a big mistake.

I answered using the formula that Mr Sardis had taught me on the stairs.

“And how is anyone going to know that?”

I stood mute, as it dawned on me that I should have put my name tag on.

“Get back to your room and get your name tag! Put it here,” he ordered, pointing to his name tag on the left side of his shirt over the flap of his pocket. “Go! Go! Go! Run, thete! One at a time! One at a time!”

Back up the stairs, back down the stairs, shouting out requests to drive up, down, or around, I made the circuit again. This time, I came back and stood at attention where I had been. So far, I was still the only one there, though I suspect some of my classmates might have been sent back in the meantime for their name tags as well.

“It’s the early worm,” expounded Sergeant Gunn. “You know, the one that gets devoured? Wipe that smile off your face, thete! Now hit it and give me ten.”

This I knew was the order to pump out ten push-ups. Half-way through, Sergeant Jung rushed up to me, knelt down and shouted in my ear, “We’re not doing push-ups yet. Those come later! Stand up, thete!”

Of course, as I was at this point expecting, Sergeant Gunn smiled grimly at me and demanded, “Why didn’t you finish my push-ups?” And the shouting back and forth in one ear and then in the other and then in both simultaneously faded into a menacing drone. Through it all, I barely heard the outraged voice of Mr Jarmon shouting at one of my classmates, “You’re supposed to salute me when you report for duty, thete!”

At last, there were ten of us lined up on the gallery, all being yelled at in the same manner. First Sergeant Woodward was still standing behind the desk, which now had six more cadet recruits lined up, looking anywhere between nervous and terrified. Mr Woodward glanced over to the company commander who stood rigid. He then turned toward Mr Gunn and said firmly, “Take’em away.”

Mr Gunn stood in front of us and barked out “Squad, attention! Right face!”

Someone in the back of the line had never attempted a facing movement before, and he managed to fall into the cadet recruit in front of him, creating a domino effect all the way up the squad. I put my hand out and braced myself against the thick column in front of me.

As at least two sergeants descended upon my clumsy classmate in the rear, Mr Gunn strode up to me shouting, “Get your filthy hand off my column, thete!”

I immediately complied, but the tangled mess behind me had not yet recovered, and I fell headlong onto the gallery, twisting hard so as to miss the column. At that point, I could not have told whether I was so intent on missing it in order to avoid being hurt or to avoid getting my filthy face on it.

Eventually, we were ordered into some semblance of a military formation and marched off, receiving both threatening, demeaning insults and chanted drill instruction along the way – “Swing your arms, nine to the front, six to the rear!” Our first stop was Mitchell Hall across the parade ground. Mr Gunn put us in a long line outside the barbershop and disappeared.

We received the traditional thete cut – a thin layer of bristle sticking up out of a bald head – from a cluster of aged barbers who seemed perpetually amused at the varied hair styles they saw entering the shop and how they stood in contrast to the satisfying uniformity created from them. When the first few of us were done, we walked over to the door, but Mr Gunn was nowhere to be seen. We waited in the hallway just outside the barber shop, not wanting to get lost but suspecting we were doing it wrong.

Once we were all there, one of my classmates spoke up. “Hi. I’m Tadd.” We all replied hastily with our names, though I knew that after another round of marching, the names would lose their faces and then fade away completely. “This is probably some sort of a test,” he continued, “which we’ll inevitably fail, whatever we do.” Each of us nodded in resigned agreement. “Let’s just line up here at parade rest against the wall and look as sharp as we can.”

After a few minutes, Mr Gunn strutted back into the hallway, and we snapped to attention. He walked slowly in front of us, examining our haircuts. I believed that Tadd’s suggestion took the wind out of his sails, but only for a moment. “Left face!” he commanded, and the line wavered and fell into itself again.

Off we went to the Gymnasium, where we had to climb up the right-hand leg of an A-shaped stairway into the second floor. Rows and rows of tables brimming with uniforms and equipment lay before us as a cadet from some other company shoved a mattress cover into each of our hands. We snaked through the Gymnasium, as trousers, shirts, sweat suits, and other uniform items were held up to us in a cursory attempt at measurement and then stuffed into our mattress bags along with sheets, towels, blankets, and so forth.

Just before we went out the door, we were “measured” for hats. Two types of garrison hat (as they called the visored kind), one black and one white, were shoved onto our heads until one pair fit. These were placed more carefully on the top of the pile in the mattress cover. Finally, the same procedure was followed to fit us with two thin rectangular field caps (known, confusingly, as garrison caps in the military), black with white trim. One was stuffed into the cover and one was left on our heads as a sign of our cadet recruit status – as though anyone really needed a sign after taking a cursory glance at us.

From here, we lugged our burdens down the left-hand leg and marched back to Second Battalion, around the quadrangle on the gallery, and then back to our spot by the stairwell. “Squad, halt!” shouted Mr Gunn, his voice straining to be heard over the rest of the shouts reverberating throughout the barracks. “Right face!” Each time we were getting better, and this time no one actually tripped.

“All right, thetes,” he shouted. “Take these mattress covers up to your rooms. You can unpack your precious treasures later. Just search through them and find a pair of white cotton gloves, put them on, and report back here.” He paused for dramatic effect. “On the double! Go! Go! Go!” He did not have to shout out “One at a time,” because we were so weighted down by our full mattress covers that we could barely make it up the stairs as it was.

With difficulty, we got to the top of the first flight, and one cadet peeled off and entered room 248, just at the top of the stairs and to the right of the company bulletin board. We looked at him in envy and continued on. Besides Tadd, who turned right down the gallery, the rest of us were on the second and third divisions. Thankfully, or by design, Mr Sardis was only milling about while we carried our burdens. He would return to the stairs as new cadet recruits reported. I put my mattress cover by the table on the right, located the gloves, and dashed back out the door.

This time, I was the last one back in formation beside the stairwell. “And what took *you* so long, thete?” Sergeant Gunn drove his index finger into the middle of my chest to make his point – the first of many chest pokings I would receive that year. A few feet behind him, Mr Woodward gave a slight cough, and the poking ceased.

“I’ll deal with you later, thete,” he whispered hoarsely into my ear. Whether he really did deal with me later for being the last one down, I could not tell. The harassment was so ubiquitous, and he was so good at it, that such threats carried little weight beyond the immediate terror and the lingering unease they generated.

Again, we marched out, but this time through the side sally port nearest us. We made a reasonable column-right down the road and came to an intersection. In front of us and to the left was the mess hall, where we could smell lunch cooking. It occurred to me that it was still early – the sun was just climbing above the barracks. We executed another column-right and passed in front of the print shop on our left. We continued on behind Second Battalion, between the laundry on our left and First Battalion on our right, and across the road to the Armory – a long field house replete with cylindrically curved roof.

Most of the Armory was used for speeches, hops (formal dances), and basketball. At the rear, however, was where the arms were issued. After much signing of documents, we each received an M1 rifle, complete and serviceable, except for the absence of a firing pin.

We stood outside in a line as Mr Gunn proceeded to tell us how to hold the rifle at right-shoulder arms. From there we made our first visit with our newly issued rifles to the parade ground, where he continued drilling us in the manual of arms.

“In your rooms,” he concluded, “you’ll find three publications attached to the inside of the door. *The Blue Book* is the book of regulations for the Corps of Cadets. *Customs and Courtesies* tells you how you are expected to conduct yourselves properly in nineteenth-century society, i.e. Charleston, South Carolina. You will be regularly questioned on the contents of these books at mess, along with the fourth-class knowledge section of the orientation manual sent to you this summer. The third book is the *Infantryman’s Guide*, which contains all of the information you’ll need for drill. Except, of course, for some arcane Napoleonic troop movements we still use here.”

Ordinarily, I would have found Mr Gunn’s dry humor very much in keeping with my own; and ordinarily, I would have appreciated it. Coming from his mouth and in this context, however, I found it sarcastic and disorienting.

After marching us back to our position in the barracks, Mr Gunn addressed us: “Formation for noon meal will be at 1200 hours sharp. It is now 1145 hours, so go back to your rooms, put your rifles in the racks at the end of your bunks, take off your drill gloves – don’t forget to wash your face and hands – and take it easy for awhile. “Oh, yes,” he added carelessly, “you might want to take a shirt and trousers out of your mattress cover and hang them up so they won’t be wrinkled this afternoon when we teach you all how to dress yourselves. Now move! Move!” he shouted as we scurried up the stairwell.

As I placed my rifle in one of the slots on the end of the bunk next to the sink and above a box for shoe-shining and cleaning supplies, I saw another suitcase on the top bunk and another mattress cover by the desk to the left. Evidently, my roommate had arrived, although his whereabouts were as yet a mystery.

When we assembled by the stairwell for mess, there were a lot more of us now, and the sergeants formed us into three rows. When the bugle blew over the public address system, we stood there awaiting instructions.

“What are you standing there for?” the sergeants yelled at us from every direction. “Run out there and form up. No, no, no – not like that! Run out yelling. I wanna hear your voices bouncing off the walls of the barracks. What? You call that a line? Okay, form up in three squads. You, put your toes up to this line; you, up to this line; and you here.”

Gradually, they formed us into some semblance of a platoon. Actually, there were two platoons, upperclassmen on the right and thetes to the left, with sergeants at either end of each of the three squads. In front, Mr Woodward observed us and then executed a crisp about face and saluted Mr Powell, who returned the salute and executed his own crisp about face, turning away from us. As the other three infantry companies did the same in their corners of the quadrangle and the band formed up in the middle, an imperious group of cadets strode out from the front sally port – the Second Battalion staff. Reports were made, orders were given, all in a flurry of well-rehearsed roles. Before we could figure out what it all meant, we were being marched out the side sally port to the mess hall.

In the mess hall stood rows of tables shoved together in pairs, each to form two messes. At the head of each mess stood the “mess carver,” usually a senior officer in charge of the table, and to his right was his assistant. We were man-handled into positions at random, each thete standing behind a chair. After grace, we all sat down, and waitresses brought out the food in large serving dishes. Although the mess-hall rituals had not yet begun, we did learn right away that the mess carver received all food first, followed by his assistant. Our duty was to make sure that they wanted for nothing. It would become a lot more complicated, though.

After the meal, we were not free to leave (as most of the upperclassmen were), but remained seated until we were ordered to form up outside. We were marched back and remained in formation, while Sergeant Sardis and Guidon Corporal Sinclair stood in front of us. Mr Sinclair was wearing no accouterments on his uniform, as this was to be our instruction on how to dress ourselves.

Mr Sardis took out a 4 and showed how this was to be placed on the right collar. Under the collars went two spring-operated collar stays. The belt buckle was affixed to the belt, with the extra webbing removed. The lacquer would also have to be removed from the buckle – front and back – so that it could be properly shined. The name tag went through the left-hand pocket flap, even with the top – we would not be using these pockets anyway. A handkerchief was stuffed down in the right-rear pocket, with none of it showing. And off we went to put ourselves together, with a whole fifteen minutes in which to accomplish the task.

When I returned to the room, another young man came through the door just behind me. “Holy Cow!” he exclaimed. “Oh, I’m Orrin Murphy.” He was an intense-looking young man, and the thete haircut over his short, aquiline nose and his gray eyes gave him a slightly stern, avian appearance.

“Holy Cow is right!” I replied and introduced myself. We shook hands and rummaged through our mattress covers.

“This thing here says it’s a collar stay,” he said in his broad Massachusetts accent. He held up a card with a strange-looking contraption on it. It had two spring-operated points on arms that were connected just below the top, like a very shallow continuous H.

“That doesn’t look like what we just saw,” I replied and pulled out a card with two separate stays. “I think this is what we need. The other one has a picture of a tie on it, so I guess it’s for use with ties.”

We managed to find our things and put them on our uniforms. We checked each other out and ran out the door, seconds to spare. Down we ran to our spot on the edge of the quadrangle, and we all formed up into three ranks, with some “help” from the sergeants.

We were then ordered out to the same positions we had taken before noon meal. We were immediately sent back and ordered to yell on the way out. Then we were sent back again and told to yell louder this time. I had the luck of having Sergeant Gunn inspect my squad. His ever-active finger poked against name tags, belt buckles, and 4’s as he went down the line.

Once again, Mr Sinclair was standing in front of us. Mr Sardis pointed to Mr Sinclair’s waist and then to his own. “Do you notice the difference, thetes?” Receiving nothing but silence, he added “Pop-off!” and we all yelled “Yes, sir” in unison. We had not been waiting to pop-off, we had simply been confused.

Mr Sardis had Mr Sinclair turn his back to us and we saw how his shirt billowed out over his belt. He loosened his belt, grabbed the two sides of his shirt and pulled them out taught. Mr Sardis grabbed the right end from him, held it firmly in his right hand, and folded it back over his left hand. After Mr Sardis took his hand out from the fold, Mr Sinclair held that side down, and they repeated the procedure on the other side. Finally, Mr Sinclair synched his belt to reveal a tightly fitted shirt with two folds down the back, just like the black lines on the back of a wool dress gray blouse.

“That, thetes, is a shirt tuck.” We were all told to work in pairs and were led through the procedure. Of course, ours did not look as neat and crisp. After all, we had never done this before. Nonetheless, we were assailed with yells and insults.

Now that we were “properly dressed” (although it was evident from a great distance that we had a long way to go before looking like real Acropolis cadets), we were ordered back to our rooms to retrieve our drill gloves and rifles. The rest of the afternoon was spent learning the manual of arms and close-order drill.

At 4:00pm – 1600 hours – we were dismissed and told to start putting our rooms in order. Orrin and I reintroduced ourselves. In the hectic life of the first-day cadet recruit, first names were difficult to remember. Fortunately, we wore our last names on our chests. As for Tadd, who had taken charge of us and had kept us (momentarily) out of trouble after our haircuts, his name was long gone from my memory and his face but a hazy recollection, soon to join his name.

One name I did remember was Cadet Sergeant Sardis – perhaps because I had associated it with the ancient Lydian capital burned by the Athenians and through that connected with The Acropolis; or perhaps simply because it was easier to remember a name once I had yelled it several times. Mr Sardis grabbed the screen door handle, opened it slightly, then slammed it into the door jam. That, as we would learn, was the way upperclassmen knocked. It certainly served to get the notice of the thetes in the room and to bring the room to attention.

Mr Sardis looked at me with his hand over his name tag. “Who am I, thete?”

“Sir, Mr Sardis, sir,” I shouted out with confidence and not a little pride.

“Excellent, thete!” he proclaimed, with what looked to be a little pride in himself as well. “I’m glad you remember my name, because you two are gonna to be in my Cadre squad. Meanwhile,” he continued, “I’m gonna show you how to put your room together.”

“Thank you, sir!” said Orrin, apparently wishing to join the conversation and perhaps encouraged by Mr Sardis’ New England accent. It was the wrong thing to say, however.

“Don’t you ever thank an upperclassman for performing his duty, thete! I’m not showing you this because I like you. I’m doing it because that’s my job. Do you two thetes understand?”

“Yes, sir, Mr Sardis, sir!” we shouted in unison.

Mr Sardis showed us how to make a bed, with square tucked corners and the pillow the width of a *Blue Book* from the end. He showed us how to fold our socks around pieces of cardboard (that the laundry wrapped our shirts around) so they would lay flat on their appointed shelf in the press. He showed us where folded things were laid, where things on hangers were hung, and where various types of shoes were placed below the lower bunk. He introduced us to the cleaning supplies in the bucket under the sink – the bucket that would be our trash can in the room and our wash bucket for cleaning the gallery. He pointed out the slips of paper with our names on them that had appeared sometime during the day on our desks. “Each of you put your name in the slot on your bunk, press, desk, and bookcase, and in the slot behind your rifle. You see that slot on top of the mirror over the sink? Each week after Saturday Morning Inspection – SMI – you’ll change the name. Each of you serves a week at a time as room orderly, responsible for everything in the room that doesn’t have a name on it – like this filthy floor. Now get to work and assemble with your squad in front of the shower room at 1700 hours in bathrobes, field caps, name tags, and flip-flops. Don’t forget your soap, shampoo, and towel. You’re gonna learn how to take a shower!”

At precisely 5:00pm, all of us from the third division were lined up on the edge of the gallery, facing the latrine and shower room just this side of E Company. Mr Woodward was there, along with Mr Sardis, Mr Gunn, and one or two other sergeants. With our eyes looking straight ahead, it was always hard for us to tell just how many there were.

“Take one step forward,” commanded the first sergeant. This took us off the outer row of tiles to which we were generally restricted, but it gave the sergeants room to walk behind us. It was always more intimidating if we could be surrounded.

Mr Woodward strode back and forth in front of the squad like Napoleon addressing his troops. He told us how to lather with soap and shampoo and rinse all in the time allotted to a thete to shower – twelve seconds. In mid stride and mid sentence, he wheeled around toward me, almost touching nose to nose and bellowed, “This time, Cadet, I’ll overlook the fact that your name tag’s on upside down.”

He quickly looked away, but not before I spied a slight wry smile on his lips. Could it be that he had done the same thing his thete year? Looking back on it, I had to admit that I smiled the same way whenever I caught a thete repeating one of my numerous blunders from freshman year.

At that moment, though, such thoughts were the furthest thing from my mind. Precisely what was on my mind was hard to tell because of the sheer panic that set in from all angles. I looked down instinctively, just to be closed in upon by two sergeants behind me, each yelling in different ways to keep my eyes straight ahead. One of them was Mr Gunn, as I could tell by the finger poking into my shoulder, at least until he was given a glance with a raised eyebrow from Mr Woodward.

We all received twelve seconds under the showers, the whole time with the sergeants’ voices reverberating so loudly from the walls that we could discern practically nothing of what they were saying. Finally, we were told to get back to our rooms and prepare for evening meal at 1800 hours, including ties (tucked in between the second and third button) and with the other collar stays.

This time when we yelled our way onto the quadrangle, we were organized into our training squads. In the third squad, Mr Sardis arranged us by height (subtle as that difference may have been) with the tallest to our right. I was somewhere in the middle, and Mr Sardis was all the way over to the right, with Mr Gunn all the way over to the left. Again, we were in the second platoon, with most of the Cadre in the first.

After retreat and the lowering of the colors, we were marched off to mess and given “permanent” seating – permanent being for the rest of September. A mess consisted of seven cadets, with two messes sharing a long table. Although most of them had a cadet officer and a sergeant at the head, mine was commanded by Mr Sardis as mess carver and by Mr Sinclair as assistant. After the meal, we were marched back in a group and ordered to go to our rooms and start shining our shoes. We should expect a visit from members of the Cadre, who would give us instruction.

In the small alcove room of third division, Orrin and I took out our shoes and polish. I put some water in the cap of my metal tin of polish, wrapped a soft handkerchief around the index and middle fingers of my right hand, and proceeded to spit-shine my shoes. But Orrin took out a brush and started buffing his.

“That’s not the way you do it,” I informed him, wishing to be helpful. “Here, I’ll show you how to spit-shine.”

“I know how to spit-shine,” he asserted with an air of authority. “These are special Spanish leather. You don’t spit-shine them. They get just as good a shine buffing.”

Air of authority or not, I knew that buffing would not work. So I tried to convince him that the only way to get the shine they wanted was to spit-shine. He dug in his heels and suggested

we wait for the upperclassmen, who would, no doubt, be duly impressed by his Spanish leather shoes.

Down the gallery, I could hear the slamming of screen doors that announced visits by members of the Training Cadre. I was afraid. If they came in here and saw me spit-shining my shoes and Orrin buffing his, I would look awfully bad. I thought of putting away my polish and buffing my shoes too, but I had no brush.

Just then, our door slammed and in walked Mr Woodward, followed closely by Mr Gunn and Mr Jung. It took the First Sergeant only a second to size up the situation, and he descended upon me in a rage. "What are you doing, letting your roommate buff his shoes when you know how to spit-shine?" he demanded in a genuinely angry voice. "Are you trying to outshine your roommate? 'Cause if you are, that's the lowest thing you can do, thete. Never, never, never try to outshine your roommate. He may be the only friend you ever have at this place. So what were you trying to do?"

"Sir, I did try to..."

"Quiet, thete! What are the three answers you can give an upperclassman?"

"Yes, sir. No, sir. No excuse, sir."

"Right! Now I say again, what were you trying to do?"

"No excuse, sir," I replied, feeling trapped and defeated. All the time, Orrin stood there silent. I wanted desperately for him to come to my rescue and explain about his wonderful Spanish leather shoes. But he was caught in the same dilemma I was – something important to say and no permission to say it.

In the end, we were given a brief instruction in spit-shining, and they whisked out the door. But not before Mr Woodward spun around and growled at me, "Be sure I never, ever catch you trying to outshine your roommate again!"

I felt isolated by the accusation and by my roommate's refusal (as I irrationally saw it) to stand up for me. I never allowed myself that close to Orrin. Something in the back of my mind kept warning me not to trust him, even though my reason said that he would not have been allowed to say anything. And besides, he was just as afraid as I was. Still, that irrational something in the back of my mind ushered me into a world of self-isolation.

That night, as we lay in our bunks, he turned over and looked down at me. "I'm sorry about the shoes."

"Don't worry about it," I assured him. "By morning, they'll have forgotten about it and have some new way to torment us." At least, I hoped they would forget about it. I hated to think that I had ruined my career at The Acropolis the very first day.

"You know something?" I added, trying to be friendly and to overcome the tension that flowed through the room. "I think I see two levels at work here. On the lower level is all the harassment we get. You know, 'Move! Move! Move! Run up those stairs like greased lightning!' Then on the upper level, things are governed by safety and training. This is the 'One at a time, thete! One at a time!' level. And like Mr Gunn, poking us constantly with his finger. When he seems to get to carried away, Mr Woodward gives him a look or coughs, and he backs off."

"So?" asked Orrin. "How does that help us?"

"Don't you see?" I continued with my analysis. "They really won't hurt us, at least not permanently. The lower level is applied with the oversight of the upper level – brute force meted out only in accordance with reason."

“Oh, great!” Orrin exclaimed. “I’m rooming with a philosopher! Okay, let’s say you’re right. What happens when Mr Gunn operates on the lower level and forgets about the upper level – and Mr Woodward isn’t around to raise an eyebrow?”

With that one question, I realized that I did indeed have something to fear. Someone operating on the lower level with no respect for the upper would be a sadist. Now I felt even more isolated and afraid than ever.

All cadets were required to carry delinquency slips in the lining of their field caps (with their names and units filled out and ready to present), just in case an officer or a senior-level cadet had reason to report them to the Commandant’s office. At the top of each slip was the motto “Discipline is training that makes punishment unnecessary.” That was, of course, only if both levels were operating together. For an unchecked sadist, the motto should have read, “Discipline is punishment that makes training unnecessary.” The more I thought about it, the more I feared. And the more I feared, the more isolated I felt.

I looked down at the luminous dials on the alarm clock that I had placed under my bunk. It was set to go off at 5:45, so we would have a half hour to get up, get ready, shine our shoes and brass, and be in place at the quadrangle by 6:15. At that time, five minutes before reveille, a bugler switched on the PA system and played first call, the tune best known for its use at horse races (the call to post) but traditionally the signal that a more substantive call was five or ten minutes away. It was at this first bugle call that the thetes would race out, yelling at the top of their lungs, to their positions on the quadrangle; and we wanted to be ready for whatever this new day would throw at us. Was it really only our first full day at The Acropolis?

As I fell asleep, I worried about the levels. Perhaps even more than that though, I worried about worrying about the levels. Where had I got such an idea? It was not at all typical for me. Yet, somewhere deep inside me there was something telling me about higher levels and lower levels, and how the one must govern the other, lest disaster ensue.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THETE SYSTEM

Whatever special surprise that first full day had to throw at us took its time coming. All day, we drilled, and we went to orientation sessions about The Acropolis, its history, and the various facets of its operation. We had physical training, or PT, in which we ran with our rifles around and around the road encircling the parade ground. We ate our three meals in the mess hall, always making sure that the mess carver and his assistant were properly and generously served. We attended the various formations and listened to announcements we could not understand. The only announcement we did understand at the end of evening meal was an ominous one – “The Thete System will officially begin this evening at 2200 hours, gentleman,” followed by a sinister laugh from all of the Training Cadres.

After evening meal, we were marched back to the quadrangle and ordered to report in bathrobes and field caps – the usual barracks “lounge wear” of thetes – to the second division alcove room at 1930 hours sharp. We heard the same orders being given to the other three infantry companies. The Regimental Band was to meet in their southwest alcove, behind the big H.

As Orrin and I drove down the stairs to the second division in our bathrobes and field caps, we were herded into a line forming from the corner opposite the alcove room back to the latrine. Once everyone was present, we were marched down the little extension of the gallery into the large alcove room. Although I had lived next to an empty one for almost two days now, I had no idea what one of these large rooms looked like.

The outer corner room was circular, following the wall of the turret at the corner of the building. At the far end, Mr Powell and his executive officer, Mr Woodward and several of his sergeants, and Mr Sinclair stood motionless behind a wooden desk. We were crowded together in front of the desk so closely that we were pressing against each other. The room was hot, not just from the press of scared bodies, but also from the radiators, which had been turned on to contribute to the effect.

The room was far too small for three dozen thetes, and we were only allowed half of it. As the sergeants pushed us together, I thought of what the higher-level interpretation of this action might be. Clearly, it was to force us into unity, to make us all slip together into one.

Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect on me. The more I was squeezed together with my classmates, the more isolated and alone I felt. I did not want to feel this way, and I was totally aware that the feeling was wrong – wrong on any level. Yet, this was how I felt.

To make matters worse, as soon as we had been squashed together as tightly as we could be, we were ordered by several loud voices in unison, “Sit down, thetes! Sit! Sit! Sit! What’s the matter with you? I want all your bottoms on this floor immediately.” We ended up in a tangled mess, with me feeling even less a part of the unity than before.

Finally, Mr Woodward stepped up onto the table in the circular part of the room. From our lowly vantage point, we could see just how impressively muscular and powerful he was. He stood erect, slapping a brand new Marine swagger stick in his hand and glaring at us with an intensity that gave us shivers in the stifling hot room.

“Thetes,” he began, “I am your First Sergeant, Mr Woodward. If you ever have the misfortune to have to visit me in my room two doors down from here at the bottom of the stairwell, you will place your nose against the Marine first-sergeant device on my screen and report. For now, all you need to know about me is that I’m five foot seven, weigh 180 pounds – all of it muscle – and have a 20 inch neck. After we’re done with you here, I want you all to return to your rooms and write a letter to your parents giving them that information.”

The speech went on about his expectations – actually demands – for us, how difficult the thete year was going to be, and why we had all been ill-advised as to come here in the first place – wretched, unmilitary, useless beings that we were. This was the worst class ever to enroll at The Acropolis, and he took it as his special duty – and pleasure – to run out anyone he did not see as fit for the System.

It was the standard speech. Just as the General had his, the first sergeant of each company had his speech as well. Needless to say, we took the latter to be far more important and certainly less boring than the former. When he had finished his harangue and introduced us to all the other members of the Training Cadre, he concluded in a threatening tone, “Now get back to your rooms and write that letter while you’re still able. At 2200 hours report in the uniforms you’re wearing now to your station by the quadrangle for, let us say, a very special introduction to the Thete System. Now get out of here! Move! Move! Move out of here like greased lightning!” All the other sergeants joined in the chorus. The cadet officers stood back, silently watching.

We all ran to our rooms, and each one of us wrote the same letter to our parents. For some, it would be the first of many letters begging their parents to allow them to withdraw from The Acropolis. In his standard speech, General Mitchell had already given warning that the letters would come, and he urged the parents to be sympathetic, but firm in their resolution that we would all become Acropolis Men.

At 2200 hours, we stood ready to roll out onto the quadrangle. The bugle sounded a single note, followed by screams from cadet sergeants to get out there. We stood in formation without our squad leaders at the ends of the squads and without our company commander and first sergeant in front of us. We were all alone when the flood lights suddenly went out, leaving us in the dark. Over the public address system wafted the sad, lonely strains of “Old Folks at Home,” played wavering on a harmonica.

“Gentlemen,” the official-sounding announcement began over the PA system, reverberating from the silent walls. “The Thete System for the class of 1968 is now in effect.”

Immediately, the lights glared down with unexpected brilliance as Cadremen who had been hiding in the shadows, lying in wait, now waited no longer but descended upon us screaming at the tops of their lungs. “Get that chin in, thete! I wanna see that chin come out the back of your neck! It’s called a brace, thete, and that chin won’t come back out again for nine months! You’re a waste, thete, I’m gonna run you out of this place! Get those shoulders back! Get that stomach in!”

Over and over we were each told to “Hit it, and give me ten!” At this point in the System, the maximum number of push-ups an upperclassman could order at any one time was ten. The number increased through the year as we got into shape. That was the theory – the higher-level purpose. In reality, and especially on Thete Night, each order to hit it was followed by another voice giving the same command. Now it was not just Mr Gunn, but all the sergeants who were poking, poking, poking with their fingers and knuckles, giving concrete emphasis to their words. All around me, thetes were giving out. I was fortunate in having been an athlete in high school,

so I gave out later than most. The bad side of it was that I got to give out with a lot more sergeants yelling in my ear.

After what seemed like hours, but was in reality only thirty minutes, the bugle sounded tattoo, and every man was ordered to return to his quarters. Yes, the Thete System had officially begun – a hectic routine of bracing, doing push-ups, being yelled at, moving always in double-time.

All day Thursday and Friday, the torment continued, only occasionally broken up by instructional sessions overseen by Army or Air Force officers. We marched and jogged in formation, with and without rifles, all over campus from the parade ground to the mosquito-infested marshes behind the Armory.

Meals became things to be dreaded. We had to sit at a brace on the first three inches of our chairs and serve our upperclassmen. When we wanted to eat we had to hold our plates between stiff, praying hands and shout out, “Sir, Mr Sardis, sir. Would you or Mr Sinclair care for this food, sir?” We especially feared what would happen when we were integrated into the company and two of us had to serve five upperclassmen, shouting “Sir, Mr Sardis, sir. Would you or any of these other fine, refined, and otherwise highly sophisticated Southern gentlemen – and *N* grim Yankees – care for this food, sir?” When – and even whether – we would be able to eat then was a matter of great concern to us (although, of course, we had never heard of an Acropolis cadet starving to death).

Finally, after a parade on Friday – a custom that would continue every Friday afternoon for the rest of our time at the Academy – we were gathered together by Mr Jarmon, the supply sergeant, to learn how to take our rifles apart and prepare them for the next morning’s inspection, our first SMI. Over and over again we dismantled our M1 rifles and put them back together again, and we were finally told to practice it in our rooms until we could do it blindfolded. He also ordered us to “burl and url” our rifles. Although Mr Jarmon was a fellow Marylander, he came from the Eastern Shore, and it took me a while to figure out that he wanted us to “boil” our rifles – to use hot water to remove the old oil – and to replace it with a thin coat of new oil. Boiling was a procedure that, if asked about by Major Cantwell – the Tactical Officer (an active duty military officer who was assigned to the company and who also served as a military science instructor) – we had to deny, since it was definitely against military regulations. But it was also the only way to get the rifle clean.

That evening, Orrin and I cleaned our rifles and started preparing our room for SMI. Of course, we were exhausted and overwrought. At 10:30 we heard tattoo over the PA system and decided that we would have to get up early in the morning – about 4:00am – to finish. I put two alarm clocks (both Orrin’s and my own) under my bunk, just to make sure. Neither of us heard taps at 11:00 that night.

During the night, I had a strange dream. I dreamt that I heard a grotesque sound, like an otherworldly alarm clock going off. But it sounded as though it came from a great distance. I traveled down a country road till I found myself face-to-face with a giant alarm clock that wavered and melted before me when I touched it, like some animated surreal painting by Salvador Dali. Then I had another dream, in which the sound returned. This time, I seemed to be looking below my bunk at a monstrously large alarm clock that appeared to be growing out of the floor beside my shoes. I performed some ritual that I must have learned in the earlier dream, and the sound stopped.

The next thing I heard was the bugle playing first call – the most jolting and terrifying bugle call a thete can hear between sleeping and waking. We sprang from our bunks, disoriented and still exhausted. We had no time for such niceties as brushing our teeth, much less polishing our shoes and brass, but we immediately started throwing on our clothes, neglecting such details as shirt tucks. We could hear our classmates yelling as they ran out to their places on the quadrangle. We were doomed.

“Didn’t you hear the alarm clocks?” Orrin snapped. “They were right under your bunk.”

“Didn’t you hear them?” I retorted, feeling both insulted and ashamed.

“Yeah. But I was just as wiped out as you were.”

We managed a weak laugh at both of our expenses, and we tore out the door, down the small extension hall, and onto the gallery. There we were met by our classmates who were all scurrying back to their rooms. I wondered if this was some continuation of my surreal dreams of the previous night.

“Attention to orders, attention to orders,” came crackling over the PA system. “The uniform of the day is now raincoats. I say again, the uniform of the day is now raincoats. That is all.”

Never before had Fortune smiled upon me so broadly, so benevolently, so ironically. With the scramble back up the stairs, the fumbling with raincoats, and the mad dash back down the stairs, our classmates would not look so much better than we did that the upperclassmen would realize that we had not prepared – only that we had very poorly prepared. Above all, no one would know that we had not made it to breakfast formation on time.

Of course, we were all severely reprimanded at the mess hall for our poor appearance. And Orrin and I were singled out as the worst of the lot. Nonetheless, our appearance was not so relatively bad as to be worthy of any punishments that would keep us from getting back to our room as soon after mess as we could to try to throw things together.

The personal inspections on the gallery were marked by rain splashing in on us, further saving us from disgrace; and the wet raincoats with their billowing capes had made enough of a mess in all of the rooms to at least partially cover for us there as well. Once again, we were certainly the worst, but not so egregious as to warrant anything more than the greatest amount of punishment.

The worst was indeed yet to come, though. So long as we were preparing, being inspected, getting yelled at, and doing push-ups, I had neither the time nor the energy to think. Once it was all over, most of the upperclassmen went into town, leaving me time to sit down and take stock. For the first time, it dawned on me that I might not become Regimental Commander after all – not because of my height, but because I was just not Regimental-Commander material.

Now, this realization should have served to draw me closer to my classmates, to convince me (if I needed convincing) that I was no better than they were and that we were all in the same predicament. But it did not do this. Nor did it convince me that I was any worse than my classmates – I still had dreams of making corporal at the end of the year, just not guidon corporal. Instead, it simply seemed to isolate me further, to separate me from the rest not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of Fate.

All the rest of that day, I worked on polishing and cleaning whatever should have been polished and cleaned early that morning. Since I could not excel, I set myself a new goal: I would at least do well enough to be invisible, somewhere in the middle, where I could be overlooked by everyone – by the upperclassmen and even by my own classmates. Survival was a task to be achieved alone.

The next morning, after being allowed to “sleep in” an extra hour, most of us formed up to be marched to general Protestant services at the Chapel. The Roman Catholics, Jews, and Orthodox were led off to their own services at various parts of the campus. The Episcopalians, who abounded in Charleston, had already arisen an hour early (the normal time) to attend to their services at the Chapel before the Protestants.

For the first time in the history of the Military Academy of the South, there arose the “problem” of Buddhists. Starting with our class, the government of Thailand sent two young men per year to be educated at The Acropolis, so they could return and serve as officers in the Thai Army. Since they were characteristically shorter than the average American, we ended up with one of them in H Company – the other was in the at-least as-short I Company.

Our cadet was a particularly affable young man with a name that none of us could pronounce. So we all – upperclassmen and thetes alike – called him Guy, which was close enough to part of his first name to work. I do not know if it was from his Buddhist background, but he was certainly one of the most stoic individuals I had ever met. But he was not stoic like some puritanical, humorless Cato. He was congenial and laughed easily and heartily among friends. I took an immediate liking to him, and since I was majoring in modern languages, I decided to attempt calling him by his real name. After a few weeks of mispronunciations, he finally smiled and told me, “Just relax and call me Guy. I’m the same ‘guy’ no matter what you call me, anyway!”

On that first Sunday, though, Guy presented a major problem for the company. Since he did not fit into any of the other categories for services, he had to report to the general Protestant formation. But, of course, he was far from a Protestant by any definition.

Sergeant Gunn was the one who first broached the topic. As we were formed up and ready to march out the front sally port, he approached First Sergeant Woodward and said, “What’re we gonna do about Guy? Frankly I don’t think he should hafta go to religious services he doesn’t believe in, but as the regulations stand now, he hasta come to this formation. I sure don’t wanna see our first Thai cadet get burned.”

My ears perked up at this for a couple of reasons. First of all, it became clear that Mr Gunn was not in fact a sadist – one who operated only on the lower, brutish level – but he was quite capable of seeing the reasons for things. He even appeared to be genuinely concerned for Guy’s religious freedom. Compounding that bit of confusion, I was curious that he should use the term “burned.” The first thing that popped into my mind was that he thought Guy would burn in perdition. But then it occurred to me that this was a term used for receiving demerits. At that point, the dilemma was clear: Guy should not be forced into a religion he did not believe in, but he had to be a part of this formation.

From the corner of my eye, I could see Mr Woodward pondering the problem. “Okay,” he finally concluded, “this is a required military formation. So Guy forms up with us as required. There’s also a military formation in front of the Chapel. But there’s nothing in the regulations prohibiting him from leaving the line as it enters the Chapel – there’s no formation in the Chapel itself.”

As it turned out, the Commandant agreed with Mr Woodward. From then on, the two Thai cadets (and all those yet to come) would break off from the line going into the Chapel and would repair to Mitchell Hall, where they could hold their own religious discussions and meditations.

Once again, my mind focused on the two levels of the System. Mr Woodward may have been very strict in making sure the Thete System was enforced fully and properly, and Mr Gunn may have been extremely enthusiastic about the execution of the System (or of us, as it appeared from our angle), but all of this was carried out in accordance with the higher-level plan.

After Chapel, I polished and cleaned. And as I performed these menial tasks my mind was free to contemplate the levels. As before, however, I wondered not only about the relationship between the higher-level thought and the lower-level action, but even more about why my mind should be thus occupied. Where were these thoughts coming from?

Then there was that “other” thought – a thought that seemed occasionally to come to me from another world, another time. Was this *The Acropolis*? Was there not some other name? Or was it really some other place, some other universe altogether? Some things did seem vaguely familiar. Yet, I had a foreboding that some things would be disturbingly different. But different from what?

On the next day, my feelings of isolation were extended beyond the debacle of my first SMI and into the academic. Monday, the thetes were assembled in the quadrangle to be called out for their first faculty advisement. We were ordered to run to the front sally port when our majors were called out, and, of course, we had to yell at the top of our lungs as we ran.

The majors proceeded alphabetically, with thetes running and yelling from all four infantry companies and the band. Business Administration was first, and a roar went up as the majors filled the sally port. The roars were somewhat more muted for Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Education, Electrical Engineering, and English. A mighty chorus sounded for History, perhaps the most popular major at the Military Academy of the South. Mathematics was decidedly less popular, with yells proceeding from only one or two cadets in each company.

Then came Modern Languages, including major programs in French, German, and Spanish. One lone voice called out pitifully on the seemingly marathon distance from H Company to the sally port. I assumed I had made some mistake and had run forth uncalled for. But F Company’s guidon corporal in the sally port looked at me and asked with no emotion, “Modern Languages?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, suppressing any show of disappointment.

“This way,” he said as he led me around the parade ground to Philanthropos Hall. On the way, he asked me my name in a curiously friendly manner. Disarmed by his openness, I answered with my full name.

“Only your last name, thete!” he barked in reply.

When we arrived on the third floor of the hall, he showed me to the office of Lieutenant Colonel Dunbar. Once more, I made the mistake of recognizing the corporal’s kindness by thanking him.

“You don’t thank me, thete. You never thank an upperclassman for performing his job. I brought you here because those were my orders, not because I like you!” And he left.

Sufficiently chastised and utterly lonely, I waited for Colonel Dunbar. In a few moments, an elderly, preoccupied man in a constant bustle burst through the door, muttering about being late. He was a senior associate professor in the South Carolina Militia – the “unorganized” militia that formed the faculty and staff of the Academy and that was designated by SC on their lapels. As with all SC officers, his military rank reflected his academic position. Reservists and military retirees, on the other hand, were allowed to wear their federal uniforms with the US on their lapels, and their ranks were not so informative of their academic standing.

As Colonel Dunbar shuffled hastily through a pile of papers, I noticed that his brass was a strange mixture of brown, black, and green. I learned later that about ten years earlier, he had removed the lacquer from his brass, shined it to perfection, and showed up in the department proclaiming in every language he knew, “Don’t I just shine?” The incredulous stares of his colleagues convinced him never to try that again; but at this point, the protective lacquer was gone and the brass had begun its long trek to total corrosion.

Colonel Dunbar was one of those brilliant thinkers who had a hard time connecting with the real world. He could walk across the parade ground reading a book and trip, only to continue reading lying down. My sophomore year, he came into my Greek class (next to the President’s office in Techne Hall – a good distance from the rest of the language classrooms in Philanthropos) three times in a row rattling away in Spanish to a train of seniors trying to keep up with him. When he set his book down and looked at us, we informed him, “Sir, this is Greek.” “Of course,” he asserted with confidence, slammed his book shut, and abruptly departed in the same fashion. Yet, he could carry on simultaneous conversations in French, German, and Spanish while walking down the hall, never missing a point.

On this day, Colonel Dunbar examined my papers, looked at me closely, and advised that I take first year French.

“But, sir,” I hesitantly protested, “I’m a German major.”

“Yes, yes,” he replied impatiently, “I see that. But as a German major, you’ll still have to have at least a minor in French. No, not Spanish, French!”

After two years of German in high school, I did not want to leave it fallow and asked if there was any possibility that I could take some German as an elective.

“No, no, no, no,” he stated emphatically. “There’s no room for an elective this year. You have to take composition and English literature, introduction to general chemistry, college algebra (first semester), trigonometry (second semester), survey of American history, ROTC – uh, Army, in your case,” he noted, looking at my papers, “and, of course, a modern language. In your case, French.”

So now I was even isolated from the subject I wanted to study most. I wondered why I had even been required to come to advisement, but this became evident when he handed me a stack of cards.

“Now, take these to registration on Wednesday. I’d advise you to register for chemistry first. It has a lab requirement, and it’s terribly difficult to register for all your classes until that’s settled. You might have all your other, lecture courses in place, and the chemistry lab will throw the whole plan out of kilter, so you’ll have to start all over again.” As he spoke, his head wagged and his arms flailed about to demonstrate the confusion I would be facing at registration.

As it turned out, his advice was solid. But I still ended up remaking my schedule several times to fit everything in. Wandering around the crowded Armory that Wednesday, I wondered why, since I had no choice in subjects and there was no particular reason to choose certain times over others (and I did not know which professors I would prefer for the basic courses), the schedule could not have been done up for me ahead of time, the same way my curriculum had been. Some time during that semester, The Acropolis discovered computers, and my wish (shared by many, many other frustrated cadets) was granted.

As always, I felt ever-more isolated in the crush of registration. Not only did I feel alone and dejected from the military aspect of The Acropolis, but now I felt the same way from the

academic. The one thing that gave me some hope was the fact that I had taken all of the academic courses in high school (except French, although I had taken Latin). My plan was to coast as much as possible in my courses, relying upon all that I had learned in what was, after all, one of the top school districts in the country. This would leave me time to ... well, survive.

Needless to say, this was not a wise plan. Like so many other students before me, I would find out all too well that high school mathematics and chemistry were not quite as advanced as college. And when you add the Thete System to it, the result could border on the catastrophic.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ACROPOLIS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

In between advisement and registration, the upperclassmen returned. At noon on Tuesday, 15 September, the quadrangle bustled with them. In addition to those with the familiar rank insignia, we saw cadets with numbers on their right collars – 1 for seniors (officially designated as firstclassmen), 2 for juniors (secondclassmen), and 3 for sophomores (thirdclassmen). These were the privates who made up about half of the upperclassmen in the Corps of Cadets and none of the Training Cadre.

These returning upperclassmen had little to do with us. They formed up in another large platoon to our right and generally left us alone. From time to time, the seniors and juniors would observe us with undisguised humor, though the sophomores would view us with contempt and resentment for not having it as hard as they had had it the previous year. Sophomores' memories were an odd thing: They remembered the isolated periods of torment and imagined that these must have stretched out unabated for nine months.

Classes started on Thursday. As first-semester thetes, we had to form up at designated locations outside the academic buildings for roll call. An upperclassman assigned a "section marcher" to perform this duty and to march us into class. The section marcher would then make his report to the professor, and we would begin class. Generally, the professors seemed mildly annoyed by all of this and looked forward to dispensing with the formality second semester, as did we. Section marchers would continue to be assigned all four years for calling roll and reporting absences though, a burden the professors did appear to appreciate being taken off their shoulders.

We went through a parade that Friday afternoon – not a full-dress parade, as we thetes did not have the uniforms yet, but a rather low-key affair in light gray cotton uniforms (starched so much that you had to force your hand through the trousers before you could fit your legs into them), black garrison (service) hats, white gloves, and white webbing around our waists and across our chests. The webbing was held together with brightly polished waist plates and domed breast plates, and the webbing across our chests held a highly polished leather cartridge box three fingers below the waist webbing behind us.

After the next morning's SMI, we were actually allowed off campus for the first time. While the upperclassmen cut dashing figures in their salt-and-pepper (gray wool blouse over white trousers) or in their dress white uniforms with their light, Acropolis-blue shoulder boards, we looked rather pathetic in our ill-fitting and sloppy light gray cottons.

I walked down Moultrie Street to King Street, turned right and proceeded downtown, as Herm had guided me so very, very long ago – almost two weeks. Trudging along the street toward the Francis Marion Hotel and noting the familiar sites I had seen before, I kept looking around at taller cadet recruits, hoping to see him. While I had readily forgotten such classmates as Tadd and would not get to know them again for a while, Herm stuck in my mind. If I could only have found him again, I was sure he would have guided me through more of my ordeal.

At chapel on Sunday, I witnessed for the first time the sword ceremony. Two parallel squads of cadets marched in with swords and arched them for the procession of the flag. It struck me as

too much militarism and nationalism in the chapel, especially since I had been raised in a church that espoused strict separation of church and state.

But for me personally, the sword ceremony was even more depressing than it may have been for someone else of my background. Already, I had experienced the restricting, lonely feeling of isolation first from the military and then from the academic. Now, I could add the religious dimension to the list of things closing me off from life at The Acropolis. It would, however, get worse – far worse.

On Monday evening, all thetes were required to attend the first meeting of their particular religious fellowship. At retreat formation, Supply Sergeant Jarmon called out our names from a clipboard and informed us of the group appropriate to our affiliation. I was assigned to the largest group – The Acropolis Christian Fellowship, or ACF.

The ACF was a general Protestant group found under various different names on many campuses around the country. The pastor of my home church had already urged me to go to its meetings, although he probably did not expect that I would have no choice in the matter, at least for the first time. Indeed, I am sure he would have been appalled to find out how much a state college was integrating religion with militarism and nationalism.

The rationalization for this integration was that most of us would serve at least for some time as officers in the armed forces. In this capacity, we might well be called upon to counsel and bolster our soldiers in their faith, whatever that faith might happen to be. Lurking behind this military justification, however, was a sense growing stronger in the country that America was fundamentally Christian and should express this Christianity as an aspect of nationalism. It had only been a decade since the phrase “under God” had been added to the Pledge of Allegiance, over the strong objection of my pastor: “America – land of religious freedom. In America you are free to worship any way you wish, so long as you pledge allegiance to the Christian God!”

But in the more conservative sections of society – and that certainly included The Acropolis – the addition was taken as a basic statement and affirmation that this was a Christian country, the New Jerusalem. More importantly perhaps, it was seen as a blow to free the country from the perceived “Pagan” traditions of the Jeffersonian Enlightenment, with its unbounded tolerance of things that such conservatives did not want to see tolerated.

On the evening of 21 September, with a completely full moon rising over Mitchell Hall, I joined into a long line of thetes shuffling out of each barrack’s front sally port and making our way somewhat sullenly through the gutter on the outer part of the street from the parade ground – where thetes were required to walk. Ahead of me I could see cadet recruits peeling off to their meetings in various buildings; and when I turned right in front of the Engineering School I noticed that another line was moving on the far side of the parade ground as well.

In an odd sort of way, I felt guided by the full moon, and this brought Herm firmly back into my mind. Would he be there, too? Or was his guidance only for when the moon had set? With such peculiar thoughts in my mind, I finally walked in the remnants of the line to the stairs leading into the front doors of Mitchell Hall, while carefully avoiding the Acropolis plaque (a gift from some previous class). Any thete who stepped on it had to polish it with a tooth brush.

The ACF met in the large conference room in the middle of the second floor, just above the main entrance on the west; and it was reached by taking either one of two curved stairways, one south and one north. Entering the door on the east wall of the room, I had my first real encounter with cadets outside my company. Although the only readily apparent difference was one of

height, coming out of H Company it looked to me like a truly heterogeneous assemblage. Besides the towering giants, especially from First and Fourth Battalion, what struck me most was the great variety of insignia I saw on the collars. Reading from left to right as I saw them, I beheld such new and exotic combinations as 1R (a senior private from R Company), staff-sergeant chevron L (a junior platoon sergeant from L Company), two round dots lyre (a senior first lieutenant from Band Company), three round dots S (a captain from one of the battalion staffs), a lozenge on each collar (a major on regimental staff). As for the thetes, all we had were 4's to show our rank (or lack thereof) – we had not even received our company letters, for we had not yet been formally received into our companies.

Then I saw a thete across the room. Although I could only see him from the rear and a bit off to his right side, I knew he was a thete from his ill-fitting uniform and absurdly short hair. Could this be Herm? I hastily wove my way through the crowd – being sure not to touch any upperclassmen – until I was right behind him. “Is that you, Herm?”

He turned around to look down at me with steel-gray eyes that lacked any glimmer of humor. No, this was definitely not Herm. The little bit of a tuft left of his hair in front was light brown. “No,” he replied, “I’m Christopher, Christopher Adams, from D Company, First Battalion.” He extended his hand and shook mine warmly, though his eyes were still cold and his smile a bit forced.

“I’m sorry,” I blurted out, “I thought you were someone else.” Somewhat embarrassed, I introduced myself.

“Oh, that’s okay,” he assured me in his thick Up-Country South Carolina accent. “You’re the first of my classmates I’ve met from H Company. In fact, you’re the first from Second Battalion. I don’t get around much, you see,” he quipped, this time with a flicker of a genuine, if somewhat ironic smile.

We struck up a forgetful conversation and a lasting acquaintance. Over the next couple years, I would get to know Christopher better, although I would never get to know him well. At least, I would not get to know him well enough until it was too late.

At last, he revealed something of his hopes and dreams. “You know, someday I’m gonna be President of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. I just can just feel it in my bones.”

“Oh,” I replied noncommittally, finding it to be a rather odd thing to say in itself, and especially to a new acquaintance.

“You see,” he explained, evidently sensing my curiosity, “the President of the ACF is offered a full scholarship for graduate studies at the NCBC.”

“The NCBC?” I asked, carefully repeating the unfamiliar acronym.

“Well, yes. The NCBC,” he asserted firmly, surprised that I was not familiar with it. He continued with a bit too much patience for the slow witted, “That’s the North Charleston Bible College. Only the finest such institution in the Great State of South Carolina! And besides,” he added with a half-smile, “my daddy has ... let us say ... a little ‘influence’ there.”

Silently, I decided that I had a lot to learn about the Great State of South Carolina, and I was not completely confident that all of it would suit me. Just then, Christopher Adams was called over to a group of upperclassmen, who were standing off in a corner discussing something very seriously by themselves.

At that point, I realized that I was separated from the classmates of my company and I suddenly felt alone and adrift. I slowly started ambling to where I thought they might be, all the while looking around for 4's on cadets about my height. Several times, I nervously attempted to

put my hands in my pockets, only to relearn that the gray cottons had only one back pocket designed for a wallet (which, on the rare instances that we carried one, we stuffed into our socks anyway, so as not to break any more starch in our trousers than we had to) and a small watch pocket (which we used for holding our Acropolis identity cards and tightly folded dollars and change).

Turning slowly around to my right, I was surprised by a sophomore corporal with a clipboard right in front of me. I started and stepped back slightly, nearly colliding with a junior sergeant. The sophomore looked at my name tag, and then ran his pen down a list on his clipboard.

“Ah, you’re the cadet from Bethesda!” He exclaimed, appearing genuinely glad to see me there. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you. I’m from just across the river in Alexandria. Our churches are very close and do a lot together, though I don’t think we’ve met before.”

To my utter astonishment, he stuck out his hand – an upperclassman, sticking out his hand to a thete was befuddling, to say the least. But his smile was genuine, and his eyes shone with a friendly, though not overly pious glint. He was handsome, with well-proportioned, soft features that matched his dark brown hair and hazel eyes. He was from E Company in my battalion, though he was slightly taller than Christopher Adams – perhaps he had grown since last year, or perhaps the system was not completely fool-proof. Feeling self-conscious, and noting that some other sophomores nearby were looking over askance at the situation, I hesitantly raised my hand, which he grabbed and shook firmly.

“My name’s Owen Hughes,” he continued, “and I think you can be a great asset to the ACF. We need people with your church background to help run things.”

Astonished, I stood there mute with my hand being pumped up and down in what seemed to be slow motion. I did not know what he meant by my “church background,” and I certainly did not know how I was expected to help “run things.” I had come to The Acropolis with the ambition either to rise to general through the military track or to professor and dean through the academic. I was so confused that I hardly comprehended what he said next.

“When it has to do with matters pertaining to the ACF, just call me Owen. Otherwise, it’ll have to be Mr Hughes at this point.”

Totally flabbergasted, I blurted out to the best of my ability, “Yes, sir, Mr Hu... M... uh, Owen ..., sir.”

He placed his hand on my shoulder, let back his head, and gave a good natured laugh that you would have expected from a knight at the Round Table. “Okay, okay,” he added through a broad smile, “that’s too much for you now. But I have a feeling we’re going to get along fine – eventually.”

Owen Hughes noted my room number on his clipboard and mercifully let me go to try to find the classmates from my company. He seemed like an awfully nice young man, the kind I would have taken an immediate liking to in any other circumstance.

My search was cut short in its first moment, however, by a sudden rise in volume from the discussion in the corner. Someone at the far end of the group was making a highly stylized proclamation – the kind that comedians would use to parody Southern preachers. I could not catch the particulars of what he was saying, but I could tell that it ended with a reference to “the Triumph of Christianity.”

Not sure what the phrase meant, but definitely sure that it carried some significance with which I was unfamiliar (and decidedly uneasy), I scurried back to Owen – Mr Hughes – like a scared rabbit. Owen was standing there with his lips pursed and a worried look in his eyes.

He looked at me kindly. Although he was slightly taller than Christopher Adams, it seemed as though he looked straight at me – not down. “Those are our Literalists,” he said in a tone of voice consistent with being forced to acknowledge his cousins who had gone over to the Communist Party.

“Don’t worry. They’re distinctly in the minority,” he continued; but adding with conviction, “and we’re determined to keep it that way.”

I looked at him quizzically, but he went no further. So I decided to make a slight detour from my search and drift over to that corner to see what they were talking about. Something about them told me that I was not interested in joining their circle, but that I needed to find out what it was about them that made me so apprehensive.

Since I had already met Christopher Adams, I decided to sidle up next to him. He glanced down at me with a cocked head and raised eyebrow, but he said nothing. Several sophomores in the group – they were mainly sophomore privates – gave me a threatening look. But then they seemed to note that I was with Christopher, so it was all right.

There were several conversations going on throughout their circle, and I had always found such situations confusing to the point that I could not focus on any one dialogue. What I could glean from them was a fervent desire to bring in more members of their kind. They called it “saving souls.” They wanted to straighten out this organization, which I took to be the ACF, though it could have been The Acropolis, the state, or the whole country, for all I could make out in the confusing coalescence of conversations.

From what I could tell, and from what I would soon learn, the Literalists’ main belief was in a literal, word-for-word interpretation of scripture as historical fact. Whatever spiritual significance or meaning it might have was beside the point – too esoteric and flighty for their consideration. Accordingly, as cadets they emphasized the strictest, harshest enforcement of the Thete System, in keeping with what I had determined to be an adherence to the lower-level brutality without concern for the upper-level reasoning behind it – my peculiar definition of sadism. In both arenas, then, they were exclusively lower-level types; and in both arenas, they made me extremely nervous.

In my thoughts about levels, I did not notice that the circle had become quiet. They were all looking at me as though I were some sort of an interloper. Perhaps they picked up on my disquiet, like foxes discovering a rabbit in their midst.

Christopher put them at ease, though, with “It’s okay. He’s with me.” I noted that he had not said that I was one of them. The implication was that I could be overlooked – this time.

Two or three of them even stuck out their hands and introduced themselves with “I’m Mr So-and-so, thete.” Their eyes were cold, and their smiles forced and toothy. The comparison with foxes and rabbits grew all-the-more threatening in my mind, and I quietly slipped away.

“I see you’ve met some of our Literalists,” Owen said nodding kindly and reassuringly. “And I see their style doesn’t agree with you. That’s good.”

Although he did not touch me, I had the distinct feeling that Owen was taking me under his wing. Only then did I realize that he was in the midst of a conversation with the cadet major from Regimental Staff. Owen introduced me to him as “Mr Brady, President of the ACF,” and it was clear from his deference that even Owen did not feel comfortable calling him John. After all, barely three months had passed since he had been a thete.

Mr Brady, however, turned out to be a congenial, even friendly individual – far from what I had expected from Regimental Staff. He looked rather similar to Owen, but he was considerably

taller. I recalled what Herm had told me about the importance of height at such levels of command.

What they were discussing at the moment, however, was far from congenial. They were both worried about the Literalists, whose numbers, though now relatively small, seemed to be growing at each meeting. New members kept joining in from outside the traditional ACF church organizations. Apparently, these were the “new souls” that needed to be saved – and that needed to “straighten out” the ACF ... at least.

Owen and Mr Brady discussed their misgivings, especially about the “Triumph of Christianity.” This was a catch-phrase that obviously had a far deeper meaning than I was aware of. And they both shook their heads slowly over it, as though they were discussing their beloved cousins who misguidedly insisted that the “Workers of the World Unite.”

I perked up my ears when I heard Mr Brady, who was a political science major and a bit of a Leftist himself (more genuinely than the rumors implied about all poli sci majors), say in a pensive tone, “You know, Lenin characterized such people as ‘useful idiots.’ They know the catch phrases, even if they don’t understand their meaning on the higher level – or their implications. The problem comes when someone, whether he believes in the cause or not, molds them into an organization capable of doing real damage.”

His reference to a higher level above the lower level of the “useful idiots” almost made me barge into the conversation and steer it to wider philosophical or even metaphysical issues. Fortunately for all of us though, another cadet came up to him just then to fetch Mr Brady for the start of the business portion of the meeting.

On the east of the room to the right of the door, there was a podium with a lectern on top of it. As Mr Brady slowly made his way there to give his own generic “Welcome to the ACF” speech, Owen explained the two factions to me.

“Basically,” he started, “there are two groups here that we have come to name the Spiritualists and the Literalists. The Spiritualists are in the majority and take the factual accuracy of scripture as a rather unimportant given. What’s important to us is what it means to us on a spiritual level. Here we like to quote the German poet Angelus Silesius: ‘Of what use, Gabriel, your message to Marie, unless you now can bring the same message to me?’ Accordingly, we don’t discuss what so-and-so said or did in the Bible, unless we’re going to use it as a model for what we should say and do in our own lives.

“The Literalists, on the other hand, stress the historical accuracy of every fact in the Bible. If Genesis says the earth was created in six days, then it was six days and not a second more or less. And if Christ distributed so many loaves and so many fishes to feed a multitude, that’s all that’s important. What it means in terms of sharing and generosity in our own lives means nothing. They take that as so much Spiritualist drivel and operate completely on the factual level – which we do not in any way, shape, or form dispute – but they do it without regard for anything on the spiritual level.

“For us, Christianity is a religion based upon spiritual values discernible from scripture. For them, it’s based upon historical fact proclaimed as such in scripture.”

“I can see why the Spiritualists look with anxiety on the Literalists, because the Literalists ignore the spiritual level,” I said hesitantly, trying to reason it all out. “But what do the Literalists have against the Spiritualists? After all, you don’t dispute the accuracy of scripture, which seems to be the only thing they care about. All you do is add a spiritual dimension.”

Owen looked at me with the sadness and affection that I remembered from Herm when his mind had drifted over to Socrates. “But that spiritual dimension could come from any religion. It could be supported from anyone’s scriptures – or no scriptures at all.”

As he said this, I saw that Christopher Adams had stealthily maneuvered himself within eavesdropping range with his back towards us. I noticed his head abruptly cock to one side; and in spite of his severe thete haircut, the hairs on the back of his neck seemed to stand up.

“Holy Cow!” I exclaimed to Orrin when I returned to our room. That had become our special greeting since that first day two terrifically long weeks ago. But this time, I really meant it, and Orrin could tell.

“You all right?” he asked with obvious concern. “Hey, you don’t look so good. Did they haze you there at the Acropolis Christian Fellowship?” True to his Irish family origins, Orrin was a Roman Catholic and was generally as clueless about Protestants as I was about Catholics.

“I don’t think I’m gonna go back there, I’ll tell you!” I exclaimed. “It’s like walking into a hornets’ nest. I went in there hoping to find something familiar, like my home church in Bethesda, and I found two factions, one of which is downright sadist. Or Fascist. Or something.”

I did my best to explain it all to him, but Orrin – comfortable ensconced in (what he perceived to be) his monolithic Catholicism – never did quite grasp it. He did pick up on my reference to levels, however, and I was afraid he thought the whole thing might have taken place in my head.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CADET PRIVATE

Throughout the month of September, we remained in our thete platoon at the end of the company. The various sergeants and corporals looked us over, knowing that at the beginning of October we would be integrated and that they would have to take charge of us. Meanwhile, the hectic training continued – the yelling, the push-ups, the bracing, and the double-time. But the Training Cadre were students as well, and they had to attend to their classes. So things by necessity lightened up a bit.

As for the thetes, we looked forward to October, when we would receive our H's and officially become cadet privates. We looked forward as well to getting out from under the pressure of the Training Cadre. What we did not look forward to was that, relative to the upperclassmen, there would be far fewer of us in each of the three squads that made up each of the three platoons. There would also be only two of us per mess to serve – and be harassed by – five upperclassmen. This would open us up to a new round of torment.

It would not be quite so bad initially, however. During the year, there were several points at which certain groups of upperclassmen were “loosed” upon the thetes. Our integration into the company as fourth-class privates would really only allow the sergeants who had not been in the Training Cadre to discipline us. After Thanksgiving, the corporals would be let loose, and after Christmas the junior and senior privates. The most dreaded “loosing” came after Easter, when the sophomore privates, eager to be made sergeants at the end of the year, would be allowed to show their classmates and the juniors and seniors what they were capable of.

The process was both good and bad. On the one hand, the gradual loosing of upperclassmen meant that we would not suddenly be overwhelmed come October. On the other hand, it also meant that we would periodically be confronted by a new group of tormentors – a group that had (particularly in the case of the sophomore privates) been chomping at the bit to participate as executioners of the Thete System.

On Friday, 2 October, as we marched back to the company after parade, Cadet Captain Powell dismissed the first two platoons, but left us standing at a strict brace. We knew something was up, because the other companies were doing precisely the same thing. First Sergeant Woodward took charge, then ostentatiously turned away. Suddenly, the sergeants were buzzing around us like angry hornets.

“Drop and give me fifteen, thete!” And we learned that the limit had been increased. Of course, it did not matter how many push-ups were allowed. Doing series of fifteen ordered by every sergeant passing by was hardly different from doing series of ten.

“Now hold that rifle out! Keep your arms straight! What’s the matter? Can’t you hold it up?”

“Drive that chin in, thete! I wanna see it come out the back of your neck!”

Judging from past experience, the torment must have lasted a good fifteen minutes, since it seemed like two hours. Then, all of a sudden, the entire barracks became silent. Mr Woodward slowly turned around to face us, as we stood bracing at attention in three neat squads.

“Gentlemen,” he began. In the background we could hear four other first sergeants giving similar addresses to their thetes. “You have survived the recruit phase of your thete year. At least, most of you have.” For the first time, it occurred to me that there were in fact slightly fewer of us than there had been at the beginning. Throughout this time, though, I had been meticulous enough about keeping a low profile not to have known who had left.

He now went through the ranks, followed by Mr Jarmon, who handed him each insigne of the letter H. Mr Woodward grabbed each of our left hands in turn and pressed the insigne into it, saying, “Congratulations, Mr _____. You’re now a cadet private.” Meanwhile, nine cadet sergeants took their posts, in three rows of three.

Once he had performed his duties, he returned to the front and addressed us again. “Now that you’re cadet privates, you’ll be integrated into the company. I shall call the name of a cadet sergeant, followed by the names of several thetes. When you hear your name, I expect you to run to your new sergeant and form up to his left.” By this time, he did not have to add that we would run yelling.

Always a stickler for proper order – and always providing us with enough information to allow us to perform our duties – he started out by announcing the first squad sergeant of the first platoon, so the thetes who came after knew where to run. By the time he got to the third platoon, the only thetes left in the space occupied by that platoon were already there, so it was just a matter of running backward, forward, or just to the side.

The very last sergeant whose name he called out was Mr Gary Daniels, squad leader of the third squad of the third platoon. I was the third from the last thete whose name was called, and I yelled as loud as I could for the yard I had to travel to his side.

“Your squad leaders will tell you exactly where to stand tomorrow morning at breakfast formation and inspection. General leave has already begun for Friday evening, so many of the upperclassman will not be at retreat tonight. You, however, will be here, since I doubt – I sincerely doubt – you’ll have any inclination to take leave with SMI in the morning. I want you to shine in your new squads and make the Training Cadre proud of you. Squad leaders, take charge of your new thetes.”

We all braced for another onslaught, but the sergeants, even those who had been in the Cadre, simply went down the lines and spoke with their new charges. Mr Daniels was definitely not a member of the Cadre. He was decidedly overweight, needed a shave, and spoke slowly in a thick South Carolina accent.

“So what have we here?” he asked approaching me – his first victim. I rattled off my name in the official formula.

“And where are you from, Cadet?”

“Bethesda, Maryland, sir.”

“Mar-y-land? Mar-y-land?” he mimicked scornfully. “Nobody pronounces it Mar-y-land, thete. It’s Mare-land. Say it, thete!”

“Bethesda, Mare-land, sir,” I repeated with some difficulty.

“Good, good, good,” he praised. I did not know if he was so full of praise that I was finally pronouncing the name of my home state “correctly” or that he had enough control over me to make me.

Then he looked down at my shoes, which were spit-shined to a high degree of reflectivity in spite of going through parade and our little graduation party. He smiled broadly in a way that I could not fathom. Was it approval? Was it malice? Or was it some combination?

“Look down at my shoes, thete, and then look at yours,” he commanded. His shoes were scuffed and dirty.

“These are my clod kickers, thete,” he proclaimed with satisfaction. “Whose shoes are shinier – yours or mine?”

“Yours, sir,” I answered automatically. He just laughed, shook his head while still looking down, and moved on to the classmate on my left.

Having Sergeant Daniels as my squad leader put a whole new perspective on my career as an Acropolis cadet. Up until then, I had shined my shoes and brass out of fear of the Training Cadre. Now, I shined and polished even harder, determined never, ever to look like my sergeant.

All in all, though, Mr Daniels was easy to get along with, because he did not really care about the “military stuff.” He had made sergeant because those who ended up as junior privates were even more slovenly. Nonetheless, he always made sure that his squad was properly supplied, well informed, and passably taken care of (even the thetes). And in drill, PT, parade, and inspection, he was a surprisingly capable sergeant.

His squad corporal, a shy, redheaded, bespectacled lad named Calvin Jones, was also easy-going – not so much from lack of interest, but from an apparent uncertainty as to exactly what it was he was supposed to be doing. Unlike the other sophomores, he did not appear to need to prove his prowess by harassing thetes, but he took his lead from Mr Daniels in making sure that the squad was always in good order. He knew that he could do nothing to straighten up the junior and senior privates, since class outweighed rank in the system, and his use of gentle persuasion and suggestion for them occasionally spilled over to us thetes as well.

Being in Mr Daniel’s squad worked well into my overall plan of keeping a low profile. If I could only slide through the next eight months without anyone’s noticing me. The shoe-shining incident still burnt into me, and I simply wanted to avoid any more mistakes or misunderstandings. The drawback to my plan was that keeping a low profile entailed a great deal of self-isolation. I consciously weighed my options and decided that isolation was not all that bad.

Isolation or not, however, I did get to know some of my classmates. Zachary Michaels, a thin gaunt thete whose body structure, like that of Mr Powell, made him look considerably taller than the rest of us, was as laid back as the System allowed for a thete. He lived locally, although I never visited his home, and he seemed to be perfectly content with the prospect of remaining a cadet private all four years.

He roomed with Jimmy Clifford, who had led his own rock band. I managed to find a copy of one of his 45 RPM records and got him to autograph the jacket for me. It was good, but nothing like the Beatles, who were at that time sweeping the nation. For me, however, it was great – I got to meet a rock star!

Roland duBerry was different from most of the classmates I got to know. Even after the onslaught of the Thete System, he desperately wanted to make guidon corporal at the end of the year and to move up to Company Commander or Regimental Staff by his senior year. He was the only classmate I knew who talked to me about his ambitions. To everyone else bucking for rank I seemed to be as invisible as I tried to make myself with the upperclassmen, but with even more

success. Either they were as unaware of me as I was of them, or they realized that I was so far out of the loop that my vote would hardly count for anything, anyway.

As for my roommate Orrin Murphy, we got along all right. But other than our special greeting of “Holy Cow,” we did not have a lot in common. As much as my rational mind tried to convince me that he really had done nothing to be blamed for in the shoe-shining incident, such events simply had too much power over me emotionally. I tried to warm up to him, but I sensed that he realized that I was trying, and that was definitely a negative.

One thing we did not have in common was the M1 rifle. It took Orrin little time to realize that he hated the thing. He fumbled with it each time he had to dismantle it for cleaning. He waved it around in his right hand as his left hand tried desperately to push back the bolt for inspection arms. He constantly got the commands crossed up. I believed that he saw the rifle as almost as great a thorn in his side as the upperclassmen were.

I, on the other hand, decided that the M1 was a rather neat toy. I practiced disassembling it so that I could smoothly take it apart and put it back together blindfolded. I practiced the manual of arms for the pure enjoyment of it and tried my best to perfect the satisfying “clack” at just the right moment of order arms. The only thing I did not like about it was actually using it as it had been intended, for shooting. Although I qualified as a sharpshooter with the smaller rifle we used for target practice, there was something about firing a rifle that made me uneasy – something basic, beyond the kick and the noise.

For Orrin, however, it was completely odious. It occurred to me more than once that perhaps it was not the rifle that was his problem, but something deeper about The Acropolis. I wondered if he had some serious misgivings about coming here – more than the rest of us had every time we ran out of our rooms double-time and at a brace. In my mind, I rehearsed over and over how I could ask him what was wrong, without being too pushy or condescending. I never did figure it out, for however much genuine interest I had, I was simply too shy – and ever more isolated – to show such a personal interest in the inner thoughts of another.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SENIORS

It did not take long to figure out the differences between the upper three classes in H Company. The juniors were fully in charge of the Thete System. In fact, through First Sergeant Woodward, they seemed to manage the day-to-day operation of the entire company as well – always, of course, with a meaningful nod to Captain Powell, who, unlike most of his classmates, garnered their respect and apparently even their admiration.

Entirely businesslike, the juniors ran things with the most obvious attention to both levels. On the one hand, they enforced the pop line-ups and inspections on the galleries, the push-ups and related physical endurance tests that constituted punishment, and the hectic double-time life suffered by the thetes. On the other hand, they seemed to be constantly aware of their purpose in enforcing the System, in making punishments fit the offences, in timing discipline for maximum efficacy, and in pulling back right before we exceeded our limits – only to push those limits later on.

There were certainly one or two of the cadet sergeants, perhaps desperate to make officer rank the next year or perhaps simply endowed with a perverse nature, who did not appear to understand what it was they were enforcing. These “sadists” operating exclusively on the lower level were the most to be feared, for we suspected that they might not take our physical and mental limits into account. Nonetheless, my discovery the first week about Mr Gunn provided me with some hope even for these. Needless to say, however, I was still petrified of the System and of the juniors who enforced it.

One highly fortunate aspect of the System was that the sophomores were not initially involved with the thetes. Theoretically, the corporals were learning from the sergeants and would be ready to be loosed upon us after Thanksgiving. Since there were more sergeants than corporals in the company, these would also be the most assured of getting rank the next year and the most likely to adopt the businesslike character of their mentors.

The sophomore privates were a different matter. They would not be loosed until after Easter, at the tail end of the year. They had to participate sometime, so their classmates, the juniors and seniors, and the Tactical Officer Major Cantwell could determine who among them should fill the remaining sergeant slots. But it was these sophomore privates who were also most likely to be oblivious to the higher-level motivations of the Thete System.

Having recently survived their thete year, the sophomores (particularly the privates) had vivid memories of all the torments they had suffered. So vivid were these memories that they were expanded in their minds – as we ourselves would learn in our sophomore year – until the entire year, day by day, was recalled as having been filled with the worst abuses of Thete Week. They would mutter to one another in voices deliberately loud enough for us to hear that we were having it easy, not the way it had been in their thete year – back in the Old System. And they would make sure that we would find out just how tough they had really had it when their turn finally came.

What made their line of reasoning particularly ludicrous was that their junior sergeants – the enforcers of their Thete System – would have been the cadets who were now seniors. As we could all see, the seniors were the most laid-back, even lackadaisical members of the company. Indeed, the H Company seniors were known throughout the Corps of Cadets for their total lack of interest in the barest essentials of regimentation at The Acropolis.

This was most evident on Tuesday, 20 October, when there was a special assembly in Mitchell Hall for cadets who were either under contract with the Army to serve as second lieutenants upon graduation or who were potential Army contract cadets. The contracts were signed at the beginning of junior year, so the juniors and seniors attending would already be under contract. The freshmen and sophomores attending were those enrolled in military science, as opposed to aerospace studies (for those having or seeking an Air Force contract).

Most cadets took a contract of one form or another (Navy and Marine were also possible, though they required some combination of basic training and officer candidate school upon graduation), especially since the draft was still in force, and a diploma from The Acropolis would ensure an early selection. While Acropolis Men caught up in the draft could expect the rank of corporal after basic training, that was a far cry from lieutenant. So the choice not to take a contract was ill-advised, at least until the draft was reformed and draftees were chosen by a lottery of birthdays.

At 7:30 that evening, over half the Corps was marching across the parade ground, company by company. The full moon had not yet risen, and the heavily overcast sky and thick fog shrank visibility in the dim lights of the barracks behind and Mitchell Hall ahead to only a few yards. Since no provision had been made for this rare formation, we thetes ended up at the rear of the company, happy to be out of sight of the upperclassmen in front of us.

As we slogged through the puddles from the day's rain and over the tufts of grass that had already sprung up since the previous Friday's parade, I noticed how quiet it was. Except for the steady soggy beat of our shoes in the puddles and wet grass, the oppression of the low clouds and the high humidity muffled all sound.

Suddenly, a voice from one of the seniors in front rang out in an exaggerated hillbilly accent, "I can't tell."

Another joined in with what turned out to be a parody of a just-released Roger Miller song, "If we're in Hell."

Yet another sang along with the first two, "Six foot under ground."

Then all of the seniors joined in enthusiastically, "But if it's true, what can we do? Guess we'll hafta go honk around, honk around, honk around, honk around!" With each "honk around," their voices became louder, and they beat out the rhythm by stomping their left feet into the rain-drenched ground. After one stomp in silence, they gave the finale in a shout, "Thar we be! Honkin' around in Hell!" And they deteriorated into a jostling, laughing mob.

The sergeants glared back at us with threatening looks, I supposed as a warning not to turn into creatures such as these – and for immediate consumption, not to think about laughing or even breaking a smile.

From off to our right, we could hear a voice from the dark rectangular shape that was one of the other companies, "That's gotta be the H Company seniors!"

At that point, the sergeants' glares completely lost their power over us, and we all broke into an uncontrollable but subdued snicker, marked by rigid back and forth movements of our heads and equally rigid up and down movements of our shoulders. The more we snickered, the more

we voluntarily slipped into as strict and forced a brace as we could manage, in a valiant but futile attempt to rein in our emotions.

Inwardly, we all glowed with the pride of attaining some degree of special notoriety, albeit only through our seniors. By the time we had reached Mitchell Hall, however, it dawned on me – ever ready to turn the positive into some realization of isolation – that the notoriety came at a price. If we identified with our seniors, we would be isolated from the rest of the Corps. Notoriety and infamy stride hand-in-hand.

Whatever the consequences in the Corps, though, we all realized, each in his own way, that we were now thinking of these first-class cadets in H Company as *our* seniors. For me, this was to become intimately crystallized in *my* seniors, the three cadets who dwelled in the great circular lair known as the third-division alcove room.

As soon as we had been integrated into the Corps, Orrin and I finally discovered our role as occupants of the small alcove room. We were to serve the three seniors in the large alcove room. There had originally been four, but one had already moved out in disgust at the constant mess made by the remaining three. If the seniors of H Company had a reputation for “marching to a different drummer” (not an easy task at a military institution), these three remaining inhabitants of the third division alcove room took this reputation to yet a higher plane.

Mr Wilson was a cadet second lieutenant, the lowest rank you could achieve senior year above senior private. As the assistant platoon leader of the third platoon, his military duties were minimal; but as with all second lieutenants, he had administrative duties that he performed quite adequately. He was the most boisterous of the three, always alert to any opportunity for having fun with the system. Of the three, he tried the hardest to take me under his wing, which I greatly appreciated even at the time – but which I was too timid and far too isolated to turn to my advantage. Nevertheless, I did learn quite a bit from him, though I did not show it then.

Mr Ford was also a cadet second lieutenant, the assistant platoon leader of the second platoon. He was the most retiring of the three, though such a distinction bore little relevance outside the room. He was more inclined to try to help Orrin, who was more outwardly accepting of the assistance. Orrin, though, simply could not comprehend the degree of disorder in the seniors’ room.

Finally there was Mr Santorelli, a plumpish senior private. With a zest for life I had never seen before, he embraced all the shenanigans of his roommates with gusto. On the other hand, his task for senior year was quite plainly to try his best to see his roommates through to graduation. Although he certainly contributed to the disarray that was the alcove room, he was known as Mama Santorelli to his grateful, though unrepentant roommates.

All three of our seniors were civil engineering majors, and they looked upon me with some degree of awe for majoring in modern languages. Civil engineers at The Acropolis were the only cadets not required to take two years of a foreign language – a concession given them grudgingly by the faculty in an attempt to squeeze a five-year program into the four years of Acropolis education. While “five-year men” were to be found, they were rare (no more than one or two per company per year), and the practice was discouraged for many reasons, not least of which was the maintenance of the class system – these people would be your classmates for life.

For my part, I was oblivious to the academic abilities of my seniors. They were, after all, in a field I knew little about (in spite of my father’s profession), and they were at the end of their studies. But when I was employed to do some typing for their Senior Essays (bachelors’ projects

or theses), I was highly impressed with their capabilities. For example, one had performed a number of experiments to determine how much metal could be removed from a beam without the loss of tensile strength and then wrote up a report that looked to me, at least, as worthy of publication.

Perhaps that was the reason for their rambunctiousness – to relieve the stress of their studies, to say nothing of the strange demands of the system. At one point, they and four of their classmates took over a mess at evening meal, kicking off all the lowerclassmen. First they dispensed with the eating utensils, then the dining plates, and finally the serving plates. With bravado, they proclaimed this the First Annual Tom Jones Invitational, after a popular movie in which the same dining practice was performed by the hero and heroine, though with totally different intentions. The mess deteriorated into a “mess,” until the Tactical Officer on duty strolled over and put a gentle, but firm stop to it.

For two weekends after that, my seniors served confinements in their room – restricted for five two-hour periods per weekend and required to sit studying at their desks with cotton grays, waist plates (with white webbing), and white gloves. The periods were spaced so as to discourage participation in general leave. True to their defiantly boisterous character, however, they proudly announced on a sign on their door: “Serving Confinements for the First Annual Tom Jones Invitational.”

As I looked back on my thete year, my most memorable event with my seniors was the infamous coffee encounter. I had never made coffee before, but it fell to my duties as butler/valet to brew their coffee in their coffee pot, a rather good sized electrical appliance. These were, of course, quite against the regulations, but they were fairly common, even among thetes.

For a couple of weeks, they suffered through my attempts with patience. Finally, unable to take it any longer, Mr Wilson explained, “Look, Cadet, your coffee is the worst I’ve ever tasted. Somehow you have the ability to make it too weak and too strong at the same time! So come over here, and I’ll show you how to make a good pot of coffee.”

Taking on the air of a pedagogue, Mr Wilson all but held my hand as he explained how much water to put in the pot. As I filled it under his tutelage, he squinted closely and nodded approvingly. He then took me step-by-step through the assemblage of the machinery. Finally, he supervised my filling of the scoop and the installation of the coffee itself.

“Okay,” he exalted in triumph, “this will be a good pot of coffee. Now, do you think you can remember how to do this?”

“Yes, sir!” I answered with enthusiasm. I noticed his roommates hiding smiles and suppressing laughs at the performance. They had watched me make coffee before and had found my strange ability to ruin a pot while following directions to the letter to be excruciatingly amusing.

Ten minutes later, I heard a plaintive cry from the large alcove room, “Cadet, get over here!”

As I ran into their room, I beheld Mr Ford and Mr Santorelli sitting at their desks behind cups of coffee. With motions that appeared to be choreographed, they were slumping down in their chairs each with one arm over the back and his head looking up to the ceiling in fits of laughter. Through this laughter, they kept repeating in mock seriousness, “This will be a good pot of coffee.”

Mr Wilson sat at his desk with his hand on the cup in front of him and a look of utter disbelief on his face. He shook his head slowly in a daze and said sadly, “But I showed you how to do it. It was exactly right. Why is it too weak and too strong at the same time?”

This brought out such a howl of laughter from his roommates that people stopped on the gallery to find out what was going on. Orrin rushed over uninvited to see what he could do, if anything.

“Orrin,” Mr Wilson said. Our seniors routinely addressed us by our first names, though they had not given us theirs, perhaps as a sign of our valet status. “You are now officially in charge of the brewing of the coffee,” he concluded in haughty tones of officialese.

He sat me down in his chair, took the measuring spoon in his right hand and held it up to the heavens. “By this solemn and sacred act, I hereby discharge you, Cadet, from your duties as brewer of the coffee and forbid – yea, proscribe and *prohibit* – your ever striving for this office in perpetuity!”

With ritual care, he brought the metal spoon down on my head three times. To be sure, it was firm enough to hurt, but not so much as to quell my laughter.

Wilson, Ford, and Santorelli: They made the year at times enjoyable and always bearable. They offered me their friendship as much as even their loose regard for the System would allow. Yet, I held back. I could joke with them and assist them in their pranks and schemes, but I could not feel close to them. I was so determined to keep myself isolated and out of sight that even in their company I could not help but feel alone and inhibited.

CHAPTER NINE IN AND OUT OF SPORTS

One thing I had excelled in back in high school was sports. Although too small for football, too short for basketball, and too eccentric a thrower for baseball, I did earn two varsity letters in wrestling and one each in track and cross country. Looking back at them critically, though, I could recognize that these were sports in which I was not a member of a team acting in unison. Each contest was between me as an individual and one or more other individuals, all of whom happened to be identified with a school.

Right after classes had begun, there was an announcement at noon meal for all those interested in trying out for cross country to meet on the north steps of the mess hall. I had run cross country only in my senior year in high school, but I had slogged my way from twentieth place on the team to second, to the humorously exaggerated consternation of all those I surpassed.

But just as I would learn that chemistry and mathematics were harder in college, I would discover how much more grueling cross country was as well. Races increased from two miles to four, with practices doubling the amount. Now my diminutive size really worked against me. I made the team with ease, but I never excelled as I had before. I occupied a spot firmly in the middle of the pack, not contesting for a placing slot.

By this point in my cadet career, however, excelling was no longer my chief concern. That had long been replaced by the merest survival – and, of course, keeping a low profile. Being on a college team allowed me to leave regular mess in the company and join with my teammates on an athletic table at the north section of the mess hall, far removed from the torment that I imagined to be growing ever worse in the main section. Here I did not have to serve the upperclassmen, although most of us thetes did take on servant roles as a reflex anyway, and I could eat in peace and without having to pop off with fourth-class knowledge.

There was one other benefit to running cross country: The Acropolis was flat. As Herm had told me ages before, the highest point was sixteen feet above sea level. Perhaps if you looked at the Low Country of South Carolina in comparison with the mountainous terrain of Greece, then Indian Hill might be analogous in a pathetic way to the real Acropolis in Athens, but nowhere in Charleston was there a course that would prepare athletes for cross country competition.

So we were bussed out every day to Summerville, where we ran in a fairly hilly (though by no means elevated) course next to a golf club. There were streams to leap and roots to avoid in our rush down the woodland trails, but the main challenge was the sheer length of the course. It would have been a pleasant leisurely run, but it was a laborious trial in competition, and I struggled to keep my mediocre standing on the team.

Time and again as I ran in practice and in races, my mind wandered as I automatically dodged the sprawling roots and jumped the lazy streams that my feet were now anticipating reflexively: Was this actually better than serving on a regular mess? Except for the complaints by Orrin and some of my other classmates – complaints that seemed more like boasts than laments and that were probably well embellished – I really did not know what was going on there.

What I recalled from Thete Week was a constant yelling and little time at the end for scarfing down some food. “How’s the cow?” they would ask, meaning how much milk was left in the pitcher.

“Sir, she walks, she talks, she’s full of chalk; the lacteal fluid extracted from the female of the bovine species is highly prolific to the N th degree, sir!” we would shout back, indicating our estimate of the number of glasses left in the pitcher.

“What time is it, thete?”

“Sir, I am deeply embarrassed and greatly humiliated that due to unforeseen circumstances over which I have no control, the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of my chronometer are in such inaccord with the sidereal movement by which time is commonly reckoned that I cannot with any degree of accuracy state the exact time, sir. But without fear of being very far off, I will state that it is approximately N minutes, N seconds, and N ticks after the N th hour, sir!”

“How many cards does a Southern gentleman leave when calling on a home?”

“Sir, a Southern gentleman leaves one card per adult male and one card per adult female up to a total of three, sir!”

“And how many cards does a Yankee gentleman leave?”

“None, sir!”

“Why none, thete?”

“Sir, a Yankee gentleman is an oxymoron, sir!”

No, I would keep on running the course at Summerville and avoid regular mess, even if the running did ruin my appetite. The fact that none of my classmates on regular mess seemed to be getting any thinner – to the contrary, they seemed to be filling out nicely with three regular meals per day – did nothing to allay my fears.

In early November, as the cross country schedule was winding down, we had a “home” meet at Summerville against the University of South Carolina. As I was struggling to maintain my position in the middle, one of my opponents tripped over a root and sprawled onto the ground in front of me. He lay there doubled over in pain and hugging his right leg. I stopped and helped him out of the path of the others and shouted to one of my teammates to let someone know up ahead that we had an injured runner.

I always wondered why I had stopped to help that runner. I remembered the big meet in Montgomery County, Maryland, where I had hoped to surpass the last of my classmates to take first place on the team and perhaps place in the race. On the very first step, however, someone to my right started out on his left foot as I started out on my right, and his cleat sliced through my ankle. I limped through the race to the praise of my couches for my perseverance, but also to their scolding for my not seeking immediate medical attention.

When the runner in Summerville went down and looked at me with pain radiating from his dark green eyes, my mind went back to that day in Maryland, and I could not help but stop. Besides, there was something about his tall, lanky frame and his green eyes and black curly hair that reminded me of Herm.

“Go on,” he said, and he nodded vigorously with his head toward the path. “I’ll be okay. Just go on!”

“No,” I replied calmly, as I looked at his leg, squinted at the scrapes in his skin, and wondered if his knee was really supposed to be bending that way. I could, of course, do nothing for him then but simply be there, make sure no one ran into him, and give him whatever comfort I could.

After the race, I was paraded in front of my team by the head coach. “That’s what sportsmanship means, men,” he announced with grave approval. “When your opponent goes down, if you’re the first one there, you help him. I don’t care where you are in the race, you just help him. This is a sport, not combat. And at that higher, nobler level, you’re all members of the sport.”

I was greatly embarrassed by the coach’s praise. Had I really stopped to help that young man because of my duty to the sport? Or had I stopped because I remembered how it had felt to be injured during a race? Did it really make any difference?

For a brief moment, I had felt that I did indeed belong to some higher-level unity of purpose, and that thought gave me immense, if only fleeting comfort. Then, my self-doubts entered into the equation, and I was left wondering if I had really sensed that I was at one with the young man with the pained green eyes, or if I had allowed myself to feel so isolated from the endeavor that I treated him as an excuse to leave the race – a race I could not have won, anyway.

In mid November, cross country season ended and wrestling season began. Wrestling had been my main sport in high school, and I really did still have ambitions of excelling in it at The Acropolis. I had never been pinned in a match between schools. The only time I had been pinned at all was in the county tournament, and that was by the boy who went on to become champion in the county and to place in the state.

When Guidon Corporal Sinclair came up to me and asked if I would be rejoining the regular mess after cross country, I informed him that I was already on the roster for wrestling. “You’re gonna be like me, Cadet,” he replied with a wry smile, “and never see a regular mess your whole thete year.”

I was oddly taken aback by Mr Sinclair’s remark. I had come to expect that such observations were criticisms and were generally yelled with invective dripping with righteous indignation. Yet he simply stated the obvious fact and seemed to hold it to my credit that I was ducking the System. In fact, he even admitted that he had done the same thing – something tantamount to your father admitting that he had smoked and drunk to excess when he was in college ... too.

In a surreptitious way, his remark served to identify him as the member of the third class most cognizant of the purpose of the Academy and most determined to ensure that it would prevail despite the excesses of others. The fact that he was the guidon corporal gave me considerable confidence in the System. And this confidence would be reaffirmed in the following two years as he became the first sergeant and then the company commander.

My career on the Acropolis wrestling team, however, would not be so affirming. My first opponent in the process of determining who would represent the college in competition was Mark Tennet, a classmate of mine from H Company. I had not got to know him very well at all, for he roomed down the gallery on first division – definitely out of the way for me – and he was in the first platoon. All I knew about him was that he was impressively muscular and was brought up doing farm work in the Up Country of South Carolina.

As I faced Mark on the mat, I saw that he had no idea how to stand and appeared to be curious about the way I fainted this way and that to test him out. It was plainly obvious that he had never wrestled competitively before, at least not on a team that stressed the stances and strategies that had been passed on down from the ancient Greek athletes. But because he did not

approach me in the manner expected of a wrestler, I found myself in a quandary as to how to make contact with him.

The quandary was short lived, though, as all of a sudden he simply walked, fully erect, right up to me, wrapped his arms around my upper arms and chest, and lifted me off the mat. Flabbergasted, I flailed my forearms about and tried to clasp him with my right leg, seeking at least to trip him up. Calmly and methodically, he twisted me around and placed me on the mat, shoulders first. I had been pinned.

All the other members of the team roared with laughter. They recognized that had Mark really learned how to wrestle in school, he would not have made such quick work of me. To be sure, it was a comical sight. But I was utterly humiliated.

At the end of the practice session, with my teammate's laughter still ringing in my ears, I approached the head coach. "I'm sorry, sir," I blurted out. "I guess I'm just not ready for college wrestling."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," he said, waving his left arm at me so as to dismiss my pessimism. "Mr Tennesse's tactic was, well, unorthodox. And I sincerely doubt you'll be taken in by it again. I've seen your record, Cadet, and you're good. The decision is yours, but I'd really like you to remain a member of the team."

"After that humiliation, sir, I don't think I can face the team."

"It happens to all of us. A surprise tactic sweeps us off our feet and we think we're the laughing stock of the country. You *can* come back, you know. Tell you what, just think it over and come to practice tomorrow and let me know what you've decided then."

It was a good plan from an experienced and thoughtful coach. Had I followed his advice, I probably would have returned the next day, found that everyone's ridicule had turned to someone else's stupid mistake, and continued on the wrestling team. But I strongly suspected from my experience in cross country that I would not excel in this sport either – the sport my father had been so proud of me in. No, I would end my wrestling career with my father's enthusiastic praise.

Of course, this placed me back on regular mess. There was one chair left on Cadet First Lieutenant Unger's mess, and his assistant mess carver was Mr Sardis. At least, I did not have to fear being thrown into the clutches of some sadist operating in the lower-level brutality of the System. Moreover, this made three theses to serve four upperclassmen, so I was not singled out.

Actually, the System had changed considerably over the time I had been in cross country. By now, it was assumed we knew our fourth-class knowledge. This became clear when Mr Unger asked me the time. Half-way into my rapid recitation of the formula he told me, "Shut up, thete! Just tell me what time it is."

When we were asked questions at all, it was usually about the main stories in that morning's edition of the *Charleston News and Courier*. That was to teach us to stay abreast of current events and community activities.

Another common command was to tell a joke. This took me by surprise, and the only one I could think of right away had to be the worst joke in human history. "A man was sitting in his parlor, minding his own business," I began, "when he heard a buzzing sound out back. He looked out his window and saw a flying saucer hovering over his back yard. A door opened, and a box dropped out. The door slammed shut, and the saucer zipped back into outer space."

“He brought the box in and opened it up. And there oozing around the bottom of the box was an oscillating blob. He wondered if it was alive. If it was alive, he reasoned, it would eat. So he tried to feed it and found that it would eat anything that dropped into the box – meat, vegetable, his gold watch – anything. He decided to call it the Rarey, because it was so rare, the only one on earth that he knew of. He almost called the authorities to let them know about it, but he decided against it, fearing they’d take it away from him.

“The Rarey ate and ate and ate, and soon it grew too big for the box. So he built another, bigger box. It grew too big for that box as well, so he built a big cage in his basement. After a while, though, he realized that it was gonna grow too big for that box as well. So the only thing he could do was to load it onto a dump truck, drive it to the Pacific Ocean, and dump it. There, it could grow as large as it wanted – engulf Hawaii – whatever.

“A couple days into his trip, he heard a crunching noise. Turning around, he saw to his horror that the Rarey had eaten its way out of the cage and was starting to devour the back of the dump truck. He finally realized that the Rarey was dangerous. But luckily he was at the Grand Canyon, so he backed up to the edge, jumped out of the dump truck, and was just about to pull the lever that would tip of the back of the dump truck up and send the Rarey down into the canyon, when along came a policeman.

“He had to explain everything to the policeman – how he had got the Rarey, how it had grown, his decision to take it to the Pacific, and now the need to tip up the back of the dump truck and send it down into the Grand Canyon. The policeman looked at him – oddly. He looked at the Rarey – even more oddly. He looked all the way down to the bottom of the canyon. Then he looked up to the dump truck and down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and said, ‘Well, it’s a long way to tip a Rarey.’”

There was complete silence at the mess, as the upperclassmen stared at me in disbelief. Then in unison, they let out screams of anguish, “No, no, no, no! Thete, that’s the worst joke I’ve ever heard.”

Their looks changed to wicked smiles when the mess carver suggested, “Okay, Cadet. Go tell that joke to Mr Stanwick!”

The joke was received the same way there, as well, with the added embellishment that Mr Stanwick threw a fork at me. From that point on, I was known as the thete with “the joke.” The positive part of my new-found reputation was that I was never ordered to tell a joke at mess again.

The worst part of being back on regular mess was the fear that each meal would be my last – that however lenient I might be having it on my current mess, the arrangements could change immediately and I would be placed on a mess where I would be starved to death. Once again, of course, I had never heard of a thete being starved to death, and I had never seen a thete around campus who had even the faintest appearance of malnutrition. Nonetheless, the fear was real.

Consequently, I ate every meal in anticipation of the deprivation that never came, usually staying behind after the upperclassmen had left to make sure that I had enough of the remnants of the meal. In addition, I would make frequent trips to the “Thete Canteen” – an extension off the north side of Mitchell Hall with a row of vending machines. And I would save up pennies in my change until I had ten, and then I would treat myself to an ice cream cone in the regular Cadet Canteen in the main building.

As did many thetes (if not most), I gained weight my freshman year at The Acropolis. Even if I had eaten only what was put in front of me for three substantial meals per day, I still would have gained weight. Fortunately, however, I did not gain too much – being once more subject to drill, physical training, parade, and, of course, living on the third division, which helped in some measure to compensate for the lack of sports. So I was never classified by the dreaded epithet “blivit.” But it was enough to make me feel self-conscious, uncomfortable, and – as always – ever more isolated.

Thanksgiving break only lasted from Wednesday to Sunday – not enough time to take the bus back to Maryland. Besides, you had to request a leave, and that was something I was not quite confident enough to do yet.

At noon meal on Wednesday, there was an announcement, “Tomorrow will be a day of general leave from after morning meal to tattoo. For those staying on campus, there will be a special Thanksgiving feast at noon. It will be open mess.”

“Open mess.” That meant that thetes could find themselves at table with any upperclassmen. This was a dangerous situation, in which I could find myself tortured and starved by any sadist from any company in the Corps. As I was worrying about the situation and deciding that I was not going to expose myself to that, another announcement was made, one that, isolated within my worried thoughts, I did not hear. My classmate across the table from me could not suppress a grin, and I wondered what kind of joke the announcer had told. Whatever it was, it must have been better than the one for which I had become infamous.

The next day, I slipped out of the barracks as quickly and quietly as I could and made my way down Moultrie Street to King Street, down King Street to Charleston proper. At first, there were a lot of cadets, especially thetes, wandering around the city, elated to be free on a Thursday morning. But as the time got closer to noon, I noticed with some wonder that the streets seemed to become deserted. Except for a few native Charlestonians and their guests scurrying home to share Thanksgiving meal with their families, there were no cadets to be seen.

This was very strange. By noon, all the inhabitants of the city were at home, and no cadets were wandering the streets. I had the entire city to myself. I walked into the drug store across Calhoun Street from the Francis Marion, sat down in a booth, and ordered a hamburger.

As I sat down, I looked around, expecting to see the faces of some of my classmates. The drug store had become a favorite of H Company thetes, and you could always see the smiling face of Phil Levis, the sparkling eyes of Billy Allen, and a host of others. That day, however, it was empty not only of cadets, but of all other customers. The waitress brought my hamburger and looked at me in a pitying way. Was I missing something?

At morning formation the next day, Mr Sinclair walked up to me in my squad. “Where were you yesterday, Cadet?” he asked, with genuine concern in his voice and in his eyes. “Except for the few who live in Charleston, you were the only thete who skipped noon meal.”

“I went downtown, sir,” I replied with an air of confusion that must have been plainly visible.

“Where did you eat?” he continued with his eyebrows revealing even further concern and curiosity.

“I had a hamburger at the drug store, sir.” I was starting to feel that somewhere along the line I had made a major mistake.

“A hamburger? A hamburger!” his voice rose in disbelief. “We had a feast of turkey with all the fixings in the mess hall, and you had a hamburger?”

He called Mr Jones. “Your thete here tells me that he had a hamburger in Charleston yesterday,” Mr Sinclair informed my corporal in a tone half-way between pity and resentment, with a degree of anger seeping through.

“You mean, we had a major feast and the Thete System was suspended for it, and you went and got a hamburger?” Mr Jones asked rhetorically, his head shaking slowly and solemnly in incredulity.

I just stood there dumb. The Thete System had been suspended for the meal? Why had I not heard that? Why did everyone else know about this, but I was not informed?

Then I remembered the announcement that had caused my classmate to grin. I had been so wrapped up in my own dread, that I had not comprehended that crucial announcement. By my own enslavement to my fears I had managed once more, as so many times in the past two long months and so many times yet to come, to isolate myself from those around me.

CHAPTER TEN

CHRISTMAS

After Thanksgiving, everyone's attention was focused on one date: 17 December 1964. This was the day we held muster and everyone cleared out of The Acropolis for Christmas leave.

As the date approached in our room, however, there was a decidedly doleful atmosphere. Orrin had been speaking for weeks about leaving The Acropolis at Christmas and enrolling the next year in the Merchant Marine Academy. "You don't have to carry a rifle there," he kept saying over and over as though in some kind of vaguely enthusiastic, yet detached mantra.

I was curious as to why he would leave at Christmas, rather than finishing out the semester at the end of January. Then he could apply whatever credits he might have and perhaps even begin as a transfer midshipman. Once or twice, I broached the topic with him, but he did not seem to be interested in pursuing it. So I retreated into silence.

The two weeks leading up to muster became ever more awkward for both of us. It was like a wake that went on too long. Deep down in, I really had come to care about him; but up on the surface of human relations, I found it difficult to talk about his impending departure. I knew there was something wrong beyond the rifle. Was he leaving before the end of the semester to avoid the embarrassment of failing courses? That was possible, although the grade sheet posted inside the door of his press did not seem to support that hypothesis. I simply did not know; nor did I know how to ask.

Of course, the question was elegantly simple: "Orrin, what is wrong?" But posing the question entailed too many taboos, real and imagined; and I found myself paralyzed and disabled by them. There was a suffering quality to him. It was as though I were facing the Fisher King and could not find a way to ask what was causing him such anguish.

On Thursday, 17 December, he had all of his things packed and cleared out of the room. We faced each other clumsily, shook hands, and on impulse simultaneously hugged each other with our left arms.

I dragged two large suitcases down to muster. In one were my clothes, including my full dress uniform – just in case I might want to really impress anyone during the break. The other suitcase was packed full of books that I intended to study at home to prepare for final exams in January. The ritual packing of an excruciatingly heavy suitcase of books was a rite of passage for all college freshmen. We would take them home to study, perhaps take one or two books out as a cure for insomnia, and then lug them back so that we could cram for exams in the little time that was left. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors carried increasingly fewer books home – not because they did not need to study for examinations, but because they became more and more realistic over the years.

Several of us went together, sharing a cab to the Trailways Bus Terminal to begin the long trek back home. The full moon accompanied us through the evening and night, crossing from east to west as we traveled from south to north. One by one, my classmates got off the bus. Before dawn on 18 December, I – the last member of the small party of H Company thetes – descended the stairs in Washington as the moon set. I took the local bus to Friendship Heights,

just inside the District Line on Wisconsin Avenue; and by the time I got there, it was late enough in the morning that I could call my mother and ask if she could pick me up.

As we drove down Wisconsin Avenue to Bradley Boulevard, Old Chester Road to Radnor, I knew my mother was barraging me with many questions, and I was doing my best to answer them. Yet, the long, five-hundred-mile bus ride and the subsequent negotiation of the local bus system with my two heavy suitcases had so dulled my senses that my mind may as well have been back somewhere in Thete Week. All I could think of was the popular Peter, Paul, and Mary song about being five hundred miles from my home and how badly I wanted to crash onto my bed.

I lugged my suitcases up the steps to the front yard, around the walkway, and up the steps to the house. My father was there to greet me with a warm handshake. We were not a family that went in for males hugging each other, so the handshake had to be as firm and sincere as possible. I fielded more questions that I hoped I gave coherent answers to and then managed to inch my way past the Gulbransen up-right on my left to my room, just opposite the front door. My old cat was sitting there, looking up expectantly at me. I petted him gently and felt glad that he could ask no questions.

In a haze, my mother said something about my being tired, and I took that as a welcome excuse to freshen up in the bathroom next to my bedroom and take a long nap. Usually, I avoided naps – they made me groggy for the rest of the day and interfered with my sleep at night. That day, however, I was too groggy to function anyway, and somehow I was confident that, if woken up for dinner (which in my opinion at the time was totally unnecessary), I could indeed manage to go right back to sleep afterward. Which, in fact, I did.

We lived in a solid, white, brick ranch-style house built in the early 1950's. Down the hall to the left (when you faced my room from the door) were the other two bedrooms – my parents' master bedroom on the left past the closet, and (across the linen closet with its full-length mirror at the end of the hall) my brother's room on the right, with the bathroom in between his room and mine. Mine had been the guest room until I had succeeded in making myself too obnoxious to my brother and his friends back when I was eight or ten. At the near end of the hall was the living room, with a large square open way on the left of the far end leading to the dining room, where there were doors to the basement and attic on the left and the swinging door to the kitchen on the right. As you entered the kitchen, there were porches on the left and right – the back and front of the house. The back porch door was scarred on the window openings from my cat's habit of leaping up to look in when he craved entrance. The front porch was now enclosed with brick and glass, but it used to just have screens on two sides, and my brother and I would sleep there on cots during hot summer nights before we had air conditioning.

Waking up that first morning, 19 December, I was still sleepy and reached over to the chair next to my bed to turn on a transistor radio. It was the Hardin and Weaver show on WMAL. The main thing on their program was advertisements, with a little music; but they would take on funny voices and would make up short comedy sketches. These were not the extended stories such as you used to hear on the recordings of the old BBC Goon Show, but simple segues between advertisements and music.

As I lay back on my bed, with the radio droning somewhere on the borders of my consciousness, I relished every sleepy moment, knowing that I did not have to get up. That in itself was quite telling of how exhausted I was, since I tended to be an early riser. All of a sudden I leapt straight off the bed in a panic, violently levitating from the supine position. Hardin and

Weaver were introducing a “Name the Horse Contest,” and they prefaced their advertisement with a sudden and loud recording of first call on the bugle.

Most people, I am sure, heard that bugle call as an enjoyable part of horse racing. For me, on the other hand, it was the most dreaded call in the arsenal of signals that daily pummeled an Acropolis cadet. It meant that it was 6:15am and the thetes had to roll out yelling onto the quadrangle for morning meal formation. In a word, it meant that I was late and in a heap of trouble. I had not woken up to it since that first SMI, after I had managed to turn off my surreal alarm clocks; and I had never intended to wake up to it again.

That morning, I spent with my parents, catching up on all that had happened in Bethesda since September, which was, frankly, not terribly much – except for the ubiquitous growth of the small, placid town into a major city appended to Washington. Since it was Saturday, my father did not “have” to go to the office, where he worked in his “retirement,” and my mother ran errands and did chores. It was a fairly warm day for December, so I took out my bicycle and went down to the library.

The library would seem to be an odd place for a freshly, though temporarily liberated cadet to go. But then you would have to know something else about the layout of the house. The living room had a large picture window facing west along one length, and in front of it was a desk bordered by chairs on either side. Opposite that was a couch flanked by end tables and a coffee table in front of it. The television was on the northwest corner, and my father’s recliner was on the southeast corner, next to the dining room. The only telephone was a black rotary phone sitting on the end table between the couch and my room, and its cord would not reach past my door. The only way I had to call young ladies was thus in the center of all activities – hence, the library with its outdoor pay phone.

For some reason, I had decided that I would like to see Alison Greene. We had met the previous summer at a youth gathering between our two churches, and she and I shared quite a few friends. Still, why I should be interested in calling her rather than the group of friends I used to hang out with intrigued me, as though I were an observer as well as a participant. Did I want to get to know her for her sake, or was I trying to avoid – to isolate myself from – my usual associates? The question made me uneasy, as did the fact that I was interrogating myself.

I got through to her and told her who I was, giving more information than she needed for fear that she had forgotten me.

“Of course, I remember you,” she assured me. Her voice rang with what seemed to be a joy at talking with me. But deeper down, I sensed some static in her voice and worried that she was not doing so well.

After some more pleasantries, I found myself at the point of no return and asked, “Would you like to go out? Maybe for a bite to eat and a movie? I’ve gotta admit, I’m not up on what movies are out there.”

“Well,” she hesitated, “I don’t think I can get out tonight.”

“Then how about Friday?” I asked, hoping that her last answer offered some room for optimism.

“Do you know what day Friday is?” she asked with an incredulous, but endearing laugh.

“Uh, I don’t have a calendar on me,” I admitted, as I desperately tried to add up the days. Muster was Thursday, and that was the all-important 17 December, ...

“It’s the twenty-fifth,” she replied, as though that explained it all. I paused.

“Christmas!” she finally spelled it out.

“Oh my goodness. I’m sorry,” I said as apologetically as I could. “You know, I’ve been looking forward so long to just one day – 17 December – that I guess I must’ve thought *that* was Christmas.”

“You need a rest,” she laughed. Then she added much more gravely, “And unfortunately, so do I. I was in a bad boating accident a while back, and I’m really not in any shape to be going out.” Then after the briefest of pauses she blurted out, “But I can have visitors. And I’d love to see you. How about tomorrow?”

“That would be great. I’ll swing by in the afternoon.” Sundays my mother performed her obsessive ironing – including sheets and underwear – as she and my father watched Bullwinkle and American Bandstand on the television, so I was confident I could borrow her car, a white Corvair.

Sunday afternoon, I donned my dress grays, which I had worn on the bus from Charleston to Washington, and went to visit Alison. As I walked up the stairs to her front door, I heard her say, “Come on in, the door’s not locked.”

I entered a front porch that had been enclosed with brick and glass, much as my parents had done with the porch on the corner of our house. Alison was sitting in the far right corner, with her feet up and some blankets over her legs.

“This’ll give our neighbor something to watch,” she said dryly. “She sits across the street, poking her binoculars through the blinds and spying on all the neighbors. She’s really pretty old and pathetic, but it does get annoying.”

Alison seemed to get tired just saying that much. She was obviously uncomfortable and in some pain, and my heart reached out to her. Unfortunately, my speech did not follow suit, and I never did ask her just how badly she was hurting – just what was wrong. I wanted to, but I felt that it might be prying or breaking some unstated taboo.

When I took my hat off, she quipped, “They got your hair pretty good, didn’t they?”

“Oh,” I said in astonishment. “I thought it had grown out rather well since my first shaving back in September. Among thetets at The Acropolis, it’s really quite daring.”

She laughed despite her pain, and we went on to talk about common friends in Bethesda and life in Charleston. All the while, though, she seemed to be bothered by something.

Finally, she came out with it: “Seeing you in that uniform worries me. War is awfully ... crude.” Her tone was sad, and not in the least accusatory.

“Well,” I answered lamely, “it’s part of our world, and I guess someone has to be prepared for it.” I could not tell if I convinced her, though I sincerely doubted it. What was worse, I could not tell if I convinced myself.

Alison had spotted my Achilles heel and had sped an arrow straight down into it. This, I came to realize, was the reason for my worrisome relationship with my rifle. As long as it was used for drill and for cleaning, it was fine. But once I had to fire at a target – especially at a target placed on the rough outline of a human torso – something within me cringed. Something within me did not want to face the reason for carrying a rifle, or the reason for wearing a sharp-looking gray uniform.

Something was direly wrong, and I wished she would pursue it further and ask me the question. But she pulled back when she saw the pained expression in my face, just as I had done when I had seen the same in hers.

We talked some more about things that mattered very little now. She invited me to drop by anytime, for she did enjoy my company. “And,” she added softly but firmly, “you really don’t have to dress up for me, you know.”

I drove home slowly, taking a circuitous route that led me past many of the landmarks that commemorated my growing up. My mind, though, kept returning to Alison. I desperately wanted to see her again and to discuss both her pain and mine. But mine was too embarrassing – I was, after all, from a military family; and there were, after all, certain expectations to be met. So finally, I forced these thoughts from my mind, and I never saw her again.

Monday morning, the high school was still in session. I arose early and went there, again in my dress gray uniform. As a visitor, I would have to check in at the office, but I arrived before the office opened so I could see the group I used to hang out with at the gate that ran across the hall just inside the lobby. It was always opened right before home-room period.

Several of my friends were still there and gathered around me, all talking at once. Samantha Hanson was there and was talking the most. She was just a junior that year, though she was only a year and a month younger than I – the result of being born right on the dividing line between starting school one year or the next. With her was Nina Ferguson, a petit girl who was very shy except in our group, and smiling Laura Nelson, whose Anglicized name could not cover her Scandinavian background. Fred Collins was still there – now a senior with a Carmen Ghia, though he preferred to hang out with this group rather than those who were “cool” or “in.” I missed a couple of my classmates, particularly Betty Liston, an intellectual and attractive tall girl with straight black hair. She used to play Natasha to my Boris – the two inept Russian spies from the Bullwinkle show. The awkward but always serious Marty Smith had gone on to Washington University in St Louis. There were also a couple new additions, who were hurriedly introduced to me before the bell rang and I had to go check in at the office.

In the week after Christmas, Samantha, Nina, and I piled into Fred’s Carmen Ghia for a number of trips. I also went out to the movies with Samantha, although it was as always understood that these were not dates, as such.

Nina had a formal dance she was required to attend, so she asked me if I would take her. I used the opportunity to wear my full dress uniform, with the three rows of buttons and tails. When I arrived to pick her up, her mother shouted up the stairs, “Nina, your Prince Charming is here!”

It was good to see my friends again. The only complication was that Samantha seemed to have eyes for me. The only one in the group that I had ever been romantically interested in, though, had been Alice Reynolds – my first “steady.”

Alice and I broke up right before my senior prom. She had already purchased a gown, so I had no choice but to go ahead and take her. At the prom, she seemed to have a really good time – and I was totally miserable. I wondered how anyone ever survived high school without permanent emotional scars. Perhaps no one did. In any case, she and her family had moved out to Colorado over the past summer.

Oddly enough, I had received a letter from Alice at The Acropolis around Thanksgiving. I did not know how she had got my address, nor did I fully comprehend her letter. It was full of surreal references to strange sights and strange sounds. I replied with the strange sounds that I heard from the gallery, and I never received any more correspondence from her.

Finally, on Saturday afternoon, 2 January 1965, my parents drove me downtown to the Trailways bus station for my long, five-hundred-mile ride from my home. It had been great to see my friends again, but there was also a negative side. When I had gone to The Acropolis in September, it was the beginning of a new adventure, and I did not give much thought to those I left behind. This time, however, I was fully cognizant of the fact that part of me belonged back in Bethesda among friends from whom inevitably – now or later – I would be separated, isolated. And I felt alone.

Added to my feelings of isolation were the words of Alison Greene, still ringing in my ears and still evoking thoughts and doubts about myself. I fantasized about writing to her and asking her what was wrong and telling her what was wrong, but I knew I could never overcome my shyness and uncertainty long enough to actually do it.

As the bus progressed through Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, we picked up a number of cadets who seemed to be sharing some of the thoughts and concerns that were picking at me. One by one, my classmates who had accompanied me northward got on the bus and we returned to Charleston early Sunday morning. Muster – that other muster, the one we did not like to talk about – was at 6:00pm.

As the time approached for that other muster, I gazed out the window of my half-empty room, through the latticed bars and the bare branches beyond. I could barely make out the moon about to set in the first glimmer of her new phase, just as she had appeared on the evening when Herm had been my guide.

Then it struck me. Since the dark moon and I had joined in our slow ritual dance of the quadrants on my journey south, and especially since the new moon had shown Herm and me the path to The Acropolis, I had been constantly aware of where she was.

Of where she was in relation to me.

She?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BACK INTO THE BREACH

Returning to The Acropolis after Christmas break was always difficult for thetes. Stepping back into that small alcove room was particularly hard for me, as everything that represented my roommate Orrin Murphy was now gone. In spite of the long wake, I found myself wishing he had changed his mind and would come walking through the door with a shout of “Holy Cow!”

After my talk with Alison, I started to have suspicions that perhaps some of his self-doubts and anxieties corresponded with mine. I thought about the Merchant Marine, with its dangerous, but noncombatant mission – its lack of rifles. Of course, everything seemed to fall into place, now that it was too late. I wanted to put the shoe-shining incident firmly behind us. I wanted to talk with him, to give him comfort, and to receive comfort from him. On some higher level, I wanted finally to pose the question to him, “What is wrong?” But like Parzival after his exile from the Fisher King, I had lost my opportunity. Unlike Parzival, I would never have another.

Not that I had to be alone. It was simply more comfortable – safer. Besides, there were only two weeks before exam week, and everyone would be studying. Needless to say, that was as flimsy a rationalization as they come. I certainly was not pouring over my books, and I was fairly confident that my classmates were not so engaged either. And in the end, our grades proved it.

Then there was the excuse of the loosing of the junior and senior privates. In reality, the only event associated with that was Mr Santorelli bursting into my room and shouting, “Okay, thete, hit it and give me twenty!”

Unthinking, I complied and had completed only a few before he gasped out my first name in horror and nervously shouted, “I didn’t think you’d do it. Please! Stop!”

On the morning of Monday, 25 January, I visited Lieutenant Colonel Dunbar, and we filled out some computer cards. That was registration for second semester, and we both agreed (along with everyone else at The Acropolis) that this was a far better way of doing it.

When I returned to my room, I was no longer alone.

Arty Thornton was an easy-going, fair-haired, soft-featured Floridian with a pleasant drawl and a determination not to be too hasty. In short, he was the exact opposite of the nervous New Englander Orrin, and I felt myself relaxing in his presence. More importantly, he knew how to make a pot of coffee. I wondered if that had played any role in his being moved up to this room. After all, Mr Ford was responsible for room assignments, and Arty’s roommate had not returned from Christmas break either.

With Arty for a roommate, I started to get to know some more of my classmates. He was a networker, and his friendly, relaxed manner drew people to him. More importantly, he made me realize just how isolated I had been – how isolated I had chosen to make myself.

One thing that had helped Arty in his networking was the fact that for the whole first semester he had lived in room 248, the room right at the top of the stairs on the first division and right beside the bulletin board. That was the room we all ducked into when we had forgotten the name of the upperclassman on the next stairway or when we saw an upperclassman approach as we were reading the bulletin board.

In a small, dark, seldom-used corner of my mind, I wished that I had been moved down to room 248 so I could meet more of my classmates (to say nothing of avoiding two more stairways). On the other hand, the small alcove room of third division was comfortable and familiar, and I was glad not to leave my seniors, whom I liked far more than I showed. And in the final analysis, this room allowed me to hide, albeit it in a state of self-imposed exile.

Two classmates I especially liked to have visit were Harry Sedgwick and Kenneth Jackson. Harry was slightly stocky and on the tall end of H Company, and Ken was thin and on the short end. In an environment that counted fractions of an inch, this may as well have been Mutt and Jeff. Although both were from the Up Country of South Carolina, Harry was a Jewish cadet majoring in political science, while Ken was of Scottish extraction and majored in history. Political science and history shared the fourth floor of Philanthropos Hall, with political science on the left and reputedly on the Left, and history on the right and decidedly on the Right.

Since classes had just begun, Harry and Ken came up to our room on Thursday during Evening Study Period (or ESP – and you can imagine the puns that that acronym evoked). After a perfunctory knock, they slid into the room, holding mathematics books, notebooks, and the chairs from their room. As soon as they were inside and the door was closed, Harry produced the deck of cards.

We pulled out one of the rickety wooden desks and sat around. “Have you ever played hearts?” Ken asked me.

“I don’t think so.” I answered hesitantly, not at all certain if that name matched up with any of the card games I had played at home with my friends. “I might have, but I’m not sure. In any case, I wouldn’t remember how to play.”

“Here, we’ll show you. It’s easy.” For the first game, they placed my hand out on the table as they played for me and explained the rules. It seemed easy enough.

Once we got going into the second game, I played for myself, and Harry, Ken, and Arty began talking about our classmates. Harry started with “Hey, did you see Tadd at retreat formation?”

“Yeah,” replied Arty. “That was something. Mr Gunn was sure he’d tied him in last night – I guess because the webbing on his door and his screen door was so neatly knotted. Boy, they were all over him!”

“First,” chimed in Ken, “they tried to find anything about him that would get him some demerits. But he was so shined up, you could’ve shaved in his shoes.”

“Yeah,” agreed Arty. “Then they had him do push-ups till he was blue in the face. But he didn’t break – and didn’t admit to doing anything. Especially not with anyone else,” he added with a notable sigh of relief.

“You know,” Harry proclaimed, “Tadd is gonna make guidon corporal for sure. They may not like to be tied in, but they admire anyone who can do it and get away with it, without caving.”

Throughout the conversation, I kept wracking my brain, trying to remember who Tadd was. I hadn’t seen this evening’s performance, because the others were in first platoon and I was way down in third. As thetes, we certainly did not look around. But there was something vaguely familiar in his name. I kept imagining someone looking me in the eye, holding out his hand, and saying “Hi, I’m Tadd.” But as soon as that image began to solidify, it vanished.

What distracted me at that point was a distant cry from the quadrangle – the thete serving as Orderly of the Guard had made an announcement. The first part had been lost in inattention, as

usual, but it ended with "... H Company." It was probably an announcement that someone had a telephone call down in the guard room, so we all stopped to listen, each hoping the call was for him.

"Call for Charles Brown, H Company," came the cry, loud and clear. I knew there was no Charles Brown in H Company, so I sat there baffled, holding my cards.

Ken's and Harry's eyes got big – Arty just calmly went into action. They reached out and gathered in all the cards from the table, snatching mine out of my hand and stuffing them all unceremoniously into the pocket of Ken's bathrobe. As they opened their math books and produced nicely sharpened pencils to hover over their notebooks, they looked at me and commanded, "Come on, Cadet! Get with it!"

Completely taken aback, I simply did what they had done. Harry took out a sheet of half-completed problems and shoved them over to me. "Here, look at these!"

"What's going on?" I blurted out.

"Where've you been for the past five months, man?" Ken scolded. "That was a call for Charles Brown! The Tac Officer and the guard are on the prowl," he explained, somewhat exasperated that I was so much in the dark.

We sat there quietly and listened. For a while, everything was still. Then we heard official-sounding footsteps coming up the stairs and heading straight to our room. Along with the footsteps was the unmistakable clinking of a heavy brass key chain against a scabbard.

"Room, attention!" cried out the Officer of the Guard, a senior private who wore his uniform only slightly more sharply than a cadet recruit. The sword he had to wear for guard duty seemed incongruous hanging at his side.

In walked the Tactical Officer, a tall Air Force major who had the supervisory duty over the guard that day. With a deep voice and an even deeper Southern accent, he demanded in an even tone, "What're you boys doin' here?"

We all answered in a jumble that we were studying mathematics. We wanted to get a jump on trigonometry this semester so we would not do as poorly as we had done with advanced algebra.

"That's what the sign said on your door down on first division," he directed to Harry and Ken, whose bathrobes gave them away as the visitors. "Yep, trigonometry's tough, all right. I nearly flunked it myself when I was a thete here. Of course, I complicated the issue by playin' cards and livin' it up instead of partakin' in a study group, like you fine scholars."

We stood there bracing and not at all comfortable with what sounded an awful lot like sarcasm.

As he turned to leave the room, he twisted the upper part of his body back around and pointed under my chair. "By the way, you might want to pick up that 'study note' on the floor. I'm sure there's a need for a ten of hearts somewhere in your equations."

He swept out of the room, with the OG in tow, whose shoulders bounced up and down in a barely stifled laugh. The Orderly was last out, looking back at us with eyes enlarged in relief.

Once they had descended the stairs, we exhaled, gathered into a circle with our arms around each others' shoulders, and laughed as loudly as we dared. Finally, Mr Wilson popped his head in the door with "Boy, were you lucky!" And we could hear the laughter spreading to our other seniors as well.

As a junior sergeant trekking back hastily and distraught just minutes before midnight on 22 April 1967, I could remember the incident as though it had been yesterday. It even managed to bring the slightest trace of a smile to my lips – remembering my long awaited bonding with my classmates – or at least the barest beginnings of it. That was important, and somehow I knew now more than ever just how important it had been.

Yet, my mind drifted once again toward the negative, toward the implications of isolation in my experiences. That entire first semester, when I should have been channeling my energies to uniting with my classmates and building the relationships that would last a lifetime, I had squandered every opportunity.

As memories flooded into my consciousness, some with which I was intimately familiar and some that seemed to have come in from some far off land at some undeterminable time, I remembered that things would get worse. Indeed, they did get much, much worse, though not as I had expected them to.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SEEKING REFUGE AT THE ACF

Between Christmas and Easter, the Thete System settled into a dull, wearying routine. Occasionally, we were lined up on the galleries for yelling and push-ups – and the ever-present poking by fingers and knuckles. We knew what to expect, and we duly expected it; although, to be sure, it happened far less frequently than we had anticipated. This, we eventually learned, was part of the System itself: Fear is a far more constant and effective control than punishment.

Nonetheless, fear tends to wane, and more and more of my classmates took part in what Tadd had done – tying in an upperclassman. This entailed taking a length of webbing and slipping it through the handles of the door and screen door and tying it so that the door could not be opened from the inside. There were other pranks as well, such as putting shoe polish on certain toilet seats, placing buckets of water in transoms so they would drench the first person to open the door, and so forth.

Far from being serious violations, however, these pranks were an expected part of the Thete System. Just as we had been forced together into a swelteringly hot room on Thete Night to press us (quite literally) into a sense of unity, the pranks nurtured unity as well. But this unity was designed to come from the fourth class itself, and it worked doubly – once in the actual planning and execution of the prank, and once more in the collective punishment. Sometimes, it was organized and directed by those who would become the leaders of the class; and sometimes, it was instigated by the more fun-loving thetes like Lester Smith, a small skinny cadet who smoked big cigars and sported an even bigger sense of humor.

As usual, my participation in the pranks reflected my isolation. During the three weeks I roomed alone, I snuck out late one Saturday evening as Mr Gunn was returning from general leave. I climbed up the chained-off stairway that led to a locked door by which custodians accessed the roof. As the junior sergeant grasped the inner hand rail on the stairs below the first division, I let loose with a water balloon, hitting him squarely on the shoulder.

It was a masterful shot, but a disappointing one. I had played my prank alone, with no assistance from my classmates. While it may have been satisfying to drench an upperclassman, especially one who had been so influential on the Training Cadre, it served no purpose. I snuck back to my empty room, knowing that I had succeeded in my mission, but that my mission had drawn me no closer to my classmates.

The one thing we still dreaded was the loosing of the sophomore privates after Easter. A few of these would become sergeants at the end of the year, and the only way they felt that they could accomplish this was to show the greatest possible ingenuity and skill in tormenting the thetes. Of course, making rank required abilities far beyond enforcing the Thete System; but many of the sophomores did not realize this, any more than they realized that we were having it no easier than they had.

Moreover, these were the very sophomores who had yet to learn that there were two levels to the System: the upper level of reason and judgment, and the lower level of enforcement. They only knew how to act on the lower level, and that made them, by my definition, sadists. While

such sadists were not as likely to make rank, they were certain to make life miserable for us in the weeks between Easter and the publication of rankings at the end of the year.

As the routine of the Thete System wore us down and the fear of the sophomore privates loomed threateningly on the horizon, we all needed refuges – places we could retreat to in order to feel safe, if only for a time. For most of us, this included certain sanctuaries in Charleston.

In my self-imposed spirit of isolation, my forays into Charleston had at least begun in solitude. For one thing, I preferred to walk so I could clear my mind and prepare it for whatever new worries were set to infest it. After a while, the walk down Moultrie Street to King Street became so much a habit on weekends that I scarcely paid any attention to the scenery. That probably came about the time I stopped looking for Herm.

I discovered many refuges tucked away on the streets of the city. Off to the right of King Street downtown was a little shop where I could buy loose tea and have some borsht. The tea I would sneak back into the barracks and prepare in my room using a personalized Acropolis beer mug, a tea ball, and occasionally – when I found one that worked – a submersible coil that heated water to a boil before one day inevitably exploding in sparks. Usually, though, the water from the tap was sufficiently hot.

Of course, there was also the drug store across from the Francis Marion where I would meet my classmates from H Company and share a meal with them. Especially after I had got to know Harry and Ken better, we would dine there, sometimes with other classmates as well, especially Guy.

At one of these fine culinary experiences on a Friday afternoon, Harry looked over his hamburger and asked, “Has anyone tried out that Chinese restaurant up on King Street?”

“Oh, the Chow Mein Inn,” I replied, doing my best to sound nonchalant, but overjoyed that I had some real information to contribute for a change. “I’ve eaten there a couple of times. It’s not like the restaurants in Washington that cater to the Chinese embassy people – in fact, it’s a bit greasy. But the food tastes okay, and besides, it’s the only Chinese restaurant in the city.”

My compatriots looked at me with a new air of appreciation. Harry floored me, though, with “So it’s not like the Peking on Connecticut Avenue?”

After I closed my jaw, he continued, “We ate there once on my class trip, and I’ve kept a match box for a souvenir.”

“Let’s get some guys together and take over a couple tables tomorrow night,” Ken suggested boldly. And the rest of us chimed in with our approval.

The next night, Arty, Harry, Ken, Guy, and I, along with Billy Allen (as fine a connoisseur as you could find at The Acropolis) and Don Mallard (whom I did not know, but came to know and like as time progressed) shuffled into the doors of the large old blue-gray wooden house at 700 North King Street for an evening of Chinese dining. The street numbers of Charleston establishments had always confused me. To my Washingtonian way of thinking, 700 should have been only seven blocks from the center of town, not a mile and a half.

As we sat down and looked over the menus, in walked Zachary Michaels, Jimmy Clifford, and Roland duBerry. “You weren’t gonna start with out us – I hope!” Zachary scolded. We pushed another table up to the two we had already joined. We were the only cadets in the house, so we felt free to excoriate certain upperclassmen and to issue challenges to those we feared most.

From that point on, I felt much more a part of my class. The Chow Mein Inn was a big hit, and it became a regular hangout of H Company thetes. Unfortunately, it was only available to us on the weekends – that and everything else outside the gates.

Inside the gates, the main refuge for thetes was the Thete Canteen – that squat addition onto the north side of Mitchell Hall. It had an entrance on the north and one on the south that jutted off the side entrance to the main building. It was down and off to the side, quite appropriate for those of us who were suffering through our first-year initiation of exile from the mainstream of cadet life. On the west side, under a row of windows, was a long shelf with affixed stools under it and with a change machine and a couple of can openers over it. The change was for the row of vending machines along the east side, and the can openers were for the cold soup that some of the machines dispensed.

Always worrying about the next meal assignment's leading to my immanent starvation, I frequented the Thete Canteen. On rare occasions, I would run into someone who actually was on a horrendous mess and felt far more urgency in eating than I had. Nonetheless, the rarity of these encounters and the fact that no thete seemed malnourished failed to dispell my fear until the end of the year.

As Easter approached, I felt compelled to revisit the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. Whether this desire for a religious refuge was spurred on by the approach of the Holy Season or by fear of the sophomore privates to be loosed all-too-soon now, I could not say – but at that point the latter appeared to be much more likely.

The ACF turned out to be far from a refuge, however. I gingerly walked into the large meeting room in Mitchell Hall and looked around like some frightened deer entering a forest rife with the smell of cougars, foxes, and bears. Over in the corner, I spotted the band of Literalists. They had the same forced, toothy smiles beneath the same steely, cruel eyes. But there were so many more of them!

Most of the Literalists appeared to be sophomores, and not just any sophomores, but the sophomore privates who were most looking forward with relish to their tormenting the thetes. They had been passed over for rank at the end of their thete year by classmates, upperclassmen, and Tactical Officers who could see right through them and did not particularly like what they saw. Now they intended to prove to those “blind idiots” just what they were made of. And they would.

In the midst of the band stood Christopher Adams. He actually appeared to be holding court – the rabbit king addressing the foxes. “Well,” I muttered quietly to myself, “if he can get away with that, maybe he will become president of the ACF and receive his graduate scholarship to the NCBC.” I muttered those last initials carefully, trying to remember them by what they stood for.

Suddenly, I felt a hand on my right shoulder and heard a voice whisper in my ear, “Unless we can stop him.” I moved my head to the right – my body was still held in place by the hand – and saw the concerned face of Owen Hughes leaning down to eye-level with me. I had not realized that my words could be heard, and his comment startled me. What startled me more, though, was the whole situation. I could not remember ever having had a more powerful feeling of *déjà vu*, and I rapidly shook my head trying to figure out where that feeling had come from.

“They’ve grown, haven’t they?” I said in a hoarse whisper, feeling ever more vulnerable, but also sharing enough of Owen’s concern to not worry about the unspoken “sir.”

“Yes,” he answered gravely, “and the rest of the ACF has proportionally declined.”

“Where are they all?” I asked. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I anticipated his reply.

“Where have you been?” He looked at me with far more resignation than accusation. “It used to be a very comfortable, spiritually up-lifting group,” he added almost whimsically.

We both stood transfixed by the sight of the Literalists with their intense inaudible discussion – inaudible, that is, except for the occasional “Triumph of Christianity,” a phrase they seemed unable to utter in hushed tones.

One figure among them seemed definitely out of place. I could not tell what his name was, because he was not wearing his name tag – an omission that appeared to be very much in keeping with his general attitude toward his uniform. In lieu of being tied, his necktie was looped over his collar stay. This was a common practice among upperclassmen, but his stay was dangling out of one collar, revealing his failure to button the collar, and a missing third button right below the point where his tie was tucked in allowed the frayed cut-off end of his tie to poke out. In general, he made my squad sergeant Mr Daniels look like a candidate for the élite drill team. He was decidedly overweight – had he been a thete he would have been labeled a “blivit” and either forced on a diet (with exercise) or run out of the Corps. His hair and thick eyebrows were dark, and this accentuated his five o’clock shadow. On his collars I could make out highly smudged 2K – a junior private from K Company, Third Battalion.

I could not take my eyes off him and watched him as he left the band of Literalists and sidled up to a circle of other cadets, including the president of the ACF, Cadet Major Brady. Mr Brady raised his eyebrows and appeared to be politely attentive to what the junior had to say. But as soon as the 2K went on in search of fresh pastures, Mr Brady shrugged his shoulders and carried on his conversation within his circle.

Standing next to me, Owen was observing the same activity. “I don’t know his name,” he said, not waiting for me to ask. “He first showed up a couple of meetings ago, all on his own. Every time I get close enough to talk with him, something gets in the way: The meeting starts, someone else steps in between us, or something.”

“What’s he doing?” I asked with some fascination. “He keeps going back and forth between the Literalists and the rest.”

“To be generous – as all Christians should be,” Owen said with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, “I’d have to praise him as the only cadet brave enough to act as a bridge between two increasingly antagonistic camps.”

“What’s he really doing?”

“Stirring things up. He hears something here and repeats it there in what is I’m sure a distorted version. Then he goes back the same way.”

“But why?” I was really curious now.

“You’ll have to ask him. As usual, he’s drifting over here now, just as John’s about to begin the business meeting. I suspect that by the time the business meeting is over, our friend will already be long gone.”

And so he was.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SWEAT PARTY

Easter break lasted less than a week, from 14 to 20 April. But since Christmas I had learned about the trains that ran between Charleston and Washington. They were a lot faster than the bus, and far more comfortable. You could get up, move around, and even visit the snack bar in the dining car. Some still had formal dining arrangements, though these tended to be much too expensive for cadets. Or you could just slide your visor down over your eyes and get some sleep.

There was always a cadet party on the train – at least on the trips home. They even served drinks from little metal carts, depending upon the laws of the county we happened to be traveling through, and these tended to enliven the party atmosphere – even for me just taking in the vicarious pleasure of watching others drink and make fools of themselves. I would join them after the beginning of my junior year. The trips back to The Acropolis were considerably more somber and the conversations more subdued, but it was still far better than the cramped conditions on the bus.

Although the train was more expensive than the bus, if we traveled in uniform (which freshmen and even sophomores had to do anyway), we received a third off our tickets. This was the Atlantic Coast Line's and the Seaboard Air Line's way of supporting the "troops," and the discount brought the cost of the ticket down at least as far as the bus.

The only problem with the arrangement was that the train got in earlier – in the middle of the night. So I had to get a bus into Bethesda from Friendship Heights. But at least I was far more rested and had had a more pleasant adventure in getting there.

Unfortunately, there was not much to do at home over Easter. Religious observances dominated everyone's schedule. I walked my usual mile stroll to church on Sunday morning – up Radnor Road to Maiden Lane and then down Wilson Lane. I was fond of walking, and that probably played a role in my frequent forays into Charleston. When I was a very small child, my mother would drive me to church with my brother, and she would pick us up afterwards. Most of the time growing up, though, I would walk with him. Then when he went off to the Naval Academy, I walked by myself for the three years before I went to The Acropolis. I knew every inch of the way and always delighted in seeing the small animals that scurried along the sidewalk in front of me.

I did manage to call some friends and went out to a movie with Nina on Saturday. Otherwise, I took advantage of the favorable weather to ride around on my bicycle and look at the sites that had been important to me growing up – the schools, the tree-lined roads, and the houses of girls I had never had the courage to approach.

All of this effort to relax, though, was doomed to failure. I knew the sophomore privates would be loosed as soon as we returned to The Acropolis, and I dreaded the torture that they might inflict. The more I tried to banish the thought from my mind, the more entrenched it became.

Indeed, it seemed like only hours before I was standing once more on the quadrangle for the return muster at 6:00pm on Tuesday, 20 April. All of the thetes in H Company were bracing as strongly as they could – both literally and figuratively – for the onslaught of the sophomore

privates. All through second semester this threat had leered at us like some malevolent funnel cloud on the horizon. And now that we were steeling ourselves for whatever might come our way ... nothing came our way.

Not only Tuesday evening, but all day Wednesday and through evening meal on Thursday, nothing happened. The sophomore privates did not even talk to us, but just looked us over menacingly from a distance. By Thursday evening, we were wishing that they had started in on us back at muster, as this waiting was really frazzling our nerves – as I am sure it was intended to do. Then Thursday after evening meal, we stopped wishing.

On Thursday evening, the waning gibbous moon would have provided ample light in the barracks, but she would not rise until after midnight. As I returned from the mess hall through the front sally port, I noticed that for some reason, the floodlights directed at the H Company stairwell had been slightly diverted, leaving that corner of the barracks in a deep shadow. Even the light over the bulletin board was off. It may well have been that the other companies were experiencing similar malfunctions, but I did not notice – my concern was only for the darkness that I saw over in the back, left-hand corner, a darkness that seemed to me to be encroaching upon the large Acropolis-blue H painted on the stairwell.

I made my way through the sally port, past the corner of the barracks beneath E Company, and up to the darkened stairwell. There was an upperclassman on the stairs. He was a cadet sergeant and had served on the Training Cadre. In fact, I had been a member of his squad and his mess. His was the first name I had known by shouting it out on the stairs between second and third division. But now, with the sultry air of deepening spring in Charleston and the surreal, sinister darkness enveloping the stairwell like some great choking serpent, my mind refused to relinquish his name.

I popped off as smartly and as loudly as I could, requesting permission to drive up the stairs, and omitting nothing but his name.

“Who am I, thete?” he asked in a manner far more menacing than anything I had ever heard from his lips before.

“I can’t see, sir. It’s too dark.” I hoped that this would suffice, but I knew that it would not.

“Then drive up here and take a closer look!” he ordered impatiently in his distinct New England accent.

I drove up the stairs, stomping my feet as hard as I could in the vain hope that doing so would dislodge his name from my uncooperative memory.

He stopped me on the fourth step from the top and demanded, “Okay, thete. Can you see me now? Good! What’s my name?” he asked, his right hand over his name tag.

I stuttered and stammered incoherently.

“I don’t believe you, Cadet. See, I know *your* name. After all, I was your squad sergeant on Cadre. But you can’t even remember *my* name. We’ve been too lax with you – with all of you.”

“Sir, Mr Sardis, sir. Cadet Private Thomas, M.C., requests permission to drive up the stairs, sir!” came a cry from below. Mark had sized up the situation and determined that I needed a little help.

“Mr Sardis, sir!” I exclaimed in a loud voice, but one full of apprehension – no, not apprehension, but certainty – that I was now so deep in trouble that nothing would get me out.

“Very good, Cadet!” he hissed sarcastically. Now get over in that line and start doing push-ups.

He pointed with his left hand to a line of cadets all squeezed into the outer row of tiles – the thetes’ pathway – and piled over each other trying to pump out their push-ups in the narrow space. Soon, I heard another plop next to me and on top of me, as Mark joined the line.

It was eerily quiet as we all counted out our push-ups in barely audible whispers. I had not heard an order to this effect, but since the others were already doing it, I followed suit – as did Mark, as did my other classmates who joined us one by one. Most of us were in the cotton gray uniform worn in the warm weather from March to November. But a few on the outer edge of the line were in bathrobes; these must have returned early from the athletic mess and had to be summoned from their rooms.

In the dark, it was difficult to notice that the furniture had been removed from room 248 and lined up in the deepest shadows along the wall. With the entire thete class of H Company present on the gallery, the last of the furniture was brought out of the unoccupied room by sophomore privates.

The sophomores grabbed us and dragged us into the room. In the corner, the radiator was blasting heat into the cramped quarters as the hot water tap was gushing into the sink. The closed windows, door, and transoms ensured that the heat could not escape – nor could we. Although emptied of furniture, it was well stocked with brooms and rifles that we had to hold out with stiff arms as sophomores screamed with their high-pitched, untrained voices. In addition to push-ups, there was a host of other exercises from the usual PT repertoire of mountain climbs, sit-ups, deep-knee bends to more exotic disciplines such as hanging from the water pipes over the room, some of which fed the radiator and sink and were too hot to handle for more than a few seconds.

This was a “sweat party,” and the sophomores screeched out time and again how they had had to endure such punishments every week, back when they were thetes – back in the “old” Thete System, the “Old Corps,” when things were tough and being an Acropolis cadet really meant something. As for us, we were too soft, having been spoiled by the “new” System. There was only a month and a half left in the year, but they were going to run every one of us softies out.

It did not take long for us to notice that whenever the sophomores spoke of the terrors of the “Old Corps,” the juniors and seniors would do their best to stifle looks of incredulity. This was the cliché of the Academy – it was far worse for me than it is now for you. Nothing demonstrated the absurdity of that charge more than hearing it from the squeaky voice of a sophomore private for the first time.

Of course, these sophomores had not suffered any more than we were suffering. A look at the professional and businesslike juniors and the laid-back seniors sufficed to prove that. It was especially ludicrous to imagine Mr Wilson, Mr Ford, or even Mr Powell himself as such ogres in their enforcement of the System.

Indeed, it was the junior sergeants and senior officers who were curbing the potential abuses of the sophomore privates at that instant. The sophomore privates seemed to delight in the punishments and torments they were inflicting, but they had no idea what the purpose of this intense discipline was. Occasionally, one would cock his fist back at a thete, and Mr Woodward or Mr Sardis, or even Mr Sinclair, would clear his throat and raise his eyebrows – and in one or two instances grab an elbow. Throughout the entire ordeal, the sophomores were given what they thought was free reign, but they were supervised by the juniors, who were in turn supervised by the seniors. These latter two groups would make sure that the brutality of the lower level would

not under any circumstances get so far out of hand as to endanger the purposes and reasons of the upper level of the System.

That was, in brief, the essence of the System itself. At its most effective, it was carried out in a matter-of-fact way – and as the great German playwright Bertolt Brecht well knew, matter-of-fact barbarity can be far more devastating than grotesque hyperbole. But even amidst the brutality of the sweat party, there had to be supervision. Without that, it turned into an exclusively lower-level exercise of sadism.

Nor were the thetes the only cadets to “benefit” from the experience. The sophomores as well were being shown by taps on the shoulders and looks of approval and disapproval just what the limits of the System were. Poking with fingers and knuckles, drives with the side of the fist, firm grasps were permissible; but striking in anger or anything that might cause injury was strictly prohibited.

As the sweat party proceeded, however, I took little notice of the niceties of the System – that would come in later reflection. Unlike those of the rest of my classmates, my primary thoughts were not of fear or anger. To me it was left to dwell throughout those torments on the fact that I was to blame for the whole affair. After all, was it not I who had forgotten Mr Sardis’ name and thus set off the brutal series of events?

Of course, such thoughts were nonsensical and totally devoid of reason. The fact that room 248 had been left vacant in spite of its prime location seemed to hint of some future purpose. The fact that the furniture had been removed and brooms and rifles introduced should have indicated some planning prior to my blunder. The fact that the radiator had been going for quite some time at full blast was apparently more than a fortuitous accident. The fact that my classmates, some of them yanked from their rooms, had already been doing push-ups outside room 248 before I forgot Mr Sardis’ name was probably indicative of something rather significant. The fact that the floodlights had even been tampered with – a feat that required someone to sneak up onto the roof – should have told me something. But these were mere facts.

On the emotional level of a dispirited thete, isolated and alone, my guilt made elegant sense. Throughout the ordeal, I knew that my classmates were condemning me in the depths of their hearts for bringing this sweat party upon them. I knew that my name would be linked forever with their pain. I knew that whatever progress I had made in finally getting to know them and to become one of them was all for naught. I knew that – whatever they might say or do – from this moment on they would forever hate me.

When the bugle call signaled the beginning of ESP, the room emptied in a flash. The sweat party had lasted only half an hour, although it seemed as though we had been there all through the night. We hobbled back to our rooms and sought refuge behind our closed doors.

Arty had a term paper due for American history and had been counting on that evening to go to the Library to check out some needed information. He washed up at the sink, dried himself off with a towel, and braved the gallery.

Although he had told me earlier of his plans, deep within myself I was sure that he left because he did not want to be in the same room as the thete who had caused the sweat party. Indeed, everything anyone did from that point on I interpreted as proof that I was held to blame. Once again, I retreated into my old patterns of isolation.

That Saturday after SMI, I broke with tradition and took the bus downtown. Alone and forlorn, I stepped off the bus in the block just beyond the Francis Marion. Two young ladies

waiting to get on the bus looked at me with startled expressions and blurted out in unison, “Hey, are you all right?”

As usual, I was too timid to speak with them and far too angry at myself to allow it in the first place. As they got on the bus behind me, I could hear one say to the other in a concerned Charleston accent, “He’d be a good-lookin’ guy, if he weren’t so *angry!*”

Looking back on it now, as I hurried on to Second Battalion trying to get there before the magic hour of midnight, I realized how deeply those two young women still haunted my memory. Yes, it was my anger, my withdrawal, my timidity that had turned me from a young man who had once been gregarious and happy to one prematurely bent down with age and rage in isolation.

But at the end of the year, although I realized what I had done to myself, I was still carried on by the inertia of emotion. The year would end, as end it must, with my imprisonment in self-isolation. I realized what had gone wrong, but I knew that there was little I could have done about it at that point.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DENOUEMENT OF THETE YEAR

From Easter to the end of the academic year on 5 June 1965, I harvested the bounty of my mistakes. It was like being in a Greek tragedy, where the protagonist fully understands that he and he alone is responsible for the catastrophe collapsing in upon him, but he is powerless to forestall the juggernaut of Fate that he himself has set into motion. Had I, too, sinned against the Gods? And if so, what was the nature of my sin? I was not entirely sure at the time, but I suspected that the self-isolation in which I had wrapped myself securely for my own protection had indeed had something to do with it.

After grades were posted, I was shocked but also relieved to see two D's – one in chemistry and one in trigonometry. These were subjects that I had already taken and to which I had already developed a considerable dislike in high school. My old chemistry teacher had spoken in a low monotone that invariably put me to sleep, especially when he digressed from the intricacies of the periodic table to preach on the impracticality of the theory of evolution given “an inadequate time-frame.” It did not help that he constantly rebuked the day's youth on the looseness of their morals. (In contrast, my German teacher, Frau Lister, was a dynamo who got to every one of her forty-five students at least twice per period – thus explaining my major in German rather than in chemistry, for which I had taken German in the first place.)

As for trigonometry, that had been and continued to be magic. I had a suspicion that there was some sound principle behind it, and I had enjoyed the practicum of measuring the flag pole in high school. But the sines, cosines, and logarithms made no sense to me whatsoever – especially at The Acropolis, where all equations were resolved by bibliomancy based upon the Chemical Rubber Corporation, or CRC, tables. Why one number and not the other? And where did the decimal point go after some calculation on the slide rule? The master bibliomancer and trigonometrist knew, but for me it remained a mystery worthy of a religious cult in which I would never gain the lowest degree of novice.

Right after grades were posted in the academic buildings, rankings were tacked to the bulletin board next to room 248. Although I had remained isolated for most of the year – or, as I preferred to think of it, I had kept a low profile – and although I was probably the least known individual among the H Company freshmen, I still had some faint glimmer of confidence that I was a model cadet and that I would make corporal. Did I not frequently receive merits for my appearance and performance, as opposed to the demerits of my classmates? Had I not managed to get through my entire thete year without once serving a confinement? Indeed, I had never been restricted to campus or required to march back and forth with a rifle on the quadrangle in the punishment known as a “tour.”

Of course, what had gained me the positive record was precisely the same thing that would militate against my standing in the class. Those who took the chances and pushed themselves out front, where they could succeed or fail gloriously, were the thetes who were noticed. They were observed closely and punished judiciously in ways that would guide them toward improvement.

When it came time to rank us, both my classmates and the upperclassmen knew and judged those they had observed. But as for the invisible cadet,

I was crushed when I saw how low I was in the rankings. I did not even have the distinction of being at the very bottom, but was down around the lowest quartile, where you would put people when you could not quite remember who they were or what they had done.

Just as Harry had predicted, Tadd Evans was chosen to be the guidon corporal. When I saw his name at the top, I wracked my brain trying to recall just who he was. I knew that I had met him once, a long time ago, and that he seemed to be a person who could take charge and make good decisions; but I could not conjure up a picture of him in my mind.

That summer, I received a long panoramic photograph that had been taken of the H Company thetes after the graduation parade and right before recognition. As I poured over the picture, it occurred to me that the thete kneeling in the first rank right there beside me must be Tadd. It was not until the following year that I realized that the thete on my right was not Tadd, but someone who did not return sophomore year. Tadd was not even in the photograph, but had probably been called out to some meeting to prepare him for taking over the duties of guidon corporal.

As I realized later (and always I scolded myself for realizing everything later), Tadd was the thete who had saved us at the barber shop, and he had continued in that role the entire nine months. I wished I would have got to know him better then, but my fears and my tendency toward isolation prohibited me from going all the way down the gallery on first division to meet him. Had I met him, could he have inspired me to come out of my shell? He was in all respects an excellent cadet and an outstanding human being. Once again, though, I had to pay the penalty for my sin of self-isolation.

Right after that picture was taken, while we were still in full dress with webbing and holding our shakos (though we had deposited our rifles in our rooms for the picture), the upperclassmen descended upon us for the last time. This was the formal ritual of recognition, and the atmosphere was far different from the post-Easter sweat party, or from any other encounter we had had with the upperclassmen.

We were ordered to do push-ups, which we performed with bravado and with creative counting. We were told to drive our chins in till they came out the back of our necks, and we complied – almost. We were ritually spanked with brooms, swords, and toothbrushes (the last of which, by the way, should never be picked if you have a choice). And in the end, the upperclassmen stuck out their hands and introduced themselves by their first names. After our harrowing nine-month journey, we had become accepted members of the élite club of Acropolis cadets.

That evening, H Company had a portion of the beach reserved on the Isles of Palms near the Acropolis beach house. Here it was traditional to drink too much, party too hard, and settle old scores that still rankled thetes and upperclassmen alike. There were a few punches thrown; but by that time, the pugilists were too far gone to cause any permanent damage.

Determined that I was going to make every effort from this time forth to tear myself out of my self-isolation and rejoin humanity, I approached Gary Daniels with a serious look on my face and, worst of all, cold sober.

“I’ve got a bone to pick with you ... Gary,” I declared with an even voice.

Gary looked at me in utter confusion. Surely, he was not the best squad sergeant around, but he had treated us all fairly and had no inkling as to what I might have against him.

I strutted up to him, poked my face in his face, and said in a tone that sounded as though it was holding a volcano in check, “It’s Mar-y-land. Three syllables.”

For a moment, he just stared at me. Then a glimmer of recollection passed from one eye to the other and he let loose with a roar of laughter that brought the entire party to a standstill. He doubled up with his elbows propped on his knees, and I rocked back and forth in hilarious convulsion, patting him on the shoulder.

The rest of the company just stared at us in astonishment, as Calvin came up to Gary, wagged his finger at him and proclaimed, “He’s right, you know!” For a moment, we were both afraid he was going to choke.

Now, if I could just keep up that out-going, good-humored behavior that had once indeed made me popular among my peers before Thete Week. And before ... other things. Many was the time I wracked my brain trying to recall what those other things were – events so hazy and alien in my memory that I could not even be sure that they were there. But they were there. Yes, there they were, if only I could draw them out.

After graduation the next morning, I said my farewells – not entirely dry-eyed – to my seniors. I packed up my uniforms for storage, except for my full dress, which I was expected to wear to the prom of a girl I did not know, but whose mother was good friends with my mother. Besides, my mother emphasized, her late father had been an admiral. She turned out to be a very nice young lady, though she seemed to be as awkward in the situation as I was. Perhaps, had it not been for our mothers’ involvement, we might have got to know one another.

As I put my uniforms in storage, I took out the civies I had worn to Charleston nine months earlier, including the shoes I had had on when I trudged across the wet field with Herm. Incredibly, they were not moldy. And the jacket and tie, which were required traveling gear for a young man, were reasonably presentable, at least for a five-hundred-mile train ride. Of course, I would not put them on until after boarding the train – after receiving my uniform discount.

Seeing my civies again though made me wonder one more time just what had ever happened to my guide. I looked him up in the yearbook that we all received that morning, and he was not in it. Had he dropped out? Or had he simply vanished altogether? I wondered if our paths would ever cross again and if he would guide me to something else. I dismissed the thoughts as a strange fantasy, but they did not depart as ordered.

Summer in Bethesda was hot and humid, much like Charleston but without the ocean quite so close at hand. My father was working as a consultant for a company that was building a new school in the area, and he managed to secure me a position as a laborer. He had always hoped that I would follow in his footsteps and become a civil engineer, and I had no doubt that he had arranged the job for me so that I would discover a fascination for how a building was constructed.

Like my seniors, he found my propensity for language to be an odd gift – not at all practical. As for my complete lack of appreciation for mathematics, he was sure that I would catch on sooner or later. After all, when I was little, he had once taught me how to do arithmetic in Roman numerals and I had grasped the concept with gusto. Of course, in my mind the exercise had much more to do with the Latin I was destined to take in school than with building anything. And besides, it was so anachronistic and pointless that I was naturally delighted with it.

As for more advanced applications of mathematics, I had well proved my incompetence in trigonometry. Certainly, I would never feel comfortable driving over a bridge I had built on the basis of my mathematical ability. If it remained standing, I would have considered it to be just as much a work of magic as the CRC tables.

The construction job, however, was as enjoyable as it was arduous. For the first time in my life I got to work alongside real people and to try to connect with them. Far from the ignorant brutes they were often portrayed as, I discovered that they were just as intelligent and perceptive as anyone else. In some cases, they may have been a bit too perceptive.

There was one short wiry black man named John whom I was particularly fond of and talked with most of the time. From my youthful perspective, I took him to be rather old, but he was probably only in his thirties. One day, John grinned slyly and observed, “I like you, I really do. But, you know, you’re not really one of us.”

I looked at him with some astonishment. “What do you mean?”

He pointed at my trousers and laughed, “You got creases!” Ah, my mother and her iron.

The other laborers (which is to say, the real laborers) and I lived from break to break and looked forward to the arrival of the lunch wagon as the high point of the day. This went on for a month until I learned something very important and very painful about creosote, especially in the hot sun and without a shirt.

After a trip to the Naval hospital and strict orders to stay out of the sun until my skin healed, and then to stay out of the sun some more, my laborer days were over. But what I had learned from my coworkers would gradually sink in as I made my plans to connect with my classmates come fall and to shake off the sin of self-isolation.

That summer, I also made many calls from the library and went out as often as I could. Most of the outings were with Fred, Samantha, and Nina, all piled into Fred’s Carmen Ghia. I also hung out with old friends like “Little” Willie Richardson (well over six feet tall, of course) and Travis Kohl, who lived a couple houses down from the back. Travis and I had long experimented with electronic devices, such as setting up an intercom between the two houses, to which my mother vociferously objected – there being no way to hang up. His grandfather lived with him – a distinguished old gentleman whose claim to fame was deserting from the Austro-Hungarian cavalry before the First World War.

With the skills I had developed with Travis, though, I was able to rig up an earphone attachment to my little plastic-cased record player. This way I would be able to listen to my set of *Welsh on Gramophone Records* without disturbing my roommate.

I also read up on some of the subjects I was going to take sophomore year. My German had become very rusty, and I needed to review and learn a lot. In high school, we had used the Audio-Lingual Method, and that had given me a good degree of confidence and fluency, but without such details as adjective endings and the subjunctive – things that I knew would be expected at the end of one year of college German. I also kept up my French as best I could. As for Greek, that had best wait for September.

Some visits to the library actually entailed going inside to read up on physics, a subject I had liked in high school far more than chemistry. For one thing, you could see in physics just how the world worked. It was not magic, like chemistry that depended upon exotic concepts and dealt with objects that could not be seen. For another thing, reading physics did not put me to sleep – there was no association with a low, monotone voice.

Most of all, I tried to recover from thete year. I went to church each Sunday – not so much for the services, but to be with the people. The task for sophomore year, perhaps even more important than the academics and certainly more important than making rank, was to finally become a member of the class of 1968.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MARY

Throughout the summer, I had gone out with a number of young women, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups. Since my unfortunate experience with Alice Reynolds though, I had not particularly wanted to become entangled in any exclusive relationships. Indeed, between working at the school and then studying to prepare for sophomore year, in which I was bound and determined to turn things around, I did not have the time or the energy to invest in any romance.

All of that changed on Wednesday, 1 September. I had driven down to Bruce Variety in an old shopping strip along Arlington Boulevard in order to stock up on some needed school supplies. Of course, I could easily have found the same things in Charleston, mostly at the Cadet Canteen in Mitchell Hall, but that was not the point. I wanted to come to one of my favorite haunts to get reminders of home as I studied at The Acropolis.

Bruce Variety was one of the most fascinating stores I had ever been in. Two constantly busy check-out counters flanked the two doors in the front. Off to the left were “notions” and sewing materials. In an annex to the left of the left were toys of every sort that had mesmerized me as a child – the old type toys such as sparkling tops, cap guns, and the more modern Hula Hoops. The middle aisle was full of odds and ends of clothing and household goods. Down further in an area that appeared as though it had been excavated out of the end of a cave were appliances and garden goods that could not be found anywhere else, such as moth spray, clacking mole repellers, and other items that were just intriguing to look at. Down the right were the school supplies, with everything from French curves and compasses to notebooks and windbreakers emblazoned with the local schools’ coats of arms.

There a crowd of young people was sifting through the supplies preparing to return to college or high school. As I picked out a spiral notebook with Walt Whitman’s emblem (which had been designed by a friend of mine right before he moved away), I looked up and saw Wally Guinn, a friend who had also run on the cross country team. He was tall and thin, with a smiling angular face and short light brown hair that almost could have passed muster at The Acropolis.

“Wally!” I exclaimed, and continued with the usual ironic comment, “Fancy meeting you here!”

He laughed, “Just getting some stuff together before going back to UVa. I thought you were off learning to be a Confederate general.”

“Gotta be back Tuesday,” I replied.

Suddenly, Wally jerked forward as though someone had just poked him in the back. He glanced over his shoulder and moved out of the way, “You remember my sister Mary, don’t you?”

Perhaps I had met her once, but I certainly did not remember her like this. She was exactly my height and had wavy black hair that framed a face as soft as her brother’s was angular. Her deep violet eyes – the color of the twilight sky around a full moon – gazed steadily into mine, and our jaws went limp. It was as though she looked straight through my eyes and into my heart, as I

did the same and was captivated by what I saw and felt there. Everything outside our gaze became hazy, including Wally's look of bemusement.

As if in a dream, I asked her out. As if in a dream, she accepted.

I had no idea how we managed to break that gaze. Perhaps Wally finally became impatient and stepped in between us. The next thing I knew I was packing school supplies into my suitcase at home and checking the *Washington Evening Star* to see what movies were playing.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I remembered 5:00pm Friday; so I assumed that I was going to take her out to dinner and a movie. I looked up Wally's phone number and address in my old high school directory, so I would at least know where to pick her up and how to get in touch with her.

Just to make sure, and in hopes of hearing her voice, I called. She was not in, but her mother assured me, "Yes, that's what she thought you two had agreed on, though she didn't seem too terribly sure." Although I had never met Mrs Guinn, I was rather certain from her tone of voice that she was smiling and probably on the brink of good-natured laughter.

Promptly at 5:00pm, I arrived for my date with Mary. She was ready, and she kissed her mother on the cheek and promised to be back by 11:30pm. As she danced out the door, our eyes met, and then we both looked down with embarrassment – neither wanted to repeat the gaze and stand on the porch for the rest of the evening. Whenever we did look into each other's eyes, though, time suddenly took a holiday, ending in two barely audible sighs and two radiant blushes.

We went to Francesca's, Bethesda's only pizza parlor, and we were each amazed to discover someone else who liked ginger ale. The main thing I remembered from the date was that we both dominated the conversation. In the past, whenever I had been out with someone, either I babbled incessantly to keep the conversation alive or the young woman I was out with did. Or else, as in the case of the admiral's daughter, neither one of us spoke much.

With Mary, though, it was different. I was as interested in her background and activities and in her hopes and dreams as she was in mine. Nor did we hold anything back. She remembered that I had been a rather good wrestler in the high school and wondered if I had kept it up in college. Rather than hemming and hawing, I launched into a description of my match with Mark Tennet as though it had happened to someone else or in a movie or television show. We both laughed, she more sympathetically than I, but I with a greater degree of relief and joy in being able to share the story.

Before we knew it, we had to hurry down to the Town Theater in downtown Washington. "Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines" had been one of the most popular movies of the summer, and we had both been looking forward to seeing it. But, frankly, beyond flashes of certain scenes and the title music, I could not describe the movie afterwards. We sat far in the back, with no one around us, and whispered back and forth through the whole show.

Every time I leaned over and whispered something to her, the feel and smell her hair melted me down to my toes. And every time she leaned over and whispered something to me, the warmth of her breath and of her hand on my shoulder nearly knocked me out. From the look in her eyes, I could tell that she was experiencing the very same feelings. There were other lone couples in the back of the theater who were hugging and kissing, but none of them, I was sure, felt anything close to the bond that was developing between Mary and me.

On the way back, we stopped for some ice cream at a Howard Johnson's on Wisconsin Avenue. The moon was waxing gibbous and almost two-thirds full, and she shone like a gentle sun in the western sky. Over ice cream, we continued our discussion, which was less intense now that we were sitting across a table from one another. But our feet touched, and neither one of us was willing to shift in our seats, lest the subtle bond be broken.

She was entering her senior year at the high school and was thinking about colleges. "What are you going to major in?" I asked.

"Math," she replied with enthusiasm. "Is something wrong?" she queried when I gave a start.

"Oh, no," I assured her. "It's just that math has always been my weak point. Especially trigonometry and the math that you need in chemistry. I almost flunked them both because of poor bibliomancy."

"Poor bibliomancy?" she laughed.

"I couldn't figure out the magic behind the CRC tables. What is a logarithm, anyway?"

She whipped a paper napkin out of the dispenser at the end of the table and fumbled around for a pen in her purse.

"Here," I offered her the pen from the inside pocket of my jacket.

She took it and proceeded to explain about the base ten – which I understood – and exponents – which I also understood. She then proceeded from an exponential form to a logarithmic form in a way she seemed ridiculously simple. Finally, she showed me how to use it and, more importantly, why – all on a single napkin!

"It's not magic," I exclaimed. "It actually makes sense. Why didn't my teachers ever explain it, rather than just assuming that I should know?"

"For the same reason," she teased me, "that German is so much more difficult than French in school. The German teachers all assume that you know grammar, which is also simple, if someone takes the trouble to explain it."

"I learned it in Latin," I admitted sheepishly, "and if it hadn't been for that, I doubt if I'd be in German now."

Mary looked at me and a deep concern came over her eyes. We had spoken freely and without pretensions or excuses, and I knew she was about to broach a serious topic. Far from dreading it, I welcomed the opportunity for us to get to know each other better.

"Could you kill?" she asked. Alison had hinted at the same question the previous Christmas. Had she asked it as bluntly, I probably would have ducked it and worried about it later.

I looked into Mary's eyes and admitted with sorrow and relief, "I just don't know. I kind of doubt it. And I don't know if I should be ashamed or relieved to say it." There, it was out!

"I know I couldn't," she said with sympathy. No, it was beyond sympathy; it was empathy – empathy not only with me but with me and the whole of humanity. "I know I couldn't, no matter how much danger I was in, no matter how much my life depended on it. It's just something about me – I can't drag myself to harm others, much less kill them."

Every inch of my being silently thanked her for venturing into this dangerous territory. "That's the problem with war," I admitted feeling somewhat depressed. "I can imagine myself at the head of a platoon of soldiers. I can imagine bullets flying around me. But when it comes to taking *my* rifle and shooting someone, I just don't know. And I'm afraid that if I had to, and if I did, I wouldn't like the way I'd feel about myself afterwards."

She reached across the table and grasped my hand. Then she took the napkin with the logarithms on it and dried my eye. This time when we gazed into each other's eyes, it was as though we were slipping together into one. She and I. I and she. We.

The moon was just peeking over the trees outside the window. The time! It was fast approaching her curfew. I quickly paid, and we rushed out to the Corvair. We pulled into her driveway, right as the moon was setting. We looked at each other and laughed – not just in relief at having just barely made it (give or take three minutes), but in the joy of having found each other; and in finding each other, finding ourself.

We stood outside her door, our eyes exactly level, our hands holding on to each other's. We both leaned gently inward and kissed.

"May I write you?" I asked sincerely.

"Yes!" she exclaimed laughing. "You'd better!"

Our hands parted, but from that time on our souls were linked inextricably together.

The last thing I did before walking out the door at home to return to The Acropolis was to look at Mary's picture in my old high school yearbook. The picture was nearly two years old, and she looked awfully young. But there was still something in it that reminded me of the beautiful, poised, and fascinating young woman I had, whether I had meant to or not, freely and completely given myself over to. As I gazed at the picture, imagining her gazing back at me, it struck me that she did not possess me, nor did I possess her. We had joined together at some higher, deeper level in complete equality.

As the train drew me closer and closer to Charleston, I felt the bond with Mary grow, not fade. Yes, of course I would write. Here was someone I could share everything with, because on that higher, deeper level we already did.

I was still determined, and now more than ever, to make a new beginning this sophomore year. I would get to know my classmates and become one with them. My relationship with Mary strengthened this resolve, for it occurred to me that to be truly one with another, I had to be open to all. She did not possess me, any more than I jealously possessed myself. The thought of jealously possessing myself brought to mind all the mistakes that I had made the previous year – the mistakes that I was determined never again to repeat. I would not isolate myself.

As I hurried back to the barracks that April night junior year, my thoughts drifted on to how my life had changed as a sophomore. Thete year, there had been so many things that happened and that filled my memories with the residues of a young man in isolation. Sophomore year, on the other hand, the things that happened would prove far more important and would help to explain how I ended up in my painful marathon from Colonial Lake to the refuge of H Company, tears streaming from my eyes.

And central to everything – everything – was always Mary. Oh, Mary!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SOPHOMORE YEAR – THE NEW BEGINNING

Sophomore year started out with such promise. I had known so few of my classmates and had been so forgettable myself that I had not even picked out a roommate at the end of the year. Somehow, and I am not at all sure how it had happened, I ended up rooming with Bill Williams, perhaps the best match that could have been made – certainly a better match than either of us were capable of making ourselves. Bill was slight of frame, with sharply angular features and dark hair already turning prematurely gray.

As had I, Bill had maintained a low profile the year, although he seemed to have come about it with less determination. He was naturally shy and introspective, and he and I had been ranked about the same in the class – around the 25% mark where cadets who were generally unknown seemed to gravitate to. We hit it off right away.

We laughed and talked in the room, though we also had a lot of studying to do. Academically, we both had some serious ground to make up after the year. As in the year, though, we had a series of core courses that we both had to take, including physics. Bill was, in fact, a physics major, but his class used the same book as mine did. The only difference was that as a science major, he was required to solve the problems using calculus, and I could get by with algebra.

One major difference between us was that Bill remained shy and continued to operate as much as possible below the radar. On the other hand, I was determined to break out of that cycle and to focus outwards towards my classmates as much as possible. It seemed natural to me even at the time that this determination was bolstered by the mere presence of Mary in my life, and I attributed it to my feeling of happiness over the relationship; although later I could see that it went far, far deeper than that.

Most of the classmates I tended to associate with were, like me, sophomore privates with no particular ambition for making sergeant at the end of the year. In addition to Harry and Ken, Guy, Arty, Zachary, and the rest, I got to know Sean McCollum particularly well. While my father had retired from the Navy when I was five, Sean's father had been an active-duty Air Force officer and had taken his family to exotic places like Europe and Turkey, so he had lots of fascinating stories to share and had gained valuable experience.

Among the corporals with whom I developed a special bond there was Don Mallard, one of the group that frequented the Chow Mein Inn. Although he craved rank and was determined to follow Mr Woodward and Mr Sinclair into the Marine Corps, he was nonetheless friendly and always bore a smile – unless, of course, he was standing in front of a thete. Even then, he was never overbearing and understood the two-level Thete System with all of its intricacies. More than any of that, though, he was a genuine human who showed interest in others and who sparked interest from others.

Also there was my favorite Greek, Alex Basileios – alias “King” Alex. Alex accepted everything The Acropolis had to deal out with tired resignation. Near the beginning of the year, he showed me a picture from his childhood. At what looked like about eight or ten years of age, he was dressed in a fancy uniform and enrolled at a military elementary school. His family's

expectation was that he would follow tradition and be a high-ranking military officer, but at nineteen he seemed to be wearying of the endeavor. By a quirk of fate, right before he was to sign his contract at the beginning of junior year, one of our classmates ran into him the wrong way during an intramural football game and badly injured Alex's knee. From that point on, he was classified 4F – medically unfit for the military – and it seemed as though a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. It troubled me that I was so envious of him.

While I was friendly with the other corporals, I nonetheless tended to avoid being in their presence too long. I wanted to be free from the stress that always seemed to accompany those who were bent upon achieving rank. Of course, I knew this was ironic from a young man who had just over a year before entered The Acropolis with the certainty that he would become Regimental Commander.

My ambitions now were completely academic. By striving to achieve the highest grades and the greatest degree of understanding in my subjects, I was not competing with anyone. If I received an A in intermediate German, this had no effect at all on anyone else's grades. In a word, it was not a zero-sum game – my winning did not entail anyone else's losing. If I made rank, on the other hand, that meant that someone else would not. In a way, I suppose Mary's feeling of wanting to do no harm to others, regardless of what harm that might bring to herself, seemed to find a sympathetic resonance in me as well.

Nor was my new openness restricted to my classmates. Early on in the semester, Grant Woodward, now the company commander, had me assigned to his mess. One day at noon meal, he looked over at me and asked earnestly, "Have you ever thought about joining the Marines?"

"Oh, yes." I replied sincerely. "I've thought about it many times."

Grant's eyes lit up in expectation. "And ...?"

"Well, each time I think about it, after I stop laughing, I decide to stay with the Army."

He glowered at me with feigned darkness, but he could not suppress that wry smile. His look reminded me of the time thete year when I had worn my name tag upside down on my bathrobe. In fact, it swept me back so intensely to that incident, that I felt a pressing urge to look down and make sure that it was right-side up on my shirt.

Upon further reflection, it dawned on me that Grant Woodward, for whom I had such awe and respect, not only had requested my assignment to his mess, but had even asked if I was interested in his most holy institution, the USMC. And I was a mere sophomore private. Clearly, when I crawled out of my isolation and opened myself up to others, they accepted me and even embraced me as one with them.

Right from the beginning of the year, my academic choices were gaining some interest. Of course, I continued with French – that was required as part of my major in German. And I finally was able to get back into German itself. Thanks to my efforts over the summer at memorizing adjective endings, the subjunctive, and all the other grammatical niceties covered in elementary German at colleges, combined with the fluency and ease of speaking that I had gained in the two-year high school program, I breezed right into it.

Of more interest, though, was elementary Greek. Far from the original curriculum that had stressed the Greek heritage and its influence at The Acropolis, Greek and Latin were offered now only on demand. By the greatest of fortunes, at the end of thete year there were just enough cadets demanding Greek that the Academy had to offer it, in spite of the fact that the professor

who taught it was to go on sabbatical. So The Acropolis hired the local Greek priest, and we were off and running.

I was most relieved to have physics this year, a subject I was as genuinely interested in as I was totally bored with chemistry. This was, after all, the way the world worked; or at least, the way it worked according to Sir Isaac Newton, with occasional nods to Albert Einstein and bare mentionings of Niels Bohr. Ironically, those latter two would have to wait until I took a course on Greek philosophy the next year.

In physics, I even managed to “outshine” my roommate, but in a way that hurt neither of us. I consistently solved the problems in the physics book faster and more reliably. Unfortunately, since he had to construct and solve his equations in calculus, I could offer him no help beyond my ability to visualize and conceptualize the problems. I hoped that helped, though my knowledge of calculus was so utterly nonexistent that I never really knew if it did nor not.

British literature I found far more interesting than American the year before, simply because I had not had it as frequently in my academic career. Its relative newness also kept me from slipping back into the complacency that had so badly damaged me as a thete.

My study habits also improved. Evening Study Period was not always terribly quiet and I had never been an evening person anyway, but had preferred getting up early and studying with my mind fresh. Besides, the Tac Officer and the guard would regularly come around after taps and check to see if anyone was studying beyond lights out. While late lights were strictly enforced, however, no one ever bothered to check for early lights.

Consequently, I started the practice of taking the top bunk, going to bed as early as possible, and then rising anywhere from 4:00 to 5:00am to study. As I got out of bed, I would drape my blanket down to shield my roommate from the light and turn on the little high-intensity lamp at my desk.

Then, in the last fifteen minutes before first call at 6:15am, I would shave and polish my shoes and brass. This was the one behavior that I knew irked my classmates, though in a reasonably good-natured way. I was shined up, smelling of English Leather, and ready to talk, when the rest of my compatriots were still struggling to stand in formation and survive till breakfast. On the rare occasions that we had a morning formation inspection, usually after someone (assumed to be among the upperclassmen) played a prank on the Battalion or Regimental Staff, I tended to rack up the merits.

My performance in academics was very quickly recognized. In English, we had to read aloud from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* in the original, the opening passage of which I had been required to memorize in high school. When the professor went around the room from cadet to cadet having them read, my classmates struggled to pronounce the strange spellings of Middle English. I was over in the front of the row next to the window, the last row to be called upon. When it came to me, I simply rattled off, “Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote, The droghte of March hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour, Of which vertu engendred is the flour ...,” as though I were reading my native language.

The rest of the class stared at me, jaws agape. After more than a page, the professor raised his eyebrows and finally corrected me, “That’s *engendred* with a hard g. Cadet, do you know German?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, “that’s my major.”

“Very good,” he replied with interest, and I noticed that he made some notation in a tablet that he picked up off his desk.

It did not take long to discover what that special tablet was for. In fact, that very afternoon, I heard a knock on my door, and I looked through the screen to see a smiling junior private from G Company, just down the gallery. He was quite thin and had red hair with a complexion to match. As he walked into the room, I could see that the complexion was not entirely due to ruddiness, but also due to eczema. The smell of the cream brought back memories of my brother, who as a child had suffered with it so badly that our mother often tied socks on his hands to keep him from scratching in his sleep. I took an immediate liking to Harold Prichard and a special feeling of kinship.

“Hey,” he started up after cursory introductions, his voice full of enthusiasm. “I hear you have some knowledge of the English language. I’m the news editor of *The Bugler* and I’d like to invite you to join my staff.”

Now it was my turn to stare with jaw agape. In high school, I had wanted to write for the newspaper, but I was disqualified in the initial test, since I did not know such basic facts about the school as how many students and faculty there were. After the year, of course, that was hardly a problem here.

“Sure,” I managed to blurt out.

“Great,” he answered. “I’ve already told Neil Lennon, the editor-in-chief, that I thought you might be interested, and ... speak of the devil.”

At the door stood a tall, handsome cadet captain in full dress uniform with sash. “Hi, I’m Neil Lennon. I just heard Harold say my name, so I rushed over from the General’s office.” As it turned out, he had in fact come from the office of the new President, Lieutenant General Augustin, and that explained the formality of his dress – it was a requirement that all cadets calling upon the President appear in full dress with sash.

As he entered the room and Harold formally introduced us (as though he had known me for much longer than two minutes), my eyes were drawn to his collar. In particular, I stared at his Gold Stars, the highest academic recognition that a cadet could achieve. It took a 3.0 grade point average to be on the Dean’s List and wear the medal, but a 3.6 to wear the stars. In fact, Harold had them too, as I noted when I saw him some time later in a dress uniform.

Neil looked at my grade sheet posted on the inside of the left-hand press door. “Greek,” he said with eyebrows raised. He looked over at Harold and added, “Let’s give him a try.”

My position on the newspaper was not the only activity that Harold Prichard introduced me to. He also mentioned that he was on the fencing team, which was actually little more than a club, although it did participate in the Southeastern Conference. After failing at my old sports, I had already thought about trying something new, and fencing seemed to be just the ticket.

In November, before Thanksgiving and at the height of my confidence, I tried out for the team. After experimenting with all three weapons – the foil, the saber, and the épée – I decided upon the épée. While it was the only one that was a real weapon, it was so far removed from actual use that I hardly thought of it as something to cause bodily harm. Besides, like doing arithmetic in Roman numerals, it was refreshingly anachronistic.

All the other épéeists in the Conference were tall. Indeed, height was considered essential to the weapon because a touch anywhere on the opponent’s body was a score. Thus, the épéeist typically held his arm fully extended and probed his opponent’s blade. Sooner or later, someone

would thrust, resulting in a series of parries leading to a touch. “Fencing,” Harold would inform me with authority, “is a series of parries to an initial mistake.”

What I brought to the épée was a new tactic, one that had not appeared before – at least not in the Southeastern Conference. Rather than extending my arm forward, where I would never gain any advantage from my tall opponents, I held back with arm crooked. My opponent, baffled by the stance, would inevitably advance with his blade, which I would parry sunwise and up as I stepped forward. This put his full body in range and his blade beyond me – a classic Roman legionary maneuver, but without the shield.

I could not help, of course, but remember my experience wrestling with Mark Tennet. He had taken me completely by surprise with an unorthodox maneuver. Had I not been so humiliated and dispirited by it all, particularly in the context of the year, I might have stayed and learned how to defeat him. My new tactic in fencing, though, would prove productive at least for the first year.

Through the fencing team, I gained a host of new friends. There were two joyful seniors named Owen Daniels (no relation to Gary) and Nick Pappas, the epitome of a Greek, who took a special interest in me for actually braving the language he had had to suffer through in church. When I saw Sean McCollum, my classmate from H Company, at the first practice wielding a saber like a pro, I searched my memory and remembered that he had mentioned something about it last year. Then there was Brent Larsen, the other main épéeist and a classmate from E Company. Brent was from Columbia, South Carolina, a fact that would prove important later.

In my frenzied retreat to the barracks in April 1967, I looked back painfully to that happy time when I was one with the rest of the world. What Harold had told me about fencing, I had already heard about wrestling – a series of counters to an initial mistake. Was this life itself? A desperate series of attempts to recover from initial misfortune? With my shaking hand clasping the pin, it certainly looked that way now.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OH, MARY, MARY

Whatever I was engaged in, be it academics, the newspaper, or fencing, my feelings were never far from Mary. Oddly enough, it was not as though I were torn from her by a distance of five hundred miles, but rather I was tied with her – not to her – regardless of distance, regardless of activities. On that higher, deeper level we were one.

We exchanged correspondence, not like superficial lovers sending daily epistles pining over each other and wishing to be together, while communicating nothing. Rather, we carried on our conversations, learning each other's thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams. All the while, our unity was strengthened as our souls slipped closer and closer together. And in some strange process of sympathy, I was drawn closer to all those around me and felt as never before a part of everything – an integral portion of the unity.

As Thanksgiving approached, I took the money I had been saving for some special purpose and went to the Cadet Canteen. Over on the left was the soda fountain and grill. Down the center were tables where upperclassmen relaxed, had a snack, and discussed classes and other activities. Beyond that there were school supplies and books that catered especially to the tastes of Acropolis cadets – *History of the German General Staff*, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* (the latter of which I eventually could not resist), and so forth. On the right was a long counter with gifts especially tailored for alumni and the special friends of cadets.

There behind the glass was a pin that I had had my eye on. It was a gold vermeil pin with crossed Acropolis swords and the seal in the middle. On each hand-guard was a tiny ruby. Since the pin opened on the bottom, it was customary to attach another pin, with the cadet's class year on the end of a chain, to the top of this pin. I purchased the pin with the small class year 68 in block-style gold numerals and put the rest of what I had into quarters.

From there, I went down the hall, past the barber shop, to the post office with its rows of post boxes in sections and its wooden phone booths over on the right with glass on the doors and black phones hanging on the sides. I piled the quarters on the little desk in the first booth and called Mary.

Her mother answered the telephone and sounded surprised but pleased to hear me. "Mary's out in the yard with some of her friends. Here, I'll get her right away for you."

In only a few moments, she came breathlessly to the phone. The first thing she said was my name, and it thrilled me to hear it from her lips.

"I'm coming home for Thanksgiving," I said, "and I've got something special for you. Do you think we could get together again on Friday evening? I won't have much time and I have to leave Saturday."

"Of course," she exclaimed, as though that were a foregone conclusion.

Amidst reminders from the operator to deposit more quarters, we crammed in a conversation as quickly as we could, filling in some of the questions that were not fully clear from our letters. Finally, I ran out of quarters, and we promised to see each other Friday, 26 November.

The leave was so short that permission to travel had to be requested. But I had my train tickets to prove that I could do it, and the Commandant's Office was willing to oblige. A waxing crescent moon crossed east to west on the way north, and I looked out the window of the train to seek her blessing.

I had Thanksgiving dinner with my parents at home. By that time, only one of my mother's cousins still lived close enough to join us – a cheerful middle-aged redhead who worked at the Pentagon. While I talked as pleasantly as I could, my thoughts were elsewhere, and I was longing with every fiber of my body for the time to stop dallying and push on to 5:00pm Friday.

This time as I drove up to her house, Mary was already coming out the door, kissing her mother on the cheek. She skipped to the car and jumped in, without waiting for me to come around and open the door for her. Our eyes locked as our souls traversed the now-familiar path to make contact with each other and to restore our unity – as if that was even necessary. As I started driving, she leaned over and placed her head on my shoulder.

This date was almost a carbon copy of the previous date, except that I could not even remember what the movie was, although it was at the Town Theater. The big difference came when we drove into the parking lot of the Howard Johnson's ice cream parlor. I reached into my jacket pocket, pulled out a small rectangular box of Acropolis blue, and handed it to her.

She opened it, threw her arms around my neck, and kissed me so hard on the lips that I nearly lost my breath. Had anyone else kissed me like that, I would have been taken aback at the forwardness and fearful of being dominated. But I saw Mary as so much my equal in every respect that I simply kissed her back, and we held each other close for several minutes.

Finally, we disentangled ourselves, gazed into each other's eyes, and smiled with the purest happiness I had ever experienced or ever beheld in another. We walked into the ice cream shop and sat with hands clasped firmly together. Again, we talked and shared our hopes and dreads, but this time we included each other in our plans for the future.

What I remembered most vividly from the conversation, and what proved to be most prophetic, was about pets. She had once had a little kitten named Tabby and loved it and took care of it. But the family who had given it to her lost the kitten's mother and had no cats left. The little girl whose mother had given her the kitten was distraught at the loss of her precious cat.

"I just couldn't stand it," Mary admitted. "I loved that little kitten and had bonded with her, but I knew that the other little girl thought that Tabby should have been hers. You know, it's the same thing as not being able to kill – it's just something about me that demands that I harm no one. But if someone must be hurt, I'll let it be me. I can't help but think that Tabby missed me too – I felt she'd bonded to me as firmly as I had to her – but she had a good home, and she'd get over it."

"But you didn't," I added, feeling the loss in her voice.

Mary smiled at me and pressed my hands as though she never wanted to let them go.

When I returned to The Acropolis that Sunday after Thanksgiving, I was so aware of my blessings that I was ecstatic. Mary and I were one, in a way that no trite cliché could ever capture, for our unity was of our very souls.

Everything else in my life reflected this relationship. I felt that I was a full-fledged member of my class and of the entire Acropolis Corps of Cadets. On *The Bugler*, I was praised for my writing; and when Neil Lennon, P&T Officer on Regimental Staff and editor-in-chief, had been voted in as president of the State Collegiate Press Association, he asked me to serve as

corresponding secretary. On the fencing team, I was having great fun and actually doing fairly well at fencing, as well as in getting to know my teammates. In class, everything came into focus, and I was well on my way to earning Gold Stars myself. But most importantly, I was happy – from top to bottom, inside and out, I was happy.

I waited expectantly for my first letter from Mary. She had promised to write and to send a senior picture. So when I received a thick padded envelope from her – posted by special delivery – on Wednesday, 8 December, I knew what was in it. I took the letter back to my room at the far right end of second division, in the middle of the rear of the barracks and right next to G Company. I placed the envelope reverently on my desk and opened it carefully and expectantly.

What was in the envelope, however, was not a picture, but the little box with the pin. My brain spun around, my heart fluttered, and my head jumped several degrees in temperature. Shaking, I read her letter:

When I got to school this morning, I flaunted the pin – perhaps I flaunted it too much. Samantha Hanson saw it and said that she had been dating a cadet at The Acropolis too. She went on and talked about you in such loving terms that I simply couldn't admit to her that the pin was from you. Samantha is deeply in love with you, so I have to step back. If we got married, not a day would go by that I would not think of how badly I had hurt her. Our whole relationship would be based upon someone else's pain. I just can't do it. Please forgive me. Doing this is so painful to me as it is, I couldn't bear the thought that you might hate me for it.

I sat there at my desk staring at the letter and saying, "No, no, no, no, no!" I closed my eyes, breathed shakily, and repeated and repeated and repeated my words of denial. I would not be Tabby. I would not give up Mary. And I would not let Samantha get away with this monstrous lie – a lie that so severely threatened my hopes and dreams.

Gradually, I got ahold of myself. She was still in school. It was Wednesday, so I did not have drill or PT. I would go back to the canteen, get a handful of quarters, and call her.

Each minute stretched out mercilessly, and I walked around campus to work off my nervous energy. Everything was a blur, and I had no idea where I had walked and how many officers I had failed to salute. As though in a dream, I saw faces looking at me and suddenly twisting in concern. I vaguely heard voices coming at me as though in an echo chamber from cadets who spoke earnestly and tried to be comforting.

At 4:00pm, I called Mary. She answered the phone, and all I could do was to choke out "Mary, Mary."

She broke down sobbing. "It's not you," she assured me, "it's me. I told you, there's something about me. I just can't kill, and I'm afraid it would be like killing her."

"But I never really even dated her." I protested. "I don't know what she told you, but we've usually gone out in a group. And when we've gone out alone, I never even kissed her good night. There is not and never has been anything between Samantha and me beyond simple friendship."

"I know that," she admitted, still crying. "And that's what makes it worse. She honestly believes that you belong to her, even though you never have."

"I don't believe it," I said with conviction, my anger at Samantha coming to the fore.

“Please, please, please. Don’t make this harder. If we got together, every time I would look at you I would see her. I can’t live with that. I just can’t. I think you know exactly how hard this hurts me, and I hope you realize how necessary it is.”

After a long pause, she added, “Promise me something. Promise me that you’ll take her out this Christmas. Don’t let my sacrifice – and the sacrifice I know I’m forcing on you – be in vain. Please.”

I could say nothing.

In the most plaintive and painful voice I had ever heard, she whispered into the phone, “I love you.”

“Oh, Mary, Mary, I lo ...” but then the dial tone interrupted my last words to her, and all of my hopes and dreams vanished into it. I was not yet mature enough to appreciate that the unity that our souls had experienced could not dissolve, that her sacrifice would always occupy a special place in my heart, that indeed at some higher, deeper level we would never part. No, all I felt then was the pain of my loss.

Slowly, I made my way around on the sidewalks – like a good sophomore – and back to my room. By this time, Bill was back as well, and as soon as he saw me he looked at me intently and asked me in as voice as full of concern, “Are you all right?”

It was not quite the right question, but I seized upon it and showed him the letter. He read it, and then he looked abruptly out the window, biting his lower lip.

As it turned out, he had been in exactly the same position the year before that Mary was in now. “I knew that my best friend loved the girl I was in love with,” he confessed. “It tore me to pieces, but I had to step out of the way, even though I also knew that she’d rather have had me. I wasn’t as honest as your Mary. I made up some story about a girl in Charleston. I can’t tell you how much it hurt to hear her cry on the phone like that. But I also knew, like Mary, that if I didn’t, I’d always see our relationship as a betrayal of trust.”

“But it wouldn’t have been,” I protested with so much conviction and vehemence that it brought me up short.

Bill smiled kindly and knowingly. “It would have been to me. And I’m afraid it would be the same for Mary.”

I slumped down so crestfallen and forlorn in my chair that Bill offered me what we both knew was false hope: “Maybe she’ll call you over Christmas. Maybe she’ll rethink it and stand up to this Samantha. Whatever happens, though, it’s gotta come from her. I’m sorry ... man, you have no idea how sorry I am,” he added both for me and for himself.

I walked out onto the gallery and leaned on the concrete railing overlooking the quadrangle. From our neighbors’ room, I could hear the melancholy of Chad and Jeremy on the radio gently explaining that all good things must end someday, but not explaining why. Why had Fate been so cruel? Why had I no choice in the matter? Why?

That night, I lay awake, staring up at the pipes under the ceiling. The moon was completely full, but she hid behind a thick veil of clouds and the room was dark, lit only by the scant glow from the floodlights coming through the transom. I do not know what I was thinking or whether I was thinking at all. I was only aware that my very soul ached.

Just after midnight, the full moon in all her brightness burst through the clouds and lit up the room as though it were twilight. Had I drifted off to sleep, or were my thoughts so empty that the

light dragged me back down from some soul-filled contemplation? All I was immediately aware of was an echo in my ears – the echo of a soft but firm feminine voice comforting me with the words

χρεόν ἐστι
χρεόν ἐστι
so múst it be
so múst it be

It sounded as though there were tears of empathy in her voice, but also a gentle lilt. The ethereal tempo with the high pitch accent always on the second syllable did soothe me, at least for a moment. So did her voice itself, which seemed familiar, as though I had heard that voice and those words before in some other age, in some other world.

Then all of a sudden, this age and this world came crashing back down around me. I had lost my first deep, mutual, equal relationship. Perhaps someone else wanted to “have me,” but I was neither going to be possessed nor possess. For the rest of that night, I lay awake in the brilliant, illuminating light of the moon and thought about just what Mary and I had meant to each other in our bond of equal souls. I was determined that if ever I was to have another relationship with anyone, I would settle for nothing – not an iota – less than the love I had shared with Mary.

But I was young and foolish.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHRISTMAS AFTER MARY

The next week sped by in a haze, and later I was glad that semester examinations were not given until we returned from Christmas leave. Regardless of how firmly Mary's soul may have been enmeshed with mine on some higher, deeper level, on this level of life in the world of matter, I felt alone and adrift. Her beautiful face, her soft deep violet eyes, her wavy black hair faded in and out of my sight, causing my mind to wander and my sentences to go unfinished – like that one all-important sentence that would forever remain lodged in my throat.

Through some magic completely alien to me, I found myself on Thursday, 16 December sitting on a train bound for Washington's Union Station. And, of course, I was thinking about Mary. Should I try to call her when I got home? No, Bill was right – right about everything except the hope that perhaps she might call me. After all, he had been in her position, and it all appeared as sad and hopeless from that perspective as it did from any other.

Looking at it from that view renewed yet another, by now well-worn theme in my mind: Was she suffering as much as I was? "No," I thought in a silent prayer to whatever Deity might deign to listen, "please, please, please, please, don't put her through what I'm going through. Please, please, please, please, protect her."

All around me a Christmas party was being celebrated by increasingly inebriated cadets, shaking off the narrow restrictions of The Acropolis and enjoying a brief period of abandon before taking on the narrow restrictions that their families would enforce at home. I envied them their alcohol and a part of me scolded myself for not trying to drown my own worries. But I was still too afraid of the drink – afraid of the tidily inhibited passions that it might release. And just then I needed my pain.

So I slid down in my seat, lowered my hat over my eyes, and pretended to sleep. I was isolating myself and knew it. That was precisely what I had learned that I could not do. It was also the last thing that Mary would want me to do, and I knew that too. But I needed this isolation, if only for a while. If only for a while.

When the train rolled into Union Station, I walked out to the bus stop in the middle of the night and looked up. There was the moon just past third quarter, shining benignly down upon me. With tears in my eyes – tears I knew I would have to suppress as soon as I reached home – I gazed up at her, shook my head slowly and sincerely, and prayed once more for Mary, "Please."

Once I reached home, I had to keep from showing any emotions. My father would sit on his recliner in the corner as I sat thumbing through the *National Geographics* with my cat on the couch, and we would maintain a silent bond in which somehow my feelings were accepted – or so it appeared to me. My mother, on the other hand, verbalized feelings and asked questions, "You're smiling, what's making you happy? You're frowning, what's making you sad?" It is a mother's duty to ask such questions, and it is a son's self-imposed obligation to avoid them.

In addition to the heartache, I also knew that I had a most unpleasant task before me. By my silence to Mary's request the week before, I had tacitly agreed – albeit grudgingly and

unwillingly – to take Samantha out. Whatever her feelings may have been for me, and however much Mary wanted me to be with her, I resented it. I was not Tabby!

I had arrived home Friday morning, totally spent from my sleepless, worrisome trip. That is how I had returned the year after the bus ride, so my mother did not think it odd that I immediately crashed onto my bed in dress gray uniform and did not emerge from my room until I heard her calling my name from the door about noon. Groggy from sleep and disoriented at finding myself suddenly at home, I stumbled out the door for lunch, only to find out that lunch was not the reason she had awakened me.

“You have a call from that nice girl, Samantha Hanson,” she informed me cheerfully. “I’ve talked with her several times at the grocery store, and she always wants to know about you. I hope you’ll go out with her while you’re home.” Was this a conspiracy? Or was it merely manipulation?

“Hi, Samantha,” I said in my most unenthusiastic voice, barely keeping down my anger.

“Are you all right?” she asked in a startled tone.

“Yeah,” I said, remembering my promise to Mary and trying to recover my balance. “I’ve just been sleeping after the long train ride. Something kept me awake the whole way,” I added cryptically, as though to scold her.

“You’re probably too tired to go out tonight,” she observed, sympathy dripping from her every word. Of course, I was interpreting everything she said and every way she said it in the most negative manner possible. I caught myself and steeled my whole being in preparation for what I knew I had to ask.

“How about tomorrow?” I suggested with all the cheer I could conjure up. With the loss of Mary, I had worried about how I was going to force myself to maintain my new-found unity with my classmates when I got back to The Acropolis. If I could pull this one off, though ...

“That would be great,” she bubbled with enthusiasm. “I hope you don’t think I’m being too forward to suggest it, but there’s a new Chinese restaurant in Bethesda that I thought you’d like, and ‘The Sound of Music’ has actually come to the Baronet. It’s not often that a new movie that popular makes it there so soon. It’s certainly not the old Hiser.”

At that point, I just agreed with whatever she said, glad to get the “date” over with. At 6:00pm the next day, I picked her up and we went to the Chinese restaurant. We ate mainly in silence, and the whole while she would look at me and smile, as though approving of a new acquisition. Realizing how uncomfortable it was for both of us to be so quiet, I offered the excuse that I was still extremely tired after my trip home. This afforded a slight opening for conversation, mainly from her and mainly of the socially expected kind.

During the movie, we watched Julie Andrews tripping across the mountains and singing. Samantha put her left arm around my right arm and held on tightly, as though we were watching a horror movie. From time to time, I noticed in my rather sharp peripheral vision that she would gaze at me and smile.

But that was not the end of her pursuit. Two more “dates” followed and I found myself in a quandary. As Mary had said, Samantha definitely wanted me as her own. And while I still greatly resented what she had done to Mary and me, I was fascinated by the fact that she was actually going after me tooth and nail.

As far back as I could remember (which, admittedly, was not all that far back), it had been a fantasy of mine that a girl should fight for me. Perhaps this came from too low a level of self-

esteem – I had to be validated through the desire of others. Perhaps it came from too high a level – I thought myself worthy of being fought for. Perhaps it came from a basic indecision on my part – let someone else choose for me. Most likely, it came from all of these factors and probably others as well.

The more Samantha took charge of me and went out with me, the more I could see that she was fighting, first with Mary and then with me, to conquer my affections. On some higher level, I resented it and longed for my soul to remain happily at one with Mary's. But that did not reflect life on this lower level.

Determined not to give myself over to Samantha so completely and so readily, I also went out on with Nina Ferguson. We saw "A Man for All Seasons" at that movie theater just beyond Westmoreland Circle on Massachusetts Avenue, where my mother used to take my brother and me as children – the Apex. That evening, I was far more forward and tried to be as affectionate as I could be, without leading to a commitment that I did not want to make.

Sure enough, Samantha let me know how she felt about those outings. Moreover, she made it clear that she had "discussed" matters with Nina, and Nina was not at all pleased with my advances. Yes, indeed, Samantha was actively fighting to make me hers.

On the five-hundred-mile train ride back to Charleston, I had much to think about. Deep within me, two minds fought for dominance of my heart. The one constantly went back to that full moon in December, when I had worked out just what I would settle for and what I would *not* settle for. Mary was my ideal. My relationship with her was one of equality and mutual love.

Against this opinion raged another mind that delighted in being fought over and ultimately being the prize of another. Samantha represented this camp, and she was tenacious. As I drifted between waking and sleeping, the two of them seemed to hover over me.

"Remember what we had," implored the image of Mary. "Remember how you blossomed and flourished by sharing our love. Ours was not a relationship that hinged on one dominating the other. Ours was a union of equals. And it's still there, whether I am or not. Just follow your heart!"

"Rubbish!" asserted the mental Samantha. "Look at what you have now, what you have with me. You're a prize worthy of possession. And the moment you reject that status – the status I have bestowed upon you – you will once again be alone and adrift. You'll always be alone and adrift so long as no one owns you."

"No," sobbed Mary, "you can find someone else like me, but someone not as sensitive to harming others and more sensitive to not harming you. I'm so sorry. Please, hold on and be open."

"Don't give yourself over to idle dreams," insisted Samantha. "That's not the way the world around you works. Mary had you and gave you up. I have you and I'll never let you go. Never!"

"You'll find me again, because you've never left me. As I have never left you and will never leave you. I am one with your soul, and if you keep me in your heart, you will find me again. Not in the same physical form, that's not what counts. You'll find my soul in another."

"You're dreaming!"

With that proclamation, I awoke with a jerk. For a disoriented moment, it seemed as though I looked up and saw a motionless ceiling fan bathed in the intense glow of a full, alien moon. But the odd apparition quickly dissolved into reality.

At 4:15am on Tuesday, 4 January 1966, I found myself in the train station outside Charleston. I walked out with the throng of cadets looking to share cabs back into the city, as it was much too early to think about returning to The Acropolis. I held back and gazed at the huge waxing gibbous moon, nearly full and setting in the west. The hare was clearly jumping off her down and to the right on her path. And I wondered whither I would jump.

As she set, I implored her once more, "Please. Oh, please." This time, it was equally for Mary and for myself as well.

Back in the routine of The Acropolis, I tried to be just as cheerful as I had been before. Only Bill knew what I was going through inside. He was my confidant, and I feared that I might become too much of a burden for him. He had been through this before, and I did not know if that made it easier for him or harder.

I also threw myself into *The Bugler*, the fencing team, and above all my studies. There was a lot I did not want to think about, and so much I had to do. Once more, I felt the curse of self-isolation creeping over me, but I fought it as hard as I could, for I knew that that was my special sin, the one that only I could commit against my entire being, from my body to my soul to whatever lay beyond.

My efforts bore fruit at the end of January. I astounded the Greek priest by making only one accent error on my final examination. I breezed through the physics exam, the hardest one I would have to face. And everything else simply fell into place. The only exception was military science – by far my easiest course, but the one I always had the greatest difficulty in.

When the Dean's List came out, I was on it for the first time. More than that, however, I had achieved Gold Stars. I wished that Mary could have seen my name on that list, that she could have been there with me to share the moment.

Eventually, I came to realize that my thoughts of Mary – yes, even these sad thoughts tied up with my loss – inexplicably drew me closer to others. Over time, I slowly, slowly began to understand that her ever-presence deep within me gently inclined me to others in sympathy. Indeed, she never left me. She became a source of deep comfort, but one wrapped up in the memory of pain.

So as I trudged in exhausted double-time back to the barracks, remembering all that had happened leading up to that April night in Charleston, I had an inkling that perhaps, just perhaps, Mary had been there with me when the list came out. But I knew for certain deep, deep within me that she was with me this night in my painful journey from Colonial Lake, suffering along with me in every anguished cry that coursed through my soul. Oh, Mary!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE COLONEL AND THE GENERAL

As second semester began on the last day of January, I tried my hardest to keep in touch with Mary in my soul; and to some extent, I believed – no, I knew – that I succeeded, as painful as that was. In fact, there was no way I could have kept her out, for she was a part of me. But the battle still raged for my heart, and that was far from over. As much as possible, I attempted to put it all out of my immediate thoughts, leaving it for dark nights and periods of gloom. In those early days of second semester, sophomore year, however, as dark as some nights may have been, the periods of gloom grew fewer and further between.

Saturday, 5 February, was the first day I wore my Gold Stars out on general leave. Right after SMI that morning, Harry came by the room and announced, “Hey! We’ve got some errands to run downtown today. Why don’t you meet a few of us at the Chow Mein Inn around 3:00?”

Ken stuck his head into the doorway and said, “And why don’t you wear your new Gold Stars? If you do, the rest of us’ll treat you.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, getting a little embarrassed, as young men often do when they find themselves praising other young men. “We’re all really, really proud of you.”

Harry went on to let me know that many of my classmates were going to be there, from the perennially jovial private Billy Allen to the intensely military, but kind-hearted corporal Don Mallard. Even Tadd Evans was going to attend the festivities – not that that should have surprised me, though it certainly did honor me.

At last I felt that I had become a real part of my class. It occurred to me that my academic achievement had had a lot to do with it. Far from isolating me, my success in academics had drawn us all closer together. Here was something that I had achieved not at anyone else’s expense, but with everyone’s admiration and approval.

But it was far deeper than the academics. I had allowed myself to be open with my classmates. A lot more of them were aware of my recent heartbreak than I knew, and although they did not rush in and offer advice, they felt for me as they would for a member of their own family. And every one of them was prepared to catch me if I should stumble.

That afternoon, I shined up my Gold Stars and headed down the sidewalk to meet my classmates on King Street. As I passed in front of Techne Hall, I heard a booming voice behind me bellow, “Halt, Bubba!”

It was The Colonel. There were many colonels at The Acropolis, but only one The Colonel – that was The with a capital T, as in The Acropolis. And in his own right, he was just as much an institution all by himself. As the Assistant Commandant for Discipline, he was the one we all had to answer to when we had made some really bad mistake. He looked and sounded very much like a cigar-smoking grizzly bear, and he fostered that image with masterful aplomb. Yet, behind his gruff exterior, if you looked hard into his eyes, you would see a gentle man chuckling. He must have led a wild youth, because he seemed to intimately understand every cadet’s foibles and antics. And any cadet who trusted in him and leveled with him honestly and forthrightly discovered the best friend he could ever hope for on the staff of The Acropolis.

I, however, had not been out of my self-isolation long enough to have got to know The Colonel. In fact, it struck me as astonishing that I had made it all the way to the second semester of my sophomore year before I heard those two familiar words come out of his mouth in my direction. Frankly, I did not know what to think or what to expect. I stood rigid, almost in a brace and filled with apprehension bordering on outright fear.

“Well, well, well,” he commenced, absently returning my nervous salute, “what have we here? A sophomore on his way off the hallowed grounds of The Acropolis. Lemme take a look at you, Bubba. Nice shoes! I could shave my grizzly face in those shoes, Lamb. Clean, well pressed uniform – good, good. Whoa! That hat device nearly blinded me – never seen a moon that shiny! And looky here! What do we have here on our collar? Gold Stars! You know, only four cadets in your entire class earned Gold Stars this semester.”

I tensed up. Did he know which one I was? How much did he know about me? Should I start panicking? Okay, he could easily count up to four from the grade lists, so there was no particular fear that he really might know who I was.

“And you’ve also just become news editor of *The Bugler*, haven’t you?”

He knew who I was. But had I not kept a low profile? No, of course not, I was a thete no longer. My articles were in the paper, he knew Neil Lennon and Harold Prichard (who had just moved up to editor-in-chief), and they were in the habit of praising me up and down – and recommending me for whatever task seemed appropriate. There was no reason to panic quite yet.

The Colonel stuck his cigar in his mouth and leaned forward, almost touching the visor of my hat with the glowing appendage as he admired the shine on my hat device with its brilliant waxing crescent moon. “You look sharp, Bubba. Real sharp. You’re all shined up to beat the band. You have magnificent military bearing. And Gold Stars to boot!” He leaned down, and his cigar moved from threatening my visor to threatening my chin. As our eyes met, I seemed to perceive a mischievous glint.

Then suddenly, he whipped the cigar out of his mouth with his left hand and wound his arms around ostentatiously to put his fists on his hips, deftly ensuring that his cigar would come into contact with nothing flammable along the way. He reached out with his right hand, grabbed my sleeve above the thick stripe and the one thin stripe above it signifying a thirdclassman. His thumb and fingers searched that area of the lower sleeve where cadet corporals wore their chevrons, and he bellowed out, “Then how come you don’t have rank?”

Glint or no glint, it was hard to tell from his gruff voice whether he was as angry as he sounded, and what I could have been expected to do about it, anyway. Was he praising me for my appearance and performance, or was he severely chastising me for not making corporal? I was totally unnerved and flabbergasted. Once again, I was looking into the angry face of First Sergeant Woodward, who thought I was trying to outshine my roommate. In a reflex that sprang forth from desperation, I shouted back mechanically, “No excuse, sir!”

The grizzly bear threw his head back and roared with laughter. “Very good. Very good, Cadet,” and he called me by my name. What I had shouted out in fear and consternation, The Colonel had apparently taken as wit – a quality he fostered in his Lambs.

“Run along, Bubba,” he chuckled, now in a bemused and pleasant voice, as though he were letting down his defenses and allowing me a peek at The Real Colonel. “Don’t keep your classmates waiting. And be careful with the chopsticks, Lamb. I wouldn’t want you to get chow mein on your Gold Stars.”

As I hurried on out the Propylaea, I pondered in absolute wonder. How much did The Colonel know about his Lambs? As I took on the duties of news editor, I would come into more contact with The Colonel and would gain a tiny insight into that question. And the answer would be astonishing.

Not all of the officers I got to meet in my new duties on *The Bugler* were quite so pleasant, although most of them were complex enough to offer intriguing vistas into the nature of *homo sapiens*. On the opposite end of the scale from The Colonel was the General (no capital T).

At first, I did not get to know the General directly, but only indirectly through my weekly contact with his Public Relations Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Stavros Demetri. Colonel Demetri was tall, somewhat gaunt, and a Marine through and through. He had occupied the outer office that led into the President's inner sanctum back when General Mitchell had reigned, and it was no secret – except, perhaps, from the General – that the PR Officer saw the change in leadership as a precipitous step downward.

I had no idea what had happened to set him off, but when I came into Colonel Demetri's office one Thursday that spring to get the weekly PR sheet which I gleaned for news that might interest the Corps, I found him sitting behind his desk with an unmistakable shadow over his face. His assistant, Mrs Jane Appleton sat behind her desk with her lips pursed so tightly that it looked as though they might fuse. She always reminded me of Lady Bird Johnson – every picture I had ever seen of the First Lady had made her look at best plain, though usually ugly; but when I saw her once in a reception line in Washington, I was struck by how stunningly beautiful she was in person. The door to the President's office was open, and the office was empty.

As I surveyed the scene from the door, I asked, "Is anything the matter, sir?"

"No, Cadet!" Colonel Demetri answered, pronouncing my name with a bit of bravado. "From a PR standpoint, everything is fine. Just fine! Here, have a seat and let me teach you something about public relations, my boy." Suddenly, the shadow lifted from his face and was replaced by an air of mischief. Mrs Appleton's lips remained pursed, but they turned up on the sides and her eyes regained their usual shine – she knew her boss well and was prepared for a good show.

"You know," he began, "it really doesn't matter how good – or how awful," he added with a glance at the open door to the President's office, "a military leader may be. If he has good PR, he's a resounding success. But if he has bad PR," he said, wagging his index finger back and forth, "he's in for trouble.

"Take for example ... let's say ... our current President, Lieutenant General Julius Augustin. His nickname in the Army was – and I suppose it still is – Julius 'Caesar' Augustin. Now you might take the appellation 'Caesar' as particularly praiseworthy, given your Classics background. But let me remind you of something: Julius Caesar may have been a fine general and statesman in his own right, but he rose to greatness through PR.

"You remember, of course, your perusal of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, *Commentaries on the Gallic War* – which, I trust you have read in Latin?" I nodded in agreement, and he smiled and continued, "Excellent! Now Julius Caesar always referred to himself in the third person singular – 'Caesar does this, and then he does that' and so forth. That was because he was writing his account as though it were an independent, unbiased report of his activities from some disinterested third party. So when he lavished praise upon his military exploits, the Romans believed they were being given the unvarnished truth.

“More important than his campaigns, however, were his ambitions to rule Rome. Time and again, he would clothe naked aggression in the PR of a threat to a beleaguered and loyal ally of the Roman Senate and People. As these reports flooded down into the population, everyone began to view Caesar as a magnanimous hero, a savior of the Republic – which, of course, he helped to dismantle.”

Colonel Demetri sat back in his chair and paused for effect. Mrs Appleton’s lips relaxed and she smiled broadly, if perhaps a bit maliciously, waiting for the *coup de grâce*. Of course, it was highly irregular to give such an accounting to a cadet in front of the Office of the President, but whatever had happened before my arrival seemed to have made all things possible – and even, for the sake of their sanity, necessary.

“Now, General Julius ‘Caesar’ Augustin may not have any of the military qualities of his desired namesake, but he more than justifies his moniker through his careful – yea, even astute – handling of PR. In the Second World War, he entered France gallantly in the ‘second wave’ of the invasion. I can tell by your impressed look, lad, that you’re visualizing him climbing over corpses and under heavy enemy fire somewhere in Normandy; and you’d be excused for thinking that. But by ‘second wave’ we don’t necessarily have to mean the second assault on D-Day, but we can just as appropriately use the expression to refer to the arrival of logistical and support units after the beachhead had already been secured – in fact, after Normandy as a whole had already been secured.

“He served a crucial role in the Battle of the Bulge. No, not in the actual fighting, mind you, although that would, I admit, constitute a crucial role of a sort. He was far to the rear processing prisoners taken in that pivotal battle. In fact, given your major in German, I suspect that he will show you a dangerous weapon that he valiantly wrestled off a Nazi officer who had smuggled it into prison. But, I’ll leave you to learn of this courageous exploit from him.” Mrs Appleton’s head was now face-down on her hands, as she shook with silent laughter.

“In Korea, his unit took part in an important battle, for which it was awarded the highest unit citation. After he had caught back up with it due to some regrettable error in transportation right before the battle, he was placed in command of a battalion holding the critical hill. Well, actually, he wasn’t placed in command directly. The general simply assigned him to the battalion that was commanded by a capable officer of junior rank. But after the enemy counterattack, he was the ranking officer left alive and took credit for repelling the attack. The junior officer in actual command, by the way, was hastily promoted and moved to where he could contribute more to the war effort.

“So the illustrious military career that led to the plumb position of President of The Acropolis, the Military Academy of the South, owed a great deal to ... PR. It’s not what you do, Cadet, that advances your military career. It’s how you report it.

“Here’s this week’s PR release,” he announced abruptly, handing me a thick sheaf of papers, rather than the page or two that he usually had to offer. “Look through it. See what masterful PR acrobatics can be done – nay, have been done – in its reporting. As news editor of *The Bugler*, I expect great things from you. And someday, in the distant future, I hope to see your name on the PR releases of the next Great Man.

“By the way,” he mentioned as I was about to leave – and he called me by my first name, “all I did today was hand you this release. Nothing else transpired. Nothing at all,” he assured me with a wink and a wave of his hand. Mrs Appleton lifted her head from her hands and laughed in

a way that resembled a dam's bursting. Colonel Demetri had evidently dispelled some major tension in the room for both of them. But as for me, all I did was fetch that week's PR release.

CHAPTER TWENTY

QUEST FOR THE JEALOUS GODDESS

In spite of its brilliant military reputation, The Acropolis fell short in its accomplishments with the sword. The ironic fact was that our fencing team/club vied for last place in the Southeastern Conference with Virginia Military Institute. But we had fun.

On the road trips, I tried to get in the same car as our seniors Nick Pappas and Owen Daniels. When those two got started, the laughter continued for the whole trip. The frightening thing was that sometimes Nick would drive, and his Hellenic temperament would manifest itself on the road – all over the road. But with seatbelts firmly in place, it was worth every near miss followed by every insult shouted against the other driver's idiocy.

In February, fencing season was in full swing. There were not yet terribly many teams in the Conference, but we did get to go to some interesting places and sample some exotic school cafeteria menus, which in some instances actually gave us an appreciation for the mess hall. On 12 February, we went up against our arch-rival (VMI aside, of course), Clemson University.

The match was uneventful. I won one against an opponent who was totally baffled by my innovative but limited technique, and then I lost one against an opponent who had closely studied the first match. As a whole, The Acropolis fencers managed to maintain our standing in the Conference.

That evening was dark – the moon, just past her last quarter, would not rise till after midnight. Nick announced to all of us at dinner, “My cousin's church is having a dance tonight just outside of town. Anyone wanna come?” Then he turned to me, pointed at me with his left index finger, and said, “As for you, Cadet, your presence is required!”

At that point, you could not have paid me to pass up whatever adventure Nick had in store for me. After dinner, a small group of us piled into one of the Acropolis cars and headed “just outside of town.” Of course, it came as no surprise to any of us that “just outside of town” was in actuality close to the North Carolina State Line. It also came as no surprise that Nick managed to get us there by winding country roads in a matter of minutes.

As we rolled into town, I must have blinked, because I did not recall seeing any sign giving the name of the place. Not that that would have made any difference, for the only thing in the town was a large church surrounded by a handful of assorted small buildings. Where people lived remained a mystery.

That there were people in the area, though, was immediately apparent upon seeing the crowd of mostly young people in the church basement. Nick entered to cheers and greetings, his hands held high and his face beaming. “It's cousin Nick!” I heard several people call out, and I wondered just how many cousins Nick had in this out-of-the-way region, especially for a young man who had grown up in the city of Greenville.

But for Nick, there was only one cousin who was at the center of his attention at the moment. He clutched my sleeve right where The Colonel had grabbed me before and dragged me across the hall to a long table with punch and cookies and a young woman. As he scooped up a handful of cookies, Nick turned to me and introduced her, “This is my cousin Leslie. She goes to school

at Clemson, but we can't hold that against her, now can we?" His question was more of a command, though to an out-of-stater like me, it lost a lot of its significance.

After a pause, Leslie smiled ironically at Nick and asked, "And your friend ...?"

"Oh, yeah," he uttered around a cookie, as he realized he had left the introduction a bit short. He introduced me to her and added, "I know you two are gonna hit it off!" He quickly retreated with his hoard of cookies in both hands, and a satisfied grin on his face.

Leslie and I looked after him, laughing. And then we turned to each other. She looked nothing like Mary. Mary was thin, with deep violet eyes, wavy black hair, and a nose bowing in – the image of the beautiful Hibernian. Leslie was more athletic of build, with deep brown eyes, straight dark brown hair, and a nose bowing out – the image of the beautiful Hellene. The only thing they physically had in common was their height, and Leslie's eyes looked effortlessly straight into mine. She paused and looked deeper, with a troubled look of curiosity, as though there was something in my eyes that reminded her of something, or someone.

When I looked back into her eyes, I was drawn warmly and gently into them and led straight down to her heart. There I saw ... Mary. Mary!

We stood facing each other for a time – I have no idea how long. Then we both shook our heads in short, sudden motions as though trying to clear away cobwebs from our memories. And then we talked, hesitantly at first, but soon letting down our guard.

"Nick says you're majoring in German, and that you're even taking Greek," she said, more of an introduction for me to speak than an observation.

"Yes," I replied, still reeling from my vision. "Though I think he's a lot more impressed with the latter than the former," I added with a tentative smile. Obviously, this was a set-up by Nick who was delving further into his Mediterranean heritage by attempting matches.

I told her about my classes and how the curriculum worked at The Acropolis, with its heavy dose of required core courses. But I found myself more interested in what she was studying in college, and as I questioned her I found myself relaxing more from my shock at seeing Mary in her.

"Oh, I'm majoring in mathematics," she replied, as though that were an obvious and foregone conclusion.

All of a sudden, my knees buckled and I nearly choked on my punch. I staggered a bit and straightened up.

"Something wrong with math?" she asked with amusement at my reaction but equally with concern.

"Oh no, not at all. Not in the slightest," I tried my best to recover. "Math's a good subject, if it's explained clearly." And my mind went through the anguish of remembering the napkin in the ice cream parlor in Northwest Washington, how Mary had explained logarithms on it and then used it to dry my eye.

Leslie could not have helped but notice that my reply concealed some painfully tender wound deep within me. She softened her voice and steadied me with a gentle touch to my arm, "They seldom do a very good job with that. I guess the only people who go into math are the ones who've had the few lucid teachers." Then she added somewhat more brightly in an effort to cheer me up, "Most of them treat the Chemical Rubber tables as though they were some arcane magic on which to perform bibliomancy!"

I bit my lip as tears came to my eyes. Leslie looked at me with a gentle, nurturing concern. She knew that she had disturbed a sleeping agony in me. She grasped both my hands, slid my right hand around her waist and held up my left. “Here, let’s dance a bit and talk of other things.”

I had no idea what kind of music was playing, and I frankly cared not at all whether our slow, dreamy turnings had any connection to it. True to her word, Leslie spoke softly with me about everything but mathematics and whatever tragic memory lay hidden behind that forbidden subject.

At length, I heaved a great sigh, and we sat down in a row of metal chairs, still holding hands. Leslie looked down at my gray uniform and asked with a sympathetic smile, “Are you sure you’re in the right profession?”

“No,” I replied honestly, but with yet another tinge of pain for memory of Mary. Leslie could see right through me, too.

“I can tell,” she said earnestly but softly, “that you’ve been through something. Maybe it’s like what I’ve been through, too. But you’re not ready to talk about it, and I understand. Neither am I. Here,” she added, taking out a three-by-five card – the same kind I carried around with me to make notes and remember things. She fumbled a bit in her purse and came out with a pencil. “Here’s my address. Please write me ... if you can.”

I took the card, unzipped my dress blouse from the bottom, and slipped it into the pocket in front of my heart. I just looked at her, unable to tell her why I could not. But I perceiving from her saddened look in return that she knew.

“Did my cousin give you her address?” asked Nick as he drove the car back to Clemson.

“Yes,” I replied, trying my best not to let my emotions spill out. “I’ve got it right here,” and I patted the pocket – and my heart.

“Good!” he exclaimed, turning around to look and nearly running off the road in the process. In a hail of shouts, he returned his eyes to the front. But I could see his cheeks poking out sharply, displaced by his wide grin. I thought of my old friend and fellow athlete Wally.

I lay awake that night in Clemson, as the waning crescent moon shone through the window. She was rising; and although she was shrinking, she seemed to give off a powerful amount of light. Somewhere in the back of my mind I heard a soft, deeply saddened feminine voice repeating the words I had heard in December. The lilt in her voice was less ethereal now and more compassionate, as she whispered:

χρεόν ἐστι
χρεόν ἐστι
so múst it be
so múst it be

“So what must be? What must be?” I wondered aloud through my tears, addressing my question to the moon as she rose above the window.

I had not long to wait for the answer. The following Monday, I received a letter from Samantha. I brought the letter back to my room in the barracks and stared at it, dreading to open it. This was the first letter I had received since ... No, I did not want to think of that. And it came from precisely the person who had precipitated ... *No*, I did *not* want to think of that.

No matter how I examined the envelope, it always came back to what I did not want to think of, especially right after my encounter with Leslie. Finally, I steeled myself, stuck my right index finger under the edge of the flap, and tore down the side. There, that was done. Now all that remained to do was to take the letter out and read it. Why was I so afraid of the letter? Was I afraid that she was going to dump me? Or was I afraid she was going to pursue me? Unless it began, “Mary and I have been talking things over,” what difference did it make? And, besides, what choice did I have in the matter anyway? With that last question resolved to the nil, I boldly yanked the letter out and looked it over.

It was one of those letters that girls and boys exchange over distances – heavy on clichés and light on communication. I was being pursued. She had had such a wonderful time with me over Christmas. Why had I not written? Was I upset with her? And so forth.

The next day, I received a thick padded envelope, posted, as I noted ironically but painfully, by special delivery. She had forgotten to give this to me at Christmas, but she wanted me to have it. It was a small brass letter opener in a brass sheath, made in India. I noted ironically that it was not lacquered – one more piece of brass to polish in the Charleston humidity.

The next evening during ESP, I received a call in the guard room. With no small degree of resignation, I threw on my shirt to go down and answer it. On an impatiently checked impulse, I almost put on my hat to go out onto the gallery like a thete. How obedient, I thought.

I walked into the guard room from the gallery entrance rather than through the sally-port entrance where we signed in and out of the barracks in the evening. The senior private Officer of the Guard looked up at me without interest and motioned me over to the third phone from the left on the wall to my right. I had never received a call in the guardroom before, so I embarrassedly thanked him and hesitantly proceeded.

Of course, it was Samantha. Yes, I received both the letter and the package today and I was just setting pen to paper to write her back. The OG looked up and cast me a knowing grin as clear as if he had come out and said, “Oh yes, dear! Of course I’m telling you the truth!”

“You’ll never guess who I spoke with on the phone today,” Samantha said. I was not sure whether that was a statement or a question, but since I would never guess, I simply asked who.

“Alice Reynolds!” She exclaimed. “I told her that we’ve been dating, and do you know what she told me?”

I felt a wave of unease washing over me, and I carefully noted to myself that she had not stated whether Alice had called her or she had called Alice. Whatever the outcome, I concluded suspiciously, it would be quite significant. “What?” I replied.

Samantha’s voice quivered, and she blurted out, “She said that you were hers, and she told me to leave you alone.”

“That’s odd,” I observed with some degree of comfort, “I received one letter from her around Thanksgiving of thete year. It was a strange letter that I took as some form of humor – something about strange noises. So I replied about some of the noises in the barracks. And that was the end of it.”

I nearly kicked myself, for I realized immediately that I had just played right into her hand, taking her side against Alice. A smarter course would have been to avoid both of them. But something very strange started stirring in my mind. Now, for the third time, Samantha was fighting over me, and that fact wrapped itself around me like a cocoon, keeping me warm and safe. The third time is, after all, the charm – three times for a Welshman.

“Oh, thank you!” she exclaimed. “I certainly didn’t want to come between you and Alice if there was anything really there, and I was so afraid that there might be.”

Masterful! She managed to get from the real issue to a strawman and to knock it down with my assistance. Parts of me resented the manipulation, particularly the part that was aching over Mary, and now over Leslie as well. But parts of me were full of admiration and gratitude, especially the part that longed to be fought over. And fought over so extraordinarily well!

We talked further, and gradually, inexorably I felt myself drawn to her by the very force of her desire to possess me. I had to admit that I had always liked Samantha, and liked her really quite a lot. Had it not been for the matter that I did not want to think of, I very well could have ended up with her anyway. She was not, after all, as I had portrayed her in her role as the “mental Samantha” in the debate on the train after Christmas. That had been the voice of my bitterness and fear.

Finally, I capitulated. “Look, Samantha. My parents are coming down for Acropolis Day in March, and there’ll be a big formal dance, a ‘hop’ on the nineteenth. Why don’t you see if they can bring you down, too?”

She reacted in a joyous effervescence, and I wondered how on earth it had come to this. Nonetheless, something about it all seemed right. Besides, I now belonged to someone, and perhaps that was the best I could expect in this world. And the most I could handle.

“She gotcha!” the OG cackled, making gestures of reeling in a fish. I shrugged my shoulders, smiled sheepishly, and walked a little uncertainly back to my room.

“You’re out of your mind!” observed Bill, slowly shaking his head and looking concerned. “Can you forgive her – I mean, for Mary?”

My eyes welled up, my head sank down, and I nodded slowly and deliberately. “Yes. I can’t forget what she did, and I still have the hurt deep inside me. But what she did she did because she loved me. I just hope there’s enough of me left to love her, too.”

Bill managed a worried, sympathetic smile. And at least, I did not cry.

I now saw so very clearly, with my eyes wide open, how I had stepped right into the arms of a “jealous goddess” – someone I could worship, so long as I worshiped her exclusively. That being said, I really had to admit that I had no idea at the time whether she saw herself as a jealous goddess or not. And as it would turn out later, she actually did not, in spite of the determination with which she fought for me.

The important fact was that I saw her that way – it was my choice to be possessed, to be owned, and my choice alone. I could see now how this fit the pattern that would lead me to this distraught state, stumbling through my tears toward the refuge of the barracks on this overcast night in April 1967. That, and other things. And other things.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE SPRINGTIME

That spring, had you observed me from somewhere up in the clouds, you would have nodded with approval and said, “What a good boy is he!” As my soul was away somewhere seeking comfort in memories of Mary, my mind set itself to the task of doing all the things that were right and proper for a responsible young man now firmly the exclusive possession of a young woman.

On Friday, 18 March, my parents drove down to Charleston, rising early to make it in the afternoon. Ironically, the moon that had crossed our path so long ago when they had brought me to enroll in The Acropolis now crossed their path as they brought Samantha down for her visit. The moon was brighter this day, though well faded into her waning crescent. Did Samantha gaze at her as she drifted from east to west across their path from north to south? And did she wonder at the solemn fading of that beauty and what it may have portended? I, for one, took no notice.

After the Friday afternoon parade, they all came and brought me back to the Francis Marion Hotel, where my parents and Samantha were staying. At dinner, Samantha dominated the conversation strategically, bringing up recollections of our experiences together in high school, of our outings along the towpath of the old Chesapeake and Ohio Canal along the Potomac River, of everything she could think of that would serve to bind us together (minus, of course, the presence of other friends at these events) and to give my mother the impression that we were perfect for each other. Always the practical one and protective by nature, my mother seemed to grow suspicious, as my father correctly judged the situation and stayed out of it.

Once more, Samantha was fighting for me. And once more, she was doing such a masterful job that she really could not lose. If my mother took a liking to her, they would join forces to win me over. If she did not, Samantha would become distraught and throw herself at my mercy, knowing that I would comfort her – and thereby accept her. As it turned out, my mother was ambivalent, and Samantha was a winner all the way around.

At the special Acropolis Day parade the next morning, I stood in my assigned position within H Company and looked at the reviewing stands straight ahead of me and at the unusually large crowd that had gathered for this special day’s events. At length, I could make them out, guided by my father’s distinctive bow tie. They were seated in the bleachers, and I could see Samantha in a finely tailored pink suit sitting next to my mother and talking with animated excitement. My mind drifted up to the clouds, and from there I could look down at the scene properly and see that all was, yes, as it should be.

My thoughts then drifted back to one warm summer’s day in Bethesda, when I had been a little boy. I was lying on the slope that came up from the driveway as it curved around to the right and onto the street in front, beyond the old one-car garage under the screened-in porch at the corner of the house and past the retaining wall. In my mouth, I had a piece of tangy horse sorrel that grew wild under the bush at the end of the wall and next to the steps to my left coming up from the driveway. I gazed at the clouds moving across a blue sky beyond the deep green leaves of the trees along the street and imagined how I must have looked from the clouds. Then a strange, detached thought entered my mind: “This is precisely what one should expect a little boy

to be doing on a warm summer's day." The scene and especially the curiously self-conscious thought that accompanied it had stayed with me and seemed especially appropriate now.

After the parade, the barracks were open to visitors, and my mother's comment upon seeing my room was a disbelieving, "How Spartan!" Coming from a woman who eschewed "clutter," that was a rather astonishing observation.

Samantha walked over to my desk, smiled demurely, and set a picture of herself down on it for me. "Here, you need one of these."

My father wandered around the tight quarters, examining the construction and the solid starkness of the room, though taking no notice of the antiquated furniture. He said nothing, but you could tell that the Navy captain and the civil engineer within him were both highly impressed.

Then we all went to see the sights of Charleston. We quickly drove past the museum; after all, no one who had been used to the Smithsonian would take much interest in it – at least, no one who had not known Herm. We went to the Battery overlooking Fort Sumter, but Samantha's seasickness along with the huge crowds prevented us from visiting the fort, which I had yet to step foot on. We wandered through the Slave Market, where the descendants of the slaves still carried on the tradition of offering their hand-made sweet-grass baskets for sale. And, of course, along the way we sampled the distinctive seafood dishes that Charleston was rightly known for.

That evening, I returned to the hotel to fetch Samantha for the hop. I was wearing my dress whites, a uniform that looked very naval – in fact, when I had worn it to my brother's graduation from the Naval Academy the year before, I had received several snappy salutes from the Marine guards. On my collar, I wore my Gold Stars. She was wearing a long, crepe evening gown gathered above the waist in the Empire style. The yellow of the gown clashed a bit with the corsage of pink roses that I had given her. My mother took pictures of us standing in the hall in front of the elevator and finally let us go.

I drove my father's Oldsmobile to the hop. It was always a harrowing experience driving through the narrow streets of Charleston, and I rarely had the opportunity of doing it. Whoever had designed these streets had certainly not expected that Samantha would take one of my hands from the wheel, adding pressure on two counts.

As we danced, Samantha gently led my head down so that our cheeks touched. The fight that should have raged within me was won by default – my soul was off somewhere kneeling before a shrine to Mary, and my mind sized up the situation and decided that this was, in fact, proper and good. Samantha had fought against everyone, including me, to win me, and she deserved the prize. Such as it was and all that was left of it.

She was, in addition, a beautiful young woman, and she knew how to talk with people. She would be a great asset as a career military officer's wife.

I went home for Easter break on 6 April. As always, there was not much time to socialize, and most of the people I knew who were still in Bethesda (a dwindling number, to be sure) were engaged in religious activities of one form or another. Samantha and I did go out Saturday evening, and she got around the religious holidays by asking me to her church on Sunday and to spend the afternoon with her.

Sometime during church or the afternoon with her parents, she invited me to take her to her prom. I was not sure how that would fit in with the end of the school year at The Acropolis – it would certainly be close, but I promised to do all I could for her.

I had now invited her to one formal ball, and she had invited me to another. This should have been an opportunity for us to establish a good, mutual relationship. But I was so afraid of being hurt again and so very, very weary of fighting it, that I was all too eager simply to surrender unconditionally. No, there was one condition: that she possess me as her own and shield me from hurt as my jealous goddess.

As a proper young man who had gone to church with a proper young woman, I returned from Easter break with the resolution of making my first visit of the year to the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. That Sunday after chapel and without taking time to change out of my dress whites, I walked down past the H Company stairwell and continued on into E Company, in search of Owen Hughes.

“Long time, no see,” he exclaimed, showing every sign of happiness to see me again. “Your stars look great. I’ve actually been keeping up with your progress; I just haven’t had much time to venture into H Company to see you. Sorry about that,” he added with a genuine look of concern and apology on his face.

Yes, this was the same old Owen Hughes I had got to know the year before. He was now vice-president of the ACF and supply sergeant of E Company – the first-ranked junior in one, and the second-ranked junior in the other. I had also taken an interest in his progress, though I was frankly frightened of returning to the ACF with Christopher Adams and the Literalists. Now, however, I had divine protection.

“Is the ACF meeting tomorrow evening?” I asked him and watched his entire countenance glow with joy.

“Absolutely! Will you be there?” his voice was full of hope.

“Sure,” I answered confidently. “I guess I’m kinda settling in now.”

“And settling down, it would appear,” he added with amusement, his gaze fixed on my left ring finger that now had a slightly smaller version of my high school ring than young men generally wore.

The exchange of rings had happened so smoothly that at first I did not catch on to what Owen was referring to. Samantha and I had been sitting in her church, and she calmly and adroitly slipped my ring off my right ring finger and slipped hers over my left. Although she was smaller than I was, we both had the same sized fingers and the same discrepancy between hands. So the switch from right to left required both of us to wrap tape around the backs of the rings to make them fit.

I inquired a bit nervously, “So how *are* things going in the ACF? You know ...?”

“So long as we can get people like you to come back, everything will be fine,” he assured me, rather unassuringly. “But you know, it’s not the ideological divide that’s important. It’s about helping others and learning about your own spirituality. Getting in touch with your soul.”

That last comment was met by a sharp pain somewhere within me. Was my soul all there? At the moment, it felt as though it were only lightly, or only partially covering me. Somewhere in this whole soul-mind-body complex, something had gone seriously awry. I slowly slipped my left thumb under my forefinger and middle finger and touched the faceted blue star sapphire on Samantha’s ring.

Eager to change the immediate subject and to find out more of what was happening in the ACF, I asked Owen, “What about that sly, slovenly creature that kept drifting back and forth?”

“Oh,” he exclaimed with a broad grin, “you mean Bart – Bart Schmidt – and he waved his hand to indicate that it was all really quite all right. “Now he’s a complicated individual. He did make senior private in K Company, though!” Owen announced with vigor, and we both laughed.

Turning a bit more serious, but not too much so, he continued, “Bart’s interesting. He’ll stir things up and really bring out the vinegar in some people. In fact, he seems to make it a sport to try to get people to say and do things they wouldn’t normally think of. He looks pretty unattractive, to say the least, but I’ve found out that he has tremendous success with the women. ... Hey, don’t look at me that way, I can’t figure it out either. But any ridiculous line he throws them they gobble up like famished fish.

“You gotta come and see for yourself,” he added, in too pointed an attempt to get me back into the ACF. Owen was honest, forthright, and he could neither manipulate nor dissemble, even if his life depended upon it.

I suspected that this Bart was a very different kind of person from Owen, and Owen confirmed that as he added less lightly and more thoughtfully, “Bart’s really loath to do anything against anyone himself. It’s as though he’s always maneuvering, but never striking. In any case, I’ve actually come to enjoy some of his shenanigans and especially what they tell me about people. He does have a sense of humor, and,” he paused and laughed jovially, “he’s not a *total* reprobate!”

Owen’s laugh was infectious – just the note to end our conversation about the ACF on. Moreover, while he may not have planned it that way, his remarks had made me now genuinely determined to see the show for myself. Whether or not it was the right attitude for a young man properly possessed, my main motivation for going to the next evening’s meeting had now evolved into seeing Bart Schmidt working the crowd and enjoying whatever levity his performance could provide.

There was no levity to be found at the next evening’s meeting, however. Bart did not show up, but the Literalists were there in droves. No longer were they relegated to the corner of the room, but they had increased to almost half the hall both by their own accretions and by the consequent flight of those who did not agree with them.

In discussions around the hall, the Literalists seemed intent on evangelizing everyone in sight, both inside and outside the ACF. And of course, the Good News they preached was acceptance of the literal Word as written by Jesus himself and accompanied by an extremely conservative insistence on “moral values.” I sidled up to one group that was discussing the need to close the borders and keep Mexican (i.e., Catholic) migrant farmers out, or at the very least to ensure that they did not receive any of the medical or educational benefits of this country. When I mentioned the frequent references in the Bible to treating the alien as one of our own, “for you too were sojourners in the land of Egypt,” I received hateful glares and icy silence.

“They don’t really want to be reminded of what’s actually in the Bible,” explained Owen, who had seen what had happened, “beyond, of course, their own highly restricted set of Bible verses. You know, the ones that support their views.”

“Oh,” I replied with sarcasm, “you mean like ‘God helps those who help themselves?’”

“Exactly,” he said with a smile. “And just stick with your blood retributions and restrictions of the Old Testament. Stay away from the love and peace stuff in the New – that’s too much like Buddhism.”

“They’ve totally abandoned the idea that there could be anything on a higher level, haven’t they?” I observed rhetorically. “They’re all stuck on literal infallibility and the oppression of all other religions.”

Owen lowered his voice and looked around nervously, “Don’t forget the Triumph of Christianity.”

“Yeah,” I grumbled. “The power – the whole power.”

During the business meeting, the Literalists raised points of order and objections and managed to head off any real business’ being accomplished. I noted with rising anger that they were especially opposed to any proposal directed at helping the poor with anything except the Word of God – and, of course, the Triumph of Christianity. There seemed to be just enough of them, and they seemed to have cowed the rest of the fellowship to such a degree that nothing could be done. They had achieved the “negative majority” – the path through to their Unholy Grail.

As we left, Owen walked around on the sidewalk with me, rather than taking his junior’s privilege of walking in the street. “Elections are in two weeks,” he mentioned with as much nonchalance as he could manage.

“Is that when it ends?” I asked, far too bluntly. The meeting had left me angry and nearly fed up with the entire religion. Had I not had obligations to my own jealous goddess – or at least obligations that I placed on myself in such a way that they could be virtuously attributed to my loyalty to her – I would have visited Guy to see what his people had to offer.

“I hope not,” Owen replied. “I certainly hope not.”

I knew he wanted me to say that I would come and support the remaining Spiritualists and the rest of the non-Literalists. At that moment, however, I could not. I simply could not.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO THE TRANSITIONAL SUMMER

By Acropolis standards, sophomore year ended superbly. I retained my Gold Stars for a second semester in a row, although physics did slip down to a B alongside my perennially problematic military science. In the grade point average, the latter counted less than other courses, in spite of the amount of trouble it gave me.

Far more of a surprise was the fact that I actually made rank. In fact, I was eighth in the rankings of rising juniors in H Company – high enough to have made corporal the past year. This ranking was a great mystery to me. I had taken no interest in the Thete System; and even after Easter, I had not participated in any of the ceremonies associated with the loosing of my fellow classmate privates.

The event of the previous year in room 248 had haunted me, as had the reaction from those two young women to my visible anger as I got off the bus in Charleston. This year, that had been Ken and Harry's room, and although I liked them and visited them often, each time I entered their room, I had to force myself over the threshold. Each time, my memories went back to 22 April 1965 and especially to the painful guilt that I had felt during and after the sweat party – a guilt that was as real to me as it was irrational.

So how in the world did I get promoted to squad sergeant – leader of the third squad of second platoon? The only explanation I could come up with was what The Colonel had observed at the beginning of the semester: I was sharp, poised, and I possessed what only four cadets in my class had – Gold Stars.

What I did not figure into the equation was my relationship with my classmates, and even with the juniors and seniors. I had opened myself up and become a member of the community. Ranking was not supposed to be a popularity contest, but perhaps, once they got to know me outside my stiff isolating shell, they saw something they liked – and something of military potential that frankly I did not see.

In my new relationship with Samantha, the suggestion of military potential gave me some comfort. It was not the comfort that I had received from that lilting, ethereal, but deeply concerned feminine voice, but comfort in a kind of future that the two of us could share – a future more in line with my parents' expectations and my upbringing. In this kind of future, she would be an outstanding partner. Had things worked out with No, I did not want to think of that!

But I did have to think of that. By some quirk of fate, The Acropolis' calendar ran out a bit ahead of the usual time, and Samantha's high school prom was a bit delayed. I had a whole week at home before the event.

During that week, I found myself wandering around Bethesda, looking here and there for connections with the past, and connections with futures that were now closed to me. I rode my bicycle and drove my mother's Corvair past Alice's old house, and past the houses of girls I had known, but whom I knew I could never see again now that I belonged to Samantha.

I also found myself ducking into Bruce Variety far more frequently than necessary. What was I looking for? Or whom? Several times, I drove up to a certain out-of-the-way intersection and almost turned onto a certain street. But each time, a tear would come to my eye and my arms became too weak to turn the steering wheel. Could I have borne the pain? Probably not.

At the end of that week, amidst a flurry of communications from Samantha, I drove well out of town, down practically the whole extent of Bradley Boulevard, and turned left. As always, I had to admit that she looked beautiful, even stunning this evening. She was wearing a pink gown with a high Empire waist and a small white jacket that matched her long gloves, both of which were more for ornament than for warmth. I presented her with a corsage bearing three yellow roses, and we decided that, come to think of it, the combination did not clash after all.

I wore my dress whites, each light blue shoulder board now bearing two white stripes on the ends to signify that I was a junior and a metal insignie with three silvery stripes in the middle. I had my Gold Stars on my collar, and my Dean's List medal, along with my rifle qualifying medal, on my left pocket flap. The only thing yet missing from my uniform was the long black cloisonné badge with crossed rifles and Acropolis seal that signified an Army contract cadet. That would come soon enough in September, as inevitably as everything else in my life was falling, falling into place.

We then drove downtown to Washington and the Sheraton Park Hotel. It was Saturday, 28 May, and the waxing gibbous moon, about two-thirds full, shone high up in the western sky. As we entered the hotel where the prom was already underway, I looked up at her and recalled that I had seen her the same way back in that long-ago September, when I had gone out on my first date with Mary.

I did not know many people in Samantha's class, so I stuck by her and felt rather isolated. The good part was – or at least at the time it seemed like the good part to me – that I was isolated under the protection of someone else. That was not, I rationalized, the same as isolating myself. Well, certainly not on purpose, as I had too often done my thete year.

Of course, there was one member of the class I did know, and I constantly looked around to find her. I desperately wanted to see her, and just as desperately did not want to see her. What could I say? What could I do, other than fall completely and utterly to pieces?

I had the small blue box in my pocket, and from time to time I would press my hand against it as though invoking some sacred bond vested in it. On a sudden impulse right before leaving home that evening, I had stuck it in my pocket with the resolve that if I saw Mary, I would pour my heart out to her and beg her to take it – and me – back.

But could I have done that to Samantha? Mary had made a bitter sacrifice so as not to hurt her. Had I hurt Samantha that way, what happiness could I possibly have expected to achieve with Mary? Somewhere on some higher, deeper level of my soul, Mary had already won me over to her way of seeing things. But at what cost? At what cost?

I never saw Mary at the prom. And although she never left me, I never saw her again – ever.

After the prom, Samantha and I stopped by an ice cream parlor – not the one in the Howard Johnson's on Wisconsin Avenue, but another one along the way back on Connecticut. Once we were seated, I reached into my pocket and felt the box. Slowly I drew it out, opened it, and in resignation presented it to Samantha. She looked at it first with concern – she had seen it before. But then she accepted it with joy and triumph. I delighted in her joy – I really did. And I wanted to make her happy; for with all that was left of my heart, I did love her ... as much as I could.

There were far, far worse fates than being captured by Samantha Hanson. She was warm and kind. She fought hard for what she had, which now included me, and that was a positive thing to a young man who needed someone to comfort him and protect him. Yet, she was also gentle and genuinely concerned with others and their welfare. Again, I told myself over and over that if I had never met Mary, I probably would have ended up with Samantha, anyway, and would certainly have counted myself fortunate.

Throughout that summer, we became closer than I had ever been with anyone in this world of matter. Our arms embraced each other easily, our lips met frequently. We went out most weekends (seeing “The Graduate” at the Avalon Theater stuck out most in my mind, although we also went to “A Man for All Seasons” at the MacArthur), and we spent as much time as we could together during the week. On the record player, Samantha played Petula Clark’s “Sign of the Times” over and over and never seemed to tire of assuring me how happy she was that we had finally got together.

Increasingly, we went out alone – just the two of us – not only to dinner and the movies, but even to walk the towpath along the canal and explore its many pathways, and to go to the zoo and the discotheque, and to do other things that we had always done before in small groups of friends. This was fine with me, for I was quite content with being possessed by her, even if that entailed restrictions on relationships and activities not even remotely bordering on the romantic.

Samantha, on the other hand, still wanted to be more gregarious. She had a friend, Cindy, who lived in the District, and she and Cindy had been wanting to go to a small amusement park over in Virginia. She asked me if I could set Cindy up with someone so we could all go out together.

Having gradually drifted away from the few friends who remained in the area, I was at a loss until I remembered a thete from the past year – a rising sophomore named Jim Knight who lived nearby. He had been in my squad, so I had got to know him as well as a sophomore could know a thete. One thing I was aware of, though, was that he was a shy, withdrawn lad and would probably appreciate being introduced to a young lady and to go out on a reasonably unstressful blind date.

I picked up Samantha, and we followed Jim’s directions as best we could around Washington and finally found him. Then we cut back down into the District, following the numbers *versus* the one-, two-, three-syllable street names arranged alphabetically (a far cry from the haphazard numbering and street arrangements in Charleston). Finally, we made our way past Harrison and Garrison to Fessenden and followed the numbers to Cindy’s house.

Cindy was a nice-looking young woman with dark curly hair and deep brown eyes. She wore far too much make-up for me, though, and I retreated – figuratively – behind the protective wall provided by Samantha. We all piled into the Corvair and made our way to Chain Bridge. In the rearview mirror, I could see that Jim was indeed shy and a bit nervous, but he seemed pleased to be going out.

The amusement park was small and uncrowded. There were the usual tame rides that you find at a small park, plus the obligatory neck-snapping mine ride.

“Let’s go on the mine ride,” I suggested to Samantha with enthusiasm.

“Oh, yeah! That really looks like fun,” chimed in Cindy with a big smile.

“No way!” Samantha exclaimed. We had avoided the big roller coaster in our visits to Glen Echo Amusement Park, but I thought that the mine ride looked small enough and short enough

that she would not find it so threatening. “You can go if you have to,” she added with an endearing laugh, “but not with me!”

“You can count me out, too,” Jim agreed; and then he quickly added, “I’ve been having some problems with my neck,” as a face-saving gesture.

“Why don’t you two go ahead,” laughed Samantha to Cindy and me, and she practically pushed both of us into the first “log” on the ride.

The log was built for two people, each straddling a single bench going up the middle. Cindy jumped into the front of the log, leaving the “back seat” for me. This placed me in a quandary, for if I straddled the seat, I would also be straddling Cindy. While this would have been fine with Samantha – it was only a short amusement ride, for goodness’ sake – I, as the young man possessed by a young woman, whom I was determined to force into the role of jealous goddess, found it so distressing that I somehow managed to ride sidesaddle, squeezed in behind Cindy, whose perfume wafted back into my face and turned it a deep shade of red.

In the end, Samantha simply would not play the role of jealous goddess. She wanted me, but she did not want to own me. However secure I may have felt being isolated and possessed by her, she evidently felt differently. She was, after all, going off to college in the fall and did not want to be in a relationship in which either of us might feel too guilty to go out with friends.

At the beginning of August, we got into the back seat of Fred’s Carmen Ghia. Fred had a date, a thin blond young woman whom I did not know. Indeed, I never quite caught her name, as my mind was on other things: I realized full well that this was the last time Samantha and I would go out; perhaps the last time we would see each other.

We went to the Tomfoolery, a discotheque down on M Street past Wisconsin Avenue with a tiny dance floor and an atmosphere dominated by noise. We sat in a high-backed wooden booth, the two couples facing each other, and we ordered burgers and sodas.

While Fred and his date were struggling to stay on the dance floor, Samantha explained things to me. “I really want us both to feel free to see other people in college and not feel that we’re tied down to each other,” she said softly, and she continued on with the standard speech heard all over the country as summer came to a close.

I listened, ashen-faced, to the words that I knew were coming, but that I was unprepared to hear. A tear came to my eye, I lowered my head, and I uttered in a hoarse whisper, “Okay.”

She reached in her purse and took out a little light blue box and slipped it into the side pocket of my jacket. In unison, we pulled the rings off our left ring fingers and placed them ceremoniously on the right ring finger of the original owner. With the tape on both of them, however, they did not fit. We looked up at each other and smiled with pathos.

When Fred came back, he found us both picking at tape on the back of our rings. “Here,” he volunteered cheerfully, “let me help.” He drew out a small pen knife from his jacket pocket and worked on Samantha’s. She slipped it on and disappeared with Fred’s date into the ladies’ room.

I handed my ring to him with a saddened, imploring look, and it dawned on him that there was something going on here that he was unaware of.

“Uh, what’s this all about, anyway?” he stammered, as the answer started to occur to him. That it took so long was by no means a reflection on his mental abilities. It was simply that he had got used to the old relationships – the old adventures among friends – and had never quite fathomed the fact that Samantha and I were a couple. Or, at least, that we had been a couple until that moment.

“Oh, man. I’m sorry. If I’d have known, I never would have offered ...”

“You’re a good friend, Fred,” I assured him gently. “You’d have done it if we’d have asked you to.”

The rest of the evening turned into a wake. Fred’s poor date never did realize what had transpired before her. And I wondered: Did I?

For the rest of August, I recalled casting about desperately, trying to find someone who could replace Samantha. On some higher, deeper level within me, though, I fully realized that I should not have been trying to replace her, to find some other jealous goddess, or at least someone I could force into that mold. I should rather have been seeking someone I could relate to as I had with Mary, as I had promised myself on that long, moonlit night in December. But I also fully realized that when I had met Nick’s cousin Leslie and had indeed found Mary again deep within her heart, I had fled.

And so it was now, on my path of tears from Colonial Lake. What, if anything, had I learned? What, if anything, had I been aware of since that final painful statement from Mary and my abruptly and cruelly cut-off reply? Was I so very fearful, that I needed a woman to possess me and shield me from all future harm? And what would inevitably happen to that woman, as it had happened with Samantha? All this was running through the jumbled thoughts racing through me, Cadet, in my stolid but rapid retreat.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

JUNIOR YEAR: CADRE WEEK

I returned to The Acropolis on Tuesday, 30 August 1966, for Cadre Week. This was the period before Thete Week when the élite of the Corps of Cadets would receive their training so that they could in turn train the new thetes and ensure the unbroken tradition of the System. It was a great honor to be chosen for the Training Cadre – an honor reserved for those cadets who had demonstrated the highest military aptitude and an undying devotion to the traditions of The Acropolis, The Military Academy of the South.

I was not a member of the Training Cadre, but was there as news editor of *The Bugler* to cover the event and to report on anything particularly newsworthy that might happen to occur. My roommate had not been chosen either, so I trudged alone up to my new room. That was one thing I had chosen – the room on second division that had been First Sergeant Grant Woodward's old abode. This would be the first year at the Academy that I would miss Mr Woodward – Grant. And, yes, I would miss him.

Munro Sinclair was now the company commander, and Tadd Evans was the new first sergeant. To me, these choices for the top leadership positions were as obvious as my elevation to sergeant had been fortuitous. Things were looking up for H Company; although, as far as I could tell, they had never really been down.

As for me, on the other hand, I was definitely down. Sophomore year, from its beginning the previous summer with Mary to its last throes this summer with Samantha, had been my most successful time as a cadet at The Acropolis – and the most disastrous time within my heart and soul. In spite of her role in losing my Mary, Samantha had come to fill a great void in my shrunken heart, and I missed her terribly. Perhaps more than her though, I missed being possessed.

That night, I fell asleep in a dark room beneath the blackness of an overcast sky hiding a completely full moon. There seemed to be something ironically significant about that – a promise of wonderful things unfulfilled. Under a moon that remained hidden from me, I fretted over my loneliness, compounded by being alone in a room designed for two. I wondered aloud, "What's wrong with me? Doesn't anyone out there want a slightly used cadet?"

Around midnight, the moon reached her zenith and blasted through the clouds, plunging the room into stark brightness as though it were twilight, or even beyond twilight. I awoke with a start and an awareness of a feminine presence that had permeated my sleep – a presence so regal and divine that I almost jumped out of the top bunk and knelt. Distinctly, as though someone were physically there in the room with me, I heard an echo of the words:

χρεόν ἐστι
χρεόν ἐστι
so múst it be
so múst it be

This time the voice, in its ethereal lilt, was not simply compassionate, as she had been before. Rather, she was also resolved and seemed to want to prepare me for what would come, as much as to comfort me for what I had already been through.

And this time, I was ready. With the phrase fresh in my mind, I leapt out of the top bunk and grabbed my old Greek book from the bookshelf attached to the back of the new metal desk that had appeared during the summer. I pivoted back to the window to look at it in the brilliant and illuminating moonlight. I had brought back my old Greek book in the scant hope that enough people would come out of the woodwork to sign up for intermediate Greek for the class to make. Failing that, I hoped to keep my Greek viable as I replaced it with intermediate Latin this year.

Sure that the phrase should probably have come from something I had been required to memorize sophomore year, I thumbed through my well-worn copy of Paine's *Beginning Greek*. I looked through every applicable example in the syntactic summary, as I repeated the phrase over and over to keep it fresh. I checked out the glossary at the end, and there I found an adjective *χρεία* having to do with need and necessity and an impersonal verb *χρή* meaning 'it is necessary'. These seemed to be somewhere in the ballpark, but not quite what I had heard.

So I put Paine back and brought down Berry's *Classic Greek Dictionary*. There it was on page 788 – *χρεόν ἐστι* 'it is fated or necessary, it must be'. The phrase had to do with fate, destiny, and the workings of the Gods and Goddesses in the affairs of mortals.

But now there was a new problem. Reading through the entry, I learned that *χρεόν ἐστι* was the Ionic variant. The usual Attic was *χρεών ἐστι*, with a longer omega rather than the shorter omicron that I had so distinctly heard and that was by now firmly etched into my memory. I marked the page with a three-by-five card, put the dictionary up, and slowly climbed back into my bunk. The message made sense, but why would I have heard it this way? What was it about Ionic and Ionia that now kept rapping at my mind like some impatient visitor at the door? And why was there no *ν* on the end of *ἐστι* – was the sentence not complete?

Pondering such matters Hellenic, I drifted into sleep within the watchful, comforting aura of the full moon. She seemed to be smiling at me in her brightness; and as I fell asleep, I had strange dreams of eight Ionic columns dancing in a circle. They seemed uncannily familiar both on an actual physical level and on some other less well defined, but higher level. Their capitals curled around like the hairstyle popular at the time, the one that framed a woman's face and that now seemed immensely significant in some way that was thoroughly and deliberately partitioned outside my memory. Their long, delicate flutes fell like the soft folds in a Greek lady's chiton and swayed to unheard music.

Sometime during the graceful dance of the columns, a thought intruded upon my psyche. The voice had not only been comforting me, but had also been preparing me for something. I asked back with no small measure of dread, "So what must be now?" But she did not answer.

The next morning, I rose early, polished my shoes and brass, and took a fresh uniform out of my fancy new press with the metal chest of draws next to it. The formalities of morning preparation completed, I pulled at the three-by-five card in page 788 of *The Classic Greek Dictionary*. I looked over the entry one more time and sat in my new metal chair (with padding!) pondering over what it all could mean. First call jolted me out of my reverie, and I strolled out onto the gallery and down the stairwell, hoping some of my classmates were early birds too. Thank goodness, we were well past the stage of being the early worms!

At breakfast formation, Sean McCollum did not come down from his room, where he was also staying alone for Cadre Week, though he was indeed a member of the Training Cadre. We almost sent up a search party, but since it was the first morning and discipline was notably lax, we decided instead to let him sleep in. No reports would be necessary.

Half-way through breakfast, Sean came stumbling over to the H Company tables in the mess hall, holding his hand over his forehead.

"Whatcha got," Don Mallard chirped happily, "a hangover?"

Sean removed his hand and Don, and then the rest of us, let out a load, "Whoa, what happened to you?" Sean was sporting a crisp horizontal bruise straight across his forehead.

"Don' wanna talk about it," he replied somewhat grumpily, but with an embarrassed grin.

Needless to say, we were not about to let him get away with that. Besides the curiosity in painful accidents that characterizes the young male, we were also concerned for our classmate and friend.

"Okay," he relented, "but try not to laugh! You know the new bunks we have?" We all nodded with pleasure – the thin old mattresses of the past two years had apparently not been changed since Korea, at the latest.

"You know how they have this bar going across half-way down the bunk," he continued, "the one you're supposed to be able to grab hold of to pull yourself outta the lower bunk?" It started to dawn on us where he was headed, and we stifled our laughs.

"Well, when the bugle blew, I just sat up straight. My head connected with the bar, and everything went black for a while."

Try as we might not to, we laughed up a storm. The more successful of us managed to restrict it to good-natured, back-slapping type laughter. The less successful put their heads down on one arm and pounded the table with the other, cackling wildly.

The rest of Cadre Week was filled with classes and reviews of the System. At nearly all of them, there were warnings not to interfere with the integration of the Corps, which had just enrolled its first "Negro" cadet. Having grown up in integrated schools in Maryland, I was rather oblivious to the problem. In fact, it only then occurred to me that The Acropolis had not had any cadets of African heritage up to that time. It bothered me a bit that I had never noticed; but then again, there had been too many crises of a more personal nature for me to handle in the past two years.

Throughout this week, however, the same camaraderie that had evinced itself in the incident of Sean and the bed-grip continued unabated. It was refreshing to be with a group of fellow cadets with neither the Thete System nor the academics there to interfere with our bonding. Even the most serious proponents of the System were relaxed and outgoing.

Sean and I became fast friends that week. We visited each other frequently, and I even told him about the break-up with Samantha just a month before. No, I could not bring myself to talk about Mary. Whenever she came out and down from that special place deep and high in my soul, tears welled up in my eyes and I lost the ability to speak.

For his part, Sean had Margaret. He went on and on about how wonderful she was, and I could tell from the look in his eyes whenever he spoke of her that she was indeed the love of his life.

“Tell you what,” he said that Sunday after an abbreviated chapel, “the nursing students at St Francis came back this morning. Let’s go down and I’ll introduce you to Margaret and her roommate. Maybe her roommate will be someone you like.”

I was touched that he made the offer, although he did not know the extent of my growing losses. I put on my cheeriest face and said, “Sure, that would be great.”

Although Sean had a car, a beat-up little blue VW bug, we decided the walk would be refreshing; and, besides, he still had stuff to move out of the car. We took off walking downtown. This time, however, we turned down Routledge Avenue to go straight to St Francis.

Inside the lobby, Sean spoke to the young lady in a nurse’s uniform at the reception desk, and she called up on an intercom to Margaret’s room. As it turned out, Margaret’s roommate also wanted to meet us and to see who her friend’s beau was. That plan ended in disaster.

The two young women came into the reception area, turned toward one another, and started shouting to each other while pointing at Sean. I could not tell what they were saying, for it was all too loud and simultaneous in the echoing room. Finally, the two (and I still did not know which one was Margaret) marched up to Sean and slapped him across the face one after the other. Then they marched back to the end of the room and out.

As we emerged from St Francis Nursing School, I asked rather timidly, “What was that all about?”

But Sean was not ready to talk about it and suggested we go to Labrasca’s for pizza. It was a long, silent walk. Time and again I would glance over at my friend and see that he was kicking himself inside for some major error in judgment – doubtless one that had to do with the recent scene.

At Labrasca’s we ordered a pizza, and he had “Russian Tea.” Since Charleston was dry on Sundays, Labrasca would serve cadets – and only cadets – a special drink that they called Russian Tea. It consisted of beer in a tea pot.

“Did you see Margaret’s roommate?” he asked, finally getting up the nerve and attaining the equilibrium to speak.

“I didn’t even know which one Margaret was,” I admitted.

“She was the one on your right, the one who slapped me first.” I nodded gravely, although by this time the scene had become so jumbled in my brain that such details were difficult to reconstruct.

“Well,” he continued in a sad, resigned voice, “I dated her new roommate early last year, before I ever met Margaret. And I never dated her afterwards. I had no idea they were rooming together this year. Now,” he added with a distinct tone of anguish, “I’ve lost Margaret. Margaret!”

He confessed that he had been at that moment prepared to give her a pin, or even a ring to ensure they would be together. After a rather wild youth, he had found the love that would last for his whole life.

I reached over and put my hand on his shoulder. I did not try to say that I knew how he felt, but I sadly joined him in the agonizingly slow and solemn wake meal of pizza. All the while, I sipped on my ginger ale – like her ginger ale – and hoped that Sean would think the tear in my eye was for his agony alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THETE WEEK: A JUNIOR'S PERSPECTIVE

When the new cadet recruits arrived the following Tuesday, 6 September, I found myself less involved with my friends among the Training Cadre, because they had obviously become wrapped up in their duties tormenting the thetes. My role was strictly as an observer and reporter, so I carried around my little instamatic camera and notebook and followed the new crop of freshman around from their reporting, to their haircuts, to their mattress covers laden with new treasures, to their first attempts at drill under arms.

I had been afraid, for reasons that by now should be clear, that observing the thetes as an outsider, so to speak, would put me in danger of once more falling into the trap of self-isolation. In actuality, the experience was quite the opposite. As I saw the thetes go through their paces and as I realized the reasons and purposes behind the various apparently petty disciplines, I grew to see myself, quite approvingly, as a member of the long gray line of The Acropolis.

All those fears that had driven me apart from my classmates two years earlier I could now see as unfounded, and I detected many ways that I could have made the experience more valuable. Perhaps, had I had the assurances I now possessed, I could indeed have become guidon corporal and battalion sergeant major. But frankly, I was rather more content with my current role on the fringes. Had there been some way of bonding thete year with my classmates and avoiding corporal, that would have been the best. 'Tis a strange thing, Destiny – I wondered who had cast it. And why.

Not only were the thetes a matter of journalistic interest, but so were the members of the faculty and staff. The week before classes, the professors were gearing back up for the fall semester, and the administrators were as hectic as cadets who had forgotten to study for exams until the night before. Major Friedrich Konrad, the general Protestant chaplain, on the other hand, was already back and functioning, and apparently he actually had some time on his hands. This is why, I reasoned (quite incorrectly, as it turned out), he had had the guard leave a message on my desk that he would like to be interviewed.

On Wednesday morning, I walked up the familiar steps of the Chapel, down the aisle paved with large flat stones, and back to his office door to the right of the sanctuary. His secretary, a pleasant middle-aged lady who wore a perpetual kind smile and maintained a reputation that hinted at the dangers of ever, ever crossing her, rose to meet me with a gracious, "Major Konrad has been expecting you, Cadet. Please, go on in."

It was a sparsely furnished office lined with light wood and judiciously placed crosses and crucifixes. Behind his light wooden desk were light wooden bookshelves lined with the works of Rudolf Bultmann, Albert Schweitzer, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, most in the original German. He rose half-way, returned my relaxed salute, and gestured me to a comfortable straight-backed chair with fabric also the color of light wood. He was gentle man, with large, sad gray eyes in a round, avuncular face.

I took out my notebook and thanked him profusely for allowing me to interview him.

"I'm happy you came, Cadet," he said graciously and with genuine gladness at seeing me.

“Well, sir,” I took up my pen, ready for business, “where did you go to seminary?”

Chaplain Konrad smiled, leaned back in his chair, and said with a wave of his hand, “We’ll get to me later. What I’d really like to discuss with you now is the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. You are a member, aren’t you?”

I nodded tentatively. I had been avoiding the ACF like the plague. Yet, at that moment I came to realize that I was – at least technically – a member. And whatever happened in that organization would, like it or not, reflect upon me as well.

The chaplain leaned forward on his desk, placing his elbows on the blotter and rubbing his hands together nervously. “I’m concerned about the direction the ACF is going in,” he confided seriously.

I nodded with my eyes closed and then admitted, “Chaplain Konrad, I’m worried about it too. It’s become so bad that I just can’t drag myself over there on the Monday evenings they meet.”

“But that’s just what they’re counting on,” he replied, and with sudden vehemence he slammed his fists down on his desk in frustration. He breathed heavily, gathered himself, and continued, “Mr Hughes recommends you very highly and wishes that more cadets like you would return and help him get the ACF back on an even keel.”

A shadow crept over his eyes, and they stared past me as though they were fixed on people parading back and forth in the air. He spoke from a great distance and from a long time ago – a dreadful, weary time – and a hint of his native German accent broke through his carefully cultivated colloquial English, “I lived through the times before ’33 and the times after ’33. You see, I’ve seen it all before, and I am so tired, so very, very tired. I’ve spoken with your Mr Adams, but he has his mind fixed on some terribly shallow beliefs and some terribly grandiose ambitions.”

He shifted in his chair and looked straight into my eyes. “I don’t know what you can do. I don’t know what you’re willing to try. I’m sure none of this would get past the General’s censoring for the paper – or for anything else. Please, Cadet, just think it over and do what you can. And by the way, Cadet,” he added pointedly, as though he could see right through to my innermost thoughts, “if you withdraw, you’ll just be isolating yourself not only from them, but from the greater, nobler community as well.”

“Now,” he announced with a complete change of voice, “as for my seminary ...”

After the interview, I had enough for a good article on the chaplain – and more than enough to ponder and worry about. Why had he connected Christopher and the ACF with the “times” he had barely lived through? Just how barely I found out, to my surprise and horror, in our interview. I was also bothered by his reference to the “General’s censoring.” Could this have had something to do with Colonel Demetri and Mrs Appleton and the overly lengthy press release? All I could recall from it was some rather boring and long-winded insistence upon cooperation with area academic institutions and corporations. Corporations? Now that did – finally – strike me as rather odd. How were these things all connected? Were they all connected?

My first inclination was to see Owen Hughes. If anyone knew anything about the problems with the ACF, it was Owen. But this was not a good time to bother him. He had taken over as executive officer of E Company and was swamped with the details of running the System, as only an XO could be. The first meeting would not be for a while, anyway.

When I returned to my room, Harold Prichard, who (though a senior private) had also come back early to discharge his duties as editor-in-chief of *The Bugler*, was just walking away from

my door. As he heard me come up the stairs, he spun around and greeted me with a flurry of excitement.

"Hey," he started off, "Good to see you. I just got back yesterday with the thetes. I trust you've got some great copy for the first issue."

As we walked into my room, I pointed over to the instamatic and noted, "I think I've got a whole two-page spread in that thing. That should be suitable filler till somethin' happens around here."

"Okay!" he shouted with glee, "Yesterday's news tomorrow!"

"All the news that fits!" I replied, reciting *The Bugler's* other unofficial motto.

"What I really came down to let you in on," he said, plopping himself down in my roommate's chair, "is that we have an important meeting in Columbia this weekend."

"Oh?" I inquired with raised eyebrows.

"Yeah. The Colonel's already signed the leave papers for both of us. We've gotta get together with Melissa Lewis on," he hesitated suspiciously, "important State Collegiate Press business."

"What kind of business?" I asked skeptically, but not so skeptically as to endanger any meeting with Melissa, one of the most beautiful and poised young ladies I had ever met, though well out of my league. We were the same age and had graduated from high school the same year, but she had been taking her college courses on an accelerated schedule and was a year ahead of me.

"Oh, there's this, there's that, and, well, there's the other, too! And besides, the Supremes are having a big concert at USC." In that part of the country, USC was, unless further modified by disparaging references to California, the University of South Carolina.

"Sounds important enough to me," I agreed readily.

"I have the use of an Acropolis vehicle, and we'll leave sharply at 4:30."

"That late?" I asked incredulously. "I thought The Colonel had cleared it himself."

"Well," said Harold, shaking his head briskly, "The Colonel's a hard, hard, man. Can you believe it? He wasn't sure this was really a legitimate business meeting!"

"No!" I exclaimed with exaggerated indignation, "I'm shocked. Shocked!"

That Friday, after the thetes' first attempt at a parade of sorts, Harold and I took off in an Academy car for Columbia. It was not very far, and the new interstate really sped things along. We checked into the YMCA, and my first experience with it was, as I became increasingly determined with every new look at the residents, definitely going to be my last. It was, however oddly, not so much a matter of fear, but rather one of guilt.

The next morning, we headed out to Columbia College. Melissa was sitting at a registration desk in her dormitory welcoming the new freshman – quite a difference from the welcome they got at The Acropolis. She stretched her hands out in front of herself and yawned a greeting.

"Not much excitement here, I take it," Harold noted.

"It's boring," she replied, forcing the word "boring" out of her mouth with exaggerated emphasis.

"Have you found anyone for our friend here, yet?" he inquired. I just stood there and then just sat there, looking at Melissa. Her hair, in between dark blond and light brunette, curled down either side of her face and framed her stunning green eyes. Whenever she fixed those soft green eyes on me, I found myself speechless, and she was fixing them on me now.

“I think I’ve found just the young lady for him,” she said, with more than a hint of intrigue in her voice.

Melissa and Harold were not going as dates that night – he also considered himself well out of her league, though I thought he could tolerate her eyes rather well. Nonetheless, a grouping of two young men and a young woman was still a bit awkward, so she had hunted down a “date” for me. A free college press pass to the concert was surely a rather fine inducement.

After we had talked for a while, ostentatiously throwing in references to reputed business of the Collegiate Press Association along the way, we went to the cafeteria for a quick bite and then to a dormitory on the other side of campus. Harold and I sat in the reception room, as young ladies cast sidelong glances at our Acropolis uniforms, and Melissa went to fetch my “date.”

Surprisingly, she did not return from the stairs leading up to the rooms, but came up from the lower level. She introduced me to Belle Carter, a very pretty young woman with light brown bobbed hair and sparkling hazel eyes. Her face and body were soft and rounded, though not plump. She was almost as tall as I was, and she extended her hand to me with an oddly folded piece of red paper.

I accepted the paper and noticed that both Melissa and Belle were looking at me intently and right on the verge of breaking into a giggle. Knowing something was afoot, I gingerly unfolded the paper. To my shock, it was a swastika. I stood there speechless, my mouth agape, and my head spinning in this suddenly Kafkaesque setting.

“You’ve done it!” Harold proclaimed. “I’ve never seen him at a loss for words before!”

“It’s from a Holocaust display downstairs,” Melissa explained gently. “I told Belle that you’re a German major, and we thought this might get a rise out of you.”

“Thanks,” I managed to push past my locked jaws. It was a strange joke, though not as strange as they had imagined. After my talk with the chaplain on Wednesday, it seemed like too much of a coincidence for any degree of comfort – more like Carl Jung’s synchronicity. And it let loose a rush of dread within my mind – dread about something nebulous that I knew was there somewhere, but that I could not, or would not locate.

We all spent the rest of the afternoon together, seeing the sights of Columbia and enjoying each others’ company. Finally we went to a shadowy little burger place and then on to the concert. It was the standard concert, filled with Motown favorites and flashy sequins.

After it was over, I walked Belle back to her dormitory. It was late, but the moon was not in the sky. On sudden impulse, we took up waltz positions and danced by the light of the streetlights as I sang “Zwei Herzen im dreiviertel Takt” to her. We laughed and talked in what I would come to remember as an exquisitely romantic encounter. I seem to recall that we may even have kissed.

The evening had been so romantic that when Harold and I returned to The Acropolis the next afternoon, I called Belle and asked her if she would like to go to the Peter, Paul, and Mary concert on 24 September.

“Oh, I already have a date,” she admitted, and then she hesitantly added in a lower, more confidential tone, “Actually, I have a steady, so I don’t think it would work out between us. Thanks anyway, though.”

How romantic, I thought. That is, romantic in the literary sense – longing for the unattainable, confusion between dream and reality. The song had ended out of tense and out of mood: *Wer brauchte mehr, um glücklich zu sein.*

Something about the thwarted relationship reminded me of Alison Greene, and I even assumed that it was the uniform that had caused her to reject me. Such assumptions were, of course, utterly wrong, and on some higher, deeper level I knew they were. But they gave me comfort nonetheless. It was odd though. With Alison I had felt no rejection, but only disappointment in a relationship that, by mutual agreement, was not destined to be. With Belle, on the other hand, I somehow felt rejected and retreated behind the uniform as a means of avoidance, of rationalization, of isolation.

Once more, as had happened so terribly often since December of the past year, I felt alone and adrift. And again I asked from my bunk that night, “Doesn’t anyone out there want a slightly used cadet?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

RETURN OF THE CORPS

On Tuesday morning, 13 September, I sat at my desk arranging the first batch of pictures that I would use to compose a photo montage of Thete Week for *The Bugler*, as one by one, the rest of the Corps was returning from summer vacation. You could hear loud exclamations from all over the barracks, and even through the windows from the Third Battalion next door. “Wow! Look at that!” they all shouted out when they saw the new furniture. I wondered how many heads would be bruised by the bed-grips the next morning.

Suddenly, I heard the same outburst directed right into the room. My new roommate, Ryan White, dropped his suitcase and his jaw as he stood there in the doorway.

“Good to see you, too!” I laughed back at him.

Ryan was as happy and outgoing a lad as you could hope for after two years at The Acropolis. Indeed, the word “lad” seemed especially appropriate to him, although he possessed a depth that every once in a while he allowed to seep up to the surface and astonish others. It certainly always astonished me. We were both squad sergeants in the second platoon, so it seemed natural that we should be rooming together.

Actually, though, I had assumed right up to the end of sophomore year that I would be rooming with Bill again, and I was greatly surprised when the initial lists came out and he was rooming with another classmate. Bill knew my anguish over Mary, and perhaps it had simply become too overpowering for him. Having gone through the same experience himself, he could hardly be faulted for deciding not to room with someone who must have become a huge emotional drain on him.

His decision sent me into the whirlwind searching that always took place after the first lists appeared, and I ran into Ryan. I had not really got to know him that well before, but as time went on I really came to like him. One thing I did not do, however, was to unburden my pain over Mary on him. Indeed, I never spoke her name aloud again, although he must have wondered at the abrupt silence and melancholic looks from time to time.

We went down to the bottom of the stairwell to the shelves and open space where we deposited and picked up laundry every week. There, his small footlocker and some other of his things were piled in a heap along with everyone else’s, and we picked through the jumble to carry his bags and locker back up to the room.

We paused at the top of the first flight of stairs and greeted Harry and Ken, who had once again laid claim to room 248. It was an immensely practical choice for them, as they did not have far to lug their possessions and could always afford to be the last ones out for formation, if only by a few seconds.

I, on the other hand, knew that I could never occupy that room. For me it was still haunted by memories of the sweat party thete year – ghosts of guilt, however rationally dismissed, still hovered behind the door. As much as I liked Harry and Ken, even this year I still had to force myself to cross that dreaded threshold every time I visited them, for somewhere in the depths of my irrationality, I saw it as a boundary that had once separated me from my classmates.

The next day, I went to register for courses with my advisor, the head of the department. Colonel Vaughn was a slightly plump man, with a friendly smile and a relaxed manner (despite his two Ph.D.'s). When matters got out of control, however, such as when a faculty member wanted to keep bringing his poodle to his office (with regrettable consequences for the furniture and carpet), his former career as a Military Police officer showed through and he became quite firm and businesslike. That was a side of him I was happy never to see myself.

In a last-ditch effort, I asked him if there was any chance at all that intermediate Greek might be offered.

"No," he replied shaking his head in disappointment – he had also wanted me to take it. "I'm afraid there just aren't enough warm bodies there to satisfy the Dean. I had talked him down a bit in number, arguing that the second year quota shouldn't be as stringent as the first. But we never got the lower number either."

"Okay, sir," I replied, "I really do appreciate your efforts."

He beamed at the thanks, something faculty members – and especially academic advisors – rarely heard. Keeping the smile, he added, "But intermediate Latin did make, and you're in."

"Great," I said, following his lead from disappointment to enthusiasm. "But isn't Major Black off on sabbatical this year, sir?"

"He sure is," Colonel Vaughn observed with a wry smile. "You budding young Classicists certainly do wreak havoc on our scheduling. I've contacted an Episcopal priest from downtown – one who has an undergraduate degree in Classics – and we've hired him to take on the class."

"I guess I also hafta make up sophomore European civilization, sir?" I asked, hoping it could somehow be waived, as I was eager to get on with the more advanced courses I was interested in. I had put it off the previous year so that I could fit in the elementary Greek while it was in demand.

"You sure do," he answered with a smile and a cock of the head. "In addition to your courses in this department, you have room for one more elective."

"History of the Ancient World," I said with such verve that I forgot the "sir."

He did not seem to notice the omission (on academic matters none of the regular faculty ever did), but he simply said, "I should've known!" as he scribbled it down on the computer card.

"Okay," he concluded, "that just leaves military science, Classical French Literature – wow, it's even in the name there, isn't it? – and of course," and here he paused for dramatic effect, "the first semester of my course on Goethe's *Faust*. Do you think you're ready for that? You've only had intermediate, although you did read quite a bit of literature in it, I understand."

"I suppose I don't have much choice, sir," I admitted the obvious. "The third-year courses won't be offered again till next year."

"Yeah, it's tough to hit the schedule out of synch like that. It happened to me in college, too. Frankly, it'll be tough, but I know you'll do all right."

It was good to have the confidence of my advisor and department head, and I looked forward to taking my first class from him. The fact that it was a bit over my head at this point both frightened me and fascinated me. At last, I was going to get deep into my major.

That evening, Ryan and I were sitting back and talking about our summer experiences. I tried to keep the conversation focused on his adventures, not only to avoid mine, but also because his laid-back excitement was exhilarating. For my part, I preferred to reminisce about my visit to Florence, Ryan's home town, right before the year. We had our chairs pulled back from our

desks and facing slightly toward the door, when we noticed two shadows appearing through the screen.

After a quick knock, Harry and Ken clumsily made their way in carrying their new chairs. “These things are a lot bigger,” Ken exclaimed, as he battered the door with his chair.

“Hey,” Ryan shot back, “at least they’ve got padding!”

Harry also had a deck of cards in his hand. It was a bit more awkward for upperclassmen. At least the thetes could stuff them into the pockets of their bathrobes. For us, on the other hand, there was no room in the small rear pocket of the cotton gray trousers and no pocket on the tee-shirt.

They put their chairs down, and Ryan and I automatically turned ours the rest of the way so we would be facing Harry and Ken. “Now what?” asked Ryan, taking the deck and, with exaggerated gestures, finding no place to put it down.

“Just a sec,” said Ken with his right index finger raised. He went out onto the gallery and picked up the footlocker, that my roommate had placed outside the door to take down to the laundry area beneath the stairwell the next morning. We set it up on end to make an impromptu card table.

“Let’s see if you’ve learned anything about hearts since thete year,” Harry said cheerfully, giving me a sidelong look over on my left. “Classes haven’t started yet, so there’s no ESP, and we won’t have to worry about the Tac Officer this time.”

His comments sent me back to that Evening Study Period shortly after Arty had moved in. How long ago it seemed now! I was genuinely touched that he had remembered. I had had a lot to learn about so many things – not just how to play a card game, but about the unofficial protocols (“Call for Charles Brown!”) that helped to weld us into a single body.

Unfortunately, while I had indeed picked up some strategies and techniques for winning at hearts (at least at the card game), I had never grasped its real purpose. As I set upon my task and swept the first two hands, Harry looked over at me ruefully and said with a definite point, “You sure do play a cut-throat game of hearts!”

I could tell from his tone that there was something far more important to the game – something I had been missing. As I paid more attention to my card-mates, I realized that it was the discussion, not the game, that was important. Hoping that this would be the last vestige of self-isolation that I would subject myself to among my classmates, I took the cue and participated more in the gossip. My hands may have suffered, but my game – all of our game – markedly improved.

“You know,” I tossed in and paused to claim the floor. “Something’s been bothering me since one of the training sessions that I listened in on during Cadre week,” being sure to emphasize that I was only listening in – I was not claiming to be a member of the Cadre. “One of the Tac Officers, I think it was our own Major Cantwell, stood up in front of the bleachers full of Cadre members and really made a point of telling them, ‘Whatever you do, don’t call anyone boy!’ He was so emphatic, shouting out each word. Given all the horrible insults you hear people use against them, why in the world would he say not to call any of them ‘boy?’”

My classmates, all three from South Carolina, slowly lowered their cards and looked at me in disbelief. They stared for a while, until Ken pointed out, “Don’t you know we’ve just admitted our first Negro cadet?”

“Sure,” I answered. “What does that hafta do with it?”

They all let loose a yowl and started laughing. “You’re in the South,” Harry finally stated.

“And?” I asked.

He stood up and struck a professorial pose, his thumbs hooking through imaginary suspenders, “And the black people used to be the slaves of the white people. And the parties colored white, so to speak, used to call their chattel property, the descendants of whom treat the entire episode with rage and repudiating revulsion, ‘boy’. And some still do, which I’m sure you can see adds considerable insult to injury.”

“How was I supposed to know that?” I pleaded, trying my hardest to blend in with the merriment my ignorance had caused.

“By opening your ears,” Ryan observed, slowly coming down from his laughter. He then addressed the whole “table” with a bit more intensity, “Did you know that there’s a law on the books that stipulates that if The Acropolis ever integrates, all schools in the entire state are required to shut down?”

“So,” I threw in casually, seeing my chance to get off of the subject of my naïveté, “there’s also been a law on the books in the Great State of South Carolina since World War I, forbidding the teaching of German in state schools and colleges. Some laws,” I added profoundly, “are best ignored, lest anyone notice they’re still there.”

“Good point!” exclaimed Harry, carefully removing his hands from his imaginary suspenders and taking his seat – thereby signaling the resumption of the game.

The next morning, classes began and things became more serious. Just before ESP, I received a visit from Owen Hughes. We walked out onto the gallery, leaned against the concrete rail overlooking the quadrangle, and talked in hushed tones.

“Has Chaplain Konrad spoken with you?” he asked with concern.

“Yes,” I answered with equal concern.

“Then you know that I was elected president of the ACF.”

“No, he didn’t mention that detail. I’m glad you’re running the show”

“Well,” he answered slowly, “it ain’t all beer and skittles. Christopher Adams was elected vice president.”

“Whoa!” I exclaimed in as low a voice as I could and looked down across the quadrangle to G and F Companies, and toward the First Battalion beyond. “Well,” I added with a hopeful tone, “at least he’s not president.”

“Only because he’s still a junior,” Owen pointed out. “And I’m sure he’s gonna push the limits just as far as he can. We really need to get more people in there.”

I tried to look even more sympathetic than I was, as I gave him the bad news, “Colonel Vaughn made up the language laboratory monitor schedule today. He put me on Monday evenings.”

“Not good,” Owen replied, pursing his lips together.

“I’ll see what I can do to rearrange the schedule when there’s a meeting you need me at,” I promised. I was torn between helping him and avoiding the Literalists. To be sure, I had in fact requested Mondays. But seeing Owen’s face that evening, I was determined to do what I could to help.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE SECOND COLUMBIA EXPEDITION

After Friday afternoon parade on 23 September, Sean McCollum and I piled into his VW beetle and took off for Columbia, to attend the Peter, Paul, and Mary concert. We knew that the crowd for this concert would not be quite as friendly to cadets in uniform as the crowd for Diana Ross and the Supremes had been, so we also packed some civies.

On the trip up Interstate 26, my mind wandered to the last weekend leave I had taken – the last completely voluntary trip unconnected with sports or the newspaper (which, technically, the last one had been). To my surprise, it had been all the way back in the spring of thete year. I had been invited home by a classmate, Dennis Harmon, a very good friend who had been as awkward at The Acropolis as I had been isolated. His father was the mechanic on a plantation near Andrews, along the coast. We fished in the Black River for catfish, but we caught more moccasin trying to slither into the boat than fish. Each time, we would wait for the head to come over the side and bang it with an oar. Then we would put a small notch in the already well cut-up oars to commemorate the triumph.

All around the Harmon house roamed cats that had reverted to the wild, except, of course, for their willingness to eat whatever Mrs Harmon might place out for them. One of the cats was blind, and the others seemed to take special care of him. On one occasion, an unfamiliar cat snuck up to the blind cat while he was eating some treat left over from the catfish. No sooner had the interloper snatched the food than the rest of the cats set upon him and chased him out of the area.

I thought a long time about those cats. They seemed to be independent creatures, yet when the blind cat needed the others, they all became one. As I rode to Columbia with Sean, I wondered if my classmates would be as united as the cats had been if I ever really, really needed them. Somewhere deep inside I felt like a little kitten alone and adrift in a big, frightening world. I felt like Tabby. ... But no, I did not want to think of that.

So I turned my thoughts to the upcoming concert. It was strange for two major acts to visit Columbia so close together – or so I thought. The Lettermen had come to Charleston at the end of thete year to play at the beach house. I remembered that I had looked forward to hearing the group, because they had also played at my high school just one year before. The concert at the beach house did not go so well, though. Some of the more inebriated cadets danced the “dying cockroach” and made slanderous comments concerning the Lettermen’s virility, and the group vowed never to return.

I brought this up with Sean in the car: “I sure hope the crowd in Columbia doesn’t treat Peter, Paul, and Mary the way we treated the Lettermen.”

Recalling the scene, Sean laughed so hard that he nearly lost control of the VW. The rest of the trip was filled with conversation, starting with what certain upperclassmen had done at the concert and spreading from there to many other topics. I always found it easy to talk with Sean.

Officially, the concert was to be a “double date.” That Sean actually knew someone in Columbia he could call up and ask out amazed me. The previous year he had dated Margaret’s

new roommate, and then he had become very serious indeed about Margaret. How would he even have known anyone else? After all, when I had been Samantha's beau, I had been cut off from all other contact. ... Or at least, I had allowed myself to be cut off from all other contact. ... Actually, I had cut myself off from all other contact, whether Samantha had wanted me to or not.

I had thought about my relationship with Samantha a lot, and I sometimes wondered why I had allowed myself to be ... no, why I had isolated myself on her account. I liked to think that it was the high virtue of loyalty, but I worried that I may have been rationalizing my own self-isolation, finding a jealous goddess to put the blame on and taking false refuge in my own virtue. I certainly had not felt that restriction with ... well, with another, whom I did not want to think of.

The only young woman I knew in Columbia was Melissa Lewis, so I had called her up to ask her if she would like to come with "us." I was careful not to make it sound as though I were being so presumptuous as to ask her out on a date. To my surprise, she gladly accepted and told me she was looking forward to seeing me again.

Melissa was slender and just slightly taller than I was, and she was by far the most poised young lady I had ever met. Every motion she went through seemed at once perfectly natural and utterly regal. Her soft green eyes exuded kindness and compassion, and I still found it difficult to look into them without becoming flustered and speechless.

At the previous concert, she had mentioned that they had already taken their senior-year photos and that they would be coming in soon. Sheepishly, I had asked if I could have a wallet size. Without the slightest indication that she thought I was being forward or sentimental, she simply cocked her head and said, "Well, of course."

When she greeted me in the reception room of her dormitory the next afternoon, she handed me a picture with the inscription "To my good friend, Melissa" on the back. I was touched, and when I got back to The Acropolis, I did not put it out where others could see it. This relationship was simply not that way. Rather, I hid it away behind the lock box built into the top drawer of the dresser. There it became a prized icon, and it always brought a smile to my face – a smile and a strange feeling of comfort and even of protection.

Melissa liked to walk, and so did I. So she took me on a tour of the campus, carefully avoiding (as I silently noted) the area where Belle Carter lived. Just as in the Collegiate Press Association, she seemed to know everyone at the women's college, including many of the male day students, whom the women often shunned as somehow being interlopers. Whenever she greeted individuals and groups, she always displayed an eager friendship checked only by her graceful poise.

Somewhere on the walk from the dormitory to the motel to fetch Sean, she took my hand. Not as a girlfriend takes possession of her boyfriend's hand, but deeper than that – the way a friend takes a friend's hand. Something about it, though, brought thoughts of Mary into my heart. Melissa looked at the gathering tears in my eyes and seemed to know exactly what the problem was. She squeezed my hand and said in a voice soft with compassion, "Some things just have to be, you know."

That should have startled me a lot more than it did, but we were just then coming up to the door of Sean's and my motel room. There was a rubber band placed loosely around the doorknob. That was supposed to be Sean's secret message to me not to open the door. He had company.

Melissa took one look at me staring at rubber band on the doorknob and laughed, "Perhaps your friend is feeling better now! Let's go back to my dorm so I can freshen up a bit, if you don't

mind waiting in the lobby.” The last words were spoken in playful mischief – she knew I had to wait somewhere or other.

When we got back to the motel, Sean and his friend were outside, leaning up against the metal railing along the walkway. We went through our introductions, and Sean and Kim, Melissa and I squeezed into his VW to go to the concert. We all sat on an Acropolis blanket that Sean had brought along, as it was still much too hot in September for him to put it on his bunk, anyway. The music was different from what the Supremes’ had been, and I was glad to be in civies.

After the concert, we dropped Melissa off first at Columbia College, so she would make the curfew, and then Kim at USC, which was a bit more lenient. From there, Sean made a bee-line to a “red dot” liquor store, where he bought a six-pack of light Dutch beer and a six-pack of dark, and we returned to the motel.

Aside from the occasional shot glass of beer that my father would sneak to me on very rare occasions, I had never drunk. But the feel of Melissa’s hand, the thoughts of Mary that that had evoked, and Melissa’s too-knowing comment that just now started to sink in all conspired to make me want to give it a try. After three light followed by three dark, I fell so ill that I thought I was in mortal danger. However sick it may have made me, though, I was surprised to see that I still had my wits about me. From then on, I knew that I could drink with my classmates – just not quite so much.

On the way back the next morning, all Sean could talk about was Margaret. “Nothing happened between Kim and me yesterday,” he confessed, as though that were a point of shame as well as of virtue. “Every time I got close enough to kiss her, I found myself looking into Margaret’s eyes.”

“I tried to tell her,” he continued, his voice quaking, and apparently unaware that he had shifted the subject, “that I had stopped dating her roommate as soon as I’d met her. I tried to tell her how much she means to me. I begged, I pleaded, I appealed to her mercy. And she hung up on me.”

I listened. All through that long trip, I listened. I never said that I knew what he was going through. I couldn’t bring myself to talk about it. But as one part of my brain took in all that he was saying with full attention and compassion, another part – a far higher and deeper part, a part of my soul – was occupied with recollections of Mary.

But I also thought of Leslie in that out-of-the-way spot in my psyche. I had only known her for perhaps two hours, but I had seen Mary in her heart. Rather than reaching out to Leslie/Mary, I had retreated in terror. Mary and Leslie, the Hibernian and the Hellene, the one I had loved and lost and the one who by my choice would never be.

Instead, I had run into the arms of Samantha, the very person who had cost me Mary. I had allowed her – no, required her – to possess me to such a degree that I could close myself off from this painful world. And then there was Belle. Samantha and Belle, the one who had loved and pursued me, and whom I still had lost, and the one who by her choice would never be.

There they were, in descending order of hurt. I found it strange, in a detached sort of way, that I had known Samantha for so long, yet both Mary, whom I had known only three months and had seen only three times, and Leslie, whom I had met only once, gave me so much more pain.

Then there was Melissa Lewis, that incredible beauty with her soft green eyes and her warm enveloping kindness. Had Melissa proposed to me, I would have said yes in a heartbeat. Yet, I accepted the relationship as friends and was glad to have it – overjoyed, in fact. In my flustered bewilderment, I even found myself worrying about why I was not worrying about Melissa. But as I would just begin to realize later, the Melissa I knew had been on a level far higher than I. A level far higher.

Running back to the safety of the barracks that April night that was now closing in so quickly, I remembered Melissa and took some comfort in having known her, although her ability to look within me and to tell what exactly was wrong still concerned me.

And I also remembered the cats at Dennis Harmon's house and how they had come together in unity for the protection of one poor old blind cat. Oddly enough, I took some comfort in that, too, as well as some hope.

And, of course, in spite of the intervening turmoil and heartache, I remembered most of all Mary. Oh, Mary, Mary.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN OCTOBER AND ELIZA BETH

Saturday, 1 October, turned out to be a very important day on two counts. The first major event was that I took over my duties as squad leader, as the thetes were promoted to fourth-class privates and integrated into the platoons now reorganized for their inclusion. I was the squad leader of the third squad, second platoon, and I was assigned four thetes.

The ceremony took place right after Saturday Morning Inspection. Unlike in our thete year, this time each squad's thetes were sent scurrying to report to their new sergeants in their rooms. Ryan and I were waiting at our desks when the first batch of thetes reported. The first one in the line approached the door, banged his fist against it so hard the door rattled and the screen shook, and shouted, "Sir, Mr White, sir. Cadet Recru ... Cadet *Private* Smith, R.J. reporting with the first squad, second platoon, sir!" The final "sir" was so loud it made the screen shake again.

Ryan turned to me on the way out and observed, "My thetes are faster than your thetes." I laughed, but he could not afford to go out to meet his new charges with anything resembling levity on his face. He moved his thetes down the gallery to make room for mine, who were right behind them.

The whole ritual was repeated, this time by a Mr Williams, S.R., reporting with the third squad, second platoon, SIR! Something within me stirred at the appellation "sir," and I strode out of the room like a general reviewing his army.

They were still in cotton grays replete with webbing and breast plates across their chests and webbing and waist plates over their belts. I started at the far end and slowly, silently inspected them. I ended with Stephen Williams, whose webbing had shifted when he banged on the door.

"Look at that webbing, thete!" I shouted with well-staged rage. "You're the sloppiest excuse for a cadet I've ever seen in my life!" To emphasize my point, I poked him in the chest *pro forma* with my right index finger.

Then, he looked at me. He looked at me with such hurt and anger in his eyes that I nearly apologized. It took a Herculean effort on my part not to show any emotion, and I stared threateningly into his eyes, which scurried back to the front like scared rabbits. I had won. But what had I done?

Long after I dismissed them, and long after that day, I could see the look of hurt and anger in his eyes. I remembered two young ladies getting onto a bus in Charleston, and one of them saying, "He'd be a good-lookin' guy, if he weren't so *angry*!" I had made myself angry back then by my own self-isolation and irrational guilt. Now, I had just looked not into Mr Williams' face, but into my own – the face that had haunted me since thete year.

At that point, I decided to do no more poking. In fact I would not take part in any disciplinary action not explicitly condoned by the *Blue Book*. I realized that this might ruin my chances of making cadet lieutenant the following year, but I refused to let the lower level run rampant without the reason of the upper level firmly in control. I was still determined to be the model cadet myself – I had learned that lesson all too well from Gary Daniels – and to work with the thetes to bring them up to that level. But I would pull them up, not push them.

As I looked around at my fellow squad leaders, I noticed that, while perhaps not taking it to the extreme that I did, they were also determined to let the upper rule the lower. Indeed, I did not believe that there was a single sadist among the sergeants of H Company that year.

The encounter with Mr Williams with all of its implications was not, however, the most important event of 1 October 1966. That would have to wait until evening.

The Acropolis was hosting a mixer that Saturday evening with the young ladies from the School of Nursing of the Medical College South Carolina – the one that Herm had said that I would have to deal with sooner or later. I went by Sean's room that afternoon and found him sulking over his loss of Margaret and, I suspected, his ominous failure with Kim.

"Okay, Sean," I said in a voice appropriate to my newly found military authority. "It's time to move on. There's a mixer tonight with the young ladies from the Nursing College, and I expect you to be there."

"Don' wanna," he replied thoroughly depressed.

"Come on, Sean," I implored with a lower, more compassionate voice. "I really want to go. I've gotta get over Samantha – it's tearing me up, too, you know. But I sure don't wanna face that crowd by myself."

Sean looked up with a wry smile. He knew what I was up to; and he knew that if the tables were turned, he would be doing exactly the same thing for me. He sighed, played a bit with a pencil on his desk, and ultimately told the pencil, "Okay."

The truth was that I did want to go to the mixer to see if there might be anyone who wanted a slightly used cadet. But I was in a quandary. When I had met Leslie, I had looked into her eyes and seen Mary. Why had I bolted like a frightened deer at the sight of an archer? Deep within me, I knew full well that I longed for Mary with every inch of my body and every hope of my soul. But could I face the prospect of losing Mary again? No. No.

No, I would go to the mixer to see if there might be another Samantha – someone who would love me as her own, someone I could love dutifully with whatever was left of that dwindling commodity that was my heart.

Just after 7:30pm, we donned our salt-and-pepper uniforms and walked around – in the road this time, as juniors – to Mitchell Hall and the reception area run by the Hostess. It was a large area on the south end of the building with couches and easy chairs and a large glass door opening up onto a patio. When we arrived, the place was filled with nursing students and gradually becoming populated by cadets.

As Sean and I walked through the crowd, I looked over at him to make some comment and felt myself bump into someone. I reflexively stepped back, apologized for my clumsiness, and looked into a pair of sweet brown eyes a few inches below mine. Fearfully, I looked deep within them; and to my relief, I saw nothing threatening. But they were beautiful.

"You're excused, cadet," she said grandly with a playful nod of her head in ironic imitation of royalty. Right off the bat, I decided that here was a possibility. She had a very pretty face and short, bobbed brown hair, an appealing, if not perfect, figure, an up-turned nose, and an air of being in control. Of all her attributes, it was primarily that last one that drew me to her.

Like me, she was there with a friend – her roommate. That revelation would prove to be enough to scare Sean off and leave me alone with both of them. Her roommate was my height with red hair and pretty blue-gray eyes. She was thin and had an aquiline nose that fit her particularly attractively.

"If you're not going to introduce yourself," the first one took charge in a broad, aristocratic Southern accent, "then I'll break all proper protocol and give you my name. I'm Eliza Beth – not Elizabeth! – Eliza Beth Jasper. I'll have you know that I'm related to the famous Sergeant William Jasper, defender of Sullivan's Island in the War for Independence – I believe you've seen his picture defending the ramparts in a painting in Jasper Hall – and martyr of Savannah, where he held the ramparts bravely until his tragic death in 1779. My family lives in a colonial-era house in Savannah just off Madison Square within sight of the Jasper monument."

"And I'm her sidekick," chimed in her roommate with an obviously affected aristocratic accent (but no less genuinely Southern), "Melanie Joyce of Beaufort, South Carolina. I'm not related to James, or for that matter, to Ulysses – as far as I know."

I briefly gave my name and turned to Melanie. Despite her fascinating blue-gray eyes – or perhaps because of them – I decided not to look deeply for fear of what I might find there. But she had a sense of humor that drew me to her nonetheless. "To Ulysses the Greek or to Ulysses the Grant?" I asked, suppressing a grin.

"Why to Ulysses the Greek, of course," she instantly retorted. "I'd never, never admit to not being related to a Yankee!"

Recognizing someone with my somewhat rare sense of humor, I ventured to affect a British accent and attempt a joke. "I say, I say, I say. Did you hear about the English major?"

"The English major?" she replied in an accent straight off the BBC's old Goon Show. "You mean Major Bloodnok?"

"No, no, no! An English major in college," I corrected in feigned impatience.

"I didn't know that Bloodnok ever attended college. Did he buy a Cambridge tie?"

"Hm!" I vocalized with pursed lips. "Have you heard about the nursing student?"

"Ohhhh?" she uttered in overstated surprise.

"Yes, the one who tried to get a construction job in the summer. The foreman didn't believe he knew anything about construction so he gave him a test. What's the difference between a girder and a joist?"

"A girder and a joist, you say?"

"Yes, so the English major replies ..."

"Major Bloodnok?"

"No, the one majoring in nursing"

"Ah!"

"That's easy, girder wrote *Faust*, and joist wrote *Ulysses*."

"Iiiii don't wish to know that!"

"No, neither do I!" And we both erupted into a round of chuckles – not so much for the well-worn old joke, but for the experience of sharing it.

"Children! Children! Children, please!" Eliza Beth chastised us. "Melanie, you do bring out the utter worst in people. Here I was getting interested in this nice young cadet with his Gold Stars and his sergeant's chevrons. And you have to go and bring out the silliness in him!" She did laugh, but I picked up on a genuine interest in her voice and in her looks at me.

"Now," she continued on, "Let's start all over. I'm Eliza Beth – not Elizabeth. But some people like to call me EB, with the accent on the first letter. Which do you prefer, young man?"

I looked at her thoughtfully and replied emphatically, "Eliza Beth."

"That's wonderful!" she said with more enthusiasm than I had been expecting. "That's exactly what I'd hoped you'd say," and she sidled around and grasped my right arm with both of

hers, squeezing it tightly but a moment, before dutifully returning to her position next to Melanie. For some reason, Melanie had caught her breath when Eliza Beth asked her question, and then she released it audibly at my answer.

As I spoke with them together, I somehow knew that one of them would have a profound impact on my life. I just did not know which one it would be, or why. Both of them connected with me in very different ways. And both of them seemed to be vying for me, but doing so on a more abstract plane. Melanie made an immediate connection with me deep inside, which is why, I realized, that I was so hesitant to look into her eyes, attractive as they were. It was as though our souls could very well slip together – if I would but let them.

Eliza Beth, on the other hand, was far more aggressive, and she seemed determined to win me over. Her flowing words seemed designed to set me at ease while creating an atmosphere in which her gestures would have the greatest effect, such as her frequently touching my arm and, of course, the squeeze.

We must have talked – the three of us – for the better part of an hour, for Eliza Beth pointed behind me to the patio and exclaimed, “Look, the moon is coming up.” She was in the last stages of fullness and in her light, the trees cast deep, dark shadows across the patio.

At last, Eliza Beth made her move. She wrapped her arms once more around my arm, but this time she gently tugged me toward the patio door. “Let’s go see!” she exclaimed in a bubbly voice. But Melanie did not follow.

Alone on the patio, Eliza Beth inspected me by moonlight. She circled me sunwise three times, checking me out as though she were The Colonel. “Gold Stars – that’s very good. You have rank – good, good. ... And my, you are handsome,” she whispered playfully, causing my face to turn a deep shade of red. “But you’re a Yankee,” she added sadly.

“Actually, I’m from Maryland,” I pointed out hopefully, realizing as soon as I said it that I had just played into her hand – but also realizing that that was really quite all right.

She looked at me slightly askance, but still with a playful air about her. “Do you have a girlfriend you’re hiding away somewhere?”

“No,” I laughed, and I noted that she was carefully weighing the kind of laugh.

“Well you have one now,” she informed me. “And I refuse to be hidden!”

Of course, I realized that she had made her claim veiled in so much jest that I could, without loss of face to either of us, have gone back in and chosen Melanie, or anyone else for that matter. But what she had done in jest, I had craved in earnest.

For the rest of October, we saw each other every weekend. We shared a common joy in walking, especially through the antiquated streets of Charleston south of Broad. You could have seen us frequently strolling hand-in-hand through those old portions of the city. She would point out particularly beautiful houses and promise that when the restoration of Savannah was complete, her city would be every bit as gorgeous.

We did not talk deeply about our feelings. From time to time, I could tell that she had suffered from an experience that may, in some way, have been similar to mine. Certainly, something made her sad now and then, when we would pass by some spot in Charleston that was laden with a painful memory for her. And occasionally, she would take both my hands and gently inform me that there was a tear in my eye.

Soon in our wanderings around the stately houses of Charleston, we found our spot – a bench on the southeastern corner of Colonial Lake. There we could gaze across the little lake, which

looked something like the reflecting pool in Washington, and see the palmettos and houses mirrored in the water. In the evening, it was well lit and safe – there were always people promenading around it, although we seldom noticed them. We talked, but never about the pain in her face or the tear in my eye.

On Saturday evening, 29 October, we sat in our spot on Colonial Lake, and I told her about my dream of being the SMG – the Sergeant of the Propylaea – back on the evening before I reported for the year (I left out the part of the Regimental Commander). As it happened, I had been assigned that duty for the first time the night before, and I had been looking forward all day to telling her of my experience.

“I had the midnight shift,” I said, “so a few minutes before twelve, I got on my uniform with the waist plate and white gloves and headed down to the guard room. The Officer of the Guard let me out the sally port and leaned back against the side of the personal gate in the archway’s closed general gate to wait for the old SMG to return.

“As a member of the guard, I was allowed the privilege usually reserved for seniors of walking across the parade ground. The moon was full, as it is now, but just past her zenith, and she darted in and out between the clouds. This made sharp shadows under the trees,” I said pointedly, hoping she would remember the night we met.

“About a third of the way across, I heard this whooshing noise that started up constant then became intermittent – whoosh-whoosh-whoosh-whoosh. The automatic sprinklers were coming on! Luckily, they started out behind me, and I set out in a jog and then a sprint, as the whoosh-whoosh-whooshing came closer and closer with each new bank of sprinklers joining in.

“I reached the street right in front of the Library and took a leap onto it – just in front of the last bank of sprinklers. Way back behind me, I could hear the laughter of the OG in Second Battalion, and that was joined by the old SMG and by me. Though I was as much relieved as amused.”

Eliza Beth smiled faintly. Something had been bothering her, and I had the feeling that my story, far from cheering her up, made the memory more painful. “Well,” she finally said, clearly searching for something to say, “that’s what you get for taking a privilege that isn’t really yours.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she hurriedly added when she saw the disappointment in my face. “That’s a good story, really. Good, and funny, and ...” she broke off in a sad stare out across the lake. She shifted around and looked into my eyes, “I’m just out of sorts tonight. Please forgive me.

“Now, next weekend,” she quickly recovered, pressing my hands in between hers, “I have to go to Columbia for two weeks. I declare, your friend Mr Sherman could have done a much better job burning down that up-state, up-start city. Anyway, I have to do an internship at the state mental hospital, and I’m afraid it’s going to drive me crazy. Please do come visit me the weekend after. I’m sorry I’m just not good company tonight. I’ll make up for it then.”

She leaned over and kissed me tenderly. We both felt each other’s tear merging on our lips, and we sat back and laughed sadly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

COLUMBIA WITH ELIZA BETH

In spite of my two earlier visits to the city, I did not know Columbia very well at all. I was especially at a loss when it came to downtown. Where was the state mental hospital, anyway?

Knowing that Brent Larsen came from Columbia, I went down to E Company to visit my friend and fellow épéeist on the fencing team.

"Sure, I know where it is. You thinkin' of checkin' in?" he asked with a grin.

"No," I replied, smiling at his remark, "I need to go to visit Eliza Beth. She'll be working there as a nursing intern," I added quickly and a bit more loudly to head off the obvious retort.

"Well," he pondered, "I won't be goin' home this weekend, but I will be next weekend."

"That's when I'm planning to go," I said with relief – Brent had a car. "Could I get a ride from you to some motel reasonably close to the hospital?"

"Better than that," he exclaimed, "you can stay at my house. We have an extra room and my mother loves it when I bring friends home. It's kinda lonely there since my father passed away. And besides, it's right on the bus line that takes you to the hospital. ... And to Eliza Beth," he added tentatively, "You sure you don't need to check in there?"

"She's a nice girl!" I insisted with a broad, embarrassed smile. Such comments were common cadet practice, not to be taken offense at.

We both requested "long" weekend leaves, from after parade on Friday to retreat on Sunday. This got us in a bit too late to see Eliza Beth on Friday, and I was not sure when she would be off duty, anyway. I had written her and given her Brent's phone number in hopes she would leave a message. There was no message when we arrived early in the evening, so Brent and I went into the city, and he showed me where the hospital was in relation to everything else of interest, and what bus line to take.

When we returned, Mrs Larsen, a large happy woman with an infectious smile and hearty laugh, greeted us at the door. She could hardly contain herself when she saw me. She clasped her hands together in front of her and announced more than asked, "Do you know a Miss Eliza Beth?"

"Yes," I answered, smiling both at her demeanor and the prospect of a message.

"She called and asked if this is where Brent lived. I said it was and she declared, 'Well, he has my fiancé, and I want him!'"

"Oh," I replied laughing along with Brent and his mother. "Did she tell you when?"

Mrs Larsen straightened up and affected Eliza Beth's accent – and accompanying mannerism, "At twelve o'clock, noon, sharp, young man!"

That night, I lay awake for some time replaying over and over in my mind the part of the message, "Well, he has my fiancé, and I want him." I was her fiancé. I was her fiancé. And she wanted me. She wanted me. This put everything into a new light. I now had a new identity – I was Eliza Beth's fiancé – and I was thrilled by it all.

At one point in my meditation over that one sentence, something odd occurred to me, but I could not figure out what it was. It was like a memory from some other time, some other place. It

had to do with someone's identity, and it bothered me. I shoved the thought back out of my mind again and reassured myself, "I am Eliza Beth's fiancé, and she wants me."

The next day, at twelve o'clock, noon, sharp, Brent let me off in front of the state hospital. Eliza Beth was already coming out the door. She skipped up to me and threw her arms around my neck. "It's so good to see you," she asserted. "This place is indeed driving me nuts. Let's get outta here."

The weather was warm for early November, and we went out to lunch at a little coffee house near the hospital. Then we strolled down the street, looking in shop windows and enjoying each other's company. I took some pictures of her with my little instamatic camera – she was radiant with joy.

After a while, we came up to a movie theater that was just about to show Doctor Zhivago, and we rushed in. During the movie, she grasped my arm with both her hands, as she had done that first evening in Mitchell Hall, and she scooted her knees up and pressed them against my leg. She seemed so worn down by her experience at the state mental hospital that it failed to take me by surprise when I heard her slow steady breathing and realized that she had fallen asleep, still clutching me close. I placed my cheek on the top of her head, stroking it gently and relishing my new identity – I was her fiancé, and she wanted me.

At the end of the movie, Eliza Beth awoke with a start at the lights in the theater. Then she looked into my eyes so softly and lovingly that I nearly melted. She smiled sweetly, as she extricated herself from her cuddling position, leaned over, and kissed me on the cheek.

When we came out of the movie theater, she suggested that we go over to the State House to watch the sunset. We sat on the southeastern corner of the grounds, like we did at Colonial Lake, as the sun descended next to the capitol.

"You see all the stars on the building?" she asked, pointing out several of them as we sat in each other's arms. "Those are where General Sherman's artillery poked holes in the State House. It's a shame he had to march through South Carolina – it's such beautiful country, you know. But if he had to, I wish he'd have left the State House alone and demolished the state hospital instead."

I smiled and looked at the growing glow of red that was spreading transparently next to the building. It was the softest, yet the most exhilarating sunset I had ever witnessed, and I felt thankful to see it with Eliza Beth in my arms.

"Here, just a minute," I said, as I took my right arm from around her and reached into my pocket. She looked a bit disappointed that I had taken my arm away, but the look of disappointment vanished when I took out a small light blue box.

Suddenly I felt embarrassed. Although it looked brand new, it was a used pin. But then again, I was a used cadet. "I'd like you to have this," I offered, "it's a ..."

"Oh, I know what it is! I know what it is!" she interrupted. She threw both arms around my neck and pressed her lips firmly against mine, as though she never wanted them to part.

"Excuse me," said the old grounds keeper, who came up behind us. "I hate to interrupt you, but it gets a bit dangerous out here after dark. Last week a couple was brick-batted right around here."

We thanked the old gentleman and rose to leave. The pin called for a good dinner somewhere nice, and we were about to turn back to the road when I looked at the sunset and exclaimed, "Look! Look at the moon!"

Within the expanse of soft red, a dark moon was following the sun so closely that she seemed to etch out a hole in the edge of his wake through the light diaphanous film of clouds. I stood there transfixed.

“You’re such a romantic,” Eliza Beth laughed to me and pulled me back toward the road.

After dinner, I rushed her back to the hospital just before her curfew. We kissed one last, long time in the doorway, and she hurried in. I strolled out to the road and caught what turned out to be the very last bus that could take me back to Brent’s house.

On the way, I looked out the window at all the people still walking back and forth on the streets of Columbia. It was Veterans’ Day weekend, with Christmas just around the corner, and there was a festive feel to the air. The first of the Christmas displays were already making their appearance in some of the shops. Then, a sad thought entered my mind. I seemed to see myself as Yuri, looking out the streetcar window for Lara in a now alien world. A tear came to my eye.

I wondered if the moon had been a premonition of some emptiness to follow. No, I assured myself, I was Eliza Beth’s fiancé, and she wanted me.

But she never said that to me directly. And as far as I know, she never said it again at all.

When I got back to my room the next afternoon, well before retreat, Ryan was sitting at his desk polishing his shoes. “So how’d it go?” he inquired cheerfully.

“It was great,” I said, plopping down on my chair, a dreamy smile on my face.

“So I see,” he observed laughing. “What all did you do? You can spare the lurid details if you wish.”

“Not all that much,” I admitted, ignoring his last comment, “we only had the afternoon and evening. We did get out to see Doctor Zhivago, though.”

“Doctor Zhivago!” Ryan exclaimed with a big smile. He burst into song: “Somewhere my love, there will be snow on the ground.” Then he broke into his own singing to observe earnestly, “Boy, there’s a lot of snow in that movie.”

Still reeling a bit from my premonition and my feeling on the bus from the night before, I felt taken aback that in all that emotion, in all that love and loss, the only thing Ryan seemed to care about was the snow. To be sure, the snow scenes were spectacular, but they also represented a huge amount of turmoil.

But as usual, I had underestimated him. He paused in his shoe shining but tactfully did not look over at me. “You doin’ all right?” he asked with a low voice and high eyebrows.

He was getting to know me well, and to know how sometimes certain things might affect me. He did not know about Mary, but I felt rather sure he had figured out that something had happened before Samantha – something that kept following me around.

Now, however, with my new identity fixed firmly in Eliza Beth, I hoped that I could start that part of my life afresh.

As for my other classmates, there was a growing dissatisfaction and concern that was now clear to me as I trekked back from Eliza Beth’s and my beloved Colonial Lake in April. I recalled that on weekend evenings when she had clinic duty and I was free to go out with them, I found myself not doing this or that for fear that Eliza Beth might not approve. When classmates introduced their girlfriends along with their girlfriends’ girl friends, I found myself avoiding talking to them for fear that Eliza Beth might think my talking with unattached young ladies inappropriate.

I also recalled that they would even make comments, such as, “Ever since you got together with Eliza Beth, you’ve been awfully hard to connect with.” That one came up several times from different friends.

When I had placed pictures I had taken of her in Columbia under the plastic sheet on my desk blotter, several times classmates would come in and make disparaging comments about her – not the usual comments that cadets routinely made, those at least bordering on the lewd, but more sincere comments about whether I really knew what I had gotten myself into.

Clearly, they were concerned for me in my attachment to – and isolation in – Eliza Beth. At the time, I had simply dismissed these comments as jealousy that I had a girl in Charleston. Now I could see clearly that what my friends were concerned with was that a girl in Charleston had me. And what toll that might ultimately have taken on what they perceived to be an old wound in my psyche. Yes, they knew me far better than I was aware of.

I hurried on all the more urgently to get back to the safety of the barracks, where my friends were.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE FENCING WITH THE GENERAL

When I had returned from Columbia, there was a little envelope with the Acropolis seal lying on my desk. Ryan had no idea where it had come from or who had put it there. In fact, he had not even noticed it before. But when I took down my books to prepare for Monday's classes, there it was, stuck partially under the padded top portion of my desk blotter. It was a special "invitation" to interview the President of The Acropolis at 3:00pm – 1500 hours Acropolis time – Monday afternoon, 14 November.

The next morning, I borrowed a maroon sash from Munro and arranged to have his thete "wrap" me in it at 2:30. I had wrapped Mr Wilson and sometimes Mr Ford thete year often enough that I remembered how it was done. But it was a rather difficult task to accomplish alone, and, of course, for the General it had to be perfect.

Precisely at 1500 hours, I stood in front of Colonel Demetri's desk in the full dress uniform with sash required by protocol. I saluted and reported as ordered. Usually, we were not quite so formal with each other, but General Augustin was in his office with his door open just to my right, and he was expecting me. As my eyes darted beneath my saluting hand, I could just discern the General's features as he sat behind his desk. I was startled to note that the glance revealed a tall, fair gentleman who seemed to be the mirror image of the Augustin I had seen previously. As my hand dropped, he changed back to the familiar figure. Did I somehow dream it?

Colonel Demetri returned the salute with the snappy gestures of a Marine, but also with a sly smile – the General could not see that. He walked around his desk, stood behind me, and placed his left hand on my right shoulder. "You ready for this?" he whispered surreptitiously.

I had no idea what he meant by that, and I could not see his face to tell if he was frowning or smiling (I suspected the former on the outside but the latter on the inside). "Yes, sir," I answered smartly but quietly.

"Good luck, Cadet," he whispered with notable irony as he guided me, still holding on to my shoulder from behind, into the office of Lieutenant General Julius "Caesar" Augustin.

"Well, well, well, Cadet," the General exclaimed broadly, standing and offering his hand before I had a chance to salute and report. I wondered if my salute to Colonel Demetri through the open door sufficed, but I was not sure, so I saluted and extended my hand in one, self-conscious and unsure gesture. He seemed amused at my awkwardness. It occurred to me later – and Colonel Demetri laughed and confirmed my suspicions – that General Augustin had crafted and carefully orchestrated the confusion in order to take charge of the interview. Here was an individual firmly in control of PR, and for that reason, military competence aside, he had earned his nickname.

"I see you found my little note. I was hoping the OG had put it in an obvious place," he said with a broad smile as he sat back down and motioned me to do the same. He was a tall man – as Herm had predicted, not much less in height than General Mitchell. But where General Mitchell had been gaunt, General Augustin appeared to be well fed enough. His eyes and features were dark, a mixture of Levantine and Byzantine, as was his nature.

“Yes, sir. It was on my desk,” I answered, ill at ease.

“Not ‘Yes, sir’, Cadet,” he tossed in, apparently also in keeping with his finely tuned sense of PR control, “I’m a general officer. I see from your expression that you’re not used to speaking with creatures such as I,” he laughed, ascertaining quite correctly. “With a general officer, you say, ‘Yes, general.’”

“Yes, s ... general,” I replied awkwardly. In spite of his efforts at congeniality, I was not taking a liking to him. I did not appreciate his pompous manner and his thick Yankee accent, which was far thicker than mine. My accent set me off as a Yankee to Southerners and a Southerner to Yankees. The General was a Yankee’s Yankee – what we called a grim Yankee.

“I understand you’re a German major, Cadet,” he said, looking at me intently and using my name carefully. “I’ve got something here that you might find of interest,” he added as he reached over to the side of his desk and picked up a swagger stick – the same one he could always be seen flourishing around campus.

I took the swagger stick and looked at it. It was not the usual piece of kitsch with the bullet-head point and the cartridge top. Rather, it was made of real wood and sported brilliant, but worn sterling silver fittings. I examined the ferrule at the top and saw an old German imperial eagle from the Second Empire spread proudly within an engraved inscription in the traditional German Fraktur script: “Wilhelm von Gottes Gnaden König von Preussen – 1871.” On the other side of the ferrule was an inscription in Roman letters, which the Germans called Antiqua: “Pour le mérite.”

“I’ll bet you can read both those inscriptions, Cadet,” he boasted for me. But I was already suspicious and on my guard.

“Yes, sir – I mean, general,” I replied, almost throwing in another “sir” after the “general.” “The German states ‘William by the Grace of God King of Prussia – 1871’ and the French is ‘For Valor.’”

“And what do think it means?” he asked, almost rhetorically but still requiring some answer.

“Well, general,” I replied carefully, “it appears to have been awarded to someone high in the Prussian army or in one of the allied German armies upon the victory over the French in the Franco-Prussian War. The date coincides with the treaty signed at Versailles, so it was probably awarded in the Hall of Mirrors in recognition of the transition from the independent German states to the Empire.”

“Very good, Cadet,” he said tersely, as he retrieved the swagger stick and sat back cradling it. Colonel Vaughn would have jumped up and applauded me for such a perspicuous response, but General Augustin was not a professor and seemed miffed that a lowly cadet would have given the answer he was poised to triumphantly present.

Quickly recovering, he went on to brag, “Yes, Cadet, you hit the nail right on the head. But of course, the King, soon to be proclaimed Kaiser, had nothing to do with it. It was his prime minister Bismarck who used such baubles to win over the upper echelons of the military – and who, I might had, used some rather pointed threats to their governments.” He emphasized this last point by jabbing the swagger stick in the air.

“And how did you come by it, general?” I asked, now genuinely interested as well as hoping to recover from my previous brilliance.

“Ah,” he said, raising his left index finger. “I was going to get to that. It was right after the Battle of the Bulge,” he leaned back in his large leather chair and started tapping his left palm

with the swagger stick. I tried to show no emotion except admiration, although I remembered very well the “PR lesson” Colonel Demetri had “not” given me the previous spring.

“We were rounding up prisoners from the front,” he continued, not stating how far from the front he actually had been. “And I came face-to-face with a German Oberst – a colonel of the dreaded Nazi Wehrmacht,” he said with a gravity that I was sure usually impressed his audiences, although I knew full well that the Wehrmacht was simply the army and had no particular connection with the National Socialist Party. Indeed, its officers tended to distrust and hate the Waffen SS – the real dread.

“I saw this colonel and grabbed hold of his tunic. ‘How did you get here with that?’ I demanded, looking down at what could, in the hands of a fanatically crazed Nazi, be a lethal weapon. I was frankly appalled that no one before me had confiscated the thing.” If you dismissed his histrionic presentation with its threatening tones and grand gestures, you could see right through it and discover Colonel Demetri’s version of events. So this was the famous weapon.

“Well, I’ll tell you one thing,” he went on with force and conviction, “I grabbed it out of his hand before he could do any damage with it.

“But sir – general,” I said with a sudden sympathy for the old German colonel. “That swagger stick must have been in his family for generations. Why didn’t you return it to him after he was released?”

“Oh, he begged for it,” the General bragged. “He even cried – the wimp! But I taught him an important phrase that all those Krauts needed to remember and remember well, ‘To the victor belong the spoils!’” and he thumped his left fist on his desk.

“But general,” I doggedly continued, feeling the robbery of a treasured heirloom as though it had been my own, “it was his family’s.”

“Are you suggesting, Cadet,” he growled, sitting up straight and wagging the swagger stick at me, “are you suggesting that I acted ... unethically?”

With my sympathy for the old Wehrmacht colonel mixing with a loathing for the *miles gloriosus* in front of me, I affirmed, “Yes, general, I am.”

“What?” he exploded in a fit of rage. “How dare you question me? You’re just a pipsqueak cadet from a poor backwater Southern redneck imitation of West Point. I’m a three-star general. You understand? A three-star general!”

I sat braced – and practically bracing – against the hurricane of rage that swept from his chair to mine. I had no recollection of all that he said to me after that, but it ended abruptly with, “Good afternoon, Cadet! Close the door on the way out!”

I stood, walked to the door, swung around smartly and saluted stiffly, “Good afternoon, general.”

Once I had closed the door, Colonel Demetri and Mrs Appleton leapt to my side. In silence the Colonel shook my hand as firmly as my father had at the beginning of the year, and Mrs Appleton hugged me as tightly as had my mother. I was embarrassed by her action, because although she was considerably older than I, she was not my mother (and not nearly as old as my mother either) and she was very attractive. I wondered if Eliza Beth would approve or find it weird and unacceptable. And then, true to form, I worried that I worried about it.

The next day, I reported to the old Gymnasium for fencing. I had missed the opening practice of the season because of my “interview” with the General. When I got there, all my teammates

cheered and gathered around me, slapping me on the shoulder. I wondered if the news of my standing up to Augustin had traveled so fast, but that was not the reason.

"All hail the new épée captain," announced Sean and Brent in unison.

"Uh?" was all that I could manage in the too-swift shifting of gears.

"We voted you in yesterday," I heard someone say behind me.

"Oh, and by the way," mentioned Captain Stockman, the fencing coach. He was at least as short as I was, with a close-cropped flattop of wiry blond hair over a square muscular face and body. "You and Sean, the new saber captain, will have to share duties as team cocaptains."

I was touched and stood there with my mouth open for what seemed like minutes, but was probably just a few seconds. "Well," I said, trying to regain my equanimity, "if this is what happens when you miss practice, maybe I should miss more often."

"Not so fast, Cadet," laughed the coach, and I could not help but contrast the friendly, familiar way he pronounced my name with what I had heard the previous day, both before and after the tirade. "Suit up and let's get started. You have a whole day to catch up on!"

I looked around and finally asked the coach, "Where's Harold Prichard, sir? Isn't he fencing this year?" It occurred to me that with his expertise in foil, and as a senior, he should have been captain of the team.

"Afraid not," Captain Stockman answered with some regret in his voice. "He said *The Bugler* has just come to demand too much of his time."

It was not until Thursday that I ventured back to see Colonel Demetri. It was time for a press release, and I slipped quietly into his office. I peeked around the door to the General's office, trying to see if he was in.

"It's okay, Cadet," Colonel Demetri laughed, "the ogre's out." Then he stood up, walked around his desk, and sat down on it with his right leg dangling and added gleefully, "But let me tell you what happened after the ... incident."

Mrs Appleton propped her head in her hands, looking forward to hearing it all over again. The photographer, Major Carolus was also there and chuckled, "Gotta go take some pictures," as he slipped out of the office.

The new assistant secretary, Miss North, nervously started to file papers that probably did not need filing. She obviously did not want to hear anything she might have to deny later, so Mrs Appleton glanced up at her, still cradling her chin in her hands, and suggested, "Why don't you go over and see if the printer has that brochure ready? You know, the draft about next year's quasiquicentennial?" Miss North heaved a sigh of relief and beat a hasty retreat.

"Right after your 'interview'," the Colonel began, "Caesar complained of pains in his stomach. It appears that for the first time in his life, he had gastric pains so bad he almost had to cancel one of his fund-raising meetings with some corporation or other. Seems like that's become his main job nowadays. Always hush-hush about it, too."

Suddenly, he looked at me – or perhaps a bit past me – askance, as though something very disturbing were just beginning to dawn on him. I almost asked him what was wrong, but he shook his head reflexively and held up his hand.

"First thing the next morning," he continued now with a mischievous smile that would not budge, "he drags me over to Jasper Hall and bursts into General Butler's office." Brigadier General Butler was a short, dark man and a distinguished military veteran, having led troops both in overt and in covert operations for the Army. He was a no-nonsense Commandant, who

emphasized his points by banging the ground with his cane, which he used as a result of his last covert (but fairly well-known) campaign in Laos.

“General Augustin flew into as much of a tirade about you as he had to you. But General Butler just remained seated and stared at him with incredulous curiosity. Finally, when Augustin demanded that Butler discipline you, Butler just looked at him calmly and said, ‘I can’t discipline him. You were in an interview and he could expect the privilege of speaking frankly. Besides, I know his record, and he’s a model cadet.’

“Well, the Lieutenant General just stood there and stared at the Brigadier. I suppose it did compound his frustration that Butler was wearing his Army uniform and not an Acropolis faculty uniform. Faced with such insubordination, Augustin just spluttered and fumed. ‘What’s the world coming to,’ he shouted, ‘when one star trumps three?’

“But Butler was unmoved. It probably didn’t help matters for Augustin that Butler had somehow – I really can’t say how – learned of that little remark about The Acropolis. And I’m sure,” Colonel Demetri added, reaching over and patting my shoulder, “that no one on the Board of Visitors would approve of it either. If that be necessary.”

That Sunday afternoon, I rushed right after chapel to the Nursing College to see Eliza Beth, who had returned from Columbia the evening before. There was so much to share with her – the confrontation with the General and its aftermath, the honor and respect shown me by my teammates. That, added to my cherished new identity as her fiancé whom she wanted (although that still remained unsaid between us), made me giddy.

As we strolled along Colonial Lake, I told her about the incident with General Augustin. But she just looked cross and said, “Why, you shouldn’t have spoken to a General that way! If I’d been the Commandant, I’d have had you in for a good tongue-lashing.”

I was crushed, and I suppose I showed it, because she looked up at me full of regret and said, “Oh, no! I’m sorry. I’ve done that before, haven’t I? It’s just that sometimes I get ... out of sorts, and ... I just blurt out the wrong things – things that Eliza Beth would never, never, ever dream of saying, things that she really doesn’t believe at all.”

At that moment, we reached our bench and sat down, holding each other’s hands. She leaned over and kissed me tenderly on the lips and looked into my eyes imploringly. “I really am sorry. That just wasn’t me talking. Please believe me.”

It became a pattern that worried me more and more. She would berate me or take sides against me, and then she would apologize sincerely and earnestly. I could not bring myself to ask her what was wrong, for I was just too afraid that I would lay bare some wound that cut her as deeply as mine cut me. And I was afraid – terribly afraid – I might lose her. I did care about her, and I truly did love her – more than anyone except Mary ... and that would never be. Sure, I was aware that she would make a good match for a military officer, now that I had signed my contract with the Army, and that certainly played a part in my holding on to her so tightly. But she meant so much more to me. So much more. How much of that was determined by her willingness – indeed her eagerness – to possess me exclusively, I could not say. Indeed, I was not willing to admit that to myself. Perhaps I was still caught up in the quest for the jealous goddess.

Stumbling along through the cool April air, I remembered us sitting there on the bench – and her sweet, sorrowful kiss. I recalled with pain in my heart that it had been just five months before, as I made my way back from Colonial Lake and from our bench for the very last time.

CHAPTER THIRTY

PAUL HERMANN AND THE DOOMSDAY SCENARIO

When I returned to my room after walking Eliza Beth back to the Nursing College that Sunday before Thanksgiving, I looked down the gallery and noticed Owen Hughes walking toward me. He had another cadet with him and they were talking animatedly. They continued walking and talking and followed me right into my room. Ryan had not yet returned from general leave, since there was still more than an hour before retreat.

"This is a friend of mine, Paul Hermann," Owen said. I gave him my name and shook hands with him. He was a tall, intense young man with dark wavy brown hair and eyes to match. Although he was very military-looking in a spotless and shiny uniform and with an erect and proud bearing, he was a senior private, and I found that incongruent. He reminded me of Herm Poynter, and I found it curious that he had the same last name as Herm's first name. At least, I had always assumed that Herm was short for Herman, though I supposed it could have been something else as well. For some reason, that thought made me flinch, and I jerked my head to the side involuntarily, as though to look over my right shoulder.

"You okay?" Paul asked.

"Yeah," I answered, rather confused myself, "something just struck me as odd. It's okay. Doesn't have anything to do with you two."

"Paul's a political science major," Owen continued with the introduction, "and he has a theory on the Literalists in the ACF. I thought you might find it interesting. Anyway, I'd kinda like your read on it."

"Okay," I said with a smile and a nod to Paul, "shoot!" I had no idea what kind of take he might have in what appeared to me to be a bizarre situation, but I was certainly willing, if not eager to find out. We sat down on the chairs, and Owen leaned up against Ryan's desk.

"You're a German major, right?" he asked, and I nodded. "Well, can you tell me what the fatal flaw was in the constitution of the Weimar Republic?"

"Sure," I answered. "Every party that received votes had to be represented in the Reichstag proportionally, with no required minimum for representation. This meant that there were so many little parties that they couldn't be welded together into any kind of effective coalition."

"So how did Hitler exploit the situation?"

"The Nazis had the largest party, but President Hindenburg was suspicious of the Austrian corporal and wouldn't call on Hitler to form a government. So Hitler dealt with the small parties to vote 'no' on every important bill – the 'negative majority.' Nothing could get through the Reichstag, and governments kept being defeated in votes of confidence. After he'd gone through the more palatable options, Hindenburg had no choice but to appoint Hitler Chancellor, hoping all the while that the Nazis couldn't do anything with the mess either. But right before an election, Reichstag was burned down. Hitler blamed it on his Communist enemies, convinced the German people they were under attack, and he and his coalition allies were voted in by a majority. From there, he used perfectly legal means to attain his goal – 'the whole power.'"

"Really?" Owen exclaimed. "I always thought he was a madman who gained power by some kind of *coup d'état*."

“No,” Paul asserted. “Now, he did pass a ‘Reichstag fire bill’ that allowed him vast anti-terror powers he used to close opposition papers – those that hadn’t already been closed by intimidation from his brown-shirted thugs – and even to imprison Communists, but this was too close to the election, anyway. No, he was a democratically elected leader who was enthusiastically supported and loved by a majority of the Germans right up to the end of the Fascist state in 1945. Of course, Germans today aren’t terribly willing to admit that. And in their defense, I would add that they were bombarded with a steady diet of ‘good news’ from conservative papers, and by the terror of ‘disappearances’ – all perfectly legal, of course. Don’t forget, by the way, that they weren’t used to democracy and valued their safety far above their rights and freedoms.”

“The people of Goethe,” I added ironically.

“Okay,” concluded Paul. “But now can you tell me what the potentially fatal flaw is in the U.S. Constitution?”

“No problem – the Electoral College. Several times already, candidates for President have lost the popular vote and have been elected anyway because they had a strategic distribution of the states.”

“That’s right,” he said with some surprise. Evidently, he had not expected me to know that one, since I was not a political science major.

“In high school,” I explained, “I spoke against the same type of system used by the student government for class elections. If by some quirk of fate, 99% of the students in 10 sections were for candidate A, and 51% of students in 11 sections were in favor of candidate B, then candidate B would win regardless of the fact that candidate A had a clear majority of the votes. The system could thwart the will of the majority – not just of a thin majority, but of an overwhelming majority”

“And this brings us to the ACF,” continued Paul. “I’m sure you were wondering when it would.” I nodded. “Do you think that the sentiments expressed by Christopher Adams and the Literalists represent the ideas of the ACF, its contributing churches, or for that matter churches throughout the country?”

“I certainly hope not,” I replied emphatically.

“What happens when they get more of their radical friends to join the ACF?”

“Moderates get out and the balance of power shifts to the Literalists. We see that happening already, and there’s not much we can do about it.”

“Do all of the moderates get out?”

“Well, probably not all. But those who remain know that if they stay in with the futile hope that they can regain any say in things, they’ll be a minority and will have to put up with the radicals in charge. I’d guess that most of them will go to other organizations where they’re still in the majority though.”

“Ah, but what happens when the radicals strike the next organization?”

“I see where you’re going, Paul, and it won’t work. ... It’s not turtles all the way down, you know,” I added as a joke for the political scientist. Owen just stared blankly as Paul smiled. I went on, “There just aren’t enough of them to take over most, or even a sizable portion of the organizations.”

“In a democratic system, though, they don’t have to,” he retorted. “All of the organizations compete in a sort of Electoral College in the free market of ideas for the majority vote of organizations. To put it more crassly, there’s a budget that the council of organizations votes on.

And whoever makes the budget sets the agenda.” He added wryly, “He who makes the budget, takes the budget.”

I answered with the same wryness, “And he who sets the budget, gets the budget. But they still need 51% of a bare majority of organizations, and that’s a real stretch. Remember, many of the moderates have left the organization that was taken over to join the others, and that will bolster the number of moderates in these other organizations, making it harder for the radicals to take them over.

“Okay. Tell me,” he added pointedly, “what other religious organization have you joined?”

“Hm!” I stalled. He had me there. “But still. I can’t see them taking even 51% of a sizable number of organizations.”

“They don’t need to. Let’s say there are two camps vying for control – it always seems to degenerate to that in a democratic system. The one ‘party’ has nineteen groups behind it, the other has seventeen. But there’s this little group of three controlled by radicals like your Literalists. Who controls the agenda? Each ‘party’ will be so eager to gain the three, that they’ll be willing to jettison the will of their own groups. After all, their own groups have nowhere else to go; and if they don’t get the support of the three, they’ll give power over to their opponents. In effect, they allow the three to set the agenda – and the budget – for everyone. That’s why South Carolina will soon be firmly in the camp of the Republican Party.”

“That’s preposterous!” I exclaimed. “South Carolina hasn’t voted Republican since Reconstruction. There’s hardly a more Democratic state in the entire country. Certainly not outside the South.”

“Are all South Carolinians Democrats?” he asked calmly.

“Well, no,” I admitted. “But most of them are.”

“And if a small number of radicals – Literalists or anyone else, for that matter – were to gain a foothold in just enough voting districts, where would they go? The Democrats wouldn’t want them, because they’d mess up their delicate coalition. They’d go to the Republicans – to the seventeen as opposed to the nineteen. And since we’re only talking about two parties here, a lot of ultraconservative Democrats would follow them – it isn’t as though they had a choice of going to a bunch of different parties. You know, there’s a lot of grumbling over integration – as well as, frankly, strong Literalist tendencies here, as you’ve seen in the ACF.”

“Come on!” I objected. “Integration is way overdue. How could anyone still be angry about that?”

“Where are you from?” he asked with a smile.

“Bethesda, Maryland.”

“Where the Nazis have recently been picketing theaters and amusement parks over integration. How long ago did Maryland integrate?”

“Okay, I see your point.” I conceded. “And there don’t have to be so many. Fine. But getting back to your doomsday scenario, if they take over South Carolina, that’s just one out of 50. The country is hardly divided straight down the middle.”

“No, they use the same procedure to take over the entire South and form a block that one party will get. And their agenda will rule all of us. Deep within these agenda lurks Literalism with its call for religious intolerance as a means of ending the perceived (as they see it!) secular persecution of Christians.”

“The Triumph of Christianity,” I said cringing.

“You got it!” He seemed unreasonably cheerful.

“But I still can’t see how the people will go along with it. Most people are good, decent folk and would never agree with the radical ideas of these few extremists.”

“Good PR. The radicals will couch their program in terms of traditional values. What could be more American than that? When their opponents try to expose them for what they are, these opponents in either party will be labeled as being against traditional values. If the opponents get specific, the radicals will simply repeat the same accusation over and over and over. It’s a well worn technique – just ask your Mr Goebbels. Hey, ask Plato: Democracy degenerates into demagoguery, especially when it’s accompanied by thuggery – witness Socrates.”

It was getting hot and uncomfortable in the room, especially when I thought about what demagoguery degenerates into – dictatorship. But that all started with *direct* democracy. Direct democracy degenerates into demagoguery and demagoguery into dictatorship. But what had I been advocating? Was I an unwitting tool in all this? And wasn’t the alternative also leading in the same direction? Bewildered, I forfeited my move and handed the court back to Paul.

“This is beyond just Republicans *versus* Democrats, which at the moment aren’t too terribly different, anyway,” he explained. “It’ll come down to conservatism *versus* liberalism. And in this kind of polarized atmosphere, conservatives always win.”

“How so?”

“Conservatives – like your Literalists – have a few set beliefs for which there is no compromise. Liberals, by their very nature, are open-minded and not willing to reduce complicated issues to slogans. So conservatives simply have to state whatever their beliefs are in such a way that they’ll correspond to those of the American public, and then they’ll claim the liberals believe in the opposite and then catch their opponents up in their own complicated way of seeing things. They’ll say, for instance, that they believe that this is God’s country, but the liberals want to take ‘under God’ back out of the Pledge of Allegiance. Therefore the liberals don’t share the religious values America was founded on.”

“Wait a minute,” I objected. “The ‘under God’ phrase was only added recently to confront Communism, and the religious values of the founding fathers were the tolerance and freedom of the Enlightenment, not the rigid religion of the church, and furthermore ...”

“You see,” Paul smiled, “you took the bait. Most people believe what they want to believe. You’re bogged down in facts and issues.”

“And I’m a Republican,” I admitted.

“A lot of people are, and at the moment in the South that can be pretty liberal. But this goes even further beyond party politics. What we’re really dealing with here is a resurgence of Fascism. Not Fascism with brown or black shirts, but, as Huey Long predicted, Fascism insidiously wrapped in an American flag. No one – including many of the radicals themselves – will realize this till it’s too late.”

“Fascism! Now you’ve really gone over the top, Paul. We defeated Fascism in 1945!”

Paul just smiled with the same combination of wryness and affection that I remembered seeing on the face of Herm Poynter, back when he guided me to The Acropolis – it seemed like a lifetime ago. And I remembered something strange that he had said: Franklin Roosevelt “saved the world from Fascism (at least for a time).” I shuddered. Paul and Owen just looked at me as my expression transformed itself from incredulity to apprehension. Socrates!

“But wait a minute! Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” I objected strenuously. How in the world is some little club on a campus of a college in South Carolina going to bring all of this about?

How many centuries would it take to have this miniscule movement grow to the grandiose structure of Fascism you're envisioning?"

"Good question," Paul replied with too much delight, "and I'm glad you've finally come around to asking it. It's not just here, you see, and it's not just on campuses. Get off campus and open your ears. It's happening in 'patriotic' churches, school boards, precincts, and – above all – corporate headquarters all over the South and all over the country, each with its own desire for control – religious, moral, political, economic, or whatever. But it all starts everywhere on the micro level. And I'm afraid that's where it has to be stopped, before it gets to the point that one micro joins other micros and we end up with a macro. ... Before the staves join together around the ax."

Paul had to return to the First Battalion to get ready for retreat, but Owen lingered – he only had to get to E Company. And as we spoke further, I removed my dress blouse and started to put on my gray shirt.

"You really don't think any of that could happen?" I asked him, full of concern that I might be wrong and that Paul's doomsday scenario actually could take place.

"I don't know," he replied slowly. "I hope not. I just don't see how someone like Christopher could pull it off. Perhaps he could take over the ACF – that's possible. And I'm really afraid that next year it will be more than possible. But beyond that? I just don't think he has the ability."

"He's got his useful idiots," I observed, remembering Mr Brady's comments from two years before. "But, you're right – he himself just doesn't seem to be all that much more elevated in his thinking than the idiots he controls."

"No," agreed Owen thoughtfully, "he doesn't. But what would happen if he and a lot of others like him became someone else's useful idiots? Someone with enough savvy to use people like Christopher and the groups they control to that someone-else's ends?"

I thought for a moment about that prospect and told Owen, "I'll be there tomorrow."

That evening during ESP, Ryan turned his chair to the left to look back at me and startled me with, "So, I hear you met Paul Hermann this afternoon."

I nearly jumped out of my chair and then shifted it to the right to match his – as we had done when Harry and Ken visited for the follow-up game of hearts. I looked at him curiously and asked, "How did you know that?"

"Paul's in a class with me, and I ran into him in the sally port as I was getting back from leave. He mentioned that he'd been here. Saw my name on the desk." He pointed to the tag displayed on the upper shelf.

"Yeah. He seemed to be worried about a resurgence of Fascism in South Carolina," I observed, trying to keep my own worry from showing through.

Ryan smiled broadly with the boyish glee he always displayed when he was about to trap me. "So what's so bad about Fascism? Lotta people have sworn by it. And, you know, The Acropolis looks pretty much like a Fascist state to me. Hey, you got the System and the snappy uniforms. Okay, gray instead of black or brown, but you gotta have some leeway."

Flustered, I cast about for a reply. Of course, The Acropolis was certainly not Fascist. But what made it not Fascist, in spite of the appearances? "Well," I started slowly, "what makes an organization or country Fascist isn't the regimentation, it's deeper than that. It's tyranny to any opposing thought. What's the first thing out of a Fascist's mouth when he even thinks that

someone is disagreeing with him? It's 'traitor!' It's the accusation that the objector doesn't belong, isn't a true patriot or whatever. Here, it's different. The System – the whole system of systems – is designed to draw us all together. ... Even if, especially in these years, we sometimes try to isolate ourselves," I added with some measure of guilt, which Ryan appeared studiously not to pick up on.

He grinned broadly, whirled back around in his chair, and pulled a blank piece of paper from a pile on his lower shelf. "Like a fasces!" he asserted happily.

He whirled back and handed me the paper with a cartoon of a fasces, the axe well surrounded by its sheath of sticks. I looked at it thoughtfully, turned to my desk and added a pile of sticks underneath the fasces.

Handing it back to him, I pointed out, "Only after the axe has cast off a bunch of other sticks. Fascism may look unifying, but in reality it's based on exclusivism and carefully generated hate. It draws people together around it out of their fear of external threats and internal 'treason.'"

Ryan casually took back the paper and altered the pile of cast-off sticks so they appeared broken. "Not quite," he looked at me earnestly with an expression that added years to both of us. "It doesn't just cast them off. It destroys them."

I smiled wryly and duly noted, "I guess not all South Carolinians are prone to Fascism."

"Not in a long shot!" he smiled with the right side of his mouth and with his right eyebrow arched. "Not in a long shot!"

As we both turned back to our desks, I looked at the broken sticks and remembered Chaplain Konrad. Then I gazed at the fasces. Some disturbing, far-off memory seemed to haunt me, but I could not figure out what it was. Like so many memories that had intruded upon my thoughts in the past two years, it seemed to come from some other universe, from some other time. And this time, it seemed to fill me with dread.

The next morning before *Faust* class, I asked Ben Chapman if he would switch language lab evenings with me that week. He was a tall, good-looking junior sergeant from A Company, with blond hair that formed into waves in spite of its shortness. He owed me a favor – I had done the same for him on even shorter notice back at the beginning of October.

"Sure," he agreed. "But what's the rush?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "There's something going on at the Acropolis Christian Fellowship that kinda worries me. I thought I'd make a meeting to see what it's all about."

Ben's eyes got big, and he practically ordered me, "You get over there and see if you can straighten those weirdoes out!" Obviously, he had heard something, too.

I had not bought all of Paul's argument. I still could not believe that his larger, national doomsday scenario was anything more than a grandiose conspiracy theory. Nor could I believe that the American people and the democracy, both of which I trusted implicitly, could be so thoroughly duped and manipulated by religious ideologues.

But when it came to The Acropolis, I was concerned – enough to see how such a situation might in fact be developing in the ACF. Then there was Chaplain Konrad's remark about the General's "censoring," and that long PR release kept gnawing at me. All of that bothered me as well, and I thought there might be a connection. Whether I had the confidence and ability to go on from there though, I did not know.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE ACF AND THANKSGIVING

On the evening of Monday, 21 November, right before Thanksgiving, the moon was slightly over two-thirds full and waxing. She was well up in the sky when I left Second Battalion and walked around on the street to Mitchell Hall for the last meeting of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship in the calendar year and probably in the semester. As I walked around the parade ground, I recalled how I had shuffled through the gutter in a long line of thetes more than two years earlier. I relaxed and took in the sights forbidden my gaze back then, and I thought about how different things were. Approaching Mitchell hall and the ACF, however, I felt an oddly familiar knot in my stomach – fear tied up with uncertainty – and I thought about how little some things had changed.

Once more, I walked like a frightened deer into the room. But this time, there was no small group of Literalists to avoid, and no place to hide from them.

“Glad you could make it!” said Owen, coming up behind me and giving me a start. “Sorry, didn’t know you were so jumpy.”

“Look at them!” I said in a hushed tone of horror. “They’re everywhere. How come there are so many of them?” I could tell immediately who the Literalists were by their toothy smiles and their angry, yet pious eyes.

“Parliamentary procedure,” Owen said dryly. “Usually, we meet right before Christmas break and make a party of it. But they don’t like parties much – too frivolous, you know. Besides, that’s when everyone expects the final meeting of the semester – after Christmas is too close to exams. So I suspect that a lot of members who aren’t with them will show up in a couple weeks for a party and wonder if there still is an ACF.

“You see, last week,” he continued, “they moved to reschedule the meeting to tonight. Most people didn’t care and didn’t vote. But they cared and they voted. And they made sure that they’d be here in force tonight. I’d say about half the crowd.”

“At least!” I exclaimed, still in hushed tones so as not to be overheard by the omnipresent ears. “And look at them! They’re like wooden soldiers with hideous painted-on smiles. And they’re so ... so ... grim.”

“And most of them aren’t even Yankees,” he quipped.

I smiled ironically at this comment, but that was as good as a genuine smile for Christopher Adams, who sidled up to us and told me how glad he was that I had come back. Then he introduced some new cadets, pointing out how they were in the Triumph of Christianity. I sure was getting sick of that phrase. Sick and, frankly, afraid.

“And here’s someone you might remember, though not the way he looks now,” Christopher announced with a big grin.

There just behind the Triumphs of Christianity was Bart Schmidt in civies. It amazed me that I had not noticed him there before, especially since he stuck out in his civilian jacket and tie, which was, of course, slightly undone, revealing an unbuttoned top button. But then again, Bart had made a career out of remaining invisible, and you had to admire how far he could take it.

I was glad to see him. I had never had the opportunity of watching him “work the crowd” the previous semester. The fact that he was a man of no fixed loyalties – a side of him to which Christopher seemed oblivious – made him dangerous, but no more dangerous to the Spiritualists than to the Literalists. And unblinded as they were by the Light of Exclusive Truth, the Spiritualists assumed no loyalty from him and knew how many grains of salt to take with his observations.

Christopher went off to conspire with his cohorts and Owen had to prepare a few things for the business meeting, so I was finally able to introduce myself to Bart and talk with him.

“So what are you doing back here so soon after graduation?” I asked, “I thought you’d be off making the world safe for democracy.”

Bart smiled – that was just the sort of tongue-in-cheek that he relished. But then he took on an air of resignation and let me know, “I was supposed to graduate, but there was some mix-up with my grades right at the end of the year. Now I’ll admit,” he said, holding up both hands, palms outwards, “that my grades were not the strong point of my career here at The Apocalypse. That fell to my personal appearance.”

I was momentarily taken aback by his reference to the Academy as The Apocalypse, but I soon got used to it. And I had to admit that his self-deprecating humor and easy mannerisms did make him a rather endearing figure. I began to see why, as Owen had pointed out the previous spring, women might find him attractive and accept every strange tale he had to offer.

“So how close are you?” I asked, finding that I was taking a genuine interest in him.

“Twelve quality points,” he answered sullenly, “twelve lousy little quality points. Broken down, that’s only one A – fat chance of that! – or two C’s, or a B and two D’s. Have it all worked out.”

“Why didn’t you come back in the summer or fall and get it over with?” I asked with real concern.

“The Army had already scheduled me for Adjutant General Officer Basic,” he explained, “and they told me to complete it and then come back and finish my degree – if I expected to stay in as an officer rather than as an enlisted man. That pretty much cut into both terms. And besides, I wasn’t at all sad to get out of the place for a while.”

“So, are you coming back in civies like a veteran student?”

“Nah. They just stored my uniforms for me, and I’ll be back next semester as a venerable,” and he straightened up and gave an exaggerated salute, “five-year man!” He reminded me of Costello in the old Abbott and Costello comedy series on television, when he had announced his enlistment in the National Guard.

“Also,” he added in a conspiratorial whisper and a strained Chicago accent, “I hadta get outta town for a while, ya see. Girl problems. One in particular. She thinks I had to go off to Monterey to take a crash course in Russian so I could spy on the USSR for Army Intelligence.”

“Wow!” I exclaimed. I did not like to think that he had misled some young lady so badly. I thought of Eliza Beth and how vulnerable she sometimes seemed, and my protective instincts went into high gear. As upset as I was, however, I did have to admire his ability to pull off something so patently outrageous.

At the other end of the hall, Owen took the gavel and brought the business meeting to order.

“Gotta go,” said Bart. “I’m not really into the boring stuff. Seeya next semester.”

I took a seat and nervously looked around, picking out the stiff smiles and grim eyes of the Literalists. From the looks of it they had the majority, although I was not sure by how much.

After the secretary's minutes and the treasurer's financial report, Owen looked out at the group and announced, "Since this is our Christmas meeting, may I entertain a motion to donate the same amount this year as last year to the Charleston Orphans' Home?"

One of the Literalists rose and was recognized. "Is this home associated with any of the churches that support the ACF?" he asked with a thinly veiled belligerence.

"No," Owen noted, "that has never been our concern. The Christmas gift has always been a gift of charity to those in need, and for the past two decades we have supported the home with money and with various projects to help maintain and improve the grounds."

"But it does nothing to further the Triumph of Christianity," the Literalist objected, this time with less thinly veiled belligerence.

Another cadet stood up in obvious displeasure at the scene and announced in a loud voice, "I so move!"

After the required second, Owen asked if there was any further discussion. There was none. Apparently this was not the battle the Literalists had stacked the meeting for. The motion passed, but – I was embarrassed to witness – not without a loud chorus of "nays."

Traditionally, that had been the only business at the Christmas meeting. But when Owen asked if there was any new business, the same cadet stood up to be recognized. I noticed that he looked frequently over at Christopher Adams, who seemed to be giving him subtle yet definitive signs with his head.

"It has come to our attention," he proceeded, "that there are a number of Buddhist cadets at The Acropolis under the auspices of the Thai and American governments. There are now six of these creatures, and next year there will be eight. ... It has come to our attention," he repeated, as though starting again – or perhaps forgetting his lines, "that these cadets are allowed to skip out of chapel formation at the very doors of that hallowed institution and to go to Mitchell Hall to partake in what they call 'meditation and discussion.'"

"Probably feeding their faces at the Thete Canteen," someone called out from the back. I looked over at Christopher, and noted that his head was still nodding slightly in that direction.

"The next thing you know," the first cadet continued, "American Christian cadets will be converting to Buddhism as a means of skipping chapel. Either we have to get rid of these foreigners with their illegitimate religion or we have to force them to conform. This is, need I remind the august members of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship, a military institution after all."

"Is there a motion on the floor?" asked Owen wearily.

"I move," the cadet asserted, "that the ACF formally petition General Augustin to require that the Buddhist cadets attend general Protestant chapel."

"I second the motion," came a call from the back. It sounded much like the cadet responsible for the earlier outburst."

"There's a motion on the floor," announced Owen dryly. "Is there any discussion of the motion?"

"Yes," shouted out another cadet in righteous indignation. "It all comes down to this. This is a Christian country founded on Christian principles." My thoughts went back ominously to Paul Hermann's argument of the day before. "But as Christians," he pleaded, "we are a persecuted and martyred community, here in our own country, by secularists who do not share American

values, but hate Christians. We have the Truth, and everybody knows that, but we're not allowed to say it. It is our duty as Christians and as Americans to force these Buddhists to listen to the Truth.

"The next thing you know," he continued in a lower, more threatening voice, "they'll make chapel optional for everyone. They'll let anyone leave before entering so they can just go and worship whatever Pagan way they see fit. No Christian, no American can tolerate this! We have to stand up for our rights as Christians, our rights as Americans, and end this horrible persecution so we can usher in the final Triumph of Christianity." The speech was met by a roar of applause, and also by the stomping of feet – something I had never witnessed before in such a meeting, and something I took immediate offense at.

Before I had time to think it through, I found myself rising before the hostile group. Everyone hushed – they had never seen this before.

"The chair recognizes Cadet from H Company," Owen stated, with a high degree of interest in his voice.

"Guy is a friend of mine," I began clumsily, "and I don't tell my friends that they have to abandon their beliefs to associate with me. This country was founded by Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and a host of other proponents of the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and tolerance. We have freedom of religion built right into our founding documents, and there is no word – not a single, solitary word – that *that* particular freedom ends at the Propylaea.

"Had the cadet who made the motion and the cadet who seconded it been born in Thailand, they would have been Buddhists just like Guy. And I don't think they would want anyone telling them that they had to take part in religious observances that were contrary to their beliefs. Do unto others, gentlemen, as you would have others do unto you!"

The hall was plunged into silence, and I could see faint traces of doubt on some faces. This was an argument they had not thought of before, and the Golden Rule used to support tolerance of other religions was an unusual tactic they probably found rather disorienting. Finally, someone in the front row called for the question. The motion failed – by one vote.

"Thanks," Owen said with a sigh of relief after the meeting, as he accompanied me in the street around the parade ground. "I needed that."

My knees felt unsteady as I walked. The anger that had blossomed inside me left me exhausted and disturbed. It occurred to me that Monday evening was not a bad time at all to be scheduled as language laboratory monitor.

On Wednesday, 23 November, I went to see Eliza Beth after class. The next day was Thanksgiving, and juniors and seniors had been granted general leave after their Wednesday classes. I got to the Nursing College just in time to see her off. She was with another nursing student from Savannah from whom she was accepting a ride home for the holiday, and she took my hand and led me away a short distance so we could say our good-byes.

"I do wish I could take you home with me," she implored in a voice that seemed to plead, as though the decision had been someone else's. "But all our relatives are going to be there. And although I'd love for you to meet them too, there just won't be enough room or enough time for us to be alone.

I nodded sadly, but knowingly.

"And then there are the ghosts," she added thoughtfully. Noting my raised eyebrow with amusement, she laughed, "Why, every old house in Savannah has its ghosts. They pretty much

rule our top floor, and I do declare they're often just as noisy and bothersome as the relatives! Especially at Thanksgiving," she asserted. "They never did like Thanksgiving. They think it's a Yankee holiday."

We laughed together, strolled around the side of the building, and shared a quick embrace and a soft kiss.

Ryan also went home for the holiday – back the short distance to Florence. That left me alone in the room to think, to ponder, to worry.

Noon meal the next day was the famous Thanksgiving feast, and it was the first one in which I had partaken. As I shared the turkey and all the traditional fixings with a table full of my classmates – each taking turns as "thetes," – I recalled my hamburger that first year. I had been really, really foolish, but only because I had been really, really scared and isolated.

As I was leaving the mess hall, I walked past a sophomore corporal from another company chewing out a thete. I wheeled around and asked the thete, "Are you finished eating?"

"Yes, sir," he answered in a shaking voice.

"Then you're dismissed."

"Hold, on," objected the corporal, "I'm not finished with him yet."

"Yes, you are," I contradicted with a forcefulness that surprised me. When the thete had left, I turned to the corporal and informed him, "The Thete System is suspended during Thanksgiving meal. And besides, you're a sophomore corporal, and sophomore corporals aren't loosed until Monday."

"This isn't like the Old Corps!" complained the sophomore.

"The Old Corps!" I practically shouted back at him. "I was here before you and I don't recall any wracking of thetes at Thanksgiving. And the upperclassmen my thete year didn't recall any wracking of thetes at Thanksgiving. When was this famous 'Old Corps' anyway? Look at the old pictures in the Library, those thetes seemed pretty relaxed to me. So drop this Old Corps nonsense!"

He looked at me hatefully, and I saw in his dull, predatory eyes the same glare I had seen when I stood to speak on Monday.

"I don't know where it's written down officially that thetes can't be wracked at Thanksgiving meal!" he spat out with hate now in his voice as well.

"Well I know where it's written that sophomore corporals don't discipline thetes before Monday, and I know where it's written that sophomore corporals are to show proper respect to junior sergeants."

He looked stunned, and I felt stunned. I had never pulled rank before, and I was doing it now to maintain the integrity of the Thete System, of all things. The corporal obviously had no idea that there were rules and reasons behind the disciplinary practices of The Acropolis – or at least, there were supposed to be. He was operating completely on the lower level, where discipline crosses the line into outright brutality.

In short, he was a sadist; and I knew the only language sadists understood. For the first time and I hoped the last time, I spoke to him in his language. "Give me a DR corporal!" I ordered crisply in a military manner.

"Sir?" he replied, reverting back to thete practice in numb disbelief.

"A DR," I repeated harshly. Then I bent down close to his face and explained slowly and deliberately, "A Delinquency Report. The little slip of paper you keep in your hat."

He fumbled behind himself to retrieve his field cap that was neatly woven through the slats of the chair. His hand shaking, he handed me a DR with his name and unit on it, and he looked at me like a frightened thete – almost at a brace.

I snatched the slip of paper from his hand, wheeled back around, and stormed out of the mess hall. As I passed the first trash can on the porch, I dropped the DR into it. It had served its purpose.

Saturday night, I lay alone in the room staring at the wall beside me. The moon was just past her zenith and poured enough light into the room for the wall to glow faintly in front of my face and to gently let me know that she was there.

My thoughts were focused that night on Mary and Eliza Beth. There was no competition between the two – no fight to win me over. Mary shared a part of my soul so deep and so high that no one – no, nothing: not time nor space nor any creature of this world of matter – could come close to her, much less dislodge her. I missed her dearly, but the most important part of her was with me and always would be. I also missed Eliza Beth, and I wondered if a part of her would someday also inhabit my soul, as she had already come to claim my heart.

It had been a year to the day since I had given Mary the pin in the parking lot of the Howard Johnson's ice cream parlor in Washington. I remembered how she had looked at it in its little blue box, the joy that lit up her whole face. And I remembered how she had thrown her arms around my neck and kissed me. The tears welled up in my eyes. And slowly, one by one, they tumbled over the bridge of my nose and onto my pillow.

Through my tears, I looked at the moon's glow on the wall, and I perceived the feminine presence who had offered me comfort and protection so often before. Although I did not hear her words that night, I felt her compassion, her love, and her deep, deep concern. And I wondered aloud in a broken and weary voice, "What next must be?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO PREPARATIONS FOR SPRING

During the following Monday's ESP, I did not work in the language laboratory. Colonel Vaughn had switched me with Clark Wesson, a classmate of mine in H Company who had changed his major to French sophomore year. It was too bad he had not been a language major from the start, so there would have been two voices yelling across the quadrangle for the year advisement. The reason Colonel Vaughn had switched us was so that I could join the Faust class that evening at his house to watch the recent film version of Goethe's classic (or at least the first part of it) with Will Quadflieg as Faust and Gustaf Gründgens as Mephistopheles. Somehow, he had managed to procure a 16mm copy for the Academy.

There were only five of us in the class, and his quarters on campus just beyond Fourth Battalion were reasonably spacious, so the viewing was comfortable, enhanced by Mrs Vaughn's home-made desserts and coffee. Right after the film started, as God was giving Mephistopheles his directive to pursue Faust (a directive required in Job's strict monotheism), a white-haired gentleman dressed neatly in a blue blazer and an Acropolis tie slipped into the room and whispered his apologies to Colonel Vaughn in German. From time to time, the two would comment on the film as though they were both natives, and I wondered who the visitor was.

After the film, Colonel Vaughn introduced the gentleman to us as Colonel Julian Gemistos, Professor Emeritus. He had kind, gentle green eyes that went well with his white hair and humble smile. From his height, he could well have been an alumnus of H Company. "Colonel Gemistos was one of those rare professors," announced Colonel Vaughn, much to his visitor's embarrassment, "who combined disciplines to the point that he taught German, Latin, and Greek for the language department and classical Greek philosophy through the English department. He's also well versed in modern theories of physics, mathematics, linguistics, ..."

And at that point, his guest interrupted him with a good-natured "And this, that, and the other. Jack of all trades, I'm afraid." Colonel Vaughn smiled, knowing that his friend was far beyond that stage. Indeed, he was perhaps the most venerated emeritus – and alumnus – of the Military Academy of the South.

To my astonishment, Colonel Gemistos came up to me as we were all leaving and asked, "Cadet, may I accompany you a bit of the way?" Flabbergasted, I nodded as best I could.

We stepped out into a cool Charleston evening. The sky was clear, and the light of the moon – just beyond her full stage and still almost completely round – cascaded through the fronds of the palmettos and the needles of the evergreens, casting deep shadows.

"This spring," he began, "I'll be teaching my occasional course on Neoplatonic philosophy – Plotinus, if you will. It's a course open only to seniors and by invitation to the rare junior who comes with the highest recommendations. Colonel Vaughn thinks very highly of you and informs me that you have taken both Greek and Latin at The Acropolis. Do you know what that gets you, by the way?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"No, sir," I answered, curious at where he was going with this.

"Only to the rarest degree The Acropolis offers these days. It won't say so on your diploma, but when you order your transcripts, you'll discover that you have an A.B. degree, not the usual

B.A. That means that you've had your share of the classical languages, although Colonel Vaughn informs me that you would like take a lot more of them if it were possible."

"Yes, sir," I responded, "I would."

"Then I have a proposition for you, Cadet. I'd like to invite you to join my Plotinus class in the spring. I know," he said staring deep into my eyes and nodding approvingly, "that you would benefit greatly from the course. ... Greatly, on many levels," he added cryptically.

In spite of the difference in ages and in appearance, his last comment conjured up the image of Herm in my mind, and I found myself saying with an eagerness that surprised me, "I would be honored and delighted to be in your class, Colonel."

He smiled and added with a chuckle, "You didn't even let me inform you that your friends Messrs Hughes and Prichard both recommended you most highly. Indeed, they both insisted you be invited."

As we approached the intersection between Third and Fourth Battalion to our left and Techne Hall to our right, he slowed down and stopped, gazing about and basking in the moonlight. "Ah Charleston!" he exclaimed. "This is my native city – my Athens. And The Acropolis is its holy precinct. How well I can understand why Socrates would have chosen death over exile. No, I could not inflict death upon myself, no sooner than I could against any other human being. But exile – exile – that would be death in itself."

He turned to me and smiled, "I'm sorry. The November air sometimes makes me melancholy. I assure, you, though," he added with the twinkle back in his green eyes, "the spring will be much, much more lively."

As he turned right toward the Propylaea, I proceeded on down the road to the barracks. In the light of the moon, the palmettos cast shadows that seemed to be painted on the road before me. The old professor's melancholy was infectious, and once again, as so many times before, my thoughts drifted to Herm, my guide to The Acropolis that late summer's night a lifetime ago. He too had been moved by the death of Socrates into that black state of the soul.

I felt the soft glow of the moon on my back as though she were trying to comfort me and protect me. Yet, some things must be.

The next weekend, when Eliza Beth and I were making our rounds of the city, I mentioned my meeting with Colonel Gemistos. "It's a course open only to seniors," I noted, hoping to impress her, "but I'm being let in by special invitation."

I was about to tell her just how excited I was about it, and how I had gone to the library and become fascinated by what I found there on Plotinus, when she suddenly looked cross, stared straight ahead, and scolded, "Why should you be admitted to a class that's only for seniors? Isn't that a bit presumptuous?"

Then she stopped dead in her tracks, looked at me with tears in her eyes, and implored, "Oh, please don't listen to me! I'm so sorry. These horribly, horribly contrary feelings just come over me and I say things I don't want to say – things that Eliza Beth doesn't mean at all. Oh, please," and she put her hands on my shoulders, leaned up, and kissed me with quivering lips.

"Eliza Beth," I finally asked, seeing how much pain she was in and drawing up all my courage to ask her the question, "what is wrong? What keeps happening to you?"

"I can't talk about it – I don't really know myself," she replied with prophetic ambiguity. Question or no question, I was not to receive an answer that day. But it would come. It would come.

The next Friday evening and Saturday, she pulled clinic duty, which was, as I saw it, something like guard duty at The Acropolis, only longer and more demanding. Finally, on the Sunday afternoon before Christmas break, I got to see her again. We had a late lunch, and spent the day walking and talking. She carefully avoiding any mention of her words the previous weekend, and we finally ended up sitting on our bench on the southeastern corner of Colonial Lake.

As she pivoted around to look at me with her eyes full of concern over something she would not mention, she gazed over my shoulder and said in a voice full of awe laced with sadness, “Oh look. Your moon. She’s in her last moments and she’s setting. The end of the end. Soon,” she added with a heavy sigh, “the sun will be at the end of his end, too.”

“But they’ll come back,” I added with a feeling of urgency. “They always do. And so will we.”

She gazed into my eyes earnestly but tenderly, “Oh, I hope so. I so truly, truly hope so.”

I promised her that I would write her in Savannah, and she smiled and said, “You’re so sweet. So very sweet.”

When we got back to the Nursing College, I gave her a little box, cheerfully wrapped in Christmas paper. I had barely got out the words, “Now, don’t open it before Christmas,” before the wrapping was off and she took out a small gold neck chain.

She smiled at it like a little girl, put it around her neck, and patted it to signal that there was where it was going to stay. She looked at me in sad wonder and said, “Why are you so good to me?”

I smiled back at her and started to speak, “Eliza Beth, ...” But she put her finger on my lips, let a tear fall from her eye, and kissed me. Then she backed up into the building, as though some alien force were drawing her away.

As soon as I got home early on 17 December, I went down to Bradley Drug Store and purchased the nicest Christmas card I could find. Then I went up to the post office on Wisconsin Avenue to write in it and post it.

A couple days later, when I was rested and could write more coherently – and when I was missing her even more – I wrote a letter. It was the usual letter that a young man writes a young woman, and it bothered me that it was not more. I casually stepped out of the house for a walk and hurried up Radnor Road and then turned right down Maiden Lane to the mail box at the corner.

Christmas morning, the Three Kings of Orion’s Belt followed the Star of Sirius to point to Apollo’s rising – the new beginning that Eliza Beth and I had hoped for. I could see neither the stars nor even the nascent sun, though, because the red haze of pollution hung thick in the sky over Washington like the bloody breath of some advancing War God.

Nor had I received a card from Eliza Beth. Perhaps, I tried to believe, it had been delayed in the mail. There was, after all, a lot of mail that time of year. And Christmas came on Sunday, so there was no delivery on Monday. Surely I would hear from her Tuesday.

When I went to bed disappointed on Tuesday, 27 December, the full moon had already risen and promised to linger all through the night. At midnight, she was approaching her zenith and poured her light gently through my window. I awoke and stared up at the dark ceiling light to the left of my feet and to the window glowing beyond them. I did not believe that I had dreamt at all,

but I did feel the feminine presence and I once again heard the lilting and ethereal, but ever so sad, compassionate, and loving echo:

χρεόν ἐστι
χρεόν ἐστι
so múst it be
so múst it be

I had the feeling she was trying to convince me, and for a moment I did feel reassured and protected. But then my thoughts turned to dread and regret. Was my relationship with Eliza Beth doomed? Why must it be? Why?

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

BACK IN CIVIES

On the way back to Charleston after Christmas, I changed into civies in the restroom of the train. I had needed to wear the uniform while embarking to receive my one-third-off discount, but as a junior I was allowed to return to The Acropolis in civilian attire. It felt immensely odd to walk onto campus with a jacket and tie on 3 January 1967, an unusually warm day. What felt even odder was then to walk back out of the barracks still in civies. After all, I did not need to change back into uniform until the muster formation at 6:00 that evening, and I thought I would surprise Eliza Beth in something different.

As I was walking in front of Techne Hall on the way to the Propylaea, however, I heard the by-now familiar bellow, “Halt, Bubba!” Rather than fear, I turned to meet The Colonel as a friend and mentor, as he was to all who would join with him.

“Well, well, well, what have we here?” he started off. Then he walked around me trying to figure it out. Amidst hums and exaggerated nods of approval, he took inventory of my clothing. “Fine blue jacket, Bubba. Hey, I like the Acropolis uniform buttons – nice touch. Yep, goes well with the gray trousers – very snappy. And a straight crease – are those them newfangled permanent press jobbies, Lamb? Crisp white shirt – good, good, good. And what have we around our neck? An Acropolis-blue tie! Wow, they should sell those things in the canteen, maybe put a little seal on them or something. Yeah, that would be nicer than that stripy thing. You know something, Cadet? You make a pretty good-lookin’ civilian.”

He moved squarely in front of me now, whipped his cigar out of his mouth, and wheeled his arms around to his hips in the finely tuned choreography I had by now expected and even looked forward to. Then he shouted out in histrionic frustration, “So how come you didn’t go to a *real* college, Bubba?”

This time I was ready for him, but with the same answer I had given him in stark terror nearly a year before. “No excuse, sir!” I shouted at the top of my lungs as I braced like a thete with a smile on my face.

The eruption started with shaking that moved from his legs to his shoulders and blasted forth in a roar of laughter that could have been heard on the other side of campus – and probably was. “That’s your answer, isn’t it, Lamb?” he said, pointing at my face, his finger still shaking from the laughter. “You didn’t mean it last year – you were just flustered then. Now, you got me,” and he laughed some more and slapped his thigh.

“Just don’t forget to change back into uniform at 1800 hours! I don’t want you wearing this stuff down to muster formation and confusing all my Lambs. They might get disoriented and think they’ve been transferred up to William and Mary.”

At the name of Mary, I winced ever so slightly, but just enough so that The Colonel, who knew all things and noticed all things, squinted inquiringly at me and asked, “You got something against William and Mary, Bubba?”

“Yes, sir,” I proclaimed, quickly thinking of something to say.

“What is it, Lamb? They been mean to you?”

“Well, sir, they tried to woo me away from The Acropolis.”

“To woo you away, you say,” he repeated, trying to anticipate the punch line.

“Why yes, sir. They kept offering something ... something they called a ... called an ... education. Well, I sure didn’t know what that was, so I decided I’d stay here, sir!”

Another eruption of laughter followed. “You’d better get on and see that young lady nursing student of yours, the one from Savannah.”

“Sir,” I stammered after I had returned my jaw to its proper place, “do you know everything that goes on here?”

“I’d tell you, Cadet, but then you’d be afraid – very, very afraid.” He drew out the word “afraid” ominously. But frankly, he did not need to.

When I got to the Nursing College, I checked in with the receptionist; and she buzzed Eliza Beth’s room, while I sat down on the sofa behind the large coffee table in the lobby. Melanie came walking down the stairs and into the lobby. She greeted me with a big, happy smile. “My,” she exclaimed with enthusiasm, “don’t we look dapper! Eliza Beth will be down in a moment, she’s still moving her things back in.”

I stood and blushed from the compliment and from the uncertainty that I should be hearing it. I belonged to her roommate Eliza Beth, after all, and I still remembered the unfortunate reception that Sean had received from Margaret. More than that, I was well aware of how profound the consequences of that incident had since been for him. Indeed, I knew them all too well.

“Now don’t you be getting coy with me, young man,” she jokingly scolded, sending me even deeper into a fluster and causing her to giggle gleefully. Melanie always seemed to know exactly what I was thinking, and always tried to keep me from becoming too serious with myself.

“I love that tie,” she said. Then she walked around the coffee table and took it between her thumb and forefinger, all the while smiling at my reactions. “Why, that’s Acropolis blue, isn’t it?”

“Actually,” I confessed, “it’s a tie I had in high school. I went to a brand new school that took the colors black, white, and this – what they called Columbia blue.”

“You mean there are so many schools up there they had to go to a tricolor?” she asked in surprise. “I mean,” she added playfully, “before even considering chartreuse and shocking pink?”

“Abe Burroughs!” I exclaimed. “I didn’t think anyone else was familiar with his songs. Or that anyone would openly admit it.” We shared a laugh as she curtsied and introduced herself as the Duchess of Dortenditten.

“There are a lot of schools around Washington,” I went on to answer her question, “though I don’t really know if they had to go to three colors. I think they may have just been avoiding the stark black-and-white combination.”

“It would be rather dull,” she agreed. “But I like this. And I can see how it would fit in very nicely with black and white.”

“What were your school colors?” I asked, finally feeling at ease and interested in finding out. But at that moment, we were interrupted.

“Who is this?” demanded Eliza Beth as she came into the lobby and took a firm stance opposite us on the other side of the coffee table. “This isn’t *my* cadet. *My* cadet has a sharp gray uniform with Gold Stars and sergeant’s chevrons.” Once again, I was flustered. I had the distinct impression that she might not be joking – that she might actually be upset that I came by in civies. On the other hand, the emphatic “my” filled my heart with hope – hope that I was still

indeed her cadet, her exclusive possession. Even, if I still dared think it, her fiancé, whom she wanted.

"I just thought I'd surprise you in something different," I confessed sheepishly, with my head bowed. With my head down, I could see a strange play being acted out in the reflection of the coffee table's glass top. Melanie quickly moved around next to Eliza Beth and shook her head violently and mouthed the word "No." All the while she kept her eye on me to make sure I did not witness any of this.

When I looked up, the entire atmosphere had changed. Eliza Beth's eyes were brimming with tears, "Oh, I'm so, so sorry. I guess your coming here like that – and you do look handsome – just took me by surprise. Please, don't hold it against me!"

Before I had a chance to speak, she hastily added, "And I'm so sorry I never sent you a card or letter. I got yours and they meant so very much to me. And see, I'm still wearing your necklace."

I did not ask her why she had not written, and I would not have asked, but Eliza Beth hurriedly added, "There were so many, many relatives. I never had a moment of peace. And the ghosts," she added with a smile, trying to cheer me up, "the ghosts were simply horrendous with all the noise and commotion they caused." She reached over the coffee table and grasped both my hands, holding on to me as though I were an anchor – and perhaps I was. Perhaps Melanie was, too.

She squeezed my hands hard and shook her head slightly. "Tell you what," she said with a deep breath. "I still have a couple suitcases on the back loading dock. Do you think you could help me with them? Only as far as the lobby, of course."

"Sure," I said in a soft voice. I felt so helpless and confused that I needed something to do for her. Eliza Beth's reaction to my appearance in civies and her sudden change of heart at Melanie's prompting gave me too much to digest all at once. If only I could get up the courage to talk with Melanie. Even though it would be about Eliza Beth, though, I felt that I could not do it. Was it fear? Was it loyalty? Was it both? ... Was it something else?

We walked down the back stairs to the loading dock and found her suitcases. With some difficulty, we hauled them onto the elevator – I was amazed at how much she must have packed – and Eliza Beth pressed the "L" on the panel. As she did, I noticed a button marked "Stop" and looked at her with raised eyebrows. She looked at me and smiled mischievously. But when I pressed the button, the elevator not only stopped with a jolt, but it also set off an alarm. I quickly hit it again and the alarm stopped.

On the second half of the trip up on the elevator, Eliza Beth laughed. But I did not, for her laugh sounded disturbingly ambiguous – between the simple comedy of the situation and my getting my just desserts for pressing the button. I just stood there embarrassed as the door opened revealing an older nurse looking in. Actually, she was probably not really much older than we were, but she was already in a position of authority.

"Uh, I accidentally leaned up against the button," I lied, not terribly convincingly.

"I know," the nurse assured me with a far-away gaze, "I know." She looked at us with a wistful, wry smile – a little like the one Grant Woodward tried to hide from me when my name tag had been on upside down. She did not try to hide it though, and I believed that if there had been a way to stop the elevator without the alarm, she would have shown us.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE SEMESTER ENDS

As I took my final examinations, I knew that I would not retain the Gold Stars that semester. While the Faust course was a challenge, and I did receive only a B in it – my first B ever in a German course – there were plenty of other B's besides that and, of course, the usual one in military science. But in amongst *The Bugler*, fencing, my concerns about the ACF, and, of course, worrying myself sick over Eliza Beth, Dean's List did not really seem so low an achievement.

In spite of my worries (and perhaps because of them), I was looking forward to the State Collegiate Press Association meeting in Myrtle Beach right at the end of the semester. The weekend of 27-29 January was, after all, semester break for all the schools, and the meeting promised to include a lot of partying. Oddly enough, I actually looked forward to the parties, though deep down I knew I could not really participate – not without Eliza Beth.

We all stayed at a tall, square, red-brick hotel on the beach, which was practically empty except for us and for a few people who were passing through on business. It was cold and damp, and the sky was streaked with sullen gray clouds – not what you would call ideal vacation weather. I had gone up on Friday evening with members of my staff – *my* staff because I was now officially editor-in-chief of *The Bugler* – and we divided ourselves up among a few rooms on one of the floors designated for the meeting participants.

That night I walked out onto the beach alone and gazed across the dark gray waves with their light gray crests. The gray waves shifted and slid together in a way that I found disturbing and hauntingly reminiscent of something – something I just could not pin down in my mind. As I stood there pondering what it all meant and what memory was hidden from me, the moon shone through the clouds. She was still in the last stage of a full moon or the first stage of waning gibbous – it was hard to tell as she floated in and out of the clouds. But she was rising just above the water, and her light skipped across the amorphous waves, providing an eerie structure and definition to them. I wished Eliza Beth could be there to see “my” moon, as she always called her.

The next day, the bulk of the participants finally arrived, and we held our meeting that evening. I was given an award for the pictorial of Thete Week at The Acropolis. It struck me, though, as I came up to receive the certificate that someone was missing from the front table – Melissa Lewis. Of course, she was a year ahead of me, and like Harold Prichard she had passed on her position to someone else and would not be there any more.

I missed Melissa and was doubly sad at the thought that I would never see her again. Eliza Beth did not ever want to go back to Columbia, and I knew that without her I would not go either. And could I even introduce Eliza Beth to Melissa? Would she be upset that I knew such a beautiful young woman with such soft green eyes, even though she was really “just” a friend?

Late into that night, the partying raged on in the halls. I was both frightened and intrigued by the forwardness of the young women, who seemed to drink as much as the young men and who were ... well ... so aggressive. At the all-male Acropolis nestled safely within the archaic gentility of Charleston, such behavior of the late 1960's had not yet made inroads. I looked down the hall through the safety of the peep-hole in the door. My roommates were enjoying themselves and

basking in the attention lavished on them by the young women, by whom they were significantly outnumbered. I wanted to open the door and join them – just join them in the fun. But Eliza Beth was not there.

Why was I behaving that way? Why could I not just walk out the door and socialize? Not drink myself silly, but just socialize? Was it the virtue of loyalty, as I preferred to think? Or was I seeking safety in isolation with the excuse that I was Eliza Beth's "fiancé?" I worried about that last question and the assumption it was built upon. My being cordoned off in the room from the party just beyond the door reminded me of someone else, somewhere else ... some other time, some other universe. I thought of Eliza Beth, my "fiancée," and worried about what was happening with her – to her.

As soon as I got back Sunday afternoon, I rushed down to the Nursing College to see Eliza Beth. She had gone home for the weekend, though, and had not yet returned. But Melanie came down to talk with me and we went out for a cup of coffee. I needed to ask her something so urgent that I would risk going out for coffee with another young woman.

We sat across the table from each other at the coffee shop on King Street, and I asked her bluntly, "What's wrong with Eliza Beth?"

Melanie took a deep breath, shook her head slowly, and said with a slight quiver in her voice, "I don't know what you mean."

"You know how she greeted me last week when I showed up in civies?"

"Yes," she answered tentatively, becoming noticeably uncomfortable. "She was ... out of sorts."

"Well," I said as delicately as I could, "when I put my head down, there was this glass top on the coffee table. And ... I saw something, something that's really been bothering me ever since."

She looked deep into my eyes, reached over and laid her hand on mine, and she said with slow resignation, her eyes glistening, "Eliza Beth has had a hard time – a very, very hard time. It was all I could do to get her to that mixer last October. She didn't want anything to do with men, and especially not with The Acropolis. But then you ran into her there – so to speak," she added with a sweet, sad smile. "You know, you're a very gentle, kind man – probably the gentlest and kindest I've ever met, anyway. You were everything she needed, and you still are. It's just that sometimes, a different part of her takes over and doesn't know what's good for her. So I step in."

"Like you did to get her to go to the mixer," I stated.

"Like I did to get her to go to the mixer," she confirmed. "And like I did when she spoke so abruptly with you."

We sat for a while in silence drinking our coffees. Then she reached over again and placed her hand back on mine. "May I ask you a personal question that's been bothering me?" she asked.

"Sure," I replied with a pensive smile.

"I've been watching you closely – I hafta make sure you're all right for Eliza Beth, you understand," she added quickly, perhaps a bit too quickly. "And that Army contract badge above your Dean's List medal? Are you sure?"

I smiled ironically, for this was not the first time I had been asked such a question by those who could see through me. "No," I sighed, "I'm not sure at all. Or perhaps I am sure, but I don't like the answer."

She pressed her hand down more firmly on mine and looked deep into my eyes. This time, I looked back. I could not help but wonder what would have happened if on that evening in October I had chosen ... But no, I did not want to go there. Nor did I want to admit to myself that I saw anything in her eyes.

Oh, Mary!

That evening right before ESP, Ryan stepped out to see some classmates, and Harold dropped by our room. “So how did it go in Myrtle Beach?” he asked cheerfully.

“Well, I got this,” I said as I showed him the certificate.

“Fine, but did you have a good time?” he asked as though this was really the important question. And I supposed it was.

“Sure, the place was wild. I really did miss Melissa, though. And I wish you could’ve been there, too. You and she together have kinda mentored me through the whole thing. I guess what I miss about her most of all are those soft green eyes.”

“Green?” he exclaimed in disbelief. “Melissa doesn’t have green eyes. They’re an intense light blue.”

“Huh?” I questioned, taken aback.

“Yeah,” he insisted. “Why do you think she always says ‘Look into these baby blues’ when she’s trying to get someone to talk directly to her?”

“I’ve always taken that as just an expression.”

Harold laughed, “Hey, Cadet, you’ve gotta get those baby ... violets checked out!”

Just then, the bugle blew for study period, and Harold instantly vanished. I reached behind the lock box and pulled out the treasured icon from “my good friend.” Of course, there was no way I could tell from the picture – it was in black and white. But if her eyes really were blue, why had I always seen them as a green so soft that they could send me into speechlessness? Just who was Melissa Lewis? Would I ever know?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE THE SEMESTER BEGINS

The first week of the spring semester junior year, I moved into my “office” on the north end of the third floor of Mitchell Hall. This simply meant that as editor-in-chief I could take possession of the large metal desk with the glass “blotter” under one of the windows in the publications room, which was actually a small suite of rooms for the newspaper, the magazine, the yearbook, and the handbook. One of the advantages of having the desk/office was that it afforded me a place to escape to where I could usually be sure of being alone, whether to work or to sulk. Another big advantage was the telephone on the desk that could access not only campus phones, but local phones as well.

I put a few pens, pencils, and other odds and ends in the desk. Then I took out copies of the pictures I had back in my barracks room. These were the pictures I had taken of Eliza Beth in Columbia. I found myself frequently looking at them and thinking back to that one afternoon and evening as the “happy time” – when I was her fiancé and she wanted me. She had never said those words again, and her more recent behavior left me increasingly worried about her – about us. Carefully and lovingly, I slipped the pictures under the glass.

For a long time, I stood there behind the desk and gazed at the pictures. I wanted so much to hear from those sweet lips the magic words she had told Mrs Larsen. At last, I tore myself away and returned to my room in the barracks.

As I approached the room, I noticed a flurry of activity around the door. It seemed as though all of my classmates and most of the seniors were crowded around my door gawking at something on my desk. It was a shiny black telephone – for official use only, of course, by the editor-in-chief of *The Bugler*. Like the one in the office, it could call out, but only to local numbers.

I pushed my way through the crowd, suppressing the urge to say, “Move along. Move along. Nothing to see here. Nothing to see here.” Well, I almost suppressed the urge. When I got to my desk, I turned around with a broad grin and announced, “Okay. As long as I’m not here, and Ryan’s either not here or he doesn’t mind, I really won’t know what goes on with this telephone, will I?”

With thumbs up all the way around, they left satisfied with the arrangement. “You ever thought of a career quelling mutinies?” Ryan asked with his trademark boyish smile.

Fencing continued virtually unaffected by the transition from fall to spring semester. Over Christmas, Sean had designed a patch for the fencing team/club with a fencer *en garde* over a diagonal bar. Given our at-best uncertain position within the athletic hierarchy of The Acropolis, he made sure that the bar was sinister, in heraldry reflecting illegitimate parentage. Now the patches themselves were in and we proudly sewed them onto our field jackets.

I had to miss Wednesday’s practice though because of a tight deadline with the paper and a rare afternoon meeting. I was beginning to discover that the editor-in-chief had quite a few more duties than I had originally anticipated, and I started to realize why Harold had decided not to continue fencing the past semester.

When I returned to the barracks, Sean rushed up to me, still in his Acropolis sweat suit, and asked, “Did you hear what happened to Brent?”

Taken aback and worried about my friend, I said that I’d been in Mitchell Hall all afternoon after classes and had not heard anything.

“Let me tell you!” he exclaimed with a smile and a slight laugh that set me at ease. At least it was not going to be anything tragic.

“We were practicing, and all of a sudden I hear this commotion over where the épéeists were clustered. There was Brent, standing with sword stuck in his shoulder. John’s blade had broken on his chest during a thrust, and it carried right on in.”

“Was he bleeding bad?” I asked, full of concern.

“Nah,” Sean assured me. “We left the blade in so he wouldn’t bleed too badly and slowly walked him over to the infirmary.”

“That must’ve been a sight!” I exclaimed, imagining the campus being brought to a standstill.

“Sure was,” Sean nodded. “Anyways, we slowly guide him up the step and into the doorway, and there’s old nurse O’Brien, just standin’ there lookin’ mean as ever. And you know what she said?” he asked rhetorically.

“No,” I finally answered, after I saw he was waiting.

Sean put his fists on his hips, wagged his head, and imitated the nurse’s Irish brogue, “This isn’t sick call. Has that cadet signed out of the barracks?”

We looked at each other in disbelief and then broke down laughing. “So what finally happened?” I asked him.

“We turned around and started back to the barracks, but the doctor rushed out of his office and stopped us. He got it out all right and dressed the wound. He thought we did a pretty good job of bringing him there, too. He didn’t need any stitches. Miss O’Brien, of course, just stood there lookin’ mean.”

Sean went back to his room, and I thought about the time I had also had an accident with a blade. Brent had thrust at me and his blade broke, taking a neat slice out of my vest. I had not known that anything had happened though, until I saw Brent rip off his mask and stare at me, his face as white as his vest. I looked down and saw the slit-open canvas and just barely a scratch – the kind you can get anyway, even with the vest. Coach Stockman calmly walked up to me and said, “Close shave. That’s why we have protective gear. Go pick out another and get back to work.” There was an awful lot of sweat on his forehead though.

Then it occurred to me how much worse I would have felt had our roles been reversed. And inevitably, that brought thoughts of a conversation long ago in an ice cream shop in Washington.

In amongst my new classes, the excitement of telephones, my new “office,” the pressures of the newspaper business, and Brent’s accident, my mind kept going back to Eliza Beth. I had called from the office and found out that she had clinical duties Friday evening, so I left a message that I would come by Saturday afternoon. There was a lot I wanted to share with her, and I missed her as much as I worried about her.

When I got to the Nursing College on Saturday, 4 February, Melanie came down to tell me that Eliza Beth would need a few minutes yet. She looked at the Dean’s List medal on my chest with the new bar dangling from it and said cheerfully, “Third award. I’m impressed.”

“Yeah,” I answered with a notable absence of cheer, “but I lost the Gold Stars.”

"Oh, that's just a matter of a few tenths of a point," she said, waving her hands palms outward to illustrate that it was really not all that much. "Besides," she said looking at me with utmost approval, "you're just as brilliant as ever, stars or no stars."

She was so very kind. I felt my eyes being drawn slowly and relentlessly toward hers, but with a grand effort I lowered my head and closed my eyes to avoid seeing what I did not want to – did not dare to see.

"That's all right," she said softly, "I understand. I understand all too well. Why don't we just sit down here in the lobby and wait?"

We sat in silence, me on a small sofa behind the infamous coffee table, and she in an easy chair at the end. It was a strange silence, neither awkward nor at all uncomfortable. After a while, though, I noticed a strange little game we seemed to be playing. Occasionally, I would look up at her just in time to see her look down. Then she would look up and I would look down. I knew that if I asked about it, the answer would be "Whatever do you mean?"

Time went by – minutes, seconds, I could not tell. At some point and to my surprise, I noticed that my eyes were damp. When I glanced over at Melanie, I saw tears forming in her eyes as well. Finally, I leaned over to her and asked her without looking at her, "Why?"

Melanie reached over and touched my hand. She spoke my name in a soft, sorrowful sigh and whispered barely audibly, "Some things just have to be, you know." For the briefest of moments and out of the corner of my eye, I seemed to catch a faint, green glimmer coming from the direction of Melanie's eyes.

Before I could fathom her words and try to put them into their cosmic perspective, Eliza Beth came down the stairs and into the room. She did not notice that my eyes were glistening; she only uttered in surprise, "Why, you're not *my* cadet! *My* cadet has Gold Stars!"

I stood up and could hear Melanie cough behind me. Once again, I lowered my head and gave credible reason for the tears in my eyes. I looked in the coffee table, but this time I could see only Eliza Beth. Her expression changed from one of anger to one of horror to one of anguished regret.

"Oh, no," cried Eliza Beth. "No, no, no, no, no. I'm so sorry. Don't hold it against me. Please, please, please, please, please." She ran around the coffee table and threw herself against my chest, her arms tucked tightly up into her sides, "Hold me, please hold me."

I grasped her as firmly as I dared. "No, tighter, tighter," she pleaded.

Finally, she heaved a long sigh and pushed herself away. She looked at me sadly and said, "I'm the reason you lost them, aren't I?"

I looked down into her soft brown eyes swimming behind tears and told her gently, "If you're the reason, Eliza Beth, then I'm glad to be rid of them."

She tucked her head into my chest and let loose a sigh that sounded as loud and mournful as a groan. Then she was quiet for a moment and slowly, tenderly pushed herself back from my grasp. "Look what I've done to your dress blouse," she exclaimed.

"It's okay," I assured her. "It's designed to absorb all the beer a cadet can spill on it in an evening. It'll dry."

Eliza Beth looked into my eyes and gave a gentle laugh. "You're so good to me," she said. "I wish I deserved you. And I wish I were someone you'd want to deserve, too."

"Eliza Beth," I whispered into her face. "You are."

"That's because you don't see me as I am," she blurted out through her tears.

“Let’s go for a walk,” I suggested, and we made our way slowly out the door and down the steps like a pair of invalids helping each other.

But the walk, the dinner, the huddling together in the cold by Colonial Lake were punctuated by outbursts and tears, followed by apologies and more tears.

“Well, I don’t see why you should have a telephone, and I don’t see what we have to talk to each other about so much during the week,” was followed by “No, please, please, that was not Eliza Beth. Please, please, believe me.”

On our bench at Colonial Lake I held her tightly – so tightly I was afraid I would hurt her, but not as tightly as she pleaded to be held. Once again, I begged her to tell me what was wrong.

She looked into my eyes through her tears and said, “I’ve had a terrible, terrible time. It was all I could do to go with Melanie to that mixer last October. At that point, I didn’t want anything to do with men, and especially not with The Acropolis. But then you ran into me there – so to speak. You know, you’re a very gentle, kind man – probably the gentlest and kindest I’ve ever met. You were everything I needed, and you still are. It’s just that sometimes, a different part of me takes over and says and does horrid things. Please don’t hold it against me.”

She looked at me with hope in her eyes, and she declared, “If I can just get rid of that awful part – those awful memories – the real Eliza Beth will prevail and never, never, ever make you cry again. I promise.”

Only later did I realize that I should have pursued the second part of her explanation. But the first part had struck me so hard it knocked me completely off balance. I had heard it before, practically word-for-word. And then I remembered – Melanie, Melanie Joyce. She may not have been related to Ulysses, but I wondered if she was perhaps related to Cyrano.

That was just eleven weeks before, as the countdown drew inexorably on to my last bitter retreat from Colonial Lake. It was more complicated than that though. Far, far more complicated. The way it all fit together reminded me of something I had read in a book or seen in a movie – I could not remember which. As the world caved in around the protagonist, he looked up to the heavens and bitterly told his comrades that the Gods were laughing – he could hear the Gods laughing.

*But I did not hear the Gods laughing. No, I heard not the Gods, but I did feel their anxious stares as they hesitated – waiting, waiting for whatever must be. And I heard the voice of one lone Ionic Goddess, unable to alter Relentless Fate but trusting in me to do ... something. But what? All she would tell me was *χρεόν ἐστί, χρεόν ἐστί*.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX PLOTINUS CLASS

Colonel Julian Gemistos' special course on Plotinus and Neoplatonism was the high point of my academic career at The Acropolis. We met at 9:00am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, right after Latin, which was scheduled so early because the Episcopal priest teaching it had to get back to his parish. Although it was taught under the auspices of the English Department, Modern Languages provided a room all the way at the end of the west side of the third floor, with windows facing out toward the parade ground on the left and the Library on the right of the road that looked as though it led straight out from under our window.

Because Colonel Gemistos was returning late from a trip to Greece, our class did not begin until Monday, 7 February. But with the high level of the course and its offering only to seniors – and to me – no one worried about the late start. Before class, the professor emeritus had written a note on the blackboard: "Please get to know each other first. When I hear things quiet down, I'll come in."

At the time, it seemed like an odd message. But the more we got to know Colonel Gemistos and Plotinus, the more it seemed uniquely appropriate. This was going to be a course ultimately concerned with the One, and we souls had to join together before we went any further.

Of course, Owen Hughes was there, the thoughtful yet optimistic president of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship and the overworked executive officer of E Company. As was typical for him, his hand was out to grasp others, and his genuinely friendly smile put everyone at ease.

I was also expecting Harold Prichard, and he was there sporting his 1G insignia. He had always been a private at The Acropolis, in spite of the fact that he had risen to be editor-in-chief of *The Bugler*. As he liked to say about rank, "Never had it, never missed it." Friendly and outgoing, he joked that except for the eczema, he was comfortable in his own skin.

Sitting to my left in the front row was a second lieutenant – assistant platoon leader – named Fabian Ward. A tall, thin, angular man with light brown hair, sea-blue eyes, and a rueful smile, he was one of the most interesting people I got to know at the Academy. After attending the University of the South at Sewanee, where he had studied theology and philosophy for three years before transferring, he had to go through the complete Thete System and was then allowed into only his junior year. Despite his wealth of courses, they were mostly not the right subjects for the Acropolis curriculum. Transfer students seldom fit into either the class they completed there year with or the one they were to graduate in. But Fabian managed to make rank – barely, to be sure – his senior year. Besides, he was in N Company of Fourth Battalion – a philosopher among athletes.

On my right next to the door was Greg Thompson, a cadet captain on Fourth Battalion staff and a political science major. He was tall and dark with intense brown eyes and an equally intense interest in others. In spite of his rank and position, he tended to slouch back in his chair and take things in with apparent disinterest. But when he spoke, it was clear just how perspicacious and highly intellectual he was.

Part-way through the introductions, the door opened and in hurried an overweight senior private from K Company, huffing and puffing from the exertion of climbing the stairs and the

frantic activity that must have accompanied his trying to get a uniform together – and that not terribly well. To all of our surprise – and everyone seemed to know him – it was Bart Schmidt.

“Bart!” cried out a first lieutenant from L Company, whom I had not yet met. “I thought Colonel Gemistos interviewed everyone who tried to enroll for the course.”

“He did,” insisted Bart. “So ... what’s the problem?” Everyone laughed along with Bart, who laughed the heartiest, for he knew the best just how out of place he was here. Yet, the professor had seen something in him – something worth developing, and something capable of being developed.

After about half the class period, things quieted down, and true to his word, Colonel Gemistos walked into the room making barely a noise. He set his books down beside the lectern, smiled gently, his green eyes gleaming, and welcomed us. “Gentlemen,” he began, “I’m glad to see that all twelve of you are here. I’ve met each of you already, and I trust you’ve got to know each other a bit?” We all nodded and waited for him to continue. I noticed that everyone, including Bart, was looking expectantly at him with interest and excitement at the new academic adventure.

He started picking up the course books and explaining what they were, as we checked them against the books we had received after registration. “First of all, we have the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the core of this course. This is the Great Books edition, which usually sits on dusty shelves of peoples’ studies for the purpose of impressing visitors. You, however, will have to be content with being impressed by the contents.”

He picked up another, smaller book and before holding it up said, “The Great Books edition is the standard English version mostly completed by Stephen MacKenna and then finished, with some editing, by B.S. Page. It is very readable, although some liberties were taken with the translation. Now this little book,” and he held up the other one, “*Plotinus*, contains a splendid introduction to the work along with translations of key passages. It is edited and translated by A.H. Armstrong, who has just begun a series of volumes in both Greek and English in the Loeb Classical Library. Someday, that will be the definitive text to use in class, although I’m sure it will not be quite as readable as the MacKenna. For now, between these two books, you should get a good introduction to Neoplatonic thought.

“Now, in the Bibliothek there is also a number of works that I’ve put on reserve for you and that I believe you might find interesting and illuminating. None of them is a replacement for the work itself, but they do offer important insights that you may discover you want to find out about. In addition, there are some editions of Porphyry, Proclus, and Iamblichus, who followed Plotinus in the Neoplatonic school of thought. And for those of you with an intellectual Christian background, I would particularly recommend William Inge’s excellent two-volume expansion of his Gifford Lectures from the turn of the century – *The Philosophy of Plotinus*. If you read that, you’ll gain a good understanding of just how profoundly Neoplatonism and some other related philosophies deepened Christianity. In the first centuries of their faith, a few Christian philosophers did indeed grow impressively beyond the simple literal reading of scriptures.”

He looked around to see if there were any questions and then launched into his lesson. “The first thing we need to establish, gentlemen, is the nature of Myth.” He wrote the word on the board, which seemed like an odd thing to do until he continued, “See how I have spelt it? – With a capital M.” I noticed Fabian smiling and nodding. This was evidently something he was well versed in from his theological studies at the Episcopal university.

“For our purposes, and for the purposes of all scholars (be they philosophers or theologians), a Myth is a story that relates humanity to divinity and that contains an essential Truth,” and he wrote that word down on the board too, also capitalized, “unencumbered by mere fact.” The last word was deliberately left in lower case.

“Before we tackle a Myth proper, let us begin with a familiar little fable. Now in Aesop’s story of the fox and the grapes, you will recall that the fox tries and fails to obtain the grapes and then sulks off grumbling, ‘They were probably sour, anyway.’ My question to you, gentlemen, is this: Do foxes speak? Do foxes eat grapes? No? So why should we care about this story?”

Colonel Gemistos smiled kindly at Bart Schmidt, in whose eyes he seemed to catch a glimmer. “Mr Schmidt, what good is this story?”

“Well, sir,” he said slightly embarrassed but also with a measure of interest and enthusiasm no one had ever recalled seeing in him before, “we are the fox. And as the moral states, I believe, we tend to despise the things we cannot have.”

“Excellent,” the professor cried out, bringing a broad grin to Bart’s face. “This is not a story about foxes and grapes; but rather, it is a story about us. Myths work the same way. Now, I would wager a good deal of money that Mr Ward can tell us how many creation stories there are at the beginning of the Book of Genesis.”

“Two, sir,” Fabian answered with confidence. Then in reply to the ensuing pause, he continued, “In the first story, God creates man and woman to stand before him together; and in the second story he creates man and then creates woman out of Adam’s – man’s – rib.”

“And what does this tell us about the relationship between humanity and divinity?”

“On the one hand, we are all creations of God and are all together, equal on a lower level of being than God. On the other hand, Hebrew Law, or the tradition of the Torah, requires that women be subject to men and that men be the priests of God.”

“Good,” Colonel Gemistos smiled, “Sewanee is still earning its keep, I see. Now for the bonus round, what do we call such stories in seminary?”

“Myths, sir,” Fabian mentioned nonchalantly, “with a capital M.”

“So when we speak of Myths in this class (and although there will be few in Plotinus, there will be more in the works on reserve), we shall not care if the stories are factually correct or even remotely plausible. We’re after the kernel – the Truth that we despise what we cannot have, the Truth in Hebrew society of the various relationships between humanity and divinity. Notice, gentlemen, that I specified ‘in Hebrew society,’ for a Myth is often interpretable only in terms of the culture in which it originates.

“Now, the Greek and Roman Myths – again with a capital M – are not silly stories that are obviously false. No, they’re True – with a capital T. Rather than dismissing them as impossible stories of Gods that do not exist – the way the early church (and the modern church for that matter) preferred that you look at them – you need to delve into them and see what the stories mean to actual human beings faced with the prospect of the divine, as well as with each other.

“Of course, they were written down by people, just as the Bible was written down by people – many different people. I’m sure Mr Ward would like to elaborate over coffee in the canteen just how the J writer, the P writer, the Deuteronomist, and others are represented. But that is not the thrust of this course. We will be examining the Neoplatonism of Plotinus in the philosophical tradition of Hellenism, not of Christianity, in spite of the great influence he has had on that religion as well – and even on the Muslim, by the way. Indeed, if you studied your theology

strictly from the Hebrew background and without any of the contributions that Plotinus made through St Augustine, you might be surprised, or even shocked at what you would be left with.”

Once again, Fabian Ward nodded in full agreement. As it turned out, that was why he had left Sewanee to come to Charleston. To be precise, he had come to study under one eminent professor emeritus, if only for a single course and all the tutoring he could get. It amazed me when I learned that someone in his early twenties would subject himself to the Thete System to study ever so briefly with one professor.

At that point, the door swung open and a thirteenth cadet hurried into the room, brandishing a slip of paper. Everyone stopped still and looked at him. It was Christopher Adams, and he said breathlessly, “I’m sorry, sir. I’ve just managed to be admitted to the class. Here is my late enrollment form.”

Colonel Gemistos looked at it with a puzzled expression on his face. “Have I spoken with you, Mr ...” he looked at the paper, “... Adams?”

“No, sir. But *he* said it should be all right,” he added pointing at the paper.

Colonel Gemistos continued to examine the late enrollment form with detached interest, although I seemed to detect a look of concern in his eyes. “Very well,” he concluded, “I suppose this has all been accomplished in proper form and with some ‘higher authority.’ In that case, there must be a ‘higher purpose’ involved, mustn’t there?”

As Christopher took his seat in the remaining lecture desk on the front row, just on the other side of Fabian, I noticed that he was wearing the metal insigne of a staff sergeant. When last I had seen him at the ACF, he had been wearing 2C – a junior private in C Company – and I knew that his often inappropriate puritanical fervor had convinced his classmates and those above him to rank him quite low. To be sure, it was not unusual when grades or demerits caught up with people, for a highly rated junior private to be moved up to take the place of a faltering squad sergeant – my friend and language laboratory colleague Ben Chapman had risen that way quite easily and deservedly. But to jump from a low rated private to platoon sergeant was completely unheard of. Certainly, I would not have expected it from General Butler, who was, after all, as Commandant ultimately responsible for such things.

As the semester went on, Colonel Gemistos’ prescient suggestion that Fabian might inform the rest of us over coffee on some theological matters proved quite accurate, as a group of us who did not have classes after Plotinus regularly started meeting in the canteen to discuss the course and to share things we had read and, especially, things we had thought about. A couple of the cadets actually rearranged their schedules so they could attend these sessions.

At one of our earlier meetings, I recall sitting at the far right end of a table with my arm draped over the back of a chair in the canteen – an unintentional copy of Greg who was sitting just across from me. We were engaged in a serious, informed discussion of Greek philosophy. Of all things! Greek philosophy from a group of Acropolis cadets lounging in the canteen! I was every bit as thrilled at the very incongruity of the prospect as I was by what was being said. Had the ghost of Plotinus himself walked up to the table and suggested that one of us convince another of us about some particular doctrine, I could hardly have been more surprised.

But when Owen brought up something that he had found in the reserve materials about Iamblichus, a Neopythagorean philosopher in that highly mathematical tradition, my mind took a sudden, though perhaps not an unexpected leap into the depths of my soul. Deep within me, I

heard my own voice imploring, “Oh, Mary. I wish you could be here to share this with me. I’ll bet you’d bring in Pythagoras and dazzle us all with your mathematical insights – all on one napkin.”

A tear came into my eye and rolled down my cheek. “Hey,” said Greg, leaning across the table to me and whispering confidentially with concern and sympathy, “are you all right?”

I leaned forward and wiped up the tear with the palm of my hand. I almost attributed it to the return of springtime allergies, but I felt Mary’s warm, gentle smile somewhere within me, and I whispered back, “A memory – a memory from a long time ago.”

Greg looked at me knowingly, “I understand. I understand.” And it looked as though he was fighting one back himself.

“Sorry,” I said, looking at his eyes.

“It’s okay,” he replied with a smile. Then we sighed, unnoticed by the others in their animated discussion, and we rejoined the discourse.

The memories of the class all flooded into me at once, and it was difficult in my own mind to separate one from the other. I realized that I was recalling the first moments interspersed with moments later and with moments toward the end – the week before this, my flight back to The Acropolis from Colonial Lake. But they were all important, and they all played a vital role in what was going to happen to me in April. I searched my mind, I searched my soul, and I tried to pick out what in the class had helped to bring me to the determination to get back to the refuge of the barracks, what that refuge represented, and what I so earnestly hoped I would find there.

As I searched, I realized that all my recollections were involved with growing higher, growing deeper. There were important lessons not only from Colonel Gemistos, but also from my fellow students. And some of them, I recalled with dread, were more ominous than others.

But then it also occurred to me as my thoughts started descending into dreads, that something of extreme importance had occurred in that one discussion in the canteen – something far more important than Iamblichus or Pythagoras. It had almost escaped my attention at the time, but I now saw clearly how it was the thought of Mary – dear, dear Mary – that had stopped me from dismissing Greg’s question and had convinced me to be honest and open to him. Honest, open, and in the end, compassionate. Yes, in a very special way, she was still with me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN HIGHER AND DEEPER WITHIN

Although the arguments supporting them were lengthy and tedious, the core concepts behind the Plotinian universe were fairly easy to grasp. To my delight and mysteriously to my expectation, everything existed on levels. Indeed, the lower two levels had been the framework through which I had come to see things already, from the execution of the Thete System to the relationship between thought or reason and action. I was especially intrigued by the concepts, not only because they seemed remarkably logical to me, but also because, in a disturbing way, the concepts had already been impinging upon my perception of things for the past two and a half years, and I had always wondered and even worried where they had come from. Now, even if I could not tell where my thoughts had come from, I could at least discover how other, far greater minds had arrived at that point in their philosophy.

The way Colonel Gemistos introduced the Plotinian world-view was really quite remarkable. He walked into class on Wednesday and took out a large silver disk and held it up to the class. “What is this?” he asked.

We all answered that it was a silver dollar.

“Quite so!” he exclaimed. Then he held up a piece of paper and asked, “And so what is this?”

We all answered that it was a dollar bill.

“Excellent! What is the difference between these two things you call ‘dollars?’”

One is made of silver and the other is made of paper.

“So they differ in the ‘matter’ that makes them up – and we’ll refine that concept of matter later on. But they are both dollars. How do we know that this,” he asked holding up the silver coin, “is a dollar?”

It has ‘dollar’ stamped on it.

“Ah, like this,” he pounced, holding up a plastic disk of play money.

No, it has to be silver.

“But this,” he said holding up the dollar bill, “is also a dollar, and it’s not silver. Why can the plastic disk not be a dollar as well?”

It doesn’t bear the images and fit the form of an official dollar minted or printed by the United States government.

“Wonderful!” he shouted out. “It does not ‘fit the form.’ Perfect – for now! So as long as it fits the form and is made of the proper matter, it’s a dollar?”

Correct.

“Now what can we make of this?” and he held up a little book, a catalogue of American coins, and showed us a picture of a silver dollar like the one he had held up before.

That’s a picture of a dollar.

“How do you know that it’s a representation of a dollar at all.”

It has the form of a dollar.

“So it, too, is a dollar?”

No, it has the form but not the matter.

“So the form of a dollar does not consist of ink on a page?”

Correct, that is only a representation of the dollar.

“And you know that this,” he said holding up the silver dollar, “is a dollar, if and only if you can match it with its picture in a book like this?”

No, we know what a dollar looks like.

“How do you know what a dollar looks like? Do you carry the ‘form’ in your heads?”

Essentially, yes.

“Exactly yes, I would say! So the real form is a concept – an idea – that you have in your head, and the matter is the stuff that is used to actualize the form. This,” he went on holding up the silver dollar, “is a dollar only because it fits the abstract form for a dollar. To put it another way, so long as the form is imprinted on – governs, if you will – the matter, is it a dollar. A plain disk of silver will not do, even though it possess precisely the same matter.”

We sat there and digested the information for a moment, and he continued. “But you say this piece of paper is a dollar as well. It does not fit the form, nor does that form govern the same type of matter.”

The one is a silver dollar and the other is a dollar bill.

“But they’re both dollars?”

Yes, just different kinds of dollars.

“So what’s a dollar?” He paused a moment and continued, “Don’t say it’s a type of money, because if you do you will be going from one abstract concept – the dollar – to a more abstract concept – money – without providing any explanation for the former.”

Greg spoke up and offered, “A dollar is a value placed upon any commodity that is worth ... a dollar. That’s circular, isn’t it, sir?”

“But a valiant attempt at an as-yet impossible task. And I’m not really trying to direct us into the world of economics. The point is that there is an abstract idea that has – that indeed *is* – a form in our minds. When we see that form manifest in the appropriate matter, we call it a dollar. But which – the form or the matter – is *essentially* the dollar? That’s the big question.”

He took out another, smaller silver disk and asked, “What is this?”

A quarter.

How do you know?

It maintains the form of a quarter that we have in our heads as an idea, and it’s manifest in the appropriate matter.

“Very good – very, very good. But what is this?” he asked holding up something like the quarter but with different colors along the edge.

A Great Society quarter.

Colonel Gemistos chuckled, “Yes, if you must. Or a clad quarter or sandwich quarter. Now when these recently came out, how did you know it was a quarter?”

It had the form of a quarter.

“But the form did not govern the appropriate matter. In the case of this,” and he once more held aloft the plastic dollar, “you refused to accept it. Why do you accept this clad, or ‘Great Society’ quarter as you call it?”

We had been informed that the matter was going to change, but the form remained the same.

“Now what if I put this quarter – or either quarter for that matter – into a furnace and melted it down. Would it still be a quarter?”

No, the quarter relies on its form to be a quarter.

“And this?” he asked, flipping through the catalogue of American coins to the page with the quarter.

That’s just a representation of the quarter. Like the idea of the form we carry in our heads.

“But,” he said, pulling out a small lump of silver, “you would call the picture a quarter, or at the very least you would associate the word ‘quarter’ with the representation, simply because it manifests the form or idea. Indeed, you would even call the idea you carry around in your heads (and I cannot emphasize this too much) a quarter, even though it has no substance at all. And yet, you would call this lump of silver that has in fact been a quarter ... well, just a lump of silver?”

Yes, everyone replied, but the wheels were definitely starting to turn at a higher gear now.

“Matter then is not a sufficient factor. The matter of a quarter can become the matter of a lump of silver through change. This, gentlemen, is what we call the world of Becoming. And the forms that stand behind this silver dollar, this dollar bill, this silver quarter, and this clad quarter, as well as these pictures of a silver dollar and a quarter are what are in your minds as ideas. And these, gentleman, these forms – these ideas in your minds – are the true dollars and quarters in what we call the world of Being. The forms remain constant, while the matter by nature and necessity continuously changes. Herein, by the way, lies the key to Mr Thompson’s question, for you to consider at your leisure. Just don’t tie ‘form’ to ‘physical structure,’ but rather with ‘abstract idea,’ and you’ll get it. We’ve been a bit loose today with the distinction, but we’ll get stricter as time goes on – and you can handle it.”

He looked around to let that sink in and then continued, “This ‘solid’ world you see around you is a world of matter that is constantly changing. For those of you who have already discovered the little book of Heraclitus on reserve, you know that in the world of matter you cannot step into the same river twice. That’s the nature of matter in this world of Becoming.

“But for those of you who have come across the little bit we have left of Parmenides, you know that this Greek philosopher claims that there is no Becoming, only Being. Knowing that things change constantly, you were probably confused by that. But what Parmenides is getting at is not the matter, but the forms or ideas – the world of constant and eternal Being. Taken together, both of these pre-Socratic philosophers had a powerful influence on Plato and all the other philosophers you’ve read about in the Armstrong book up to and including Plotinus.

“Now Plotinus doesn’t care about the world of Becoming, other than that’s where he finds his lunch. What he’s interested in is the world of Being. And as Mr Ward has been chomping at the bit to hear, this is where philosophy meets theology.

“Notice how I raised this silver dollar. I had it in my hand, which is matter, and my hand went through the motion of lifting. What is it that caused all of that to occur? What governs the body – this matter,” he asked tapping his fingers to his chest, “and causes it to move?”

“An atheist would start referring at this point to synapses in the brain and various substances of matter ruled by causes and effects. But Plotinus was no atheist. For him the lowest level of the realm of Being that made contact with and governed the matter of Nature was something he called *ἡ ψυχή* ‘the soul’, from which we derive the English word *psyche*.

“Now, don’t get excited, Mr Adams. This is not the soul destined for salvation or condemnation. In Plotinian thought, a soul envelops you and governs your movements and development – the movements and development of the matter in your bodies (or more precisely, the matter upon which your bodies are imposed). Likewise, there’s a soul that does the same for the bird that just flew by the window and for the palmetto tree she landed in. The entire world even has its own soul – appropriately enough the World Soul – and she is your sister, not your

mother (using gender here simply to reflect the grammatical categories of Greek, as Mr Ward and Cadet will understand).

“So that’s the Neoplatonic explanation for my lifting the coin – my soul directed me, reasoning it out in discursive thought. But what gave me the idea to do so? The answer is right there in the word ‘idea.’ This came from my intellect, or spirit, what the Greeks called *ὁ νοῦς* (though, you’ll learn that technically what I’m talking about here is *διάνοια* – but we’ll get into that later). This individual *nous*, the intellect or spirit, is what governs the soul and gives it decision and purpose, or will, in a nondiscursive manner. Your *nous* knows, your soul thinks.

“But all of that is on a personal level. How about the cosmos? In the world of Being, there are three foundational levels, or hypostases. It is on the level of this overall *Nous* – the second hypostasis – that we find the Forms, the Ideas that stand behind everything. Often the *Nous* himself is considered to be a creator God or Demiurge that imagines and arranges these Forms in his mind – his *Nous* himself (again, using Greek grammatical gender to help us distinguish one level from another). In their broadest and most potent arrangements, the Forms at the very beginning of the process are what the Gods are made of, a concept that was developed later in detail by Proclus.

“Once these Forms or Ideas are in place, they are radiated and combined into usable groupings by the Soul that governs the third hypostasis. She ensures that there are souls assigned to all things that must have them. This Soul, or Universal Soul, is both your sister and your mother. From one perspective, she emanates from *Nous* along with your individual souls; and from another perspective, your individual souls emanate from her. As on the individual level, the *Nous* knows nondiscursively, and this is the spiritual side of him – indeed, the mystical side, if you will. The Soul, on the other hand, reasons discursively and can only transcend this reason in the contemplation of the *Nous*.”

At that point, Colonel Gemistos paused and looked over at me, his green eyes gleaming in a way that seemed to penetrate. “The *Nous* and the Gods simply know,” he observed pointedly, “and it is up to the Soul and the souls to determine through reason. Thus, the Gods do not give you exclusive revelations, no matter how it may appear to you. Through dreams and insights they may – with your collaboration – guide you along toward them, but it is up to you by your very nature to reason things out discursively.

“Now, I mentioned there were three hypostases,” he said abruptly to the class, as though what he had said to me had taken place in some other dimension. “The question is: Where does the *Nous* with all his Forms come from? On the one hand, you could say from nothing, for before they existed – or more precisely, previous to their existence, since time is not a factor in Being – there was/is nothing. On the other hand, you could say everything, for when we try to conceive of all of the Forms coalescing, would that not be everything? But that would be a multiplicity – hardly what we could expect for what must precede multiplicity, what must be the ultimate simplex. You see, gentlemen, whenever you are left with two, you must conceive that something simpler, some unity preceded them (not in time or space, of course, but in precedence). Indeed, the only purely nonmultiplicity would be nothing; but that would overshoot the simplex in the other direction.

“Plotinus’ answer, gentlemen, is that the first hypostasis from which the *Nous* and all his Forms proceed, and from which in turn the Soul and all her souls emanate, is everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere, every time and no time. But in order to accomplish this, It transcends everything as It transcends nothing, It transcends everywhere as It transcends

nowhere, It transcends every time as It transcends no time. It is the ultimate affirmation as It is the ultimate negation. It is beyond our comprehension, for all of our powers of comprehension emanate from It. This is τὸ ἓν ‘the One,’ also known as τὸ ἀγαθόν ‘the Good.’ The One is not the One because it has unity as some sort of attribute. Rather, it is the One because it *is* Unity. Indeed, Unity beyond Unity – the very Principle of the very Form.

“So from the One, in a process that must remain hidden from us, the Nous and his Forms proceed, or emanate (but without weakening the source), and from the level of the Nous, the Soul and all of her souls proceed as well. The expression of the higher level in the lower is known in Greek – are you ready for this, Mr Adams? and you, Mr Hughes? – ὁ λόγος, the Logos or ‘the Expression.’ In the process, though, each time something proceeds toward a lower level, it must necessarily look back to ‘contemplate’ that from which it has come. Now, whatever you do, do not lose sight of the fact that all this talk of three levels and emanation is just a way of trying to wrap our minds around something that happens without time and without space, altogether ‘in’ the One, the Good.

“Your task as souls, then, is to contemplate the Soul, going within yourselves and to a higher level – always in and up, deeper and higher (again simply as a way of visualizing that which has neither time nor space). And once you have achieved unity with the Soul, you must contemplate the Nous – the Intellect or Spirit – also struggling in and up, deeper and higher both from the perspective of the Soul and that of your own nous, your own intellect or spirit. And once you have achieved unity with the Nous, once you have achieved oneness with Intellect/Spirit, only then can you dare to attempt to contemplate the One – the complete unity, the utter negation of all. This contemplation is a mystical experience, and Plotinus here combines stringent intellectual philosophy with mysticism.

“What makes this contemplation possible is once again that there is neither time nor space in the world of Being. You contemplate that from which you emanate, but you *are* that from which you emanate, or at least you are an aspect of it. Thus, you exist here in the world of Becoming in a space and in a time, both of which are constantly changing. But you also exist in the timelessness – the eternity if you will – of the world of Being. You are here, but you are also There. A strand of you, again figuratively speaking, reaches from your soul to the Soul to the Nous. All is in you, and you are in All.

“After all, if your soul exists in Being There, then she is eternal and not subject to time as you perceive it here. You, your soul, must therefore exist ‘simultaneously’ here and There, both as a soul emanating from Soul, emanating from Nous, emanating from the One and as a soul in connection with a material body. Conversely, you here exist as a soul contemplating Soul, contemplating Nous, contemplating the One.

“This is the pinnacle of ancient Greek philosophy, gentlemen. After Plotinus and his followers, the church was established and ended all such speculative thought based on reason and nature, allowing only the study of revealed scripture. In a word, you don’t get any better than this, at least not until the Renaissance and Enlightenment – and they hardly surpassed these third- and fourth-century thinkers.”

Professor Gemistos looked around the class. Everyone sat in wrapped attention. Everyone, I noted, except Christopher, who slouched in his seat sulking. Even Bart stared at the Colonel in fascination at this new world that was opening up for him.

“This is the barest of outlines, gentlemen,” he concluded, “and a bit of an oversimplification, I’m afraid. You just can’t cover it all in a single class. But this is enough to get you started, some benchmarks from which to orient your compasses. Now get out there and read! And *think!*”

On my way to the canteen for our discussion, I thought about higher and deeper. Was that not where Mary was in my soul? I had thought this, but I had not known where these thoughts of levels of depth and height had come from. They had been bothering me ever since about the time I had met Herm ... Herm. *Herm!*

The thoughts that suddenly flooded into my mind were too complicated to entertain before our discussion, so I let them play out in my subconscious for the rest of the day. But that night I lay awake in my bunk and dwelled upon them in the dark. My first thought, as so often when I lay down, was about Mary. For a long time now, and growing in intensity, it was as though I could “physically” feel her – or at least some crucial aspect of her, of her soul – deep and high within my own soul, or so it seemed to me. Had I somehow united with her here on that level of the psyche? Was I present there in her soul, too? Did here and there make any sense anyway?

Then I remembered Herm and his bright green eyes – a green that was not the normal green of normal eyes, but some otherworldly green. Those eyes had reminded me of someone crucially important to me when I met him – someone who seemed to be at the root of something of the ultimate significance. But despite all my efforts, I could never dredge up that seminal memory. Herm had been my guide, just as Colonel Gemistos with his otherworldly green eyes was filling that role now. What had he meant by his aside to me in the lecture? Why had he singled me out for this insight?

And then there was Melissa Lewis, whose soft green (and yes, otherworldly) eyes seemed to have been visible only to me. Was there some connection I could not fathom? The thought of Melissa brought Melanie to mind. For but an instant, I could have sworn I had caught the faintest glimmer of that same green in her eyes when she said ... the same thing Melissa had said to me. The same thing the feminine presence had said to me so many times now – those Ionic words that I longed for and yet dreaded. If I could meet her, would I behold some green-eyed Goddess? I wondered. I wondered.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE PHYSICS OF BEING

Early in March, there was one particular class that stuck out in my mind, not only because it reawakened my fascination for physics and helped me see the cosmos in a whole new light, but also because it seemed to be the point at which certain forces teetered and then began cascading down to break my world apart – or at least, to contribute in yet one more way to its breaking apart.

Colonel Julian Gemistos walked into class wearing an unusually glowing grin and some posters curled up in his arm. He set them down on the table and addressed us from the lectern, “Gentlemen, as cadets of The Acropolis, you have all taken the introduction to physics. And I suppose that some of your physics professors may have mentioned in passing that the physics you were using in class was founded upon a view of the universe interpreted through the equations of one Sir Isaac Newton. The fact that the physics developed in the past six decades or so has rendered Newton obsolete – at least for gaining an understanding of how the universe actually works – was then mentioned and summarily dismissed. And you opened your books.”

There were ironic nods from some cadets who had taken more advanced physics courses, but the rest of us just sat there waiting for whatever he was going to make of this.

“Today, gentlemen, we’re going to set a toe into the enthralling field of quantum mechanics. To wit, we shall take a look at the notorious double-slit experiment.”

Fabian smiled broadly next to me. Evidently this was information well known to the initiates, and I sat forward eagerly, hoping to join their ranks.

“Let us begin,” the professor said thoughtfully, “with some diagrams I’m sure you’ve seen in your sophomore physics course. We see here a barrier with a wave approaching it and passing through this one small hole, or slit. Beyond the slit, we see a continuation of one little section of the wave – one slit in width, or initial diameter – as it once again fans out and strikes the wall opposite.”

We all gave him a look that seemed to say, “Yes? So?”

“You appear to be rather familiar with that concept, so let’s take a look at the next diagram. Notice that the barrier has two slits now, and the wave breaks up into two sections that send waves fanning out beyond the barrier and striking the wall opposite. But look at what’s happening to the new waves. They’re intersecting in what you were taught was an interference pattern – crests are joining crests to make larger crests, troughs are joining troughs to make deeper troughs, and crests and troughs are meeting to cancel each other out.”

Of course, since we had all been required to take physics, none of this seemed particularly novel or surprising to us. Indeed, we were used to the concept and eager that he continue.

“Now let’s take a look at a schematic diagram of particles going through the same motions. Of course, the water is made up ultimately of particles, and it would be useful to see things on this particulate level. Notice here again we have a single slit with the particles coming through and this time they – or in quantum physics their potentialities – fan through the slit and strike the wall in what we can now see as a pattern. Most of them strike dead ahead of the slit, fewer strike

just next to that point, fewer next to that point, and so on until it peters out on either side. This pattern gets us into the realm of mathematics, and my apologies to you, Cadet.”

I was startled by his remark. He had no doubt simply seen my transcript with my near-catastrophic performance in the subject. But to me, mathematics now had another, more personal significance. Could he somehow have known that, too?

“Right below the wave diagram, you see a long rectangle, representing the frequency of the particles’ impacts on the far wall – what the wall sees, so to speak. The very dark patch representing lots and lots of particles there in the middle and the lesser and lesser amounts as we spread out define a probability wave. For any one particle, the greatest probability is that it will strike here, in the dark area directly opposite the slit. The probability lessens gradually that the particle will strike further away. So it is more probable for any given particle to strike here in the middle than it is for the same particle to strike here on the edge. Do you all follow me?”

We all nodded approvingly, though I noticed that some of my fellow students – presumably those who had not done so well in sophomore physics – raised their eyebrows in belated recognition. It was too bad for them that Colonel Gemistos had not taught physics as well. As for me, I was still reeling a bit from his earlier comment to me, and my mind kept wanting to digress to another mathematical explanation, so long ago.

“All right, gentlemen, now let’s go to the penultimate diagram. Once again, here’s the double slit and the waves of particles emanating from them. Notice how when crests of different degrees are added to crests we have various dark areas on the representation of the wall here below, signifying lots and lots of particles coinciding – as in the center of the wall before. These numerous vertical bands are the mark of an interference pattern. Is all this clear?”

We nodded expectantly, as this had indeed been covered in our physics classes. By this time though, we could tell that the point was about to be made, and we felt sure that whatever it was, it would be a shock.

“Let us say now,” he continued without diagrams, “that we were to fire individual particles, one at a time, in the direction of the slits. What would happen? We could not follow them on their path – they would be mere potentialities. We would have to wait until they hit the wall opposite. Now, what do you think would appear in that slice of wall?”

“If you think like Newton, one of the particles will strike the left slit, pass through it, and just strike the wall opposite, and one will strike the right slit with the same effect. Now that’s logical isn’t it? After all, with only one particle passing through one or the other slit at one time and then striking the wall before another particle is loosed, how could it be any different? Indeed, gentlemen, that’s just what they got when they sent particles through a single slit; and with only one particle fired at a time, what we have here is in effect two single slits.”

He picked up his last poster and held it curled up in both his hands. “But when they did the experiment with the two slits, this is what they got.” He opened the poster to reveal the interference pattern.

Some of the cadets – I among them – jerked and sat bolt upright in our chairs. Others looked concerned, but still requiring a bit of explanation. Fabian and a physics major behind him just sat there smiling, but nodding with something that looked like some renewed concern.

“You see, each particle entered completely independently of the others. And yet, somewhere between the slits and the wall, each one realized that since there were two slits and not one, it had to assume that it was participating in a wave interference and had to behave accordingly.”

The rest of the cadets now sat bolt upright as well. The only exception was Christopher Adams, who slouched impatiently and finally demanded, “But sir, this is all just physics. What does this have to do with the philosophy of Plotinus?”

We all turned in amazement. Christopher had seen the experimental results, and they meant absolutely nothing to him. As I would learn, not even the quantum physicists themselves could treat these results with anything short of astonished awe. Yet, Christopher was unmoved.

Colonel Gemistos looked down at him kindly and said calmly, “Mr Adams, this physics has everything to do with the philosophy of Plotinus. Everything. Indeed, it is a verification of his entire world view.”

Now we all looked at the professor emeritus like a group of cats detecting something that had just moved. We did not know what it was, but we certainly wanted to find out and were prepared to pounce.

“What happens when your soul extricates itself from the world of Becoming and exists simply on the world of Being?”

“You go to heaven by the Grace of God and the Love of Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord,” fired off Christopher with the determination of one who must suppress all doubt, “or you go to hell as a reprobate to burn forever!”

We all once again wheeled around and stared at Christopher. Nothing – nothing at all – that contradicted his religion in the slightest could be tolerated. His mind was completely and utterly closed. Why had he signed up for this class, anyway?

The Colonel just smiled gently and said, “That’s one view. But here we’re considering the views of the Greek philosopher Plotinus and the Neoplatonic school of thought.”

Christopher curled in on himself, and I could barely hear him breathe out the words, “It’s wrong! It’s not the Truth. It’s not.”

Once more, the professor smiled and continued, “In Plotinus’ framework, we are all souls and we have a separate existence as souls in much the same way as each particle going through the double slits has a separate existence. Now, each particle realizes that it is part of a larger pattern with all the other particles in all their separate existences. So they behave as though in a larger unit – a larger unity, if you will. Plotinus argued that your souls behave in exactly the same way. On one level and in one respect, they are independent entities; but on another level in another respect, they are one with the larger pattern.

“Here, gentlemen, lies the essence of the journey up and in from hypostasis to hypostasis. As you go higher, you are bound into the Soul through your souls. Your souls, as it were, slip together into Soul. From There you are bound into the Nous – the Intellect or Spirit – through your intellects, your spirits. And from There to the One. You always exist as separate souls, but you are also integral ... somethings ... of the One – we know not what.”

He surveyed the room, and when he determined that he could pull it off, he stated nonchalantly, “You see, gentlemen, all things are together. As Proclus puts it, everything is in everything. Modern physics has demonstrated that mathematically, and I have every confidence that the experiments – once we have the necessary equipment – will verify that.”

Suddenly, we realized that he was launching into yet another insight from physics that had not been explained to us as sophomores. I could hear an audible intake of breath as we steeled ourselves for another round.

“Einstein did not like quantum physics, with its reliance upon probabilities rather than certainties. He did not want to admit, as he put it, that God plays dice with the universe.”

Glancing over at Christopher, I saw the Literalist glare up angrily from his sulking position in his lecture desk. I began to worry about his odd late enrollment in the class, the resigned look on Colonel Gemistos' face when he noted some "higher authority" and some "higher purpose," and the consequences that Paul Hermann had attributed to certain mind-sets, certain behaviors. Such were the consequences that Chaplain Konrad had barely survived and that he seemed to perceive in some vague way in Augustin's "censoring." More than ever, I viewed Christopher not so much as an irritant, than as a real threat even beyond the confines of the ACF.

But the professor simply went on with his lesson, "Einstein and two of his colleagues came up with a challenge. In order to prove their theories, quantum physicists had to demonstrate that you can go beyond 'local realism' – that particles that had originated together would act as though they were still together, even when separated and at a distance. They would constitute an 'entangled system.' A couple years ago, the Irish physicist John Bell devised the mathematical basis for the experiment that will ultimately prove that two particles thus separated do in fact operate in tandem over a distance that could stretch from one end of the universe to the other. Now, this is much too far for a signal from one to reach the other even at the speed of light; yet, they nonetheless influence each other. His arguments are heavy reading, and I would not advise that you tackle them without a firm grounding in statistics and a lot of patience. They are, however, so convincing that experimenters are right now trying to devise the equipment that they are confident will provide the real-world verification.

"In the meantime, the important point in this for us is that two things separated can still act together as a unit. In Plotinian terms, your soul and your soul and your soul," he pointed out at random around the class, "are on some higher, deeper level acting as one soul. They have all slipped together – not in time or space, but in their 'upper' aspect in Being from which they emanate. And so they must act in our contemplative quest to go up and in.

"Compare that with the double-slit experiments, and I believe you'll see that the philosophy of this third-century Greek thinker corresponds rather agreeably with the findings of modern physics. Indeed, what we have here are important insights into the world of Being. And indeed," he added with gravity, "if all of our souls ultimately emanate from the same source, then they are all connected and all work in tandem."

"Sin!" muttered Christopher.

"Ah, yes," the Colonel snatched up the subject. "Sin. What do you suppose the only sin is in this Neoplatonism when it is viewed as a religious framework?"

We sat in silence, although I guessed that we probably all had figured it out. Or at least, I had; for it was a failing that I was most painfully aware of.

"Isolation, gentlemen, self-isolation. The refusal to slip together with the others on whatever level you happen to be operating at the time – and please bear in mind that the levels are not spatially defined – for nothing is isolated, There in the world of Being. This is a sin, because it thwarts the essence of Being. Without slipping together into unity, we can never achieve Being and we can never go beyond Being to the One."

The sound of a bugle wafted across the parade ground to signal the end of class. We were all exhausted and most of us staggered to the canteen to try and make sense of it all, or at least to try to build some consensus on what it might have meant. It occurred to me, as it had before, that Christopher never came to these sessions, even though he did not have a ten-o'clock class or any

other duties that I knew of. He was dangerous, though, wherever he might be going, and I worried about him.

One person who did stagger in after us was Bart, and he in fact did have a class at this hour. He stood awkwardly shifting on his feet while the rest of us took our seats.

“Hey, Bart,” Greg smiled cheerfully, but not without concern, “I thought you had a business class now.”

“I do – or I did – or something,” he answered, finally grabbing a chair from the next table and collapsing into it at the far end of ours. “I’m not doing too well in it. And besides, the professor hates me. They all hate me,” he continued as in a daze, “except for Colonel Gemistos. He has confidence in me and he brings out my own confidence. He’s the only real teacher I’ve had here at The Apocalypse!” He uttered his nickname for the institution in a way that revealed a lot of bitterness and pent-up anxiety.

“Remember,” I said, trying to comfort him, “you only need twelve quality points.”

“Is that so?” inquired Owen. “Well then, you’re doing really well in the Plotinus class. Why don’t you drop at least one of the others and concentrate on Plotinus and maybe the other one. Or just on Plotinus.”

“I couldn’t do that!” Bart exclaimed. “I can’t take a chance like that. I’ve gotta graduate this spring or I’m an enlisted man in some far-off jungle somewhere.”

“Look,” said Owen, “Colonel Gemistos certainly doesn’t hate you. And I’d say that in his book you have a clear A – no question about it. ... Don’t look at me like that, Bart! Who’s been bringing up the most lucid questions? Well, besides Fabian, here, and you know he can’t be the only A.”

“Yeah, but that’s only because I don’t know the answers.”

“And the rest of us do? Come on, you know enough to ask the right questions, and that’s doing great!”

“Besides,” mentioned Fabian with a wry smile, “I have it on good authority that the professor emeritus is a *very* easy grader, especially for those who ask questions. It’s philosophy, you know, and the questions are the important part. Remember how he guided us between the world of Becoming and the world of Being with the dollars and quarters? It was all questions,” and then he added with a sly grin, “wasn’t it?”

“But you guys just don’t know how messed up I get before exams. If I hafta take the exam, I guarantee you, I’ll flunk it.”

“What did I just say? It’s the questions, not the answers. His exam is designed to make you ask, not answer.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Bart said in worried resignation, “I know all that. But you just have no idea what I can do to a final. If there was only a way to get out of the final, I could get out of The Apocalypse!”

“Why don’t you talk to Colonel Gemistos?” Owen suggested. “He’ll let you know how you’re doing so you can stop worrying.”

“I can’t do it. I just can’t do it!” he concluded, rose slowly, and sadly walked away.

I wondered what he just could not do. Speak to the professor? Stop worrying? Take the exam? Or was it something else altogether? And why did I start becoming so concerned now when he referred to The Apocalypse?

That night, the thoughts flooded in on me to the point I felt I was drowning in them. The physics, the philosophy, the utter confusion of it all. Yet, the elegant simplicity of it all! I felt Mary in my soul – somewhere in there, up there. We had been forced apart like two particles ripped asunder and thrown to the opposite ends of the universe, and yet No, I dared not think, and I would not think.

And what of Eliza Beth? We were not being torn asunder, and yet I could feel her gently drifting away from me – two particles that lacked the charges and the structures to remain together. Somewhere deep inside of me, my soul desperately reached out to hers, but there was no soul – no ethereal hand – reaching back to me.

Would Melanie help, I wondered. She had before. But why? Was she reaching to me, as I was reaching to Eliza Beth?

Then another, darker thought entered my mind. What was my relationship with Eliza Beth, anyway? My classmates kept complaining that I had become so hard to connect with. To connect with! Was I just using her as a jealous goddess to do for me what I knew I should not do for myself? The sin!

An image, as of something long ago and far away, entered my mind just as I was drifting into sleep. It was a strange scene, the disorienting type of scene that your mind passes through sometimes on the limits between waking and sleeping. A hall. Gray people in gray. Everyone slipping together in the twilight. Slipping together in the twilight. Through the waves interfering with waves, a pair of green eyes. From unseen lips whispering through falling tears:

χρεόν ἐστὶ
χρεόν ἐστὶ
so múst it be
so múst it be

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

LONELY MARCH

My joy in the Plotinus class was matched by my fear and apprehension for my relationship with Eliza Beth. Throughout February and even before, I had felt a shadow passing over us – some specter from out of the past that haunted her and would give her no peace. Her pattern of snapping at me and then apologizing – with or without prompting from Melanie – seemed to wear her down as much as it did me. I did not know where it came from, but I feared where it would lead to.

On 4 March, we had a fencing meet at Duke University. When we got there the evening before, I realized just how tense I had been. Trying to open the back of the Acropolis station wagon to help take our gear out, I yanked on the handle, but it did not budge. It was cold up in the Piedmont of North Carolina, and I was sure that the sudden drop in temperature had something to do with it. But when I yanked harder in frustration, the handle broke.

My teammates laughed and made snide remarks about my not knowing my own strength. When Sean noticed me just standing there gazing at the broken-off piece of metal in my hand, though, he patted me on the shoulder and said, “Come on, don’t worry about it. It was just cold.” But that was not what I was worried about.

The next Saturday, the weather in Charleston was pleasant, but the moon was dark. I went to see Eliza Beth right after Saturday Morning Inspection, my heart full of longing and dread, hope and fear. But she came skipping down the outside stairs as I approached the building.

“I am so glad to see you,” she said breathlessly, staring into my eyes, her head gently wagging. “I’ve missed you so very, very, very, very much!”

My mouth dropped open and I looked at her beautiful, radiant face in awe and disbelief. What had happened?

She wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me so long and so hard that I physically became dizzy. It seemed as though the entire scene was spinning around, as my eyes focused and unfocused. She slowly drew back, smiling every bit as sweetly as the Eliza Beth from the happy time in Columbia had smiled at me in the movie theater.

Standing out there in front of the Nursing College, I just gazed at her. Unable to speak, I took my hand and stroked her cheek with the outside of my fingers, and she reached up and held my hand, closed her eyes, and kissed it. When she opened her eyes, she saw tears in mine, and she looked at me with love and concern.

“I just don’t know what came over me this past winter,” she said, looking at me gently and catching my tears with her finger. “Maybe it was the awful darkness of the season, it always does make me melancholy.” She whispered my name over and over and over. Then she seemed to stand more erect and proclaim, “This is the real Eliza Beth – the Eliza Beth you met at Mitchell Hall, the Eliza Beth you came and rescued in Columbia, the Eliza Beth,” she paused, looking deep into my eyes, “the Eliza Beth who loves you.”

All I could do was gaze into her big brown eyes and stammer, “Please. Stay.”

“Oh, I have every intension of staying, young man,” she replied with a playful laugh. “You just try to get rid of me and see what happens!” She sidled around to my right and grabbed hold of my arm with both her arms and squeezed while she just uttered, “HmMMM.”

I found myself opening my eyes suddenly wide to see if I would wake up, although if this had been a dream I certainly did not want it to end. Eliza Beth was still clinging to my right arm, so I reached around with my left and cupped my hand around her cheek. She looked up at me expectantly, and I looked into her eyes and said as sincerely as I had ever said anything in my life, “Eliza Beth, I love you.”

She squeezed my arm more tightly, then she bounced in front of me and said through her smile, “Let’s go see the azaleas!”

It was a long walk back to Hampton Park next to The Acropolis, but it seemed short that day with Eliza Beth bubbling and chatting like a little girl – happy again. She seemed to find dozens of ways to hold my hand and arm as she smiled and effervesced.

The park was more gorgeous than I had ever seen it. In the warm weather, the azaleas were already in full bloom, accompanied by wisteria, camellias, and the fragrance of jasmine. We walked through the little canopies of plants, each time looking into each other’s eyes and kissing tenderly.

Then we strolled downtown for dinner and over to Colonial Lake to our – yes, our – bench to gaze into one another’s eyes some more. When I walked her back to the Nursing College, she held me close and said quietly, “Tomorrow I have hospital duty. But tell you what. I’ll give you a call this week!”

At 8:00pm during Evening Study Period on Tuesday, 14 March, the telephone rang. Ryan and I looked at it startled – it had never rung before. Then I smiled and said, “Oh, that’s Eliza Beth.”

With his boyish grin, Ryan hastened to the door with, “Gotta go to the latrine.”

I picked up the receiver, beaming with love and joy, “Eliza Beth?”

“Just a moment,” I heard Melanie Joyce say on the other end. “You do have to talk with her, really.” I heard some crying in the background and I worried about what was going on.

Then Eliza Beth came on the phone, repeating my name once again over and over and over, but this time imploring with distress. “I have to go home. I have to go home.”

“Eliza Beth,” I stuttered, “what happened?”

She breathed heavily, trying to regain some composure but with little success. “Sunday, Sunday, you know. I had hospital duty. On the way, I ... I collapsed.”

“Eliza Beth,” I practically shouted, “what’s wrong? Are you sick?”

“No, not sick. I don’t think sick. I saw ... I saw ... a ghost. Yes, it must have been a ghost. It had to have been a ghost.”

“A ... a ghost?”

“Yes, a ghost. Actually,” she said, her voice becoming dreamy and surreal, “there are two ghosts. Two awful, wretched ghosts. And I was making so much progress, so much progress in purging both of them – *both* of them, you hear? – both of them from my life. So they would never hurt me again and never, never, ever hurt you.”

“Whose ghosts are they?” I asked, trying to keep her talking.

“One outside, and one inside. One outside, and one inside.”

There was a long pause, and the next thing I knew, Melanie was back on the phone. “She got special permission to go home. I’m afraid she won’t be able to go with you to the Acropolis Day hop this weekend, and she was so looking forward to it. She really, really does love you. Please believe that and don’t give up. She’ll be back after Easter.”

A week before Easter 1967 was Acropolis Day. I could have gone to the festivities, but without Eliza Beth I knew I would not enjoy them. Certainly, that was the reason I gave myself, and this time I was sure that that was all there was to it.

I had planned to stay on campus over Easter break so I could be close to Eliza Beth. Even if she had not been able to stay too, from here it might have been possible for me to make a day-visit to her in Savannah – and meet her folks. I had told my parents that I had some newspaper business that might cut into the break, so they made plans to go visit some long-lost relatives my father had recently discovered.

There were about a score of us who stayed behind for various reasons – some, like a couple of the Thai cadets, because they lived too far away to travel and could not find any hosts; some because they had problems at home and found it easier just to stay there; and some whose attachments had given them cause to stay in Charleston, as should have been the case with me. Since the barracks were closed for the break, we stayed on the third floor of the Gymnasium in a cluster of large rooms with bunks for visiting athletes – the visiting team quarters.

A couple of thetes were among us, but since everyone was so lonely to begin with, we suspended the System, and those of us in other companies went ahead and recognized them. There was a high degree of camaraderie, as you would expect among prisoners of war and castaways from a shipwreck. I got to meet some new and interesting people and hoped that they could cut through my occasional quiet detachment to find something of interest in me, too. Since the mess hall was closed, there was an abundance of snack food lying around in what the Acropolis staff would doubtless denounce as a state of Communism. And we learned important details of life, such as the fact that even preserves get fuzzy when left out and unrefrigerated.

Named for the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring, Easter with her hares and eggs and promises of new beginnings should have filled me with hope – not with emptiness, fear, and resignation. Nonetheless, that year Easter Eve did promise the comfort and protection of a full moon. She rose and stayed with me throughout the night, gracing me with her light and presence each time I drifted out of my fitful sleep. Sometime after midnight, she reached her zenith, and her light flowed gently through the windows. It felt as though she tugged at me – not to disturb me, but rather to assure me of her presence. As I awoke bathed in the soft moonlight, I heard the echo of the feminine voice that by now I had fully come to expect, and even to look forward to, despite my dread:

χρεόν ἐστι
χρεόν ἐστι
so múst it be
so múst it be

I looked up at the ceiling and I silently asked, “Why must it be? Why must it be?” But she did not answer. Did she know why? Did it make any difference?

March had been a blow to me. I realized this all too well in my dazed, tearful stumble back from Colonial Lake – from our bench, but our bench no longer. It had begun with promises – promises of joy that made my heart pound with life, with hope, with love. Where had they gone? Oh, where had they gone?

However bad a blow March had been though, April lay yet in ambush. April was where it all came apart. Would it ever, ever come back together again?

On my trek back, I looked up to the sky and begged, “Why April? Where will it go from April?” But the moon was still veiled in clouds, and she would not answer.

CHAPTER FORTY

APRIL COMMENCES

On 1 April, Eliza Beth was still at home in Savannah, leaving me alone and full of anxiety. What were these ghosts she had seen – one outside, and one inside? Was she losing her mind? Was I losing mine? Was I losing her?

We had our final home fencing meet of the season that day. I thought back to that final wrestling match in high school, when my parents had come and my father could not stop repeating what he had heard from the students in front of him: “He’s good!” While I had no pretensions of being good at fencing, I had wished that Eliza Beth could have come that Saturday afternoon to see me.

Then at 8:00 Tuesday evening, 4 April, the phone rang in our room. I pounced on it as Ryan leapt up and bolted for the door, this time with a worried look on his face. I had shared with him in broadest outline what had happened, and I felt assured that he had probably figured out enough of the details himself.

“Eliza Beth?” I gasped.

There was a pause on the other end, and I heard someone with a catch in her throat. Finally, Melanie came on the phone and said, “No, it’s just me.” There was a sad, dreamy quality to her voice, and she sighed. I wondered what that all meant. The catch in her throat, the disappointed tone, the sigh – were they for Eliza Beth? Were they in sympathy for me? Or had she been hoping that the first word out of my mouth would have been “Melanie?”

“Eliza Beth came back today, but she’s in the clinic and will be there a lot ... uh ... catching up on work and projects and things. I was calling to see if you could take her out Saturday? It’ll be a long day for her, so it might be best if you two made it an early evening, say around six?”

“Melanie,” I asked slowly and carefully, “why didn’t she call herself?”

“Why, she’s so distraught and busy,” she answered as though relieved at my question.

But I pressed on, “That’s not exactly what I mean.”

There was a long pause. Yes, Melanie knew precisely what I meant. And I knew precisely what she would reply, “Whatever do you mean?”

“Melanie, do you remember when you told me that Eliza Beth had gone through a hard time and how it had been all you could do to get her to go to the mixer?”

“Yes,” she said with an air of resignation.

“Eliza Beth told me the same thing, in almost the same words when I saw her the next time.”

“You have to understand,” she defended herself, “sometimes she needs a bit of prompting, a little guidance. She loves you. She loves you so very, very much. And I will not – *not*,” she repeated vehemently, “let anything get in her way. Not even herself.”

“And not even you?” I asked gently.

“No,” she answered, her voice quivering, “not even me.”

That night, I had a dream. A pretty little girl with black wavy hair and soft violet eyes was holding a tiny orange kitten in her arms. She kept stroking it on the head with her cheek as she walked slowly and sadly. When she reached the home of her friend, she dried her tears with a

handkerchief, smiled, and gave the other little girl the kitten. After all, the other little girl was so sad and she really needed that kitten, and she did perhaps think that the kitten should have been hers. Perhaps.

I awoke in darkness, my head resting on a pillow soaked with the tears of my dream. What were we kittens to make of it all? χρεόν ἐστί, χρεόν ἐστί.

Saturday afternoon the weather turned cold and drizzly, and my fears raged inside me. I was sitting alone in my room in front of a desk empty but for the pictures of Eliza Beth – pictures from the happy time. Sean McCollum softly knocked on the door.

“How are you doing?” he asked with far more sincerity and concern than one cadet would normally expect from another. How much did my classmates know? I wondered and searched for solace in the thought.

“Okay,” I replied, managing a smile that convinced neither him nor me.

“You going to see Eliza Beth today?” he asked tentatively.

“Yeah. In the evening,” I confirmed, my anxieties showing through clearly and strongly in spite of my efforts to subdue them.

“Well, I have guard duty tonight,” he said, “so I’m not going anywhere. Why don’t you take my car? It’s too nasty to go out walking today.” Saying that, he tossed his keys up onto my bunk.

“Thanks,” I said, looking at him earnestly. Then I smiled and added, “How much gas does it need?”

Sean walked to the door, turned and smiled back, “It’s full.”

He knew.

On Saturday evening at 6:00, I arrived at the Nursing College, once more with longing and dread, hope and fear, and above all, apprehension. I had found an old umbrella in Sean’s car and had borrowed it as well in case Eliza Beth forgot hers.

She walked into the lobby hesitantly. But as soon as she saw me she rushed up to me and threw her arms around my neck, “Oh, thank you for coming. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I was so afraid you might come to your senses,” she added with a deeply sad smile.

“Not a chance!” I assured her, gazing into her teary brown eyes. “Would I be wearing this,” I looked down at my uniform, “if I were sane?”

Eliza Beth laughed through her sigh. She looked down at herself, then back into my eyes and asked, “Would you be hugging this?”

“I’ve borrowed Sean’s car,” I told her, and then I smiled and added, “and his umbrella, too. Let’s go down to the Hotel Fort Sumter where we can see the park and the Battery without the cold and the wet.”

She cocked her head as though trying to hear something unfamiliar and distant. “Sean?” she asked.

“He’s a friend of mine,” I smiled. Suddenly it really hit home to me. Sean was not just a friend, he was my best friend. But Eliza Beth had no idea who he was. A disturbing thought pricked at the back of my mind: Had we both been isolating each other in our own little universe? And what would happen if something were to come crashing in upon it from one side or the other? Eliza Beth’s ghosts!

The Hotel Fort Sumter was one of the more elegant establishments in Charleston, and one that I could rarely afford, even with the allowance I received for being an Army contract cadet.

We looked at each other lovingly and talked beneath the chandeliers in the dining room. Outside the long window, we could see the barest shadows and outlines of the park and the Battery, obscured by the dark and drizzle on the outside and by the lights reflecting off the glass on the inside.

The weather had chased most people indoors, but now and then you could see someone scurrying by, especially cadets, to whom the prospect of staying in the barracks greatly lessened the severity of the rain. I noticed that whenever one would hurry along below the window, Eliza Beth would cast a fearful – yes, a fearful – glance in his direction, as though she were bracing herself for some sight of horror that would turn her world upside down. It seemed to wear her down physically and emotionally.

By the time we walked out and across the street to Sean's little VW, that I had parked by the walkway around the Battery, Eliza Beth was exhausted. Once we were in the car, it suddenly started to pour in earnest. As I fumbled to find the ignition with the key, she reached over and pulled my hand back.

"Hold me!" she pleaded through her exhaustion, "oh, please, hold me!" In her voice and in her eyes, I could detect a fear of some terror she could not face alone.

In the cramped confines of the little car, I held her as best I could. Her face wavered under the streetlight filtered through the water cascading down the windshield, their shadows merging with the tears cascaded down her face. She cried so pitifully that I joined in her tears as I held her closer and pressed my lips against her forehead.

"Eliza Beth," I groaned, and this time it was my turn to plead. "Please tell me, what is wrong?"

She breathed heavily a few times, her head rocking forward and backward in weariness. "There are two of me in here," she blurted out looking plaintively into my eyes. "There's Eliza Beth, the one you love and the one who loves you so very much. Oh so very, very much. At the mixer, when you decided that you wanted to call me Eliza Beth, you have no idea – no idea! – how happy that made me. But the other one – EB – she was positively livid, and although I try my hardest to keep her out of me, she keeps creeping back inside, making me say the most horrid things to you."

She paused, breathing hard to regain her composure. "That's the ghost on the inside. But there's also a ghost on the outside. He's out there somewhere," she said with terrified eyes, "I know he's out there somewhere. And if I see him, EB will come back in and destroy us both."

"Who is he?" I asked quietly and gently. "Who is this ghost on the outside?"

She stiffened up and shook her head more in shudder than in denial. She looked up at me and smiled mournfully. "Oh, you know," she said shaking her head slowly now and pensively, "he's not even all that important. And he wouldn't matter at all, if it weren't that he brings EB back."

Once again she said my name over and over and over, as though trying to regain control of herself through a mantra. Finally, she breathed out, "I'm so weary. So weary. I've got to get back. Got to get back."

Before I got the engine started, she was asleep. I looked at her tenderly. How at peace she seemed. Then her brows furled and she shuddered as in a disturbing dream, and I hurried her back to the Nursing College.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

10 APRIL

On 10 April, Colonel Gemistos walked into class, smiling broadly. We could tell he had some special intellectual challenge in store for us, and we looked at him full of anticipation. These presentations and the discussions afterwards – both in class and in the canteen – were very important to me. With the turmoil that was tearing Eliza Beth apart and sending me into unparalleled fits of worry, the Plotinus class offered a brief respite – and occasionally some insight into what was going on in my life.

“Gentlemen,” he began as usual, “today let us enter the fascinating world of comparative religion.” Fabian Ward practically jumped in his seat and grabbed his pencil.

“We have studied Plotinus’ Neoplatonic philosophical and theological system, with excursions into Proclus and others. By now you are probably bored of hearing that the One transcends all Being and is yet everywhere and nowhere; that the Nous, the Intellect or Spirit, through nondiscursive thought creates, is, and/or organizes (depending upon the interpretation) the Forms or Ideas, along with the Gods; that the Psyche, or Soul, through discursive thought arranges and combines the Forms so that they can act in Nature, built upon the insubstantial membrane of Matter; and so forth. But do you really grasp it all?” This was met by an embarrassed shuffling of cadets not knowing how even to begin to answer such a question.

“Cadet,” he said, turning to me, “you’re a language major. How do you master a difficult construction in a foreign language?”

“Well, sir,” I stalled, “I guess the best way is to find what corresponds to it in English and compare and contrast the two.”

“Excellent!” he burst out. “You use the technique that linguists call contrastive analysis. Now, gentlemen, have you all been brought up with the teachings of Christianity?”

Everyone nodded except Christopher, who sat there glum and suspicious. He did not like others – non-Literalists – discussing Christian theological concepts. Nor, for that matter, did he appreciate theological concepts to begin with.

“Of course, most of you who have studied Christianity at any depth have been exposed to many centuries of theologians from St Augustine to the present, who have incorporated Neoplatonic thought into Christianity. Indeed, the German Rudolf Eucken argued rather convincingly that although the philosopher had been a Hellenist (Eucken used the less precise, more pejorative term ‘Pagan’), Plotinus has had more influence on the development of Christianity than any other thinker. And if you’ve read the views of the Very Reverend William Inge, Dean of St Paul’s, on reserve in the Bibliothek, you will see what is in essence Christianity with a rather thick Neoplatonic veneer. So if we’re going to compare and contrast Neoplatonism with Christianity, we shall first have to strip off this veneer and look more directly at the scriptures themselves, as I’m sure Mr Adams would prefer.”

For the first time, Christopher seemed to show some interest, and the professor seized this opportunity to try to draw him into the discussion with the question: “From this perspective, Mr Adams, what in the tripartite structure of the Plotinian intelligible world would you see as corresponding with the Hebrew God as depicted strictly in scripture?”

“He has to be the One,” insisted Christopher, appearing a bit nervous that the professor addressed him in particular.

“Does he?” queried the professor. “But the One is even beyond Being and has no contact with the Soul but through the Intellect. Yet, your scriptures indicate that God has spoken directly to mortals – to souls.”

“Sir,” suggested Fabian, chomping at the bit, “many Christian theologians – and this is certainly reflected in the work of Inge – suggest that the Hebrew God is more compatible with the Intellect or Nous, because this allows him to be the Demiurge, the Creator.”

“And you think ...?” asked Colonel Gemistos, evidently detecting a hint of doubt in Fabian’s voice.

“Well, if we take the earliest scriptures by themselves, the Hebrew God Yahweh is the God of War, corresponding to the Greek Ares.”

“What!?” exclaimed Christopher.

“Haven’t you heard the expression Lord of Hosts?” Fabian asked patiently.

“Yeah, and ...?”

“And that means God of War. Look at what his role is in the *conquest* of Canaan, for goodness sake. And the rest of it, for that matter.”

Christopher was livid, but there was nothing he could say. It was clear he realized that he did not, in fact, understand the expression Lord of Hosts. And every time he got into an argument with Fabian, the former theology student ran circles around him.

“Obviously,” Fabian threw in nonchalantly, “the earliest Hebrews saw it this way. At the beginning of Genesis, God is talking with others and says that they should create man in *their* image. They’re all the same sort of entity – Gods. And Yahweh is one of them – the God of War.”

“Perhaps ...” interjected the professor, trying to defuse the situation with a wag of his left hand, palm downward. I found myself greatly relieved whenever he cut Fabian off from an attack on Christopher. Although I usually appreciated a good argument, these exchanges seemed unequal. No, not unequal, but something else – something asymmetrical, lacking a center. They both fed off each other, Fabian arguing from learning and reason, Christopher from faith. But something in addition to faith. There was another aspect to Christopher’s approach, and whatever it was, it made me nervous.

Colonel Gemistos went on, “True, we cannot say that the Hebrew God Yahweh is equivalent to the Nous himself, although Proclus would put him as a God – perhaps Ares – at the beginning of the Nous. But let me backtrack a bit and remind you that in the Plotinian system, of which the Nous is a part, power or potentiality must precede act or actuality. The sculptor must have a concept of what he is going to sculpt before he creates a statue. An ultimate God, then, whether we see him as the One or the Nous, represents the power and potentiality. It is left to lower-level agents to commit the act or actualization.

“Here is where we can see the major contrast between this Plotinian system and the strictly scriptural Christian heritage – the part of it that was not influenced by the Neoplatonists. In the Christian system, God is personal and he is hence an act or actualization in himself. What happens, for instance, when Lott bargains with God to reduce the number of faithful people he has to find in Sodom?”

“God shows his inestimable mercy,” insisted Christopher.

“God changes his mind,” Colonel Gemistos gently corrected him.

“So?” asked Christopher belligerently.

“So, the Hebrew God Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, operates at least partly in the world of Becoming. In a word, he changes. Early critics of Christianity delighted in pointing out that the Hebrew God showed in the scriptures themselves that he was often ignorant of the future and of the consequences of his own actions. How many times does he wish he had not created these people? So not only does he operate in the world of Becoming, but the world of Being appears to be shut off from him – at least the levels that would allow him to see ‘around’ time. Even St Augustine recognized the fallacy of the God in time, but his argument was based upon principles from his Neoplatonic background, not upon Scripture, so he could not put the problem to rest.”

“But your Pagan god-things,” objected Christopher, only a little mollified by the professor’s rescuing him from Fabian, “don’t know what’s going to happen either.”

“Quite correct, Mr Adams,” observed Colonel Gemistos. “And you do bring up a very important point,” he added, trying as always to ease Christopher into the learning process, as difficult as that might be. “The reason why Mr Ward contends that Yahweh is more appropriately Ares (or, at least, some God on this level) than the Nous himself is that Yahweh cannot in fact see into the future, at least in some crucial instances. And There, in the absence of space and time, the future is more a matter of importance than it is of sequencing. As that which radiates or emanates directly from the Good, the Nous has a view of everything. But as one of the emanations from the Nous, a God such as Ares is not privy to this information and must witness and participate in its evolution. As does the Hebrew Yahweh.”

“In defense of Christianity and Judaism, sir,” suggested Fabian, perhaps joining in the effort of trying to guide Christopher into the process, “isn’t this what theologians refer to as the God of History?”

“Precisely! And this has been brought up with reference to the Holocaust and other calamities that are mollified by saying that God has a greater plan. Yet, that doesn’t change the fact that in the revealed scriptures, he changes his mind. Does this also, then, change history? And, of course, if he changes his mind because of the influence that such humans as Lott have upon him ...”

Fabian winced. “I see where you’re going, sir. Let’s not.”

“A wise decision,” the professor laughed.

“Yeah,” snapped Christopher, unwilling or unable to budge from his previous line of argument, “but how about all those Pagan myths? Don’t those Gods change their minds, too? Even Zeus, who seems to be equated pretty often with your Nous?”

“Good observation, Mr Adams, and one that was used extensively by the early church, although I would urge you to use the term Hellenist, which is both more precise and more respectful of the beliefs of others. But remember what I said on the very first day. A Myth – with a capital M – is a story relating humanity and divinity and showing some basic Truth – capital T – unencumbered by mere fact.”

“I’m afraid I came in late, sir,” Christopher admitted sheepishly.

“Neoplatonism takes a philosophical approach to religion, you see,” Colonel Gemistos continued, “so the Neoplatonists generally take the Myths inherited from the Greeks and others and mold them to reflect their thoughts about the divine – thoughts they construct through the observation of nature interpreted through reason. Like the waxing and waning of the moon,” he added, inexplicably glancing over at me and smiling, “giving the message of death and rebirth.

It's no coincidence, Mr Adams, that the moon remains dark for the same length of time that Jesus remains in the grave." Christopher's eyes flashed angrily at the comparison.

"Of course, there are factual inaccuracies in the *Enneads*," the professor continued, "such as the nature of the planets and stars and the process of sight. But even here, we are not dealing with revealed scripture as unerring word of God, but with philosophy. Just as the ancient philosophers did, we must also change our philosophy to fit the observed facts, not the observed facts – be they heliocentrism, evolution, or whatever – to fit our philosophy.

"Judaism and Christianity, on the other hand, are religions based upon a collection of Myths – with a capital M, Mr Adams, with a capital M. Without a more thorough grounding in philosophical thought (and especially, I might add, Neoplatonic philosophical thought, such as you may have read about in Professor Inge's work), they are thus forced into a corner in having to explain the concept of God, not through philosophy, nature, and reason, but through the literal interpretation of the Myth – or story, if you will."

"That's right," agreed Christopher. "The stories in the Bible reflect precisely what happened and are therefore to be taken as true."

"By true, do you mean factually correct?"

"Of course!"

"Well, then we do have a problem. Perhaps you came into class in time to hear about the two creation stories in Genesis? ... From your reaction, I suppose not. In chapter one (verse 26), God creates male and female together as equals; and in chapter two (verse 22), God creates Eve out of Adam's rib."

As Colonel Gemistos was talking, Christopher frantically reached into his briefcase, pulled out a Bible, and looked it up. He squinted, glowered, and stuck it back into his briefcase.

"A philosophical Hellenist," continued the professor, "wouldn't object at all to the contradiction. The first Myth would reflect the relationship between humanity and divinity in general, and the second Myth would reflect the Hebrew social practice of the woman's being dominated by the man, the priest of God. By insisting on historical accuracy, however, the Christian would have to reconcile these two Myths in order to come up with an explanation of how God reached down with his hands and created people."

"You keep referring to Christian myths," objected Christopher.

"Come, come, Mr Adams. We've been using the term all along."

"Yeah, but that was with the Pagan lies."

The class groaned, and several cadets in the back laughed.

"Okay," challenged Christopher angrily, "you might find one or two problems in the Hebrew stuff, but that doesn't count anymore. There aren't any in the New Testament!"

"Sure there are," broke in Fabian, with a bit too much patience, "how about the Beatitudes? Matthew has them as the Sermon on the Mount, because he was addressing Jews and wanted Jesus to look as much as possible like Moses. Luke has them as the Sermon on the Plain, because he was addressing Greeks and wanted to stress Jesus' democratic equality with the people. Each one tells of the relationship between humanity and divinity, but each from its own cultural perspective. That, by definition, is a Myth."

Christopher grabbed his Bible again, but simply sat there fingering it as though partly for protection and partly as a weapon.

"And then there are the temptations and even the resurrection itself," continued Fabian. "Did you know that the early church hotly debated whether such things really happened at all and

what *mythical* significance to make of them? Your Doctrine of the Resurrection was accepted by the church by democratic vote among the clergy, not by some divine revelation exclusively given to disciples or prophets.”

Fabian was on a role and there was no stopping him – he did not even notice the Colonel trying to flag him down. “The New Testament itself is full of additions, deletions, and changes made by writers as they saw fit from the plethora of scriptures floating around the area. Look at all the footnotes to a study Bible, giving only the most common variations, some of them directly contradicting what church committees have decided to include in the body and call the Bible. The fact is, you had all these Myths in various forms floating around and major theologians trying valiantly to coalesce it all into a Hebrew-based religion along the lines of the established mystery cults of Osiris, Dionysus, Orpheus, Persephone, and a host of others. Most of these mysteries had a God or Demigod (like Jesus, you know, the offspring of a God and a mortal mother?) who died for our salvation. Even the Irish had CúChulainn! But Christians insisted that theirs was literally true. And then they had the audacity to try to interpret the old Myths in their way – as though they were statements of fact on which to build a religion – and declared that they were just stupid lies. Come on, Christopher, you need to think more deeply!”

“That’s heresy!” yelled Christopher, “un-American heresy.”

“Un-American?” questioned Fabian.

“Yeah, haven’t you heard the Pledge of Allegiance? One nation under God!”

“And couldn’t that God be the One or the Nous? Or Zeus, or Ahura Mazda, or Shiva, for that matter? And besides, the fact that Congress put it in by majority vote doesn’t qualify it as Truth, any more than a majority vote of the Athenians could have made asses into horses.”

“That’s just the treasonous snivelings of Socrates.”

“Actually, of his student Antisthenes.”

“They all shoulda drunk hemlock!”

At this, Colonel Gemistos stopped trying to get Fabian’s attention. Into his normally sparkling green eyes came a look of sternness and determination that I had never seen before, and he leaned back on the blackboard and folded his arms.

Evidently, Christopher realized he had made a tactical blunder, and he shifted his approach, “Now that Christianity has triumphed, anything that seeks to contradict us is mere heresy. And it should be dealt with accordingly! We were persecuted by the Pagans and we won’t forget it!”

“Persecuted?” countered Fabian, still displaying what to Christopher must have been a maddening patience. “First of all, Hellenists were largely tolerant – they were, after all, polytheists with no great objection to any new Gods. In Rome, if you believed there was a God in a well on your land, you went to the Senate, and they’d enter it into the sacred calendar for you.”

Suddenly, my mind reeled and objected strenuously. What of those who might believe differently than the majority, or at least than the majority in power? Thoughts were coming in from all directions, not the least of which involved Chaplain Konrad and Paul Hermann. But at the very center of all of them was a single name: Socrates.

“Secondly,” Fabian continued, as though he had paused to let my thoughts develop, “the persecution of Christians consisted only of a relative handful of cases. As bad as he was, Nero didn’t know or care what they were, but just needed a scapegoat for the Roman fire, some safely obscure sect of Jews. In fact, there were so few Christians in Rome at that time that they were probably a minor side-show – Nero would more logically have gone after the more numerous

followers of Isis, already held in fear and contempt, and these were then ‘misidentified’ as Christian martyrs by later Christian hagiographers and manuscript copyists as their own. Even Diocletian wasn’t particularly against the Christians – he hated everybody who didn’t agree that he was God. The ‘Great Persecution’ lasted officially twelve years, of which perhaps only five saw any real enforcement, and that in only a few places in the Empire. The stories of thousands upon thousands of Christian martyrs is nothing more than good PR. Remember, all the martyrologies were written by Christian propagandists – excuse me, PR experts of the highest caliber. Many of the supposed Christian martyrs – like Hippolytus – were actually characters from stories about traditional heroes forced into a Christian setting.

“Of course, there were Christian martyrs. In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon works it out to under two thousand – about the size of The Acropolis – during the worst years of Diocletian. But quite a few of them, as we learn from Roman records, rushed in and begged for martyrdom so they could prove their righteousness to God and gain everlasting life. In some cases, Roman judges sent them back two or three times to reconsider or offered to let them ‘sacrifice’ a pinch of incense to the emperor rather than an animal to a God. But these ‘confessors’ demanded martyrdom. Why, that’s suicide by gladiator!”

I thought of Hartmann von Aue’s story of *Poor Henry*, that we had read in German. A young girl wants to give her life for her feudal lord, not out of love or even out of devotion, but through the belief that if she died young (before she sinned as a woman) in an act of apparent selflessness, she would go to heaven – as though an otherwise omniscient God was oblivious to her selfish motive. It had struck me as misguided in German, but now it seemed to fit a pattern. Still, I found myself hoping that Fabian would stop. I did not know where this argument would lead, but I felt a distinct unease that it might get ... out of hand. As had become typical of my mental behavior since that first night as a thete at The Acropolis, I also found myself worrying about what I meant by “out of hand.”

While Christopher sat beneath a dark cloud though, Fabian calmly continued, “And do you want to know what set off the persecutions in the first place? Everything was hunky-dory with this new religion. It had a God acceptable to the Romans – something between their Jupiter and Mars – and a Hebrew take on the Hellenistic and other mysteries they were comfortable with. Then some ignorant early Literalists had to go off the deep end. They read that the Christ would come ‘like a thief in the night.’ Unable to think in similes, they decided that they should meet at night (I don’t know what they did about the thief part). The Eucharist, however, was conducted in secret among baptized Christians only – the Hellenist visitors were dismissed with the Peace.

“Now the Romans had a law that was so important to them that they attributed it to the earliest kings, though it really reflected the fears of insurrection in a republic. Nonetheless, it was old and well known to everybody: You could not, under any circumstances, conduct a secret meeting at night. The early Literalists knew this, but they broke the law anyway in keeping with what they misguidedly took as some ‘higher law’ based on a single simile they didn’t understand.

“But if you wanna get into persecution, take a look at what the Christians did to the Hellenists once they got into power! Remember Hypatia? These loving Christians with their hearts full of forgiveness and grace turned around and slaughtered Hellenists by the thousands. In some instances, the streets literally ran with blood, especially once they turned their wrath loose on Eastern Europe. Then when they ran out of victims from the outside, they turned their

attention inward and worked on the ‘heretics’ – anyone disagreeing with the majority vote of the clergy. Does the word Inquisition mean anything to you?”

“Shut up!” screamed Christopher with both fists pounding on his desk. “Christianity has triumphed and will triumph and there’s nothing you Pagans can do about it! It is the only way, and you,” he said with a broad ugly smile, “and you are damned to hell!”

“No,” replied Fabian calmly, “I don’t believe in hell.”

The rest of the class laughed – appreciatively at Fabian, derisively at Christopher. They were to a man devoted Christians, but Christians who believed in love and tolerance. To them, the brand of “their” religion preached by Christopher Adams was anathema.

Finally, Colonel Gemistos stepped up from the blackboard, his kindly smile once more in place, if a bit tentatively. “All right, gentlemen,” he said pensively, “it looks like we’ve opened up something that needs a bit of attention. But attention with cooler heads,” he added emphatically.

“When we meet Wednesday, let’s have a little debate on the topic. Then on Friday, we’ll meet for the all-important summaries. And gentlemen,” he added poignantly, “debates are not about winning and losing, but about gaining new insights, new perspectives.

“Now, I know that Mr Ward has an impressive background in formal debate, so let’s make it informal, so no one has the advantage of procedure. I want each of you to choose two members for your team to gather information and formulate arguments before Wednesday. It’s not a lot of time – I frankly didn’t really want to spend so much time on it, although I do recognize now that it is important to you. Mr Adams, whom do you choose?”

Christopher looked around the room. He was somewhat at a loss, isolated by his radical ideology from the others. “First,” he said slowly, “Bart Schmidt.” This took us initially by surprise, until we realized how limited his choices were – though I still found it worrisome how quickly he had made this choice. “Second,” and then with a dark smile spreading across his face – a smile that set the hair on the back of my neck on edge, “Owen Hughes.”

“Excellent,” said the Colonel with obvious approval. Owen was the best choice even remotely available to him, and Bart was a wildcard – but a wildcard with promise. “And Mr Ward?”

Fabian’s problem was the opposite – too many good choices. “First, Harold Prichard,” he said, and then he looked at me.

“I have a fencing meet Friday,” I said with a mixture of disappointment and relief.

“A pity,” he replied. “Greg Thompson, then.”

As usual, we met right after class in the canteen. The discussants were unusually excited that day – hardly a surprise given what had just transpired in class. Bart was there, too, and he seemed far more agitated and even more depressed than ever.

“What’s wrong, Bart?” Greg asked sympathetically and with genuine concern. I remembered how he had detected the tear in my eye when I had thought of No, not now.

“Colonel Gemistos is the best professor at The Apocalypse,” he said slowly and sadly, “the only one who has any faith in me. What’s going to become of this? What’s going to become of us?”

He walked away slowly, shaking his head. We all looked after him dumbfounded.

That night, I lay awake. The thin sliver of the new moon had already set, but I did not make the connection then with her fateful setting on that long-ago September evening when it all began. This time in addition to my growing concern for Eliza Beth, I worried about what had transpired in the Plotinus class. I was disturbed not only at Christopher's sudden outburst, but also at my own feelings when Fabian had looked over at me. I was sorry to have to miss the intellectual debate, but I was also greatly relieved not to have to take his side. There seemed to be something significant in all of that, and I felt that I needed to understand what was going on.

I was also disturbed by Fabian's dismissal of the Christian martyrs. Certainly, a glance at a martyrology with its stylizations and repetitions should convince anyone that the persecution was by no means as broad as the church had painted it. And the Hellenist martyrs had, if anything, been greatly ignored by Christian historians. Nonetheless, Fabian seemed to take as extreme a view from his standpoint as Christopher took from his. Two extremes fighting against the middle.

Then it hit me – Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (which at this point I had read only in English). On the one side was Fabian Ward the intellectual, and on the other side was Christopher Adams the Literalist, the anti-intellectual. The Fascist? But there was something far more complicated. Although I had the disturbing feeling that I was an outsider in all of this, I identified myself most clearly with Owen Hughes, the Spiritualist. How did he fit into the equation?

Of course! The key lay in Plotinus' concept of the Nous, which was at once the Intellect and the Spirit. Fabian, for all his knowledge, all his mastery of Neoplatonic thought, dwelled in the realm of mere intellect. He had not achieved spirit, much less Spirit. What was lacking in him abounded in Owen.

And Christopher? He was not only anti-intellectual, he was anti-spiritual. It was no wonder that he opposed Fabian, with his rational approach to philosophy and religion. Nor was it surprising that he opposed Owen, with his insistence that spirit take precedence over scripture. Once Christopher had chosen Owen for his team, I had been relieved not to have been put into the position of opposing my friend, one of the first people I had met at The Acropolis – on the same evening I had met Christopher.

Now the thoughts were shouting at me from all sides, like the apian droning of the sergeants on the day I had reported to H Company. I shook my head violently, as though to free myself from them, or at least to consider only one at a time. But this was not a safe one-at-a-time situation, but many steps had to be stridden at once if I was to make any sense of it all.

In the end, as always, worries were added to worries. I did not like the fact that Christopher had chosen Owen, and I did not like the smile on his face when he had done it. Was he going after two birds with one stone? Did he not realize that he, with his unintellectual background, had a chance of getting only one of them? Now more thoughts started screaming at me – thoughts of the ACF, the NCBC, Paul Hermann, and General Augustin's "censoring" and his long PR release, which for some reason still kept gnawing at my mind. Perhaps one bird was all he was really after. But which one? And, more importantly, was he alone?

I fell asleep wondering, "Must this be, too?"

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

12 APRIL

Between Monday and Wednesday, I observed a frenetic flurry of activity among the members of Fabian's team. Every time I would go into the canteen – and curiosity drove me there far more often than was my usual practice – I could see Fabian working from the war-room of his table, papers and books strewn around. Harold and Gregg meanwhile would rush in with yet more papers and books, some of them very old books that they had managed to check out of the Library on promises of the utmost care. They would pour over the materials, go into a hectic huddle, and break out running as though to a football scrimmage line.

But when I looked for Christopher, he was nowhere to be found – not in the canteen, not in his barracks, not in the Bibliothek. Finally, I snuck quietly into the Chapel and saw him seated deep in prayer in the first pew. He was clutching his King James Bible and rocking back and forth on his knees, muttering strange incantations.

Off in the corner I could see Chaplain Konrad. He was staring relentlessly at Christopher, his face full of fear, his eyes glistening. As he had during my interview with him at the beginning of the academic year, the old German chaplain seemed to be witnessing another scene – a dark scene from his past.

Later, when I ran into Owen at the Library, I told him where he could find Fabian. Owen just sighed in tight-lipped resignation and continued to pull books down from the philosophy and religion section and sift through them. He had a worried look on his face, and I wondered which was worrying him more – the behavior of his team leader or what he was discovering in the books.

Wednesday was the big day, and Colonel Gemistos seated himself in a lecture desk in the front left corner of the room by a window, where he could survey the entire scene. Two chairs were placed behind the desk in front of the class – one for Fabian nearer the door, and one for Christopher, closer to the windows and to the professor. To me, this looked like a deliberate attempt to avoid the appearance that Colonel Gemistos might be taking Fabian's side. And it probably was.

From their seats, the two debaters were supposed to exchange questions and answers, rebuttals and discussions in an orderly alternation, although not in accordance with the formal rules. But this plan was soon thwarted by Christopher, who reached into his briefcase, pulled out his King James Bible, slapped it on the desk with a loud thump and declared, "This is the only Truth, and it was written by Jesus Christ our Lord himself, in his own hand. I cannot and I will not argue more than this."

Flustered, Owen crouched and glided to the desk, passing a sheaf of papers on to Christopher. The team leader glanced down his nose at the pages and then tossed them back with an air of arrogance, declaring, "Don't think, Brother. Just have faith and believe. Reason is the work of the devil. But we have this," he pronounced, once more thumping his Bible on the desk, "to save us and to damn the infidel. How would you feel if a nonbeliever was saved?"

“Like Jonah,” came a voice from the back, “mad at God for changing his mind and not slaughtering every man, woman, and child in Nineveh.” A ripple of laughter passed through the class, but a glaring look from Christopher and a disapproving frown from the professor quelled it.

“So, how do we proceed?” asked Fabian. Colonel Gemistos leaned forward, not wanting to intervene – at least not yet – and curious about how his students would work this one out. He had, after all, proposed an informal debate, and it was up to them.

“Tell you what,” said Christopher cheerfully, “I have this in my possession – the very Word of God. His testament is my testimony. Why don’t you just cross-examine me like in a court? I shall defend the eternal Word of God!”

Colonel Gemistos shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands, palms upward, to signal his acquiescence. It was a novel approach, and novel approaches always seemed to pique his curiosity.

“May I stand as the cross examining counselor?” Fabian asked with exaggerated politeness.

“Fire away, counselor!” replied Christopher with a magnanimous gesture, hands lifted with palms facing in.

“So this was written by your Demigod?” Fabian inquired with raised eyebrow.

“By Jesus Christ the only Son of God,” Christopher answered with a smile designed to show that God was on his side and he would not be flustered.

“Does this Jesus understand basic mathematics?”

Christopher laughed, “Understand mathematics? He invented mathematics!”

“In here,” and Fabian reached for the Bible with a “may I” look on his face that was met with a “but of course” look from Christopher, “we find in II Chronicles 4,2 the following account: ‘Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.’ What, may I ask, is the value of π ?”

“3.1416,” answered Christopher with a shrug.

“So a line of thirty cubits could not compass a round object ten cubits in diameter.”

“With God,” Christopher replied with maddening smugness, “anything is possible.”

“If you tried to construct a bridge with arches based upon the value of π in accordance with God’s Word,” asked the prosecutor, “would you dare to cross over it?”

“I would, if I constructed it with my faith in the Lord.”

“Yes, you’d have to have faith in the Lord to try to cross it,” Fabian shot as an aside to the class, followed by the inevitable ripple of stifled chuckles. Christopher shot a hateful glare at the class – he did not like being ridiculed.

I thought about my hesitancy to cross any bridge I’d built – even fully aware of the value of π . More than that, though, the mathematics inevitably turned my mind, and my heart, to Mary. I hoped that Fabian would not be too hard on Christopher. After all, the ultimate goal was to join together with all souls, including Christopher’s, and I did not want to see his hurt or alienated.

Fabian riffled the pages of the Bible, saying into it, “We have a lot of strange things here – talking donkeys, a flat earth, God sticking his fingers through the vault of heaven. Does God even have fingers? Sounds like matter to me. And where is this vault that the rain comes through, anyway?” He was not waiting for replies, but playing to the jury.

Finally, he rested on one page, stuck his finger ostentatiously down on it and burst out with an “Aha!” as he whirled around at Christopher. “The Battle of Gibeon. Now does the earth go around the sun or does the sun go around the earth?”

“The earth goes around the sun,” admitted Christopher, his anger starting to rise to the surface. He was caught in a major contradiction with Genesis and he knew it. But that was not at all what Fabian had in mind.

“It says here – excuse me – Jesus says here in Joshua 10,12-13: ‘Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.’

“Now, as you said before, the earth moves around the sun. (As for the moon ... well, that just stretches our equations – and our credulity – a bit too much.) Can I assume therefore that this is seen from Joshua’s relative perspective, and that the sun didn’t stand still, but rather the earth momentarily stopped revolving?”

“Yes,” Christopher replied with visible relief. He did not have to defend the geocentric universe after all. And indeed, he would have tried his best to defend it if necessary. For once you admit that some scientific observation takes precedence over some clearly fallacious minutia of scripture, then the whole is at issue – including parthenogenesis and physical resurrection. The thought worried me, and I looked around at Owen; but he looked more worried than I.

“And are you aware that in the earth’s rotation that plot of land around Jericho was traveling at roughly,” Fabian said, raising his voice authoritatively and consulting a piece of paper on the desk, “five hundred miles per hour? Have you ever stopped a car abruptly and seen things flying off the passenger’s seat? That’s the power of inertia. If the earth stopped its rotation, as Joshua – or Jesus – says, then everything would have been hurtled at five thousand miles per hour to the east.”

“As I’ve already stated: With God, anything is possible,” replied Christopher once again, the anger now clearly showing through his smugness.

“I’m confused,” stated Fabian. “Sometimes *pi* is 3.1416 and sometimes it’s 3, sometimes inertia works and sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes natural phenomena and mathematics are right, and sometimes they’re wrong. How do you know?”

“You take it on faith,” replied Christopher in a voice a bit too loud for the court. The class guffawed as someone wished his math and physics teachers had taken it on faith too. But everyone quieted down after a stern look from Colonel Gemistos.

“You know, Pagans have silly myths where the sun stands still, and they don’t even have faith in the Lord!” objected Christopher.

“Ah,” replied Fabian, “but they also don’t build their religion on the basis of the factual accuracy of their Myths – remember? For them the Myth is an interpretable story. It’s Christianity and the other religions based upon ‘revealed scripture’ that have to rest their faith on the factual accuracy of the events so revealed by their Deity.”

I had to admit that the scriptures sounded less and less credible not only when Fabian brought up the problems, but also when Christopher tried to defend them. Nonetheless, I wanted Fabian to take it easy, not to alienate the soul before him. It would be better, I thought, to convince rather than to vanquish, although I also had to admit that Christopher seemed an unlikely

candidate to be convinced of anything not in his approved mind-set. He was also someone to fear – someone who could cause, and was indeed causing, divisions. And those were the last things we needed.

“Okay,” said Christopher, “there may be – *may be* – problems in the Old Testament, but that’s old Jewish stuff, anyway. You can’t find such problems in the New Testament, though.” He had obviously forgotten the discussion on Monday. But again, Fabian chose another tack.

“What’s the most important part of the Gospels?” he asked.

“The death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” replied Christopher from rote.

“I have here,” said Fabian, unrolling a large poster and tacking it onto the cork strip over the blackboard, “the pertinent parts of the Gospels as found in your King James Bible arranged in columns side by side. Here you have Matthew’s, Mark’s, Luke’s, and John’s testimonies on the death and resurrection. Notice how they do *not* coincide in important details.” He stood back, took out a pointer, and tapped each column to draw together the parallel passages.

“I defy you,” he continued, “to come up with a single, coherent, factually accurate rendition of these most important events. Yet, if these scriptures had been divinely inspired as the unerring Word of God, the composition of Jesus the Christ himself, shouldn’t they at least tell the same story?”

“Are you trying to say that the death and resurrection didn’t happen?” demanded Christopher. I knew that Fabian was too smart to allow Christopher to change the topic, but it appeared as though he had been counting on it.

“Can you give me any reference from Greek or Latin records that indicated that Jesus ever did exist, apart perhaps from a figure of Myth?” Fabian asked quietly, but coldly.

“He’s in Josephus,” announced Christopher triumphantly.

“Not so fast,” cautioned Fabian. “At the beginning of the third century, the great church scholar Origen searched through all the works of Josephus and announced that he could find not one reference to Jesus. A hundred years later, the church propagandist Eusebius miraculously produced a copy of Josephus with two such references. Now, the main passage in question interrupts the flow of the work – the paragraph before it seems for some odd reason to flow directly into the paragraph after it – and the style is demonstrably different from the rest of Josephus’ writing. How do you explain this?”

“Obviously, God didn’t want Origen to see it,” began Christopher to the gags and laughter of the class. “Origen was, after all, a heretic.”

“What?”

“Origen was a philosopher who tried to water down scripture with reason,” Christopher pointed out with a proud flourish. Evidently, he had been exposed to some church history after all. But then he confounded the situation by proclaiming, “Besides, he had to have been a heretic, or God would have allowed him to see the passage himself. Clearly God blinded him from it because he was a philosopher and a heretic and was not worthy to take part in the Triumph of Christianity.”

I noticed Colonel Gemistos, unwilling to step in directly to the student discussion, but subtly trying to gesture to Fabian to slow down and take it easier on Christopher – this in spite of the latter’s disparaging remarks about philosophy. From the other side of Fabian, I also tried to send the same message. I did not want to see Christopher hurt, as silly as his approach to the exercise

was and as dangerous as he may well have been. He was, after all, a soul, and as such precious and ultimately connected with us all.

But Fabian took no notice of our hand signals and just stood there for a moment with mouth agape at the remarks about Origen. Christopher seemed to take this as a sign of his victory, but Fabian pressed on, “But you follow heresies, too. You’re also a heretic.”

“I am not!”

“Do you believe in free will – that the human is endowed by God with the power and responsibility to choose between good and evil? In particular, that the human is capable of doing good by his own free will?”

“Of course.”

“That, my friend, is the essence of the Pelagian Heresy. Augustine (St Augustine to you) – the same Augustine who plagiarized much of Neoplatonism and the writings of Plotinus to give them a Christian twist and to give Christianity a Neoplatonic twist – couldn’t convince the rest of the church to condemn Pelagius for this heresy, so he went to the Emperor – over the church’s head, so to speak. The Emperor, for his own political and PR reasons, decided to support Augustine and to condemn Pelagius as a hesiarch – a leader of heresies. For whatever reason, this has never been officially contradicted by the church, perhaps because it might open the door to the notion that you can save yourself through your own actions or nature. It’s still a canonical law on the books. So, if you follow this outrage of Pelagius, you’re guilty of heresy!”

“You’re doing the work of the devil!” shouted Christopher.

“No,” Fabian replied calmly, “I don’t believe in the devil. Do you?”

Christopher just sat there glaring. That was perhaps lucky for him, for I had heard Fabian use that strategy at the canteen to show that those who believed in a devil acting free from the will of God were not monotheists, but dualists – like the Zoroastrians from whom the concept came into Judaism and Christianity.

Finally, Fabian cast a glance in my direction, and I quickly made up-and-down motions with my hands, palms downward – slow down, take it easy, give him a break! I seemed to feel somewhere deep in my soul an approving nod from Mary, but Fabian just raised an eyebrow. It occurred to me that he acted as though someone, somewhere – perhaps at Sewanee – had once put him in Christopher’s position, and he was now going to exact his revenge. He turned sharply and faced his opponent again.

“Are you familiar with the ancient mystery religions?” Fabian asked, resuming his role as chief counselor. Receiving no answer, he proceeded to tick through the characteristics of the mysteries of Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, Attis, Tamuz, Adonis, and Osiris to show how the characteristics of each of these saviors who had died for us and had been resurrected was copied into Christianity. Indeed, the worship of Mithras was so close to that of Christianity in all respects – even in the date of the Savior’s birth – that early churchmen were concerned that it might represent an attempt by the devil to head off Christianity. He even noted that there had been the makings of a Jewish mystery before Christianity and how it had also been incorporated.

“So they prefigured Christianity to help convert the Pagans,” Christopher objected. “That,” he added darkly, “or the work of the devil!”

Fabian simply ignored him and concluded, “As Myths, these mystery religions – including the Jewish mystery religion of Jesus – are invaluable. Through reason and nature – the two great gifts that have been divinely bestowed upon us – people have come to realize the relationship between us and the divine, and to realize our very own divine nature as well. The pity is that

some religions have taken the Myth and have erroneously historicized it, reducing us to mere spectators to an historical event with no requirement that we recognize, much less understand and act upon, our own spiritual identity.”

“Our own divine nature? Our own spiritual identity? Now that *is* the work of the devil,” Christopher screamed in rage. “The work of the devil, the work of the devil, the work of the devil.” And he pounded the desk with such vehemence and glowered at Fabian and all the rest of us with such hatred that no one laughed.

In the silence that followed, the bugle blew across the parade ground, signaling the end.

When we met in the canteen all rather haggard from the show, Fabian summed up the real problem. He had known that he could not have brought this out in front of Christopher, and I was frankly glad that he had not tried.

“The crux of the problem,” he said thoughtfully, “is that religions of holy writ are ‘revealed religions’ – religions supposedly revealed by God, or the Supreme Being, or Whatever. If you believe God said or did something, then all reason, observation, or fact to the contrary must be dismissed out of hand. You must stand four-square against anything at odds with your particular scripture, because anything at odds with the scripture is a direct confrontation to God. Such a confrontation to an avowed monotheist cannot even be tolerated, for by tolerating it, you would be denying your faith and would be guilty of sin. Therefore, followers of other revealed religions, the scriptures of which contradict yours, must be doing the work of the devil. And, of course, you are fully justified in going to war against the infidels and killing them – killing not human beings, but devils.

“This is why Yahweh really *is* still the God of War, the Hebrew Ares. It is not that he thinks of himself that way – There at the far reaches of the Intellect, where everything comes directly from the Good and there can be no evil, and hence no devil or God of Evil. It is rather that his followers choose to think of him that way. As long as they insist that their particular and exclusive revelation from God is right and that all others must necessarily be the work of the devil, then Jew, Christian, and Moslem will continue to slaughter each other. They simply have no choice, if they are true to their religions.”

I thought of Schiller’s *Nathan the Wise* and excerpt of the Parable of the Ring that we had read in German the year before. The old man had to pass on to his favorite son the ring with the power to make the wearer pleasing before God and man. But he had three favorite sons. So he made two perfect copies, allowing each to have one. The sons fought each other most violently and most unpleasantly over who had the true ring, until they finally took the matter to a judge. The judge wisely decided that so long as the brothers fought with one another and – ring or no ring – made themselves unpleasing before God and man, two thousand years would not be time enough to determine which ring was the real one.

“Of course,” noted Harold with an uncharacteristic tinge of pessimism, “the real losers are those caught out in the cold and in the cross-fire. That’s what happened to the European ‘Pagans’ and ‘Witches’ under the Christians and to the Hindus and especially the Buddhists under the Moslems.” He paused, as the worry deepened in his face.

I picked up on his worry and glanced over at Owen. Would he also be caught in the cross-fire? Would he survive? Would I?

Then, as though gathering the strength to say what needed to be said, Harold added, “But the ones they hate most of all are those who reason – the philosophers.”

“We’ve gotta watch out for Colonel Gemistos,” Greg interjected nervously. “I don’t trust that Christopher Adams. He’s dangerous.”

All the while, Owen sat there with his head looking to one speaker and then to another as though in a trance. His face was worried – far more worried than I had ever seen it before. Finally, very slowly and dreamily, he managed to say to no one in particular, “If Christianity as we know it – or as we hope we know it – is so dependent upon Neoplatonism for its very nature, for its humanity and its concept of divinity, then why do we cling so tenaciously to ...” and his voice trailed off. Now everyone gazed at Owen with the same worried faces.

But I had worries of my own. When I got back to my room in the barracks, there was a message on my desk. “Melanie called,” Ryan had written, “EB all weekend in Savannah. Has to think things thru.” It was cryptic, but it told me all I needed to know and all I needed to worry about, including the use of her initials. Was that just Ryan abbreviating to copy it down faster? I hoped so. I really, really hoped so.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

14 APRIL

The final fencing meet of the season was scheduled against Virginia Military Institute, our rivals for last place in the Southeastern Conference and our rivals for whatever award there may have been for nonchalance and having the most fun. This match was particularly promising for the teams from the last two state all-male military colleges in the South, because it was to be held at Hollins College, a women's college in Roanoke, Virginia. And it was to be held on Friday afternoon, when we would be assured of a large audience.

On the long drive from Charleston on Thursday, 13 April, we were divided up into five cars, rather than the usual three, so the entire team could make the trip. It promised to be an exciting and, most importantly, a fun-filled adventure. The car I was in was rocking and bouncing from the animated exuberance of cadets anticipating the fantastic female-male ratio and relating – or making up – stories about parties that had previously rocked Roanoke.

As best I could, I smiled and looked at my classmates as they spoke, while trying to hide my anxieties about Eliza Beth and whatever would come of our relationship. Passing into the hills of Appalachia, I became aware of how the Low-Country car struggled to get up the hills and then plummeted down them. How very similar that was to my relationship with Eliza Beth – the long struggles to happiness, the sudden plunges into despair.

We stayed that night with our friends from VMI – we certainly never considered them our opponents – in a part of the gymnasium something like our visiting team quarters, but much cleaner and more comfortable. It was good to see them again. Our unique position made for an instant bond that renewed itself effortlessly on the rare occasions when we got together. Amidst the banter of which college was better (or worse), we learned what had happened to those who had graduated since last season and met new fencers, whose names would eventually follow ours to join those in the first group.

Finally, Captain Stockman and the VMI coach quieted us down – somewhat – and convinced us to get to bed. After all, we had to look our best for the young ladies of Hollins College the next afternoon. Of course, undermining their efforts was the fact that there would be no bugle in the morning.

Throughout the night, I slept little and worried much. I received no message from my feminine presence, although I knew all too well what it would be – what it always was. But this night, it was as though she knew that I knew and did not want to worry me even more. The moon, a gentle sliver waxing just over a tenth of her fullness, had already set, and I lay there in the dark.

There were other feminine presences on that campus too, and I was well aware of them. I felt alone, surrounded, and vulnerable. I wanted Eliza Beth to appear next to me, to put her arms around me, and to shield me from them. I wanted to be hers, and hers alone and exclusively. I wanted to feel safe in the isolating arms of her protective love.

And I knew that somewhere down in Savannah, near Madison Square and the Jasper monument, Eliza Beth was thinking the same thing of me. But as for her, she had to contend with

ghosts far worse than those above her in the house. If only, if only I could put my arms around her and shield her from them.

On Friday, 14 April, we arose late and staggered over to the cafeteria for breakfast. Both groups of cadets became the focal point of campus, and few of the young ladies – and those few were probably sisters of cadets at VMI and familiar with the device on their gray hats – could tell which of us were from Virginia and which from South Carolina. They seemed delighted in us all and flirted mercilessly, seeing who could make her cadet blush the reddest.

The fencing exhibition that afternoon must have been exciting to watch. Although neither team was terribly good, we were so evenly matched that thrust met with parry in exciting exchanges that, to the untrained eye, looked very impressive. Another indication of the level of play was that even with my lack of sleep and my all-pervading worry, I won more than I lost.

That evening, we went to a small row of red-brick dormitories with white-columned porches. They stood on a ridge with walkways going down a hill to the sidewalk connecting them by the road. I was not sure if this was on campus or off, but there were small, genteel parties in the lobbies of each, and the cadets wandered up and down the walkways and the sidewalk from reception to reception.

I came along a bit late and trudged up to the porch of the house at the end. It was on the highest point of the ridge and furthest from our quarters, which were actually a good distance away in among other red-brick buildings with white columns. I supposed that I had ended up there because it was the furthest point and I wanted to walk in the chill evening air, imagining that Eliza Beth was beside me. The moon had waxed slightly, and she presented a classic sickle hanging in the western sky.

Inside, there were several cadets from VMI and The Acropolis surrounded by young ladies in the lobby. I looked through the open door at the festivities and fought with myself over whether or not I should go in and join Sean and Brent with their many admirers. I noticed a very pretty young woman with gentle blue-gray eyes and light brown and red hair gathered back in a short ponytail. She was talking with Sean, and I could tell from him that she was about my height. It barely registered in my consciousness that they were looking out at me as they were talking.

The next thing I knew, the young lady was coming out the door with a bright, friendly gate and a charming smile, her ponytail swishing back and forth. “Hi,” she said cheerfully, “your friend says you’re a language major.”

I was so taken by surprise that I could only stammer, “Oh. I’m sorry. I have a girlfriend.”

She laughed and shook her head, sending her short ponytail bouncing back and forth again, “I’m not offering to be your girlfriend. I just want to talk with you.”

Confused and disoriented, I leaned back on the rail to steady myself. My eyes filled with tears.

With my head bowed down, she had to bend over to look at my eyes beneath the visor. “Here, look at me,” she said softly in a voice full of compassion but gentle firmness. “You said that to isolate yourself, didn’t you?”

I closed my eyes and nodded.

“It’s okay,” she assured me, “I just want to talk with you. That’s all.”

I looked up at her eyes and then tensed up and closed mine. I was so afraid that if I looked into those soft, caring eyes I would see No, I could not take that, and I knew it.

The young lady seemed to know it as well and continued in a soft, sincere voice such as you would use to coax a frightened kitten out from beneath a bush, “I’m majoring in French. What’s your language?”

My mouth opened. No sound came out. And it closed.

“Please, just try to relax and speak with me,” she continued coaxing softly.

My mouth opened again, but no sound would emerge. I took both of her hands in mine and squeezed them gently together between our hearts in a desperate attempt to let her know how grateful I was for her trying. Shaking my head slowly and sighing deeply, I stepped down from the porch and walked haltingly down the walkway. On my back, I could feel her following me with sad, concerned gray-blue eyes, and somehow I knew that they were, like mine, filled with tears.

Now, near the end of my journey from Colonial Lake, I recalled that gentle, caring young woman at Hollins College and I hoped that she understood how much she had touched me in those few minutes on the porch. Had I looked into her eyes, would I have seen Mary? Would I have seen Leslie? I dared not find out.

With the strange call of a bird at the lake still ringing in my ears, I did remember her voice. It was full of compassion – not pity, but compassion. In my fitful stagger back to the barracks, I had a sudden insight. That compassion shown by ... I never even knew her name ... was a genuine attempt to connect with my suffering. It was free of the dispassionate arrogance of pity. I longed for that compassion, that connection of one soul with another.

My encounter with that kind young lady had taken place only nine days before, but it seemed like so long ago. So long ago. And I was so very, very weary. There had been, I recalled, yet a week to go, and that week would be far worse than anything I had experienced in the turmoil of Thete Week at The Acropolis.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

16 APRIL

After a late start, a long trip, and two flat tires along the way, we finally rolled back into Charleston late Saturday night – or actually, early Sunday morning. Sean, Brent, and I signed back into the barracks together. After we stepped out of the guardroom, Sean and I said goodnight to Brent and began our walk across the quadrangle to H Company. Suddenly, Sean stopped and looked at me. “How are you holding up?” he asked with concern. We had been in separate cars, and this was his first chance to talk with me alone.

“Okay, I guess,” I answered. “Why do you ask?”

“Why do I ask?” he repeated incredulously. “First of all, I know there’s something wrong with you and Eliza Beth, and I don’t think it’s something either of you particularly enjoys. I know people at the Nursing College, too. And I know you, and I’m worried.”

“Thanks, Sean,” I replied wearily. “It means a lot to me that you’re concerned. It really does. If I understood things better, I’d tell you what’s going on. But I just don’t know. I just don’t know. I’ll be all right, though – don’t worry.”

“That’s not what that young lady at Hollins College thought,” he said looking steadily at me. “Something you said – or I guess, you didn’t say – really tore her up. She asked me to keep an eye on you, and to keep you away from rifles and swords and things.”

At last, I laughed, and Sean laughed along with me. “Here?” I said grandly, sweeping my arm across the Second Battalion of the Military Academy of the South. “Certainly, there are no such things here.”

He put his arm on my shoulder and walked with me to my room. With one more “Sure you’re all right?” he went on up to his room on the third division.

As I walked up to the screen door, I imagined Grant Woodward’s old metal first sergeant insigne on it, right at nose height. Why did I ever think that those were such hard times? The light was off, so I opened the thick wooden door quietly. But then I remembered that Ryan had taken a weekend leave to go home.

Flipping on the light, I walked across the room to my desk, hoping and dreading to see if there might be some message. There was not – only the pictures of Eliza Beth under the plastic on my blotter. I stood there and stared at them until they became too distorted by my tears and the spell was broken – for the moment.

The next morning, Sunday 16 April, I woke up to my alarm clock as usual. For the first time in a long time, I felt rested and realized that I had no idea how or when I had gone to sleep the night before. But my uniforms were laid out, and the buttons for my dress whites were polished, attached to the uniform, and ready for chapel. Had you claimed that leprechauns had knocked me out, dragged me to bed, and prepared my uniforms, I could not have contradicted you.

Breakfast was uneventful and chapel even more so. Major Konrad’s sermons of late had been somewhat morose, and since I had also been somewhat morose I had simply stopped listening to them. Unfortunately, this left me alone with my own morose thoughts, so I surreptitiously slid

the guidebook to *Welsh on Gramophone Records* into a Bible cover. Had any of my classmates put his ear next to my lips, he would have supposed that I was practicing speaking in tongues.

When I got back to my room, I just sat at my desk in my dress whites unsure of what to do. Eliza Beth would certainly not be back so early, and I was too afraid to call anyway. Perhaps I could walk downtown for some tea – I was nearly out of Lapsang Souchong, and the walk might help clear my mind and keep me from worrying, so long as I could steer clear of all of “our” sites. I gazed over at Eliza Beth’s pictures from the happy time, and once more I was lost.

An urgent knock at the door broke the trance, and Harold Prichard came in holding his spiral notebook from the Plotinus class. He was in his cotton grays, having long since changed out of his dress whites after Episcopal chapel. “Have you heard what happened?” he asked tentatively and seriously.

I did not like the tone in his voice. Harold was always cheerful and energetic, even in the worst of circumstances. “No,” I replied, “is something wrong?”

“Is it ever!” he said and plopped himself down in Ryan’s chair. He opened up his notebook and said, “Frankly, I don’t know how to say this without taking it out of Friday’s notes and the observations I wrote into them most of Friday night – actually, all of Friday night. Every time I think about it without my notes, it just becomes a jumble in my mind.”

“For goodness sake, Harold,” I exclaimed, “what is wrong? I’ve never seen you like this.”

“Okay,” he began, putting his finger on a line of his notebook. At least to a degree, he seemed to become more calm and methodical, once thrust back into the reporter’s routine. “Friday, 14 April. I’ll try to fill in more of the details for you that I haven’t written down as I go. If it gets jumbled, just stop me and I’ll backtrack.

“Colonel Gemistos took his seat as before in the front left corner by the windows and left two chairs at the desk for Fabian and Christopher. But Christopher wasn’t there. We waited for a good ten minutes, and he never showed up. Finally, Owen suggested that Fabian start, and if Christopher didn’t show up by the time he was finished, Owen would sit in for him. He also had some observations on the debate that he would like to share.

“Once again, Colonel Gemistos emphasized that the purpose of the debate, or of any debate, was not to win. Rather, it was to gain insights and explore new avenues. He turned to Fabian and asked him what he had learned from Christopher.

“Fabian shuffled some notes and gave what I thought was a very insightful observation. He said that most people are like Christopher Adams. At that point, several members of the class objected, but he pointed out that we were taking an advanced course in Greek philosophy from a prestigious military college. When he spoke of most people, he was not thinking of the people in the room, but rather the people, let us say, of North Charleston. His prejudiced remark got a chuckle, especially from those who dwelled in the Holy City, and he continued.

“So most people live their lives completely on the lower level – the world of Becoming. They understand nothing of the concept of Being and can’t fathom the idea that a higher level, or to them a heaven, might be anything more than a world of Becoming as well. So their God must necessarily be a God of Becoming too, a river into which you cannot step twice.

“While to a Neoplatonist – and I’m pretty sure Fabian at this point was referring to himself – this God may appear to be too volatile, to these people who dwell exclusively in the changing, Becoming world, he is the only thing they have to hold onto, to anchor them. He is, after all, the most stable thing in their world in which they can believe.

“As long as they don’t try to force their beliefs on others, they should be allowed the dignity to believe in peace. This need of theirs must be recognized by those of us who acknowledge and try to understand the Intelligible World – the upper levels – the world of Being and its interaction with this world of Becoming.

“It’s no good arguing from Being or from the interaction of Being and Becoming to someone who acknowledges only the Becoming, the lower level. And it may well be dangerous to question their faith in their God of Becoming. That would be tantamount to cornering them and requiring them to fight with whatever weapons they may have at their disposal. After all, they firmly believe that they are right and possess the only Truth revealed by the only God – and the only True interpretation of the nature of that True God.”

At that point, I interjected, “You know, we’ve talked before about the sadists in the Thete System – the ones who just punish without any thought to the overall reason and purpose to the System.”

“Yeah,” Harold replied thoughtfully, seeing where I was going. But he also became more visibly agitated, anxious to proceed with his account.

“Well, it looks like the Literalists are the religious equivalent to the sadists of the Thete System, operating only on the lower level and oblivious to anything on a higher level. In fact, they seem to think that the lower level is justification enough in itself.”

Harold snapped his fingers, and I could see some of his characteristic enthusiasm – if not his cheerfulness – returning to his demeanor. “That’s right! They’re even dead set against reason. To them, belief always trumps reason. It’s as though God gave us reason to trip us up and send those who use it to hell. Now that’s behaving just like the Ogre God they seem to want. Yeah, you know, this may go a long way to explaining the popularity of the Inquisition!”

That last sentence, I noted, should have been pronounced with Harold’s characteristic gleeful irony. That it was, if anything, grim, worried me and caused my thoughts to drift far from the Inquisition – or perhaps not far from it at all. The rise of Fascism. Could Paul Hermann’s strange scenario represent the lower level run amok? Not just in Literalism, but the lower level in all aspects of human endeavor? I was still not convinced of his argument that the whole country, or even the State of South Carolina, could drift so easily into Fascism. But I could certainly grasp his philosophy. There was something in it that made me think of Socrates, and I found myself shuddering in the warm room.

“So what happened next?” I asked, noticing that Harold was watching me and waiting, all the while fidgeting with far more nervous energy than I had ever seen in him.

“It was a pity that Christopher wasn’t there to hear this, though I doubt that he would have understood it, anyway. He’s so set in his own narrow world view, that I don’t think he’s comprehended a quarter of what’s gone on in class – only the stuff he might be able to use against someone sometime.”

“You’re editorializing,” I said and smiled hesitantly. “You’re supposed to be reporting.”

“Sorry,” he admitted, returning to his notebook, “it’s been a long time. Anyway, at this point Fabian paused and looked at Colonel Gemistos. Colonel Gemistos looked concerned and then nodded to Owen. Just as Owen was coming up to the front, in struts Christopher in full dress salt-and-pepper with sash. Greg looked at him askance and said, ‘Overdoing it a bit, aren’t we?’

“But Christopher simply strode like a wooden soldier up to the desk, bowed too rigidly from the waist to the professor, and turned to the class. He began by saying that he’d learned a lot

from Fabian's presentation on Wednesday. He looked around the room like a vulture smelling carrion, and then he added, 'especially the part about St Augustine and the Pelagian Heresy.'

"We all assumed that he'd say something conciliatory at this point, but he simply stood back from the desk and called out 'Room, attention!'

"We remained seated and just stared at him, and when nothing happened for several seconds, his eyes started shifting nervously toward the door. Then Bart Schmidt marched through the door, practically at a goose-step, and executed a sharp left face next to Christopher. He was shined from head to foot in full dress with sash. He'd even shined his buttons. And they were all there!

"Into this surreal scene strode Lieutenant General Julius 'Caesar' Augustin, his face flushed with anger and his swagger stick protruding from his armpit. Everyone jumped up. 'Take your seats, men!' he barked. 'Not you,' he growled at Colonel Gemistos.

"The General marched up to the desk, opened a copy of Plotinus' *Enneads* that was there on the corner and closed it in disgust. 'Two things I won't tolerate while I'm in charge of The Acropolis,' he roared. Then his eyes scoured the room as though he were looking for someone – someone who wasn't there. But he continued anyway, 'and I *am* still in charge of The Acropolis'.

"With each word he banged his swagger stick against the book, until finally, with the word 'Acropolis', the swagger stick shattered. The ferrule with the inscription on it went flying out the open window next to Colonel Gemistos. As he tried to regain his balance, the General stepped on the point, flattening it. Meanwhile, Christopher and Bart looked like the Keystone Kops bumping into each other trying to retrieve the shattered pieces. Bart couldn't even bend in his full dress.

"Seeing he was about to lose control, the General shouted, 'Room, attention!' and everyone stood practically at a brace. 'Two things I will not tolerate at The Acropolis,' he continued. 'One of them is insubordination. And the other is heresy, which, you people, I consider to be the same as treason. One nation under God – *the* God, the almighty Jehovah, and don't you forget it!' This time he banged his fist on the book and then tossed it angrily out the window.

"He waited a moment and finally announced in an officious manner, 'This class is as of now officially ended. Your grades will be posted Monday morning. As for you,' he wheeled and looked at Colonel Gemistos with eyes full of hate, 'you are hereby dismissed!'"

"Holy Cow!" was all I could muster. After a moment, I looked at Harold with shock and asked, "Can he get away with that?"

"I don't know," he answered, finally and uncharacteristically displaying an air of total resignation. "I don't know."

It was as though retelling the story sent Harold into the same shock he had experienced witnessing it. I wondered how he had managed to proceed chronologically without blurting out the end in exasperation at my digressions. We sat for a while in silence – I did not know how long.

Finally, Harold said, "We won't get anything out of Adams, and I wouldn't believe anything he had to say anyway. Let's go see Schmidt!"

We walked out the front sally port and over to Third Battalion, Harold in his gray cottons and I in my dress whites. It had always amazed me how easily Harold could just stride into another battalion. I found it daunting, even to do an interview – as though I were some kind of interloper. This day, however, I marched in right beside him on a mission.

On the second division of K Company (the second floor over there without the band), we checked the bulletin board for room assignments and walked around the corner to our left to Schmidt's room. When we got there, we saw a skinny sophomore private – the only person who could be convinced or coerced into rooming with him in his fifth year – shining his shoes at his desk.

"Where's Schmidt?" Harold demanded, displaying a military presence I had never seen in him before. Indeed, Harold's martial bearing was so impressive that the sophomore nearly sprang to attention.

"He's gone," answered the sophomore.

"Gone?" we both repeated in confusion.

"Yeah. He came back to the room just before parade on Friday. He was wearing full dress with sash. I was on my way down to formation, so I figured I'd ask him about it later. But after parade he and all his stuff were cleared out. He even took some things that weren't his stuff. But frankly, he can have 'em. I'm just glad to be rid of the blivit."

We went back to Harold's room, where he put his dress whites back on, and we went out for some Russian Tea and a pizza at Labrasca's. We did not talk much about what had happened. Each time one of us would begin, we would end up in mid-sentence, staring at each other in disturbed disbelief.

When we got back to The Acropolis, Harold came with me to First Battalion, where I once again exchanged language laboratory times with Ben. Whatever had happened would come to some kind of head at the next evening's meeting of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. Of that, I felt sure.

That evening, I tried to call Eliza Beth. The receptionist did not even check her room, but said with a hesitant voice, "She's ... not available. I'm so sorry. I really, really am."

I tried to say something to her, but her reply had been so final and so agonizingly heartfelt that I could find nothing to say.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE
17 APRIL – MORNING

Monday morning, I dashed out of Latin and hurried to the Plotinus class. Harold and Owen were standing next to the door staring at a sheet of paper taped to the wall – the grade sheet usually posted at the end of a semester. It was arranged alphabetically by last name, but only revealed the cadet identification numbers, a series of five numbers ending in the year of graduation. Mine was 33238.

As I looked at the sheet, my jaw dropped. Near the head of the list was a number ending in 8 – that would be my classmate, Adams. Near the end of the list was a number ending in 6 – the one who should have graduated last year, Schmidt. Those two had A's, and the rest of us had F's.

No one said a word. We just kept staring at the list in disbelief. We could vaguely detect others from the class coming up behind us, stopping stock still, and in their turn staring in disbelief.

All of a sudden we were swept aside by a tall, thin figure in the old khaki uniform of the Acropolis faculty. It was Colonel Plummer, head of the English department. He stood in front of the list, breaking our gazes and our trances.

"I've just got back from Augustin's office," he announced with a mixture of anger and pride. "I informed him that the President does not give out grades. That's a faculty prerogative. When he asked me what I was going to do about it – in the most rude and profane manner, I might add – I let him know that the state chapter of the Association of College Professors had already been advised of his behavior on Friday and had called an emergency meeting of the executive committee over the weekend. Any further outrage on his part would lead to a strike supported by the entire state.

"He fumed, but he couldn't take the chance of a state-wide, or for that matter even a campus-wide strike. Huh! Some general!" he added in disgust. "Colonel Demetri told him that he had to give in to me or the Board of Visitors wouldn't even ask for his resignation – they'd sack him outright to get back into the good graces of civilization. And had they been there, they'd have fired him on the spot."

Colonel Plummer smiled grimly and angrily and went on, "Finally, with Colonel Demetri pressing him with reality, the great General 'Caesar' grudgingly relented, and then he stiffly and officiously apologized and requested with forced humility that I post the grades.

"A weird thing happened then, though. As I left the office, I could hear the martinet banging the desk with his fist and screaming, 'Now even an eagle trumps three stars!' I didn't wait around to find out what that meant."

In the cramped space that was left to him in the press of the class and other curious cadets who had gathered around, he turned and ripped down the grade list. "You all have A's. That's what Colonel Gemistos would have wanted. And besides, that's what's in the grade book he left for me," and he held up the little grade book that the professor emeritus always carried to class.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, finally locating my tongue. "Why can't we have class now? Why did you say it's what he *would* have wanted? Where's Colonel Gemistos?"

The rest of the cadets made vocalizations of agreement and leaned forward. But Colonel Plummer just looked down, avoiding eye contact, and said, "Excuse me, gentlemen!" As he moved toward the circle of cadets, a path opened up for him and he walked away, his head still bowed.

We reconvened at the canteen. This time the entire class was there except for Schmidt, who had received his all-important twelve "quality" points; Adams, for whom showing his face at that moment would have been a bad and painful mistake; and Fabian, who we all hoped was just lying low.

Rightly or wrongly, all eyes turned to Owen, the last member of the "winning" side of the debate. He, however, seemed more troubled than any of us over what had happened. As it turned out, he would have the most to pay for the sin of Adams.

Owen took a sheet of paper out of his notebook and tossed it into the middle of the table. "That's the summary that I'd come up with for my part of the team," he said absently. "I'd concluded that historical correctness was not important. The important thing is spiritual, regardless of the religion. A deeply spiritual Hindu and a deeply spiritual Christian have a tie with each other and with God – whatever It is – that no religious minutiae are going to diminish."

At that, several cadets grabbed for the paper and skimmed it eagerly. "It's a good thing Adams didn't know you were going to say this!" exclaimed Greg with a whistle.

"Oh, he got a carbon copy," Owen continued in his vacuous daze. "You know," he continued to the startled looks his last comment had generated, "I've come to the realization that, like it or not, Christianity as a religion is Adams."

"No!" protested Harold. "Christianity is a religion of love and peace!"

"Where is all this 'love' and 'peace' then? This is touted as a Christian country, but I don't see much 'love' and 'peace' here. The fact is that from its very inception, Christianity went down the road leading to Adams. In fact, he was there at the beginning."

We all looked at him curiously, and he said to me, "You remember when you found me in the philosophy and religion section of the Library – when you told me where to find Adams? Well, I came across some stuff that Colonel Gemistos didn't put on reserve – he wouldn't have dared. Collections by Thomas Taylor and others of what the ancient opponents of Christianity had to say – people who were there and didn't need to alter things to fit the 'Triumph of Christianity.'"

"Porphyry, whom we know from Plotinus, Celsus, and Julian all made the same observation. The early Christians deliberately targeted the ignorant – as they put it 'children, slaves, and women' (at least, those who were kept from learning). Whenever the master of the house or any other educated person would come within earshot, they'd stop and wait for them to leave. They couldn't afford to let anyone with a well-developed faculty of reason hear them, because they'd blow them out of the water – just like Fabian did to Adams. Even St Augustine – St Augustine! – admitted that the reason Christianity would triumph over Neoplatonism was not that it was superior, but it was easier for the ignorant masses to follow. Asking forgiveness for sins didn't require any intellectual effort or spiritual discipline.

"Nor," he continued darkly, "could they admit that the essence of their message was the same mystery that their hated 'Pagans' had. With one major difference, though: Their message presupposed the failure of an 'omnipotent' God to make people the way he'd intended them to

be. He not only changes, he makes mistakes – mistakes his creatures have to pay for in hell. The Doctrine of Salvation presupposes divine failure!”

In serious concern he looked around at his startled audience and added, “Why would a loving God condemn most of humanity to eternal torture, not because they didn’t understand love, but because they got their historical ‘facts’ ‘wrong?’ It doesn’t stand to reason. It all seems to be based on controlling the ignorant by promising celestial rewards to the obedient believers and damnation and hellfire to the disobedient infidels. No wonder it appealed to the slaves – it mirrored their reality, their experience.”

I stared at him appalled. Of course, what he was saying struck at the very core of my own belief system. More than that, however, it reminded me of a disturbing observation by Nietzsche about the difference between a slave mentality and a master mentality. I had readily dismissed the German philosopher’s claim that Christianity maintained the former, but now I was not at all sure.

Then Owen looked directly at me and said earnestly, “You understand. It all boils down to a matter of control. Remember Mr Brady and Lenin’s useful idiots? Christianity was adopted as the official religion of Rome not because of any theological concerns or spiritual superiority, but because it was organized in a way parallel to the Empire and could be used as a willing – even eager – partner. You know, the diocese has a governor and a bishop? In partnership, they could better control the ignorant ... and through force, the organization could help the ignorant control the intelligent. The useful idiots may have been responsible for the first Triumph of Christianity.” Then his voice turned darker, “But they’ll certainly be responsible for the Triumph of Christianity this evening.”

“Wait a minute!” I exclaimed, eagerly seizing upon whatever I could to turn Owen’s negative into some kind of positive. “It just hit me. Mr Brady described such people as idiots who know the catch phrases and believe on the lower level. But the one manipulating them doesn’t have to believe in the cause, he just molds them and uses them for his own purposes. Don’t you see? It’s Augustin! Remember how Adams came into class with a late enrollment form signed by some ‘higher authority’ for some ‘higher purpose?’ And he came in wearing staff sergeant’s stripes after being a low ranked junior private. How many people can get around both the academic and the military protocol of this place?” As usual, things were falling into place in my mind, now that it was too late.

“That’s right!” Greg exclaimed with an enthusiasm that comes from relief. “It really doesn’t have anything to do with Christianity, or any other religion, for that matter. It’s Augustin – it’s gotta be. What’s he up to?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted, although I certainly had my fears – from Paul Hermann. “But I’ll be there tonight, Owen. I’ve already switched evenings with Ben.”

“Thanks,” he said with resignation and gratitude, “but I’m afraid it won’t do any good. They’ve got the votes, and they’ve chased most everyone else out. I’ll be standing there like Socrates.”

“Socrates!” The name hit all of us like a thunderbolt, quickly followed by “Colonel Gemistos!” Harold, Owen, Greg, and I rushed out of the canteen and around to the phone booths in the post office. Owen was still clutching his notebook and took out the syllabus with Colonel Gemistos’ home number on it. I got to the phone first and yanked down the receiver as Harold stuffed a dime into the slot and Owen read the number.

The phone on the other side rang, and I held the receiver at an angle from my ear so my friends could hear. "The number you have called has been disconnected."

"Hey," said Greg anxiously, "I still have one outstanding favor from The Colonel. I'll see if he'll let me off campus to check."

"He won't be there, you know," said Owen slowly. We nodded with sunken heads. We knew. Exile!

We dispersed, and I pulled myself up the stairwell at the end of the hall – up to the publications room on the third floor. No one was there, of course, and I sat heavily behind my desk. I looked at the pictures of Eliza Beth, but did not lose myself in them. This time, I needed help, and I reached for the phone.

"Eliza Beth's in class," Melanie informed me when she got to the phone.

"I need to talk," I said, my voice conveying how troubled I was.

"I know," Melanie said quickly, "Greg's girlfriend told us all about what happened last Friday. I sure am glad you were away fencing. So was Greg, evidently. He thought the General was looking for you in class."

I breathed a sigh of relief – not so much because of the General, but because I didn't have to explain what had happened Friday. I did tell her what had happened that morning, though, as best I could, and that was met by a long pause.

"Eliza Beth has ... make-up classes all day," she finally said hesitantly, but full of concern, "but I can slip out this afternoon. Why don't I come down there and we can talk about it?"

I was so touched and thankful for her offer that tears came to my eyes. But all I could stammer was, "I can't."

"But you need to talk. I don't want you going through this alone!"

Again, all I could muster was, "I just can't."

"Look, I know you're Eliza Beth's boyfriend. But you need someone to talk to!" She was emphatic and sounded as though my pain were tearing her apart. "Please," she begged, "you mean too much to me to let you go through this alone."

"It's not just Eliza Beth," I said softly. "Do you remember when we spoke together over coffee before?"

"Yes," she answered with so much hesitation in her voice that I knew she was aware of where this was going to lead.

"When I looked into your eyes, Melanie, I saw something." I also remembered that momentary glimmer of green that I had seen in her eyes the week after, but that would have been all right. Actually, that would have been fine. What I had seen in her eyes in the coffee shop, though, was a far-away reflection of No.

"Did you see anything too, Melanie?" I asked.

Her voice quivered as she answered plaintively, "Yes." And then with a sigh of resignation, "Yes."

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX
17 APRIL – EVENING

That evening, I walked around the parade ground to Mitchell Hall for the meeting of the Acropolis Christian Fellowship. The moon was just past her zenith and cast a short shadow in front of me as though to point the way. I stopped and looked around and up at her in amazement. She had reached her first quarter. Had it been only three days since her sickle adorned the sky over Hollins College?

I entered the hall without looking around. There was no longer any dangerous area to avoid, nor any safe area to seek. As soon as I walked in, I was in the midst of them.

Owen stepped up to me, a blank expression having replaced his outgoing smile. “They want a meeting right away,” he said without emotion. “Seems our Literalist friends don’t go in much for socializing.”

He stepped up to the lectern, pounded the gavel with only half a heart, and opened the meeting of “17 April, in the Year of our Lord 1967.”

“How dare you talk so sanctimoniously of ‘the Year of our Lord’ when you know and we know he’s not your Lord any more?” Adams shouted as he rose to his feet, unrecognized.

Adams stalked up to the lectern and pushed his way between it and Owen, who stood back without saying a word. Indeed, it was obvious from the applause and that horrendous stomping of feet that there was nothing he could say.

“That heretic and traitor,” Adams started in a falsely hoarse voice punctuated by wooden movements, “that Judas Iscariot gave this to me in hopes that I would be seduced to the realm of the devil and abandon my Christian faith.” He waved a sheet of paper in the air so all could see it, though no one was close enough to read it.

“Historical correctness is not important,” Adams went on as though reading, but maintaining eye-contact with the crowd. “The important thing is spiritual, regardless of the religion. A deeply spiritual Hindu and a deeply spiritual Christian have a tie with each other and with God that no religious absurdities of the church are going to diminish. Let us therefore,” he continued to “read” from the paper, “admit that the Neoplatonists are correct and that an enlightened, tolerant Paganism is best for humanity.”

I started. He had begun with Owen’s words, but then he distorted and finally abandoned them altogether in favor of the Big Lie. I recalled the fears and the prophetic words of Chaplain Konrad and my own readings about recent historical events in Germany. As though to reinforce them, Adams continued with his speech – a speech I saw, but only caught bits and phrases of in my disoriented confusion. He moved with stiff, mechanical gestures. He pounded his fists on the lectern and then on his chest, and then he lifted his hands upward in choreographed, well-rehearsed motions filled with the rhetoric of the Triumph of Christianity.

Finally he said Owen’s name, and I came to. “Mr Hughes thinks the historical Jesus Christ is not important! The fact – and I say that again – the *fact* that Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior died on the cross and rose again is not important to Mr Hughes. I believe it’s time we removed Mr Hughes from the office he no longer deserves by the Grace of our Lord. The time has come when we cannot afford to have such secularist leaders. We are discriminated against and

persecuted. We are the minority in our own country. All we ask is for our rightful place as the true disciples of Jesus.”

“Yeah,” I thought to myself, “all he’s asking for is total control, total Triumph of his Will (excuse me, the Triumph of the Jesus’ Will). The power – the whole power.” Then I remembered Augustin and my anger and sarcasm shifted to worry and fear.

Owen looked over at me as though he could hear every word I thought, and I suppose my expression spoke rather loudly for me. He made a quick sideways gesture with his head toward the door. I shook my head vehemently, though hardly perceptibly. He made his gesture again and held up his right index finger, moving it in millimeters from himself to the door – he would follow. I hesitated, and he moved his head again.

I arose in the tumult of Adam’s speech and his followers’ stomping of feet and slipped out the door. I had to get out of the building and would wait for Owen outside, under the soft glow of the first-quarter moon. As I walked down the hall, I could hear a resounding “Aye!” and then more foot stomping.

As I walked out on the first floor, I could hear and feel the stomping above me. But it was regular now – marking time. The crowd was marching in place while singing, “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching on to war ...”

“On to war?” I thought. “*On* to war? What happened to ‘*as* to war’? The useful idiots – no, the dangerous idiots – still don’t know what a simile is. The only question is, what will Augustin – and who knows who else – do with them? And with people like them? How many? Where?”

I slowly turned right at the street to put a little space between me and them. Owen could catch up. I was sure he was not far behind.

“Hey!” I heard behind me, and Owen called out my name. “Come on across the parade ground with me.”

Ordinarily, I would have demurred at the offer, or at least made some polite protest to show that I knew my place. This time, however, I just trudged over to meet him on the grass. We both turned back when we heard “In a mighty army moves the Church of God ...” wafting down from above to the drumbeat of cadets’ feet.

“*In* a mighty army?” queried Owen.

“They’re still having difficulty with similes,” I noted, managing a harried smile.

“Then we’d better be careful crossing the parade ground,” Owen said dryly. “We might bump into Jesus in the night. He might rob us.”

“Owen,” I said, unable to quell my nervousness while the feet and the singing continued. “How long do you think they’ll be content just marching in place?”

He sighed and turned, shaking his head, and we started across the parade ground. In the back of my mind, I heard an echo from the hard time of innocence – “go honk around, honk around, honk around, honk around.” But somehow I knew that was no longer an option.

Owen stared straight ahead as we walked, and he spoke in slow, measured tones, “They want to be possessed – to be owned – by a vengeful, exclusive God. They want to be the only people of this jealous God, so they can say that it is their righteousness, their belief in the one and only God that separates them from others and leads to their persecution – a fantasy persecution by a disinterested minority they make out to be an oppressive majority. They see this division as holy, and their isolation as righteous; and they are perhaps more pleased with the prospect that the others will be damned than that they will be saved. But this is really only self-isolation – God

seeks to draw us all together in unity. There are many paths, and we must acknowledge those of others as well as our own.”

At the far end of the parade ground, we passed between the antique brass cannons and through the sally port of the Second Battalion. We turned left and walked slowly, silently to the E Company stairwell, Owen on my right. Then he abruptly swung around to face me squarely, his eyes fixed somewhere beyond me but through me.

Finally, he spoke with curiosity and determination, “Throughout history, all the Yahwists – Jews, Christians, and Moslems alike – have been fixated on the Myth – the *mythos*, the ‘story’ – to the almost total neglect of the Truth that lies behind it – that lies behind all religions. It seems to be all they’re able to understand ... or all they choose to understand ... or perhaps all they dare let their ‘flocks’ understand. What we have here is a failure of intellect. Intellect! The Intellect – He’s the Spirit, isn’t He?”

As he spoke those last words, his eyes took on a peculiar brightness – an other brightness. At length, he focused in on my eyes and smiled the old, familiar smile with the old, familiar brightness in his eyes. But there was something new there that I could not yet fathom. He turned and ascended the stairs.

I stood there a moment, staring after my friend. Then I turned back to the path that would return me to H Company. In the gentle, reassuring moonlight, I could see the “H” on the outside of the stairwell as I passed by the thick columns on my right. I hesitated at the last column – the one that brought back a flood of memories – before I continued on toward the stairs that I, too, would ascend.

When I returned to my room, the chart on the door indicated that Ryan was at the Library. I tossed myself down on my chair and called Eliza Beth. She was still ... unavailable. And Melanie was in an evening class.

I wondered if I could have talked with Melanie, anyway. I felt so isolated, especially from her. She and I were so much alike. If only No, for in her eyes I had seen the reflection of Mary. The hurt was so great, that I could not. Yes, the Mary in my heart and in my soul wanted me to. I knew that with as much certainty as I knew my own name. But the pain, the pain, the pain – it was just too much.

Please forgive me, Mary.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

22 APRIL

Between 18 April and 22 April I found myself in the middle of a whirlwind of action, little of which I actively took part in, but all of which I was intimately connected with. After breakfast on Tuesday, 18 April, I hurried over to Greg Thompson's mess and asked him to meet me at Harold Prichard's room.

There, I quickly laid out all that I had observed and thought about since it had occurred to me on Monday that Augustin must have been behind things. The fact that Adams had unexpectedly shown up with a late admission to class signed by someone in authority pointed to Augustin. The Dean would not have done this without first speaking with Colonel Gemistos. Adams' surprising and unprecedented promotion also pointed to Augustin. The Commandant simply would not have done it at all and was probably being kept in the dark regarding it.

Then there was Chaplain Konrad's apprehension at the General's "censoring" in the same context as Adams' misuse of the ACF – which was rather startling news to my cohorts. Of course, they were well aware of Schmidt's strange, fatalistic sadness at Colonel Gemistos' being the only professor who had faith in him, here at "The Apocalypse." The knowledge of classroom debate displayed by Augustin in his rants, there with both Adams and Schmidt in full-dress uniform with sash, also spoke volumes, I believed. So did Schmidt's immaculate uniform, which must have taken some time.

We concurred: Whatever was afoot, General Augustin was behind it and controlling it. I did not tell them of my apprehensions from talking with Paul Hermann, for that would only have been a digression, however troublesome I was finding it now. I did mention Colonel Demetri's concern with Augustin's secretive meetings with corporations, although I did not consciously realize what brought it to mind just then. For some reason, Greg looked startled at Harold, who raised his right eyebrow.

In the end, we formulated a strategy. Harold was to take care of the academic side of the action, and Greg of the military, each in accordance with his own talents. To me it was left to "coordinate" their efforts. Both of them had figured out that I was going through a bad enough period even without considering what had happened in the Plotinus class. And Greg had already perceived that it went far deeper – and had started far earlier – than that.

When I got back to my room, Ryan had a message for me from Melanie: I should take Eliza Beth out at 5:00pm on Saturday. Ryan did not like the way Melanie had sounded on the telephone. Nor did he like the way I sounded. I pushed myself out the door to go to Latin class.

For the rest of that week, I played the role of the Wounded King. Unable to take part in the adventures myself, I awaited reports from my knights, Harold and Greg. Regardless of the encouragement these reports gave me, though, the Wound did not heal.

Since as former editor-in-chief of *The Bugler* he was still close to him, Harold visited Colonel Demetri to inform him of my observations on Augustin and what had happened the previous evening in Mitchell Hall, of course in the context of what had already transpired the previous Friday in Philanthropos Hall. Colonel Demetri got back with him that afternoon to let him know that the Board of Visitors had been informed. By the next afternoon, they had decided

in a flurry of phone calls that one member would make it his duty to stay on campus for the rest of the semester and watch the General, pending a reevaluation of his position in the summer. I was curious that they would act so quickly. Did they know – or suspect – something more?

Harold also visited his academic advisor, Colonel Plummer, who was incensed that the President would interfere not only with academics, but also with extracurricular religious activities. Realizing the tenuous position Augustin was already in from his oversteps in the class, he promised further pressure from the state Association of College Professors. By Thursday evening, the executive committee of the organization had met and was prepared to call a strike at a moment's notice. Once again, I wondered at the urgency they showed in the matter. Could the rifle already have been loaded, awaiting only the installation of the firing pin? And what, exactly, was the target?

Greg, in his turn, called upon the Commandant. General Butler was outraged at the entire course of events. He vowed to attend the meetings of the ACF to ensure that proper order and discipline were maintained – yet one more well-known covert operation for the Brigadier. By Friday's parade, the Commandant had also made sure that Adams' staff-sergeant chevrons had been removed and that the appropriate, deserving cadets were promoted. That was, after all, his prerogative, not the President's.

All of this Harold and Greg reported to me throughout the week. In the end, the only loose end was Colonel Julian Gemistos. No one knew where he had gone or how long his exile would last. One thing Harold did discover from the Dean, however, was that Fabian had followed his mentor; but he would graduate on time – with a reevaluation of previously untransferred credits, all he needed was the twelve quality points from the Plotinus class. Greg used his outstanding favor with The Colonel to make sure that his absence without leave would be covered; although The Colonel now seemed to think that he owed Greg double.

It struck me how everyone had come together to save the cadets, The Acropolis, and perhaps more. And it also struck me that when Fabian Ward had followed Colonel Gemistos into exile, he did not know that he would have enough points to graduate; nor did he know that he would be allowed to. Unity!

But, as I was coming to expect, there had been a more sinister unity at work on the lower level as well. Right after Saturday Morning Inspection, Harold came down the gallery to see me. He was still in his full dress salt-and-pepper, though he had unbuttoned the blouse. Ryan and I were still in ours as well, having just removed the webbing.

"Could I see you a minute?" Harold asked in a voice that sounded too much of forced nonchalance.

Ryan looked at me and his brow creased together. He knew what had happened and did not like the idea that here was yet one more piece of disturbing news. From Harold's sideways nod down the gallery, he could also tell that whatever this piece was, it was more disturbing than usual, for Harold wanted to speak to me alone.

We walked over to the railing overlooking the quadrangle, where Owen and I had spoken together at the beginning of the year. How long ago that seemed now – for many reasons.

"I got a call from Colonel Demetri late last night," he said, squinting over the red and white checkerboard below us. "Thought you might like to know what he ... what he found out. Makes sense now. You know, didn't all add up before. I mean, what was Augustin up to that would justify the attention he was giving the ACF? What did ... what did it mean, anyway?"

Harold did not usually talk like that. His eyes were tired and shifting, as though he were looking at a pile of jigsaw puzzle pieces and assembling them in his mind. He rambled hesitantly, not at all like the articulate, optimistic English major I had come to know on *The Bugler*.

Leaning on his elbows over the concrete railing, he looked over to me earnestly and continued, "But Colonel Demetri did some snooping. Actually, some more snooping. He's been awfully suspicious of Caesar recently. Seems like Augustin's been a little too cocksure of himself and hasn't locked things up well enough. You know anything about the NCBC?" He pronounced the acronym carefully, evidently not knowing what it stood for.

"The North Charleston Bible College," I informed him, and he nodded as if to say that that did indeed make sense. "Yes, it's one of the things about the Great State of South Carolina that I've had occasion to learn of."

"Well, it seems that the President of that institution and the President of this one have developed ... a rapport, so to speak. And you wouldn't guess whose daddy their President is."

"I probably would," I said with bitter irony.

"Probably. Anyway, their President seems to have some political connections with some people who make The Acropolis look downright Bolshevik. Huh! Or maybe *they* are! Whatever. Seems like they had some plan to furnish unthinking military minds from a college that's traditionally sent a great many prominent politicians to the State House. They had a word for it – the Cadre. And a plan to 'loosen up' some key districts. And some really, *really* ... questionable tactics. Things you'd expect from thugs in brown shirts."

"Paul Hermann!" I exclaimed. "His doomsday scenario!"

Harold regarded me quizzically and asked, "Who?"

"A guy I met. He seemed to think the country was gonna drift into Fascism. And he thought it would start in South Carolina."

"Well, it won't now. Demetri's putting the Board onto it. Most of them didn't have much love for Fascism in the last go-round, and they don't have much love for Augustin either. That should take care of the power base."

I faced him squarely and protested, "Wait a minute! How in the world could a petty martinet from a military college – prominent as it may be – hope to get together with some Bible-thumping maniac and usher in a new wave of Fascism? Cadre or no Cadre, it's just not feasible. How could they have taken over the State? The country? I just can't buy it!"

"That's because you left out the most important part of the equation." I whirled around to see Greg, still in his full-dress parade uniform with sash and sword. "You keep wanting to see Fascism as some parade of fancy uniforms with black or brown shirts. But that's only window dressing – and window dressing that wouldn't go down terribly well with American tastes. Benito Mussolini envisioned the central point of Fascism to be the 'Corporate State.' You see, this brand of Fascism involves a merger of right-wing ideologues and 'corporations' – groups of interests, in which business interests prevail – all, of course, to preserve the highest ideals of the nation. Why, you could even make more corporations by privatizing government agencies, appealing to the American sense of free enterprise (which wouldn't really be free) and smaller government (which certainly wouldn't be smaller). In all of this, the claim they would make is that they don't intend to seize control outright, but to, let us say, promote traditional values."

"Wrapped in an American flag," I observed despondently.

“There you go! Huey would be proud. And of course, one of the biggest, most powerful of these ‘corporations’ is the church.”

“What!” I exclaimed in anger. But it was an anger tempered by a growing realization – an anger not aimed at him, but pointed off in some other vague direction. The fact that it was not Huey Long, or Sinclair Lewis, or even Halford Luccock who had wrapped Fascism in an American flag did not help matters much. Indeed, it made matters worse that it was a general assumption, understood well enough to be attributed to any of them. And Luccock, the professor of divinity, had made the all-important church connection three decades ago.

“Not all churches,” Greg said reassuringly, as though echoing Luccock himself. “But you have to admit that there are some that thrive on people’s not thinking. Need I name names?”

“No,” I admitted in resignation. “And I suppose they all shop in the same places and support the same ‘true American’ businesses. How convenient for everyone!”

“Should we reach that point,” Greg continued, “democracy would pretty much be finished. All decisions would be made by the various corporations, who would rule through the politicians they own. As though to show that they were really in charge, Americans would wear flags – the biggest, of course, on the politicians owned by the corporations.”

“And you join that with the third element of militarism,” tossed in Harold, “and you get the full effect, exploiting patriotism even more. Remember Eisenhower’s warning about the military-industrial complex? And if anyone should’ve known, it was Ike! Once we’ve privatized military responsibilities, such as transporting troops and equipment, then the private corporations will direct all kinds of money to politicians to start wars. You know, armies have always followed close on the heels of merchants – that’s how Rome acquired much of her empire, albeit reluctantly. If the Corporate State Fascists take over, they’ll be in tandem, and with the merchants in charge.”

There was an uncomfortable silence, and then Harold spoke up again, “Speaking of the military, I wonder what kinda contacts Caesar still has in the Army with that hyperactive PR machine of his.”

“That level always stands together ... in every respect.” Now it was Greg’s turn for a resigned admission. “Whether it be in business, politics, religion, or the military, they crave only one thing: blind obedience. Reason and philosophy are anathema, for they champion people’s coming together as equals, not as clogs in a Fascist Corporate State.

I stared out over the quadrangle and muttered to myself, “Holy Cow!”

The utterance was incongruous to Greg and Harold, and it seemed to shake them back into some state of normality. At once, we fumbled about trying to shake hands, but ended in a three-way embrace.

“It’s done!” Harold said with conviction, the old cheerfulness returning to drive the worry from his face. “All that tangled mess is settled. And a far, far greater mess has been averted.”

My mind was in a daze. I realized that I had seen only a small corner of a much larger plot – a plot that, in its entirety, would doubtless have left me far more concerned than I was. Somewhere, on some higher level of political power, I was sure that people were indeed taking care of matters and were quietly thankful that we had brought the final pieces to their attention. I wondered what it all meant, although I realized that these were not problems to be solved or even understood on my paltry, kittenish level. Nonetheless, it was on this level that actions would allow those above us to settle “that tangled mess.” Something in all of this hammered on my mind, but I could not figure out what it was ... or why. Then Herm’s words came back to me –

“at least, for a time.” How long would it be until the next battle? Would I be as ignorant then as I was now? Would I even be aware that it was happening? So many micros. So many micros. So many staves to go around the ax.

But I had a more immediate battle before me. It was still morning; and although the affairs of the greater world were being put into order (at least in this small corner), my own inner world was going to collapse come the evening. This I knew as surely as if it had been told me by Relentless Fate himself.

At 5:00 on the evening of Saturday, 22 April, I arrived at the Nursing College. Eliza Beth was sitting in the lobby and got up to greet me as though rising from a hospital bed. We embraced for a long time, and she kept tugging at me as though we could hold each other closer, to join together in one space in defiance of Newtonian physics.

We walked down to the Francis Marion. I wanted to avoid anything close to the Battery, for fear that it might reawaken Eliza Beth’s – and my – terror of the ghosts. Besides, this is where it had all begun for me: where my parents had stayed, where I had met the mysterious Herm Poynter with the green eyes. The fact that Samantha had also stayed here offered too many complications for me to think about at the time.

As we strolled over to the hotel, Eliza Beth would now and then make a small noise and look up at me with her glistening brown eyes as though she needed to say something – something vitally important. But nothing would come out, and she would squeeze my hand hard and pull my arm to her.

For my part, I would look back into her eyes through my welling tears and try to say something. All that would come out though was, “I love you.” And perhaps, that was all that I needed to say, for she would smile and rest her head on my shoulder.

We ate in silence, but we were constantly in touch – holding each other’s hand, touching each other’s cheek, and feeling each other’s presence. We knew we were nearing the end. But we were both holding on for one more moment. Just one more moment.

After dinner, we walked to our bench on the southeastern corner of Colonial Lake. We both heaved heavy, dreading sighs and shook our heads as though to deny the inevitable. We knew this was it. Neither of us wanted our relationship to end, but we both knew it had to be. So must it be. So must it be.

I gazed into her eyes and thought how she had never looked so beautiful, but so very, very sad. I knew that there was a question – a question I had to ask one more time. It was the “healing” question, but it would bring only ending, not healing. And it would send me away from her, not bring me joyously into the castle of her heart. I held her hands, but she pulled on my sleeves wordlessly and imploringly, and I cradled her in my arms. She calmed down and looked into my eyes, inviting the question.

“Oh, Eliza Beth,” I finally asked, “what is wrong?”

Finally, Eliza Beth found her voice – a weary, defeated, lonely voice, a voice that ripped at my heart. “That ghost on the outside,” she explained, “he was my boyfriend last year. I believed everything he said, and I did everything he asked. He graduated and went off to Monterey to study Russian to spy on the Soviet Union ... or something.”

I jerked in surprise and almost spoke, but Eliza Beth just smiled sweetly and knowingly and put her finger up to my lips.

"You're going into the Army," she continued after a moment. "If I went with you as your wife, I fear that one day you two would be stationed together. As soon as EB – the ghost on the inside – saw him, she would go crazy for him. She would believe every horrible thing he said and do every horrible thing he suggested. You see, last year, I was EB, and EB is horrible – horrible!" She curled up in my arms as though I could protect her from the ghost of EB.

She said my name lovingly over and over, and then she went on, "I couldn't put you through that, it would destroy you. And whatever EB thinks and EB does, Eliza Beth loves you. No, don't try to say that you could handle it – you couldn't. And what's more, I couldn't either. It would destroy both of us."

"But Eliza Beth," I objected, "that ghost, he's just ..."

But she looked lovingly into my eyes, and put her finger once more to my lips. "I know. I know. But as I told you before, he's not even all that important. What's important is that EB is still in me somewhere, lurking in a dark, evil corner waiting for him or any excuse to spring out and ruin us."

She sat there a moment, and then she gave a little shake and stiffened. "She might be able to destroy me anyway," she added with a grim determination, "but she's not – you hear me? – she is *not* going to destroy you. Eliza Beth loves you far, far too much ever to let that happen."

She bent over in my arms to do something so I would not see it. Then she gradually stood, bringing me with her. She reached out and took my left hand, raised it to her lips and kissed it tenderly, and then she placed the pin in my palm and gently closed my fingers around it.

The walk back to the Nursing College was under a mile, but it seemed to draw on forever. Yet, before I knew it, we were standing opposite one another at the door. Eliza Beth looked at me with sadness, love, and tears in her eyes.

"Please ...," I began, shaking my head slowly and matching her tears.

But one last time she put her finger to my lips and looked at me. She threw her arms around me and whispered in my ear, "Eliza Beth loves you."

I whispered back, "And I love Eliza Beth."

She pushed herself away, took one last look into my eyes, turned, and ran through the door.

I stood there looking at the door as it closed, shutting me off from Eliza Beth forever more.

Firmly I grasped onto the pin and walked back down the stairs, once again alone and adrift. Instead of walking back to The Acropolis, though, I retraced our final steps back to Colonial Lake, as though it were some holy pilgrimage. I looked at every spot where she had sighed, every corner where we had cried together, every palmetto that had witnessed our slow procession. Until finally, I was standing next to our bench where she had placed the pin back into my hand. Our bench.

I stood there gazing into the lake. Through the reflections of the clouds, I could see the moon trying to glow through the puffy darkness. Veiled by the clouds, she offered no illumination. I did not know how long I stayed there, but my moon rose to her zenith while I was standing stupefied, staring at the water.

She had just begun her decent, her glow still barely visible through the clouds in the lake, when a large bird descended from the sky and perched on the bench. She let out a strange, slow call – *dum-dée-dum-dum, dum-dée-dum-dum, dum-dée-dum-dum, dum-dée-dum-dum*. Something in her call resonated in me, but I knew not what. I looked over at her. She was a slender, erect bird with shiny green feathers. Then she flew off in the direction of The Acropolis.

I looked at my watch and realized that I had to fly off, too, or I would not make the midnight curfew. There was just enough time if I walked fast and ran. Thus began my long, hurried trek back from Colonial Lake to the Propylaea. Up and in, up and in.

Then the strangest thing happened. Near the end of my stumbling, halting journey back to The Acropolis, I felt a presence. It was not the familiar feminine presence with the fateful Greek words, but a presence far more like me myself. He joined me as though our two souls slipped together into a perfect unity. A perfect unity.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

THE RETURN

As I – we? No, I, Cadet – slipped by the hoplite’s sword into The Acropolis and behind the guard post, I did not even notice the SMG. I had come a long way since that evening in September 1964. My hopes, my fears, my aspirations were so different now. But I still had a long way to go, and the path started with the road to the Second Battalion – the Epaulis.

With one final push, I forced my legs to move through their weariness and through my heartache ever up, ever in, along the road in front of Techne Hall, around the corner, and on to the sally port. The Officer of the Guard was just putting the lock into the personal gate when he saw me hurrying up. The senior private with his awkwardly dangling sword glanced at me with a kind smile, but one tired from the duties of the day, and he slipped the lock back out of the personal gate within the sally port gate.

“Welcome to the Epaulis,” he said with a grin and a grand wave of his hand to guide the way. “Cutting it a bit close tonight, aren’t we?”

I stumbled, catching my foot on the gate, and he helped me regain my balance inside. Then he looked into my eyes and his grin evaporated into a look of concern. He searched my face, trying to read in the distorted features the story of what I had been through. Holding his hand on my shoulder, he said, “Hey! You all right?”

But that was not the right question, and I just looked at him with a vacant stare. I limped on in through the rest of the sally port, the worried eyes of the OG still tangible on the back of my neck.

I stepped out onto the quadrangle and looked up. With a blinding flash, the moon broke through the thick veil of clouds and illuminated me. She was just entering her fullness, and her light penetrated into my very soul.

How long did I stand there, staring at the moon? By the clock, it was only a few seconds. But her journey into my soul encompassed a lifetime. Through my eyes, her illuminating brightness passed deeper and deeper into my soul.

Slowly, a face formed on the moon. It was Samantha, her face reflecting from my soul onto the glowing disk of the moon. Yes, I loved Samantha as much as my wounded heart would allow. And I bore her no bitterness – that would only have added to the pain.

Yet, our love was not the love of equals, for I loved her in the safe isolation she provided me. Nor was it a mutual love, for she sought me and I capitulated. Our relationship was not fair to her, although she had wanted it so much that she No, no, not yet, not yet. Later.

“I’m sorry,” I thought, as I gazed at Samantha’s face in the moon. “I loved you as best I could, but I needed you too much. I needed you to shield me from all the things I should not have been shielded from.”

The moon illuminated deeper and deeper into my soul. How deep would she go? How deep could I stand it?

And there on the moon, I beheld the beautiful face of Eliza Beth. A sharp pain pierced my heart. So soon. So soon. Could it not have waited? No.

Ours was – had been? No, was – a mutual love. We had each chosen the other, and we had both grown in our love until the final, painful moment. And even then, the love we had for one another did not die. No, it grew even stronger. That made it so much harder and so much more ... tragic. Why? Why?

But I knew the answer. Our love, as mutual as it had been, was mutually unequal. From my standpoint, I needed her to isolate me every bit as much as I had needed Samantha to do the same. And for her part, she needed me to isolate her in the very same way. As mutual as our love may have been, it was only symmetrical – two souls seeking refuge in the isolating safety of the other.

“Eliza Beth ...,” I thought to her reflected image on the moon. But I could take it no further. She knew what I meant, and I knew that she thought the same.

In spite of its mere symmetry, if the love that had been ours had been shared by any two mortals, they would have counted themselves blessed by the Gods. But Eliza Beth – poor, sweet Eliza Beth – had a ghost in EB that she could not escape and from whom I could not isolate her. Could I have protected her from ghosts on the outside? I would have tried. But could I have protected her from the ghost on the inside? No. She had been right, and my only solace lay in knowing that Eliza Beth loved me. And I loved Eliza Beth.

But I had my own ghost to contend with. Mine was not a dreaded ghost, but a precious ghost. And at that, my whole being sighed, and I knew it was time for the light of the moon to illuminate my soul deeper ... deeper ... deeper.

Finally, I found myself staring in wonder at the face of Mary. Mary! When we had looked into each other’s eyes and passed right down into each other’s heart, we had discovered such a love – a full, complete, mutual and equal love. In our equal love, I was not isolated from others, I was united with them, as I had been with my classmates sophomore year. Why did it have to end?

End? No, it never ended. For although we would spend our lives forever apart, her soul was still joined with my soul – so high and so deep. And even now, her love was what prompted me to trust in the Good and in the compassion of others, and to be open, as I had been in the canteen with Greg. No, it never ended – our love would be with me forever.

Looking at her face in the moon, blessed by the Goddess with one last look into her deep, violet eyes, I knew it was time to finish the sentence that had been cut off so long ago. So long ago. I wanted to shout loud enough that she could hear me in the moon, but all I could manage was a weak, weary, hoarse whisper, no louder than the mewing of a kitten.

“Oh, Mary, Mary, I love you! Please ... please ...”

But one sentence was all I was allowed before the moon sank beneath cascades of tears.

In the distorted wavering landscape beneath the waters of my pain, I staggered as though pierced by a triad of arrows and slowly made my way to the H Company stairwell. I pulled myself up, determined in spite of my wounds. And as I reached the top of the stairs, I could make out another light through my tears – room 248 and my friends.

Harry and Ken were in their room, and Zachary was standing outside the screen door talking with them. His hat was pushed back and his dress blouse was unzipped as he leaned up against the doorframe with his elbow. He turned and looked at me, and his face fell. He reached out, took me by the arm, and guided me into the room. He was speaking, but I could not tell what he was saying. It was not the question.

They sat me down on the bottom bunk. Again, they spoke to me, but I could not discern what they were saying. It was noise that all blended into an interference pattern that I could not understand. Everything in the room was wavering, on the verge of slipping together. I was confused and disoriented.

Then a voice came through to me. I believed it was Harry's voice, though it was not important whose it was exactly – perhaps Parzival's. It sounded as though we were in a surreal echo chamber. "What is wrong?" came the question – the right question at last, the question for the wounded.

Yet, I could not speak. Slowly, as though lifting a great weight, I brought my left hand up, and with all my energy I forced my fingers to unfold. The pin.

Ken – or at least, I thought it was Ken – ran out the door as the others sat down on either side of me and put their arms around my shoulders. I wept. For how long? – I did not know.

Then in the echo chamber I heard another voice. "You're a good-looking guy. You'll find someone else."

It was spoken so kindly, so kindly. But it was so wrong! I stared down at the pin. It was Mary's pin. Did he not understand? It was Mary's pin! Mary's!

Slowly, I lifted my head as though it were a boulder, and I gazed through my tears in the direction from which the voice had come. There through my tears I beheld all my classmates streaming into the room. Those who happened to be closest to me enveloped me in a firm embrace, and those further out reached over their comrades' shoulders to touch me and assure me that they were there.

There – there in room 248 of all places – my classmates, my friends, all came together for me! No. No, not for me alone. For us all – for the unity of All – for ourself!

Gently, ever so gently, I felt myself being lifted from the cadet I had just joined beyond the Propylaea, outside The Acropolis. Deep within our soul, we would forever be Cadet. But now it was time for the next stage of my return.

With love, I looked down at the crowd of cadets like so many cats joining together to protect the one old blind cat – but really joining to be one. Slowly, I drifted backward through the latticed bars in the window and out into the brilliant moonlight of a crisp Charleston sky just after midnight on 23 April 1967.

As I floated into the sky, I felt drawn by someone behind me, someone in the presence of a bird. And as I looked back down to the room filled with light, I noticed a large shadow on the ground below. It was like a big, black bear guarding the source of light – the light from the cadets within.

I felt my soul drifting through time and space, but it was more like timelessness and spacelessness. In the strange emptiness of the world between 1967 and 1997, I heard a comforting feminine voice. It was the same voice I had heard so many times before, but this time, she was asking a question: "What have you learned, Cadet?" And indeed, she did address me not by name but as "Cadet," as though that title held some specially and sacred significance.

Then I heard a voice that sounded like my own. Yes, it was my voice, and I said, "My Lady, I have learned that all are one, and all must be one on a higher, deeper level. We must join together, all as equals."

"Can you achieve it, Cadet?"

"No, my Lady, not yet ... not yet."

“What must you do to achieve it?”

“I must be open to all other parts of the Soul, my Lady, in the unity of compassion. For that which is above, I must contemplate. And I must overcome the sin.”

“What is the sin, Cadet?”

“The sin is isolation. As long as we souls are isolated – as long as we have shielded ourselves in self-isolation – there can be no unity. But I have found an aspect of it that is even worse, my Lady, and that is the desire to be possessed. Such possession is but another form of self-isolation – finding another to possess us and thereby to isolate us.”

“And why is this so much worse, Cadet?”

“When we force some other to do our isolating for us, we are not only abrogating our responsibility for ourselves, but we are also placing ourselves beyond responsibility, so the other can receive the blame and we can be seen as the righteous one – even the righteous victim. We can then attribute our isolation to ‘the will of the other.’ The other, however, is even more a victim, for this act also isolates the possessor from the possessed.”

“And who is the other, Cadet?”

“The other can be another human or a Deity – a God. In both cases the other – human or God – is forced into the role of appearing vengeful and exclusive. But ultimately, we must bear the responsibility for the isolation, and we must overcome it ourselves. We define others – humans and Deities – by our behavior toward them, not by the words we like to associate with them. It is up to us whether we treat them as jealous, dominating lords or as friends – whether we see ourselves as subjects of them or as a part of them in a greater whole. It is the wish neither of the friend nor of the Deity to dominate and isolate – that is our own misguided choice.”

“Do the Gods not want to dominate you souls, Cadet?”

“No, my Lady. You wish rather to draw our attention up to that part of us that dwells with you, that is a part of you.”

I could feel the feminine presence smile as we continued our journey. And round about her, I could sense great sighs of relief.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

23 APRIL 1997

Lying on my back, I gazed up at the motionless ceiling fan in my bedroom. The room was bathed in the light of the full moon, this time not at the beginning, but at the very height of her fullness and approaching her zenith. Had I just opened my eyes? Had they been open the whole time? A faint, fading image of a cadet hurriedly walking up the dark streets of Charleston below lingered in an echo of my sight. I glanced at the clock – just moments after midnight.

I had only returned part way. There was another journey ahead of me, and I was desperate to be on it. The Lady in the Shiny Green Dress was suffering, and I now knew precisely what I had to do. Gently, I closed my eyes.

You cannot step into the same river twice. And yet, the dream was exactly as it had been before, as though it were a painting. I stepped right back into that dream and once more – still? – found myself faced by those imploring green eyes, as that whole wavering world of the upper level of Hibernian Hall watched and waited, scarcely daring to breathe.

My eyes streaming with tears for her pain – a pain I knew all too well – I stepped up to the Lady and embraced her, as my classmates had embraced me thirty years ago to the night. Could it have been to the very moment, in spite of the difference in time zones? Of course – daylight savings time had moved forward in the interval; so midnight then and there was midnight here and now.

With my left arm I held her warmly, and with my right arm I motioned behind her for all to come together in unity around the Suffering Lady. They all took one step ... and vanished.

We stood facing each other. Behind the Lady were meadows and forests and the ocean beyond. Above her, right over her head, the brilliant full moon shone forth in glory – a fitting crown for the Lady. She looked at me with a loving, gentle smile, as her long shiny green dress transformed itself into a brilliant white chiton gathered at the waist and falling to just above her knees, revealing white sandals laced half-way up her tanned shins. The pin in her left hand grew into a bow, and the feathers of a quiver of arrows appeared behind her right shoulder. A silver crescent diadem arose in her hair, and the hair itself – hair the color of wheat – gathered back into a short ponytail behind her head. Yes, that was the right way.

“So we meet face-to-face, my Cadet,” she said quietly, but with immense pride and enthusiasm in her voice.

“Yes, my Lady,” I answered, knowing not what else to say.

Her eyes blazed forth with the brilliance of emeralds, and she added, “Thank you.”

“My Lady?” I asked in confusion.

But she just put her head back and laughed a laugh of great relief. From far in the distance, I could hear echoes of her laughter. But no, the Gods were not laughing at me. They were laughing as a man long held under water laughs after he comes up to the surface and once more breathes the air of life. A laugh with tears of joy.

“My Lady,” I pleaded, “please tell me what is going on.”

She smiled with a beneficent radiance after her restorative laugh. “You know that,” she assured me, “for you were in on the planning. It is, after all, your life. Before you, the soul, descended into the world of matter, you knew what would happen with only one exception. And that you have performed beyond our dearest hope. Thank you!”

Again, I looked at her puzzled. And again, all I could manage was a confused, “My Lady?” Then I felt suddenly insecure and added, “What have I done? Did you not even know what would happen?”

“You are still too much in that life,” she explained, “to grasp it all now. Indeed, we all see from our own level. Some things are so important that they can be perceived only by the Nous himself. To us, he seems like Relentless Fate. And I suppose he is. You see, the rest of us were as much in the dark as to what would happen as you were.”

“Whatever it was,” I began tentatively, “pleased you then?” As I posed the question, though I seemed to know what the answer would be.

“Pleased? No, for that would imply change, and we do not change. As for what you perceive to be my emotions, that is for your benefit. After all, if I am to appear to you in human form, then I must display the appropriate human emotions that you would expect. As you will indeed recollect, the Gods connect across the levels, the Nous knows, the Soul reasons, and on this level of Nature you experience. And your experience, painful as that may sometimes be, is crucial to the functioning of All.”

“But, my Lady,” I objected, “what will come about because of ... of this experience?”

“You also know that the Gods do not give individuals exclusive revelations. As Xenophanes tells you, those you supply for yourself far better, as you seek through nature and reason. And,” she added with her right eyebrow raised sternly, “any mortal who says he has a personal exclusive revelation from any God is merely stating his own opinion – or his own delusion – and he is intent upon controlling others. Exclusive revelations, you will notice, tend to bring far more suffering, oppression, and strife than love, unity, and peace. That is why a good God would not provoke humanity with exclusive revelations or inspired scriptures. Humanity supplies those provocations entirely on its own.”

Her sternness melted away, and she looked at me with an immense smile and said as though relenting, “All right. I will tell you this. You are, after all, my Cadet. In two years, you will experience in the depths of Newgrange a heightened awareness of many, many souls. This will be the beginning of your spiritual awakening. In two-times-two years, you will have progressed to the point that you can leave your old crutch behind and delve into the study you will need to get to this place. Then in two-times-two-times-two years – and not a moment before, mind you – you will arrive here, and only then will you begin to write this down.”

“My Lady,” I stammered, shaking my head in confusion, “how can I prepare in the next eight years to reach the point where I am now?”

She smiled gently and informed me quietly, “It is not the simple event that is important. It is the understanding. At the point that you call 1997, you are confused but highly fascinated by a dream you have just had and mysteriously, impossibly reentered – the Dream of the Lady in the Shiny Green Dress. At first, you misinterpret it in accordance with your old crutch – your old way of looking at things. But you are constrained from writing it down yet. Through learning and reason and contemplation, though, you come to have an understanding of what that dream really meant – really means. You will achieve that understanding in two-times-two-times-two years,” and she measured the multiplications out, “past the time of the dream itself. And then, and only

then, you will take on the task of writing it down. It will take you quite a while to complete it, but I need not remind you of one of your favorite Latin phrases – *festīnā lentē*.”

She cocked her head slightly and, still regarding at me with her loving, gentle smile, she continued, “Until you came up and in, you were in 1997. Now, with me perceived by your reason and contemplation – not by any revelation I deign to give to a ‘mere mortal’ – it is what you call 2005, among many other times. Up on this level, you see, such temporal details are just too cumbersome to deal with. And,” she added with a twinkle in her green eyes, “I can tell you this now without really giving you a revelation, because you will not realize what I have told you until it comes to pass, anyway; and at that point, you will have found it by yourself. You can think of it as just a reminder of your life’s planning, in which you, after all, played a major role. Indeed, we had marked it all out ‘before,’ and we did it ‘here.’”

“And that is why,” I suggested slowly and thoughtfully, “I was able to step into the same river – the same dream – twice.”

“Exactly!” she cried out delighted, clasping her right hand over her left on the bow. “In the world of Becoming, you cannot step into the same river twice. Ah, but if you take a shortcut through the world of Being, you can reenter that river at any point whatsoever.”

“Thank you, my Lady,” I said sincerely.

“Thank you, my Cadet,” she replied with a still-perceptible air of relief. Whatever I had done, it had been right. And whatever would come of it, I would know at the right time – at the time of understanding.

She looked deep into my eyes, although my eyes could not even begin to penetrate the emerald jewels before me. As though talking to someone far within me, she asked, “Do you love me?”

“My Lady,” I gasped. “My soul is only so deep. At the depth I would need to love you, I could never survive!”

Once more, she laughed delightedly. “No, no, Cadet. I was not addressing the part of you that is in the Soul. I was addressing the part of you that is with me in the Intellect, the Spirit.”

From some spot so deep within me that it sounded as though it were coming from another galaxy, I heard a voice – could it have been my voice? – reply as a matter of fact, “Yes, of course.”

She smiled at me as though for the first time and said, “No, I revealed nothing that you do not already know. I mean merely to prepare you for our next meeting, for it is a meeting that you are on the very verge of understanding. Indeed, you do understand, but first you must finish this encounter. Time,” she added with her brows furled over playfully squinting, glimmering eyes and a tight-lipped smile, “is so ... bothersome.”

I smiled back to her. Yes, I believed I was beginning to understand. And I was fascinated.

“You and I,” she said in such a way that I knew it was in conclusion, “are intimately bound together. You are indeed a ‘part’ of me. Now, you are my Cadet. When we meet again, I shall call you my Friend.”

She stood before me as the meadows and the forests and the ocean beyond faded, and darkness – not an ominous darkness, but a comfortable darkness – closed in upon us. I found myself moving backward, with her still directly in front of me. Back, back we traveled toward some point far behind me – the world of matter, the world yet illuminated by a beautiful full

moon still climbing to her zenith and spreading her brilliant glory over the earth for all who would but see it.

My Lady kept pace with me through the entire journey, looking into my eyes with her constant love and protection, and also with a sense of relief and gratitude that I still did not comprehend. Her green eyes shone out like beacons over her white chiton surrounded by the darkness – like some great lighthouse guiding me safely on my journey.

At last, we reached that preordained spot behind me. Suddenly, I saw her face come out of the encroaching darkness. She nearly touched her right cheek to mine as she whispered softly in my ear:

χρεόν ἐστίν.