AGAINST THE WAR

















Roland Menge

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AGAINST THE WAR v2

by Roland Menge

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The cover image is a collage of photos including the following (left to right, top to bottom):

(1) "Soldiers at Hue City, 02/6/1968." Original caption (Twentieth Century): "'Angel of Mercy' D. R. Howe (Glencoe, MN) treats the wounds of Private First Class D. A. Crum (New Brighton, PA), 'H' Company, 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment, during Operation Hue City;" National Archives Identifier 543484: alamy copy 2026

(2) Apollo 11 moonwalk, July 20, 1969: NASA;

(3) "Female Demonstrator Offering a Flower to a Military Police Officer, 10/21/1967;" captured by S. Sgt. Albert R. Simpson on October 21, 1967; National Archives Identifier: 594360;

(4) "Marine landing at Danang, Vietnam, 08/03/1965;" National Archives Identifier: 595865;

(5) F-105Ds in Vietnam. Caption: "The F-105D was the workhorse of the SEA bombing effort between 1965 and 1970, accounting for the lion's share of targets. While the aircraft had good survivability, 334 were lost during the Vietnam war, mainly to SAMs and AAA (US Air Force)." Ausi Air Power website: www.ausairpower.net/Analysis-JSF-Thud-2004.html;

(6) "VISTA Volunteer mentoring children—1969 South Florida;" 1969. Photographer Federico Santi: www.drawrm.com/vista.htm;

(7) Anti-war demonstrators: wordisbeing.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/chapters-1718-19-civil-rights-vietnam-and-more-unrest/vietnam-war-protest;

(8) "Nurses care for a patient at the 24th Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh, Vietnam. " U.S. Army Office of Medical History, Army Nursing History in Pictures 1898 to Present: history.amedd.army.mil/ANCWebsite/pictorial_hist.html;

(9) Background photo: "Columbia University 1968:" www.columbia.edu/cu/computinghistory/1968/68-dc1.html.

Versions & Revisions
The original version of AGAINST THE WAR was compiled on September 23, 2013. This major revision was saved as AgainsttheWar_v2_0074 on October 13, 2026.
AGAINST THE WAR v2 corrects all known historical errors in the original novel, with special attention given to errors and issues identified by David A. Willson in his 2014 review on the Vietnam Veterans of America website and in email correspondence with the author in succeeding years.

Online Resources
For more information on AGAINST THE WAR V2, refer to the author's personal website (rolandmenge.com) where you will find the following topics:

- How Does AGAINST THE WAR v2 Differ from 2013 Version?
- Statement of Purpose (AGAINST THE WAR v2)
- Synopsis (AGAINST THE WAR)
- Resources (AGAINST THE WAR)
- Structure (AGAINST THE WAR)
- Use of Microsoft Copilot for Validation

All hypertext addresses and end notes in this online file were checked and if necessary updated in v2.

Table of Main Changes Made 2013 to v2
For a table summarizing the main changes made in the v2 version, refer to the last topic in this online file. Use the following link:

Table of Main Changes Made 2013 to v2

for Jeanne

We have found ourselves rich in goods, but ragged in spirit; reaching with magnificent precision for the moon, but falling into raucous discord on earth. We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by divisions, wanting unity.

Richard Milhous Nixon (1969)

Statement of Purpose (v2)

AGAINST THE WAR is a historical novel examining the response of college students of the Vietnam War era to the Vietnam War and, through the prism of their experience, the effect of the war on American life and on life wherever in the world America was at that time a military or cultural presence. The effect described is a broad phenomenon extending from the theater of war overseas to the growing response to the war at home, as evidenced in the "war on poverty," the anti-war movement, and the counterculture that arises from the anti-war movement.

The military draft, AGAINST THE WAR shows, was the underlying reason why this effect spread so widely. All military-eligible men of the students studied in this novel (graduating from college in the years 1965 to 1970) were subject to the draft. Most could avoid the clutch of the draft while they remained students in good standing, but as the date of graduation approached, they were forced, if they acted at all, to make a decision. Options available included enlisting or waiting to be drafted, joining in a reserve officer training program, staying in school to secure a new deferment, obtaining some other kind of deferment, or filing as a conscientious objector. In addition, there were the extremer options of "resisting the war," "dropping out," or moving to another country.

It is at this point of divergence, as these men confronted the pressure of the draft, that this novel begins its story of the behaviors evinced by this sub-group of young Americans. The four main characters represent four of the paths selected. Jim Morris enlists in the Air Force and winds up eventually as a fighter pilot in Laos. Bill O'Rourke, younger than the others, continues in school for two more years and then enlists becoming by choice a medic in Vietnam. Tom Steward, after being deferred as a VISTA volunteer in North Carolina, is accepted as a conscientious objector ("to the Vietnam war only") and does two years of alternative service in West Virginia, Arizona, and New Mexico. Matt Brandt is deferred for two years as a Mountain Volunteer in Kentucky then secures a student deferment as a graduate student in Washington D.C. where he becomes a photographer and winds up with a common problem of the era, overuse of drugs. Through the experience and engagement of these participants in the fervor of the times, the vast web of activities documented in this novel comes into view.

Admittedly, as observed by critic David A. Willson in his review of the 2013 version of this novel, the four main men of this novel could not possibly represent the entire "Vietnam War generation," as claimed in the Statement of Purpose in that version. More importantly, as he notes, they could not represent the immense pool of the younger men of average age

19 who had never attended college and became the front line “grunts” of the war. The group studied in this novel composed only about 2 percent of the hundreds of thousands of men drafted into service. They are a “privileged group,” as Willson observes (and which I, the author, did not sufficiently acknowledge in the earlier version, and, in fact, did not fully realize at that time). As such, however, they are a group equipped, through more education, with a more informed view of the world. This was a group, also, who had the time, and presumably as students the inclination, to form opinions about what to do before being forced to act. For the same reason, however, and this is the crucial point here, this was the group who played a primary role in the development and evolution of the American “counterculture” and anti-war movement. In the similar manner, the individuals in this group who did wind up as soldiers brought an often more informed perspective to their activity as soldiers and their interactions with foreign nationals, making for a unique prism on the war experience alongside the prism of the others who had taken an “alternative” route. Between these juxtaposed experiences of soldier and counterculture participant, there developed, as generally well known and as documented in this novel, an ever-expanding social and cultural divide.

On the counter-culture side of the cultural division, the social and cultural dynamic presented is one of growing resentment and spreading influence. Draft-deferrable programs like the Teacher Corps and VISTA (amply available in the “war on poverty” of this era) pushed many of the students confronting the draft into assignments among poor and excluded Americans;—in effect, enlisting these men (and soon their female peers) as advocates for social change against institutions like local governments that impeded such change;—opposition to the war brought interactions with other bulwarks of the status quo like draft boards and schools; and the ensuing confrontations, intended to force social change or oppose the war, provided a real-life education in the intricacy of societal control. The scope of questioning thereby expanded beyond the social structures initially identified with the war to the whole fabric of society.

Adding to this expanding inquiry, the novel shows, was the shared experience,—for both men and women,—of demonstrations, marches, concerts, defiant speeches, appeals to solidarity, invitations to drugs, cross-cultural contacts, and itinerant “searching,” coalescing into a counterculture of societal opposition, and bringing—for this generation raised in the complacency of the 1950’s—a new mentality toward cultural expression: new taking serious of politics, music, and art; new fervor in exchange of ideas; new “lifestyles;” new disregard for propriety and long-held norms.

On the war side of the growing divide, as also documented in this

novel, another experience shared by many members of this group, the war itself, forced a mentality change of a different kind. Accommodations to the slaughter of combat, personal danger and deprivation, contemplations regarding the ambiguities of an impugned war, and the comradery engendered by the war situation, combined to form this mentality. As the novel demonstrates, however, for many like the character Jim Morris, this was a mentality ineffectively applied to making sense of the war and returning with no problems to civilian life.

The four main characters of AGAINST THE WAR,— Morris, Tom Steward, Matt Brandt, and Bill O'Rourke,—in the historical record of this novel, represent the male college students of this era, the choices they made under pressure of the war and the draft, the ways they conducted themselves on both sides of the societal gulf of the war, and the results of their choices in terms of individual conscience, the indictment of the war, attitudes toward authority, distribution of political power, fulfillment of democratic ideals, changes in gender roles, and other facets of American life. These actions, when done in opposition to the war, were described as "against the war" in the jargon of the era. But all actions performed by these men, for the war or opposed to it, were done "against the war" in the sense that the war was an undismissable backdrop. Such is the wider meaning of the title and the overall theme of this novel.

Men, as said, were the ones directly challenged by the draft, but many of the women associated with this social group also became involved in the war effort, sometimes as spouses or lovers of soldiers, committed to supporting them in their war experience or in their resultant injuries, such as the character Ellen Kass Morris in this novel; and sometimes as voluntary participants in the war, such as the character Army nurse Barbara Carpenter O'Rourke. Women were also the earnest soldiers of the counterculture, as it developed, active in the war resistance, feminism, and political, social, and cultural change, as well as in the great flowering of music, writing, and art that the counterculture brought. Mary Kass Brandt, in this novel, represents the best of these women. Kristine DeSolt Steward is an example of the courageous women of the era, not consciously feminist but influenced by feminist ideas, who struggled for personal independence in face of cultural restraints. As the double surnames given here indicate, these female characters are the eventual spouses, within the story, of the four male characters listed above.

As also described in this novel, the broad phenomenon of war and response had repercussions at home and overseas far beyond the transformative experiences of the young men and women that are the focus of the central story of the novel. At home, the placement and

activities of these educated idealists amidst previously ignored and desperate people created an expectation of democratic participation, civil rights, economic advancement, and educational opportunity. This expectation, in turn, led many in these populations to assert themselves, as exhorted to do by their young volunteers, creating a chain reaction that, over the course of the four and a half years described in this novel, activated individuals and communities all across America. Overseas, an effect of like magnitude occurred, in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, as the result of the insertion into these countries of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and the American machinery of war, bringing contact with American concepts of democracy and civil rights (as well as with the demonstrated belief in martial coercion), capitalization of local economies to provide goods and services to military bases and soldiers, corruption sowed by the free flow of Yankee dollars to illicit activities like prostitution and sale of drugs, and the societal burden of recovering from the widespread damage inflicted by carpet bombing and defoliation.

As for the non-college soldiers who, as earlier noted, often made the hardest sacrifices of the war while getting the least recognition, they were part of this picture, also, and they are everywhere evident in this novel in the many realistic depictions of the roles they play on the battlefield and in the support activities of the American presence. For example, they are described as fighting alongside O'Rourke in the battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord. As author of this novel, I wish to acknowledge this here again and apologize to anyone who may have felt omitted as Willson claimed he had himself as a rear echelon stenographer in Saigon and Long Binh.

"The war was a lie," decides Jim Morris, patriot, combat pilot, prisoner of war, "true believer;"—one who, in the story, starts out with the highest of ideals;—and, indeed, as the record contained here reveals, this was a war prosecuted for many years without a hope of being won while actual people, such as Morris represents, were risking their lives for the purpose of winning the war. This was a war, as the record also reveals, involving atrocities perpetrated by American forces and kept secret, while heroic soldiers, such as depicted in this novel, were sacrificing their lives for fidelity to their nation and devotion to one another.

The counterculture of this era was, also, in the final analysis, revealed to be flawed, as it rose in what seemed at first a single voice of protest and cultural promise, then crumbled upon itself as the conflicts between its inconsistencies grew: peaceful vs. violent "revolution;" "egalitarianism" vs. the desire for possession; serious inquiry vs. "letting things be;" self-discipline vs. self-indulgence; social participation vs.

dropping out. AGAINST THE WAR documents this arc of the early counterculture in the period described.

In not only this, but in all aspects, AGAINST THE WAR is meant to be historically correct. For this reason, the novel includes a comprehensive bibliography giving sources for all facts presented, and many developments in the story are tied by accurate dates to political, social, and military events. The case made here is conveyed with a documentary exactness to permit a fair judgment of the ways this era's response to the war and building of the counterculture should be emulated or corrected by future generations.

Roland Menge (2026)

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PART I: THE LOOMING WAR

1. Steward brings his 1-A letter to the boat club
2. Brandt and Morris argue about the Vietnam war
3. O'Rourke steps in to bring the crew on task
4. Morris offers Steward a way out of the draft
5. Brandt asks about his dad's experience in World War Two
6. Brandt struggles to accommodate to Mary Kass's cultural interests
7. Brandt leaves Mary behind to avoid an audience discussion
8. Mary goes after Matt; they come upon Morris in uniform
9. Brandt rescues Morris in a fight with an antiwar demonstrator
10. Steward gets some heartfelt advice from Barbara Carpenter
11. Steward visits his draft board to ask about his status
12. Steward bores Mary's sister, Ellen; she winds up with Morris
13. Matt and Mary discuss their relationship and make a commitment
14. VISTA trainee Brandt learns about social problems, meets Dennis Kelly
15. Steward starts Air Force ROTC camp with roommate Orin Brown
16. Steward gives the Air Force camp his sincere best effort
17. Steward "orientates" with Air Force social worker Gary Hansard
18. Brandt arrives at his assigned VISTA worksite in Crabtree, Kentucky
19. Brandt meets his boss, Fletcher Bourne, and gets shown around
20. Brandt talks to Bourne and stays overnight at Bourne's house
21. Brandt moves in with Fletcher and his son Bumper
22. Steward starts feeling out of place in the Air Force
23. Steward races Jim Morris in an inter-base track meet
24. Steward quits the Air Force program, gets accepted to VISTA
25. Morris, with Ellen, visits Scotts Bluff, site on Oregon trail
26. Morris and Ellen share a romantic dinner in Council Bluffs
27. Morris and Ellen struggle through an awkward goodbye
28. Morris and his mother re-visit a scene from their past
29. Morris looks through his father's wartime letters to his mother
30. Mary tries to concoct a reason to visit Matt
31. Brandt interrupts his new duties to arrange for Mary's visit
32. Brandt, Kelly, and Harris hold their first "dog cadre" meeting
33. Steward arrives in Dulatown to replace departing VISTA Stan Yeshe
34. Steward bids Yeshe goodbye and ventures out into the community
35. Brandt picks up Mary Kass for her three-day visit
36. Matt and Mary sleep together without sex, travel to Bourne's

37. Matt and Mary listen as Hattie Beecher defends Appalachian traditions
38. Matt and Mary part, professing their love for one another
39. Combat trainee Morris follows the national debate on the war
40. Morris warms to a fervent description of Air Force ideals
41. Morris, coached by Tom Pitt, overcomes a crisis of self-doubt
42. Steward charges into community work with an ideal of service
43. Steward tries to help Sammy Lane and ends up resented
44. Steward and Doug Thomasek visit a ghost town in Tennessee
45. Brandt observes a strip mine demonstration and assaults a deputy
46. Brandt spends the night in county jail with Birl Poling
47. Brandt reads an editorial by Fletcher Bourne advising caution
48. Brandt receives a lesson in labor history from Birl Poling
49. Steward travels home, contemplating changes in himself and his peers
50. Steward discovers the changes do not extend to his family
51. Brandt, also visiting home, notices the farm scene is fading
52. Matt finds Mary ready to address all obstacles to marriage
53. Former crew gathers to celebrate Matt and Mary's engagement
54. Steward makes a move on Barbie Carpenter and gets rebuffed
55. Steward researches the options for a water coop in Dulatown
56. Steward goes around Dulatown explaining and promoting the water coop
57. Morris recommits himself to his ideals while missing Ellen Kass
58. Morris and Ellen, enroute to Mexico, hear of Tet Offensive
59. Morris and Ellen romance in Mexico as Tet reports continue
60. Morris and Ellen return; Morris is assigned to combat duty
61. Morris and Ellen separate, but Ellen makes her own arrangements
62. Harris leaves; Brandt and Kelly attend an MVs general meeting
63. Brandt and Kelly attend a lecture by Father Dan Riley
64. Brandt and Kelly re-start the dog cadre with a new direction
65. Brandt argues with Fletcher and strikes out on his own
66. Steward has a disappointing show for his water coop meeting
67. Coop meeting reconvenes with addition of Church of God people
68. Steward reflects on the outcome of the water coop meeting
69. Steward encounters skepticism and exclusion at his second coop meeting
70. Steward learns of the assassination of civil rights leader King
71. Steward drives up to Porcupine to talk with Doug Thomasek
72. Morris accepts Ellen in his life as world unrest continues
73. Morris follows the war while growing ever fonder of Ellen
74. Morris, in isolation training, hears about the "inner home" concept
75. Steward, O'Rourke, and Morris re-unite for Matt and Mary's

wedding
76. Morris and his mother talk about Ellen Kass and marriage
77. Morris and Ellen exchange wedding vows in a roadside chapel
78. Steward and his father Joe visit the old neighborhood together
79. Steward stops at the boat club and runs into O'Rourke
80. Steward listens as his father cautions him about his plans
81. Steward and O'Rourke hit the road to hitch to Chicago
82. Steward and O'Rourke travel through Chicago to Rogers Park
83. Steward and O'Rourke find food for thought in Patrick's apartment
84. Steward and O'Rourke talk on a roof top in Indiana
85. Steward's trip ends with an order to report for induction

PART II: DIVERGING PATHS

86. O'Rourke begins as a volunteer medic, runs into Mark Chambers
87. O'Rourke works in a rural clinic for migrant farm workers
88. Matt and Mary settle into their new life in Kentucky
89. Brandt and Kelly attend a planning meeting in Simers Branch
90. Brandt and Kelly stop to see Birl Poling in Edinburg
91. MVs and Bourne attend the demonstration at Simers Branch mine
92. Mary visits Hattie Beecher to discuss a cook book project
93. Morris and Pitt attend an intelligence briefing on the war
94. Morris, with Pitt as flight leader, flies his ninth mission
95. Morris, on his way to rescue Pitt, downs a MiG 17
96. Back at Takhli, Morris and Pitt hear Sardo is dead
97. O'Rourke returns to Chicago to find it abuzz with politics
98. O'Rourke brothers attend an "unbirthday party" for Lyndon Johnson
99. O'Rourke brothers and friends join the demonstration in Grant Park
100. O'Rourke group, fleeing tear gas, winds up in SCLC march
101. O'Rourke runs into Barbara Carpenter at a parkside clinic
102. Steward prepares his statement to file as a conscientious objector
103. Steward considers whether to object to the "Vietnam war only"
104. Steward completes and mails in his claim of conscientious objection
105. Steward visits Doug Thomasek to show him his CO statement
106. Matt and Mary discuss Steward's statement and their MV projects
107. Brandt drives over the mountains to visit Fr. Dan Riley
108. Brandt and Fr. Dan discuss political change and "sobering clarity"
109. Brandt and Fr. Dan watch a program on national discord
110. Brandt returns to find growing political tension in Lecher County
111. MVs gather for election returns as rumors spread about Poling
112. Morris and Pitt react to the election in Takhli, Thailand
113. Morris inadvertently fires on a village killing women and children
114. Morris wards off troubled thoughts as Pitt fetes Souphana

Xayaphong
115. Steward visits everyone a final time and leaves Dulatown unseen
116. Steward attends his draft board interview determined to be honest
117. Steward stops at the boat club and happens on Brandt
118. Steward balances wanderlust with a desire to connect with tradition
119. A different Ellen attends a subdued Red Garter crew party
120. Morris meets Ellen in Bangkok for a week of R&R
121. Morris and Ellen find romance in Bangkok, and "allies," also
122. Morris spends an evening with intelligence officer Orin Brown
123. Morris re-states his concern about leaving behind a fatherless child
124. Matt and Mary start their new life in Washington D.C.
125. Brandt discovers history and "strangeness" in his new urban world
126. Mary begins her graduate program in nutrition and community health
127. Steward and O'Rourke with backpacks hit the road for Chicago
128. Steward and O'Rourke depart from Chicago headed for Las Vegas
129. Steward and O'Rourke hear competing views as they enter California
130. Steward and O'Rourke visit Mark Chambers in his Pasadena apartment
131. Steward and O'Rourke begin as UFW organizers in East L.A.
132. Brandt attends a presentation about the counterculture and the war
133. Brandt finds a refuge in photography, seeks a documentary directness
134. Mary pursues her intellectual journey through her journal and correspondence
135. Steward and O'Rourke immerse themselves in meetings and picket lines
136. Steward hitches up the coast and meets a young woman
137. Steward tours mission with Art as draft status is resolved
138. Steward meets the woman again; her name is Kristine DeSolt
139. Steward gets stood up his first date with Kristine DeSolt
140. Amidst ambiguous war, Morris reassures Pitt that Vanna wants love
141. Pitt gets hit, returns to base in a crippled plane
142. Morris is best man as Pitt and Vanna get married
143. Steward's first date with Kristine winds up hot and heavy
144. Steward calls Kristine and gets invited to a pool party
145. Steward learns about Kristine's family past as the relationship deepens
146. Steward divides his attention between Cinco de Mayo and Kristine
147. Brandt balks at the rhetoric of revolution—peaceful or violent
148. Brandt gets stoned his first time in Houghten's alley apartment
149. Matt and Mary argue after Mary discovers he got stoned

150. O'Rourke and then Steward leave their L.A. garage home behind
151. Steward establishes himself in Santa Barbara and calls his brother
152. Steward calls Kristine and bikes ten miles to see her
153. Steward negotiates the unpredictable turns of his romance with Kristine
154. Morris and Pitt hear about the "great irony of Laos"
155. Morris and Pitt fly on their ill-fated last mission together
156. Morris, reeling from Pitt's death, writes a letter to Steward
157. Steward reads Morris's letter and reacquaints himself with the war
158. Steward plots to maintain contact with Kris, winds up engaged
159. Brandt's react to Steward's engagement as their own lives diverge
160. Brandt and his father decide to re-roof the damaged barn
161. Brandt encounters familiar issues at home and the boat club
162. Brandt gets stoned in the barn to contemplate his heritage
163. Steward moves back to L.A. as his wedding date approaches
164. Steward and O'Rourke re-unite with friends from their activist past
165. Steward and Kristine exchange wedding vows over a pool-side fire
166. Newlyweds cruise out of California and break down in Arizona

PART III: CAUGHT AND TORN

167. Morris, in Takhli, Thailand, watches the Apollo 11 moon walk
168. On his 98th mission, Morris goes down in northeastern Laos
169. Morris plans and executes an escape plan that goes awry
170. Newlywed Steward's happen upon the Brandt's at the boat club
171. Steward's land in West Virginia and meet the project personnel
172. Tom and Kris settle into a hillside apartment in Morgantown
173. Brandt's travel with Darren, Gail, and Jane to Woodstock concert
174. Woodstock brings a sense of community amidst rain and shortages
175. The D.C. five decide to call themselves a "Woodstock family"
176. Steward tries to make sense of the Family Services WRO
177. Tom and Kris buy a car and ride up to Kingwood
178. Tom and Kris help with "welfare office day" in Kingwood
179. Morris is moved, meets another POW, Ellwood Erland
180. Erland, before being killed, warns of the "collection apparatus"
181. Medic Bill O'Rourke arrives in Vietnam for his tour of duty
182. O'Rourke starts as a triage medic at Chu Lai hospital
183. Steward's seek a place to live, rent an isolated farmhouse
184. Steward looks for someone to serve as WRO president
185. Steward's visit Clara Mohs then stop at Rachel Shoats' house
186. Steward's feel increasingly isolated as mountain winter sets in
187. D.C. "Woodstock family" meets to go together to first Moratorium
188. Woodstock family and Kelly march together in first Moratorium parade

189. Mary reads newspaper accounts of Moratorium events across the nation
190. Arrival of new prisoner alerts Morris to try an escape
191. Morris executes his escape plan but find Pathet soldiers waiting
192. Steward's drive to DC for second Moratorium, reunion with Brandt's
193. Brandt group carries names of Vietnam dead in candlelight procession
194. Brandt friends march and then discuss Kerouac, drugs, and spirituality
195. Steward's bid farewell to Brandt's and return to face changes
196. O'Rourke corresponds with nurse Carpenter, arranges flight to see her
197. O'Rourke flies to Binh Thuy for a friendly welcome from Barb
198. O'Rourke romances with Barb, ending in a meeting of eyes
199. Steward's move to busy Masontown as their money problems increase
200. Steward brothers and spouses go to see *Easy Rider* together
201. Steward brothers and spouses talk about dope and the war
202. Steward, in Minnesota, reconnects with tradition and his father's "fragility"
203. Steward's return to frozen pipes, get evicted from mobile home
204. Brandt and Houghten discuss the positive artistic effect of grass
205. Brandt keeps himself stoned as he evaluates his photographic project
206. Brandt sees Mary's aura and tries to re-connect with her
207. Mary writes Ellen, researches for her upcoming trip to Cuba
208. Morris resorts to his "inner home" as Sam Neua changes
209. Morris listens as Xuan Than talks about "contention" and "egalitarianism"
210. Xuan Than describes the "French War" and the "American War"
211. Morris accepts refreshments at his last meeting with Xuan Than
212. Mary meets a Cuban woman doctor in a government clinic
213. Mary confronts a cadre, Xavier Cortez, about centralization in Cuba
214. Lonely Brandt completes his project stoned, finds solace in Gail
215. O'Rourke takes part in Orin Brown's "medical civic action program"
216. O'Rourke sees Xuan Than being withheld treatment to extort information
217. O'Rourke and Brown discuss whether Xuan Than was treated properly
218. Steward resists self-compromise as a letter from Barb suggests "expectation"

219. Steward attends conference with Matt's old colleagues, considers quitting project
220. Steward quits project; realizes Barb's expectation is for "cultural breakthrough"
221. Steward's and Brandt's discuss "cultural change" (as Mary calls it)
222. Brandt's visit Fr. Dan, talk about powers behind the scene
223. Brandt's sense a "different time" as they continue to Kentucky
224. Brandt's, with Kelly, meet Bourne and visit their former cabin
225. Re-union with Fletcher and Hattie leaves a strain of difference
226. Brandt's leave Kentucky realizing that they can no longer fit in
227. O'Rourke resolves to make decisions about Barbara Carpenter and combat
228. O'Rourke volunteers for combat and woos Barbie at China Beach
229. Chance encounter moves O'Rourke a step further toward combat duty
230. Steward's, driving toward California, observe cultural change and culture war
231. Steward's read about the Kent State killings and continue west
232. Steward's arrive in Los Angeles for a summer among friends
233. Morris speculates on the war as bombing approaches Sam Neua
234. Morris is relocated from Sam Neua to a Lao village
235. Morris observes daily life in the village of Ban Hatbay
236. O'Rourke reports to 101st Airborne, is briefed by Orin Brown
237. O'Rourke begins his combat duty at Fire Support Base Ripcord
238. O'Rourke carries a wounded soldier down a dark jungle road
239. Steward tries to be supportive as Kris becomes more independent
240. Steward journals to sort out his thoughts on "cultural change"
241. Steward finds a CO assignment as Kris manages the band
242. Steward resists being controlled by the pressure to be "hip"
243. Steward's participate in the Thunder Mountain "hippie caravan" to Bishop
244. O'Rourke hears rumors of an imminent attack on the firebase
245. O'Rourke moves out with Charlie Company to secure Hill 902
246. O'Rourke scurries to save lives as Hill 902 is attacked
247. Convalescent O'Rourke gets visited by Brown, Forland, and Barbie Carpenter

PART IV: LOOKING FOR AMERICA

248. Steward's leave Sunland for Tom's new job in Winslow, Arizona
249. Steward's get their first sense of the local Winslow scene
250. Steward's drive to Gallup office to find "people like us"
251. "Woodstock family" drives to New Hampshire to look for land
252. "Woodstock family" discusses issues that might arise in living

together
253. "Woodstock family" visits a historic commune, the Canterbury Shaker Farm
254. Steward's host Sandy Andrews for her "open school" Indians project
255. Steward implores Kris not to invite the band to Winslow
256. As Morris is moved around, he hears tidbits of news
257. Morris, back at Ban Hatbay, looks for Mayral and Soutsada
258. Steward steps aside as the band moves into the house
259. Steward finds himself isolated and pegged as paranoid and controlling
260. After the final concert, Steward discovers Kristine with David
261. Steward travels to Phoenix to get some distance from Kris
262. O'Rourke receives a Silver Star and a combat medic badge
263. O'Rourke, his mind made up, weds Barbie in Hong Kong
264. Steward, alone again, settles into the Henry Hotel in Gallup
265. Steward and his co-workers spend Thanksgiving Day in Monument Valley
266. Brandt's, traveling, hear Buster had heart attack, rush to Minnesota
267. Buster Brandt's death brings reflection and a reunion with Ellen
268. Steward tries writing Kris but Mary is more substantial and loyal
269. At Minnesota Christmas, Steward finds subtle changes from the past
270. Changes in old friends lead Steward to make changes, too
271. O'Rourke heads for Khe Sanh, meets his CO Art Steward
272. No action in Dewey Canyon, but O'Rourke hears from Barb
273. O'Rourke shares beer and conversation in a bunker with Art
274. News arrives of Bumper's injury as Brandt's redefine their marriage
275. Brandt's get a visit from Fletcher Bourne and amputee Bumper
276. Brandt has a bad experience on grass and decides to give it up
277. Morris realizes that Ban Hatbay is within his "inner home"
278. Morris sees Ban Hatbay bombed; tries to help Soutsada; flees
279. O'Rourke takes part in a chaotic medivac drop in Laos
280. O'Rourke is on hand as escapee Morris reaches Allied lines
281. O'Rourke goes down, shoots an enemy soldier, and is shot
282. Morris fights "dullness" as he is processed by Orin Brown
283. Morris reunites with Ellen but everything feels distant and unreal
284. Steward senses the collective search is turning toward inner consciousness
285. Steward visits Kristine in California; realizes there's no going back
286. Steward determines to break out of his self-imposed isolation
287. Morris attends a therapy session with social worker Gary Hansard
288. Morris confronts impotence and a growing sense of war guilt

289. Morris visits his dying mother then visits Ellwood Erland's son
290. Woodstock Family (and Kelly) move to their collective, Cranston Farm
291. New Cranston Farm owners work and scheme in happy accord
292. Mary takes charge of the sheep and assesses flock health
293. Matt finds a follower of tradition in namesake "Little Matt"
294. Steward meets new nurse Joan Shannon, old friend Doug Thomasek
295. Steward and Joan discuss "looking for America" vs. "median way"
296. Steward completes his GRE, then goes with Eddie to a squaw dance
297. Mary hears of Cuban suppression as she travels to Cuba
298. Mary observes and confronts to investigate free speech in Cuba
299. Steward and Joan talk about stars in a moonlit field
300. Steward gets a lesson in self-reliance at Thomasek's "spread"
301. Steward spends the night alone in a tent with Joan
302. Mary accepts Cortez's invitation to spend a day together talking
303. Mary becomes disenchanted with Cortez and Cuba's cultural blandness
304. At Georgetown meeting, Mary finds Hattie suspects her Cuban ties
305. Mary and Gail resolve to remain "sisters" despite sharing Matt
306. Jim and Ellen fly home to Minnesota for Jane's funeral
307. Morris reels from the Pentagon Papers and Ellen's accusations
308. Stumphand tells Matthew: "Sometimes it just takes a strong hand"
309. Shut out, Matthew listens as Dennis describes "the ultimate development"
310. Matt barges into the house and destroys the sound equipment
311. With Ellen left behind, Morris visits Steward, not knowing why
312. At Scott's Bluff, Morris struggles to regain the old ideal
313. Morris returns to the family house for the last time
314. Mary flies home to console Ellen as Ellen blames herself
315. Farm group meets to discuss paying off people who left
316. Darren and then Dennis announce their plans and depart
317. Steward leaves Gallup with his backpack to "look for America"
318. Steward senses a dimension of history on his "unfolding path"
319. In Sunland, Steward finds Kristine troubled and sick but determined
320. Steward decides that America is found in a vast mosaic
321. Back in Minnesota, Steward reconnects with his family and heritage
322. Steward hitches to the farm looking for a synthesis of ideas
323. Steward and Brandt get along working but talking is strained
324. Steward learns of the farm's conflicted past and departed members
325. Steward cleans a chicken barn, gets chickens for the farm
326. Steward, unaware of financial make-up of farm, considers staying longer
327. Jane Larue offers Steward a bridge to the "primordial mind"

328. Brandt informs Steward remaining on the farm requires buying in
329. Steward realizes he found discord, not the synthesis he sought
330. Steward decides to leave and heads out with intense farewells
331. Steward hitches to Minnesota thinking the whole era is over

PART V: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART I: THE LOOMING WAR

1. Steward brings his 1-A letter to the boat club

As he drove across the Wabasha Street Bridge on Friday, April 7, 1967, Thomas Steward scanned the gleaming water of the Mississippi River to see if the junior varsity crew was on its way to the boat house. He thought he saw a glint of oars—about a mile upstream, below the tall span of the High Bridge. But a news bulletin on the car radio drew his attention from the river.

He turned up the volume.

"Eight Americans died today as allied forces struggled to repel a surprise attack in Quang Tri, capitol of the northernmost province of South Vietnam," the announcer was saying. "U.S. jet bombers flew through heavy clouds to attack an arc of missile sites on the outskirts of Haiphong. And, in New York, a draft card burner sat down on the courtroom floor after being sentenced for draft evasion. 'To show you it's against my will,' the young man explained to the judge. His wife fell to her knees behind the cordon of marshals. She tried to grab his hand, but he was carried from the courtroom without being allowed to touch her."

Tom Steward listened closely to this report, much more closely than he would have listened only the day before. The morning mail had brought him an official letter from his draft board, giving him a new draft status of 1-A. From what he had heard, a 1-A status meant close to being drafted. Just how close he wasn't sure. He had been surprised to get 1-A; he had asked for a continuation of his 2-S student deferment status.

Steward was an alert, healthy-looking fellow with a lean, athletic build, somewhat too long-headed to be called really handsome, but with an appealing ruddiness of complexion and bright, keen eyes.

He had spent the entire day, since opening the letter, considering what to do in response to it. He had always assumed that he would be able to remain in school, through arranging deferments, until he had prepared himself in some way to "do something of value in my life," as he often put it to himself in his own words. He knew he had goofed up in taking five years, instead of the usual four, to get a degree, but he had not expected the draft board to bear down on him so hard.

At the end of the bridge, he turned to the right between a red- brick warehouse and a vacant parking lot. From here he could see the boat house of the Minnesota Boat Club, partially hidden behind some scraggly cottonwoods along the river bank. It was a two-story, tan stucco building with a red tile roof, located below the bridge on a small offshore island. Beyond the island, a stretch of river water could be seen, with a bluff beyond that, above which rose the humble brick and granite skyline of downtown St. Paul.

Steward turned to the right at the end of the parking lot and then to

the right again along a bumpy road that led along the bank toward the wooden bridge that crossed to the boat house.

The announcer had gone on to a new subject: “Vice President Hubert Humphrey was in West Berlin today, a half mile from the Berlin Wall. In the West Berlin House of Representatives, he proclaimed that American commitment in Vietnam is proof that America will honor its commitments to protect West Berlin and Western Europe. 15,000 Berliners ignored a chilly rain to cheer Humphrey as he passed along a parade route. Another crowd of about a thousand, kept at a distance by the West Berlin police, yelled, ‘Vice Murderer!’ and waved Viet Cong flags.”

There was a brief pause, followed by the sound of Humphrey speaking in his cadenced, exuberant voice. “Berliners, more than anyone else, know the value of commitments that are kept,” Humphrey was saying. “And I know that the people of Berlin know that our commitment to freedom...”

Steward leaned forward and clicked off the radio. He felt tired and weighted down. Why had he gotten 1-A? He had recently responded to a draft board inquiry in a careful manner. He had explained at length why he had taken an extra year in his progress toward a degree. What if he actually got drafted? Two years in the army! Two years in a goofed up war! He had to move fast, he had to “scramble,” he told himself, using a word he had heard lately all of a sudden quite often. He had to go down and talk to his draft board, or something, to figure out what was going on.

Turning on to the wooden bridge, Steward sped across it, examining the parked cars behind the boat house to determine which of his teammates had already arrived for practice.

As he did so, a lean figure in an oversize gray sweat suit emerged from the river bank at the far point of the island and threw a piece of drift wood on a pile. Steward could not make out the face exactly, but he could tell from the shorn head and explosive movements that this figure was Matthew Brandt, the number four oar. He and Brandt were not close friends, but they were well acquainted with one another, having rowed together in a double the previous summer.

Brandt had just announced, days before, that he had been accepted for a government program called Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). It was a program of the sort, carrying a public service deferment, that Steward had applied for himself without success.

Steward pulled up at the red back door of the boat house. From inside a textbook, he drew out the envelope with the official seal of Local Board Number 90, Ramsey County, Minnesota.

He removed the letter from the envelope, jumped from the car with

athletic bag in hand, and strode across the gravel-strewn ground to the point of the island where he had seen Matt Brandt.

"What's this, a warrant?" Brandt inquired with mock ferocity as he emerged from the bank with another timber.

Brandt heaved the timber on the pile, displacing several others. For the whole day at school, he had been agitated and restless, also, as much as had Tom Steward, though with a different kind of problem. His problem was what to do about a budding romance now that he was due to leave for VISTA training after graduation in June.

"Not for you," Steward answered, handing the letter across the wood pile for Brandt to look at.

He stood waiting for Brandt's reaction as the soft breeze off the river blew back his tussled brown hair.

"Well, that's wonderful," said Brandt. "Didn't you tell them you got a big season coming?"

"You think it's immediate?" Steward returned with alarm. He had assumed that even with his 1-A classification he would be permitted to complete his current semester in school, thereby being able to complete the rowing season. The season still had about six weeks remaining. By tradition it ended on Memorial Day with a final regatta at the boat club followed by an end-of-the year party at the Red Garter Saloon on the second floor of the boat club.

"I don't know. 'Immediate?' 'On deck?'" said Brandt. "So we're all on deck, Stewie. This is our sad fate, huh?"

"Sure nice on deck for you. Off to the wilds of Kentucky."

Kentucky was where Brandt had been assigned, Steward knew, to work with a group called the Mountain Volunteers.

"Yea, you got me there," Brandt replied in his dismissive manner. "I can hardly wait."

Brandt stepped aside, looking for a piece of drift wood. He understood the implication, that he had dodged the battle while others had been left in the fray. He didn't like the idea of being backed into VISTA. He had applied for VISTA on the suggestion of a friend. He had been surprised to get accepted. Now, with the draft bearing down, he felt like he had no other options.

To make matters worse, various people, including his parents, were treating the whole state of affairs as if it showed idealism on his part. He didn't like that. He knew in his own mind he was just trying to get out of the draft. Mary Kass, his budding romance, had also given VISTA this "idealist" interpretation. He didn't like being regarded as something he wasn't, but he didn't want to disappoint her, either.

"I don't get it anyhow," he said, looking back to Tom Steward. "You didn't send in the forms? I thought you told me they sent you some kind

of forms."

"Yea, I sent in all the forms. Just a couple weeks ago. I even sent this long letter explaining."

"So what's their problem?"

"I don't know. Maybe I said too much."

Brandt considered a moment. "Yea, well, Stewball, that could just be a problem as you go forward into the future."

"What could be a problem?"

"This inclination to explain—when nobody gives a goddam to hear it, or read it."

Their conversation was interrupted by the one-two knocking sound of the junior varsity crew as the sleek shell, riding high in the water, shot out from the river bend upstream beyond the waving masts of the sailboats in a nearby marina.

The JVs were rowing sharply at a high cadence. Bill O'Rourke, the coxswain, in his trademark red stocking cap, was bending toward the crew, exhorting them as he pounded out the rhythm on the side of the boat. He was calling for a "power ten."

"After three now!" he cried in his tenor voice, raised to a shrill tone by his insistence. "After two! Can you do it? Can you do it? Here we go now! Ready! Ho!"

The crew responded with a powerful first stroke that nearly lifted the shell out of the water. Two clean strokes followed with the bow of the boat surging ahead.

"Now you got it! Now you got it!" chanted O'Rourke.

Suddenly the shell tilted and lurched with a splash as one of the oarsmen failed to clean quickly on the starboard side.

"Haw! Caught a crab!" cried Brandt, laughing.

"Rorkie will turn them around," Steward replied.

The arrival of the JVs was a signal to head into the boat club as the coxswain, Bill O'Rourke, trained both crews.

Steward and Brandt walked together in silence, as they had done for many hours the previous summer, to and from boating events. Brandt had a weight-lifter's walk, with his feet planted wide. He was big through the arms and chest with muscles developed from working on his family's farm just outside of St. Paul. As he walked, he rubbed his broad hand over his bald scalp. He and several others had shaved off their hair to show their dedication to the upcoming season.

Steward's thoughts, meanwhile, had returned to his draft situation and his letter to the draft board. One phrase, in particular, kept coming back into his mind: "due to some mistakes and misconceptions, but out of a sincere desire to find something worthwhile to do with my life." That phrase had been an introduction to explaining why he had taken several

months off to work in a volunteer project in Mexico, why he had dropped out of school to work in a factory, why he had gone into Peace Corps training (from which he had been "deselected," he reflected to himself, for "moral rigidity," whatever that was).

Steward felt embarrassed—in retrospect—that he had made such an effort to inject his personal concerns into a matter-of-fact process. He felt that he had been personally rejected.

Matthew Brandt felt now that he had been a little hard on Steward regarding the letter to the draft board. In general, he didn't like people who spoke carefully, selecting words, as Steward did. But, after countless hours in the same boat with Steward, he had come to like certain things about him. He liked Steward's physical discipline. He liked how Steward bumbled around when anyone said anything to him that required a quick response. Steward was a good laugh at times and he never put on airs.

Steward was also a good team player. He always put the crew before any of his personal business, to the point almost of priestly devotion. Brandt liked that crazy team loyalty, also, as he had it himself, though of a coarser type in expression.

"You know, Stewie, somebody told me," Brandt said, looking toward him, "you can actually call VISTA, in Washington, and somebody answers. They let you know where you stand. You applied to VISTA, right?"

"Yes."

"It's worth a try. Maybe it'll help you get in."

"Just say, 'What happened to my application?'"

"Exactly. Yes. Say you really want to be of service, you know. Give 'em some bullshit."

In response, Steward frowned. He didn't like dealing with people on the phone. He felt he represented himself better in writing. Anyway, he said to himself, he really did want to be of service. He didn't think of it as bullshit. He looked back to the river where the JVs were resting on their oars. O'Rourke, in his red stocking cap, was leaning toward the crew, talking and gesturing with his head megaphone in hand.

"Dirty dogs on the draft board may give you some slack, you know, if you come up with something definite," Brandt persisted.

"Sure," Steward replied. "And how about you? Ready for VISTA?"

"What's to get ready?"

"Oh, I don't know," Steward replied, thinking of Mary Kass, whom he knew slightly. He had heard from some of the other oarsmen that Brandt was going out with her, and that Brandt had betrayed, in subtle ways, being more serious about her than he was willing to admit.

Steward had seen Mary Kass a couple of times. He thought she was pretty, with her dark hair and dark eyes. He had heard her talk once in a

seminar he had attended with some girls from her college. She had a nice quality of seeming pleasant and optimistic while also being serious and thoughtful. She seemed idealistic and earnest in her beliefs. He had noticed her once writing down thoughts in a journal-like spiral notebook. Her writing was in neat block letters, he had noticed when walking past. Amidst the words, she had pen sketches colored with pencils.

"How about Mary Kass?" Steward said, coming more to the point. "I heard you were going out with her."

"Mary Kass?" scoffed Brandt. "Went out with her a couple times. I got no arrangements to make with her."

"Seems like you're not so indifferent," Steward answered, smiling, with a glance at his gruff friend, as they reached the back door of the boat house.

[Chapter 1 notes]

2. Brandt and Morris argue about the Vietnam war

"Better forget about Stewball for the rest of the season," Matthew Brandt announced as he and Thomas Steward entered the boat club. "Uncle Sam wants him, and he wants to go. He wants to kill the little chinks."

"Say it isn't so, fierce animal!" came from somewhere.

There were about a half dozen oarsmen in the oblong, windowless room below some unevenly situated fluorescent lights. They were getting dressed by the battered green and brown lockers or lifting weights with some barbells in the corner adjacent to the door.

"You got drafted?" someone asked.

"Not drafted!" Steward replied. "Just 1-A."

"Hey, and, Brandt, the word isn't 'chinks,' for your information," said a tall, skinny youth with a narrow face and short, black hair. "The word is 'gooks,' as in 'dirty little gooks'."

The speaker was Dennis Nolan, the stroke oar. He didn't look strong enough to pull his own weight, but he had long arms, quick hands, and a good sense of balance and timing.

"Oh, yea, 'gooks.' Now I remember," said Brandt, going immediately over to the weights. He threw a well-stacked bar overhead and did several technically precise military presses, very slowly with loud expulsions of breath. "In any case, all may not be lost. It's just 1-A, as Stewie says, and he may still be a draft pick for VISTA."

"VISTA?" Nolan exclaimed as he fastened his half-socks around his calves to protect his legs from the metal runners in the shell. "Brandt, you've got to be kidding. You want to send this great resource into VISTA? And just a second ago you were saying he is a candidate for the military service? Lieutenant Old Guy will have something to say about that since this is apparently a big day of some kind since he wore his uniform. What do you think, Jimbo, can he win it for us?"

All eyes turned then to "Lieutenant Old Guy," a.k.a. James Morris, a muscular young man of medium height with a blonde crew cut and a classic square jaw. Morris had rowed with the crew the previous spring and by a set of circumstances had wound up with them again—which was possible because crew at St. Thomas College, where the team was from, was an "association," not an official sport. Morris was a commissioned officer in the Air Force, and he had already been through ten months of undergraduate pilot training at Randolph Air Base in Texas. He had returned home on an administrative leave because his mother was due to have surgery for cancer. He was an only child.

Hearing himself addressed, Morris looked up with his sinewy arms halfway into a blue sweatshirt. He cocked back his head with his thin lips drawn back from his clenched teeth.

"Yes, he can win it for us," he replied in a flat voice, "if the Viet Cong will take him."

There was laughter all around as Nolan picked up a broom and pretended to shoot with it backwards.

"Well, I hate to disappoint you," said Steward when the laughter subsided. "But I'd like to make some other arrangements."

"Yea, you guys are good at arrangements," Morris observed dryly. "Like Mr. Brandt here, in service to Kentucky."

Brandt dismissed him with a flick of his hand and went over to the weight bench.

"Stewmeat, get over here and spot me!" he called.

Morris watched for a moment, shook his head in mock disgust, and stretched out his compact legs to put on his white socks. He was called "Old Guy" because he was two years older than the current seniors and could have passed for several years older still.

Like Steward, Morris had taken five years to get through college. He had taken a year off, between high school and college, to work and take flying lessons. Since returning home on leave, he had been helping out in the University of Minnesota Air Force ROTC program, the same program he had come through himself. He had been advising students who wanted to be pilots and had been taking some of them up now and then in a plane he rented at Holman Airfield just down the river from the boat club.

"Hey, you guys ever stop to consider," Morris said, striding over to the weight bench, "while you've been rowing up and down this river for the past several years, a little thing has happened—in our society."

"And what's that?" asked Steward obligingly. "Little three-letter word, W-A-R."

"Oh, that's a revelation," Brandt retorted, breathing in loudly as he lifted the bar from the metal supports.

He bounced the bar down with a thud against his chest and threw it up again with a prolonged expulsion of breath. He repositioned his hands with a quick little motion then stared at the bar as he steadied it for another repetition.

"Seems like I heard we had guys there already under Kennedy," Nolan remarked, referring to the previous American president, John F. Kennedy, who had been assassinated in 1962. "That's what? Five or six years ago? That is not recent, Jimbo. We've grown up with this, really."

"Yes, especially Old Guy," said Brandt between his clenched teeth. "He's had a lot more time to grow up."

He brought down the bar with another thud, but this time it bounced up and down again and remained on his chest. Steward helped with one hand below the bar as Brandt pushed the bar upward with a loud roar.

“In 1961, we had at most a couple of thousand guys over there,” Morris continued, ignoring him. “Just two years ago, we had maybe a hundred thousand. We are now pushing up toward half a million.”

“So what's the point?” Brandt returned as he sat up on the bench. “We all know this, Jimbo.”

“The point is, do we really all know this, do we really all take this into account? We've gotten used to this idea that it's some kind of skirmish, or as they say, ‘conflict,’ going on over there. But it is no longer a skirmish, it is no longer a conflict, it is a bona fide war, and a war is a total society act. This is our war as the American people.”

“You can call it your war, if you want to,” Brandt responded, going over to his locker. “I don't want to call it my war, if you don't mind.”

“For a lot of us, the war is just irrelevant,” said Nolan quietly to Morris, sensing that he had become a little agitated in the course of the discussion. “Look at me, I'm just a junior... what's it to me?”

“Well, it may mean something to you when it's on the other side of your nose,” Morris answered with an expression of chagrin. “I mean, in the form of a rifle barrel. Look at the situation over there now, with Abrams, a tank commander, a full general, being appointed today second in command... What do you think that means?”

“I don't know,” said Nolan. “I have no idea.”

“It means they're thinking of going after them big time. It means things are going to heat up.”

“You really think that?”

“Yes.”

Suddenly the sound of the large boat doors swooshing open on the far side of the club, beyond the central boat repair room, could be heard, then the coxswain O'Rourke's high-pitched, insistent voice as he barked the orders for the shell to be carried in and lifted overhead onto the boat rack.

A definitive clunk announced the successful completion of that, and the JVs soon started filing into the locker room through the door from the repair room. They were joking and laughing and dripping wet from having lifted the boat overhead to drain it.

The last to enter the room was O'Rourke himself. He was a slightly-built young man a full head shorter than the others with scraggly red hair and a full beard of the same color. He stood with his red stocking cap and head megaphone in hand, observing the crew with a harried expression. His sweat shirt was also red, the firehouse color that he liked to wear to contrast with his hair and beard, which were of the orangish-red color rarely seen.

“Corbet, you have to clean the oar,” the coxswain called across the room to his number five oar, the one who had caught the crab in the final

dash to the boat club. “Think of it logically once, will you, Corbet? The forward thrust of the boat is trapping the oar in the water. And why, Corbet? Think! You let it stay there too long!”

“Give him credit,” someone said. “He almost broke the oar!”

“Yea, his girlfriend will give him credit,” O'Rourke replied. “They will all give you credit when they see you on Memorial Day, rowing like a goddam bunch of clowns.”

He looked to the other end of the room, next to the open showers, where Morris, Brandt, Steward, and Nolan were now all standing.

“Steward, you going to row in a T-shirt?” he shouted. “Get a move on, man!”

“Sure, Rorkie, sure. Sorry,” Steward replied.

Steward sat down on the bench and took out a white sweat shirt from his athletic bag, all the while watching Morris as O'Rourke spun off to check something in the boat room. He had been surprised to hear Morris propounding. He had never known him to express any lengthy opinions on political or philosophical subjects.

“So what's the deal with this Abrams?” he said, watching as Morris bent forward on the bench with his hands clasped together like a halfback waiting for the nod to run onto the field. “He's a tank commander? Wow, sounds like World War Two, like Rommel or something.”

“Well, yea, Second World War, you're right on that one,” answered Morris, unclasping his hands and placing them firmly on his upper thighs. He nodded with his head held stiff and his entire upper body getting into the action. “He was second only to Patton, they say. Some say as good as Patton. He's an aggressive fighter, I just read today. Believes in force. Overpower them with force! So there's no chance of reaction, you know. But he loses soldiers, they say. I just know this from the news clip.”

Morris was actually much more knowledgeable on the whole subject of the war than Steward was aware of. In his activity as an officer among the initiates in ROTC, Morris had taken on the role of apologist for the war and had begun to educate himself on the basic facts.

“You think he will actually go after them on land,” Steward asked, “across the land with big divisions like in World War Two?”

“Maybe so,” Morris answered softly, rubbing his hands together. “Just my personal opinion. More planes. More force. Right up ol’ Ho's wazoo, if you know what I mean.”

“Yea, but come on now, Jimmy,” Brandt broke in. “Think about that. What are you talking about? Up into North Vietnam? Where do they get the license to do that? Who declared a war? This is not even a true war going on, Jim. It’s a conflict, like you said before.”

Brandt was on much shakier ground than Morris, and he knew it. He

had not kept up with the war or the debate about it. He was expressing an idea fresh on his mind since he had heard it that very same day as he had passed a campus rally. He had not even stopped a moment to hear the full thread of the argument as it was being presented.

“There was a definite resolution, Matthew,” Morris replied in his confident tone. “The Tonkin Resolution.”

“Okay, what was that?” said Brandt, never one to feign knowledge. “I heard of it. What was that?”

“August 24, 1964,” Morris replied. “North Viet ships attack our ships in the Gulf of Tonkin by Vietnam. Two American planes are downed. Johnson sends a letter to Congress. He says basically, under our treaty with South Vietnam, in defense of our own right to be in international waters, we have to respond. Congress concurs. Quote, ‘approves and supports’ the president to do what he has to.”

He paused and looked around. “‘To take all necessary measures,’” he said, “those are the exact words.”

“Wow, Professor Old Guy!” Nolan threw in.

“How is it you know this?” asked Brandt.

“I know this from my classes in ROTC. I made it my business to know this. ‘To prevent further aggression.’ Those are the exact words, so help me, God.”

“I don't know,” said Brandt. “Even so. That was in response to some isolated incident, really, wasn't it, when you think about it? I mean, how do they go from that to what you're talking about, Jim, tanks and planes and a half million guys?”

“It's a resolution of Congress, a resolution of the Congress of the United States,” replied Morris, his voice rising. “What more do you want? The resolution is saying, this situation exists, we are determined to do something about it. As a nation. It's a de facto war.”

“De facto, de barfo!” Brandt shot back. “But, hey, I'm not worried, Old Guy, and you know why? Little four letter word, H-E-R-O. That's you, Mr. Hero Old Guy, bombing the shit out of the little chinks.”

“And that's you, Matthew, right there where you are,” said Morris. “Mr. Cynic Brandt. And you know why? Cuz it's the only way you can walk out of here without your head down.”

“That's how it is, huh?”

“Yes, that's how it is! And it's a goddam shame!”

{Chapter 2-3 notes]

3. O'Rourke steps in to bring the crew on task

As Jim Morris and Matt Brandt were ending their argument, Bill O'Rourke, the red-haired, red-bearded coxswain, came up to them with both hands raised. He had been watching the argument from the other side of the room, thinking that it was his duty to intervene, as leader of the crew, to restore a spirit of cooperation.

"Less than two months left to Memorial Day!" he said. "Our final big regatta together! And you guys are tearing each other down! Nice togetherness! Nice crew!"

The two senior oarsmen turned away with a look of having been duly chastised. O'Rourke was laughed at sometimes for being melodramatic, but his leadership was seldom challenged. Everyone accepted that his job was to keep the crew focused, a necessary task. He was deferred to like a first sergeant whenever he called people down.

"Okay, let's go now," O'Rourke pronounced after looking around at all of them. "And forget about the disputes."

There was an unusual lack of interplay and joking as the crew took the boat off the rack and carried it down the ramp to the floating dock. On O'Rourke's command, they swung the boat sharply over their heads and into the swift water, but the customary count-off from bow to stern was subdued.

Going upriver against the strong spring current, the crew struggled as the shell wobbled and sank into the water. No one was out of time. No one was off-balance. Everyone was pulling up and cleaning. But something was missing. Everyone felt it.

Upstream, about a quarter mile beyond the immense concrete foundation of the High Bridge, near the red and white buoy that marked the start of the mile and a quarter race course, O'Rourke called out, "Okay, listen up! We're going to let her run! And listen, guys! I want you to feather off and balance! Feather off and balance!"

He pounded out three more strokes on the gunnels of the shell as he inclined his head to the side to observe the faces of the oarsmen. They looked more alert. Their strokes were more deliberate.

"Okay, St. Thomas! Let her run!"

The eight oars completed a last, long stroke together. They turned up and out of the water together, cutting sharp edges in the eight puddles that floated behind. They glided like wings about the water, not touching on either side.

"Hold water!" O'Rourke called.

The eight oars turned perpendicular to the water and then down into it to brake the motion of the shell. With a spray of water the shell came to a momentary stop, then it started drifting with the current downstream. The oarsmen sat silently, waiting for the coxswain to speak.

"Now you probably wonder why we stopped here," O'Rourke remarked, shifting into a subdued, more intimate tone. "Today, guys, we're going to do something easy, we're going to do something hard. We're going to row the race course. Not the usual six miles. Just one mile and one quarter, the race course. You think you can handle that?"

No one replied as just then the leading edge of a rust-brown barge appeared beyond the railroad bridge upstream. Faces grew impassive as the wall-like sides of the massive barges passed, followed by the black hull of the tugboat. The shell rocked in the waves that swelled out with the water displaced by the volume of the cargo.

Brandt found his mind wandering to Mary Kass, in particular, to the awkward goodbye at her front door his last time out with her, the previous weekend. She had paused for a moment, as if waiting for him to kiss her, but he had not. He sensed that she had expectations. Not just for a good night kiss. She loved the outdoors, she loved to be unfettered, as he did. But Mary Kass had a serious intellectual side also. He sensed she wanted him to connect with that, and he wasn't sure he wanted to be led in that direction. Yet he had a feeling of naturalness with her that he had not felt with any other young woman.

As Brandt had thought along this line, the other oarsmen, left to their own thoughts, had found their minds wandering, as well, from the river to their private concerns.

Steward's mind had also gone in the direction of romance. Though 23 years old, he had had only one romance of any duration in his entire life. The romance, involving a very young seeming sophomore named Barbara Carpenter, had ended abruptly after she had gotten pregnant by another student. In his mind, he recalled his last interaction with her, three weeks before. "I like you, Tom. Maybe I even love you," he heard her saying. "But I'm so overwhelmed. I just can't handle any of this anymore!" Since then, he hadn't seen here.

Jim Morris's mind had gone to his upcoming return to the Air Force for combat flight training. He wanted to focus his whole attention on that as he had never before focused his attention. He wanted to prepare himself physically so he could enter into his new duties in the best shape he had ever been. He had determined, also, that he needed to steer clear of any romantic entanglements that would divide his sympathies when he left for training. That had become an issue in his mind lately as he had met a few women at the university who seemed to have an interest in him. He didn't want any complications before he left.

Beyond that, pressing on his mind, were the extenuations having to do with his mother's upcoming surgery. If the surgery showed a more urgent situation than the doctors expected, a situation such as a death sentence, in effect, for his mother, what would he do then? He would

have to put off his training longer, maybe, in order to be with her, or he would have to obtain her blessing to go off knowing that she could well die before he returned.

These concerns, traveling along well-worn tracks in Morris's mind, passed through in an instant without being sorted.

Even Bill O'Rourke, the coxswain, despite his exhortations aimed at keeping the crew trained on the task at hand, had found his thoughts trending elsewhere in the moment of rest. Though he hadn't mentioned it in the boat club, he had also been thinking about the war and the draft after talking to an acquaintance (older brother of a neighborhood friend) who had just returned to the States after a tour of duty as a medic. O'Rourke had been thinking that would be the ideal way to serve. He wanted to serve without having to kill anyone. His thoughts on the subject had the luxury of proceeding without any stress. He was a half-year-behind junior; his entry into the Army, if he went ahead, would be almost two years away after a planned mid-year graduation.

Soon, however, the barge had passed, and O'Rourke looked again to the crew. "And you know why we are doing this?" he called out as the shell rocked in the wake. "You know why we're going to do the race course? Because we're going to feel it! And think about it! How we can row together!"

"All right!" said Nolan.

The eight oarsmen and their red-haired, red-bearded leader sat for a moment with the shell riding softly on the soft swell of the water. The sun was low in the sky now above the railroad trestle bridge that spanned the river about a quarter mile upstream. They sat quietly, looking off to the grain elevators beside the river. A workman there was pounding a hammer on the side of a barge, emitting a hollow metallic sound.

"Port side, hold water!" cried O'Rourke. "Starboard, bring her around!"

The oarsmen brought the shell around and sat waiting in silence. Brandt had restored his full attention to the scene now. He drew in his breath and focused his senses on Nolan's stroke oar.

"Are you ready?"

They drew up on their seats and waited with backswept oars for the command to begin.

"Ready all! Ho!"

Five short strokes, paced by Dennis Nolan, catapulted the shell forward amidst spraying mist as the shell cut through the choppy water left behind by the tugboat and barges.

"Lengthen out now!" O'Rourke cried. "Lengthen out! Lengthen out! Are you going to give me ten now? I need a ten!"

Nolan lengthened the stroke in response to O'Rourke's commands

and snapped his wrists at the end of each stroke to snap the blade of the oar cleanly from the water. The seven oarsmen behind him watched the blade of his oar closely and kept in close time, as the urgent entreaties of the coxswain pierced the quiet river scene.

"Here we go now! Here we go! Can you do it? Can you do it? Give me one! Now I need it, two! Strong and clean now, three!" the red-bearded coxswain yelled, in rhythm with the oars, as he leaned toward the crew, pounding in time on the gunnels with the knockers in each hand, as he chanted the crew through seven more strokes.

Propelled by those ten mighty strokes, the shell rode high on the water as the oarsmen continued through a smooth quarter mile and replied with another great effort through another power ten.

Tom Steward watched the familiar shorn head of Matt Brandt as it moved back and forth in time with the oars. Behind him he could hear the methodical breathing of Jim Morris. He could see the blade of Morris's oar, in perfect timing with the blade of Brandt's oar, as the two oars swept forward, on his left and right sides, then turned and rose from the water cleanly and shot back parallel to the water.

"Now we're moving, now we're moving," Bill O'Rourke was chanting in his high tenor voice. "Nice and long now! Clean those blades!"

At the marina near the bleachers where people sat to watch the races, O'Rourke called for still another ten as the shell reached the quarter mile point with a rhythmic efficiency that all the oarsmen recognized without being told.

They came across the finish line rowing cleanly and strongly, and feathered off with the blades gliding above the water like wings. There was no need for anyone to express an opinion about how they had done. They knew they had rowed well and together.

It was Friday evening. Everyone was in a hurry to shower and dress and get going. In the shower there was a lot of horseplay and laughter about O'Rourke, who had left early without taking a shower.

"Coxie Rorkie thinks he's a preacher," said Dennis Nolan, lathering up his long, thin arms and legs in the light of the fluorescent lamp at the far end of the open shower area.

"He got you going though, huh?" Brandt remarked dryly, stepping in with his hairless head and hairy upper shoulders and arms. He had more body hair than anyone else in the crew. "Maybe you need that, Nolan."

"Look who speaks," Nolan replied. "Lover boy."

"Ain't that the truth?" Morris shouted from several showers down. "Hey, Brandt, I suppose you're going to see her tonight, huh?" He bobbed his crew-cut blond head from side to side with his characteristic stiff upper torso and tense arms. "Brandt has the hots for Mary Kass!" he

announced to everyone within earshot. “You going to see her, Matt?”

Brandt didn’t reply. He turned in the shower away from Morris and rubbed a bar of soap back and forth on his head to soap up his pig shave. “What’s it to you?” he said, looking back. “You got an interest?”

“Got an interest? Haw! She’s too smart for me! Heard she aced ol’ Baldie’s poly sci class,” Morris said, looking gleefully around at the others. “She needs someone smart like you, Matt.”

“Yea, so she told me,” Brandt replied without smiling, his head capped with soap suds. “She said too bad you had to flunk out of everything, maybe you might crash in your little plane.”

“Haw! Haw! Haw! Hey, need some more soap? Thinks he’s got hair! Poor guy is trying to look like he’s still got hair! He’s got it bad!”

Brandt left a little later, dressed in his usual baggy work pants, extra large T-shirt, and brown loafers without socks.

“Hey, Stewie!” he called back as he went out the door. “Remember what I told you! Don’t let the dirty dogs scare you!”

{Chapter 2-3 notes]

4. Morris offers Steward a way out of the draft

Tom Steward finished showering and dressed. While the others rushed out, he sat on a bench, arranging his workout clothes in his athletic bag. Then he got up and walked through the boat repair room and boat storage room to the tall double doors on the far side of the storage room.

He opened the doors just wide enough to get through and walked out to the concrete embankment above the dock. He could hear the cars of the remaining oarsmen leaving in quick succession from the parking lot on the other side of the boat club.

They all had plans for the evening, he supposed. He didn't know for sure. He was on good terms with everyone, but he had no close relationship with anyone outside of the activity of rowing itself.

Steward was a student at the University of Minnesota, as Jim Morris had been, though he had also attended the College of St. Thomas (where the crew was from) for two years before transferring to the university for his final year. Like Morris, he had been asked to row with the spring crew because the same crew had rowed together for the Minnesota Boat Club for several years in summer competition.

From the dock, he looked back to the upper story of the boat club where some couples with drinks in their hands stood on the veranda of the Red Garter Saloon, looking out toward the river. The sound of music could be heard coming from the saloon, with talking and laughter.

The sight of these men and women together made Steward feel lonely, returning his thoughts briefly to the ill-ended romance—with Barbara Carpenter – that he had thought of in the boat. None of the other team members were aware of that romance. With them, he had a reputation for having no interest in dates or women. He got such razzing whenever he tried to break out of the role that he had learned to keep his efforts to himself. They all assumed he didn't care, that he was a "rolling stone that gathers no moss."

Steward thought of this as he watched the couples on the veranda of the saloon. If he was drafted in the Army, would that result in another two years without any real relationship with a woman? The prospect of maybe arriving at age 25 in that state was alarming.

His thoughts soon went from this, however, to the issues that Jim Morris had brought up in the locker room. It seemed true, as Morris had said, that the war in Vietnam was now a war carried out by the entire society. Everyone would be required to take a position on it, he said to himself, and on much more serious grounds than on what being drafted would do to social life.

Even as he thought about this, Steward looked back to the boat club and saw that Morris had come out of the double doors of the boat club.

He was standing on the concrete platform below the veranda of the Red Garter, dressed in his blue Air Force uniform with a blue garrison cap and dark glasses that made him look like a World War Two pilot.

Seeing Steward, Morris thought to himself that he ought to go down and talk to Steward and invite him up to the Red Garter for a couple of beers. He had an hour or so to wile away before heading out to his Air Force ROTC dinner, due to begin about 8 P.M. Morris thought to himself that maybe he could do Steward a favor by telling him about an Air Force ROTC summer program that would get him an immediate, automatic deferment if accepted.

He waved at Steward and headed down the ramp toward him, his face impassive behind his dark glasses.

"Thought you had some kind of occasion tonight," Steward said as Morris approached.

"Yea, I do, a little later," Morris responded in his deep voice. "Formal uniform dinner. In some hall or something, on the West Bank, by the campus there. End of year thing."

"Oh," said Steward, trying to gauge his team-mate's mood after the argument in the locker room. But there was no movement at all in the taut face and tightly drawn lips. The eyes were inscrutable behind the dark glasses.

They stood looking at the river. The sun was low in the sky above the High Bridge. The water below it had taken on an orange glow. Billows of white smoke rose from the tall smoke stack of the power plant on the far side of the bridge.

"Hey, the reason I came down here is there's a ROTC program at the U. I thought maybe would be of interest to you, considering your current situation," Morris ventured, stooping down to pick up a stone from the cracked, weed-overgrown embankment. "The way it works, you go to a summer camp, conditionally, without any obligation. Then, if you like them, if they like you, you sign up for a two-year course at the U. Then, after that, you're committed to go in the Air Force, of course."

"For how long?" asked Steward, considering.

"Four years," Morris replied, flinging the stone out into the swift current. "Just today I noticed there's still some openings for the program-- four or five, I think. Once you join for the camp, you're off the hook with the draft. You can proceed to grad school. You've been thinking of social work, right?"

"Yes," answered Steward.

Truth was, he wasn't excited about the prospect of graduate school. He had no real interest in social work itself. He had a vaguely formulated desire to be involved in something more idealistic and adventurous, but he didn't really know how to go about it.

"The idea doesn't appeal to you?" Morris said.

"Well, I don't know. You're saying, I graduate in social work, then I go in the Air Force as a social worker?"

"Sure, why not? The Air Force has social workers. The Air Force has hospitals. They've got a whole big medical system."

"Seems like a weird place to be a social worker," Steward remarked softly. "Four years is a long time."

Morris laughed. "Hey, I'll grant you that. Then again, it's a hell of a lot better than being dead."

He walked down along the embankment for several paces and scanned the sky as he did almost habitually looking for planes. "But, look at it this way, Stewie," he said, turning back, "times goes fast, you know. I'm in for eight years myself."

"Eight years?"

"Yea, assuming I get my wings."

"Holy Cow!" Steward exclaimed. "I didn't realize that. Hey, tell me the truth, Jimmy, you must just hate people like me, making arrangements, like you were saying in the locker room, when you're making a commitment like that!"

"Hey, each to his own," Morris replied. "You got your interests. I got mine. You want to be a social worker. I want to be a pilot."

Actually, Jim Morris had a much more noble concept of what it meant to be a pilot than indicated by these words. In particular, he had a lofty concept of what it meant to be a combat pilot. But he seldom described his motives in terms of this pilot ideal other than with his fellow airmen who shared the same convictions.

"This is for me, Stewie," he said, pointing to his blue uniformed chest. "Being a pilot is in my blood."

"Yes, I heard that," Steward replied with a grave expression. "Your father was a pilot, also, wasn't he? I heard he died in the Second World War."

"Yes, that's true."

"When was that?"

"August of 1944, three months after D-Day."

"Did you ever even know him?"

"Never met the man, not even as a baby."

"Wow, that's too bad."

"Oh, I don't know," Morris replied. That's just the way it was."

Steward observed to himself that probably Morris had more feelings about that than he wanted to own up to. The obvious resemblance between how Morris was dressed at the moment, with his cap and dark glasses, and pictures of World War Two pilots, seemed to bear that out. The outfit was just a uniform, of course, same for everyone, but Morris

moved in his uniform as though acting out a role in a movie.

Morris's mind had, in fact, gone off in the direction such as Tom Steward had imagined it did. The young pilot picked up another stone and walked down a ways on the deck to throw it in the water. He saw a plane in that direction, in the sky above the High Bridge, a small, single-engine prop circling above the smoke stacks of the power plant. The soft light falling on the clouds had turned from orange to pink and purple.

Morris thought to himself that all of his future would be in clouds such as those and in the blue sky beyond. Assuming no complications in his mother's surgery, he would be able to return to Texas in June, as planned, to complete his undergraduate pilot training. Then, in September, he would be off to combat training for the F-105, at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada,—if he could trust the unofficial promises made to him already by various people in the flight program.

Morris felt a great urgency and desire to get on with his plans, coupled lately with an underlying anxiety, an almost visceral concern, for how the war was bad-mouthed in the university world to which he had been unexpectedly returned.

He found himself getting into discussions and arguments on an almost daily basis.

"Well, I appreciate what you're doing," Steward said, tucking up his athletic bag under his arm as if preparing to go. He stood with the bag under his arm with his head pointed up the ramp.

"How's that?" Morris asked, turning toward him. "What's the big deal? What's to appreciate?"

"I appreciate how you're so dutiful about what you think should be done. You don't say that, exactly, but I sense you're doing what you're doing because you think it's right."

Morris laughed. "Stewmeat, you're a goddam serious guy, aren't you? You know, did it ever occur to you, maybe you're too serious?"

"I don't know," Steward answered, caught off guard. "I guess it has, actually, sometimes."

"Hey, you know," Morris said, shaking his head. "I've got an hour or so to spare before this ROTC thing. You and me, Stewie, we better go upstairs and throw down a couple beers. What do you say?"

Steward thought to himself that out of courtesy he ought to say yes, but he felt uneasy about getting so close to Morris. He didn't want to get trapped into an hour of having Morris expound in greater detail about his seriousness.

He smiled good-naturedly and laughed. "You know me, Jimbo. I don't drink."

"Well, fuck you then," Morris replied.

With that, the young man in the blue uniform, his eyes still unseen

behind the dark glasses, wheeled abruptly and headed up the ramp toward the boat club without saying goodbye.

[Chapter 4 notes]

5. Brandt asks about his dad's experience in World War Two

As Matthew Brandt drove from the boat club in his battered 1961 blue and white Ford Fairlane, his thoughts were on Mary Kass. He wanted very much to see her but for the first time he felt conflicted.

This time she had done the asking. She had made arrangements for the two of them to go to a play. As he understood from her brief description, it was about a "black woman" (as Mary said it) who had been a union leader in the 1930s. He could tell that the very mention of the topic brought out a spark in Mary. Even in her careful use of the word "black,"—by contrast with the "Negro" epithet of his childhood,—Brandt understood there was an expectation that he would, or ought to, share in certain kinds of views. Mary had some kind of connection with people who were involved in social causes and political discussions. Brandt had no interest in these activities. He didn't want to be drawn into them and he didn't want to pretend to be something he wasn't.

His route from the boat club took him from the island where the boat club was located across the river bottomland then up a winding road to the top of the bluff on the west side of the High Bridge. From there it led along the bluffs, parallel to the river, through wooded areas with budding trees and open areas from which the river could be seen far below in the orange light of the waning day.

The buds had just opened. Everywhere there was a cloudlike effulgence of green. Far below a tug boat pushed a load of eight interlocked barges, gliding gracefully sideways as it swung the back of the load wide to round a distant bend.

The sight of the river bending out of sight in the distance made Brandt feel restless. With spring bursting forth and graduation approaching, he was eager to make a clean break with college and go on to something new.

He resented the constraints of the draft and VISTA and now even Mary Kass. He went back and forth from wanting to break up with her to, wanting to make a surer commitment.

Near the long Mendota Bridge spanning the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, he turned off the highway unto a country road that curved around a cemetery with tall, column-like pines and then continued over rolling hills with newly plowed fields amidst other fields where russet-colored corn still stood from the previous fall.

Coming over a hill, he saw his family's farm in the distance, a square, white, two-story house and red outbuildings beside a grove of maples and pines. The eastern sides of the buildings glowed in the horizontal light of the sun setting on the western horizon.

Arriving at home, he jumped from the car and burst into the kitchen,

hoping to move quickly through to his bedroom without facing questions from his mother and sister. But there was his mother, in the breakfast nook off the kitchen. She was a large, hardy woman, with a handsome, serious face, not talkative by nature, in fact almost shy, but always interested in his activities.

"Big hurry tonight," she said softly, smiling, as she came across the kitchen towards him, wiping her hands on her blue and white apron embroidered with red flowers. "Got something lined up with Mary?"

"Yea, looks like it," he replied, uneasy with her assumptions. He opened the refrigerator and stared into it as he absent-mindedly felt the hard muscles on his stomach.

In a matter of moments she had obtained the details. It wasn't hard to do since she knew how much he disliked indirectness.

"A play," she remarked. "Well, that should be interesting!"

She was amused that this young lady had taken him so far toward civilization in less than two months. She had a high opinion of her son and a high opinion of cultural events. She felt that he was on the verge of growth in this direction and just needed a budge from the right person. "Well, put some socks on!" she called after him, observing his bare ankles as he continued through the kitchen with several cold, unbuttered rolls from the previous night's meal.

He didn't answer. He was aware that his mother, and his father too, had come to like his girlfriend. In a way this made him feel proud. He knew that the couple of hours his mother and Mary had spent raking the garden together the previous weekend had boosted the girl even more in his mother's eyes. For all her serious thinking, this Mary Kass could be down to earth. She didn't shrink from physical work. He liked that quality about her.

In his room he changed quickly from his gray crew T-shirt to a navy blue shirt that everyone said looked good on him. He tucked in his stomach to look at his reflection in the mirror, surprised almost by his shorn head, which he wasn't quite used to, but he didn't dwell long on his image. Then, as he dutifully put on his socks as his mother had directed, he looked out the window toward the barn below the garden. The yard light was already on there in the twilight.

Seeing motion by the barn, he looked closer. His father was there, a thin figure barely discernible in the long shadow of the pole shed. He was struggling with a green steel gate about 10 feet long, trying to drag it around the pole shed over uneven ground.

Matthew jumped up at once to go lend a hand. He checked the money in his wallet, stuffed the wallet in his back pocket and, without a thought of his clean shirt, went down a back stairway, out the back door of the house, and down the long slope toward the barn.

He felt relieved to be outside again in the cool spring air. The pool of light by the barn had an inviting familiarity. He had spent many hours in that light with his father and brother, talking after finishing work or working on cars or machinery together.

“Aha! Do I spy a beast of burden?” his father called as the youth approached walking his habitual weight lifter's walk with his shoulders swaying from side to side and his upper arms held out a little from his side as if his triceps were so large there wasn't enough room there to swing his arms naturally.

“Unfortunately, yes,” Matthew replied, though as usual he relished the thought of a physical task. “Just point me which way and say go,” he said, grabbing hold of one end of the gate.

“I guess I asked for it,” his father said as the gate was nearly jerked out of his hands. He knew that impetuousness was as natural to his son as caution to others. “Around the barn then and don't ask to stop. Lucky for you, this is the last one.”

“Last one! How many you drag over there?”

“Four. This is the fourth one here.”

“Hombre loco!”

The “old man” was, in fact, an old man compared to most fathers. He had not married until his 40s. He had fathered Matthew when he was 45. So at the present time he was 66 years old. But he had determined he would not allow his children to grow up thinking they were the children of an old man. He had succeeded in maintaining a youthfulness that was certainly not due to his physical appearance. He was entirely gray and there were deeply-lined wrinkles around his eyes, which were grayish blue in color like his son's. He had a youthful tone and animation in his voice, however. Though he moved stiffly at times, his body was a lean as a young athlete's. Also, he had a habit of forcing himself into postures such as prolonged squats while talking that gave an impression of youthfulness.

Father and son carried the gate around the pole shed and onto a flat area of new grass. At the old man's direction, they set it on some bricks against some metal posts in a long line with the other gates he had dragged over. Then they fastened the gate to the posts with baling wire. A flock of about 20 Suffolk sheep, with heavy coats of tallow-colored wool and black legs and faces, watched as they finished up the job. “

Making a chute,” the older Brandt replied, drawing his soiled hands together. “Saves a lot of work chasing them around.” “You're really going to shear them yourself?”

“Sure, why not? Give them a better haircut than you got there.”

In response to that, the youth smiled, but a downward deflection of his eyes betrayed that the remark had missed the mark as humor.

“Actually, you know, I think you look pretty good,” the old man continued, running his hand across his son's head as he had done years before. “Considering you come from an old dog like me. You can thank your lucky stars for your mother.”

Matthew laughed and turned to give the gate a final tug to test that it was solid.

They turned together and started back around the pole shed toward the house. ”When they first took me in the Army, back during the war,” said the father as they walked up the slope to the house, “they shaved us all like that. God, I hated it, really. Had a new girlfriend, you know.”

“What did she say?”

“Said it made me look like a real soldier.”

Matthew was thinking now that he had better hurry and get going to his date with Mary Kass. But the talk of soldiering reminded him of the locker room argument with Jim Morris.

“You know,” he said, “I've been meaning to ask you, when you were in Africa, in the war, what did you really do there? I mean, on a day to day basis.”

“Well, you know what I did, Matt. I was just a foot soldier.”

“Well, yea, I know that.”

And what I did, from day to day... Well, mostly a lot of walking across what, you know, was a real desert like you see in the movies. And then there were times when we heard we were going into battle, heard it by hearsay, almost, or from some corporal or sergeant or something who wasn't quite sure, and we waited for it, and didn't go in. And there were several occasions when we did go into battle, walking alongside the tanks.”

“And what was that like?”

“Mostly it was frightening.” They paused at the door.

“Did you ever actually kill someone, that you knew about?” the son said, observing that the glow of twilight was gone now. The constellation Orion with its central three bright stars side by side was high in the western sky.

“I did once. A poor fellow that came up on me. He was part of a small group that somehow broke into our ranks out of nowhere.”

“How did you kill him?”

“With a bayonet. With a very clean, lucky forward lunge, doing it just exactly like they told me to.”

“And what did he do?”

“Remember when you were a boy and you had that rabbit that got sick from that sore and I had to kill it?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And you insisted on coming along when I did it?”

"Yes."

"Well, he died just like that, in an instant with a panicked look or a look of questioning in his eyes. Maybe he would have spoken if he thought it would have done him any good. But he was surrounded by several of us, and we were his enemies."

They stood silently for a moment. Then the elder Brandt—his name was Lester though everyone called him "Buster"—placed his hand on his son's shoulder.

"So, you see, if you ever wonder what I think of what you're doing, with respect to the draft, you can see the angle I'm coming from. I don't want to see you wasted like that boy."

Matthew did not respond. As a boy he had retained a distinct memory of how the rabbit his father referred to had died. The odd thing about it was that the animal had almost seemed to sense what was going to happen and had made a bleating sound as if pleading for its life when his father raised the axe.

"Nothing to do this evening?" the older man inquired.

"Got a date with Mary. Supposed to be there at eight-thirty."

"Eight-fifteen now."

"Is it really?"

"Better get a move on," said the father, smiling. "I appreciate your help, though."

He stood and watched as his strapping son nodded, spun around, and bounded easily up the slope to the driveway.

6. Brandt struggles to accommodate to Mary Kass's cultural interests

When Matt Brandt arrived at the neat, little yellow bungalow where Mary Kass lived, he saw her slender silhouette in the front window below a white awning illumined by a street light.

She waved broadly, emerged from the front door at once, and bounded down the front walk with a burgundy-colored sweater and her small black purse under her arm.

Her thick black hair was pulled behind her head in a neatly-tied French braid. She looked trim and athletic in a white blouse and jeans. She ran gracefully, taking the last two steps in a single stride.

"Well, hello, Matthew!" she said pleasantly, a little out of breath, as she swung onto the front seat and glanced at him with her intelligent brown eyes.

She moved across the seat toward him, but no so close as to press against him.

As usual, she wore no make-up. Her movement across the seat produced a faint scent of lilac. She had straight, dark eyebrows and firmly set lips that gave her pretty face an appearance of thoughtful resolve. Her cheeks were flushed from her dash to the car.

He liked how she looked, especially her hair. Usually she wore it pulled straight back without curls or braids. He liked that simple style, too, but this style looked grand. He wanted to tell her how beautiful she looked but he couldn't say the words.

"Nice to see you," he said, and left it at that.

The words came out more brusquely than he had intended. He looked over his shoulder and pulled out into the street, feeling he had gotten off to a bad start. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Are we ready for this?" she ventured, smiling, as they followed a line of red tail lights down a main thoroughfare toward the university. "I mean, for the play!"

She had noticed a slight reluctance in his voice in their last phone conversation, especially with regard to the play. She sensed that he felt himself being forced out of his natural surroundings. She had determined to set things right with him as soon as possible.

"Sure, I'm ready for this great night of drama," he replied in his habitual dry tone.

Immediately he felt sorry for it because the comment sounded meaner than he had meant it to be.

They stopped at a red light. He turned to look at her full-figure for the first time since her entry into the car. She sat with her hands folded on her lap. The thick, straight eyebrows were lowered over her eyes, an expression he was used to by this time that he took to mean she was

thinking. Her lips were pressed together firmly.

When she noticed him looking at her, the lips curled in a gesture approaching a smile, but the large brown eyes, which so often expressed her true emotion, remained serious.

“So you really don't like this whole idea then,” she said softly. “Let's just go for a walk then, Matthew. I don't care if we don't go.”

Saying that, she felt that her resolve of the night before had been fulfilled, because she had decided to give him a definite, easy out at the first sign of discomfort.

It took him a moment to catch up with her sudden change of heart regarding the play. “Hey, no, I'm sorry I seemed so down on it, Mary,” he answered. “We don't need to do that. Really, Mary, I'm looking forward to it.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes.”

“Really sure about it? I don't want you to just oblige me.”

“Yes, I am sure.”

“All right then!” she replied pleasantly, rearranging herself on the seat and taking a deep breath. “I got to thinking, you know. Worried I was pushing. But I don't want to push you or anyone. I just want to do right with people. Especially you.”

The tenderness in the last two words didn't escape him. It was the first time she had spoken to him in such a tone. This plus her unaffected beauty as she looked at him with her big expressive brown eyes made him think nothing could go wrong in this.

“Sure, we'll have a great time,” he said, almost laughing, as he suddenly looked toward her with a bright, boyish smile. “In any case, I could use some pushing when it comes to culture.”

They rode along a few more blocks with the slight strain of a few moments before completely dispelled.

“Hey, Mary, I meant to tell you,” he said. “That is really some hair-do.”

“Oh, you mean, you like it,” she said, for the first time smiling fully, with her white teeth bared and dimples appearing in her flushed cheeks.

“Yes, I really do. Are you going to do this now every time?”

“Oh, don't you wish!” she laughed. “It took poor Ellie half an hour.”

“Ellie?” he replied. “You mean, your sister? The one I met last time, last Sunday?”

“Yes,” she said, shaking her finger at him. “And don't you get an interest!”

Now why should I do that?” he bantered back, amused that she had ordinary female instincts beneath her serious demeanor.

This sister Ellie with her chestnut hair was without a doubt worthy of

interest. But he hadn't given her much thought except to notice how much more stylish she was than Mary. She had come into the living room when he was waiting there for Mary, and had graciously introduced her contingent of friends, but there had been something unconvincing about it compared to Mary's intense sincerity. Her friends were pretty young women and well-dressed young men who looked like they were in business school or in something completely removed from college.

"In any case, she's got an interest on the crew," said Mary. "She's got her eyes on Tom Steward."

"Tom Steward? Mr. Professor?" Brandt laughed. He found this amusing because he was aware of Steward's reputation for being ill at ease with women and had observed some awkward encounters firsthand. Still he had heard women say Steward was good-looking and he wanted to help him break out into normal social interactions. He had thought about this from time to time since he had been thrown into many social situations with Steward associated with rowing.

"Well, we'll have to set them up then," he exclaimed. "Are you serious?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Well, Ellie would like to go to the Memorial Day Regatta."

She paused, realizing that she herself had not yet been invited. "Not to be assuming, I'll be going myself."

"Well, I think you might just get invited," Matthew said, pleased that she was making it sound so important. "Hey, and that's great! Me and you and Stewball and your sister. Maybe they'll hit it off!"

"It's a deal then," she said, smiling.

They shook hands.

"You think he'll do it then?"

"Sure, he'll do it if I have to tie him up and bring him over in the trunk."

They were driving along the river road now, about a mile from the university. Under the street lights couples strolled arm in arm along the walk paths overlooking the river.

Brandt was still laughing to himself about having to tie Steward up when he saw a tall, thin girl with long blonde hair who looked like a girl who had taken an interest in Steward the previous summer. This had happened in Prince William, Canada where he and Steward had rowed the double together. The girl and a dark-eyed friend had invited them to a party after the regatta. Steward had been all right when they were walking along talking. But once they got back to her place and put on some music for dancing, Steward has shrugged his shoulders and said he didn't know how to dance. He had gone alone back to the hotel despite the girl's objections.

“Hey, you know,” he said, suddenly becoming more serious. “I was trying to remember your sister. She's really stylish, right? Out to have a good time?”

“That's her all right.”

“Well, maybe we should think this through.”

“Think it through how?”

“Tom Steward is a serious guy.”

“Might not work, huh?”

“Wrong combination.”

“I thought about that, too,” she replied, nodding, with her thick eyebrows set in a frown. “But who knows? It might do them both some good. Maybe the difference will do them both some good... Kind of like you and me, huh?”

“How's that?” he replied, glancing at her. They were passing along a dark stretch of the river parkway now. He couldn't make out her facial expression, but her voice was more deliberate.

“I mean, you worry about that about me and you, too.”

“Worry about what?”

“That we're the wrong combination. That I'm too serious. I think too much. I try to talk about things you don't really want to talk about,” she said softly. “Is that true?”

He looked ahead over the moving front hood of the car. He could see the campus now, a cluster of white and yellow lights in the distance. “Sometimes I just don't know what to do with it,” he said. “It makes me feel weighted down. Maybe I just feel dumb.” He shook his head and smiled but the smile vanished quickly. “Maybe that's the problem. You're just smarter than me.”

“Well, I don't think that's true at all, Matt. Maybe I put things more in words. But that's not the meaning of smartness. That's not the only way to be smart. I appreciate your intelligence. I think you're perceptive, really.”

“Well, thank you.”

“You are!”

She settled back in the seat, feeling she had made considerable progress. She did really feel that he was smarter than he claimed to be. She had come to the conclusion that he was simply too honest to propound when his thoughts were tentative. She admired his restraint.

“Well, thank you again,” he said after a pause. “I'd like to meet you halfway, Mary. I think we can work it out.”

And I do too!” she exclaimed.

“Deal then?”

“Sure.”

They shook hands again, laughing.

“And we'll still tie up Steward?”

“Sure, why not?” he replied, shaking his head. He felt a little confused but it struck him as funny. He felt like he had been talked into something without completely understanding what it was.

For her part, Mary Kass felt extremely encouraged and optimistic. She began explaining in a soft voice just what her connection was with the play they were going to. She knew some of the people in the group. They had been together in a civil rights march in Mississippi several months before.

“Something like the Selma march, sort of fashioned on that, but not so publicized. The purpose of the play is to continue the sense of commitment. It probably won't be much of a play. It's mostly intended to be a starting point for discussion.”

“What kind of discussion?” he asked warily. There were few things he hated more than sitting in a formal group exchanging opinions. He didn't like to hear other people expound and he was not inclined to explain his own positions.

“I think, just a general discussion to talk about what people are doing and get them involved,” she replied, noticing his change in tone. “And, Matthew, if you don't like it, if you want to leave, just give me a budge, okay?”

“Sure, that sounds fine,” he replied, resolved to make the best of it for her sake. He figured he could tough through it in silence, as he usually did in situations of this kind.

7. Brandt leaves Mary behind to avoid an audience discussion

As Matthew Brandt drove through the West Bank of the University of Minnesota with his date, Mary Kass, he observed how greatly the area had changed in the past few years. He remembered the West Bank as an area of warehouses, bars, and gospel missions. Now, apparently, large numbers of students and other young people had moved in. The red and brown brick buildings were the same, but the youthful energy and colorful displays in the shop windows gave the area a new atmosphere. The atmosphere was festive, but also it was serious and earnest for everywhere there were posters pertaining to the war and other social causes.

They found a parking spot at last in a vacant lot beside a railroad track on a street that dead-ended there on the perimeter of the street lights. From there they walked several blocks through streets crowded with young people on their way to the bars, cafes, and movie houses on Cedar Avenue, the main street of the West Bank.

Matt walked with his hands in the pockets of his baggy gray work-pants, hunched over slightly and inclined to the side to get his ears down close to Mary's mouth so he could hear her occasional comments in the midst of the general noise of traffic and competing voices. He felt like he really wanted to talk to her, but he couldn't think of anything to say. He wound up talking about the crew.

"Ol' Coxie Rorkie, he's got this idea now. I don't know, this maybe doesn't interest you at all..."

"Oh, yes, it does!"

"Well, he's got this idea. Bring down the stroke. Less strokes per minute. But keep the stroke longer with a very clean ending. He thinks that by doing this we'll actually go faster."

"Well, it does make sense. Because you gain in efficiency."

"Yea, and we're only talking... maybe two strokes difference per minute."

This said, they fell into an awkward silence again with both leaning toward the other as if to hear the words that never got spoken. Mary Kass clutched her small black purse in her left hand and kept up her thoughtful frown

Turning around a corner, they saw the building where the play was being held. It was a three-story, red-brick storefront that looked as if it had previously been a small business of some kind. There was a line of about 25 or 30 people, most of them young and neatly dressed in jeans and sweaters, filing into a door where several people were taking tickets. A sign by the door showed a young, pretty black woman in a uniform of some kind, maybe that of a waitress or maid, with the words "People's

Theater" above her and "Frances Dula, Social Pioneer" below. These words in red and blue, combined with the white background, suggested the. red, white and blue of the American flag.

Matthew Brandt read this sign slowly, perplexed by the words "social pioneer" and "people's." "Social pioneer" struck him as simply an odd combination. "People's" he had heard lately with various organizations and projects. His only strong association with it was "People's Republic of China." But that was a Communist country and he didn't think the meaning here was that the group putting on the play was Communist. He sensed there was some kind of connection, put forth almost as an inside secret.

He glanced at Mary Kass. She looked sleek with her shiny black hair pulled back tightly from her glowing face. She looked fresh and alert. He liked that wholesomeness. He liked how she was pretty despite making no effort to alter the basic product.

There was some kind of demonstration going on on the other side of Cedar Avenue, he noticed. People were walking around with signs. Someone was talking into a megaphone. He couldn't make out the words.

They handed over their tickets and entered a large, dimly lit room with rows of folding chairs, most of them already occupied.

A handsome black man with an Afro haircut, dressed in a multi-colored frock with red, green, brown and black vertical stripes, appeared to notice them at once as they came in. He nodded and smiled and made a little flick of a salute from his eyebrow outward with his right hand.

That was Samuel Copening, Mary explained in a whisper as they took some of the few available seats several rows back from where he was standing.

"He's a very nice man. He knows me just a little from the march. He was the organizer and he walked with us the whole way. I talked to him one day when we were walking for a couple of hours."

From where they were sitting, they could hear his conversation with a group of black people in the first two rows dressed as if for church in suits and dresses.

"Ol' Rev Doctor King, he took the heat before and he will take it again," Sammy was saying.

"Yes, sir, that's so," replied the man he was talking to, an older black man in a neatly-pressed blue suit.

"They say he is making a too easy connection between revving up the war in Vietnam and slowing down the war on poverty. But the war on poverty is the war that is lifting up our people. This other war in Vietnam, what is it doing? They are fighting this war with the young brothers."

"I hear you, Sammy," replied the man in the blue suit. "We been through this before."

These people had some connection with the performers, they were maybe their parents, Brandt surmised. The young, bearded Sammy was clearly making a case to them. He was respectful, almost solicitous, as he responded to their remarks. He leaned over, nodding, to listen to a softly-spoken comment from a woman with neatly-curled gray hair. The whole group erupted into laughter.

"Says Brother Sammy look like he might make a good soldier himself," the man in the blue suit repeated for an old man at the end of the row who had not heard the comment.

Several lights came on up front revealing a stage setting of a hotel lobby with a large cabinet radio and padded chairs before a lobby window backdrop showing several 1930's era automobiles parked outside. The hum of conversation ceased at once and the play began with the entrance of a young black woman in a modest, ankle-length shirt dress, colored mauve, with white shoes, white gloves and a wide-brimmed white hat.

It was a simple, one-act play of about a dozen scenes depicting the rise of the young woman from her entrance into the labor force as a maid in the portrayed hotel to her eventual emergence as a shop steward and local labor leader.

The scenes were uncomplicated but believable. The acting was low-key and convincing. The general thrust of it was that the labor situation for blacks was demeaning and had to be challenged. This woman, Frances Banner, had realized this and brought forth the challenge despite her natural modesty and shyness.

"I saw what I had to do and I did it," she said in the final scene in a talk to young members of the union. "You can do it, too, no matter what you are, if you believe in what you are doing."

Following this final statement, a group of young, black singers came out and sang a medley of spirited songs ending up with "We Shall Not Be Moved." Many in the audience joined arms and swayed back and forth during this last song. Mary Kass reached for Matt's arm but he would not allow it. He clasped his right wrist with his left hand and stood in a posture similar to a military parade rest position with his face set in a stolid expression.

Far from being indifferent to the message of the play, he had been impressed by it. But he felt uncomfortable with the sudden camaraderie suggested by the joining of arms.

After the singing ended, the bearded man Sammy came suddenly toward them in the midst of the confusion of people getting up to stretch or leave. "Mary! Mary Kass! I've been meaning to come over and say

how do you do!"

"Well, I'm just fine," she replied in her pleasant voice.

He held out both hands to grasp her extended hand and continued to hold it. "And how are them feet? Looking better, I can see!"

Oh, yes. No worse for the wear."

"And who is this handsome young man?"

"Samuel Copening, allow me to introduce you... Matthew Brandt."

"Matthew Brandt! My pleasure! You've got a good lady there!"

"Yes, I know."

Just as quickly as he came up, he was swept away by several young men, also dressed in brightly-colored, striped frocks, calling out his name. He gave his little salute from the eyebrow outward as he backed away from them, gesturing to the young men.

The pleasant, bearded face that Brandt observed in this brief interaction had a clouded appearance around the brown eyes suggesting sadness and serious thought. There was a striking contrast between the soberness of the eyes and the ebullient, humorous exchanges.

About a fourth of the people in the audience had left. The rest were settling down, apparently waiting for the final part of the program. A program on the seat next to where Matthew sat identified the final part as a discussion as Mary had said. The discussion was titled, "Where Do We Go Now?"

Matthew leaned toward Mary to suggest that now would be a good time to leave, before the discussion began. But Samuel Copening had already taken a position before the group several rows in front of them with his long, thin hands raised to ask for silence. Matt saw that it was too late to make an appeal and settled back into his seat, determined to stick it out while remaining as inconspicuous as possible.

"Brothers and sisters," said Samuel, intoning like a preacher. "We want to talk about this Florence Banner. She said, 'You can do it, no matter who you are.' What did she mean by that? What does that mean in here and now?"

He paused for a moment and the face took on the clouded expression Matt had observed. "This stage here was set up with a big old radio like I remember my mommy and daddy talking about listening to when they were coming up. There was an old car out there, Model A or B or C or something like that. I don't know which it was. I just know it was old. And that dress Miss Florence had on at the start there, down to her ankles, covered them up. That was old, too, covering up them legs. I don't see any of you pretty ladies out there covering up them pretty legs. We don't do that no more. But this talk she was saying about organizing across hotels and that being the start. That was the start then. But that ain't old."

He went to talk about how the struggle was continuing and each person had a part. Then he started talking about the freedom march in Louisiana, the one Mary had described, and he brought her suddenly into his presentation as an example of someone who had played a part. “She developed some bad blisters the second day out. But that didn’t stop her. She just had them bandaged and she kept on limping along for the last 20 miles. That was an inspiration to us all.”

Brandt took note of this and glanced at her to see her reaction. She lowered her eyes in embarrassment and then looked up and nodded to acknowledge his graciousness.

Soon, to Brandt’s alarm, Sammy finished his remarks and began working the audience. “How about you? Where do you fit in? What is your part?” he asked the girl on the end of the row where he was standing.

“I like to think of college as a preparation,” she replied.

“Preparation for what?”

“Well, I don’t know. I just want to get a foundation first and go on from there.”

The other comments he elicited were equally bland but the speaker persisted and his comments became increasingly confrontive. “Well, if you don’t know your part now, when will you learn it?” he asked another student who merely sunk down in his seat and maintained a dogged silence.

“Mary, I don’t like this,” Matt whispered, leaning into her ear. “I want to get out of here.”

“Can we please wait just a minute? I don’t want to embarrass him. He’s not going to ask us.”

“You can stay if you want to. I’m leaving,” he whispered back.

He arose at once and sidled through to the aisle. He felt Sammy and everyone else looking at him but he didn’t look back.

“Excuse me, excuse me... Matthew,” Sammy said as he turned to leave. He turned around.

“Hey, I didn’t mean to offend you, man,” Sammy said. There was genuine concern in his voice. The confrontive tone was gone.

“You didn’t offend,” Matt replied, aware of all the eyes on him. He noticed that Mary Kass, still seated, had her black purse positioned in her hands as if about to leave. “I just want to get out of here.”

“How come?”

“I just don’t want to be drawn into this,” he said simply, looking directly into the thoughtful brown eyes. Getting no immediate response, he turned again and walked without pausing the last few paces to the door.

“Good show, Matthew Brandt,” he heard Sammy say behind him.

“You spoke your true mind.””

Brandt pushed through the door into the aromatic spring night. He looked back to see if Mary Kass had followed him. The door didn’t open. He shrugged and began walking toward the bright lights on Cedar Avenue.

Then he heard her calling, “Matthew! Matthew!”

The voice had a quality of distress that he had not heard before. He turned to see her hurrying toward him with her purse and sweater bundled in her arms.

“Sorry to disappoint you,” he said when she reached him.

“You didn’t disappoint me,” she replied, studying his face. “I thought it was okay, if you didn’t feel right about it.”

“The thing you don’t understand,” he said, raising his hands, palms uplifted, in a gesture of helplessness. “I’m not part of all this stuff you’re involved in. I haven’t thought about it. I haven’t done anything.”

“Matt, you’re going off to Kentucky to do probably more than any other person there except for Sammy himself.”

“Kentucky,” he repeated with contempt.

“It’s true, Matthew,” she answered softly, puzzled by his resentment. “Your idealism is as good as theirs. Just because you don’t talk about it...”

“Mary, the thing you’ve got to understand, I don’t have any idealism. I don’t give a goddam rip. For me the whole thing comes down to the goddam draft.”

“Well, I never assumed...”

“You did assume. You do assume. And if you’re going to keep assuming, do me a favor and leave me alone.”

“Well, then maybe I will leave you alone,” she replied finally after returning his angry gaze.

“Well, okay, then do.”

She spun around and walked away from him up the street to Cedar Avenue and around the corner out of sight.

8. Mary goes after Matt; they come upon Morris in uniform

"Let her go then," thought Matthew Brandt as Mary Kass disappeared around the corner, but he felt a terrible loss. He walked up to the corner and looked down Cedar Avenue in the direction she had gone.

A movie house about halfway up the block had just let out filling the sidewalk with people. She had apparently passed the crowd and gone beyond. She was nowhere to be seen.

An amplified voice drew his attention to the other side of Cedar Avenue. The demonstration he had noticed earlier was still going on. A crowd of several hundred people had gathered in front of a large brick building with a well-lit, spacious lobby visible through glass panels. The lobby was crowded with blue uniforms.

The crowd was chanting something. It sounded like "Tanker, tanker, ho, ho, ho; Abrams, Abrams, we won't go." He remembered what Morris had said about General Abrams being appointed second in command. He figured the "ho, ho, ho" referred to Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Cong leader.

Here was a demonstration against the war, he thought. He was lined up against it, sort of, by trying to get out of it. But he felt no sympathy at all with the demonstrators. He just felt disgust with himself for having taken an easy way out.

That was all he had tried to get across to Mary Kass, he said to himself. Too bad he had done it in such an angry way! Why had he made such a big deal out of nothing when she had been trying to give him the benefit of the doubt?

He walked slowly down Cedar Avenue past the movie house, feeling that the whole evening had been a disaster.

Just beyond the movie house, he saw her sitting on a stone support in front of a bank. She was talking with a young man with long blond hair and a blue bandanna. He recognized him as one of those who had been selling tickets at the play. He lowered his eyes and continued walking as if to pass her without acknowledgement.

"There's my friend. I have to go," he heard her say.

At once she was beside him.

"Let's forget the harsh words," she said softly.

"Sure," he replied.

Her eyes were red as if from crying.

"Hey, Mary, I'm sorry. Forgive me."

"Sure."

The light on the next corner turned red as they approached. They stood amidst a crowd of other who all appeared to be college students. Cars passed by honking with kids leaning out of the windows flashing victory signs. Apparently a game had just ended in victory somewhere on

campus.

"I could use something to eat," she ventured, her voice regaining her normal pleasantness. "How about you?"

"Sure," he replied. "How about that?" He pointed with his chin to a bar on a triangular corner across the street. It had a dimly-lit interior with red lights and tables along the sidewalk windows.

"Looks great!" she exclaimed, taking him by his arm.

The traffic stopped for an instant while the lights changed. They followed along with a stream of people crossing through the intersection at an oblique angle.

He felt relieved by the physical movement. The dash across the final span to escape some cars speeding from a side alley brought them both to the curb in an all-out sprint, laughing.

He took her by the arm. Together they entered the bar. The doorway was crowed with people gawking inside. They sidled between the gawkers and pushed into the interior of the bar despite the apparent lack of seating. Just as they came by, a couple rose to leave a table by the window. They stepped aside to let them leave and swung into the booth-like seats.

"Ha! Just our luck!" cried Mary Kass.

"Not bad. Not bad," Matthew replied.

There was a band playing music with a persistent thumping bass in a hazy, yellow spotlight at the far end of the room. Some people were dancing there in a small, open area directly in front of the band. There was a continual clamor of conversation, laughter and shouting.

Mary leaned over the table and shouted, "Well, at least we got a table!"

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled as if to say that it was impossible to talk because of the noise. She sat upright in her seat with her hands folded on her lap. She looked around the room resuming her habitual serious expression, with her straight, dark eyebrows slightly tensed above her intelligent eyes.

Brandt was glad not to have to say anything. He looked around at the people seated and standing in the dimly-lit, smoke-filled room. They were more off-beat in appearance than the intelligent crowd who had been at the play. Many of the young men had long hair and beards, as had recently come into fashion among the discontent.

He noticed a group of four men, three of them bearded, at a corner table. Two of them were wearing headbands like Indians, and they were wearing open-necked, buttonless shirts, like peasant shirts, with some kind of Indian design. But they were not Indians. They were just typical white college students. They were passing around a hand-rolled cigarette. He figured it was marihuana. He had never seen anyone smoking it

before.

Amidst the general noise, when nothing was required except to exchange occasional smiles and shouted comments, everything went fine. They ordered a couple of Italian sandwiches and coffee and beer, and settled back to wait. But then the band stopped for a break. Now they could hear another without yelling. With this change in situation came a sudden strain. Only then was the damage done earlier in the evening understood on both sides.

Brandt leaned forward with his elbows on the table as he tried to think of something to say. The play came into his mind. He actually did have some thoughts about it, but the whole topic seemed forbidden. He felt like saying he was sorry that he had given the impression that he didn't want to show an interest in what was important to her, but his natural inclination to silence won over him. He said nothing.

“Well, will you be practicing again this weekend?” asked Mary after searching in her own mind for a topic and finding nothing. She realized that in returning to this topic of rowing it was a little defeat since it seemed to draw the circle more strongly around the small area of what they could speak about freely. She understood that her own deepest concerns, aside from her regard for him, were not within that circle.

“Yea, looks like it, if Rorkie has his way,” Brandt answered lamely, feeling the same defeat. He wanted to shift the attention to her, but he couldn't think of any graceful way to do it.

A light went on by the door, having the same effect, almost, as a stage light coming on in a dark room. One of the waitresses was helping someone look for something on the floor. Among the people suddenly illumined there was a young man in a blue uniform who was scanning the room as if looking for someone.

“Hey, that's Jim Morris,” Brandt said, touching Kass's arm.

She turned her head obligingly and smiled in expectation. She had been at rowing parties and knew most of the members of the crew. She had met Morris a couple of times. She liked him.

Matthew got up and waved. “Morris! Morris!” he yelled. “Hey, Jimbo! Get over here now!”

Morris raised back his head and bared his white teeth in his tough guy smile. His uniform caused a ripple of turned heads and amused comments as he crossed the room. He lost his balance at one point and took a step back to steady himself before proceeding.

“So this is where you hang out, huh?” Morris said, smiling, as he approached the table. He seemed glad to have found someone to talk to. He nodded hello to Mary Kass, whose face beamed brightly at the sight of the two men in good spirits.

“Oh, yea. Hey, I love it here,” Matt replied dryly. “This is where us

Indians have our pow-wows."

He gestured at the group in the corner with the peasant shirts and long hair.

"Yea, I like that one guy with the big, brown curls," Morris said. "He must be the chief or something."

He slid into the seat beside Mary Kass and raised his hand to whisper in her ear, loud enough so Brandt could hear. "Hey, not to slight you, Mary, with the beautiful black hair, but some guys in here have maybe got you beat."

She whispered back to him, "Well, don't you get any ideas!"

He fell back laughing. "Hey, I'm a soldier!" He saw the waitress passing. "Hey, good-looking! How about a Bud?"

Brandt suddenly remembered the demonstration and the blue uniforms. "Hey, Jimmy, you notice what's going on across the way, the demonstration. You part of that group there?"

"Oh, yea."

"What's the deal anyhow?"

"End of year dinner, for us, and they turned up to protest."

"Protest what?"

"I don't know. The whole damn policy. As if we made it."

Brandt left the comment go, though he thought Morris' group somehow was involved in making the policy. He wasn't in a mood to get in another argument.

The waitress arrived with Morris' order and a little smile directly at him. Apparently she had liked the "good-looking" comment. Morris paid for the order and added a dollar tip with a flourish.

"This is for you, because you got them big eyes," he said.

"Well, thank you," she replied, smiling again.

He watched her go, looking a little bit hungry.

"I don't get that whole crowd over there," he said, suddenly changing moods. "You would think they would listen to reason. There's another side to this whole picture."

"Why even bother with it?" said Brandt. "They're just in another camp."

"I don't know. I just want to reason."

"You're crazy, Jimbo. You get goddam crazier every day."

"Okay, so I'm crazy," Morris replied, chugging down his beer. He braced his hands on his thighs, sighed deeply, and smiled at both of them. "Got to go."

"Where to so fast?" said Brandt. "Have another. I'll buy."

"Naw! Not now. I just may go back over there."

"Go back where?"

"Back to that crowd."

“You're fucking looney, man.”

“I want to make my case.”

“Make your case,” Brandt replied sarcastically.

“No, I'm serious. The only reason I came in here, I was looking for some of my comrades in arms.”

“Comrades in arms! Will you quit the little act!”

“Hey, come on with me, why don't you,” Morris said, leaning toward him. It was impossible to tell if he was joking or serious.

“No thanks. You know me. I play it safe.”

“Yea, I know that,” Morris said, tossing up his glass to get the last drop.

He got up and straightened his garrison cap on his neatly clipped blonde hair.

“See you later, Jimmy,” said Mary Kass, extending her hand to him. “Watch out for yourself now!”

“Yea, I intend to. Nice seeing you,” he replied, pressing her hand. He nodded to Brandt and pivoted around, a little off-balance.

They watched him as he picked his way between the tables and standing people in the dark room. Someone at one of the tables said something to him that brought some laughter from the people at nearby tables. He responded with a jaunty salute that won him some smiles and shook heads.

Just after he crossed the room, the light went on up front. The members of the band returned from their break and resumed their loud play.

Mary reached for her purse and sat clutching it with both hands as if ready to leave. She didn't like how Matt had talked about playing safe. It was not a quality she admired, and it seemed out of keeping with what she had known about him before.

Soon the waitress, seeing them watching for her, came by with the bill. They paid and left, following along the same path traveled by Morris.

Emerging outside, Matt and Mary found themselves in the midst of a noisy crowd of students just outside the door. He reached over to take her arm, but in response she stiffened and withdrew from him slightly. Just a couple of feet, to the other side of the sidewalk, but he understood the implication.

9. Brandt rescues Morris in a fight with an antiwar demonstrator

As soon as he and Mary Kass had gone a short distance form the bar, Matt Brandt heard Jim Morris arguing with someone about a block away. The argument was going on behind some buildings out of sight.

"Well, he did say he was going to make his case," Matt said matter-of-factly. He quickened his pace.

"Got to give it to him for guts, at least," Mary replied, taking a few skipping steps to catch up to him.

"Oh, yea. Little Jimmy, he's no pancake."

As the words being exchanged became more audible, it became clear that Morris and the other person were arguing about the draft, with the other person propounding in detail with emotional heat while Morris responded calmly with brief statements.

"Well, let me tell you what I think," the second person was saying. "They will extend the draft. You watch. All this talking is just a smoke screen. They will extend it. And you know why? Because they need more bodies to throw against the Viet Cong. And you know something else? The more kids they try to push in, the more will say no."

"Some will say no. Some will say yes," Morris answered.

"Yea, like you."

"Yea, like me."

The second person was obviously trying to bait Jim Morris, and was becoming increasingly exasperated and angry at not being able to break his calm. But Brandt knew Morris well enough to detect a rising tension in his contained responses. The lid was about to blow at any moment, he thought to himself.

"Well, if it comes to blows, I'll do whatever I have to," he said to himself.

Of that, Brandt had no doubt. Despite his comment in the bar about playing it safe, his instincts were otherwise, as he knew. He also had an attitude toward fights,—that if he ever got into one, he would go in swinging. He had this attitude because of a fight he had gotten in in high school. Instead of fighting, he had wrestled around. He had never thrown a punch himself. Then he had taken a couple bad ones, just before the fight was broken up.

Coming around the side of the last building in the row, with Mary a few steps behind him, Brandt saw a group of about 25 or 30 people standing on one side of a parking lot. Morris was standing in front of them, as if addressing them. He was still neatly dressed in his blue uniform with his garrison cap and dark glasses.

Directly in front of Morris was a tall, heavy-set young man with scraggly, brown hair down to his shoulders, a red bandanna around his

head, and a peace sign painted on his forehead.

The crowd appeared to stragglers from the people who had taken part in the demonstration. Some had signs, but they were no longer holding them up for display. The building with the spacious lobby, where the supper had been held, was completely dark.

The guy with the peace sign on his forehead had just ended a flurry of words, to which Jim Morris, looking inscrutable behind the dark glasses, replied, “I'm proud to wear this uniform.”

Morris and his adversary were unsteady on their feet. The people in the crowd were following the argument distractedly while at the same time talking among themselves. Some of them looked like high school kids who had come up out of curiosity. They looked as if they had no idea at all what the argument was about or why Morris was being targeted because of his uniform.

“Are you proud to kill then, too?” said the young man with the peace sign, becoming suddenly more heated.

“It is not my intention to kill,” Morris replied in a controlled, tense voice.

“Are you willing to kill?” “Yes, I am willing to kill.”

“Yes, you're willing to kill. Out of a love of glory! Out of a love of lies! Why don't you just admit it, fucker? You love lies! That's why you have to hide!”

There was a flicker of movement. Something, a dark object, slid across the parking lot pavement and came to rest about 30 feet away. It was Morris's dark glasses.

Morris drew back and assumed a more combative pose with his hands raised from his sides. “Now who's being violent?” he said. “What the hell is wrong with you? I just want to talk.”

The sudden change in mood drew everyone's attention. The crowd drew into a half-circle as people in the crowd moved forward to watch. “Let him say his opinion,” said someone from the side of the group.

One of the high school kids, a slender, pretty girl hair, retrieved the dark glasses and brought them back to Morris. As he reached for them, there was another flicker of movement and the garrison cap flew back into the hands of someone in the crowd who started passing it around.

“Hey, I need that!” Morris shouted, pushing into the man with the peace sign on his forehead.

The other fellow responded with a vigorous shove of both hands that knocked Morris off-balance and back several feet. Morris tried to recover but got pushed back again.

Brandt waited two more shoves to see if his Jim Morris would turn things around. Seeing that Morris would not, he stepped forward into the opposer's path.

"You want to contend?" he said. "Contend with me."

"What's it to you, buzzhead?"

"I just feel mean."

The youth made a quick movement, quicker than Brandt expected, and got a hold of his arms. Brandt jerked free and struck at once with a right punch to the face. He followed through to the full length of his long arm. The punch sent the youth back into the crowd, then to the pavement as the crowd backed away.

Brandt stood panting, amazed by what he had done. His opponent was not injured, he observed, but he would not get up. Like a mad bull he headed through one side of the crowd. Wide-eyed, they stepped aside to let him through. Seeing someone with Morris's cap, he grabbed it, flipped it back to Morris, and charged on with his fists still clenched.

Brandt was aware that he had left Mary Kass behind. This would be the death-blow, he thought. She had told him once that, in her opinion, violence was immature.

"So I'm immature then," he said to himself.

She could go her own way then, he thought. Morris could go, too. Despite intervening, he felt no sympathy. Morris had a problem, that was clear. Let them go off together. What a joke pair!

Soon he heard them both coming up behind him at a run. He knew them both of them well enough to be familiar with their gait and breathing. He turned around to face them.

"Goddam Morris," he said. "You're not going to live long enough to be a hero."

"Hey, you're the hero!" cried Morris. "Where'd you get that punch? You take boxing lessons or something?"

Kass stood beside Morris, smiling, her dark eyes still wide with amazement.

"Used to punch cows," Brandt replied.

"Haw! That guy flew! He goddam, fucking flew! I was going to ask him to join the Air Force!"

"He landed good, too," said Mary.

"Well, do me a favor, okay?" said Brandt. "Next time, punch him yourself."

He looked Morris over, deliberately not looking at Kass. "You got a ride home?" he said. "You're drunk."

"Sure," Morris answered. "Some guy down the block."

"Well, take her with her," said Brandt, gesturing at Mary without meeting her eyes. "She needs a ride."

"Sure, all right," Morris replied, confused. He hadn't been aware of any strife between Brandt and Kass. "Sure thing, Matt. We'll get her home fine."

Brandt turned around and headed down the street again. Soon he heard steps behind him that he recognized as those of Mary. She was closing the distance between them. He turned around.

“Please don't be mean to me,” she said softly.

The fight had led her to the conclusion that her first impression had been right. Matt had basic good instincts of generosity and courage. He was too humble to lay claim in words to what he was inside.

“What do you want me to do?” he said. “Just walk with me. Take my hand.”

Hand in hand, they walked down the street more slowly, neither speaking.

“Where to?” he said.

“I don't know? The river?”

“Sure. Sounds fine.”

They crossed through a newly developed area of the university to a bridge that crossed to the main campus on the other side. At mid-bridge they stopped to look off at the river. A half moon was high in the sky. The water gleamed with silver light.

“Matthew, Matthew,” she said, taking his large right hand in both of her small hands and holding it firmly. “I want to say something to you. It's so very important to me to say it.”

He nodded and looked into her dark eyes. She looked beautiful in the moonlight, with her usually so neatly combed black hair blown across her moist forehead in the gentle spring wind.

“The thing I want to say, I know you're good, and I want you to let me know it. I want you to trust that I know it. And, Matthew, this maybe sounds like I'm pushing or something, and I don't want to push, really, but what I want to say, I'm starting to know that mind of yours. It's not as uneventful as you pretend.”

He smiled. “Are you sure now?”

“Yes! I know, I know that you're thinking in there hard. You're thinking, but you're not talking about it. You don't want to put on like you're smart. And you care. Tonight, when you were listening to Sammy, I could see in your face you were listening and you cared. But you would never say that you cared.”

She paused and let out a sigh. She looked back across the river to the West Bank. Street lights glittered there above the dark trees on the hillside.

“Matthew, Matthew,” she said, peering into his keen blue eyes. “I don't want to put you on the spot, but I need to know if I'm on the right track. I need to know I can speak to you as you really are inside. I want you to tell me you'll let me in.”

“Well, I don't know,” Matthew said after a pause. “I'd like to be

worthy of your good opinion. But, when it comes to telling things, Mary, it's not I want to hold back, with you. I'm just plain quiet."

"Well, how about if I just say, 'Matthew, what are you thinking?', you know, and then you just tell me. Plain and simple, you know."

He smiled. "Sure."

"But it's got to be what you're really thinking. None of this tough guy facade."

"Facade, what's that?"

"Exterior."

"Sure. It's a deal. I promise." She nestled against him. "Matthew?"

"Uh-huh?"

"What are you thinking?"

"Thinking I'd like to kiss you."

She laughed. "See, we're making progress already."

10. Steward gets some heartfelt advice from Barbara Carpenter

April of 1967 ended. May began. Every day (except for Sunday when the mail didn't come), Tom Steward opened his mailbox at school, looking for the letter he didn't want to receive, the letter from his draft board saying he was drafted. He tried to keep his mind on his studies, as he approached the final finals of his last year of college, but he felt increasingly anxious.

Without any real belief that he would go forward into it, he talked to an admissions officer from the graduate program in social work that he had applied for. His application was "pending," he was told. He called the VISTA office in Washington D.C. (as encouraged by Matthew Brandt), and learned that his VISTA application was pending, too. He walked through the upstairs corridor in the student armory where the Air Force ROTC program was headquartered that Jim Morris had described, and saw, on a bulletin board there, that the summer camp still had openings, with a final date for application less than two weeks away. But on that, too, he waited. That was pending, too.

He was more familiar than most people with ROTC in general because he had gone to an all boys' military high school. Even so, he was unable to make a decision about whether to go ahead.

Meanwhile, the feelings of loneliness that he had felt on the deck of the boat club on the evening when he had spoken to Jim Morris continued and got gradually worse. He shared an apartment with another student, but this other student had begun staying with a new girlfriend lately and was seldom around. With his apartment mate gone, Steward was left by himself. Every night he went to his part time job at the campus laundry, where he was required to work any three hours between 4 P.M and 7 A.M. cleaning up the lint between the machines when the regular employees were gone. Often it was 10 P.M. or later when he went. These circumstances of being up late at night alone just contributed more to a growing feeling of being adrift with no definite goal.

He sometimes thought of Barbara Carpenter, the sophomore he had had a brief affair with a few months before. Though she had gotten pregnant by another student, he hadn't had sex with her himself. He had gotten closer to sex with her than with anyone else, however. The memory of the intimacy was still strong in his mind. He felt like he needed to talk to her about what was going on. He knew where she lived, in a boarding house where her parents had set her up after her pregnancy. It was a restricted situation. The residents, all young women, had a midnight curfew and other rules to keep them in line.

Often he went over in his mind, also, the bizarre circumstances in which his relationship with Barbara Carpenter had ended. She and the

young man she had gotten pregnant with, according to her explanation, had not even been involved in a romantic relationship. They had been counselors together in a church-sponsored program, giving talks on dating and sex to high school students. After one presentation, she and this other student had talked late into the night, revealing to one another that they had been pretending to know about sex without having any sexual experience themselves. That had led to exploration that had gone out of control.

Steward had accepted her explanation that the other student hadn't been a romantic involvement. He had offered to marry her and adopt the child. But the pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage, resulting apparently from emotional stress. Then, in another weird turn of events, the other student, who lived at the YMCA, and was studying to be a minister, had tried to kill himself by injecting his veins with ether. Soon after that, she had sought counseling and had decided to cut herself off from all kinds of involvement with men.

For weeks, as he mulled over all of this, Steward had held himself back from going to see Barbara Carpenter. He and she had agreed to break off completely, at her insistence, as the least painful way to disengage, and he had promised to respect that arrangement. In early May, though, he happened to be passing near the house where she stayed and, as he walked from there into the campus, he saw her coming toward him, apparently on her way home from classes. Remembering his promise not to bother her, he started to turn off to avoid her before she saw him. But he kicked some loose gravel as he turned and she looked up and saw him.

"Trying to run away, huh?" she said, smiling.

He understood by that that she was in a mood to talk despite their resolution.

She was a petite, pretty girl, about 5-2, with dark brown, bobbed hair and straight, neatly combed bangs nearly touching her eyebrows. The bangs gave her a mischievous, pixie-like appearance. She was always looking for an occasion to laugh, though often she seemed weighted down with self-admonitions.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't want to assume."

"Tom, you're so serious," she replied softly. "Which way are you going?"

"Pillsbury Hall."

"Can I walk with you?"

"Of course."

"Nice to see you again."

"Thank you."

They started in walking together without speaking, but without any

strain, like old friends. They had always gotten along well together from the first time they had met in the volunteer program at the Y that they had been in together the previous winter.

She was dressed in a pink blazer with gaucho jeans and thongs. She carried her books cradled in her arms. She was a pretty sight, Steward thought, with her eyelids lowered and her lips pressed together and curved upward slightly as if in amusement. In appearance and dress, she looked more like a high school girl than a college student. She had long, dark eyelashes like a child.

From their first meeting, Steward had been attracted by her girlish appearance. Then, after learning she was just a sophomore, he had avoided her, when a mutual attraction became evident. He had thought she was too young to date for someone like himself who was a year beyond the age when most people would have finished college. That resistance on his part, he had soon found out, had made her more determined to win his attention. In trying to demonstrate that she was more mature than she looked, she had proved to be more cute and girlish still, to his undoing.

"I've missed you, Tom," she said as they climbed the steps in front of the auditorium at the end of the mall. She leaned toward him, peering directly into his face as if to register clearly in her mind what he really looked like.

"I've missed you, too," he responded, confused by this sudden show of interest. "Have you changed your mind?"

"About seeing you? No."

"Guess you've got to keep me missing me then."

She smiled. "Guess so."

Soon the two of them were walking along, talking as intimately as they had a few months before. Steward was glad for the opportunity, at last, to unburden himself of his deliberations about his draft status with someone who actually seemed to care. She truly did care, that was clear from her every gesture and expression.

"Believe it or not, I wouldn't mind being in the service," Steward sputtered out, struggling for the exact right words, as he often did. "I wouldn't mind being a soldier. It's just the years of doing something I don't really believe in." He sighed and shook his head at his inability to explain his thoughts. "And social work. I think of that in the same way, as just being something half-hearted."

"You don't really want to do it?"

"No."

Barbara Carpenter listened intently with a look of deep concern in her big girlish eyes.

"But, see, Tom, you're being against things," she remarked after a

pause. “You’re waiting for the sledge hammer to hit you on the head. I know because I was in the same situation myself. Waiting for some guy to like me. Waiting for the sorority to pick me. Waiting to see if I was pregnant. Waiting, waiting, and where counseling has helped me is I started to act, that made a world of difference.”

“Started to act how?”

“Well, it’s a wild idea. I’ve got this friend from high school and she told me about this program she’s in, kind of like a boot camp nurse program to get you to Vietnam if you want to volunteer.”

“That’s what you’re thinking of?”

“Intensely, Tom. Intensely.”

“You do it through school here?”

“No, drop out of the U nursing, get credits for courses completed, of which I have a lot, move into a dorm in St. Mary’s hospital, you know over by the West Campus there, and from there on out everything is classes, rotations in various types of medicine, strict rules, long hours. But I’ll be a nurse in Vietnam by January 1969.”

“That is really impressive.”

“I know I can make it.”

“You sure you want to do that?”

“Yes, Tom, and I’ll be an officer, a second lieutenant. It will be a tremendous change.”

“That is an amazing idea, really.”

“Thank you.”

At Pillsbury Hall, the destination that Steward had indicated, they paused together, looking at one another.

“Want to go have a coffee or something and talk?” Steward asked. “I have a class, but I could skip it.”

“No, Tom, you better go.”

“Well, then, nice to see you.”

She gave him a soft, moist kiss on his mouth and then another on his cheek that lingered. “See, I do care about you,” she said softly. “I’ve cared about you since the moment I saw you. Dang deal though! If I didn’t care so much I could see you!”

He smiled stupidly. “Oh, yea.”

She felt she had made a good joke, pointing out the absurdity of her situation. She continued peering at him with an open-mouthed smile and shook her head as if to say it was more than she could figure out.

“I tried to help you though with my little advice,” she said, pressing his hand.

The girlish brown eyes grew suddenly moist and a tear appeared at the corner of one eye. She turned away in embarrassment, wiped the tear away, and looked back with the eyes dry and sober.

"I appreciate that you did that, Barbie," he said, taking both of her hands. He understood now for the first time that she really did care and that seeing him was too emotional for her to deal with in her present state of mind.

"Well, you deserve it," she replied in almost a whisper. "Because you helped me."

"Helped you how?"

"By being so understanding. By sticking with me when I was having problems. By never pushing me, Tom."

She kissed her own fingers and touched her moistened fingers on his cheek. "But now I have to go, really." She laughed. "I mean, right now. Right this moment."

He kissed her on the forehead. "Well, you take care of yourself, Barbie! If I can do anything or anything... let me know."

"Yes, I will. Good-bye!"

He watched her walk away, noticing that she didn't seem buoyant as just an hour before but weighted down. Throughout the rest of the day, he kept thinking about her. She was more formidable than he had known her to be in the past. The pretty girl was there that he had met months before, but she had made a subtle transition to womanhood. There was a new depth and firmness in her girlish brown eyes.

In late afternoon, he headed back to his apartment, following the street that led past the university YMCA where he and she had first met. He stopped outside the steps that led down from the front door. There were some red and orange flowers there, brilliant in the sunlight. He recalled a different scene, on a winter evening, when he had come down those same steps after an outing that they had gone on together to find her waiting unexpectedly on the snowed-over sidewalk. He recalled how she had looked at him with a mischievous expression, as if to say she was being bold by waiting for him without being asked.

Thinking of that, Steward realized how much he had wanted to prove worthy of her infatuation. He appreciated what she had said about how he helped her by being understanding, but anybody could be understanding, he thought. He had hoped for more than that. He couldn't help suspecting that somehow he had fallen short on an instinctual level as a man, somehow he hadn't had the virility or toughness to retain her interest.

Back at his apartment, he found his apartment-mate gone. He settled down on the tattered gold couch and looked around the plain room. Besides the couch, the only other furniture was a blue padded chair in equally shabby condition and a coffee table with peeling veneer.

He thought about her new plans. What an impressive change! What a commitment! For many young women her age, such plans would have seemed almost incredible, he thought, but he had met her in a volunteer

activity aimed at social good and everything he had learned about her since then had indicated that she was unusually idealistic and in pursuit of some kind of intense endeavor, so in that sense her new plans were true to her character as he knew it.

Steward thought also about Barbie's remark that he was waiting when he ought to be acting. That amounted to saying he was passive, didn't it? Maybe that was what she had found wrong with him; she thought of him as an intellectual type, turning things over in his mind without ever coming to a strong decision.

Later that night, he went to his job at the laundry. As he cleaned the employee cafeteria and swept up the lint between the machines on the work floor, the word "passive" repeated in his mind. How long could he go on like this, waiting? The more he thought about it, the more intolerable it seemed.

Walking home after work, he decided to call the draft board office the first thing the next morning. He would press the case to clarify his situation as much as possible.

Then he would make some hard decisions.

11. Steward visits his draft board to ask about his status

Tom Steward woke up at about 9 o'clock the next morning. At once he called the draft board office. No one answered the phone. He made several more unsuccessful attempts in the next half hour, then decided to skip his morning classes and go down to the office in person. He would camp there all day, if necessary, until someone arrived.

An hour or so later, he parked his green and white Chevy outside the public library in downtown St. Paul. Dressed in white tennis shoes, white jeans, and a blue sport shirt, he headed across a small park to the old city hall where the office was located.

He entered a large, central court from which the upper story halls and doors were visible beyond gilded railings. He rode up in an elevator with glass sides that afforded a view of the star pattern on the court floor descending below him.

On the fifth floor, at the end of a polished marble hall, he found a door that said, "U.S. Selective Service, Ramsey County Local Boards." He opened the door slowly and went in.

A young woman of about 25 years of age, dressed in a green serge suit with lace lapels, sat at a front desk. She had brown hair, arranged in corkscrew curls, and dark, pretty eyes.

A sign on her desk identified her as "Patricia Block, Clerk of the Local Board."

"Are you for Board 90?" he asked, stopping several feet in front of the desk with his long arms straight at his side.

"I'm clerk for all the local boards of Ramsey County," she replied in a soft distinct voice, closing a folder that lay open on the desktop. "How can I help you?"

"My name is Thomas Steward," he said, nodding in his stiff, formal manner. "I'm registered with Board 90. The reason I'm here, I would just like to get some kind of idea of my status, to the extent it's possible to know it."

"You don't know your status?" she said with a quick, puzzled glance of the dark eyes. The small hands, with their neatly painted, long nails, still rested on the closed folder on the desktop.

"Yes, I know my official status. 1-A," he replied, shifting on his feet and raising one hand in a circular gesture. "I meant, my situation in general, with respect to my official status."

"Well, 1-A simply means you're not eligible... I mean, have not been placed in... any other status. And your general situation, you're in a group that could be drafted. Not to say, you necessarily will be. I don't know what else I could tell you about it."

"I see," he said, suddenly feeling confused and self-conscious. He realized he had gotten off to a bad start by not stating his intentions

clearly. He wasn't even sure what he had expected to find out. But then the main thought came back to him.

"The thing is, I'm a full-time student. I've submitted all the requested forms. I may be accepted to graduate school..."

"So you wonder, 'Why not 2-S?'."

"Yes, exactly."

"Well, let's at least look at your file then, and see if everything is here."

"Yes, let's do that. Thank you," he said, feeling that now he was making progress.

She rose and began sorting through files in a large, gray cabinet next to her desk.

For the first time he looked around the room. It was a standard government office with a large American flag in the corner behind the clerk's desk and rows of file cabinets extending in both directions from the flag. Immediately behind the desk was a large portrait of the then current president, Lyndon Baines Johnson. On the other side was a meeting room with a table that looked large enough to seat about a dozen people. There were tall, oblong windows on the far side of the table, providing a view of the roofs and windows of other downtown buildings. Parallel to the long dimension of the table was a wood-paneled wall with three open doors that apparently led to private offices.

"All we can really do, you know, is confirm your correspondence," the clerk said, turning from the cabinet with a thickly stuffed file in her hands. "And, from the draft board side, everything here is official correspondence, also... to you. You received it yourself."

"Oh," he said, leaning over to examine the papers that she fanned out on the desktop. His eyes went first to the several typed pages that he recognized as his recent long letter. He read the lead sentence in a long paragraph on the second page: "For me, especially, this is a serious question because I find it so hard to accept existence without a definite purpose."

Had he really said that? It seemed so pretentious.

He quickly looked for and found the forms that he had recently sent in as proof of his student status.

"Everything is here," he said, looking up.

"Then it's just a determination," she said, almost apologetically, with a studied glance of the lovely eyes.

"But I don't understand," he said after a pause, sweeping back his unruly hair. "A determination on what basis?"

"Well, one thing I notice, if you want my impression..."

"Yes," he said, nodding.

"This is your fifth year? In a four-year program?"

"Yes," he said again, leaning over to determine what she was looking at. It was a summary of some kind, a list of items. So there was something besides the official correspondence, this summary.

"Well, as you can imagine, that places you in a different category," she continued in her soft voice, "if you haven't been on a direct course."

"Ah, yes," Steward said, straightening up again.

He had known that it was a matter of importance to the draft board to follow a definite curriculum. But he understood, from the tone of her voice, that to deviate at all was a serious infraction,—more serious than he had supposed.

He looked to the letter again, and saw the paragraph there he had thought of at the boat club when talking to Matt Brandt, the paragraph that contained the phrase, "due to some mistakes and misconceptions, but out of a sincere desire to find something worthwhile to do with my life." It was the paragraph in which he had tried to explain his various changes in situation, from student to factory worker to student again to Peace Corps trainee. He had described the changes as showing the intensity of his effort to find the right direction.

"I have made an effort to educate myself, a steady effort," he said. "I tried to explain in my letter."

"I see that you did," she said, noticing to where his eyes were directed. She drew the sheet of paper toward her.

He could see by how she looked at it that she had not read it before. Of course, it wasn't her job to read it, but all of this passed through her hands. She had the time, at least. The members of the board probably didn't. Most likely they hadn't read it, either.

"Hard to know what to say, the extent of detail," he added, embarrassed that he had gone to such lengths of self-revelation.

"I can imagine," she replied sympathetically, giving him another quick glance of the dark pretty eyes.

He thought he saw something in that, an assessment of his metal or worth. He swept back his hair again. His forehead was moist from sweat. He realized that the brief interview was nearly over, but he held his place doggedly, trying to think if there was anything else he should ask about.

"I have just one more question," he said, gaining his bearings again.

"Yes, go ahead. I hope I can answer."

"I've applied to graduate school, as I mentioned. Say I get accepted, say I have a definite direction ..."

"Will that get your student deferment back?"

"Yes."

"Six months ago, the answer would have been, without a doubt, yes. But within the past few months the situation has changed."

A man appeared at one of the office doors along the paneled wall as

Steward and the clerk were engaged in this exchange. He was a man of about 50 years of age dressed in a gray business suit. In his hand he held some papers. It was obvious from his posture and direct eye contact that he meant to get the receptionist's attention.

"Yes, Mr. Langerquist?" she said.

"Thought I could help in the demonstration department," he offered in a pleasant voice, "about how things have changed."

"Of course," she said. "Mr. Steward,—Tom Steward, right?—this is Harold Langerquist, one of the board members."

"Pleased to meet you," said Steward.

"Pleased to meet you, too."

Here in person, thought Steward, was one of the previously faceless board officers who held his fate in their hands. He hadn't expected that a board officer would be so congenial and soft-spoken, like a kind college professor, as this man seemed to be.

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation," Langerquist said, "with the door open. So I thought I would come out and show you this. It's a news article I cut out of the paper yesterday."

He came across the room to the receptionist's desk, and held out the article for Steward to look at while standing beside him and looking at it, also. The article had a headline: "TROOP LEVELS IN VIETNAM CONTINUE TO RISE. Embedded in the text, on the bottom right side, was a bar graph showing year versus number of troops from 1961 onward. The bars grew markedly longer each year. Only 700 troops were indicated for 1961, compared to 400,000 in 1966, the last year shown.

"You can see here, at a glance," he said, gesturing.

"Yes, I do see," Steward replied.

His face grew thoughtful. He hadn't known the extent of the rise. He understood the implication in terms of fairness.

"The only thing I want to impress on you, Tom, is, with this rise in number of troops being sent over, and we in the local boards supplying a good part of those troops, there has been a gradually rising pressure, a proportional pressure, on the local boards. So how can we respond to that and be fair? That's why we resort to summaries such as Patricia just showed you. We're trying to get a handle on it."

"Sure, I can imagine," Steward said.

"None of it is punitive," Langerquist insisted. "We're not trying to chasten anyone. It's just that we have to make stricter rules in an effort to be fair."

"Sure, I understand."

The three of them stood for a moment in silence.

"What about his question about graduate school," the receptionist, Patricia, asked. "If he gets in, will that change his status?"

Langerquist shook his head slowly. “No, I can’t promise that. We’ve got a big quota coming up. We’ll certainly try to give it full consideration, though.”

“Could I ask you one more question?”

“Of course.”

“How about ROTC? An ROTC program.”

“Well, now, Tom, that’s a different situation, entirely. Signing up for ROTC, that is a fulfillment of your military obligation.”

“I see.”

“They got some darn good programs. I’d look around.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Well, I got to be running now. I was on my way out,”Langerquist said, placing the article that he had shown to Steward in his brief case. He nodded and smiled. “Good luck to you, young man.”

“Thank you,” Steward replied.

When the door to the hall had swung closed, the clerk began drawing Steward’s papers into a neat pile.

“It may interest you to know,” she said in her soft voice, “my husband and I went through this ourselves a couple years ago. We were newlyweds then and he was up for the draft. Luckily for us, he got in the Naval Reserve. We didn’t really have any big reason for him not to just give into the draft, except we were trying to have a child and thought maybe we were already on the way... Which we were,” she said, pointing to a framed picture behind her of a dark-haired little girl sitting on a white rocking chair.

Steward glanced at the girl in the picture and then at the clerk, noticing the resemblance in the dark eyes and dimpled cheeks. The smiles were the same, open-mouthed with upper and lower teeth exposed.

“Cute little girl,” he said.

“Thank you,” she replied with another quick smile. But at once she grew serious. “So here I am, an officer of this board and Daniel, my husband and I, we made our arrangements. We talked a great deal about it at the time. I don’t think there’s any shame in making arrangements within the law. The law is very definite in allowing it and also in imposing constraints. Sometimes I think there’s some ultimate good in it. The options are more limited because of the war, but it forces us to make a more considered decision.”

“Well, I appreciate your thoughts,” he said, sincerely.

She looked at the clock. “Speaking of Dan, I’m supposed to meet him for lunch in ten minutes. I hope I’ve been some help.”

“You have, you have,” he said awkwardly, backing toward the door, nodding. “Thanks very much again.”

"Thank you."

As Steward rode back to his apartment, an image of the pretty board clerk and her pretty child remained in his mind. He thought to himself that he wanted so much to be worthy of a woman like that. He had to make a start toward that somehow, he told himself, he had to force himself to make initiatives with women.

He thought about board officer had said about the rising demands of war. He had known that, on some level, but he had not thought through the full implication in terms of the resulting limits on freedom for everyone his age. The war was there and it was going to be there. The constraints would not stop. People would be forced into situations that they probably would never have gotten into without it. There would be less options. The available options would be more constrained. He would have to do exactly what the receptionist said. He would have to make a considered decision. What kind of situation would lead to the best use of his abilities?

Back at his apartment, he found a letter in the mailbox from the graduate program in social work that he had applied to. It was a letter of acceptance.

"As a graduate student of social work," the letter said, "you will be prepared to participate in the most pressing social situations and most important social decisions of this society."

Soon afterwards, he went over to the student armory to see if there were still openings for the Air Force ROTC summer program. There were two unfilled positions on the bottom of the list. An hour later, he emerged from the building with a manila envelope containing his instructions for reporting to the camp.

That night Steward typed a letter of acceptance to the graduate school of social work. He mailed it at once at a mailbox several blocks away and then went for a long walk through the dark campus returning to his apartment about ten o'clock. The phone was ringing as he opened the door. He took a couple of long strides and picked up the phone. It was Matthew Brandt.

"Got a proposition for you, Stewie. How'd you like to go to the Memorial Day Regatta with Ellie Kass, Mary's kid sister? She's already seen you, Stewie. She likes you."

"Seen me where?"

"Rowing at some regatta or something."

Steward hesitated.

"Got nothing to lose," Matt ventured.

"Okay," Steward replied, remembering his resolution of just a few hours before. "I'll give it a try."

[Chapter 11 notes]

12. Steward bores Mary's sister, Ellen; she winds up with Morris

"When does the camp start then?" asked Ellie Kass, looking from Tom Steward's ruddy, boyish face to the St. Paul downtown buildings on the other side of the Mississippi River.

"In just two weeks," Steward replied in his quiet, earnest voice. He was aware, as he spoke, that there was little interest, on her part, in either the question or the reply. "Two weeks and two days, to be exact."

"Oh, that's really close!"

"Yes, I know. It really is."

It was the evening of the Memorial Day Regatta. They had gotten along fine in the excitement of the races. Now that the races were over, they had gotten bogged down.

They were standing on the veranda of the Red Garter Saloon, on the upper floor of the boat club. Steward was dressed in a slightly more dressed up version of his usual neat clothes—freshly washed white jeans, the customary white tennis shoes, scrubbed clean, and a tan sport shirt that he had bought especially for the occasion. Ellie Kass wore a nicely-fitting, Navy blue sun-dress that exposed her perfectly tanned shoulders and slender arms. Her chestnut hair was arranged in a shining halo of wispy golden brown hairs around her moist, pretty face. She was a shapely, long-legged girl. She moved about as she spoke with charming gestures of her manicured hands.

"You said the camp is in D.C., right?" Ellie ventured, rising on her toes as she sipped a gin gimlet and shot him a sideways glance. From a distance this tussle-haired young man with the lean, athletic build had looked so dashing. She had never imagined that he would turn out to be so serious and oppressively nice at close range.

"No, state of Washington," came back the earnest voice. "I guess, near Spokane."

"Out West, then! Ever been there before?"

"Never been west of Minnesota."

"Wow, and just think, you get to see the mountains!" She shook her radiant hair back and forth, and moved her pretty hands and slim hips in a swaying motion like downhill skiing. "Are you ready for that?"

"Yes, I think I am," Steward replied, his serious manner unrelenting. Normally, he would have been more inclined to a light-hearted give and take. Her beauty had left him in a nearly speechless state of awe. "I've been thinking a lot, trying to sort things out."

"I can imagine," she said, raising her eyes. "I can just imagine!"

She told herself that out of politeness she ought to pursue the subject further. But she allowed herself a brief respite. She took another sip of the gin gimlet.

The sun had just gone down. The stars had begun to appear in the clear twilight sky. Inside the saloon the merriment had increased. A group of JVs with their girlfriends had just arrived. A make-shift rock band that Bill O'Rourke, the coxswain, had scrounged up somewhere was setting up in the far corner of the room.

She rocked back and forth and shot him a smile of a type he had not seen before. It was the smile of a girl whose main interest in life is to have a good time.

"Looks like they're getting ready to dance," she said.

"Oh, yea, you can bet on that," he responded with a note of apprehension. He had been at crew parties before but he had never danced. He didn't know how. He was too self-conscious to let loose and try.

She took a good look and saw he was going to persist in his thoughtful mood until someone forced him to drink a couple of beers. Who knows, maybe the beers would just make him more thoughtful. She didn't like the prospect at all.

"You said you'll be working in the medical corps or something?" she said, catching herself. She turned toward him with a sweet, beatific smile.

"Yes, I think so," he answered softly, startled by her loveliness. "From what they told me."

"Well, I never imagined, you know," she said, throwing up her little hands and shaking her head back and forth as if to say "dumb me,"—"I always thought of social work as being with poor people. What do you think you'll really be doing?"

"I don't know," said Steward. "I suppose, something to do with the war."

He had the impression she could have been talking about farming or bridge construction, just as well. She had no real interest in it. He felt no inclination to go deeper. He could only confide or expound when he sensed a true interest.

"Oh, yes, there's a lot to do, connected with the war," came a firm, cheerful voice from the nearby open door of the saloon.

It was Mary Kass, the older sister. She came out of the door, smiled and nodded at both of them, but continued in the serious vein of the comment. "There are serious problems, Stewie, I've heard. People coming back from the war. Soldiers, I mean. Disturbed by what they've seen or done. Marriages or romances falling apart, or whatever."

"Mary always finds the problems," said Ellie, smiling. "Mary likes problems."

Steward laughed, seeing the sisterly opposition.

Mary Kass was dressed quite simply, compared to her younger sister, in cut-off jeans and a plain white blouse. Her shining black hair was

pulled straight back from her intelligent brow and secured with a red ribbon behind her head. In contrast to her sister, she wore no make-up. Ellie wore mascara around her eyes with a faint touch of blush on her dimpled cheeks.

"Mary should be a social worker herself," said Ellie, still with the same smile, which had taken on a slightly more malicious aspect. "Have you ever thought about it, big sister?"

"Yes, little sister, in fact, I have."

"And what did you decide?"

"I decided to shove an orange down your throat as soon as we get home."

"Ha, ha! She's always been mean! Tommie, can you help me?"

"Well, I don't know. I'd like to try," Steward replied.

"Beer truck! Beer truck!" said a gruff voice from the open door. It was Matt Brandt, newly shorn. He had gotten to like the image since Mary approved of it.

"Beep, beep," went Jim Morris, looking over Brandt's shoulder. "I'm the horn, get it? I'm horny!"

They stood at the door, grinning. Each had three beers in each hand. "One for everyone! Everyone gets one! Everyone is required to drink one! Anyone want two?" said Brandt, stepping toward them and glancing at once at Mary Kass, who met his eyes strongly. "Hey, come on! Last big crew party together! Last big regatta! Even Stewie is going to get bombed!"

Everyone laughed as Steward accepted a beer. Ellie Kass patted him on the back.

Morris made his truck beep a couple more times since it had gotten a good laugh the first time. He noticed Ellen looking at him and nodded at her politely. She mimicked his nod and made him smile. When the playful green eyes kept looking at him, he looked down, remembering his resolution to steer clear of romance before heading back to training.

His mother's operation had gone well, without complications. In two weeks he would be returning to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas to complete his undergraduate pilot training. With this in mind, he had brought himself to an acute level of physical conditioning. He was a cross country runner of considerable talent. He had increased his daily runs to ten miles.

In his royal blue, open-necked golf shirt, with his strong biceps pressing against the tight sleeves, he looked jauntily handsome. He had come to the party alone.

"So you're the big pilot," said Ellie Kass, still looking at him.

"Yea, and I'm ready to fly," he responded, raising his bottle of beer. He had gotten off to a good start, having gulped down a couple of beers

within five minutes of his arrival.

"Ready to soar, huh? Into the wild blue yonder," she said, raising her pretty eyes skyward.

"Hey, last big night for the crew."

"That's what I've been hearing."

"So you have a good time."

"I intend to, Captain," she said, saluting.

"So do I."

Again, Morris reminded himself about his resolution. He walked by himself to the other end of the veranda, which was almost directly below the Wabasha Street Bridge, and looked up at the steel piers of the bridge, admiring the strength and immense scale of the construction. Then he looked below the bridge to the eastern end of the small island. There was a Navy base there consisting of a one-story brown brick building and a single pier. An American flag waved in the light of an arc lamp by the front door of the Navy building.

His mind wandered to news he had heard the day before about the war. There had been a flurry of air war activity. Navy pilots flying from an aircraft carrier (the Bon Homme Richard, as he recalled) had attacked a MIG airfield near Haiphong. He imagined those must have been A-4 Skyhawks. "Tenth attack against MIG bases," he had heard on the news. Apparently, the raids had been a success. No American planes had been downed. But he had also heard that the Marines had returned to the Buffer Strip. In action there and elsewhere more than 300 Americans had been killed. "The costliest week of the war, so far," the news report had said.

Meanwhile, Air Force planes flying out of Thailand had continued hitting interior targets on the western side of Hanoi. Most of those planes, he imagined, were F-105 Thunderchief's, the type of plane he wanted to fly. They had hit the Nguyen Khe storage area and other Red River Valley targets that he had heard about. They were hitting successfully a lot but a fair number of planes were going down.

Morris returned from the end of the veranda, encountering Bill O'Rourke. The ever-feisty coxswain was dressed in his trademark style, with his orange red hair tussled above his healthy, expressive face and curly red beard. He was wearing a firehouse red sweater and the red stocking cap that seemed permanently attached to his head.

"Hey, Morris, we're going to do the punch," said O'Rourke with a tone of confident authority. He was referring to a dance that Denny Nolan had invented to commemorate Brandt's now well known punch on the West Bank.

"Oh, you should be interested in that," remarked Ellen Kass from about ten feet away. She was standing next to Steward, turned partly

away from him, with a drink in her hand and her lovely hips slung to the side above her long, shapely legs.

"How's that?" said Morris. "What do you know about it?"

"Heard you were going to take on the whole world."

"Well, not the whole world, exactly. I'd still be there, with cars parking on me, if it weren't for Brandt."

"Yea, well, that's the idea," O'Rourke shot back impatiently. "And this is to pay honor, this is to pay honor! Who's going to pay honor to the big punch?"

It was impossible to tell if he was joking or serious. Nolan, beside him, had his typical hayseed, open-mouthed smile as if to say it was all a big joke, but the coxie treated the whole matter with all the seriousness of the final practice before a big race.

"Let's go! Right now!" he barked. "Nolan, you're the lead oar! Get your ass in gear!"

Nolan came along good-naturedly, with gangly strides. Mary Kass tried to move to the side, but O'Rourke got a firm grip on her wrist. She got a hold of her little sister as she was dragged by. Ellie made a half-hearted attempt for Steward, who pulled away, then grabbed for Morris and pulled him along behind her. Brandt stood by, shaking his head.

Soon there were seven of them—Nolan, the two Kass girls, Morris, O'Rourke, and two JVs—dancing in front of the cheering oarsmen and their dates. The dance consisted of standing in a line and throwing punches on the downbeat of the drum. Ellie Kass, in her sleek blue dress, had the attention of most of the men.

Later, a group of varsity oarsmen sat at a long table with their girlfriends, talking about future plans. The group included Morris, Nolan, Steward, Brandt, and O'Rourke. The young women were the Kass sisters, a dark, pretty, petite girl that Bill O'Rourke had brought, and the large, likeable, but not attractive girl who had come with Nolan.

After a lot of joking and laughing, the talk turned to the draft and the war.

"You hear our esteemed congress extended the draft?" said Nolan.

"When was that?" asked Steward.

"Yesterday. For four more years. 362 to 9."

"That was just the House of Representatives," Morris remarked. "I think it still has to go to the Senate."

Any bets on the Senate to vote it down?" Nolan asked, scanning the faces around the table as if to invite a punch line.

"Not from this quarter," Morris replied in a serious tone that cut off any inclination in that direction. He recalled how his opponent on the West Bank had announced with such confidence that the draft would be extended. In that statement, at least, he had been correct.

"Hit them again today," Nolan remarked to Morris. "Your fly boys."

"Is that so? Where?" Morris said, showing a keen interest. He had been at the boat club all day so he had not listened to the evening news, as was his habit now every day.

"Somewhere near Hanoi, north of Hanoi, I think. Some airfields there and some railroad yards. I think they said they were Thunderchief's or something. Is that an Air Force plane?"

"Yes," he answered without elaborating on his own interest.

"What was the outcome?"

"They must have done okay. Lots of things blowing up on the ground."

"That's good, things blowing up," said Brandt.

"Three choppers got shot down, though," Nolan went on.

"American?" asked Morris.

"Yes, I think so."

"Where was that?"

"I don't know. Further south."

Morris took all of this into grave consideration. He was seated next to Brandt. He and Brandt had become much closer since the fight. Ellie Kass was on his other side, between him and Tom Steward.

As the conversation drifted, she tapped his shoulder and held her hand to her mouth to whisper moistly in his ear. "Do you really think you'll be going over there?" she enunciated softly.

"I don't know. I suppose. I hope so," he answered, turning toward her and looking closely into her lovely green eyes.

"Aren't you scared?" she whispered, leaning toward him again.

He raised his hand to his mouth and whispered in her ear, "Yes."

She drew back a little and smiled. "How come you want to go then?"

"Too late to change my mind."

"Is that the real reason?"

He put his hand to his mouth again and whispered, "No."

"What is the reason then?" she persisted, smiling coyly.

"I don't know. I just want to fly."

"Like to zoom around, huh?"

"Now you got me."

"Oh-oh, Captain, you better watch out!"

The pairing off had become a little too obvious with Steward sitting helplessly by. Mary Kass shot a severe look across the table. Ellie sat back and took a sip of her drink. She was on her fourth gin gimlet and starting to look silly.

Soon after Steward excused himself and went over to another table to talk to a group of JVs. He was in the midst of an animated discussion when he saw Morris and Kass get up from the table and walk out to the

veranda together. He turned away from them so as not to see them through the open door. Looking in that direction later, he saw Ellen Kass place her hand on Morris's arm. Morris stepped aside to disengage.

[Chapter 12 notes]

13. Matt and Mary discuss their relationship and make a commitment

Late in the evening, as the party wore down, Matthew Brandt and Mary Kass headed from the tavern for a walk alone along the nearby marina. The foremost thought in both of their minds was that Matt was soon to leave for his Vista training. They had made no definite plans about what to do about one another. They had never even talked about it.

“What are you thinking about?” Mary ventured, invoking the formula that had worked well in the past several months as the key to his inner mind.

“Thinking about rowing is over, college is over. Everybody's going off in different directions.”

“Does that bother you?”

“Yea, hate to see it.”

“And yet, it's a kind of deal, you can't wait around. Because the place where you're waiting is going away, too. I mean, the whole scene you've been a part of.”

“Yea, that too.”

He reached for her hand. She extended it with a smile and swung herself against him. He placed his sturdy arm around her shoulder.

She nestled against him, not wanting to think about the future, just wanting to savor the moment.

It was a balmy night with a fresh, moist wind that smelled of wet soil and vegetation from a thunderstorm that had swept through just after the final race of the regatta. A thin, gray fog covered the river, here and there revealing the reflected lights of the downtown buildings on the other side.

For about a quarter mile, they walked without talking. Beyond the marina, near some bleachers that had been set up for the regatta, they paused.

Mary sat down in one of the middle rows, on the end. Matt stood beside her, watching the river.

The faint sound of music came toward them across the water from the tavern above the boat club, where the band was still playing. Now and then car lights flashed up as someone left.

Looking toward Mary, Matt caught her in a reflective moment, gazing at the river with a detached, dreamy look on her thoughtful, determined face. He studied that face again as if he had just seen it for the first time. It was an alert, intelligent, honest face, strong and womanly, and yet so pretty and delicate in an old-fashioned way. How different this face was from that of the younger sister! Not nearly so stunning. He had to admit it. But Mary's face had character. He felt that it was superior in some way he couldn't exactly define.

She, too, was thinking about her sister. She shook her head. “Ellie and Stewie and Jimbo, quite a show.”

“Yea, poor Stewball.”

“Thought he might bring out the serious side in her.”

“Bring it out from where?”

“Yea, you're right,” she said, with an aspiration of breath as if laughing, though her dark eyes remained thoughtful, almost sad. “It's just not there.”

“So what? She likes fun.”

“Yea. Fun and romance.”

“You think she's got a serious interest in Morris?”

“Well, yea, as she goes. With her, it’s all kind of, I don't know, an innocent game.” She paused. “And Steward, there's a case, too. Maybe that rarity, a true intellectual, but so quiet and unassuming about it.”

“Yea, he's a very private guy.”

They lapsed into silence again. Matt discovered a large drift log lying about three feet above water level on the steep concrete bank below the bleachers. He sidled down the bank and dragged the log to the water's edge. Then, with heave, he pushed it in. The current caught it and carried it downstream into a cloud of fog.

“Mary,” he said, coming back up the bank, “how long have we been going together?”

“Well, our first date was the day before Valentine's Day.”

“Is that so?”

“You really didn't know that?”

“How would I know that?”

“Well, I did.”

He laughed and started roaming the top of the bank about 30 feet in either direction, looking for another drift log. Unable to find one, he came back and sat down beside her. He leaned forward with his elbows on his thighs, as if restless to go somewhere.

“You ever hear about people getting engaged after four months?” he said, looking down the river.

“Not very often.”

“Neither have I.”

“Seems like it would be hasty.”

“That's what I was thinking, too,” he said, getting up.

She watched him go back over to the embankment. She knew he had made a sincere overture to the subject they had avoided. He looked rebuffed, confused.

He started humming, “Breaking Up Is Hard to Do.”

She laughed. “Well, there are different kinds of promises.”

“Going steady, yea, yea, yea,” he sang in his flat voice, going a

distance further down the bank.

He paused there in the shadows just beyond the circle of light from an arc light beyond the bleachers. There was a machine shed there with a large pile of leaves and grass clippings beside it.

She saw that she had pushed him into one of his dry humor moods. She got up from the bleachers and walked along the top of the bank to where he was standing.

“Well, more than that,” she said softly.

“I'm going to have to write, huh?”

“More than that, too.”

“I'm going to have to call, huh?”

“Matt, please be serious.”

He turned around and looked at her. “I am, Mary. I am.”

“I was thinking, we set up this definite schedule, see.”

She had thought this through beforehand and had been waiting for the right moment to present it.

“Definite times when we see one another that we can both count on. No unsureness, you know. We make that much of a sure commitment. Maybe every four months. We do that three times, for exactly a year.”

“And then what?”

She shrugged. Her face flushed. “Well, then, something more definite.”

Where would we meet then? Back here?”

“Both places. Take turns.”

He didn't reply.

“Me first,” she said, smiling. “I want to see Kentucky.”

“What will you do in the meanwhile?”

“Just classes, Matt. I can be a good way toward a masters in one program, in the nutrition program I was accepted to. Then, after that year, there are more options, for clerkships.”

He continued gazing at the river. He nodded his head slowly.

“What do you think, Matt?”

He walked several feet away from her. He stood looking away from her up the river. “I guess, what I think... dynamite idea.”

“You really think so?”

“Sure.”

“Solves all our questions.”

“Sure.”

“Four months, then,” he said, walking back toward her. He caught her playfully behind the thighs and threw her up over his shoulder like a sack of flour before she knew what was happening. “Four months,” he shouted, spinning around four times in a circle. “Hey, and then what? Four more!”

He started spinning around for four more times.

"Matthew, set me down!" she yelled into his ear, pounding on his back with her small, sturdy fist. "Set me down!"

He finished the second four spins and started on a third.. Then he lost his balance, tottered, and fell into the pile of leaves by the machine shed, with Mary Kass beside him.

They lay on their backs, panting, looking up to the gray swirls of fog moving in front of the clear, starry sky.

She turned to him with a serious, soulful gaze in her dark, lovely eyes and tapped her index finger four times on his lips.

"Just four months," she said softly.

14. VISTA trainee Brandt learns about social problems, meets Dennis Kelly

Matthew Brandt's VISTA training took place in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a two-story, white stucco building that looked like it had been a corner grocery store. The building was a processing center for people from the Appalachian mountains who were relocating to the city for work in the glass factories along the river.

Brandt and five of his fellow trainees, all men, were housed on the second floor where there were three rooms about the size of bedrooms and a small bathroom with a shower. The only other occupant, at the moment, was a man of about 50 whose car had broken down with a punctured radiator on his way to Chicago, where he had been going to look for work. He seemed embarrassed by his situation and didn't say much to the trainees.

Every morning the trainees gathered in the large open room oil the first floor. Here in this room the trainees learned about the Mountain Volunteers, the organization they had been assigned to. They received a brief history of the Appalachian region, based on a book called *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* by Harry Caudill. The history started in Colonial days with the emigration from the debtors' prisons and under-classes of England to South Carolina and Georgia. It continued with the western migration of these people, the Civil War, the inter-clan feuds, the coal mines, the moonshine stills, the unions, leading up to the present dire state of strip mines, high unemployment, and black lung. The trainees also read and discussed other sociological studies of the under-classes in America including *The Other America* by Michael Harrington.

There were 14 trainees in all, including four women who had been placed in the surrounding neighborhood of humble homes and working class families. Everyone in the training group was just out of college. They were all intellectual types of the sort that Brandt associated with Mary Kass. The association made him feel lonely for her. He tried to write to her, as he had promised, but he couldn't get himself to put his thoughts down on paper.

He did have thoughts, though. He took note of them because she had made such a point of how he had thoughts he didn't let anyone in on. He carefully read the books that were given to him, with more seriousness than he had studied at college. He stored up his thoughts, as he had them, so he would have something to tell her when he saw her again.

“In just four months,” he said to himself. Four months seemed like a long time.

Of all the trainees, Brandt was the only one who paid much attention to the man from Kentucky whose car had broken down. On several evenings, he sat down in the little backyard behind the center, smoking

cigarettes with this balding, pale hard-lucker, whose name was Franklin Lauk. Then, when Lauk found a radiator in a wrecking yard, Brandt went with him to get the radiator out of the wreck and helped him put it in the car that had broken down.

The morning Lauk left for Chicago again, Brandt helped him carry his cardboard boxes downstairs to the car.

“Well, you learn them people something, now, when you get down there,” said Lauk with a jagged toothed grin, extending his cigarette-stained hand.

Brandt took the hand and shook it slowly. “Well, I don't know about that.”

“Just don't be expecting to go too fast,” said Lauk, regarding him with weary eyes. “One thing you're going to find out, people down there are just plain hard-headed.”

Brandt remembered that when he heard people talking about everything they were going to do. He kept quiet and listened. He only gave an opinion when asked. As people got to know him, he was asked more. His opinions were almost always skeptical and plainly stated, with his natural humility and dry humor.

Aside from Lauk, the main person he talked to was his room-mate, Dennis Kelly, a doctor's son from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Kelly had spent his boyhood summers on his grandfather's dairy farm in the Wisconsin hill country southwest of Eau Claire. That made for some initial talks and they went on from there.

Kelly was a soft-spoken but talkative, self-described activist. He had been involved in the anti-war movement at the University of Wisconsin. He was a tall, thin, plain-featured youth with awkward physical movements and a clumsy but persistent social presence. His wire-rim glasses and thoughtful eyes gave him a convincing intellectual appearance. He was never at a loss for words or opinions, which he put forth in the most earnest manner.

Brandt and Kelly wound up going for some early morning runs together along the Ohio River. The friendship grew with Kelly's conversations becoming more and more political and Brandt usually just listening and shaking his head.

Several days before the end of training, they went out for drinks together one evening in the beat-up, old Jeep that Kelly had driven out from Wisconsin. They wound up in a working class bar down by the river in an area they had run through on their early morning runs. The interior was smoke-filled and noisy with a baseball game and rock-and-roll music playing loudly at the same time.

After drinking a few beers, Kelly leaned across the table to be heard amidst the general noise. “You know what really impresses me about this

whole thing?" he said, peering at Brandt through his wire-rim glasses. "These people we've been reading about—'Bloody Harlan County,'—guys packing guns in their lunch boxes, meeting on hilltops to avoid being seen—these are the same people that are still down there. All that is still there, somewhere. I just think things are going to happen again. This is a time for change. You can just feel it wherever you go."

"I thought the unions were on the decline," Brandt replied, meeting his friend's earnest eyes. "From what we've been hearing, it doesn't sound like things like in the past will happen again."

"Maybe not for the sake of organizing the unions, Matt. Maybe not on the same scale. But what about the strip mines? What about black lung? You don't think those are substantial issues?"

"I don't know," said Brandt, shrugging his shoulders. "I guess the question is, do they?"

Kelly took a sip of beer. He sat back in his chair and looked around the bar.

"Matt," he said, "have you ever been in any kind of group organizing for anything, like against the draft?"

"No, I never have," said Brandt.

"It's a tremendous feeling, Matt. I can't describe it," Kelly went on. "There's a feeling of strength. You know, the saying that's been going around about power to the people—you can feel that power, really. It doesn't even have to get nasty now, with non-violent resistance. Have you ever looked into that, Gandhi and King?"

"No, I never have," Brandt replied. He was starting to get impatient with the line of argument.

"You ought to, Matt. The times they are a-changing, like Dylan says. We're going to be part of it. It's an exciting time."

Brandt waved him off and turned his eyes to the ball game. He liked Kelly but he didn't like how the talk always got so serious.

Next morning the director of the training program came up to Brandt and said, "Looks like you'll be going to a little town called Crabtree in Letcher County." He pointed to an area in the southeast corner of Kentucky near a long ridge called Pine Mountain.

"How big is it?" said Brandt. "Pretty small. About 300."

"What will I do there?"

"You'll be working with a man named Fletcher Bourne. Also, through him you'll be loosely associated with the local CAP, the community action program. He works part-time for it. Then, of course, you'll be tied to the Mountain Volunteers organization down there. You'll get a sense of how it all fits together after you meet Bourne... And, oh yea, forgot to mention, Bourne has a little newspaper, printed right there in Crabtree."

"What kind of newspaper?"

"County newspaper with a political slant of some kind. Sorry I can't be more specific. I don't know any more about it."

After this last answer, Brandt was quiet. Those were more words then he had said to the director in the entire rest of the two weeks of training. He didn't like the idea of being "political" despite Kelly's enthusiasm about it. He felt like he was being pushed into something before he was ready.

That afternoon he made several tries at writing a letter to Mary Kass. Finally be scribbled out a short note saying: "Got through training okay. Heading out tomorrow for a little town called Crabtree. Fill you in later on the details." He paused at that point, trying to decide whether to put something like "Love" or "Fondly" before his name.

He wound up signing it "Sincerely, Matt," and mailed it at once, knowing he would tear it up if he waited too long.

[Chapter 14 notes]

15. Steward starts Air Force ROTC camp with roommate Orin Brown

"Steward, Thomas!"

"Here, sir!"

"Pilot candidate?"

"No, sir."

Dressed in civilian clothes, Tom Steward stood at attention before the training officer assigned to his flight, Capt. Ellwood Erland. Behind him stood the dozen or so fellow members of his flight not yet assigned to their rooms.

The location was Fairchild Air Force Base in eastern Washington, just south of Spokane. The date was Monday, June 26, 1967. It was 9 a.m. Steward had been at the base for less than 12 hours, but he had already learned that the training officers had a special regard for pilot candidates. He had also learned that a good number, maybe more than half, of the trainees were enrolled in the program for the main object of being able to attend graduate school or the last two years of college without being drafted.

With a stolid, sun-brown face that betrayed no emotion, Capt. Erland read Steward's introductory papers. He was not quite the "lean, mean, and keen" figure, as another trainee had described it, that was common stock among the officers who wore wings. He was shorter, thicker, and more out-of-shape looking. His expression was more often one of chagrin.

Erland had never been a training officer before. He had been given the duty temporarily after returning from a tour in Vietnam. He had also never been to college. He had come up through the ranks, going into officers' school and pilot training after attaining the rank of staff sergeant on a ground crew in the Korean war.

Hearing some suppressed laughter at the back of the group, Erland looked up from his clipboard with a pained expression. He called the group to attention.

"Some of you think the Air Force is going to be an easy ride," he said. "Well, I'm here to make sure you give it what it deserves. Men have died living up to the ideals of the uniform you're going to be wearing."

He observed the group with the clipboard at his side. In response to his admonishment, the trainees had become more quiet and serious in expression. They appeared to be in good condition. They could have passed for a group of athletes reporting for the first day of practice.

"Steward, second floor, room 201," the captain said.

"Yes, sir," Steward replied with a sharp salute.

He pivoted and stepped off in a reverse direction as he had learned in high school in his ROTC classes.

Steward's correctness earned him some amused comments as he marched off to the exterior steps that led up to the second floor of the barracks. The barracks was a long, two-story building that looked like a drab college dormitory.

"I want all of you to march like that," Erland said. "By the time you leave here, you're going to look sharp or you won't be asked to continue in the program next fall. I'll have something to say about that, and I intend to say what I think."

Unaware that he had been used as an example, Steward climbed the exterior wooden steps. He pushed through the door into a long, plain hall of a sort he was already familiar with.

"Which one you looking for, Steward?" someone called from one of the rooms.

"201. Room 201."

"Last one on the right, you lucky dog."

"Lucky dog, how?"

"Nice view of the parade ground."

Steward went in and discovered that his room-mate was a Utah Mormon named Orin Brown. By chance he had talked to Brown earlier that morning. Brown was a pleasant-looking young man of medium height with a broad forehead, bright, cheerful dark eyes, and the build of a wrestler.

"Well, I'd give you a tour of the quarters," said Brown after they had exchanged greetings, "but you've seen it all at first glance."

"Yea, and it's not bad," Steward replied.

The room was just wide enough for the two single beds and the walkway in between. On either side of the door, at the head of each bed, was a tall gray locker. At the foot of the beds was a single large window which, from the door where Steward stood, provided only a view of telephone wires and a cloudless blue sky.

Brown had already made his bed neatly with the brown wool top blanket neatly tucked in at the corners. The sheets and covers for the other bed were neatly folded and stacked on the bare mattress.

Steward liked the look of the place. He liked plain surroundings. He patted the bed. It was solid and firm.

"Locker here's got a place to hang up your uniform, when you get it," said Brown. "Tray here comes out, makes a little desk."

"Everything we need."

"Couldn't be better."

Steward went over and looked out the window. Across the street, beyond the corner and exterior stairway of another barracks, was the parade ground that the other trainee had referred to. It was an immense paved lot the size of six or eight football fields with streets on all sides.

Beyond the parade ground was another immense flat area that looked like an airfield.

Several planes were parked on the supposed airfield, beside a tall, narrow building that looked like a control tower. The planes were immense, also, considering how large they appeared compared to a transport truck parked just in front of them.

"Them's the big birds," said Orin Brown, looking over Steward's shoulder as Steward stood at the window. "B52's like they're using in Vietnam. Would you believe a wingspan of a hundred yards? Would you believe 90,000 feet high?"

"How do they know what they're hitting?"

"Hey, that's the beauty of it. They don't."

"What are they bombing?"

"You don't follow, huh?"

"No, I guess I don't, to that extent."

"Right now, they are bombing mainly the Ho Chi Minh Trail," Brown said, rising on his toes to look over Steward's shoulders again. He withdrew a couple of steps and sat down on his neatly made bed, "Road coming down from the North that they bring all their stuff down on."

"Yes, I've heard about that," Steward responded in his earnest manner, turning from the window, also.

He went over to his own bed and unstacked the sheets and blankets to make it.

"You in to be a pilot?"

"Not on your life. History. Political Science."

"What do you suppose they'll do with that?"

"Now that's a good question."

Orin Brown leaned back against the wall with his hands behind his head in a relaxed posture but the dark eyes stayed alert. The amiable expression never left his face.

"Tell you one thing," he said, leaning forward again, "from the point of view of the Air Force, this present phase doesn't appear to be letting up. They're bombing the trail every day. Johnson is not about to give in now without some real concessions. And now they've started in on Hanoi and Haiphong, the oil dumps. You see the pictures of that?"

"Yes, I did, actually. On the way out, in Billings," Steward said, recalling an aerial view of black smoke rising up from the round tops of the tanks.

"Made some good hits."

"Sure looked like it," Steward said. "Same kind of planes? The big ones?"

"Now that I don't know," Brown admitted reluctantly.

"No, they must have been F4 's off the aircraft carriers in the Gulf of

Tonkin. The B52's come way across from Cambodia. Big base there. Kuala Lumpur."

"Ah, yes. Think I heard about that, also," Steward replied softly. He was really very interested in the history of it, the military movements. He had done a lot of reading on the Second World War. He was starting to see that his room-mate had an avid interest in all aspects of the war. No doubt it would be an interesting summer, from that standpoint.

"Only thing I don't get," he said, trying to tuck in the corners of the top blanket as they were tucked in on Brown's bed, "how come they got so many of the big ones here? What's the connection?"

"No connection, Stewman," said Brown, jumping up. "Here, look, like this," he said, demonstrating how to do the corner. "This is the normal, peacetime Air Force. Strategic Air Command. SAC. These are the ones, they keep several in the air, loaded, at all times, day and night, so they will be up there ready to strike back in case the rest of us get hit by a nuclear bomb."

"Nice to know that," Steward replied, giving the bed a final tug.

'"Oh, you got a lot to learn, Mr. Steward," said Brown, laughing. He gave Steward a hardy pat on the shoulder.

Later, in the mess hall, they saw the rest of the flights for the first time. There were about 200 or so trainees at the long tables. Every- one was shouting back and forth since groups from the same states or colleges had been split up into different flights.

Soon Orin Brown was involved in another discussion, this time with a law student from Idaho who announced that he planned to go into politics after completing his four years in the Air Force. He was the oldest, most settled, most comfortable looking, trainee. He could have passed for 30 years old and in fact he had a look of middle-aged complacence. Steward, several seats down, could only catch the general drift of the discussion. They were talking about a diplomatic initiative that had occurred earlier in the year involving the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. Apparently, the British prime minister, Harold Wilson, had convinced Alexei Kozygin, the Soviet premier., to act as a go-between between the Americans and the North Vietnamese. Kozygin had then succeeded in getting the Vietnamese to agree to a halt in operations in exchange for a halt in the American bombings. But Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. president, had backed out, insisting that the operations should cease as a pre-condition for a halt in the bombings.

"What could we do?" Brown said, gesturing to the two or three people in hearing range who seemed interested in the topic. "Any time we stop the bombings, the Cong start moving their stuff down the trail again night and day.

"But there has to a slight accommodation," said the lawyer-to-be. "If

not, the war will continue to escalate. Are we really ready for even greater involvement?"

After supper, everyone milled around on the small lawn outside in the dry, sauna-like heat.

Seeing a plane rising from some low warehouse buildings about a mile away, Steward concluded that that was the direction of the barracks. He decided to walk back to get a better look at the base and sort out his thoughts.

As he walked, he looked with interest at the buildings and general layout of the base. He passed a green area that turned out to be a golf course with a drab-looking club house.

Officers stood in front of the club house by their sporty cars. Some of them had young women hanging on their arms.

Steward noticed some ranch-type houses beyond the golf course. They appeared to be residences of enlisted men. The whole area was flat and functional in appearance without the color or visible energy that might have been found in a city.

Steward thought about the discussion that had taken place. between Orin Brown and the lawyer-to-be. This discussion, and others he had heard on the base, differed from similar discussions he had heard in college. On campus the burden of proof was on the war. Here the war was assumed to be valid. The discussions went in the direction of how the war could be won. He felt a little disturbed about that. It wasn't that he disagreed with the basic assumption, exactly. He just wasn't sure where he stood or what would happen if he ever got a mind to express a contrary opinion.

Passing close to the airfield, he paused at an iron mesh fence to look at the impressive array of planes, trucks and military equipment.

He walked close to a B52 to verify that its wing span was a hundred yards as Brown had said.

A roar of engines drew his attention from that. He watched as a fighter jet of some kind charged down the runway, lifted off, and shot straight up like a rocket. The plane disappeared in the twilight sky, leaving a long white plume that caught the red and orange sunlight from beyond the horizon.

[Chapter 15 notes]

16. Steward gives the Air Force camp his sincere best effort

The next morning Steward's flight awoke to reveille piped through the public address system at six o'clock. They filed out in sweat suits to the immense parade ground across the street. The sun had just risen above the long warehouse buildings on the east side of the parade ground. The air was hot and dry.

They lined up in long rows, one flight per row, about ten rows deep. A lean officer in a gray sweat suit led the workout. He was Col. Clarence Strom, the lead officer of the summer training program. The workout consisted of football-style calisthenics done at a rapid pace with no rest between exercises.

"All right! All right!" called the colonel after each exercise. He was a young pilot's ideal—36 years old and already a "bird" colonel, slender and youthful in appearance, with a look of keen physical training. He had done two tours in Vietnam.

He went through all the exercises without a sign of fatigue and fell in after the last man when the group filed out for the final five laps of the parade ground.

Steward, in a middle row, sloughed along behind the rest at a trot then noticed a man coming by the others at a faster pace on the outside. He pulled out behind him and soon was in the midst of a group of about a dozen trainees running in the outside corridor at the pace of a good long distance workout.

Soon he heard heavy breathing behind him and saw Col. Strum pulling up into the back of the pack. He was running in a T-shirt. His sweat shirt was tied around his waist.

"Hey, you guys are serious," he said to laughter. "Keep this up, we might get some competition going! Give us something to work for!"

"All right!" called someone, echoing the colonel's workout refrain.

Steward finished near the front of the little group, a half lap in front of the main body of runners. He realized that he had just set him- self up for an exhausting daily run at a time of day when he was least inclined. But he was determined to do his best as a trainee, including physical training.

Later that day, the trainees received "buzz cuts" from the barber. Then they went to the quartermaster store for their tan summer uniforms and ankle-length black books.

Dressed in their new uniforms, they stood in the blazing heat of the late afternoon, listening to the tense, disgruntled voice of Capt. Erland as he outlined the schedule for the rest of the summer.

"Workout in the morning, breakfast, inspection, drill, classwork, lunch, demonstration or seminar, drill, supper, study, bed. The classwork will be in all aspects of Air Force operation. The seminar will bring in

selected presenters," Erland read from his clipboard.

"Sir?" came an eager voice.

"Yes, Mr. Brown."

"What kind of presenters?"

"I have no idea."

"Sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Brown."

"Will we get an introduction to whatever we're going to wind up in, in the regular Air Force... I mean, to the general area, at least?"

"You will be located and orientated, Brown," Erland replied, '"as will everyone else."

As usual, Erland looked uncomfortable in his uniform. He looked like he had recently gained weight. His stomach pushed against the glossy tan shirt, spreading it apart at the lower buttons.

"Can I ask when, sir?"

"No, you cannot."

Thus began the daily schedule. Each morning Steward joined the group of runners in the outside lane. He took part in everything like a student trying to get an A average, though apparently no records were kept. He was the only one who took notes in classes.

He even took the inspections seriously, which he hadn't done in high school. After making his own bed and preparing his own boots and clothes, he went up and down the hall helping anybody else who had fallen behind and helping with the general chores like mopping and polishing the hall.

The situation was ideal for showing his best qualities. He was quiet to the point of being almost stand-offish, but he soon became appreciated for his steady hard work, serious attitude, and contribution to the team. Also, he genuinely found the activities interesting, especially the tours of the various locations on the base where different outfits worked.

"Located and orientated" soon became a running joke. Every time Orin Brown came by, someone shouted, "Hey, Orin, you get located and orientated yet?"

Even Capt. Erland found it amusing.

Finally one day, after the joke had been going around for about two weeks, Brown came back with the surprise answer, "Yes."

Everyone crowded around as he told them. "Intelligence? Wow! Hey, ol' Orin's going to be a spy"

"Well, spy, I don't know about that," Brown protested, laughing. But he obliged that evening with the new joke, walking up and down the hall in a trench coat and dark glasses that someone provided.

Later, in the room with Steward, he turned more serious. The two had hit it off well as room-mates. Often they talked late into the night after

lights out, discussing the experiences of training.

"So you think this will be good for you, huh, Orin?" said Steward to start the discussion. "You seem pretty excited about it."

"Oh, no doubt about that," Brown replied, getting up from his bed and going over to the window. The sun was low in the sky below a bank of gray clouds edged in orange and gold. A B52, with its immense wings nearly touching the ground, was taxiing down a runway with red lights blinking. Another B52 was revving up its engines, apparently for an evening flight. "You know what really gets me going," he said, looking back to where Steward sat, polishing his boots, "the worldwide perspective... the great struggle between good and evil." He laughed. "Guess I'm getting carried away."‘

"Oh, I don't know," Steward answered softly. "I do think there's a struggle on some level. I don't know how it comes out in politics." Orin came back and sat on his bed next to a little stack of books. He always had one. This particular evening there were some history books and books of maps. He loved to look at maps.

"Tell you what I really, truly believe in," Orin said after a pause, his face growing thoughtful, "this whole domino thing, the theory that one nation falls to Communism, then the nation next to it, and so on."

"Yes. "

"I really believe that. I believe there's a worldwide struggle, for democracy and freedom."

He pulled the largest book from the stack and thumbed through it.

It was a historical atlas with colored areas representing political states and boundaries at various times in history. He found a map labeled "The Free World and the Communist Block," and handed it across for Steward to look at.

The map was a view of the world from the perspective of the North Pole. The Soviet Union, China, and the Warsaw Pact formed a continuous area, colored red, from Eastern Europe to Japan, and from the Arctic Sea to India and Southeast Asia. This area was like a large half-circle on the right side of the map. The United States and Canada, on the left, colored blue, were a much smaller area, but there were other blue areas all around the world that contained the red area like a ring of islands. Included in them were Central American and Caribbean countries, the NATO alliance in Europe, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, East Pakistan, South Vietnam, the Philippines, Formosa, South Korea, Japan, and Hawaii. The map also showed the location of heavy bomber bases, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and strategic fleets.

Steward studied the map quietly, impressed with the magnitude and organization of the opposing sides. There were maybe 40 heavy bomber sites and a dozen or so missile sites in the American contiguous states

alone. The Soviet bloc appeared to have a lesser number, more concentrated around the high population areas near Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev.

"As you can see," said Brown, coming over to sit beside him, "the whole world is lined up in battle lines. This is the great struggle of our moment in history."

"Well, yea," said Steward, nodding. "I can see it's there, and we're part of it because we're Americans and inherit these traditions. I guess I only see a problem with it if the little guys, the little countries, are drawn in without really having a sense of it ... to the extent, almost, where they just become props."

"But, Tommie, their stake in this is every bit as big as ours," Orin replied, his voice rising with insistence, though they were both almost whispering since several of the nearby rooms were already dark.

"Every bit as big as ours," he repeated.

"Well, yea, you got a point there," Steward said, not truly convinced. "I never thought of the world being divided like that so strongly."

Soon afterwards, Brown stacked up his books neatly again and they pit out the lights. Steward lay awake listening to the sound of engines from the nearby airfield, mulling over what Orin had said.

The world view of opposing camps remained in his mind, the spectacle of the red bloc opposed and contained by the blue bloc like two groups of chess players. Of course, he had heard it all before. He himself believed it to a certain extent. But he felt there was something slightly amiss in it. It was the possibility that the two sides were nothing more than colonial empires with their political philosophies just rationales like the "white man's burden" of the 19th century. He had never really thought it through.

[Chapter 16 notes]

17. Steward "orientates" with Air Force social worker Gary Hansard

The next morning Capt. Erland handed Steward a slip of paper with a name and address on it: "Gary Hansard, Base Hospital, Ward 3A, Room 347."

"You're getting orientated today," he said with an air of dismissal. "Here's the information. You can walk over there or take the transport. Be there at ten hundred sharp."

Steward saluted smartly and went to get his notebook. It was already a quarter to ten. He set out at once, walking. The hospital was about a half mile away. It was a modern brick building with a central lobby and two four-story wings.

Steward noticed, on entering, that the hospital had a more subdued atmosphere than a civilian hospital. Finding no receptionist or volunteers in the lobby, he went down a long central hall and found the elevator.

Upstairs, on the third floor, he encountered a specialist in a white uniform who directed him to an office at the end of a side hall. Looking into the office, he saw a middle-aged man with thinning reddish brown hair standing by a window. The man was dressed in a rumpled white shirt with a solid blue tie and tan trousers.

Hearing Steward's knock, he turned a pale, tired face toward him. "You must be Tom Steward," he said in a soft voice lacking enthusiasm or inflection. "I'm Dr. Hansard, as you must have assumed."

He came across the room and extended his hand.

"Yes, sir," said Steward, thinking that maybe "sir" was the wrong address since apparently the man was a civilian. He grasped the hand expecting a firm handshake, but there was no firmness returned on the other side.

"And, as I understand, you have an interest in counseling or social work in the Air Force," Hansard went on, regarding Steward with gray eyes deeply set in shadows.

"Yes, sir," said Steward, nodding.

"Well, I'll do my best to show you around. We can start right here, with this office. In such an office as this, you'll spend about half of your time because half of medicine is keeping records, as you probably already know."

Steward merely nodded. He hadn't known that, and he had no sense of whether it was good or bad. He looked around the room and observed that there was nothing personal about it. There was just a large desk, the chair that went with it, and several large filing cabinets. On the desk was a yellow, legal-size tablet with handwritten notes. There were no books lying around, no wall hangings, no plaques, no diplomas. The windows looked out to a cloudless blue sky.

"Any questions?" asked Hansard.

"No, I guess not," Steward replied.

"Then, let's go for a walk. I'll show you around."

With Hansard a half step ahead and moving slowly, they went up the side hall to a longer hall with numbered rooms on either side. Some of the rooms had beds and patients in them. Others were empty except for several chairs arranged as if for meetings or consultations.

"What we deal with here are primarily three things," Hansard said softly, almost in a whisper, as they walked. "The usual things you deal with in the civilian world—psychological or psychiatric problems of one kind or another. Then we deal with soldiers who come back from the war. Lately, the cases of this type are growing. Thirdly, we deal with domestic problems that arise as a result of people going off to the war, spouses who are left alone and can't quite deal with it or marital discord when the soldier returns."

"Yes, I understand," said Steward softly, trying to take it all in. They paused by a large open room with windows all along the back wall. There were several people sitting alone in chairs. There appeared to be no interaction between them. They almost seemed unaware of one another. One woman had her face in her hands. All that could be seen of her were her small hands, bedecked with jeweled rings, and her frizzy mane of blonde hair. Suddenly she lowered her hands and Steward saw that she was beautiful. She noticed him looking and covered her face again.

"This is our community room," said Hansard. "We have our group meetings here. In the smaller rooms that you maybe noticed, we have one to one meetings or small group meetings. I don't know what else to tell you. Everything else is in the interaction of people or in the medical therapy administered by the psychiatric staff. To get a sense of it, you'd have to hang around and talk to people and observe what the staff really does. I guess, all I can give you, within the confines of your visit today, is a sense of the physical place. This is the physical setting, more or less, that you'd find yourself in in any Air Force hospital."

Steward stood with his notebook in his hand, thinking he should probe the situation more with intelligent questions. But his mind felt blank. He felt very tired. There was something about the whole setting that made him want to run away from it. He felt no kinship or attraction for Hansard. The image conveyed was not one that he aspired to himself. He could not imagine himself as such a man as this, confined in a world like this of beige-colored rooms.

Later, after looking at some of the individual rooms, Steward and Hansard sat in Hansard's office as he smoked a cigarette.

"Used to be, in a war, the main thing you encountered was shell

shock," said Hansard in a flat, matter-of-fact tone. “You have a different thing in this war."

“How's that?" said Steward.

He sat in the corner of the room by the window on a chair he had brought in from across the hall. From his chair, he could see the evenly spaced ranch style houses on the outside of the base. They were pastel colors—yellow, lime, pink, and beige. Beyond them was the flat, brown expanse of the surrounding country. The area had been gripped in a drought throughout the hot summer.

“You have a phenomenon unique to this war that often a soldier, especially the airman, lives in almost a home situation, a very normal situation, as if they never left America, maybe sitting in a base or a bar or something,” said Hansard with an uplifted hand. “Then all of a sudden they get thrown into a real war situation, you know, maybe flying out into it within several hours, or being ported in by helicopter. And all of a sudden they see the horrors of war. Then, if they don’t get hurt, they’re back in that homelike situation. Plus there is reported to be a fair amount of usage of marihuana and hallucinogenic drugs. It makes things seem unreal. It makes the real war experience more horrible than a lot of wars were in the past.”

“How’s that?” said Steward, trying to imagine the situation that Hansard described. He hadn’t known that people were ferried in and out of action so abruptly.

“Because the psychic numbness isn’t there,” said Hansard, tapping his cigarette on the ash tray. “The psyche is not protected by having seen horrible things to a point where they lose their psychological power.”

“People get hit harder by it?”

“Oh, yea... Then they come back, you know, and they can’t quite deal with life in the States again after seeing some of the horrible things over there. They can’t relate to their spouses like they used to. They’re not so carefree. So marital problems or lover problems develop.

They tend to split apart but it’s very painful on both sides. And it isn’t always the one who stayed behind who pulls away from it. Often it’s the one who went away.”

“Why’s that?”

Hansard shrugged. “Sometimes that same unreality.”

After they finished talking, Hansard showed Steward some files, showed him how they kept records of people seen, and so on. Then he accompanied Steward down to the front lobby, shook his hand, and wished him good luck.

“Good luck to you, also,” Steward called as he turned toward the front door.

He pushed through the door into the blazing heat of the sun, glad to

be away from the hospital. He had gotten a different, better impression of Hansard as they talked about the effects of the war, but he still felt drained and repulsed by the whole situation.

Arriving back at the barracks, he encountered Capt. Erland as he came around the building to go up the exterior stairs. Erland was standing there, looking disgruntled as always, smoking a cigarette.

“So you get orientated and located?” said Erland, repeating the joke that the trainees had been saying but not seeming to find any humor in it at all. His face remained sour.

“Yes, I did, sir,” said Steward, stopping. “What did you think of it?”

“Just a hospital, sir. Quiet.”

“See any guns around there?”

“No, sir, I didn’t.”

Steward paused for a moment, waiting for the captain to speak again, but Erland turned and looked away from him as he took another puff of his cigarette.

Steward proceeded to the steps and started up them.

“Think that’s fair, Steward?” came the captain’s voice from behind him. “Some people going off to die and other people wearing the same uniform sitting in a hospital waiting for them to come back in need of patching?”

“No, sir. I don’t think it is,” said Steward, looking around.

He had, in fact, been thinking about this very subject as he walked back to the barracks, though it had occurred to him, also, that people like Orin Brown who went into things like intelligence also escaped the brunt of the service.

Erland took a couple of steps toward him. He threw down the cigarette into the parking lot beside the dry, brown grass.

“You know what happens sometimes, Steward?"

“No, sir, I don't."

“These guys of off to the war. They leave their wives or sweethearts behind. Out of loneliness the wives or sweethearts go to these hospital guys for company. Then when the guys who went off come back, they find out there's been an affair, or worse. Does that seem right to you?"

“No, sir, it doesn’t.”

Again Steward waited to hear if another comment would be coming, but Erland passed by him and walked around the side of the building. Steward continued up to his room and stood at the window watching the giant planes getting ready for an afternoon flight.

18. Brandt arrives at his assigned VISTA worksite in Crabtree, Kentucky

Before leaving the training center the next morning, Matthew Brandt stood upstairs in the small bathroom observing himself in the mirror while a steady rain lashed against the bathroom window. His dark hair had grown out to almost the length of a normal haircut. He no longer had the shorn look of the rowing season. He had lost his ruddy tan. All for the best, he thought. He was glad that he was no longer a college student. He wanted to take on the responsibilities of a man. He was eager to get on to his new situation, for whatever it turned out to be.

It was still raining when he headed out in a white government van with four other trainees and a distracted driver named John Stanton who made no pretense of having an interest in the anti-poverty program. The rain continued all day while the other trainees were let out in little towns along the way. Brandt's town was the last drop-off.

The woods seemed to get thicker and the valleys narrower as the trip progressed. Brandt noticed a lot of poor-looking houses with chickens loose in the front yard and old cars or trucks in the weeds at the edge of the yard. People, usually old, sat on front porches. Sometimes a young woman could be seen with children hanging on her legs. Ravines were littered with trash. The roads were in dire need of repair. The little towns had vacant, boarded up buildings.

Reaching Letcher County, with the other volunteers all gone, Brandt watched ahead as Stanton steered the van around a steep bank and along a creek toward a water tower and church steeple in the distance. Closer to those landmarks, Stanton turned off at an angle across a creek on a road that turned into the main street of small town.

The small town consisted of a cluster of paint-worn houses and red-brick buildings in the midst of steep, wooded hills. The rain had stopped but a gray sky hung low above the quiet scene.

Stanton continued up the main street past a motley line of local business establishments. "Crabtree Kitchen," "Lestor & Lennox, Attorneys at Law," and "Martha's Everything Store," were among the signs that Brandt noticed. Near the end of the street was a white-plank church with a three- story steeple,—the same steeple, Brandt noted, that had been visible in the distance, from outside of town. At the side of the church was a sign: "Crabtree Community Action Program."

"Well, this is it, looks like," Stanton said, pulling to the curb. He turned off the motor and stretched out his skinny legs below his ample stomach. He turned his unanimated face toward Brandt. "Might as well go in, have a look see."

Brandt jumped from the car, with a sigh of relief that the journey was over. He followed the green pants and shirt of his scarce-of-words driver

up a sidewalk beside a low flagstone wall to the basement door of the church.

He watched from behind as Stanton leaned toward the door, gave it a tentative yank, and swung it open. Inside the door was a large, empty room with a bulletin board covered with newspaper articles, photographs, and information sheets on government programs. Matthew looked into the room, disappointed that no other human being was in sight. After all the fanfare he had heard in training about the important job he was going to be doing, he had expected that someone would be waiting for on hand to greet him upon his arrival.

A bulletin board on the side of the room was covered with newspaper articles, posters, and notices about community meetings. The display, in general, had the same vague political quality that Brandt had noticed was present now wherever he was led in his new occupation.

In a side room designated by a office sign as “Crabtree CAP” stood a large, paper-cluttered desk with folding chairs set up around it as if for a meeting. The coffee pot sitting on a burner on a table by the desk had old coffee in it that had boiled down into a bottom layer of a tar- like residue. The pot seemed on the point of blowing up.

John Stanton turned off the burner and stood with his hands in his pockets, nodding. “Might as well go on down to the newspaper office,” he said with a shrug.

They got back in the van and drove down the main street looking for the newspaper office. They found it two blocks away, located in a one-story cement block building with a large, plate glass window in front. A large blue and white sign running all along the front above the window and front door said “Miner Mountaineer—Voice of Letcher County.”

“Might as well go in,” Stanton said, pointing with his chin to the front door. “Ask them, is Fletcher Bourne there.”

Brandt got out and pushed through the front door into a small front lobby with a counter like a hotel. Behind the counter sat a heavy-set woman with frosted hair.

“Looking for Fletcher Bourne,” said Brandt.

“Oh, are you the new VISTA?” said the woman, rising from her desk.

“Yes, I am. Supposed to report to him.”

“Well, welcome to Crabtree!”

“Thank you,” Brandt replied, bowing his head slightly.

“Well, you’re jes’ going to kill us. Fletcher tol’ me you’uz coming in tomorrow. I don’t know where he is. He went off with his notebook. No tellin’ what the man is up to.”

“Oh.”

“Tell you what. I’m just about to go home. I see him, though, I’ll tell him to stop down and see you. You going to stay down there at the little

camp?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I think you are. That's what Fletcher tol' me. It's the only one place to stay around here, less'n you go to somebody's house. He said you'uz going to stay there 'til you get settled."

Going back to the van, Brandt found Stanton slumped over the steering wheel. He opened the door and Stanton looked up, his eyes red with fatigue.

"Bourne's not there," Brandt announced. "Lady in there said to go down to some kind of little camp." He got in the van and sat forward on the seat with his hand on the dashboard.

Stanton nodded. Without a word, he started the engine and made a U-turn back up the lackluster main street toward their original entry point into the town. Just before reaching the bridge on which they had crossed over the creek on their way into town, Stanton took a right turn over a low bridge without railings. Brandt looked off from this bridge and saw that it crossed the same creek a little further downstream.

Just beyond the bridge, tucked up against the side of a steep hill, was a little group of gray and white buildings in a wooded area overgrown with weeds. Stanton turned in toward the buildings on the gravel access road and stopped.

"What is this place?" asked Brandt.

"Old motel. Used to be," Stanton replied with a yawn. "Still is, kind of. Just doesn't have a sign."

"Who stays here?"

"Truckers mostly, driving through. People shacking up."

They got out. Stanton unloaded Brandt's two suitcases from the back of the van. He set them on the gravel road and pointed to a yellow house that stood slightly apart from the other buildings.

"That's the office there," he said. "Knock on the back door."

"They're expecting me?" asked Brandt, squinting at the yellow house. There was a red dog house by the back door. Towels and underwear hung on a clothes line.

"Said they had it all worked out," said Stanton.

He closed the back gate of the van and went around to the driver side door. He stood with his hand on the door handle.

"Well, thank you, John," said Brandt, realizing that Stanton was about to leave.

He picked up his suitcases to move them out of the way.

"Glad to oblige," Stanton replied, opening the door. "You take care now, you hear?"

He nodded with a blank expression, swung into the seat, and closed the door without looking back again at Brandt. With out any further word

or gesture, he maneuvered the van around and drove back over the bridge and around the next corner.

Brandt watched as the van passed over the bridge further upstream. He set down his suitcases on the side of the road by the long shaft of a fallen tree and walked up toward the yellow house.

A large, black dog emerged from the dog house and barked" loudly at him as he ducked under the clothes hanging on the line to reach the back door. The door opened slightly before he could knock.

"You the new VISTA?" said a woman from behind the door.

"Yes," Brandt answered, tilting his head to look at her. "They said they had made arrangements."

"Number six is ready. Key's on the table by the bed."

"Thank you," he replied, but the door had already closed.

Brandt walked back to the gray and white cabins, looking up at the steep, pine-covered slopes on either side. He found number six and went in. It was a small, plain cabin consisting of a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen area on the back wall. The bedroom contained a beige padded chair, a table with a lamp, and a single bed covered with a green spread. There was no radio, television or phone. The kitchen area had a four-burner gas stove, a small refrigerator, and a rust-stained sink.

Brandt threw himself down on the bed and lay staring at the ceiling, trying to decide what to do. It was about five o'clock. He didn't really expect that Bourne would come by. He decided to call it quits for the day and go down to the newspaper office the next morning. He felt a little hungry but he didn't want to walk back into town looking for food. Later, after dark, he looked out and saw a big truck parked on the road between the cabins.

He went out and found a man of about 35, with coal-black, scraggly hair and a sallow, lean face, sitting beside the truck on the ground with his back against a tree.

"Care for a beer?" said the driver, looking up.

"Boy, would I ever!" Brandt replied, drawing near.

He took the beer and bottle opener extended in his direction, opened the bottle, and stood beside a hoar-barked, old oak tree, sipping the beer.

"That your own rig?" he said to make conversation.

"Belongs to my pa," the driver responded, observing Brandt more closely as he detected the Yankee accent.

Brandt noticed that something was slightly amiss, but he wasn't sure what it was.

"What you got in there?" he persisted.

"Groceries," the driver replied in a less friendly tone. "Drop them off in each town."

They were silent for a moment. There was an air of strain.

"Where you from?" said the driver,

"Minnesota. Twin Cities," Brandt replied.

"What are you doing down here?"

"VISTA volunteer, Came to work at the CAP."

"CAP? What's that?"

"Community action program."

The driver held off a little more in attitude. He took a long sip of beer. "Government, huh?"

"Yes, it gets government money," said Brandt.

"Oh, they got plenty of that," the driver said with finality, getting up. He brushed off the back of his pants and took up the brown bag containing the remaining beers.

"Well, you take care now," he said. "Got to head in. Got to get her rolling early."

"Sure. Hey, thanks again for the beer!" said Brandt, extending his hand, but the man either didn't see the extended hand or didn't want to shake it.

19. Brandt meets his boss, Fletcher Bourne, and gets shown around

Matthew Brandt looked out of his cabin window the next morning to see the gray clouds still there, pressing against the scraggly pines on the upper ridges of the hills. The grocery truck was gone. An old green pick-up stood at the farthest cabin, at the edge of the woods.

He did some sit-ups and push-ups and prepared for the day. He went out dressed in his usual baggy gray workpants and a dark green shirt with cut-off sleeves. Under his arm he carried an athletic bag containing his jacket and the papers he was supposed to give to Bourne. At the last minute he had also put in the book by Caudill. He figured he would maybe be in for hours of sitting around, waiting for something to happen.

At the little bridge just down the road from the motel, he stopped to watch the creek where it narrowed and tumbled over rocks. From here he could see a neighborhood of a few city blocks with mostly two-story, box- frame houses painted white and tan and muted colors. Some of the houses were in need of paint, but the scene, in general, was not as abject as he had expected, considering what he had heard in training about the dire state of affairs.

Walking down the main street toward the church where he and Stanton had stopped the day before, he noticed that several of the brick buildings in the heart of the little downtown appeared to have been boarded up for a considerable time. The only activity he saw was at the gas station where several vehicles were in line for gas. Some men stood there around a car that was up on the hoist for repairs.

At the church he found a black Chevy pick-up parked out front. He went along the sidewalk and down the several steps to the basement and found there an unimposing man who appeared to be about 60 years old with curly grayish black hair swept straight back from his brow.

The man was standing on the far side of the open room, holding a push broom. He set the broom against the wall and came across the room, brushing off his hands on his faded jeans.

“Well, you must be Matthew Brandt,” he said with an unaffected smile, revealing several gaps where teeth were missing. “I’m Fletcher Bourne. Welcome to Kentucky.”

He extended a small, thin hand with bony knuckles that appeared to be stained with motor oil or black ink.

“Thank you,” Brandt replied in his flat voice, gripping the extended hand without returning the smile.

“Sorry I missed you yesterday.”

“Oh, that’s all right.”

Bourne was smaller and less refined in appearance than Brandt had expected him to be. He was only about 5’6” in height, and thin to the

point of almost looking malnourished. His face was pale and slightly yellowish in hue with prominent cheek bones and deeply set gray eyes beneath bushy eyebrows that were grayish black like his hair. He looked more like the coalminers Brandt had seen in pictures than like the newspaperman he had imagined. But he had a quality of alertness and sincerity that Brandt immediately liked.

"Well, I suppose they told you everything," said Bourne in a raspy, high-pitched voice, steadily regarding Brandt with his keen gray eyes. "I'm to be your boss, kind of, mainly 'cause I'm the one that got it arranged, through the CAP, for you to come here. The way it works in these set-ups, as I understand, you got your Mountain Volunteers organization, you meet with them once or twice't a month, or whatever, and then you got me, on a day to day basis. As to what exactly you'll do, we'll talk about that more as we go along today... Main thing today, we got a meeting up in the next county. It'll be a good thing for you, you can meet some of the other people, including the MV's, we call them, the Mountain Volunteers... Care for some coffee?"

"Yes, sir," Brandt replied with his innate courtesy for elders.

He didn't usually drink it, but he was glad for the opportunity to get away from Bourne's eyes for a moment.

They walked into the office that Brandt had stopped in the previous day. There was a pot of coffee perking there. The folding chairs that had been arranged around the desk the previous day were now stacked up against the wall.

Bourne poured coffee into two paper cups and handed one of the cups to Brandt. He sat down on the top of the desk and took a sip of coffee, resuming his steady gaze. He liked what he saw. He had been expecting to find some kind of reserved, intellectual college student with fancy ideas. This young man appeared to be down-to-earth.

"They give you any kind of papers?" he said.

"Yes, sir," Brandt answered.

He opened his athletic bag and took them out, moving aside the book by Caudill.

"Got a good book there," said Bourne.

"Yes, sir. I thought so, too," said Brandt. "You read it?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, if you did that, you know a lot already of what I could tell you about this area around here. I've done quite a bit of reading myself. We've got a little newspaper here. They tell you that?"

"Yes, sir. I was down to the building yesterday."

"Well, yes, of course... I forgot... You ever do any work with papers?"

"No."

"You ever want to?"

"No, I never did."

Bourne threw his head back, laughing. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Well, I guess you told me."

Brandt smiled for the first time since meeting Bourne. "Maybe you got the wrong man."

"Don't be thinking you'll be getting out so easy now," said Bourne, shaking his head. "Paper's not the only thing we got to do." He tipped up the cup to finish his coffee. "In fact, one thing, right now, got some boxes of commodities in the back room there. Feel like helping me tote them out? Supposed to bring a dozen or so up to the other place."

"Sure," Brandt replied slowly, lagging on the word "tote."

"Well, let's get at it then."

Brandt went at it with his typical gusto, carrying two boxes at a time while Bourne carried one. After nine boxes were loaded, he grabbed the last three and came out of the church with them while Bourne was heading in.

"Well, now you're are a work horse, aren't you?" said Bourne.

"Not a work horse. Just crazy," Brandt answered.

"Crazy horse, then," said Bourne.

He was starting to think they had sent him a good boy.

They headed out of town along the main street past the gas station and boarded-up stores, then across the creek and along it for a few miles until the road curved up toward a pine-covered ridge.

"Used to be, these hills were covered with big trees," Bourne noted as they drove through the sparse woods. "I guess you must have read about that in Caudill. Back when I was a boy growing up, they used to cut up the logs a11 winter and lay them up for spring when they could send them down the swollen creeks. Folks sold the timber off of their own land and never thought about how long it would take for the trees to grow back."

"Are growing back some," Brandt responded softly, peering through a thicket of slender trees that crisscrossed in the gray light as far as he could see up the steep hillside.

"Some little bit, yes. But you or I will never see the day when this land has the beauty it had. Timber and coal have been the big industries, as I guess you must have read. And that's where the problem lies, because the things that got taken out were only there to be taken once."

With Bourne's help, Brandt started seeing things he hadn't seen on the way down—old coal cars and timber-framed entrances to mines, car dumps on the sides of hills, abandoned cabins where this or that family had lived for generation before leaving for this or that city in the Northeast or Midwest.

Later they passed through a little town of row houses where coke stoves glowed red beside a long line of coal hoppers.

"As you can see," said Bourne, with a flick of his hand, "the coal is still coming out. The war has brought an increased demand. The war looks different from here, you're going to find out."

They stopped for lunch in a larger town with a busy main street and prosperous-looking stores.

Sitting at the window with Bourne, Matt saw a large sign in the distance, "U.S. Coke & Steel." Trucks passed with metal fittings and timbers that he assumed were used in the mine.

Bourne identified the mine as a union shop.

"Union jobs are good," he observed, looking down the busy street. "Only thing is, they're hard to get without some kind of connection. You'll learn about that, too, as we go along."

Soon they were off again through similar country for another 20 or so miles to a one-story brick building that looked like an old school. A sign out front identified it as the Tri-County CAP office.

Inside Brandt stood awkwardly as he was introduced all around to a group of about 15 people. The group included a bearded man of about 40 who said he had once taught in the same building, a wiry, sallow-complexioned man with dark hair who looked like he could have been Bourne's brother or cousin, several gray-haired ladies who reminded Brandt of women in his mother's circle at church, and two pretty young women who said they were secretaries in the CAP office. Brandt thought to himself they were just ordinary people such as he might have found at home, except for the mountain accent—the drawn out vowels and nasal twang.

Brandt soon learned that another MV named Bruce Harris had been at work for more than a year in the county where the meeting was being held.

He also learned that Dennis Kelly, his friend from training, had been assigned to the county beyond that, with another CAP but within the same organizational unit of the MVs.

Bruce Harris wasn't present when the meeting started. He came in late and took a seat at the back. He was a handsome young man, about the same age as Brandt, with neatly combed blonde hair. He noticed Brandt at once and nodded hello.

The meeting consisted of reports from various program with head-counts of how many people had attended this or that function. Harris rose at one point, when the commodities program was being discussed, and made a long-winded comment that Brandt didn't exactly understand but which he thought implied that commodities were being given to relatives and friends and in some cases being sold.

His comment drew a stony-faced silence.

"Well, those are serious charges," said someone.

"I know they are," Harris replied.

Harris was dressed neatly, in clean, freshly pressed jeans with a white shirt, open at the neck, and a hip-length denim jacket that looked almost like a sport coat. He spoke carefully, choosing his words, and seemed impressed with his own intelligence.

After the meeting, there was a buffet supper, served on long tables set up behind the building in the old school playground. Brandt walked out with Bourne, helped himself to a beer, and stood with Bourne beneath some tall pines at one side of the playground.

Harris emerged from the back door of the building a few minutes later and came over immediately to introduce himself to Brandt. Bourne moved aside to let them talk in private.

"Suppose you noticed a little contention there," said Harris with a flick of his hand. "That kind of thing has to be said. I tell you, these meetings drone on and on and nobody ever gets to the substance of anything unless you force it."

Harris paused to let Brandt reply, but Brandt just looked at him and took another sip of beer.

"One thing you're going to find out around here," Harris went on, "a lot of things seem all right on the surface, then you start observing, something is slightly amiss. Take up here, in this county, Stanley Denton, supervisor of the school district. You meet him at a meeting. He tells you all the good things he wants to do for the schools. Then you find out he's the owner of a plumbing company and several of the schools just got new plumbing... Guess from who... How much did it cost? Well, there's no budget to be found. Then you learn this Denton is also a county supervisor. Unopposed in the last election. That's a little strange, don't you think?"

"I don't know," Brandt replied.

"Well, how about this? On your way out tonight, look for a very nice, very obvious house on the top of a hill about two miles down the road from here, right by Jerry's Auto there, where the road makes a big turn. You'll see some nice new gravel there on the road up the hill. County trucks brought it in. I saw them one day when I was driving by. Private road. What do you think of that?"

"Maybe he paid for it."

"Aw, come on."

Bourne came over toward them.

"Hey, boys, looks like they're going to force us to eat."

They went over and got in line with the rest. Harris appeared to be the only one interested in talking business. The others were talking about

somebody's brother who had broken his wrists in a speedway crash.

Later, as Brandt and Bourne were getting ready to go, Harris came over to say goodbye.

"Hey, no hard feelings," he said to Brandt when Bourne was out of earshot. "There's bound to be some disagreements. That's what we're here for, to make things happen."

Brandt made no reply.

"Listen," said Harris in a more intimate tone, "group of us are going to the school board meeting Wednesday evening. Going to bring up this issue of the budget. You care to come along, we'll be glad to have you,"

"I'll think about it," said Brandt.

"All right. That's all I ask," Harris replied with a tap on Brandt's shoulder. "Let me know if you need a ride."

20. Brandt talks to Bourne and stays overnight at Bourne's house

"Ol' Bruce Harris, he can talk up a storm," said Fletcher Bourne as he and Matthew Brandt drove away from the CAP building.

He shook his head and glanced at Brandt, smiling.

"People like him?" asked Brandt.

"Oh, I guess some do, as I guess you could tell from the meeting... Tell you one thing, though, I think maybe he's taking it a little too far with all that talk about the commodities. Everybody knows they're there for the taking. Big boxes of them like what we brought up today. People figure, the government has plenty to spare. So everybody and his brother has his little store of government cheese."

"Selling it, though. That doesn't seem right."

"Well, I agree with you there. Still I never have seen anybody sell commodities on a regular basis, like a business. Maybe I got some cheese, you give me a dollar for it, that kind of thing. But to me that's not selling it like a business."

Brandt noticed a red, garage-like building in the distance at a bend of the road, with old cars and trucks parked around it. He looked to the top of the hill on the other side of the road and saw a large house.

It was not a mansion, by any means, but it was an immense, freshly painted house with a wide, enclosed porch visible between the trees on the hill- side. Coming around the bend, he saw the new gravel, liberally spread on the road that led up toward the top of the hill. Several trees on the side of the road bore signs saying "Private Property, No Trespassing."

"Harris was telling me about some kind of investigation or something he's got going on the school district," Brandt remarked as they left the house behind.

"Oh, yes, he's got them going on that. 20, 30 people maybe, meet in the CAP office."

"He's got some meeting he's going to next Wednesday. School board or something. Wants me to go along."

"You got a mind to?"

"I don't know. What do you think?"

"Think you should do what you think is right."

They were winding uphill through a growth of slender poplars with silver leaves that fluttered in the wind. The sun was low in the sky behind some ragged clouds at the far end of the narrow valley they had just left behind.

"You done any work on the school board in your county like they've been doing up there?" Brandt inquired.

"No, not really. My main work, outside of the paper, has been with

the mines. Truck mines, mostly. Safety codes and things like that. Then, some with the strip mines, too. Trying to get them to fix up the mess a little after they're done. I guess I'm inclined in that direction since I worked in the mines myself. Know a little bit about them."

"When was that, that you worked in them?" said Brandt.

He was starting to see there was more to the man than was apparent at first glance.

"Oh, years back, when I was growing up. Just out of grade school. See, I never went to high school. Just started working because my daddy was crippled up. You maybe thought I had a fair piece of schooling, being a newspaperman and all. But I just picked up the newspaper business from a job I got when I was about 21. Didn't exactly come out of nowhere, though. I always had an interest in reading and writing things down. I was just lucky to get that job and lucky that Hillard Brown, the publisher, brought me along so kindly."

The sun broke out briefly from the gray clouds as they reached the top of the ridge. Brandt looked out from there and saw that the land was composed of hills and narrow valleys as far as he could see. In the long shadows on the western slopes, the foliage was a dark, rich green. On the eastern slopes, where the sun struck, the densely-packed, small trees sparkled with the moisture of the previous days' rain.

Dipping down into the next valley, they soon lost sight of the sun. A dull, gray twilight, broken here and there by golden fissures in the thick clouds, settled down on the woods as Bourne's steady-firing pickup droned along into the deepening night.

Bourne was quiet, lost in his own thoughts. His face, illumined by the dashboard, was deeply shadowed above the prominent cheekbones, with the eyes faintly shadowed and the bushy eyebrows etched with white light. He drove with both hands solidly planted on the steering wheel.

Brandt found himself thinking about the little red pickup he and his father and younger brother had fixed up in the glow of the yard light down by the shed at home. He recalled his father's account of the man his father had killed in the war, how his father had compared the man to the wounded rabbit that he and his father had killed when he was a boy. Then he started thinking about Mary Kass and for a long time he tried to get a clear picture in his mind of her bright, intelligent face, the face that looked at him with such trust and expectation.

Soon after dark, they passed through the town where they had stopped for lunch. The parking lot by the mine entrance was empty. The storefronts along the main street were dark. A gas station at the end of town was the only place open.

Leaving that, they headed off into the dark countryside again. Here and there, a solitary light shone from a house or building close to the

road or from a hillside or hollow where the source of the light could not be seen. In the little town with row houses, the coke ovens glowed red beside the long line of coal hoppers.

Brandt thought to himself he was in a strange land. He dreaded going back to the grim cabin at the motel.

As they neared Crabtree, Bourne said, “Say, Matt, why not stop over at my place? It’s five miles closer than town. Just two of us live there, my son, Wilbur, and I.”

“Wouldn’t want to impose on you,” said Brandt.

“Impose on us? Lord, just about anybody can tell you, folks coming around is a pleasure, lonesome as folks are in these hills.”

“Well, I’d like to, then,” Brandt replied. “Thanks.”

“Take you into town tomorrow.”

“Oh, sure,” said Brandt. “I’m not worried about that.”

Reaching a hollow where the main road turned sharply around the base of a hill, Bourne took a dirt road off to the side, along the base of the hill in the other direction. They bumped along the road past a small house where a single light burned from an upstairs window, then headed into the dark again for about a half mile up a gradual incline. Soon a light flickered in the distance between some tall trees.

“Well, here it is,” said Bourne.

They pulled into a yard with a house and a couple of outbuildings that looked like a machine shed and a small barn. The house had an open front porch, a lean-to roof extension on one side, and a small upstairs with two dormer windows above the front porch.

Bourne parked the truck by the shed next to an older pickup that was set up on blocks. They got out of the truck into the moist, cool air, and headed across the yard at an angle between some tall shrubs.

Brandt noticed that there were two old cars parked behind the shed. Beyond them was a steep, wooded hillside that extended up out of sight into the dark.

Bourne walked stiffly with his hands straight down at his sides. He looked thin, almost frail, in the yellow light of the yard light. He had an angular, uneven walk that brought up his right shoulder when he planted his left foot.

With Brandt several paces behind, Bourne went around the side of the house to the door at the back of the lean-to roof extension. He opened the door without undoing any kind of lock. They stepped into a large, plain kitchen where the table was covered with books, tools, cereal boxes and packaged bread.

“Wilbur, he thinks that table is a workbench when he’s not eating,” Bourne remarked, pointing at the tools.

They included several box wrenches and a ratchet with various

fittings. Back beside the cereal and bread was a partly disassembled car part that looked like an alternator.

"Those old cars his, out by the shed?" Brandt inquired.

"One of them is, and he's trying to get a hold on mine."

"How old is he?"

"Just sprung loose from high school," said Bourne. "Well, let me show you around."

He led Brandt into a living room with several padded chairs and a black corner stove. A black chimney pipe extended straight up several feet and then bent at a right angle to the outside through a square metal plate on the back wall: There were some large, cheap-looking paintings of out- door scenes on the walls. The walls and ceilings were tinted dark from coal dust from the old stove. There was a small television in another corner.

In general, the place was humbler than Brandt had expected. It was a functional, masculine place without any feminine improvements. Still it had the feel of a comfortable home.

"We sit here a lot and talk on winter evenings," Bourne said. "Fire up that old stove and just sit and talk and read. At least, I read. Wi1- bur, he's not much for that. Don't get much on the TV up through here, with the hills so close around us. Hardly worth having one. Don't know why we do. Guess we're just trying to be modern."

He shrugged his shoulders apologetically and walked a few paces to a small room. Brandt followed behind him. The room was set up as an office. It had a large, Army-style metal desk and several large bookcases filled with books.

"You read all those books?" asked Brandt.

"Yes, in fact, I did," Bourne replied, turning his thin, drawn face directly toward Brandt. "See, I got a rule. If I don't read it, I don't get to put it in there."

Brandt laughed. "When you start that?"

"Oh, long time ago," Bourne replied, "when I was first starting in the newspaper business. See, Hillard Brown, my boss, he used to encourage me to write, and I would always tell him, 'I just ain't got the education to do it right.' Well, one day he came in carrying an empty bookcase—the same, identical one that's there in the corner now. He said, 'Fletch, here's your education. Education is reading books. I'm going to buy you any book you promise to read. When you read it, you put it in this bookcase, and you keep on doing that, one book at a time, until it's a11 filled up.' So that's what I did. I filled up that bookcase with the same, identical books that are in there right now."

"So you got your education then," said Brandt.

"Well, yes, I did, kind of," said Bourne. "Only thing is, no one ever

told me I really learned it."

He shrugged again and led Matt to another small room, back in the corner by the stove. The room had a single bed next to a window. It was cluttered with cardboard boxes and other miscellaneous articles including a coffee percolator, a battered old world globe, several suitcases, and a rusted contraption that looked like an old lantern.

"Here's where I thought you could sleep," said Bourne. "Think it will be all right."

"Hey, compared to where I was last night, this is the Kentucky Hilton."

"Kentucky Hilton, huh? Well, you don't get wake-up service, you know."

Brandt lay in bed that night, trying to sort out all of the events of the past several days. He felt grateful for Fletcher Bourne. He liked the man. He felt that he could depend on him for a trustworthy introduction to the area and people.

He thought about Bourne's office and the full bookcase. It occurred to him that Bourne had applied a lot of will and effort to something that he himself had taken for granted.

He thought about Bruce Harris. The impression he had of him was that Harris was an intellectual show-off who nevertheless had some substantial claims. He thought to himself that eventually he would have to take those claims into consideration.

Even so, he decided not to get involved in anything he didn't understand including the upcoming school board meeting.

Later, as he was about to fall asleep, he noticed a steady, low background noise. He thought at first it was inside the house, maybe the hum of a refrigerator motor. Then he realized that the noise was outside, coming from a direction in line with the window.

He looked out the window and saw several white points of light, like floodlights, in the distance between two dark hillsides.

21. Brandt moves in with Fletcher and his son Bumper

The next morning Matt Brandt asked Fletcher Bourne about the lights he had seen in the distance the night before.

Bourne was seated at the kitchen table with his paperwork spread cut before him in an area cleared off by shoving the bread, cereal and other items back toward the wall. The tools and alternator were no longer there. Bourne was freshly shaven and neatly dressed in blue jeans and a white shirt, open at the collar, with his grayish-black hair swept back from his brow and still wet from combing. Brandt, unshaved, dressed in the wrinkled gray pants and cut-off green shirt of the day before, stood at the kitchen counter, holding the cup of coffee that Bourne had got for him as soon as he entered the room.

"Those what you saw are floodlights from a strip mine over there," said Bourne with a steady gaze, looking over his reading glasses. "They've been working the strip mines hard, now that the demand for coal is up. Trying to starve out the big mines, the old ones underground."

"How can they do that?" Brandt asked, frowning, as he looked out the kitchen window in the direction where he had seen the floodlights the night before. All he could see in that direction now were wooded hillsides forming a narrow valley, the one side still in shade, the other in morning light.

"Why can't the big mines just sell their coal, too, if the demand is up?"

"Because there's only so much coal bought," Bourne replied, "even with the greater demand. The more the strip mines put out, the more they cut in to the part of the demand that the big mines would get if there was no other coal to be had. And the reason they can do that, strip coal is cheaper, simple as that. No digging under, no filtering, no washing like they still do in the big mines. See, strip coal mine is a lower grade. No one would take it years ago. The technology has changed. They can use it now. And every lump of coal they use from a strip mine is a lump of coal that won't come out of a union mine. Goes way back to when the big mines were trying to starve out the truck mines in the exact same way."

Brandt understood that there was competition, but he couldn't get a sense of what was in the best interest of the people. He was on the verge of asking but he didn't press the subject. He finished his coffee and stood restlessly at the kitchen counter. He felt generally at odds with himself, not knowing where he was going to be living or how he could do anything at all to better anyone's life. He was getting the impression that he had just been dumped here without any forethought.

"You'll learn it all eventually," said Bourne, surmising his mood. "You'll get a sense of what's going on around here. Meanwhile, I think, well, being your boss, kind of, I might just as well tell you, what I want

you to do, for the time being, is just look around. You'll get a sense of it by and by and we'll find something you want to do. Today, later, we'll go for a ride. I'll show you some of the things we've been talking about."

Brandt merely nodded.

"Sound okay to you?" said Bourne, peering at him more closely.

"Sure," Brandt replied.

"Anything around here you want me to do?"

"What kind of thing?"

"I don't know. Empty the trash?"

"You know how to use a chain saw?"

"Oh, yea. I've done plenty of that."

"Know how to oil them?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, there's some old trees up there beyond the shed on the hillside. Got hit by lightning, need to be cut down. Chain saw's hanging in the shed. Oil's on the workbench."

Brandt walked outside, swinging his arms wide from the hips, glad for the chance to exert himself at something. It was a cool, crisp day. Not a cloud in the sky. The trees all around were brilliant green in the sunlight. At the shed he found someone whom he assumed to be Bourne's son, Wilbur, lying under a car with just his boots sticking out the front end.

"What are you looking at down there?" he said, stopping at the car.

"Lots of things. Lots of things I can see from down here," came the reply. "And a good half of them are bad."

Wilbur came out from under the car. He had a thin, bony face like his dad, with long, jaggedly-cut black hair. His hands were black with gunk.

"Well, you're the college boy, I imagine," he said.

"Never thought of myself as that," Brandt replied.

"They learn you anything in that school?"

"Learned me to sit on my rear end."

"Is that so?" said the youth, smiling. He had an open-mouthed, bashful smile. "Don't suppose they ever told you anything about alternators."

"No, they didn't," Brandt responded. "Learned a little on my own, though. What are you trying to do?"

"Just trying to figure out where to get a hold with the crowbar to tense up the belt."

"Used to do it here," said Brandt, pointing to an abutment of the motor mount.

He positioned the crowbar to leverage the alternator upward and held it in place while Wilbur tightened the bolts. Then he watched while the youth cranked up the engine.

"Charging?" he said.

"Oh, yes. Hit's a-charging up fine!"

"Dirty dog knows better than to mess with us," Brandt replied without smiling.

He waved to the youth and went to the tool shed for the chain saw. He oiled it, filled it with gas, and came out of the shed with it without a further word to the youth. He went straight up the hill, and tore into the first of the trees that Bourne had pointed out.

By the time Bourne came outside, Brandt had one tree entirely down and Wilbur was stacking up the cut pieces in a pile. Bourne stood by for a minute watching, amused that his son had been so quickly recruited.

"Guess you met Bumper," said Bourne.

"Yes, kind of," Brandt replied.

"Where you get that name?"

"Kind of pig-headed, maybe," said Bumper, smiling. "Like cars."

They shook hands and continued working, with the father also helping, until the second tree was cut into pieces and stacked up neatly.

Soon after that, Brandt and Fletcher Bourne went for a ride to look around the country, as Bourne had promised. They started at the strip mine that Brandt had seen in the distance the night before.

From where they stood beside Bourne's pickup truck, they could see the high wall of the strip mine about 200 feet above them. Bulldozers and backhoes were at work there, digging along a long ridge that looked like a road bed. The debris from the mine was strewn down the hill into the pine trees below the high wall.

"Now, if you're looking for a culprit, I suppose that could be one," said Bourne quietly, "the folks that run operations like this. They are not local people. They are moneyed people somewhere. The pay is not as good as in the rail mines where the unions have a firm hold. You can see they make a fair mess."

"Yes," said Brandt, assessing the scene. He could see that the hillside was ruined for many years to come. Also, he could sense that Bourne, whose sympathies he had begun to trust, was troubled by the sight of the damaged hills. But he was puzzled by the lack of anger or indignation in the man's voice.

"What do people do about it?" asked Brandt.

"Oh, we have a committee, organized through the CAP. Got some folks on it, old miners mostly, come once a month to meetings. We have sent off some letters to the companies that are doing the mining. We have sent off some letters to elected officials. I've written some editorials. It's a hard one to resolve, since what else can the land do? And they can always come back and talk about having to operate cheaply to make a profit so they can pay decent wages. Which is a valid argument."

"Ah yes," said Brandt, taking it all in.

"You see," said Bourne, "I'm a believer in not pushing too hard, at least not without a lot of thinking about it beforehand. People pushed real hard in the days when the union was established. A lot of people were hurt in that. Had an uncle killed in a strike we had here in 1959. Oh, he was scabbing all right, but he had his reasons. Got shot through the forehead driving in."

Bourne paused and walked a short distance from the truck to squat down and consider the mucky water in a little creek that went under the road. "All that is still here, waiting to fire up again. You got to be awful sure before you go convincing people to put themselves on the line. Then again, this creek was once clear. I remember it clear when I was a boy. The strip mines are ruining this creek."

Brandt recalled how enthusiastically Dennis Kelly, his friend in training, had talked about reviving the sprit of the unions. Obviously, Bourne was more cautious, though he seemed to admit, also, that there were valid reasons for opposing the current state of affairs.

Later, they drove along a gravel road to another mine that Bourne called a "low ceiling truck mine." They didn't get out of the truck. The entrance looked like a long, low entrance to a cave, with the roof of the cave propped up with timbers. Some lights could be seen far inside. There was a steady drone of machinery like buzz saws.

Brandt observed that the conditions were grim. Who would go every day into a hole like this where you couldn't even stand up? There had to be a complete lack of anything else for people to do.

As they drove along the roads, they looked for places where Brandt could possibly live, assuming he got a government car, as promised. They saw a "For Rent" sign on a small house on a hillside above the road, and went to look at it. It was in shabby condition with no running water and an outside toilet. They found another place in a little town of row houses beside a railroad track overgrown with weeds. There were a few families living there with barefoot children. Brandt found that more interesting, but he had a vague feeling of anxiety about the whole situation. What really could he do here? He was going to while away his time with no definite occupation.

Fletcher Bourne watched the young man's expressions as they went from one place to another. He could see that no situation was promising in terms of giving him a sense of the people and of what needed to be done. As they drove up at the motel in Crabtree where Brandt had his cabin, Bourne considered again and came to a conclusion.

"One thing I thought of," he said, "you could come and stay with us, with me and Bumper. Could have the same room you had last night. We could move out all those boxes and all that junk, fix it up a little so you

feel at home. You could help pay for the food, put in a little for rent, if you want to. I don't really care about that, just whatever would make you feel that you're not beholden."

"You really think you would want me to do that?" said Brandt, studying Bourne's lean, sallow face.

"Darn yes, I would," Bourne replied with a vigorous nod. "And Bumper, I can see he likes you. Now there's a boy that doesn't take kindly to just everybody, now. But he sure took a liking to you."

"Well, thank you," Brandt responded, sincerely touched. "That sounds great. I really would like it."

"Bumper and I, we take turns cooking supper, every other night. Guess you'll get your turns, too."

"Sure," said Brandt. "I'm good at hamburger."

"Is that so? Come to think of it, I think Wilbur said that's what on the menu tonight."

After getting Brandt's things and dropping off the key at the yellow house, they stopped at the little church and learned that Brandt's government car would be delivered sometime the next week. From there they went to the newspaper office where the receptionist with the frosted hair gave him a hearty hello. Bourne went through a door into a back room where Brandt could see some large, black machines. Freshly printed newspapers were neatly piled on a table beside the press.

Brandt caught sight of the Bourne homestead that evening with a sense of coming home. Bumper smiled approval when his father told him of the new arrangement. Then Bourne showed Brandt where there was a shower and sink in an upstairs room.

Brandt came down about a half hour later freshly shaved, in clean clothes, to the inviting smell of hamburgers and beans. Bumper had cleared off the big table completely to set a place for Brandt.

At supper they talked about the boy's future plans. He had taken an exam to get in the Army.

"For myself, I told Bumper I would have preferred for him to stay in school a couple of more years, at the technical school down in that town we ate lunch in yesterday. But, good thing about it, if you volunteer, you can say what you want to go into. And Bumper here's been thinking about mechanics, as I guess you could have guessed."

"Is that right?" said Brandt. "Well, good for you. Maybe when you come back on leave, you can teach me something."

"Well, I wouldn't mind, since I expect to be a regular expert," the youth replied, smiling.

"Bumper here would like to set up his own shop when he gets out."

"Is that right?" said Brandt. "Well, good for you."

"Figure I can make big money and buy my old pa a decent car,"

Wilbur said. “Then maybe he’ll give me that nice-running truck.”

Later, toward sunset, Brandt went out for a walk in the area just around the house. Stopping at the far end of the yard, he saw what looked like a vegetable garden beyond the rise of the hill in a low area not in view from the first story of the house. The garden was poorly tended and overgrown with weeds.

“Whose garden?” he asked Bourne when the older man came over to join him on his walk.”

“Our’n, shamed to say,” said Bourne. “That’s another one of our little projects, through the CAP. Got people started on these all around the county. Supplied the seeds, and so on.”

They walked down closer to it. Brandt squatted down to examine a cabbage plant with yellow leaves. He could see there were some squash bugs hovering around the pumpkins several rows across.

“Ever do any gardening?” Bourne asked, observing Brandt’s studied, concerned expression as he looked at the plants.

“Yes, actually, I have,” Brandt replied, looking up. He got up and dusted off his knees.

“Well, that’s something else you could do, now,” said Bourne. “Lord knows I don’t know much about it myself. I guess the garden speaks for itself... Yes, that’s something you could work on, sure.”

“Really think so?” said Brandt, sweeping back his black hair, which was just long enough now to require it. His mouth curled up slightly.

“Oh, yes,” answered Bourne, nodding as he realized the idea was taking hold. “Got to warn you, though. Lot of folks won’t even consider gardens. They figure, why make the effort when the government provides food. Folks that do do it got their own notions. Then maybe again some’ll listen to advice. It would get you out there, at least, round over the country to get to know people and get some ideas.”

Brandt was silent, considering.

“You just think about it,” said Bourne. “No hurry. Just sleep on it, Matt. We can talk about it tomorrow.”

The next morning, when Bourne got up at about 8 o’clock, he looked in Brandt’s room and saw he was already up.

Not finding him in the kitchen, he looked over to the shed. Not there, either. Then, remembering the garden, he went up to the corner upstairs window from which the garden could be seen. There was Brandt, crawling along on his knees, pulling up weeds. He had already weeded two rows cleanly and was halfway up the third.

22. Steward starts feeling out of place in the Air Force

In July, with the Air Force camp about half done, Tom Steward and the fellow members of his flight went up in a K-139 tanker to observe the tanker refueling a B-52 in mid-air.

Steward spent more time in the cockpit than anyone else. He observed with great interest the use of the instruments and automatic mapping and the sun-dappled desert landscape below. Also, he had a number of polite, intelligent questions to ask of the amiable co-pilot, a sandy- haired man of about 28 or 30 with a Southern drawl.

"What happens after this camp? Y'all heading down to flight school?" the co-pilot asked as they neared the roundabout location and could see the B-52 below them and floating nearer in the distant sky.

"A lot of the guys, yes," Steward replied in his earnest manner. "Not me, though, I'll be going back to school for a couple of years of grad school."

The B-52 radioed in just then. The co-pilot's attention was diverted to that. But, in the interval, there was a subtle change in the co-pilot's face indicating surprise and reassessment. Later the co-pilot was more distant. The spirit of comradery was no longer there.

From time to time, in the next several weeks, Steward thought about that look of reassessment. In effect, the look had said, "Oh, you're one of those. You're not really Air Force."

Steward felt the same sentiment coming from Col. Strom, the lead officer of the program. Strom had recruited Steward and some others for an interbase track meet to be held the last week of training. He was friendly toward everyone, but he only really extended brotherly closeness to the three or four runners who were headed for flight school.

Steward thought a lot about that, also. He had always been a strong member of any team he had been on, in spirit if not always in talent. Now he was almost an outsider despite how hard he was trying to do his best in every respect.

He tried to explain this in a letter to Barbie Carpenter, who had written him a couple of letters during the summer. She had gone on to accelerated nursing program at St. Mary Hospital in Minneapolis, as she had said she would do when they had talked the previous spring. "This is the first time in my life that I've done something I don't really believe in," he wrote. "This is the first time I've felt reluctant to express my thoughts openly."

After writing that letter, Steward went down to the television lounge that had recently been made available to the trainees. There he happened upon a news report of the recent riots in Detroit. He had not even been aware they were taking place. The report showed crowds of black youths running through debris-cluttered streets between burning buildings.

"Police returned sniper fire in conditions close to those of guerilla warfare," the announcer said. "The death toll was 43 after five days of rioting, looting, and arson. Thousands of federal troops, National Guardsmen, and state and local police have been called into action. Mayor Cavanagh has called for a committee to be formed at once to determine the causes of the unrest. High unemployment and poor housing will be among the first items considered. But the damage in lives and property has already been done. Elsewhere, militant blacks declared that they have more in common with the peasants in Vietnam than with other Americans."

Steward watched the report thinking there was increasing unrest as a result of the war. There was a spirit of dissent and confrontation. He had found himself a safe haven, but he had removed himself from the battlegrounds an either side, domestic and overseas.

He decided that he could do nothing for the time being except to continue in the program and do his best in it. After all, he had not yet made a definite commitment and would not be required to do so until he signed the formal agreement. But he continued with a more tentative feeling. He resolved to speak his thoughts clearly and freely, as he would have done in college, even if his thoughts brought up questions that challenged the official line about the war.

Soon afterwards, in early August, Steward's flight and several others attended a presentation in a large hall in the base center. The topic was "America After the Second World War." The presenter was a major from the Intelligence group on the base, an officer that Orin Brown had come to know well. The major had attended Cornell University, Orin said, He had been a Phi Beta Kappa student and had been active in the Robert Birch Society, an ultra-conservative organization.

The major's name was Estes Collard. He was a tall, thin, reedy-voiced man with a long, narrow face and wire-rim glasses. He had neatly trimmed, whitish blonde hair. His speech was fluent and articulate, with no pauses to search for words as he went along.

He said the pivotal event in the century, the event that brought America into its own predominance, was the Second World War.

"America entered World War Two as almost a backwater country. It emerged as a world power. American industry supplied the weapons and material that turned the tide in favor of the Allied Nations, in the West. American organization won the war in western Europe and in the Pacific."

"And America emerged from the war undamaged," remarked Col. Strom from where he stood on the side of the room.

"Yes, Colonel, that's true," Maj. Collard replied with a nod. "In this respect, we had an advantage over our Soviet allies, who won the war in

eastern Europe. We were suddenly in a position to give to our western European allies, and to the vanquished nations, also, something vitally needed, the means to repair their damaged infrastructures. And we did, through the Marshall Plan. But there were two other developments in history at the same time, the United Nations and the Communist Bloc. The United Nations gave us our reason for action. The Communist Bloc gave urgency to our action. Let us explore these developments and what they have meant."

On a world map, Maj. Collard pointed to the victors of the war: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Australia, New Zealand, and the Soviet Union.

"The original purpose of the United Nations," the major said, "was to preserve the principles that the war had been fought for. To make sure that utilitarianism would not rise up again. To make sure that all people have democracy and freedom and the basic rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and commerce. These were the principles that been secured with great sacrifices in human life."

"But we all know what the aftermath has been. We can summarize it all in the phrase with which we've all become so familiar, the Cold War. That is where the second development comes in, the rise of the Communist Bloc. From the start, even during the war, the Soviet Union, under Josef Stalin, was not a true partner in the alliance. Stalin didn't identify with the same principles, just described. The interest of the Soviet Union was in stopping another empire that had threatened it, not in stopping totalitarianism or in spreading democratic ideals. Yes, the Soviet Union signed on in San Francisco, but only with an object to hold the United Nations at bay, as they have through the Security Council."

"If we look at the history, we can see what has happened. Right after the war, the Soviet Union began consolidating its power in the East with the formation of the Warsaw Pact. Then came the forced admission to the United Nations of many, many small. nations to offset the power of the original alliance. Then the Soviet Union and its ally, Communist China, pressed with military might, testing the resolve of the United States and its allies. Korea was our hard lesson in that. We were there, equal to the challenge, at Inchon. But the war soon came from beyond the Yalu River. The war soon acquired global proportions and history will tell whether Truman or MacArthur was right."

He paused and looked at the several officers in the room. They met his look and nodded. The officers understood the allusion to the policy of sanctuary that had allowed the Chinese to participate in the wax, on the side of the North Koreans, without ever confronting the U.N. forces on Chinese ground. The further implication, understood by all, was that the war in Vietnam was failing for the same reason. It was not being carried

in full force against North Vietnam, the true force behind the Viet Cong rebels in the South. Few of the trainees caught the allusion or its implication. Orin Brown did, however. He nodded in consort with the officers when Maj. Collard looked at them.

"At least, at the time, we had a United Nations force fighting in behalf of a United Nations cause, in the original sense of the founding," Maj. Collard continued. "Now, with the growing influence of the Third World and the Communist Bloc in the U.N., the U.N. is no longer able to advance its original goals. But it remains for the United States and its allies to further these goals. It is incumbent upon us, as a condition of our power, that we should use our power to advance these interests. If not, we fail in our national mission, we fail in our role in what has been called the 'American Century.' We are in a unique position as the most powerful nation in the world. We must exert great care and vigilance in our use of power to advance the ideals of democracy and freedom."

That ended the formal presentation. It was followed by a discussion to allow questions or comments from the trainees.

Steward raised his hand. On being called, he presented an idea that had been forming in his mind throughout the last ten minutes or so of the lecture.

"Sir, if one of the original goals of the Allies," he said, "was to foster democracy, wouldn't it follow to allow the U.N. to function truly as a democratic organization, without the Security Council. I mean without the big nation veto. And wouldn't it follow, to allow U.N. decisions to have the force of law through international law?"

Collard recognized this idea at once as coming from the left of the political spectrum. He looked closer to see who the questioner was and stood up more erectly.

"That is to assume that the nations voting are, in fact, voting in behalf of their peoples," the major replied. "That is to assume that the voting nations are democratic from the ground up... And anyhow, you have several issues lumped together here. What you're really suggesting further is a situation where the United States would relinquish its power and influence to be controlled by other nations."

Steward, without any sense of the overall implications of what he was saying, persisted for the sake of the argument and to prove to himself that he had the integrity to speak his own mind. "But don`t we all do that in a democracy, don't we relinquish individual power?"

"Yes, we do," Collard responded quietly. "But, keep in mind, this is on an international scale, not on an individual scale, and your idea assumes that all nations are democratic from the ground up, as I just said. What we have instead, on the international scale, is the active co- option of the governmental process in many nations by an international

Communist movement that is determined to achieve world-wide totalitarian power. All democracy would be eliminated if this power were ever achieved."

Steward was silent for a moment as he considered the major's last comment. He was aware that the other trainees were quiet and that the officers were looking at him as if his line of questioning was out of order or inappropriate. Nonetheless he persisted.

"But don't we also attempt to co-opt the internal processes of nations in order to consolidate or further our own sphere of influence? You hear many examples, many claims about the C.I.A. I don't know if they're true."

"I can assure you I don't have any inside information," the major replied.

This brought laughter from several of the officers followed by laughter among the trainees.

Steward didn't laugh. Neither did his expression show any sarcasm or disrespect. His attitude and posture were completely those of the questioning student. "It just seems to me the best situation would be to allow all these nations to control and define their own inner processes and their own ideals and then to allow the United Nations to function as a truly democratic body with the force of international law. Then there would be far fewer occasions for war," he said softly.

"In an ideal world," the major answered. "In an ideal world."

Again there was head-shaking and laughter, but Steward got some cold looks from the officers as he filed from the room with the other trainees.

[Chapter 22 notes]

23. Steward races Jim Morris in an inter-base track meet

After his encounter with Maj. Collard, Tom Steward noticed that some of the officers seemed to regard him as someone who harbored ideas counter to the well-being of the corps.

His feeling that he was in the wrong place grew increasingly strong. He wondered about his options if he didn't go ahead with the ROTC program. Say he dropped out of the program and went ahead into grad school. Would the draft board allow it? Say he got accepted to VISTA and decided to go. What would the draft board do about that?

He kept these concerns to himself and worked out all the harder for the upcoming track meet. He was scheduled to compete in the three mile run. Col. Strom had arranged for runners to come in from other bases. More than 50 runners had signed up from all over the country.

Skimming over the list of names, Steward noticed that one group was from Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. Immediately he looked to see if Jim Morris was among them. He was, indeed, and he was scheduled to run in the three mile run, also.

On the day of the meet, Steward saw Morris, with his blond hair, erect posture, and customary dark glasses, on the far side of the field beside the bleachers. The lean, compact airman, dressed in blue shorts and a yellow T-shirt, was gesturing and moving around amidst a group of others dressed in the same colors.

"There's the guy I told you about," Steward called back to Orin Brown, who had come along as the volunteer team manager. Leaving Brown behind, he trotted off toward the bleachers.

"Hey, alright!" Brown called after him in his exuberant voice. "Tell him, too bad you're going to have to beat him!"

"Stew Meat, you old dog!" Morris yelled as Steward approached. "I saw your name on the list. You still running the three mile?"

"Yes, I am, Jimbo, and I'm gunning for you!"

They shook hands, grinning into one another's faces.

Morris was lean from training. With his small, sturdy frame and compact legs and arms, he looked like a middleweight boxer who had trained down to welterweight size. Steward, too, showed the effects of his summer discipline, intensified by his increasing frustration with the Air Force. Compared to Morris, he looked large, like a rangy lumberjack.

"Well, you just remember your position in the crew," Morris said, pointing over his shoulder. "Two places behind me!"

"Yea, but I hate to tell you, Jimmy, the boat was going in the opposite direction!"

Later, they did some warm-up laps together, settling into an easy rhythm remembered from the many miles they had run together along the river by the boat club.

Steward soon learned that Morris had completed undergraduate pilot training on schedule and had been assigned to begin combat training in the F-105 starting in early September.

"Hey, everything happened just as I hoped!" Morris exclaimed in his deep voice. "I'm so goddam excited, Stewie! I'm so goddam primed!" Morris said he was just starting a two-week leave and would be heading down to Oregon before heading back to the Twin Cities and then to Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. "My dad was from Oregon. I've got Oregon roots pretty deep. Great grandparents... or maybe it was great-great.,. came out on the Oregon trail."

"Is that so?" said Steward, following the details closely as he matched Morris stride for stride. "You've kept in touch with the people out there?"

"Well, not so much, really," Morris replied. "But my mother and I lived out in Portland the year after my dad died. We were living with my dad's mom, my grandma, so she could get to know me, I guess, as my mother tells it. That grandma was the last of the Morris's out there, in my immediate family. My grandpa was already dead and my dad didn't have any siblings. When my grandma died in a car accident, when I was still a baby, really, my mom and I moved back to St. Paul, where my mother grew up. She doesn't have any family to speak of, either, though, actually. All of my mom's near relatives are gone. But St. Paul was her hometown, at least."

"Your parents met in Oregon?"

"No, in St. Paul. My dad was a student at the U. Just for a year before the war started. They met at a dance or something, at the old Prom Center, on University there."

Morris ran with his lips drawn back in a gesture that was somewhere between a grimace and smile as he conveyed this information, which he did with no apparent emotional connection.. He drew in air between his teeth with a raspy sound and expelled it forcefully in a precise, methodical cadence.

"Oregon trail," Steward said softly, sincerely impressed with what Morris had told him. "You must have heard plenty of stories about that, I imagine."

"Oh, yea," Morris answered with a smile. "Used to be pretty proud of it when I was a little guy."

He let it go at that, though his Oregon past had been much on his mind. For some reason he hadn't figured out, he had been drawn lately to look into the old stories more than ever.

Two laps later, Steward learned something else he hadn't known—Morris had gone on from his charged interaction with Ellen Kass on the evening of the Memorial Day Regatta, She was coming out on the plane,

flying into Seattle, the next morning, and would be going with Morris down to Oregon and then back to the Twin Cities.

"How did all that get going?" Steward asked, turning to examine Morris's inscrutable eyes behind the dark glasses. He hadn't thought much about Ellie during the camp, but he had retained an impression of her as a young woman of exquisite beauty.

"Oh, you know, sometimes when you don't want something to happen, it makes people all the more determined, especially women," said Morris, laughing, as he chugged along like a machine, breathing in and out in his methodical manner. "I was trying to avoid her, you know, because I didn't want to get all involved right before training, but she called me a couple of times, you know, and kept hinting about how she thought it would be so much fun to go up in that plane I was renting. So one morning I was on my way down there and I stopped at a phone booth and gave her a ring."

"And things went on from there, huh?"

"Shot from a cannon."

Steward thought to himself that he could see why Ellie regarded Morris as so attractive. Morris had an excitement about him. He talked and acted like someone who had given himself completely to something he believed in. Steward compared himself against that and felt ashamed at lacking such a commitment in his own life.

Orin Brown came up to them as they rounded the turn to the starting area. "They're calling for the three mile," he announced importantly. He was dressed in tan Bermuda shorts and was wearing a green T--shirt of the same type as he had arranged to have made for the whole team. The T-shirt had "Fairchild AFB" printed on it in white block letters.

"Time to concentrate," Morris said, patting Steward on the shoulder.

"Don't be too hard on me now."

"Don't I wish I could," Steward replied. "Good luck to you, Jimbo."

"Good luck to you, too."

Steward moved off to the middle of the infield, nervously stretching and swinging his arms. He realized that he felt unsettled by what Morris had revealed about Ellie Kass. He was surprised by his strong reaction. The race began fast with a tall, gangly runner in a red uniform taking an early lead of more than 100 yards that none of the other runners thought could be sustained. A mile and a half into the race, the gangly runner developed extraneous motion and started to fall back. Morris passed, followed by Steward. Soon Steward and Morris were running together alone about 20 yards ahead of the pack.

As the pace came down, Steward prepared himself mentally to pass Morris. He knew he had to bring up the pace because Morris had a better kick. With three laps to go, Steward passed and brought up the pace

sharply. But Morris stayed right on his shoulder, breathing loudly and methodically, for the next two laps.

Coming into the lap, Steward knew the race was lost. Morris would pass on the backstretch and outsprint him to the finish. Still he tried to bring up the pace more and fought Morris all the way down to the finish, coming in two paces behind him.

Morris came over, out of breath, and threw his arm around Steward's shoulder. "Holy cow, Stewball, you really wore me out! I just barely got you! What a race!"

They walked around the infield together, talking and laughing. Morris was in high spirits. He seemed almost to be making a conscious effort to rein himself in.

Steward watched Morris go off with his team-mates, receiving their congratulations. He received congratulations himself, for having run so strongly and taken second place. But the predominant thought that remained was not that of Morris winning the race, but of how Morris had found his way to something he believed in so strongly. Ellen Kass believed in him because he believed in himself, Steward thought to himself.

Arriving back at the barracks later, Steward found Capt. Erland standing by the back steps smoking a cigarette.

"Didn't quite have enough, did you, Steward?" the captain said.

"No, sir, I guess I didn't," Steward replied.

"Maybe next time."

"Yes, sir, I hope so."

Back in his room, Steward found some mail that one of the other trainees had picked up for him.

In the mail was a letter from his father. "You got a postcard from VISTA," his father mentioned. "They want to know if you're still interested. It's just a check off thing with boxes."

He called his father that evening and told him to check off the "still interested" box.

24. Steward quits the Air Force program, gets accepted to VISTA

A week or so later, Capt. Erland announced that Tom Steward had been elected "most respected" in his flight.

"So, as you know, he has also been elected to lead you in the final review," the captain said as the men stood before him in the heat of the late afternoon.

Prior to this, the trainees had rotated in the positions of flight commander and wing leaders.

"Steward, come forward to receive the chevrons," Erland went on in his monotone voice.

He put the chevrons in position on Steward's shoulders. "Flight," he said without raising his voice, "ten-hut." The group came to attention.

"Present arms," said Erland.

The men saluted and held their hands at their foreheads in the salute position.

"Bring the flight to order arms," said the captain, seeming anxious to get the formality over.

Through the course of the summer, Erland had become increasingly perturbed with his role as a training officer. He had gained a few more pounds. He didn't like the feeling of the extra weight around his stomach. He had been drinking by himself in the evenings.

Steward saluted, did an about face, and braced himself in a position of attention.

"Fa-light!" he called in his correct inflection, learned in the military high school. "Order-r-r... hahm!"

The men brought their hands down sharply and stood at attention. They had come to like how Steward called commands. They liked how he took the whole business so seriously.

"Parade rest and fall out," said Erland.

Steward completed the commands as directed and stood accepting his fellow trainees' congratulations.

The next day, also as part of the close-up activities, Steward went to see Erland to receive his formal evaluation. This was the only such evaluation or progress report that had been offered to the men throughout the entire summer.

Erland had listed people with scheduled times, one per half hour, throughout the day. The evaluation interviews took place in the captain's office in an administrative building several blocks from the barracks.

"Steward, you did well in all the classes, as I understand from the instructors," Erland said, reading from notes on his large, metal desk as Steward sat in a chair before him. "You passed all the inspections. You completed all the formalities with good commendations."

"Thank you, sir," Steward replied, nodding.

He was tan and lean from his summer of self-imposed physical training. He had eaten less than usual due to not having snacks available as at home. His uniform was crisp and clean and freshly ironed. His black boots were polished to a spit shine.

"One thing remaining, my personal evaluation as your direct in command," said Erland, looking up with a sober expression. "On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being best, in terms of how you rate, in my opinion, as officer material, I gave you a 2... Does that surprise you?"

"Yes, sir, somewhat," Steward answered.

He rearranged himself in his seat. He was sitting almost at a position of attention, with his hands folded on his lap.

"You think, because you were elected flight commander, you deserve a little more?" said Erland, sitting back with his weary eyes still fastened on Steward.

"No, sir. I didn't expect that. It surprised me," Steward said from his braced position. The boyish eyes softened. "I was hoping I did okay otherwise, though."

"These young guys, your fellow trainees, were not looking for the qualities of a soldier," Erland continued with a dismissive flick of his hand. "They see someone like you. You study hard. You run hard. You help with the chores like in a fraternity house. You express your opinions. As in a class in college, I suppose. I've never been in one."

"I did realize there was a problem with that, in what I said after the 'United States after World War Two' presentation," Steward replied in his quiet, earnest voice. He pronounced each syllable completely, without missing a single consonant. "I just thought it was best to say sincerely what I thought. I guess I always do, as long as it's courteous."

"Courteous!" scoffed Erland, rising from his desk.

He went over a few steps to a large, metal filing cabinet. There was a picture on top of it of a smiling, hardy-looking little boy in a red and white shirt. The picture had a paper badge on it that said in kids' letters, "Dad #l."

"And maybe you thought, in the Air Force, there's no room for independent thought," the captain went on in a dry, controlled voice, looking back to Steward. "Well, what you don't understand, there's an apprenticeship here."

Steward was quiet, listening,

"And what this apprenticeship involves, corny as it may sound to you, is first and foremost to prove valor in combat before rising up to express opinions. You see what you are, Steward, you're a squire trying to seat yourself at the round table."

"I'm sorry," Steward answered. "I didn't understand it in those

terms."

"Think about it, Steward, isn't that the way it should be?" Erland persisted.

Steward leaned forward. "I'm sorry, sir. What way?"

"Valor first. Big talk later."

"Yes, I can see that it is, sir," Steward replied. "It just places me in a difficult position."

"Because there's no way you can get there because you have no intention of fighting?"

"Yes, sir. Somewhat."

"Well, so be it," said Erland, looking out the window. There was an immense flat area there with equipment of some kind stacked in orderly piles. "I didn't write the rules, But I'm a soldier, Steward. I've fought in two wars for this country. I paid my dues and I expect that other people should also, and should respect the tradition."

"Yes, sir," said Steward, joining his hands. He looked down with a thoughtful expression. "I would like to make just one comment, with your permission," he said, looking up.

"What's that? Go ahead."

"I do sincerely respect the tradition, what I've seen of it here. I'm truly sorry if I gave a different impression."

"Truly," repeated the captain beneath his breath.

"Could I ask just one further question?" Steward said after a moment of silence.

"Yes, go ahead."

"Are you saying I'm expelled from the program?"

"No, far be it from that," Erland responded impatiently, coming over to his desk again. "Heaven knows there will be plenty like you to keep you company. Let's say I just wanted you to know my personal opinion. Now, if you don't mind, Steward, I've got to get organized for the next man."

Steward saluted and walked from the office, feeling drained. He felt that Erland was right. Valor was important and should come first for a young man. He felt ashamed that he had not understood this. But to be valorous in this exact situation was maybe not correct, either. He had to find his own way to be valorous in something that made sense to him. Had he really been wrong in stating his position clearly in Maj. Collard's presentation? No, he didn't think so. That was important, too. He had to work all of this out. He thought about how hostile Erland had been toward him in the meeting. Had he really done anything to deserve that level of hostility? There was something there over and above whatever he had done to irritate Erland. He thought about the picture of the little boy. There was something strange in that. He had never heard Erland refer to

a family. The captain lived alone in the bachelor officers' quarters.

That evening he called home and heard from his father that he had received a package from VISTA. He asked his dad to open it and learned that it contained an offer to join a program in North Carolina that started in three weeks, in mid-September.

"Is there a phone number there?" he asked.

"Phone number for what?" his father replied. "Think a minute before you go off and leave an arrangement that took you so long to get set up. Think about it, Tom. Think about it."

Steward left the phone booth and walked outside into the dry summer air, thinking. He knew that his father had his best interests in mind, but he was also aware that his father was subject to swings of mood that left his judgment impaired. He had detected a level of anxiety in his father's voice that indicated that a low point. He hated to be a source of further distress for his father and yet he had to make up his own mind, he told himself, he had to do the right thing.

That evening in the barracks, he told his roommate Orin Brown that he had decided to quit the Air Force program. "What it comes down to is I don't believe in this war," he said almost sadly. "At least, not enough to fight in it."

Brown considered for a moment with his back against the wall, his legs crossed in a lotus position, on his neatly made bed.

"The Air Force is much more than this war," he said. "There are people in this Air Force, regular airmen, who don't believe in this war, either. There are people who do believe in it, from the standpoint of historical necessity, but who are in no hurry to put their own lives on the line. Tom, consider, what percentage, maybe a hundredth or a thousandth of one percent, of Americans are over there with guns in their arms actually fighting, or flying?"

"I don't know," Steward replied slowly. "It just doesn't seem right to look at it that way."

"Consider this then. You've done well here. People like you. You have leadership qualities. You're smart. You can do a service here in the Air Force, in the medical corps, maybe even expressing an occasional out of line viewpoint. Outside of this situation, where are you, even in VISTA? Right up against the wall, man, right up against the draft. Do you really think the draft board will let you make an about face and go off into VISTA, after this?"

"Maybe, if I explain."

"I don't know, Tom. Seems like I heard these draft boards are getting a little tired of explanations."

Steward got up from his bunk and went over to the window. A truck with blinking yellow lights was crossing the airfield. It stopped at a K-

139 tanker such as he had flown in himself. Seeing that, he thought again of how the pilot of the K-139 had looked at him with such dismissal, in effect implying the Air Force was being used.

"The one thing I do know," he said, looking back at Brown, "this is something I could do strongly, and I want to do that."

"And what if the draft board comes after you again?" Brown persisted.

"Then, whatever I do in response to that, I do strongly, too. Look, Orin, we're young. We're just starting out as men. Doesn't it seem better to start out with strength?"

Brown just shrugged. But Tom Steward felt satisfied with what he had said. He felt that he had spoken more truly than he had the entire rest of the summer.

25. Morris, with Ellen, visits Scotts Bluff, site on Oregon trail

At Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, Lt. James Morris found what he had been unable to find on several stops further west—two ruts in the red soil extending westward as barely perceptible lines where the sun glinted in the tall grass.

Morris climbed a rocky trail to the so-called North Outlook to scan the route the wagon trains bound for Oregon would have traveled on, based on the map he had with him. From this vantage point, he could see tourist signs marking where the trail had come around the south side of the bluff (to avoid the badlands on the north side of the bluff by the North Platte River), before following the river again. He could see the river extending in a thin blue line to the northwest, toward Fort Laramie, Wyoming, the next major stop.

"They probably did this themselves, climbed up here, probably on this very same path," he said out loud. "This was the first place where they could get a good view after the plains. They must have all camped below. That's why the ruts are so carved in."

Jim Morris had talked out loud like this, as if talking to another person, all of his boyhood. He had first done it one day when his mother had told him that he could talk to his father if he really wanted to. He had liked doing it and had never stopped.

Scotts Bluff and the Oregon Trail were of great importance to Morris because his mother's ancestors had traveled in a wagon train to Oregon in 1849 during the peak years of the migration. Morris's grandmother (his mother's mother) had moved from Oregon to Minnesota during the Depression. Just why that had happened, Morris had never heard. His mother had been an only child and his grandmother a single parent so he had had limited contact with other relatives and the Oregon part of his family.

Morris turned to begin the hike back down the bluff, and saw two jets high above in the cloudless sky. They looked like tiny, dark spots drawing out white lines behind them.

"Must be way up there, at 30 or 40 thousand feet," he said. "Must be military planes, traveling together so high."

Walking back through the tall grass, he thought to himself that he had seen his life past and future, as had through his father, as he stood on the bluff.

His mind wandered to his upcoming combat training in the F-105 at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. He knew already that the training would include the specifics of the plane itself, the weapons typically carried, combat formations, low-level navigation, aerial fueling, and radar detection—not to mention search and rescue, and survival tactics,

which could well be needed with almost half of the pilots being killed or going down before making it to the magic 100 missions.

Would he be equal to it? Could he perform under the intense pressure of combat, if sent to Vietnam? He knew he had prepared himself as best he could. He was in better shape mentally and physically than he had ever been in college. His racing victory over Tom Steward had been a confirmation of that. Still he felt an underlying apprehension about his abilities. The apprehension had grown in proportion with his growing excitement about becoming a full-fledged fighter pilot.

He found Ellen Kass lying on a blanket outside the car in her shorts and bikini top. She was plucking her eyebrows with a pair of tweezers as she observed herself in a small mirror.

"Well, Jimmy, did you find those old ruts?" she said, turning toward him with a bright smile.

As usual, she was the very picture of feminine beauty and form. Her lovely long hair, reddish brown with strands of gold, gleamed in the sunshine. Her green eyes sparkled with joy of life. In their two-week trip, she had taken care to maintain the perfect tan on her slender legs and arms. Her shape was firm and full beneath her bikini.

"Yes, in fact, I did see them," he responded. "About a quarter mile out from here, out there by the wagon. Want to go see it? It's a replica of the real thing."

"Not right now, Jimmy," she replied softly, kissing his cheek. "I'm glad you got to see it, though."

He told her how he had climbed the bluff to locate land features and how he had seen two jets flying over high in the sky.

"See, you can still see their plumes," he said, pointing. "They're just fading out now."

"Wagons and planes!" she replied, caressing his arm. "You must have been ecstatic."

"Yes, I was, really."

He laughed, realizing the futility of getting on to his more serious thoughts about it. He rolled on his back and pulled her on top of him. With her body pressed against him, he looked up and saw the plumes still there, dissipated further into two long, wispy clouds in the blue sky above him.

Later they sped in air-conditioned comfort along a two-lane highway. The immense flatness of the prairie was all around them. He looked across at her as she lounged on the seat, listening to music. Her radiant hair fell lightly on her lovely face and naked shoulders. Now and then, she met his gaze with an adoring look.

He had started their trip together not knowing what to expect from her sexually. Their relationship before had been intense, but they had

never made love. After meeting in Spokane, they had been reserved with one another the whole first day. That night, whatever barrier there had been before had fallen.

From their interaction then, he had concluded that he had been her first sexual experience. He had come to his conclusion based on her unsureness about how to proceed. It was a carefully concealed unsureness. He knew enough about her already to know that she often pretended to a level of sophistication beyond what she actually felt.

He was not a womanizer, by any means, though he had had several trysts in Texas during flight training. Out of a natural sense of decency, rather than for moralistic reasons, he was inclined to go slowly. He had passed up opportunities in Texas, also, enough so that some of the others had begun to call him a "straight arrow." His role in initiating Ellen Kass made him feel tender and protective towards her. Their time together, since that first night, had been like a honeymoon. They had made love in motels, on beaches, and once in a secluded spot in an Oregon forest. He was somewhat confused, however, by how their relationship had remained on that physical level only. They had never talked about what was going on, what it meant to both of them to be involved in this way, what it meant in so far as the future. They had never talked about Vietnam, either, though likely he would be assigned there after completing his combat crew training in the F-105.

Now that their trip was drawing to a close, he had thought about this a great deal. He hardly knew what to make of it. He was completely taken by her physically. Why couldn't he connect with her on a deeper level? He wasn't sure if it was her fault or his own.

He knew he was holding back. She regarded him as a man of action, without any self-doubts. He didn't want to fall short of that image by saying too much. But also, she never really sought him out. She seemed content to remain on a physical level. Whenever a conversation took a serious turn, she deflected it with humor or changed the subject.

She fell asleep in late afternoon, about 50 miles out from Omaha, their destination for the day. He took the opportunity to turn off the music and search the radio for news of the war since she didn't care much for long-winded, sober programs.

At last, he found a thorough account.

"Vietcong forces ambushed a battalion of U.S. Army troops yesterday just outside of Saigon," the announcer said. "Eight Americans died. 14 were wounded. The men, from the 25th Infantry Division, were making a helicopter assault when they were surprised.

"Throughout the Saigon area, American and South Vietnamese troops have stepped up their sweeps to counter guerilla bands under orders to disrupt Sunday's presidential election in South Vietnam.

"In other action, U.S. jet fighters returned to targets in North Vietnam." (Those were F-105's, probably, he thought to himself.) "American planes attacked the Hoalac MIG base 20 miles from Hanoi and hit a railroad bridge 39 miles from Haiphong.

"At Hoalac, the pilots encountered dummy planes and decoy craters painted on the runways. They were not fooled. They blasted the main runway, making it inoperable.

"B52 bombers blasted base camps and infiltration routes along the northern frontier where the Marines are preparing for an expected North Vietnamese offensive.

"Back in Saigon, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, the military candidate for president, suggested that, if elected, he would urge for a pause in the bombing for more than the one week lull previously suggested. In the same speech, he said: 'Our political organizations are not yet strong enough to deal with the Communists. Each military man should be both a soldier and a political indoctrinator.'"

Morris paid close attention to all the details. He knew that Nguyen Van Thieu was just another in the confusing succession of generals who had taken turns grabbing power and ousting one another since the overthrow and assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. He had heard, also, that Nguyen Van Thieu had worked out some kind of arrangement with the vain, pompous prime minister, Nguyen Cao Ky, who could often be seen on the evening news attending this or that event with his pretty wife dressed in matching stylish costumes.

It would be such a relief to be able to regard these characters as heroic, or at least as responsible, thought Morris. Still the issue of the containment of Communism remained, he said to himself, regardless of the worthiness of the South Vietnamese leaders.

He searched through the stations again and found a discussion of the upcoming elections in South Vietnam. The person responding to the questions was obviously from the political left. He talked about the "indifference and hostility of the population to the government in Saigon."

There were serious problems, he said, with graft and war profiteering. The South Vietnamese military forces, especially the officer corps, had no real will to fight. The government had no real commitment to addressing the conditions that had led to discontent and thus the discontent continued and grew.

"Take the land question," the man said. "There is now a limit, per person, of 250 acres. Many wealthy families have this much land per each person in the household. A limit of 10 acres, such as enforced in Japan after World War Two, would more truly distribute land to allow rural peasants to control their own means of production.

"In addition, you have the taking of land rent and taxes from these poor rural people who are really almost slaves to the middle class. What conceivable reason would these people have for supporting the Saigon government?"

Morris turned off the radio, disturbed.

He looked across to Ellen Kass and pulled back a tress of hair from her pretty face. She looked angelic, like a sleeping child. He thought to himself that he wanted to be good to her and keep her from harm. But she had never asked for his protection. She had never asked for any kind of commitment.

She was too proud for that, he said to himself. She was too much in contempt of conventional love. She was in rebellion against her parents, also, he knew from comments she had made on the trip. She was 20 years old, old enough to make her own decisions. But she still lived at home. He had gathered from her comments that her parents disapproved of her trip with him.

It struck him that he was in an odd situation, wanting to be honorable in war in a war that people were calling imperialism and murder, wanting to be honorable in love in a love that he had just fallen into out of physical desire.

[Chapter 25 notes]

26. Morris and Ellen share a romantic dinner in Council Bluffs

Jim Morris and Ellen Kass had a special dinner that evening, their last evening together, at a restaurant overlooking the Missouri River in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

They sat at an outdoor table on a veranda with a view of the downtown buildings of Omaha, Nebraska, on the other side of the river. The scene was reminiscent of the veranda at the Red Garter where they had first met on the evening of the Memorial Day Regatta.

Ellie wore a blue-and-white striped dress with a sweetheart neckline and bishop sleeves. Her long chestnut hair was pulled behind her slender neck and tied with a blue ribbon. Above her sparkling green eyes, she wore a touch of blue shadow. Her moist, pretty face had a healthy glow.

Morris noticed at once that she was in an unusual mood. No lively, constant chatter. She was subdued and quiet. She swirled her gin gimlet with a straw, now and then smiling at him adoringly when she met his eyes. He was in a quiet mood, also, watching as an occasional passenger plane glided in toward Eppley Airfield, further up the river. He was thinking again about his upcoming training, with somewhat a higher level of anxiety about it, mixed with his ambiguous feelings about having to part from Ellie the next day.

"You know, I've been meaning to ask you," she said softly when the waiter brought the second round of drinks, "what kind of plane is it, exactly, that you're going to fly?"

"F-105 Thunderchief," he replied in his matter-of-fact, deep voice, "otherwise known as the 'Thud.'"

She laughed. "And why is that?"

"Heavy machine. Lands hard. With a thud."

"And how many people fly in it?"

"In training, and for radar detection, two. They have a special type with two seats. But, most of the time, in combat, you're flying alone in the one-seater, the F-105D."

He answered informatively, like a college professor replying to a student's question. But, as often, when he spoke to her, there was a hint of tenderness in his characteristically rather flat voice. She had an acute ear for things of this sort from the masculine domain. She was very much aware of this quality that his voice only had when he spoke to her.

"Just little you!" she said, leaning toward him with a smile as she often did when about to head off into a more humorous direction.

"Yes, just little me," he replied, expecting that the conversation would take the usual course. To his surprise, however, her lovely face clouded over instead with a melancholy look of a type he had never seen there before.

She nodded slowly as if to formulate something that she had resolved on beforehand.

"You know, Jimmy," she ventured, "I'd like to know what you'd really be doing if you go over. I'd like to understand. I really would."

"Well," he replied, sincerely touched, leaning forward, "the way I understand, you're assigned over there to some particular base, to a particular squadron. Every day, orders come down. Based on the orders, people get assigned to go out. There's always at least four, what they call a 'flight.' Often there's more, sometimes maybe even 30 or so planes flying together in a formation."

She nodded slowly again, her eyes lowered in thought.

"And where are they all going?" she asked, looking up with a quizzical smile.

He laughed, drawing back. "To hit a target—a bridge, an oil depot, or whatever. Typically, you know, a particular plane has maybe a half dozen bombs. You got to get there, that's the first thing, and drop the bombs where they're supposed to go, and then get out of there."

"Why wouldn't you get there, or get out of there?"

"Because people are shooting at you, Ellie. Almost always, on your way in, you encounter defensive fire from the ground."

"What kind of defensive fire?"

"Oh, very close to the ground, rifles and automatic fire," he said, sweeping across horizontally with his compact hand. "Up a little higher, anti-aircraft artillery—you know, like you see them shooting up into the sky in World War Two movies. Higher still, heat-guided surface-to-air missiles, SAMs. I've heard you can actually see the SAMs coming up, with their white plumes behind them, and you can duck down below them close to the ground where they don't work very well, but then you come back into range of the older style weapons."

As usual, he presented his thoughts matter-of-factly, as if they had no emotional content. She could not gauge his feelings about them.

"Well, I had no idea," she commented with a pretty frown. "It never occurred to me they go in there like that shooting and everything."

"It's a real war, Ellie," he replied softly.

They sat for a moment in silence, watching the river, which had just started to take on the orange light of sunset. The sun was low in the sky above a cluster of gray and brown buildings on the other side of the river. Some neon lights and other signs had already come on there, bright pinpoints of light against the backdrop of dark buildings.

"Now, this F-105, this "Thud,"' said Ellie, looking back to Morris as she swirled her gin gimlet, "why exactly do you want to fly it? Why did you pick it?"

"Oh, for a lot of reasons," Morris responded slowly in his deep voice.

He found her unrelenting seriousness amusing. Never before had he seen her in a mood like this. “I first heard of it way back in ROTC, two or three years ago. Heard it required a lot of air skills. And a lot of self-possession since usually you’re alone, like I said. Then, too, it’s the same basic type of plane that my dad flew. I think maybe I told you that. Kind of a modern version of it.”

“And yet, really, isn’t it one of the most dangerous things to fly? I think I remember you saying that. Or, no, now I remember, it was in some article you were reading out West. I remember seeing a picture of it and the description by the picture said it was dangerous. Isn’t that so?”

Her face struck him as childlike and innocent, at this moment, with her little button nose like a bunny, her moist, fresh cheeks, her shining green eyes.

“Yes, I suppose it could be called that,” he answered, watching the lights of traffic streaming past on the other side of the river.

The number 12 came inadvertently to his mind—12 pilots shot down in the previous week, he had heard on the news while Ellie slept. He supposed that about half of those, at least, were F-105 pilots flying out of Thailand. So far as he knew, though, all of them had been rescued.

She smiled. “Jimmy, remember that night at the Red Garter, I asked you if you were scared and you said yes.”

“Yes, I remember that, Ellen.”

“You must have thought I was pretty silly, huh?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess I couldn’t think too clearly. You were such a knockout, really.”

“Did you really think that?”

“Yes, I thought you were the prettiest girl I ever saw.”

“Do you still think that?”

“Yes.”

Her face grew serious again. She looked down and rearranged her spoon and fork, then looked up again, the green eyes wide open and thoughtful.

“The silly question I asked you, about were scared, I’d kind of like to ask it again.”

He laughed. “Yes, I’m still scared.”

She leaned forward and took his right hand in both of hers. Her hands were white and soft. His were rough and brown from his continual outdoor activities and training. She tapped on his fingers.

“Do you ever worry that maybe you won’t do something right, you know, in a split second or something, and something will happen?”

“Yes.”

“And yet you go on,” she said, shaking her head. “Why do you do that? I just want to understand. I’m not trying to discourage you, Jimmy,

because I admire you so much. I really do. I'm just trying to understand what goes on in your mind."

He sat up erectly and braced his hands on his thighs, as he had a habit of doing when he took on a serious subject.

He looked so handsome and ready, so much the soldier that he was, Ellen observed to herself, with his blond hair tightly trimmed around his alert, tan face and his arms and shoulders lean and muscular beneath his brown polo shirt. There was nothing extraneous about him. His face, his hair, his body, even the eyes that looked back at her, alight with the blue color of the sky, appeared to be trained down to an acute state of vigilance.

He realized, as he thought for a moment, that she had asked him a question he had wanted to answer for himself.

"All of my life has been focused on this," he replied softly, at last. "So, whether I'm scared, or whether maybe I will do something wrong, in a split second, as you say, it all gets simplified by one inescapable fact."

"And what is that?"

"I have to do it. This is me."

"Well, you know I care about you, don't you?"

"Yes, I think you do."

"You know I'll be thinking about you?"

"Will you?"

"Yes."

He took her hand and caressed it. The waiter brought their food. They went on to other, less serious subjects. They didn't talk anymore about one another and the war as the change in the river scene from twilight to night brought a romantic mood to both of them.

He was touched by what she had said. He realized that she had begun at it as if fulfilling a task. The task was being serious. It was not at all her normal mode. He appreciated the effort she had made to meet him on his own ground. Maybe she had sensed that he wanted to connect with her more deeply. He was satisfied with what she had done. All he had really wanted to know was that the possibility was there if the need ever arose for it.

She caught him smiling to himself.

"What's so funny?" she said,

"Oh, nothing," he answered.

"Come on, now!"

"I wouldn't want to offend you."

"Oh! Now you have to tell me!"

"I was just thinking, how could it be, someone your age, living in a country at war, and hardly even knowing about it? It's been on TV every

night. Everyone's talking about it."

"Well, I don't know," she said with a charming upward twist of her manicured hands. "I guess, for me, I just focus on the here and now—you know, my friends, my classes, whatever is the next thing. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," he replied.

He didn't really see anything wrong with it—for a pretty young woman like her. For men he had a different standard.

That night, after she fell asleep, he thought to himself that there would be a "next thing" after him. That made him feel sad, in a way, but he felt relieved at the prospect of regaining his freedom.

He realized that, in talking to her, he had worked through his worries about not being able to make it as a pilot. He would make it because he had to. His whole life had led up to this.

27. Morris and Ellen struggle through an awkward goodbye

Jim Morris had expected to drop Ellen Kass off at home the next morning and make a quick exit to avoid her parents. But Mary, the older sister, met them at the curb, saying the parents weren't home.

"Might as well come in for a cup of coffee, at least," she chimed in her pleasant voice, taking hold of Ellie's bags.

She was dressed in blue jeans and a blue cotton shirt, rolled up over her sturdy forearms. Her earnest, healthy face, below the crown of black hair, was animated with good cheer. She had set down a garden rake to come down to greet them. She had just raked the yard clean into tidy piles of grass clippings and leaves.

"Well, I guess I can come in for a little while," Morris replied, not knowing how to politely refuse. He nodded formally and followed the pretty sisters up the narrow sidewalk to the yellow bungalow.

On the long drive from Council Bluffs, begun before dawn, he had made general plans for his upcoming visit to his own home, also located in St. Paul. He would have just two days at home with his mother before heading down to Nevada for F-105 training.

His mother was doing well following her surgery in May. Even so, he wanted to provide her with whatever emotional support he could provide in the short time available. Also, he wanted to ask her some questions he had thought of on the trip about how exactly his father had fitted into her life and what exactly his father had done in the war.

He had said goodbye to Ellie in the car driving in. He didn't like the prospect of going through it again. The glow of the previous evening had faded as the day wore on with no new topics of talk. A new strain had developed with the mutual unwillingness to make any commitments for the future. He was anxious to get on to his business at home.

"I think you're in for a cold reception when Mom and Dad get home," said Mary to her sister as they entered the beige-carpeted living room. Everything there was precisely arranged and immaculately clean.

"I was afraid of that," Ellie answered disconsolately. "I thought maybe you would intercede for me, big sister."

"I did intercede, Ellie," Mary said softly. "I was your constant defender. They're just not ready for these kind of changes."

She had, in fact, interceded, trying the waters for her own trip, to Kentucky to see Matthew Brandt. The four months period would soon be up that he and she had agreed to, but they had made no definite plans for when and how to see one another. This was a matter foremost in her mind. Ellie heard the conciliation in her sister's voice, but she was in no mood to respond to it in a like spirit. She was weary from the trip and confused about her feelings for Morris. She had spent the whole day in clothes that she had picked out of the laundry, having not been able to

find any clean clothes that she felt looked right. Once in the house, she went at once to freshen up and to prepare herself emotionally for another goodbye.

Morris saw her do that and realized that he was in for a considerable stay. He didn't know why, but all of a sudden he was seeing all kinds of faults in Ellie. Why did she have to go off like that and make every- thing into a big deal.

He stood at the kitchen counter, holding a cup of coffee, while Mary filled him in on the latest news of his old team-mates. He was surprised to hear that Steward had quit the Air Force program.

"He starts in a Vista training program in a couple of weeks," Mary said. "Then he'll be going with a group to North Carolina."

"Is that so? Is that so?" Morris kept repeating as new information was presented. He had a feeling that this was a time of many changes. Every day brought something new among his old friends, with the war a backdrop to everything, in his estimation.

Bill O'Rourke was working on a construction crew, Mary said, and coxing the summer crews. He still had another year left of college. Denny Nolan, who also had another year, was stroking the senior heavy eight. And then, of course, there was Matthew Brandt. He had started working on a garden project in his assigned county in Kentucky.

"He said in his last letter he has about 20 families he's seeing on a regular basis," she said.

"So you got the big animal writing letters," Morris observed with a smile. He looked much the soldier, standing by the kitchen counter, with his blond hair combed neatly and his face lean and tan.

"Well, two letters, to be exact," Mary replied. The straight, dark eyebrows lowered in a frown.

"Hey, that's two letters more than he ever wrote in his entire previous life," Morris returned, detecting a level of concern.

"Yes, I know that," Mary answered softly. "And I do appreciate how he's made an effort."

She brushed back a strand of black hair from her handsome brow, and went over to the sink to wash out her coffee cup. Standing there, with the water running over the cup, she thought of how she had watched for the mail to arrive each day, hoping it would include a letter from Matt.

She had written a letter to him regularly once per week—but not always on the same day so as not to seem too predictable, and never more than once per week so as not to seem too eager. He had never called, as she had hoped he would do at least now and then. She felt she was losing touch with him. She was losing that access to his inner thoughts that she had so carefully established in the months before he left.

With Ellie still not returned from the other room, Morris and Mary

went on to other topics. She asked him how the trip had gone out west. He described a dam he and Ellie had stopped at on the Columbia River, then he talked briefly about his father's family in Oregon, how he and Ellie had gone down to Depoe Bay on the Oregon coast, where he had gone with his mother on one trip out West that he and she had gone when he was about ten for her to show him where his dad had grown up. He mentioned how, on his just completed trip, he had looked for traces of the Oregon trail since his father's people had gone West in the wagon trains.

She listened to what he said with a serious, pensive expression. "And your father was a pilot, also," she commented. "I think I remember Matt telling me that."

"Yes."

"It's like you're tracing his steps or your whole background, your whole heritage, on his side," she said.

"Yes," he answered again.

He was impressed at how quickly and naturally she got to the heart of the matter. He sensed that she was truly interested in what he was telling her, and would have been willing to continue talking about it to whatever level of meaning he wanted to take it.

He felt that it would be impolite to dwell too long on himself, however, so he turned the attention back to her. She said she had been busy all summer taking a class in "world models of nutrition" at the University of Minnesota.

"Not so far from what Matt is doing, with his gardens," Morris observed with a soldierly nod.

"Yes, not so far, really," she responded. Her eyes brightened at the mention of him. "Only he's actually putting it to use. What I'm doing is all theory, you know. But I hope to put it to use myself someday, also."

"Well, maybe you can do it together."

"Yes, who knows," said Mary, turning away from Morris to look out the window. There were some sparrows there feeding in a bird feeder that hung between pots of red and orange impatiens in the shade of a white and blue striped awning.

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure about it, if I were her," came a voice from the hall that opened to the kitchen. It was Ellie, looking fresh and clean in a pink and white sun dress with a short, pleated yoke skirt.

"Is that so?" said Morris, noticing immediately the effort she had made to recover the full effect of her good looks. The effort was a little too obvious, he thought, but the result was without question. She looked like a moist, pink flower just unfolding into bloom.

"Those girls in Kentucky, I hear they know a good man when they see one," Ellen remarked.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, according to the latest sociological study."

"Odd how she takes such a keen interest in different sociological studies," Mary observed good-naturedly. She knew she was being baited.

"Yes," Morris replied.

He observed with interest the difference in style between the two sisters. Mary, in her blue jeans and cotton blouse, looked ready to head back out to the yard or garden. Ellen, standing with her lovely shoulder pressed against him, had the subtle scent of newly applied perfume. She had brushed back her radiant hair into a French twist with sun-bleached wisps trailing down around her pretty face. She looked like she was ready for an evening party.

Morris appreciated the care that Ellie gave to her appearance. He understood that it was part of her attraction for him. But at the moment he saw a superior quality in Mary's plainness. He sensed that this quality in Mary was related to her receptiveness to the serious subjects that Ellie usually tried to avoid. Still he had not forgotten the previous night and the effort Ellie had made to move in that direction, apparently to accommodate what she sensed were his wishes. The difference was that for Mary it was natural while for Ellie it was not. But was it fair to Ellie to expect her to be what she naturally was not, when there were so many things that did come naturally to her that she excelled in?

Ellie sensed that something was amiss between her and Morris. She felt confused by it, also. She had come to the conclusion on the last couple days of the trip that Morris wanted her to be more serious, once in a while. She had tried to, and she had succeeded to some extent, she thought, on the previous evening, but she couldn't maintain such a state of mind for long.

She also felt dissatisfied with how she looked at the moment. She knew she was lovely beyond what most women could hope for. But she wanted to be more than lovely. She wanted to be absolutely stunning.

"You know I'll be thinking about you," she said at the door, using the exact same words for a goodbye that she had said the night before in the restaurant.

Even as the words came out, she realized that they were the same and felt stupid for it.

Morris, too, was aware that the words were the same. He observed that her eyes moistened when she kissed him. She was no less beautiful in his eyes than she had been the first moment he had seen her. But he could not focus on her as he felt he should. He just had a feeling that the goodbye was taking too long.

He lingered dutifully at the kiss. Then he drew back from her. He grasped her shoulders firmly. "See you again sometime?" he asked,

looking into the teary green eyes.

"I sure hope so," she replied.

Driving away, he felt relieved that the romantic intensity was over for the time being. Even so, a sense of sadness and longing grew by the minute as he left the yellow bungalow behind.

By the time he arrived at the two-story, brick house where he had grown up, he felt so overwhelmed by the sadness and longing that he felt an urge to call Ellen at once to say goodbye again and reassure her that he really cared.

"But what good would it do?" he reasoned with himself. "Everything has already been said."

He resisted the urge and made a conscious effort to redirect his thoughts to his original objects—the same objects he had had months before, before she had come into his life.

28. Morris and his mother re-visit a scene from their past

After having supper together, Jim Morris and his mother went for a walk in a park that overlooked the Mississippi River. The park was only a couple of blocks from the house where he and his mother had lived during the entire time he was growing up.

It was a warm summer evening with crickets singing high in the elm trees. They stopped near the south end of the High Bridge in a grassy area that afforded a view of the main part of St. Paul on the other side of the river. From here they could see the tall chimney of the Northern States Power plant, spewing out smoke above the other end of the bridge. They could also see the immense green dome of St. Paul's Cathedral at the top of Summit Hill, and the railroad tracks, scrap iron yards, and grain elevators along the river.

Morris looked at this scene, seeing the remembered places of his childhood, the places where he had first gotten a sense of the river, the railroad, and the general organization and function of the city. He had taken a great interest in these pragmatic things as a child. His mother looked at them, seeing the various places that she had pointed out to him and explained to him in an effort to accommodate his interests. She had always felt such a lack, such an emptiness, not having a man there to explain it in a man's language. Now here he was, himself a man, lean and almost tough in appearance, though she knew well his sensitivity and idealism. In these traits he was so much his father's son.

"You know, I always meant to ask you, Mom," said Morris after they had stood on the hill, looking off without speaking, for several minutes. "How long did you and Dad actually spend together? Please forgive me if I'm asking too much."

He paused and turned toward her to gauge her reaction. He saw no resentment there in the sympathetic eyes.

In those eyes, blue like his own, he had earlier that day observed the effect of her bout with cancer. The eyes were more sunken with often a faint shadow around them. When disclosed in light, the skin there had a thin, blanched appearance.

Except for that, she had retained the physical attractiveness that he had always admired. Her short, neatly trimmed hair was not yet gray, or was skillfully colored a dark brown, her natural color. The flesh on her forehead and cheeks was still firm, though in her whole bearing there was a hint of world weariness and fatigue.

Receiving no answer, he pressed on. "I've just always wanted to know," he continued. "I know you were together for a while before you got married, and then you were married for about a year before he went over, when he was in training."

"Yes," she replied simply.

"Well, how much time, how many months, or whatever, did that come to?" he persisted, turning to face her again.

"That's an odd question," she returned with a quizzical smile.

"Is it?" he said, peering into the shadowed eyes.

"Yes," she answered more harshly.

Morris was silent, considering. "Just tell me then, why is it odd? I don't want to offend you."

She sighed and looked down toward the river. A towboat was passing there with eight barges. "Because I'd have to count up the months," she said. "I've never done that. I'd be almost afraid to do it."

"Why would you be afraid to do it?"

"Because the great love of my life was just that."

He let out an involuntary, almost inaudible groan that he quickly covered up with a cough.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to force you into quantifying. It's just a question that occurred to me on the trip, out west, in Oregon, with respect to my own life, not yours."

"Ah, yes," she replied with a nod.

She had seen the obvious similarity between his relationship with Ellen Kass and her own with his father. Her son had been frank with her about what had been going on between him and Ellie. She had observed that he had gone farther sexually than his father had, before marriage, but she was not the kind to make a moral judgment.

"Well, from the time we met," she said, "we were together just about every possible minute. I guess, it was what we used to call a whirlwind romance'... Then, well, we were so deep into it, we ran off and got married just before he went into the Army. You see, I loved him so much, I guess you could say I was crazy about him, so I just wanted him to know that I didn't care about any kind of practical arrangements, or the logistics, or whatever, of when we would get to see one another again. I just wanted him to know that I loved him, and that that was it, period."

"How old were you then?" Morris inquired.

"Well, let me see... 19."

"And you didn't have any hesitation about signing yourself over so completely? With the war and all?"

"I was in love with him, Jimmy. Have you ever heard of that?"

"Yes," he answered softly. He wondered, though, whether his affair with Ellie was of the same quality. He didn't think that it was, as it now stood.

"Then, after he went in, how did you manage to be together?" he persisted in almost a businesslike manner. "You were together in Texas, weren't you? "

He moved to the side a little and sat down on a flagstone wall. He rubbed his hand across the uneven surface of the stone.

"Well, as you know yourself," she replied, "he wound up getting in the Army Air Corps. It was what he had always wanted to do. And so—at that time—that meant eight months of training in Texas, there, at Randolph, where you were yourself. I went down there right away, as soon as he got sent there, and got a job in a little restaurant just off base, and found an apartment there in that same area... I'm sure I must have told you all this before."

"Yes, maybe, in part," he said. "But I'd like to hear it again."

"Well, that's pretty much all there is to it, Jim. I worked the breakfast shift, and he went out every day, at dawn, like they do, to practice in his plane. And then in the evening, we would be together. And we lived together, of course. He was actually supposed to live on the base, I think, but he had the nicest commander who looked the other way, so far as that was concerned. We didn't have much, of course. It was just a tiny, little apartment. But what do you need when you're young and in love? All I can say is it was a glorious time!"

She sat down beside him and looked with him across the river toward the gray and blue roofs of houses amidst the trees of Summit Hill. The sun was low in the sky behind a bank of clouds. Children in birthday hats ran down the grassy slope carrying brightly-colored balloons.

"You know, I sat here once with your father," Mrs. Morris said, turning to face her son. "On this very wall. I guess this old wall has been here a long time!"

He laughed. "I never knew you guys came around here," he said.

"Oh, yes. He loved the bluffs just like you."

"I never knew that."

"In fact, that was one reason I got a house up here, on the West Side, after the war. Because I had good memories of it."

"I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes."

Morris got up and looked off at the scene, wondering what the years had done to it. He didn't expect the years had done much. This old bridge, the High Bridge, with its immense girders crossing obliquely above them, had been here since who knew when, maybe since the turn of the century, he supposed. The cathedral on the horizon had been there for as many years, or more, he imagined. The railroad had been there, the barges, the grain elevators, all of the sights he had loved as a boy. So his father had loved them, too. Well, that was quite a revelation.

"And, as far as what happened during the war, Jim," his mother said from behind him, "he and I, your dad and I, we were like two souls that were joined together though we were thousands of miles apart. You

maybe can't understand that, or believe it, but we were as close as any two people in the same bed."

"I don't understand, though," he said, turning back to look at her, "why you never told me you had been up here with him. You and I, we were here so much."

She sat with her hands folded, the wind blowing her hair across her forehead. She looked younger now, almost pretty, and the blue eyes looked thoughtful. It was as if the memories had energized her, animated her with suppressed feeling. But around her face, there was somehow still an aura of sadness, and the eyes were still faintly shadowed.

"I don't know why," she said, raising her hands slightly. She shook her head. "I don't know why. Maybe I thought it would put too much of a burden on you. I don't know."

"Ah, yes," he said, not allowing himself an opinion of whether that had been right or wrong. "Well, you were always very good to me, and you always gave me such a good impression of him."

"He deserved that, Jim," she answered. "And so did you."

"I just wish that one time I could have seen him."

She got up and sighed. "He had lots of plans for you, Jimmy. He used to talk about how he was going to teach you to play baseball."

"I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes. Sometime I'll show you his letters."

"I would like that."

"How about this evening?"

"Yes, I would like that."

He knew she had the collection of his letters, neatly lined up in a cigar box. They were that small size. He had seen her looking at them when he was a boy.

She had never before offered to share them with him. He had never asked. He had felt, judging from her secretiveness about them, that they were too private to share. He didn't quite understand why she had offered to share them now.

29. Morris looks through his father's wartime letters to his mother

Before going to bed, Jim Morris's mother—her name was Jane—brought him the cigar box containing his father's letters.

The letters were stacked neatly from side to side along the long dimension of the cigar box. They filled up the box tightly. Here and there a black and white photograph stuck up slightly above the top edges of the letters.

"They're in chronological order," she said, "from left to right. The photographs, too."

"Ah, yes," he replied, nodding. He took the box carefully in his compact hands. "Well, thank you."

"You're welcome."

Without further word, she went to bed.

Earlier, he had gone out to his car to get an air war history book that he had come across in a book store in Portland, Oregon, on his recent trip. The book contained a factual account of the several campaigns that his father had fought in in World War Two. It also had photographs of the main types of airplanes used in that war, including the type that his father had flown in, the Republic P-47M Thunderbolt.

Seated at the dining room table, Morris set the box squarely in front of him, as though about to perform a methodical analysis. He looked first to the several photographs.

The first picture was of his father as a very young man, maybe 20 or 21 years old, but already in uniform. He appeared slightly built, but strong. The eyes were serious and direct. Morris could see the obvious resemblance to himself. Yes, a very close resemblance, he noted, close enough so that he had no doubt that someone who knew him could look at that photograph and identify the man as his father.

The second photograph was of his father and mother on their wedding day. He had seen another copy of this same photograph in his mother's room. His father was dressed in the same uniform. His mother wore a plain black dress with a V-neckline and a corsage of white flowers on her left shoulder and breast.

He saw a softer look in his father's eyes here, and he noted how lovely his mother had been. How wholesome and modest she looked, with her brown hair curled and pulled up from her forehead and back behind her left ear.

A third photograph was of his father in a brown leather flight jacket, standing in front of his Thunderbolt fighter. It was a jug-shaped, single-prop plane with a round, domelike cockpit.

Morris searched through his air war history book and found a place where the plane was pictured on the lead page of a chapter about the

Allied air campaign against Germany in 1943 and 1944.

"The Republic P-47M Thunderbolt, affectionately known as the 'Jug,' saw extensive action in the mid-war years," the caption said. "With a top speed of almost 470 miles per hour, it was praised for its ruggedness and maneuverability. But the greatest praise went to the brave and cheerful young men who flew it in thousands of sorties against German strategic targets. The close-flying escort of 'Jugs' brought the big bombers safely to the target and back home."

Morris noted the plane's simplicity of design. It looked straightforward in purpose, almost innocent and noble, like the lance and shield of a medieval knight.

He observed, also, the superficial similarity between his father's situation as a pilot and his own, as he imagined it would be: in both cases, a single-seat fighter called "Thunder"-something ("Thunderbolt" and "Thunderchief") with a one-syllable nickname ("Jug" and "Thud").

The similarities could be easily explained, he thought to himself. He had chosen a single-seater deliberately because his father had flown one. The name "Thunder" had simply come down along the Republic Aircraft product line. As for the one-syllable nicknames, such nicknames were common.

Turning from the introductory page with the photograph of the P-47M, Morris looked to the next page and found a table summary of World War Two single-seat fighters. The table showed engine type, horsepower, and gross weight. The P-47M was listed there as having an air-cooled, radial, 18-cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-2800-57 engine with 2800 horsepower. Gross weight was 14,200 pounds.

By comparison, the largest German fighter listed in the same table, the Focke-Wulf Ta 152C-3, had a liquid-cooled, inverted V, 12-cylinder Daimler-Benz DB 603L engine with 2100 horsepower. It had a gross weight of less than 10,000 pounds.

Two smaller German planes were also included in the table. They were the Messerschmidt BF 109K-4 and Me 209-A2. They had engine powers of 2000 and 1750 horsepower, respectively. Both had a gross weight of less than 8000 pounds. The several British planes listed were also smaller and less powerful than the Republic P-47M Thunderbolt.

So his father had flown the most powerful, heaviest single-seat fighter available at the time, Morris concluded.

Out of curiosity he looked through the book for similar figures on the F-105. He remembered seeing several photographs of the F-105 in a chapter on the modern jet fighter.

He found one photograph and examined it more closely. It showed a Vietnam-era F-105D in full battle equipment. According to the caption, the equipment included six 750-pound bombs and two 450-gallon drop

tanks fitted on external ejector racks.

On the facing page was a chapter sub-heading, “First in the New Line.”

The lead paragraphs read as follows:

“The F-105 Thunderchief, as it became eventually known, was the first aircraft specifically designed to be a modern jet fighter. Scarcely had the sounds of the World War Two air war subsided when Republic Aircraft Corporation began work on the basic design of this aircraft in June 1950. Alexander Kartveli, the lead engineer, reviewed more than a hundred configurations before choosing a single-seat, single-engine, swept-wing design deemed suitable for high-speed, low-level operation. “A decade of development brought modifications, such as sturdier landing gear, required by the immense size and weight of the aircraft. At a gross weight of more than 20 tons, the F-105 was, and still is, the largest, heaviest single-seat fighter ever built. In October 1961, before an audience that included then President John F. Kennedy, the fourth production version of this aircraft, the F-105D, demonstrated its ability to carry and deliver seven tons of bombs.

“Powered by an enormous Pratt & Whitney J75-P-19W turbojet engine providing a thrust, with afterburner, of 26,500 lb.s.t, the F-105D has a maximum speed of 1,420 miles per hour at 38,000 feet. Also, it can fly 836 miles per hour at sea level, making it a formidable foe in combat ground support and interdiction.”

“20 tons! 1400 miles per hour!” Morris exclaimed to himself, newly impressed though he had heard similar, less exact descriptions in Texas. “I guess I chose the big guy, too!”

With a thoughtful, stolid expression, he pushed back from the dining room table, where he was seated with the letters, and went to the liquor cabinet in the next room to make himself a stiff drink. He came back with the drink in hand and sat down to begin on the letters—in chronological order, as they were arranged.

He soon discovered that the letters were interspersed with intimate remarks that he found almost embarrassing. “I was thinking tonight about that little button nose, wishing I could kiss it.” “I felt you were with me this morning when we were flying out. I remembered how you sat so quietly beside me, with your head on my shoulder, when we were driving back that Sunday from Duluth.”

After reading several such comments, he passed over them quickly whenever he saw them coming and looked for comments about flying and the war. There were surprisingly few comments of this kind. In addition to the expressions of affection, there were many plain, unself-conscious descriptions of people and places in England and France, and they, too, were suffused with emotion—”you would have loved it so

much," "wish you could have been here," and so on.

Nevertheless, Morris was able to find enough factual information to place the letters in the historical framework that he was familiar with from past reading.

Then he came upon this: "You told me how good and brave you think I am, going off to face battle. I think of that often. Sometimes it seems as if the war will last forever, and then I see that we are making day-to-day progress. And I see how much I really care that we are making that progress, to bring down this Nazi regime. I realize how much I want to be as good and brave as you say I am."

In another letter: "They have a general strategy now, with the Brits hitting cities by night, to bring down the morale of the common people, and us hitting special targets like plants and transportation, by day. Right now, we are hitting the aircraft plants and the plants where they make spare parts like air-friction bearings. Each successful hit means fewer German planes in the air."

And so it went. What really was he looking for, Jim Morris asked himself after a while. Maybe just a sense of him. Just a sense of the real man that he had never really known. And he had gotten a sense of him as a straightforward man who seldom spoke of his own exploits or fears and who interacted with his mother in a gentle, charming way.

In the midst of looking through the letters, he went to the liquor cabinet and made himself another stiff drink. After three such drinks and many letters, he felt the effect as a mood of heavy brooding and sadness.

In this mood he came upon this statement in a letter in summer of 1943, a year before his father was killed**:** "So you say little Jimbo is saying "Mama." I wish I could be there so he could say "Dada" too. Poor little fella must think his dad is a real ninnie, never being around. I'm going to make it up to that kid, Janie. I'm going to be the best dad I know how."

That statement brought tears to Morris's eyes. He paused with the letter in hand and had a sensation that his father was in the room. The experience of it was enough to send a chill up his spine. He banished the thought from his mind and ended up asleep with his head on the dining room table, the letter still clutched in his hand.

[Chapter 29 notes]

30. Mary tries to concoct a reason to visit Matt

A week or so after Morris left for flight training, Mary Kass told her sister, Ellen, that she didn't plan to "actually sleep with Matthew" when she went to Kentucky to see him.

"But it never occurred to me it would be so complicated," she said from her tidy desk in her bedroom. "I thought he would have a place of his own, or just be with a room-mate. I just thought we would talk it over, and I would sleep in another room."

"You are the trusting kind," Ellie replied with a shake of her head.

She missed Morris, but she had accepted a date with a fellow student from business school. She was dressed in a burgundy jumpsuit, ready for him to come by at any moment. She observed her solemn sister, sitting at her desk with a book, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, on a lovely Friday evening. Her sister struck her as hopelessly "out of it," as the current jargon went.

"Maybe you should arrange a visit with your friend, Tom Steward," Ellen said, "for a counseling session."

"Ellie," Mary answered softly. "You're the one who will lose out in the end."

"Is that so?" Ellie shot back with a toss of her lovely hair. "So who made you the expert on romance?"

She jumped up from Mary's bed, where she had been sitting, and marched out of the room.

Mary watched her go in silence. She knew she had gotten herself into a fine predicament, with the four months ended after which she had promised to visit Brandt. She followed Ellie down the hall to the kitchen, where she found her at the window, her face set with anger.

"Ellie, let's not have an argument," Mary said forlornly. Her thick eyebrows lowered over her serious brown eyes. "The reason I brought up the subject... I need your advice."

"Why would you want my advice?"

"Because you are the real expert."

"Yea, the wanton woman."

They both laughed.

Ellie considered for a moment as she watched out the window for her date to drive up outside.

"Well, how about this?" she ventured. "Meet him in another city somewhere, in a motel or something."

She cocked her head to the side, the green eyes sparkling, to await the reply. She had never done anything of the kind herself, but she felt experienced after Morris.

"That seems too forward, or something," Mary responded.

She walked over to the kitchen window, in the back, and looked out

at the red and white petunias in the window box outside.

She thought to herself that she should maybe just give up on seeing Matthew in Kentucky. She could just wait until he came home for Christmas, which he was likely to do. But that would be to invalidate the original agreement, along with the implicit understanding that something more serious would follow a year of such meetings. She didn't want to allow that kind of ambiguity to develop in their relationship.

"Then how about this?" Ellie said, noticing for the first time the genuine concern in her sister's face. "Find some other reason to go down there, unrelated to him."

"What kind of reason?" Mary said, taking hope.

"Oh, I don't know," Ellie replied. "How about one of your projects?"

Her playful eyes settled for a moment on the serious eyes of her sister. For just that moment there was an exchange of a sentiment common to them both. Then a movement on the periphery of her vision drew her attention to the approach of a car. It was a sporty, little foreign car, sparkling clean, with a blue and white exterior and white-walled tires.

"Ellen!" Mary cried, her face lighting up. "You are the expert! That's a wonderful idea! Now I won't have to go to counseling!"

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary," Ellie responded softly, sincerely touched. She stood with her small purple purse in her hand. "I really do want it to go all right for you, you know."

"Yes, I do know," said Mary, touched with emotion, also.

She watched her lovely sister running out to the shiny blue car, to her dashing young man. Ellen ran easily, with a light, aerial manner, her beautiful chestnut hair flowing behind her. Sought as Ellen was by young men, it was no wonder she had gained experience, Mary thought. Maybe the experience had come too fast. Even so, Ellen did have a good idea of how to proceed in the game of love. It was a game, to a certain extent, Mary concluded, as she walked back down the hall to her room, mulling over the idea that her sister had put in her mind.

Mary left about a half hour later, walking with a book in her hand, to look at the activities bulletin board at the private women's college that she attended. The college was in the same neighborhood, only about a mile away.

Coming down the hall, she found Bill 0'Rourke, the rowing coxswain, standing at the bulletin board with the petite, pretty girl that had been with him at the Memorial Day Regatta.

O'Rourke was dressed in tan shorts and a white T-shirt with his red beard trimmed short for summer weather. His appearance was more subdued than had been his custom at school and the boat house. The irrepressible blue eyes looked more serious and thoughtful.

O'Rourke explained that he was at the bulletin board to write down details on a school-sanctioned medical outreach program in Georgia that he was going to take part in in November. He would be working with children of migrant farm workers, helping to administer vaccines.

"He's got this idea now, medic in the service," commented his small, dark friend (whose name, Mary knew, was Marcia Lasky).

"Is that right?" said Mary, intrigued by this new side of O'Rourke that she had not seen before. "Why not med school then? Are you thinking of that, too?"

"Little thing called grades," O'Rourke replied with a grin. "Hey, and, oh yeah, another little thing called the draft."

"Oh, yes, I have heard something about them both!" Mary answered in her pleasant voice, her hazel eyes wide with her typical interest and solicitous concern.

"Anyhow," said O'Rourke. "Say the draft wasn't there, say I could get into med school, would I be ready for it next year? I don't know. I guess I just want to see what it's like, the whole war scene, firsthand. Not to kill people, though, so this is kind of half way. Maybe after I get back, who knows?"

"But you've got another year, don't you?" Mary threw in. "You're just a junior, aren't you? You're thinking of enlisting now?"

"Oh, no, I'll be back," O'Rourke replied in the same serious vein. If I go in the service, it won't be for another whole year. Or actually, a year and a half, if they let me finish ... I'm a half year behind."

"Looking way ahead."

"Yes, maybe too much. It's hard to explain. I've just got this urge to make up my mind. About the whole draft thing."

"Why, yes, of course," Mary commented softly. "I can't blame you for that! It must be such a weight hanging over you! We girls don't have to worry about that, do we, Marsh?"

"No, we don't," the dark girl answered in a sympathetic tone.

"It would be such an experience, though, wouldn't it?" Mary went on. "Being in the midst of all that turmoil! And people dying, too! You'd have to take care of them, Bill. And you'd be in danger yourself... That little red cross wouldn't help much, I'm afraid."

"Well, actually, did you know," O'Rourke replied, "this the first war we've been in where our medics don't wear the red cross."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, as I understand."

"Why is that?"

"I'm not sure exactly. They even carry rifles."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, as I understand," O'Rourke replied, thinking he was dwelling

too much on himself. “How come you’re here? Looking for some kind of program, too?”

“Who, me?” Mary Kass returned, caught off-guard. “Oh, nothing in particular. I just happened by.”

She couldn’t bring herself to disclose her plan to get in a program somewhere close to Matthew. The connection was too obvious. She didn’t want to betray how much she wanted to see him.

O’Rourke and his girlfriend left soon after, leaving Mary a little uneasy with how secretive she had been. Nonetheless, she continued in her original course of action.

On the bulletin board she discovered a program of the exact kind she had been hoping for.

“Spend a week with Father Tom Murphy’s Appalachian Ministry,” the description said. “Baby-sit for women attending sewing classes. Build hot houses for tomatoes. Help kids with homework. Learn about problems that Appalachians have. This is a come-and-leave-as-you-wish program, provided you work when you’re here. Housing and meals provided, but you provide your own transportation to Kentucky and back.″

Mary signed up for the program in the activities office the next day. Also, she arranged to get a ride with another student who was going down at the same time. Then she stopped in the library and looked up the small town in Kentucky where the ministry headquarters was located. It was about a hundred miles northwest of Crabtree, Kentucky, where Brandt was stationed as a Vista volunteer.

. Her mind was humming with thoughts as she walked home, oblivious of the houses and people around her. So far as she could see, the arrangement would work out well. Matthew could drive down and spend a whole day with her following her three days as a volunteer. She could stay an additional day, or several days, if they worked out an arrangement for staying together without sex.

From Brandt her mind drifted to the whole business of projects and programs, and how people her own age had gotten so mixed up in them. These idealistic ventures were somehow a part of the time—as was the war, and the reaction to it. The sincerity of spoken interactions, such as O’Rourke had shown in his comments about wanting to become a medic, that was part of it, too, somehow, she reflected to herself.

She wondered about O’Rourke. Obviously, he didn’t see being a medic as a way to get out of fighting. Obviously, there was a level of idealism behind his intentions, and careful thought. She hadn’t been aware of that aspect of O’Rourke’s personality.

She was sorry that she had not met O’Rourke’s sincerity in a like spirit. He had acted as people ought to act. She herself had not. She was

normally a direct person. She felt ashamed of her indirectness.

On arriving at home, she went to her desk at once to write a letter to Brandt informing him of her plans. Two hours later, all she had to show for her efforts was a wastebasket full of crumpled up pieces of paper. She started in again and wrote out the letter without pausing.

"Matthew, dearest Matthew," she wrote, "I'm coming down there, near where you are, later this month to work in a volunteer program, just for a few days. The reason I am going to do this, I was looking for a way not to be too obvious about busting my heart out to see you. So now you know the real truth! I want to see you so bad, I'm about to blow up! But, then, you got to know, too, I am not going to sleep with you, Matthew, I mean, have sex. I won't explain. You understand why! I was thinking, though, maybe we can spend a night together. Wouldn't that be grand! Write me soon, and let me know if you can get down to see me. As soon as I hear from you, I'll write back with the details."

She signed the letter, "Love, Mary," and mailed it at once at the corner store two blocks from her house.

31. Brandt interrupts his new duties to arrange for Mary's visit

A few days later, Matt Brandt emerged from the store-front Crabtree post office with the day's mail for the *Miner Mountaineer*. He picked it up every day, a task assigned by Fletcher Bourne.

Brandt flicked back his brown hair with a trademark angry toss of his head as he walked. The hair was long enough now to get in his eyes. He had taken on a shaggy, unkempt appearance like many of the young men of Letcher County, He wore the same baggy work pants and T-shirts that he had arrived with six weeks before. They had grown a little more threadbare, but that was also part of the new image. He went for days without a shave, which gave him sometimes a sullen, hungry look. Still, the most striking feature was the blue eyes. They were full of youthful interest, and suggested always his characteristic quietness, suspicion of pretense, and dry humor.

He shuffled through the mail at once, since his letters from Mary Kass came in the same mail. He found an envelope that he recognized by its plainness and neatly-printed address.

He tore it open and read it, standing by his gray government car. The car, a 1965 Ford Fairlane four-door sedan with a stick shift and radio, had been in his possession for two weeks. He had just started to take full advantage of the mobility it provided.

The letter was on lined paper torn out of a three-hole notebook. The writing was neat block printing like the address, matter-of-fact in appearance. But the words conveyed a strong feminine presence and the earnestness of Mary Kass.

With the letter in his shirt pocket, he drove two blocks down Main Street to the cement block Miner Mountaineer building.

He found Bourne in his office, so absorbed in the papers spread out on his desk in front of him that he didn't notice Brandt at the door. Bourne was dressed in a white and gray striped shirt with a blue tie. The shirt was open at the neck. He was standing with a pen in his hand. His chair had been pushed back into the corner of the room, by a window that looked out to a red water tower and a steep hillside covered with scrubby pines.

Matthew knocked on the door frame.

"Well, hey, Matthew, come in," Bourne said, looking up with a smile.

The newspaperman was always glad to see his young assistant. He had come to like his quiet, sullen manner. He had come to regard it as showing a deep honesty and straightforwardness. He had observed that Brandt was reluctant ever to ascribe any kind of lofty idea or motives to himself, and yet was unfailingly generous in his interactions with others. Also, he had watched with approval at how Brandt interacted with his

son, Bumper. Brandt's angry dismissals of people who were out for themselves only had made an impression on the boy. For the first time Bumper had shown a strain of carefully concealed idealism himself, going along with Brandt to help some of the older people in their gardens.

"Just brought the mail," Brandt said.

"Well, thank you. Anything for you?"

"Letter from Mary Kass."

"Well, that's fine," said Bourne, looking back to his desk. "That girl is pretty faithful, you know," he said, glancing at Brandt with a smile.

"Yes, sir. I know," Brandt replied flatly.

Bourne looked back to the desk again. The lean miner's face became serious and thoughtful, with the brows a little lower above the gray eyes and the mouth set more firmly.

Brandt had seen this expression often in his time with Bourne. He had come to regard it as characteristic of him.

"Looks like you're hard at it," he said.

"Well, yes. I reckon I am," Bourne replied, smiling. "You have to forgive me, Matt. I don't mean to be so self-absorbed. But you have a part in this, you know."

"How's that?"

"Remember, when you first arrived, when you and I were driving back from the Tri-County office, you asked me about what I had done, where I came from, and so on?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, that got me to thinking, when I described things to you, about what I had been doing on the newspaper, that time was slipping by. There's a song like that, you know, 'Ain't it funny how time slips away.' And I started thinking about what I told you I had been doing to investigate the problems in the mines. I tried to make it sound like I've done a lot. Then I got to thinking, what have I really done? Look here, I've got it all laid out in front of me. And you know what?"

"No, sir, what?"

"It ain't worth a goldarn."

Brandt was silent, not knowing how to respond. He knew that the paper was important to Bourne. But he seldom read any of the articles with interest. He preferred to find out about things firsthand by going around and talking to people.

"And you know why?" Bourne persisted, with a whimsical glance.

He understood that the topic was of limited interest to Brandt. He had often observed this to himself with chagrin, that this was his fate to be a man of letters and have a son and charge who neither one cared a hoot for the written word,

"No, sir, why?" said Matt, realizing that he was being used as a sounding board.

"Because the whole darn thing is not thorough enough, not systematic enough in analysis... I had a fellow come in here, old friend, with a newspaper from Cincinnati, and I looked at the similar articles in that." He shook his head. "Well, you can't imagine, what I do here is nothing like that. So I'm off to the race tracks here to turn the whole thing up a notch or so to make it thorough. Starting with the truck mines... But I guess I won't keep you captive any longer. You got that MV meeting this evening, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Where is this one?"

"Up in Pine County, at Harris's place."

"Harris, the genius with the blonde hair?"

"Yes, sir. None other. Leader of the people."

"Or so he imagines."

"True."

"Where does he live up there?"

"Up in the northeast corner, by Poole, on top of a hill somewhere out in the sticks. He gave me some directions.

"You reckon you'll stay up there over night?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Well, you have a good time. And hold your own, if you don't mind some advice. I don't suppose Harris took it lightly when you didn't come up to his meeting."

Brandt shrugged, his face not showing any reaction. "Oh, well, you know," he said, "in his way."

"Yes," Bourne replied, smiling, "in his way."

Again, they were silent for a moment. Bourne looked back to his papers strewn out on his desk.

Brandt could see that Bourne was eager to get back to his work. He also knew, from experience, that Bourne would stand there all day, being attentive, and would never ask to be excused to get back to his work.

"Sir," he said.

"Yes?" Bourne replied, looking up again. He noticed a change in tone. The tone was slightly more urgent.

"Looks like this Mary, she may be coming down to Kentucky, to a place called Berea?"

"Berea, sure. It's sixty miles from here, west."

"I'd like to take off a few days and go down there."

"Of course, Matthew. You surely deserve that."

They were silent again.

"You suppose you'll be bringing her back up here, too?" Bourne

asked.

"Well, that was kind of on my mind."

"Well, you just do that. She can stay right in the house. We'll fix up that couch in the living room."

"Thank you," Brandt answered. "That will be fine."

Bourne considered again, observing Brandt's scruffy appearance. He opened his desk drawer and took out three ten dollar bills.

"And you take this, too," he said, reaching out the bills toward him. "I'd like you to have this. You've done us a lot of personal work. You take this, Matt, and go get you a haircut and some new clothes, and stuff."

"That's not necessary," said Brandt.

"You take it now," said Bourne. "You deserve it."

Brandt took the bills and placed them in his shirt pocket, next to the letter. He had been thinking about the same idea himself, that he needed an overhaul pretty bad to look his best for Mary.

32. Brandt, Kelly, and Harris hold their first "dog cadre" meeting

Fletcher Bourne had a meeting that evening with the strip mining committee he was involved in. Bumper Bourne had gone down the road to work on cars with a friend. Matthew Brandt decided to leave early for the MVs meeting and stop for supper somewhere along the way.

He wound up stopping at the little restaurant in the town where he and Fletcher had stopped on their way to the Tri-County CAP meeting. He ordered a hamburger and hash browns and sat looking out the window at the grimy, weary men streaming out the gate of the mine as the day shift ended.

He had a new sense of freedom, sitting by himself. He had lived at home all through high school and college. He had never eaten by himself in a restaurant before, though he had traveled with the rowing team and had gone on small vacation trips with friends.

He took out Mary Kass's letter, and looked at the words, "Matthew, dearest Matthew." He was glad that she was eager to see him. He would be in Berea, all right. He would have a lot to tell her about his month and a half in Kentucky.

He still had a feeling that he was in a strange place. He tried to formulate in his mind what the difference really was. It wasn't just the hills. It wasn't just the coal mines. It was a whole different way of life that was grimmer and more matter of fact and more stubborn. There was a quality of holding on.

That was what he would tell Mary, that there was a quality of holding on. He had seen this in Fletcher Bourne and his son. And there was a quality of holding back, also. He had seen this in them, too. Despite how kind they had been to him and how warmly they had accepted him into their own home, there was still that holding back. It was such a thing that you could almost forget it was there, then there it was again.

"They are still a little leery that I might do something that would go against something very dear to them," he said to himself, as if talking to her.

He was surprised at the extent to which he had put the idea into words in his mind. Maybe Mary was right that he had the ability to think and speak clearly. He had gone in the direction that she had trusted he would go. He wanted to keep on in that direction. He wanted to take on a man's mind.

The sun was low in the sky above the pine-bordered crest of a dark hill as he headed out of town on a winding, two-lane highway. The highway led up a long, narrow valley with wooded hills on both sides.

This part of the county he had seen before on his trips around for the garden project. He passed by a garden off to one side below the road

where he had been just the previous week to help in pulling up corn shocks. Clara Barnes, the old woman who owned the garden, saw him passing and waved—a long, stiff-handed, side-to-side motion without a smile.

He contemplated that sober expression for a mile or so of dense woods after he left her little house behind. There was that holding back again. He was glad to be off for an evening with people of his own age and background. Still he felt that with Harris and Kelly he had to retain a cautious attitude. Harris lately had been promoting a strip mine demonstration in early December. He wasn't sure what to do about it.

He thought about what Bourne had said about not being taken in by Harris. He had a great respect for Bourne, but he had begun to resent it a little when Bourne acted like a father. Sometimes he felt constrained by Bourne. He felt as if he couldn't act like himself, and yet Bourne seldom told him what to do or not to do. Again, it was a thing where you could almost say it wasn't there, and yet it was there somehow.

Ten miles further and he was in an area of the county where he had never been before. The hills grew steeper as he ascended the high ridge of Pine Mountain past a tiny hamlet called Poole.

He was following a hand-written map that Harris had mailed him. The map showed a place where the paved road turned and a dirt road went straight ahead. He reached this place five miles further and headed up the dirt road through thick woods to a flat, grassy ridge. From here he could see a pine-board, unpainted cabin beside an outgrowth of gray, slablike rock.

"Brandt, you old farmer!" cried Harris from the door as Brandt emerged from his government car.

As usual, Harris looked very neat, stylish almost, with his neatly trimmed blonde hair, his handsome, glowing face, his dapper clothes which somehow were in line with the blue jeans and plaid shirts of his fellow volunteers and yet looked almost tailored. He was wearing blue jeans and a white shirt, open at the collar, with a corduroy sport coat and brown suede shoes.

"So you made it," Harris said as Brandt drew closer.

"Hell, yes!" Brandt replied, taking on a bravado he seldom took on in the Bourne household. "And you better have some beer!"

"Got a whole damn case! And frosted glasses!"

"Is that so?" Brandt said. "Hey, you know, Harris, I'm starting to like you!"

"So that's all it takes, huh?"

"I'll tell you after I try the beer."

Brandt stepped inside to a single, open room about 15 by 20 feet in dimension, with knotty pine walls and a fireplace on the far wall. The

fireplace was made of large field stones, roughly mortared. Beside it, on the pine plank floor, was a disorderly pile of split wood. A fire burned in the fireplace. Two large windows looked out to a valley shrouded in fog and deeply shadowed in the orange light of the fading day. There was a single bed on the wall of the room away from the windows, a plain, sturdy table with four chairs, an easy chair, a brown couch, and three bookcases filled with books. There was a coffee table by the couch which was strewn with more books and several notebooks.

"You like books, I take it," Brandt said, going over to the refrigerator to get himself a beer.

"Hey, books is my living," Harris replied. "I'm a teacher, you know."

"No, I didn't know that. You're a teacher now?"

"Part-time at the community college."

"What do you teach?"

"Political Science."

"Is that right?" Brandt said, sitting down on the couch.

He thought to himself that Harris was moonlighting on his job as a volunteer. It made him think less of him, and yet he was impressed by all the books and the whole setting of the cabinet, which seemed like that of someone who knew what he stood for and believed in.

He reclined on the couch, looking around the room as Harris looked at him. There was a poster on the wall of a bearded, determined looking man. The poster said, "Che Lives."

"Che lives, who?" said Brandt.

"Che Guevara. Cuban revolutionary. Chief lieutenant to Fidel Castro. Captured in Bolivia. Executed. Just this year."

"You would think he would have made it higher than lieutenant," Brandt replied, sipping on his beer.

"Excellent man," Harris replied. "He was not afraid to confront. He took it upon himself to confront. He could have walked away from it. He could have had an easy life, as a reward from Castro. He walked away from the easy life. He chose to confront."

Dennis Kelly arrived a few minutes later. On the quiet hilltop, his jeep could be heard ascending the steep road while still several minutes away. Harris went out, with beer in hand, to greet him.

Brandt remained on the couch, in a contemplative mood. He noticed a book sitting there, on top of a pile—*One Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse.

He picked up the book and skimmed through it, noticing at once the dense prose which seemed charged with meaning. He stopped at one passage: "However, underneath the conservative, popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and colors... They live outside the democratic process; their

life is of the most immediate and the most real need..."

Kelly came in, dressed plainly, as always, in blue jeans and a short-sleeved brown Khaki Army shirt, his cognizant eyes peering out from behind the small, wire-rimmed glasses. He nodded hello and stared at Brandt in his clumsy, persistent way.

"Kelly, you better go get a beer before you drop over," Brandt said.

"Yes, I was just thinking that myself, almost," Kelly replied.

They had the customary MV meeting, going over their various projects in a very businesslike way. Harris, as the senior MV, led them through the items. There were practical considerations, such as where Brandt could get fertilizer for his garden project the next spring. Later, they declared the meeting ended, and sat around talking and drinking beer.

The discussion grew more animated as they talked about the MVs and what their ultimate objectives should be and what their relationship should be to one another.

"Look, I know you think of me as an intellectual with my head in the clouds," said Harris to Brandt. "And I saw you were looking at that book by Marcuse when Denny and I came in. You think I have it there for show, maybe. But, Matt, I don't think of myself as being along further than you in this, or if I am, well, maybe I'm one step further... I don't mean to imply, that there's a definite way to go, either... And, really, Matt, all the things the book talks about, like art and politics, meant nothing to me in any real way, in any way connected to the real world, until I came up here. Now, I think I see.

"There's a reality here. And this reality is so present, so overwhelming, it makes you think it's the only way to go. But there are other ways to go, aren't there, really, and isn't that our job, to think in terms of other ways to go? Why else are we up here, to give out cheese?"

"I don't know. I like cheese," said Brandt.

"You don't know, you like cheese," said Kelly, animatedly, raising his beer. "But, come on, Matt, I know there's more to you than that. I know you hide behind your dry humor while all the while your mind is churning away. And the thing you got to understand, Matt, is we're all in this together, and maybe even there's some kind of crazy reason for it. What I think Bruce is trying to say, he has this idea that's been coming to him of political change.

"It's like Dylan says, 'Something is happenin' here and you don't know what it is.' We've got to take it seriously. This is the time, the appropriate time. Because this is a serious time, Matt, and serious things are coming down. We're all in this together. I think of the concept of a cadre... You know what that means?"

"No," Brandt responded softly.

"Cadre... group of people working together... like a cell or something ... intensely working for change. We're a cadre, the three of us, or maybe all the MVs together are a cadre, if we can swing it."

Brandt had never heard the term before. He was willing to take anything Kelly said at face value, however. He had never gotten the impression that Kelly was just spouting off or was being far-fetched. He sat back on the couch, opened himself another beer, and looked up to see Kelly still peering at him as if waiting for a response.

"Kelly, you sad dog," he said. "Don't you ever lighten up?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! He is a sad dog!" cried Harris, falling back on the couch. "Now we've got a name for him sure! Kelly, the Sad Dog. Goddam Sad Dog, have another beer!"

They drank a few more beers and went outside onto the grassy noll beside the cabin. It was a clear, starry night, half moon high in center sky amidst a swirl of clouds. Far below glittered the lights of isolated dwellings.

They stopped at the wall-like protuberance of rock in the middle of the wide, dark meadow.

Brandt climbed to the top of the rock with the two others watching in glee. The top was about 15 feet off the ground. He crawled onto it on his stomach and stood up with arms raised in victory.

"Speech!" Harris yelled. "Speak to us poor mortals below!"

Brandt dropped his pants and stuck his bare ass over the edge of the rock. He let out a loud fart.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" cried Harris.

He laughed harder still when Kelly tried to equal the feat and fell backward into his arms from about six feet up. The two of them fell backward into the tall grass, laughing.

Later, they talked about girls. Harris confided that he had hungry eyes for a little waitress at a truck stop where he sometimes went for supper.

"I would like to sink some meat into that," he said grimly.

By the end of the long evening, Brandt and Harris had dog nicknames too. Brandt was "Bomb Dog," Harris was "Meat Dog,", and Brandt had also agreed to participate as an "official observer" for the "dog cadre," as Harris put it, at the upcoming demonstration at the strip mine.

[Chapter 32 notes]

33. Steward arrives in Dulatown to replace departing VISTA Stan Yeshe

Coming around a corner past a thick stand of pines, Tom Steward saw a clay-surface, rutted playground on the side of a hill. Above the playground, beyond a free-standing basketball backboard on a slanted metal pole, was a two-story, L-shaped, white building that looked like an old country school. The lights in the two windows above the basketball hoop were already lit, though the twilight sky was still bright behind the cluster of houses on the other side of the playground.

"This is the place I was telling you about," said Stanley Yeshe, the VISTA volunteer driving the white government station wagon in which Steward sat on the other side of the front seat. "Dulatown, they call it. Not official enough to qualify for city water. But it's got its own identity. In fact, I heard it's been here longer than the city, Lenoir."

Yeshe was about the same age as Steward. He dressed in plaid shirts, never tucked in, and blue jeans, never ironed. He had long black hair, already streaked with gray, a high, wide forehead, large expressive eyes, and a prominent Jewish nose. He had been a volunteer for exactly a year, and was due to leave in less than a week, when his obligation was up.

"How exactly did this place arise?" asked Steward, always anxious for historical facts.

He watched closely as they drove up the hill past a low, gray-board house with a narrow chimney. He could see that Dulatown extended down one side of the hill into a narrow valley and up the hill above the center along a dirt road that continued a hundred yards or so over the crest of the hill and out of sight. There was a cement block church with a plain steeple in the midst of the houses. Some of the houses looked almost like cabins. Others were freshly painted and modern in appearance. In the distance, where the sky was a muted pink, were the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"They say this place was originally a settlement of freed slaves," Yeshe explained in his clipped, New York accent. "The person who formerly owned them let them have this hillside and hollow. I don't know how it was worked out legally, if at all. A lot of them wound up working for the same family that had freed them. Some of the descendants of that family still live down the road, in that big white house on the way to town. The story is kind of vague, but you never hear anything about animosity on either side. These are not your city Negroes. None of the city questions or fire. They do have some awareness, though. King and the SCLC have made a big impression on certain people, the key people."

"Ah, yes," Steward replied, nodding thoughtfully.

He liked what he saw. He could see that there was a real need in this

community for volunteer help. The lack of resources and energy was evident in the shabby state of the poorer houses. Even the nicer houses suggested apathy in the complete lack of grass or ornamentation, except for the scraggly trees that had not been trampled down.

"What is the real situation here, economically?" he asked. "Do people have jobs?"

"Oh, yes. Some people have jobs, fairly good jobs, mostly in the furniture factories in town. But then there a lot of people who really just don't have any skills that the marketplace would care to buy. And, as you will eventually see, there's a dynamic here where the best people are thrown in with the worst, and the lower-grade people, if you'll forgive the expression, hold the other ones down."

A group of children crowded around the car as they drove up to the white building.

"Well, here you see it," said Yeshe as they stepped out into the midst of the children. "We have a kind of community center here, as I was telling you. And here is the welcoming party. This is big stuff, new VISTA, you know."

There were about a dozen kids in the group. They appeared to be in an age range of from five or six to the early teens. They were dressed neatly in slacks and dresses since they were still in their school clothes.

"You going to work here?" asked a girl of about 13 with straight black hair. She had a pretty face with intense, confrontive brown eyes.

"I hope so," Steward replied. He felt a little self-conscious with all the children looking at him.

"You hope so? You mean, you don't know?"

"No, I don't really know yet," Steward responded in his polite, careful way. "I haven't been formally assigned yet."

"Form-al-ly," the girl repeated. "Listen how he talk!"

All the children laughed and Steward smiled.

"Where you from?" the girl asked.

"Minnesota."

"Minnah Sotah? Where's that? Ain't never heard of no Minnah Sotah."

The children laughed again, crowding around closer and peering into Steward's face.

"Bev," said an older boy, tall, thin, and neatly dressed. "Ain't you studied your geography?"

"Where is it then?" said the spirited girl.

There was laughter all around again when the response was slow in coming.

"It's up north," said Steward, to rescue the older boy, who wore a serious frown. "Up on the other side of Chicago."

"Chicago, then," said the girl. "How come you don't just say that? We all know Chicago."

"Well, it's not exactly Chicago," Steward said.

"Listen to him talk, ex-akt-lee!"

Ha! Ha! Ha! All the children laughed.

"Well, if he's from Chicago, you know, he's bad," said the serious boy. "'Cuz all the peoples in Chicago are bad. You better watch out now, he'll whop you upside the head."

"Oh, he ain't bad!" the girl replied laughing, with wild eyes. "Is you bad, Mr. Chicago?"

"I hope not," Steward replied.

"Listen how you talk, 'is you'," said the serious boy, stepping apart from the others and smiling in exasperation. He shook his head, "Bev, you better learn how to talk. 'Is you.' Peoples going to think you don't know nothing."

"Talk as good as you!" said the girl, flaring up.

"You can't talk no how," the boy replied.

"And you can't neifer!" the girl shouted, throwing up her hand and spinning with a huffy expression to head off down a path along a row of houses. "And you be here, Mr. Chicago! You be here, you hear me? We going to come and get you, you go off some place else!"

Yeshe watched all this with a look of amused detachment. He led Steward into the community center. The door opened into a large, open room about 15 by 40 feet, with benches around the side by the walls and a juke box on the back wall. There were a couple of tables with chairs on one side of the room.

"Kids get together here," said Yeshe, with a wave of his hand, the large face very reserved and almost sad, as if every explanation carried an unexplained philosophical complication. "Innocent stuff. There's not much else for them to do, really."

They had left the eager kids behind. Yeshe had made the point of cutting them off at the door. He beckoned with his hand and led Steward down three steps from the large room into a room about half as large where there were tables and bookshelves with hardly any books.

"This is the future library," he said. "I'll leave that up to you. And this is the official headquarters of the CAP in this community. This is where the aides come every day. Have you met them?"

"Yes, I think I did," Steward replied, remembering a heavyset woman of about 30 and a thin woman of about 20 who had been introduced to him on his first day at the CAP.

"What do they do, exactly?"

"The main thing is count."

"Count what?"

"Count everything that happens. Like, for instance, when we drove up, how many kids were outside?"

"I don't know. Maybe eight or 10."

"That's 10 kids. Let's say 12, let's say 15, to round it off. Wait. There were a few more kids up the road, in the yard there. I saw them. Maybe, there were five or so of them. Let's say 20 kids were on hand, and we did a little more than just shoot the breeze, we counseled them. You did, especially, I thought. You were provoking them to thought. 25 or so kids probably received the benefit, when they carry it home to their siblings. Put that down. 25!" he concluded with a meaningful cast of the large, sad eyes on his colleague.

Steward hardly knew what to make of it.

"Let the aides know about it tomorrow," Yeshe said.

"Are you serious?"

"Oh, definitely. Let them know."

Steward didn't pursue the topic. He couldn't tell for sure whether Yeshe was kidding or serious.

The kids were gone when they came out. They drove out to the cabin where Yeshe lived. It was about 10 miles from Dulatown in a rural area on a secluded, wooded parcel of about 25 acres with a small pond.

Steward was a little perplexed at first by how Yeshe had come upon this living situation. It was more like a poet's retreat than a place among the people, as he had heard was expected of a VISTA volunteer. Yeshe explained he had been unable to find a place to live in Dulatown, and had come upon this place through a Jew he had met at a local synagogue. This fellow Jew was a union officer of some kind, and this was his fishing cabin. He had offered it to Yeshe, and Yeshe had accepted. So, for the main part of his VISTA service, he had lived here, in this idyllic cabin, with his plaid shirts, unironed jeans, and books. He also had a yellow Irish setter, Yevtushenko (named after the Russian poet, Steward assumed).

After supper, Yeshe built a fire in the stone fireplace on the side wall of the cabin. As he and Steward sat looking at the fire, he got into a philosophical mood. He described his thoughts about Dulatown in more detail. He felt that the area had been gerrymandered out of political involvement. "Also, it has been excluded from public designations that would have brought it advantages like city water and sewers," he said. "There is absolutely no reason for the City of Lenoir to go around it except to exclude it."

"If that isn't forthcoming, city status, is there any other way for them to get what they need?" Steward asked.

"Sure. You always have the option of incorporation, of Dulatown itself being a village, or whatever. And you have option of setting up a

cooperative, for a specific purpose. There was talk at one time of a water cooperative."

"And what happened to that?"

"Who knows? It was discussed. It went by the wayside. These things are like babies. They need for someone to watch over them to help them develop. And a cooperative doesn't just happen. It takes a tremendous level of community involvement."

Steward considered that as he watched the fire burning in the stone fireplace. He felt that this was something that he could help with, that his personality was suited for. He was not the type to get up on a soapbox and exhort people to action. But he could listen, he could listen well, and in doing that he could help people to formulate their own ideas and act on them.

"You think I will get assigned there?" he asked.

"If you have that preference and state it strongly," Yeshe replied, leaning forward with a smack of his full lips. "The way things go around here, there is no central plan for the whole program except to get more funds for the mere power of meting them out. Anyone who wants to do any- thing, if it doesn't endanger the source of funds, will get accommodated. Why not?"

Steward let that comment go. He wasn't in a mood to jump to conclusions. He sensed that Yeshe had an attitude of cynicism coming from somewhere outside the situation.

That night, he lay in his sleeping bag, thinking about the kids he had met, the serious boy who had seemed concerned about making a good first impression and the angry then cajoling girl who had said, "You be here, Mr. Chicago."

[Chapter 33 notes]

34. Steward bids Yeshe goodbye and ventures out into the community

A few days later there was a coffee and doughnuts farewell reception for Stanley Yeshe in the Dulatown community center. The reception was due to start in 15 minutes and only four people had straggled in.

"Looks like we better go do some reminding," said Delores Harper, the older, more languorous neighborhood aide, to her younger counterpart, Samanta Sorren. "Tom Steward, you come along, too, and roll them big eyes. Let me see now, can you look mad?"

Steward smiled good-naturedly and shrugged his shoulders, "Don't feel mad," he replied, bounding up from the church pew that served as a bench on the side of the room.

He came across, looking lean and collegiate in his white jeans and red "University of Minnesota" T-shirt.

"Well, you better get mad, you better roll some eyes," said Samanta, "you expect to drag some peoples down to this old community center."

In the white government station wagon, they headed out on a route already familiar to Steward—first up the hill past the cement block church, where there was a "Y" in the road, then further up the hill past several new, modest rambler houses to where the road dead-ended in a stand of pines; then down the hill to the "Y" again, and along the other branch of the road over the ridge of the hill and around and down a bend into the hollow below.

All along here, there were houses, arranged on unevenly-shaped, unlandscaped lots in what appeared to be an accidental pattern. The houses were close together, but still the little community looked almost rural. There were chickens in some of the backyards and in one of the yards a pigpen. Along the top of the ridge, the houses were small and humble, but solidly constructed. Delores Harper's house, at the edge of the ridge, was only a year old and still had construction material in the tiny front yard. Down below in the hollow, where the houses bordered a thick woods, the houses were cabin-like with black metal chimney pipes emerging from the roof, and with paintworn siding and sagging foundations. There were many young children here and Steward had seen rats scurrying over the tops of the trash piles behind some of the houses.

"Ol' Stanley Yeshe, what he ever do?" said a young man sitting on a front porch with a half-dozen others just a few houses down the hill from Delores Banner's, "Tried to hit up on them little girls."

That got a round of laughter from the young men on the porch. Among them was the town barber, Sammy Copening, who always sat there with his crutches beside him.

"Don't you mind ol' Lute, now," he said softly, "You know how he just loves to get things going."

"Luther, you ought should find you a job or get you to school or something," Delores said. "Then you wouldn't be saying so many lies." She swung the back door open. "Come on, now, you get that black ass right chere in this car."

That got another round of laughter. The lean young man, Luther, who was about 19, got in the car pulling along his younger brother, Alan, who was 16 and no longer went to school. Sammy, the bearded, amiable barber, came along, also, though he had only spoken to Stanley Yeshe a couple of times in Yeshe's entire year of service.

By the time the reception started, there were about 20 people in the community center, with several more arriving, attracted by the noise and laughter.

Soon the contingent from the CAP central office arrived. They were led by Harlin Cooper, the Perth county director, who raised his hand in a formal greeting, receiving no apparent response. Next to him was Wentworth Hyland, a gray, reserved-looking old man who appeared even more unknown to the people gathered in the room. Last of all came Stanley Yeshe with a solemn, sad expression, looking as if he had just emerged from a sleeping bag after spending the night sleeping in his blue jeans and red-and-gray plaid shirt.

They were just all getting seated, with no one knowing exactly what to do, but assuming that some kind of formal recognition was forthcoming, when another, unexpected guest arrived, Rev. Vannoy Jackson from the church just up the hill at the "Y" in the road. He was a short, sturdily built, handsome man with a dark, swarthy, soulful face and intense, direct, and almost troubled eyes. The white of the eyes had a pinkish hue. He was dressed in a dark suit with a white shirt and dark blue tie. His stature in the community was immediately evident. All at once deferred to him, and waited for him to speak to set the tone of the meeting.

He was aware of this change in mood when he entered the room. He smiled and nodded to several people and grasped a few hands. Then he stood up, at which everyone, even the children, became silent.

"Well, let's see... Brother Stanley, he been here... how long now, Stanley?" he began in a deep voice.

"One year and four days," Yeshe replied.

"And 10 hours," drawled Delores Harper.

The assembly all sat back, laughing and nodding.

"Been that bad, huh?" said Rev. Jackson.

"No, actually, it's often been quite good," Yeshe replied. He raised his hand and waved it stiffly. "So thanks to you all. Thanks a lot."

He nodded and stepped back with his hands clasped in front of him, looking determined just to ride the occasion out.

The preacher sensed that Yeshe didn't want to be an object of public display. He took a few steps away from him and faced the people seated in the back of the room.

"One year and four days, and 10 hours," he intoned. "Let's just call it one year. In one year a good young man can do a lot of good, praise the Lord, and this young man done his share. I can say for myself he done a lot of good for the childrens."

"Amen," said an old man in the corner of the room.

"Never did get him to church, though," Rev. Jackson said.

"Oh, no, he don't like that church," threw in Delores Harper.

Everyone laughed.

"Well, I don't hold that against him," the preacher said.

"Now, Rev. Jackson, you can't speak for the Lord, though," someone called out.

The preacher smiled. "Well, that's true. Try to sometimes."

"Amen," said the old man.

"Now you just better watch out what you say 'Amen' to," the preacher replied, smiling.

"Amen," said the man again.

The man's wife, seated next to him, smiled and shook her head. She tapped her finger on her ear, indicating that her husband didn't hear well.

"Well, let's just say, based on what I do know of the Lord,—if He will forgive me for trying to speak for Him,—I think, if He was here today, He would say like I sayed, that Brother Stanley done a good job, he done a good service to us all who live here. So we thank the Lord and we thank Brother Stanley."

"Amen," several called.

"Yes, childrens," said the preacher. "Say Amen to that."

"Amen! Praise the Lord!"

"And Stanley, our prayers will be with you," concluded the preacher. He reached out and extended his hand to Yeshe. Yeshe took the hand with a smile and shook it firmly. He nodded, raised his hand again in a final wave, and stepped back into the little group of CAP officials including Steward, the two aides, Artie, the maintenance man, and the two CAP directors.

Wentworth Hyland, the overall director, rose next to make some mumbled, officious comments that no one listened to closely. He presented Yeshe with a certificate of appreciation and invited everyone to help themselves to refreshments, bringing an end to the formal meeting. Steward stood at the side by the two aides, watching the people go forward for food. He observed that few people, even among the children, had any real warmth of expression for Yeshe. He had found the exchange between Yeshe and the preacher interesting since he knew from previous

comments that Yeshe had a low regard for religion.

He himself had some doubts about religion in general, and about some specific positions of the Catholic Church, which he had been raised in. But he retained a high regard for priests and their counterparts in other religions, especially for those like Rev. Jackson who worked close to the people.

Now that he knew—as of several days—that he would indeed be Yeshe's successor, he applied all these thoughts to his own upcoming service. He knew that Yeshe had steered clear of the two churches in Dulatown. He intended to have a closer relationship with them, while not actually becoming a member. Also, he hoped to have a warmer relationship with the people and children than Yeshe appeared to have had.

Soon Yeshe and everyone left, including even the two aides. Yeshe left the car with Steward since he had a ride home with the CAP officials. Steward found himself alone in the community center.

He stood at the window, looking up the dirt road that led up the hill to the familiar turn-off. Run-off down the road had dug the sides of the road deeply into the banks on each side. The roots of the trees were bare above the reddish clay soil. The movement of the trees in the sun- light created a waving, dappled pattern of light and shadow on the deeply rutted surface of the road.

He had thought a great deal about ideas that had been presented to him in VISTA training. From these he had gathered that the most important goal, in the type of work he was about to do, was to get the community involved in change rather than to merely direct people in activities. It was a democratic goal, and he felt, philosophically, sympathetic to it. He knew it would take good listening most of all.

After thinking about this for a long time, he went over to the pop machine in the corner of the room and got himself a coke. Then he stood at the window again, feeling increasingly dissatisfied with himself for not actually doing something instead of just thinking about it.

He set down the pop bottle and pushed through the door into the bright afternoon sunlight. He headed up the road and, at the very first house, encountered a man of about 50 wearing a blue baseball cap and farmer's coveralls. He had seen this man before but had never spoken to him. He remembered that the aides had described him as a very rural, very old-time Negro as in the old days of the South.

"We missed you at the meeting this morning," Steward said politely. "Well, I was thinking on coming down," the main replied in a slow drawl. "That Mr. Stanley, he was a good one, yes."

"We plan on having some other meetings," said Steward, "meetings for everyone to just sit down and talk together about what we could

maybe do as a community. We would be glad to have you come down and express your opinion."

"Well, I expect I will do that," the man replied, touching the visor of his baseball cap. "Because, you know, you got ten horses, you got them all yoked up, they got to pull together, don't they?"

"Yes, they do."

"Pull a lot better together than ten horses alone."

"Yes, they do."

"Being yoked up, that ain't no count. Got to pull together. Thas' what get that ol' cart down the road."

"Yes, that's true."

They stood in silence for a moment in the hot sun.

"You got any ideas for projects you would like to see done, once we get pulling together? Steward asked, trying to keep the metaphor going.

"Don't declare as I do," the man replied.

Again they stood in silence.

"But I sure be glad to listen," the man continued, "what peoples got to say."

"Well, thank you for that," Steward replied, extending his hand. He introduced himself after that, and learned that the man's name was James. Then he went up the road to the "Y" and over the ridge around the bend into the hollow, not encountering a single person.

Further down the road, he found a man outside a small, two-room house, unloading scraps of woods from the back of an old pick-up truck.

"I'll be glad to help you with that," he said, introducing himself as the new VISTA.

He pitched in enthusiastically, throwing off pieces of wood. He hardly spoke to the man, but got a friendly smile before leaving.

Further around the bend, he found several young children carrying pails in a flat area beside the road where there were some weeping willow trees and a some wide boards lying flat on the ground.

As he came up to them, smiling, one child was lowering his bucket between the boards.

"You get water there?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. This chere's the spring."

"Really, the water just comes out there?"

"Oh, yes. Just keeps on coming up."

He looked down in between the boards at the bubbling water.

"Can I help you carry it?"

"Oh, no, sir. We can tote it ourselves."

As he left, he heard one of them say to the other, "That's Mr. Tom." To which the other replied: "He's real nice, ain't he?"

He felt encouraged by that. He watched them go off. They were

lovely children, dark and lean, with graceful movements and lilting voices,

Not encountering anyone else, he went up around another bend to a long, gradual hill and walked along it back to the community center. Finding some older boys there playing basketball, he joined in with them and playing several games before they went home for supper.

Standing on the back porch of the community center later, when the sun was just setting, Tom Steward looked off to the west, where the Appalachian foothills met the higher ground of pine-covered ridges and rock extrusions. There was a flat rock there that he had heard called Table Rock. It was a beautiful scene. The little community below him looked beautiful, also, despite the blighted houses here and there that showed a dire need.

35. Brandt picks up Mary Kass for her three-day visit

Coming over the hill in Axe Handle, Kentucky, Matthew Brandt saw below him a cluster of blue-roofed, white buildings amidst trees edged with the first yellow of autumn. Along the side of a long, low pole shed were red letters saying, “Appalachian Ministry.”

Pulling into the driveway, he found Mary Kass sitting on the front porch of a two-story farmhouse with her small backpack beside her. She was wearing a dark blue sweater and blue jeans with her thick black hair pulled straight back from her brow.

She waved when she saw him and came running across to the car with an air of not wanting to keep him waiting. Her pretty face was flushed from exertion. She didn’t smile when she peered in the car.

“Want to come in?” she said in a tentative tone, pointing back to the farmhouse, as if that was the object of their meeting.

It was obviously not a real farmhouse but a headquarters of some kind. There were several college-age people standing just inside the front window, where there also appeared to be a reception area.

“Why? Do you want me to?” he said, leaning over to look at her more fully.

Her hair was gathered into a little tuft in back and secured with a dark blue ribbon the same color as her sweater. She looked trim and more shapely than he remembered.

“Not really,” she replied. “I would just as soon get going.”

“So would I,” he said.

“Let’s go.”

She swung into the car without moving across toward him and gave him a quick glance. He had shaved off his hair again in the style of the previous crew season, but not as tightly as before. He was dressed in a clean, freshly pressed forest green work shirt and his usual baggy tan workpants with his ankles bare above his brown loafers. He looked strong and healthy and appeared to be in reserved mood, which perplexed her.

“Oh, they gave you permission to use the car,” she said, noticing the Government Services Administration sticker on the dashboard.

“I guess you could say, they just looked the other way,” he replied in his brusque manner.

“Well, I’ll help you pay for the gas.”

“No need for that.”

“I don’t mind.”

Actually, he had planned to use the government card. He should have known she would not approve. She was a stickler for honesty in every detail.

He left it at that, feeling in a state of minor confusion. For weeks he

had stored up things to tell her. Now nothing seemed appropriate. He felt tongue-tied as on his first few dates with her. He headed out on the narrow, wood-bordered road that he had arrived on, continuing past the junction that led back to the main highway. He had no definite plan for where to go, and only 30 dollars to last for two or three days. Somehow he had imagined that his interaction with her would flow more smoothly.

She felt the same strain and could think of nothing to say from her side, also. She had forgotten how quiet he was and how he had a way of seeming angry when he really wasn't.

The road they were on was familiar to her from the past several days. It was the road she and her fellow volunteers had traveled on daily going back and forth from the tomato hot house that they had been building. The project had not gone well, judging by the angry comments of the ministry priest, Father Biden, on the previous afternoon.

She had meant to tell Matthew about that, she thought to herself as she saw the concrete foundation of the hot house in the distance next to two other, already completed hot houses.

"Well, here comes our project," she said, lifting up her head with a stern, thoughtful expression.

"Really, you mean the one you just worked on?"

"Nothing but the same."

"You want to stop and show me?"

"Sure. Why not? It's not much to see, though."

They stopped on the gravel road that led into the worksite, and walked from the road across a meadow with tall grass to the cement block foundation. It was a long, narrow structure, like the long half of a barn, set on a concrete slab below a craggy limestone bluff about 15 feet high. There were empty cement bags lying there beside two large piles of sand and crushed rock.

"Actually, it's worse than 'not much to see'," she said as they drew close to it. "The priest came out to look at it yesterday and he was very displeased."

"Why was that?"

"He said it was poor construction."

"Nice gratitude, huh?" Brandt commented with a slight smile, watching her serious face closely. "What exactly was the problem?"

"Why don't you look and see if you can see," she returned with a quick glance of her dark, intelligent eyes.

She watched as he ranged around the outside of the foundation. He stopped at a far corner and examined the mortar between the blocks. He returned, rubbing a sample of it between his fingers.

"What do you think?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Poor construction."

"Do you really think so?"

"How come they mixed it so thin?"

She sighed. "Well, that was the trouble, right there. There was this guy. I will not mention any name. He talked all around about how he had worked in construction and had been a straw boss, and Father Biden, the priest, took him at his word and put him in charge. We ran out of bags of cement, so he said just mix it three to one."

"Nice leadership, huh?"

"Well, yes. But they say that's never right, to say nice leadership as if it gets everybody else out of the blame. I suppose it was my fault, too. My mind wasn't on it. I was so distracted, you know."

She wanted him to ask what her mind had been on so she could say, "on you." But he said instead, "Well, it wasn't your fault! What do you know about construction?"

She knew he meant that as encouragement. But the whole business of having spent several days here seemed stupid, in retrospect. It all went back to the dishonesty of having set up a volunteer activity for no other reason than to set the stage for a subsequent meeting with him.

"What do you think they will do with it?" she inquired softly, drawing in his clear blue eyes.

"I suppose, take it down."

"Do you really think so?"

"Salvage the blocks, at least."

"Oh."

They stood in silence, feeling the strain of an interaction that expressed a meaning which neither intended. They had not even touched since meeting. They were both aware of that, also.

"Well, might as well go," she said with a dismal frown.

"Yes, might as well."

They headed back toward the car, walking at a distance from one another. He watched her as she looked at the surrounding, wooded hills with a plaintive expression. She was really very pretty, he thought. A curly strand had escaped from her tightly-bound black hair. Her healthy face was firmly set, as if in determination to do better on her next endeavor. He could see that she had taken his comments hard, but he could think of no immediate way to soften the impact.

At the car, he made a point of opening the door for her. He took her arm gently to help swing her in. In silence they drove to the far end of the valley as he struggled to think of something to say. There was a limestone mill there, where the road began to climb, with conveyor belts leading out from the digging to piles of chalk-covered rock.

"I was seeing a lot of a places like that last summer," he began tentatively, pointing to the mill. "When I was hauling out lime for the

gardens."

"The gardens you were working on?"

"Yes."

"And how did you ever know that that was what was needed?" she asked, seizing the opportunity to take on a maternal role.

"I had help with all that, through the county agriculture extension office," he replied in a humble tone.

He told her the details of how rain flow down steep slopes leached the soil, leaving it too acid. Liming was a way of getting it back to the proper pH, he explained. He talked about how people had been reluctant to take his advice at first and now seemed almost glad to see him.

"Well, I can see how they would appreciate your visit," she said. "You're such a good person."

"Thank you."

"You are."

She watched his face continually as he spoke. He spoke in a formal manner, as if they had just met. She was amazed at how quickly the distance had grown between them. She realized that she had lost considerable ground. She no longer had a key to his thoughts, as she had had before.

"Should we look for a place to eat?" she ventured, thinking that a restaurant would bring a more intimate mood.

"There's a little town down here, I think," he said, looking at a crumpled map folded up on the car seat.

"What's it called?"

"Berea."

"I've heard of that."

"Should we stop there?"

"Yes, I'd like to."

"So would I."

They found a coffee shop on the main street of the little town. The window looked out to a row of brick and stone buildings lined with pines and basswoods.

As they sat there, face to face, a memory arose in them both of other times when they had sat together face to face, now and then talking or staring into one another's eyes.

Matthew was quiet again—though without the strain of interaction that had been present a couple of hours before. She wanted to invoke the old formula, "What are you thinking?" But she couldn't bring herself to say the words. To say them seemed like an admission that they couldn't talk freely without little games.

"You know what I've been thinking?" he asked suddenly.

"No, what?" she replied, laughing. "I've been dying to know."

"Thinking you're prettier than ever."

"Oh, you're just being kind," she said, flushing with embarrassment. The dark eyes widened and focused on his.

"You know what else I've been thinking?" he said with a slight smile, reaching out to tap her small, sturdy hands.

"No, what?"

"Thinking it's so nice to see you again."

She felt a burden drop from her when he said those words. She looked out the window, thinking she had never beheld so lovely a scene as the humble storefronts of Berea, Kentucky.

36. Matt and Mary sleep together without sex, travel to Bourne's

That evening Matthew Brandt and Mary Kass rented a room in a small motel just outside of Berea. As prearranged between them, they spent the night side by side without sex. He had promised her that, and he did not press her to change her mind.

She felt compelled to explain. "Maybe you think this is crazy," she said, "but I've always wanted to be a bride in white, ever since I was a little girl. I want to be worthy of white."

"I don't think it's crazy," he replied without elaboration.

They were quiet after that. They nestled together, listening to the hum of tires on the highway outside. She wondered if she had said too much about being a bride and not enough about how she wanted him and had to hold herself back.

"I just want you to know it's not easy," she said, pressing ahead. She pushed him over gently and surprised him with a passionate kiss.

"Now you know how I feel!" she exclaimed when the long kiss was done.

"So this is how I prove myself, huh?" he asked with a puzzled smile.

"Not exactly, but kind of, yes," she answered as if making a joke, but the dark eyes conveyed a different meaning, that this was something that ought not to be ridiculed or taken lightly.

She woke up the next morning feeling happy and hopeful for the future. She went over to the window, seeing there a lovely light on the white curtains. The sun had just risen, an intense orange globe partially hidden behind swirled gray clouds. The wooded hills all around were shrouded in fog.

When he woke up, she went over and lay down beside him. She nestled her lips into his rough cheek. He took her in his arms. They lay together in silence as the morning light brightened on the dresser console next to the bed.

"Mary, what would you think about heading up toward Crabtree?" Matt said. "I can show you some of the places where I've been working."

"I would just love to see them!" she replied.

"We could stay at the Bourne's. Fletcher made a point of letting me know you'd be welcome. He showed me a room upstairs where you could stay. We wouldn't be able to sleep together."

"But we'd be together all day!" Mary answered cheerfully.

She was glad to find a situation that would allow them to be together without sleeping in the same bed. She felt that it wasn't quite right to be so intimate, at this point, even without sex.

They ate breakfast in a truck stop outside of town, amidst a group of truckers who regarded them with amused glances. The waitress was the

stern, knowing type, with a pretty middle-aged face and orange red hair. Hearing an item of local interest on the radio, she turned up the volume. News of the war followed with President Johnson responding to a reporter's questions.

"Seems like he was talking about that three or four months ago," a driver at the counter said when Johnson repeated the familiar refrain of needing to obtain concessions from the North Vietnamese before stopping the bombing.

"Yes, I do have a feeling we heard it before," the waitress said, coming across toward the young couple with a pot of coffee.

She filled up their coffee pots without being asked and gave Mary a little nod with a close-lipped smile.

"You having a good time, honey?" she asked.

"Why, yes, I am," Mary replied in her pleasant voice, her face alight with her natural good sympathies.

"Boy right down the road here was just killed over there," said the waitress to the driver when she arrived back behind the counter. "His poor mama was in here telling. Helicopter he was riding in got shot down."

"Ain't that a shame?" the driver responded, coughing in his hand. He was a lean, sallow man with tired, thoughtful eyes. "Just so the old sidewinder can keep on talking."

"Seems like the boys around here, they come out of school, and it's one of two things, the mines or Uncle Sam."

"I seen them coming in the mines myself as young as 16—or younger still if they can lie about their age."

"You used to work in the mines?"

"Oh, yes."

Brandt watched this interaction closely. He noticed that the driver gasped for breath after leaning over to pick up a dropped spoon. He had seen the same condition among other miners. In VISTA training, they had called it "black lung." And this boy who had died—probably about the same age as Bumper Bourne. Thinking about that, Brandt felt distressed. He realized for the first time how much he had come to think of himself as one of these people.

"When that waitress was talking about the boy that was killed, I got to thinking about Jim Morris and Ellen," Mary said softly when they were driving away from the truck stop.

The two-lane highway was lined with tall, slender aspens. Green and yellow leaves fluttered in the morning sunlight against a backdrop of red sumacs and green pines.

"Are they still a number?" asked Brandt.

"Oh, yes, and about as serious as Ellie could get, considering she

never does sit down and think anything out. That's her, you know, off at a distance, by herself, then all of a sudden she's on a plane going off to see someone. Who knows, probably she'll be married before anyone else!"

"You think she would marry Morris?"

"Well, I don't know. That's one appealing guy. And Ellie is one for surprises."

Morris had completed the first phase of flight school, or was close to it, Mary informed as they continued down the highway. He was assigned to his preferred type of plane—a "fighter bomber," as Ellen had called it.

Brandt thought back to his argument with Morris in the boat club the previous spring. How farfetched it had seemed then to think of Morris as a real pilot. Now he was well on his way, and soon to be in combat, likely. He himself had gone the route that Morris had called "Mr. Cynic." Was he really as cynical and unpatriotic as Morris had implied? Morris had no idea of the extent of complication, Brandt thought—the extent to which things beyond college, in the back roads of America, were not as expected, and required more than expected; the extent to which the circumstances required a patriotism of a sort which he had not anticipated from a classroom desk.

"Fletcher's son, Bumper, just got signed up for the service himself. He'll be going in early next year," said Brandt, watching Mary Kass as she sat with her journal and pen in her hands.

"Really? He got drafted?" she asked with concern.

"Oh, no, he's been trying to get in," Brandt replied. He explained that Bumper had no real interest in the Army, so far as he knew, and just had his heart set on getting the necessary training to be a mechanic. "It's like the waitress was saying in the restaurant. He just hangs around, looking for cars to work on, but he can't find a job doing that, without any training or experience. What else is there for him to do? There aren't even any jobs in the mines except the most horrible, non-union kinds."

"He's not interested in the newspaper business?"

"Bumper? Oh, no! Bumper is no friend of the written word, if you know what I mean. And even if Fletcher had something for him to do, like fixing printing machines or something, I don't think he wants to be dependent on his father to that extent. You know, he's just a kid. He wants to strike out on his own."

Soon they entered the hillier, more wooded, narrower valleys of the mountains. The sky had filled with large, swiftly moving gray clouds. The sun was somewhere, hardly visible, behind them. It had started to drizzle and looked like it might storm.

Brandt was silent, considering what he had said about Bumper Bourne. Coming around a bend, he saw a familiar sight, a hill chopped

off on one side, as if to form a roadbed, with rocks and debris scattered down the hillside into the scraggly pines below. Seeing that, his thoughts drifted from Bumper to Harris and Kelly and his night of drinking with them at Harris's cabin.

"Now here is something I think I wrote you about," he said to Mary, turning to engage her inquisitive eyes, "a genuine, working strip mine. See, you can see some of the machinery up there, where the trucks are lined up."

"Yes, I do remember you mentioned a strip mine," she answered, bending toward him to get a better view. "You said you can see one from your window. You said they work all night, and you can see the lights, like floodlights, on the top of a dark hill in the distance."

"Yes," he replied, flattered by her attention to what he had written. He told her how he had gone with Fletcher Bourne to see that same mine. He related the facts that Bourne had conveyed about the current demand for coal, because of the war, and the relative cheapness of strip- mined coal compared to coal mined underground.

"But, as you could see there," he continued as they left the mine behind, "these mines cause a lot of damage to the hills and trees and to any water passing near. That's why so many people are against them."

Even as he spoke, he was aware of how much his concern about the strip mines had grown. He talked about Harris's demonstration, set for early December, and how he had agreed to participate as an observer.

"Maybe you think that's copping out," he said, "but I really don't know yet whether that kind of thing is justified or effective, or should even be done."

"I don't think it's a cop-out," she responded. "I just think it's exactly what you say, that you need to take your time to learn about it before you take a position. I think it shows character, Matthew, the way you're going about it."

She listened thoughtfully as he went on explaining how Bourne, Harris, and Kelly stood with respect to the strip mine. He had said just enough about these people in his brief letters to pique her interest.

For Harris, she sensed suspicion, but also camaraderie as for a teammate. For Kelly, she saw an intellectual regard as for the best student in the class, plus trust in his integrity. For Bourne, there was reverend respect, as for an esteemed professor.

She also noted that Brandt displayed a brotherly affection and protectiveness for Bumper Bourne. There was a quality in that that she liked since she regarded this as a quality that would make him a good father, also.

Over the next 20 or so miles of winding roads, with the rain coming down in a torrent, Brandt found himself talking more and more. He

realized that he was talking as never before, and understood that a basic change was taking place in himself, and that Mary Kass was part of it. He liked the change. He liked having her around to talk to. He realized how lonely he had been despite living with Bourne and his son. They were excellent people, he felt, but they did not substitute for the closeness he felt with Kass.

They arrived at the Bourne house in pouring rain and ran across the back yard past Bumper's cars to find father and son waiting to greet them at the door.

The Bourne's were freshly shaven and dressed in clean, pressed clothes. The little house had been put in order. Brandt saw the kitchen table for the first time as it was without the usual pile of bread, cereal, car parts, papers, and books.

Soon they were all sitting in the coal-blackened living room, laughing as the elder Bourne told a story about how he had tried to get home one time in a rain storm and had gotten swept down the creek on a little bridge when it washed away.

"Thought I was a-going to New Orleans. That's where they say that creeks runs to."

Mary came later, briefly, to look at Brandt's small room. She found there a neatly made bed, some clothes in neat piles, and a large bookcase with a single book, *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse.

"Did you really read this?" she asked, impressed, as she skimmed through the dense prose.

"I put my eyes on the words, one word at a time, from start to end," he said. "If that counts as reading it, I guess I did."

She noticed that in the entire book he had made no markings or notes at all except on one page, apparently, where he had underlined two sentences in different paragraphs.

The two sentences said: "Today, political power asserts itself through its power over the machine process and over the technical organization of the apparatus... But the political trend may be reversed; essentially the power of the machine is only the stored up and projected power of man."

From this she gathered that he had, indeed, been thinking about the topics he had talked about in the car.

37. Matt and Mary listen as Hattie Beecher defends Appalachian traditions

The next morning, about an hour after dawn, Mary peeked into Matt's room and saw that the bed was empty. She crossed the plain living room to the kitchen and found Fletcher Bourne seated at the kitchen table with his paperwork in front of him.

"You might find him down by the garden," said Fletcher, squinting at her above his reading glasses. "He is not the kind to lie abed through the morning."

She went out at once with her blue sweater over her shoulders. She saw Matt in a low area that appeared to be a garden beyond the tall, dry grass on the edge of the yard. With buoyant strides, she headed across toward him along a footpath lined with wheatlike stems bending in the chilly breeze.

"So this is your garden!" she said brightly, coming up to him. "What's left of it," he replied with a boyish smile, looking up at her with his clear blue eyes. "I just dug up the potatoes last week. That was the last thing except for tilling it under."

"How will you do that?"

"Old guy down the road, friend of Fletcher's. Plows it under with an old single plow and a horse."

"Sounds like the frontier."

"Well, actually, he's about the only one that still does it that way, as far as I know," he said. "Other people have little tractors or tillers, or just do it by hand."

"Do a lot of people grow things?" she asked, sitting down beside him. She looked down the neat rows of picked over, yellow- or brown-leafed plants.

"Well, everybody grows a little bit of something, you know. You see little fields of corn in the bottoms, cut out in weird shapes against the hills. And some people have animals that they just let go off in the woods to eat nuts—sheep or goats, or maybe a pig or cow, or whatever. But the general state of things is not very good from a farming standpoint. Things probably only a person like me would notice, like yellow corn leaves—meaning a lack of nitrogen, usually. Careless methods, you know."

"You would think, with all this land, people would take farming more seriously."

"Well, it's hard here, like I was saying yesterday. The conditions are not really competitive, compared to farming elsewhere. But back in the old days here, people did farm more, and raise animals more. At least, so I heard... Lot of the industry of these people has just been beaten out of them, you know. That's what I'm starting to see. And the government

has helped by giving out commodities. People figure, why grow anything when you can get food free from the government."

She listened thoughtfully as he spoke. She was impressed by how much he knew and by his general level of intelligence. He was really very smart, as she had suspected all along. Combined with his physical stature, regarding which she had never had any doubt, the effect was strong. She had a certain ideal of what the man would be like that she would marry, and everything he did and said confirmed that he fulfilled the ideal.

The sun was higher in the sky now, she noticed. The trees on the hillside above the garden were glorious in their autumn colors, though some of the trees were already bare due to the hard rain on the previous afternoon.

"Looks like it will be a good day to go around and look at some of the garden sites, if you still want to," he said.

"Of course, I would!" she answered, pressing his hand.

They walked toward the house, arm in arm.

"One person you ought should take her to see is old Hattie Beecher," said Fletcher Bourne when he heard of their plans. "Now there is a lady of the old school, Mary, plants by the moon and stars."

"Really? What do the moon and stars have to do with it?" Mary replied in her cheerful voice.

She looked beautiful, almost sultry, but serious as always, as she stood by the kitchen counter with a cup of coffee in her sturdy hands, her thick, dark hair disheveled by her walk outside in the wind. Her strong, cleanly constructed face, with her straight, dark eyebrows and large, luminous dark eyes, gave an impression of substance and good will. The face said that she took great interest in everything she was being told. It said that she was glad to be hearing about these things, and regarded them as worthy of considerable thought. Now and then she nodded and smiled, showing her white, even teeth.

"Well, when the moon is in a certain position, with respect to the earth, or when certain stars or constellations are at various places in the sky, they say that makes the plants more inclined to start up right in the ground," Fletcher Bourne explained, impressed by her appearance and bearing. "There's a whole lot of them thinks along those lines, folks that spirit out pain and things like that," he continued. "I never took too close an interest myself, but Hattie, she's been learning it and doing it her entire life."

Brandt and Kass went out soon later, saying they planned to stop and visit Hattie Beecher on their way down the road.

Bourne watched from the kitchen window as the young couple crossed the yard. They were not arm in arm or touching, yet they looked

so attune to one another. He thought to himself that these were young people from good stock, such as Appalachia had produced many of. He thought of his own son, still upstairs in bed after a late night. With his Army entry date set, the boy was taking to more adult freedoms. As far as the father knew, his doings were innocent enough. Still he had been worrying lately about his son and comparing him to Brandt who seemed to have so much more secure a future.

Later, he and Bumper stopped at Hattie Beecher's on their way to town to see if Brandt and Kass were still there. Bourne emerged from the car to find Mary Kass coming across toward him through the expansive, untidy yard.

"Learned all about planting," she said pleasantly, turning to nod and smile at Bumper, who was a little shy around her. She fell in beside them just as naturally as a daughter or sister as they walked around the white house to the grove of apple and plum trees where Matt was standing with Hattie Beecher.

"You see any sense in it?" asked Bourne with a mischievous smile as he walked beside her. His shoulder jerked as he took each step. His limp had become more pronounced in the several months since Matt had arrived.

"Why, yes, I did," Mary replied with her unfailing, good-natured seriousness. "One thing she said, you should plant corn so it tassels when the moon is bright. That way the bees can see to do a thorough job."

"Well, that does make a little sense on the face of it," Bourne remarked as they arrived beside Hattie and Matthew. "Maybe the old lady is not as crazy as I thought."

Hattie flicked her hand at him and shook her head. She was a portly, short woman with tightly-pinned gray hair and a wide, amiable face set with a strain of contrariness and challenge. She was dressed in a plain blue and white striped cotton house dress with wide blue lapels.

"Now don't you lissen' to him," she said. "He knows, well as I, on the dark of the moon or the old of the moon won't noth'n do well. He jes' likes to hold it in 'cuz he wants to act smart. Wants to act like a big newspaper man."

Bourne raised back his head with a hearty guffaw. "Now, this lady here, she's like my own momma."

Hattie brought out some food and set it on an outdoor table under an immense maple tree with burgundy-colored leaves. There was commodity cheese, store-bought lunch meat, and some items she had made herself, apple preserves and bread.

"This here is syrup bread," she said to Mary as her guests sat down in wooden lawn chairs. "Ya take ya bread dough, jes' ord'nary dough, an' purr in some syrup in there, real maple syrup, ya know. That makes the

best bread I ever et. Jes' you try it now, young Mary, you'll see it's good."

"Mmmm! It does look good!" returned Mary cheerfully. "Maybe later you can give me the recipe."

"Jes' did."

"Well, yes, you did," Mary answered softly. "I'll try it when I get back home."

"Where ya gonna get real syrup?" Hattie asked with a frown.

"I don't know," Mary replied.

"Well, you come on up to the house with me before you go. I'll give you some to take on back."

"Thank you," said Mary. "And I'll try it for sure."

"Used to be, back when I was comin' up," said Hattie, sitting down in a lawn chair, "we'd make 10 or 12 loaves of bread ev'ry Sat'rday night. We had to do things like that. They wadn't no other way, you wanted to stay alive. Knew this one lady made 20 loaves for herself and her fam'bly. I was brought up in that way and I can't help from believin' they's sense in it still."

She took a bite of the syrup bread and turned her gaze on Fletcher Bourne. "They's some still do it," she said, "but we all go down to the store. Like Mr. Newspaperman here, he asked me up for supper one night and I was 'specting somethin' grand. Know what we et?"

"What?" said Mary, smiling.

"Old fried handburger and beans."

"Well, Miss Beecher, you said you liked it!" Bourne rejoined. "You talked all up and down how much you liked it. And it wasn't hamburgers and beans, it was meatloaf and bean casserole."

He leaned forward on his lawn chair and rocked back and forth on it, a skinny sight with his sallow face and hollow cheeks. He shook his head and smiled at Brandt and Kass.

"Tryin' to be kind, was what I was, Fletcher. Your poor boy, he grew up on handburger, and now he's goin' to the Army. Reckon he'll get more of it there. Poor boy never had nothin' to stick to his ribs. No wonder he's so skinny!"

"Well, I'm not exactly skinny," Bumper replied, patting his stomach as he looked shyly at Mary. There was, in fact, not much padding there, though he had strong, long legs and arms.

"I just bet the girls think he looks fine," said Mary.

"Well, he don't look fine to me," Hattie shot back. "Looks like his daddy fed him handburgers and beans. And now he's goin' to the war, maybe, this ol' war they got goin' over in China or somethin'. You can see it on the TV. People gettin' blowed up jes' walkin' around. You better watch out, Willie. I don't want you to get hurt over there now. You

better say a prayer to the good Lord, ask him to watch over you."

"We have prayed," said Fletcher softly. He had grown serious as the talking turned toward the war.

"Well, maybe not enough," Hattie retorted. "You know, he said to keep on knockin'."

"We have been knocking," said Bourne.

"Well, you just keep on."

"So we intend."

"Well, let it be then. Praise the Lord!"

They sat talking and eating the food that Hattie had set out. Bumper fell into a thoughtful mood, after Hattie's comments. The father, too, had a sober expression, thinking maybe he hadn't done enough in the spiritual realm.

[Chapter 37 notes]

38. Matt and Mary part, professing their love for one another

On their way to the Louisville airport the next day, about ten miles out of Crabtree, Matt and Mary passed over an iron arch bridge into a town that consisted of a main street and a cluster of houses.

The narrow river that passed under the bridge curved around in both directions, nearly encircling the town. There was a white plank church with a two-story steeple and a single store beside a two-pump gas station. Thickly wooded, autumn-colored hills with outgrowths of rock rose steeply from the town on all sides.

Mary Kass had a feeling that she had ridden back into the past. She had had the same feeling all through her visit with Matthew. She thought to herself that this was America, also, this land that seemed to go back in time to the edge of the frontier.

She had seen similar places in the Deep South, on her visit there in college. But she had seen them from the main highway, walking along with the others. She had not focused on them, and wondered about them, as she did now.

"I've been meaning to ask you about that book you read by Marcuse, the one you have in your room, wondering how you relate it to here," she said to Brandt, watching his thoughtful face as they drove slowly up the main street of the town. "I noticed that you had underlined just one quote in it. I took the liberty to write it down in my journal. It was something like 'the power of the machine is essentially the stored up and projected power of man.' What does that mean to you? Why did you think it was important?"

"Well, see, I grew up with a very definite idea of machines from the farm," he replied, meeting her glance. "My dad was always saying there was a machine for every task. Even when we couldn't afford it, he would point out what the best machine would be. So I had this idea of the machine in my mind. Then, in Vista training, we saw some old news clips of Kennedy and Humphrey in West Virginia, in the primary election there, whenever it was, when Kennedy won, and in one of the clips Kennedy was talking about how the machines in the mines were taking away jobs, from men. That stuck in my mind, that machines could do that, could be too good, almost, or too efficient. And then I got here and I saw the strip mines and all these machines working away... while meanwhile people live so poorly and hardly have any control over the very land where they've lived for generations, really. And then Marcuse... Dennis Kelly could give you a better explanation."

"I like your explanation," she said firmly. "I just wish you would say more."

"Well, what Kelly brought out... We've had these long discussions

over beer... is this one particular idea of Marcuse, which I can't say, really, where it is in the book, that the way things are has a power of its own, just by being. And being is so powerful, so convincing, that it makes us think that the ways things are is the only way they could be. But is this really true? There are alternative ways. Like here, for instance, these beautiful hills, the whole country here, could be so much better a place for people to live, if the machines would work with them instead of against them."

"I remember hearing one speech by Mario Savio," Mary responded, "you know, the head of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley. He said something like 'there comes a point when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, so oppressive, that the only recourse is to throw yourself on the gears.' To stop it. And I had the impression that by 'machine' he meant the whole machine of society. That's what I think Marcuse means, also, when he talks about 'political power over the machine process,' the 'technical organization of the apparatus,' and so on."

"Yes," Matthew replied with a nod. "Political power works into it somehow. I know that's what Harris would say. Maybe that's what he has in mind, with the strip mines, to throw himself on the gears. Or to throw me and Denny on them. But, I don't know, I'm not there yet, if I ever will be. There are a lot of pieces that I haven't put together."

He left off with that and lapsed off into silence through several turns of the road. They had left the little town behind. They were heading up a steep, winding hill through thick woods. Here and there was a low area beside the road with old tires, rusted machinery, decaying cardboard boxes, and other, unidentifiable junk.

Mary noted the odd contrast of untouched woods and piles of junk. What he had said seemed so true—this land had such potential for beauty, and yet the people seemed so weighted down and discouraged. They were discouraged because the machines and institutions that could release the land's potential were outside of their control.

She thought to herself that he had come such a long way in growing into his abilities and intelligence. He was no longer a college kid. He was becoming a man. He no longer needed her encouragement to express his own thoughts. Oh, he still hesitated sometimes. He still appreciated her support. But, with or without her, he would continue along his own course. It was a strong course now. It could leave her behind. He did seem to still value her simply as a woman. But in that area she felt she could be bested by contenders closer at hand.

She was very much aware that they were only a few hours away from her departure with no definite plans for how and when they would see one another again. She sensed that their former agreement to see one

another every four months no longer held. They had not lived up to it exactly and no longer even talked about it.

They turned to other subjects—her new classes at school, what his old rowing team buddies were doing—but she was scheming all the time, trying to figure out how to gracefully introduce the subject of what their future relations would be. She told herself that she was being too intense in wanting to pin everything down, but she could not prevent herself from thinking about what to do.

Later, as they came over a hill and saw the Louisville skyline in the distance, she asked him if her had ever thought about what he would do when his year with the MVs was over.

"I've thought about maybe doing another year," he replied softly. "Harris and Kelly have talked about it, also."

He had actually thought a great deal about his, and had even thought about the possibility that maybe she could somehow join him. But he hadn't worked out the details in his mind.

"So you'll be way up there, in the mountains, for another whole year then!" she observed dismally.

"Well, maybe," he answered, surprised by the anxious tone of her voice. "I don't know what else I can do, Mary. I'm sorry if it makes things complicated."

He was silent again as he noticed a sign ahead with directions to the airport. They had merged into another highway now with four lanes of traffic. They were moving along in a river of red tail lights with a procession of white headlights coming toward them. He glanced at her and saw that she was faced away from him, toward the side window.

"I just don't understand," she said, looking toward him. "Why do you want to see me at all when everything is so complicated." She threw up her hands in a quaint gesture that seemed more a gesture of her sister, Ellen. "Things could be a lot simpler, Matt! There are all kinds of girls in the world, you know. I don't know if your mother ever told you. Down here, too. All kinds of girls in Kentucky! Mountain girls! I just imagine they must be pretty intriguing!"

He laughed.

"You don't need to get so complicated for the sake of me!" she continued.

He had enough of an understanding of women to realize that she was looking for reassurance. Still he wasn't quite sure what to say. "But you're the point of it all," he said,

"The point of it how?" she persisted, turning toward him with the patent Mary Kass frown, the dark, straight eyebrows lowering over the serious dark eyes.

"I don't know how, exactly," he said. "The point of it because you're

the absolute ultimate, you know."

"Oh, Matthew! Foul!" she cried. "Don't play with me. You know I don't take things lightly."

"I know you don't, Mary," he replied softly, touching her hand. "I know you don't. I know you're serious, and I like you for it, truly, because nothing about you is phony, you're the real thing. And I say to you in all seriousness..."

"What?"

"I love you, Mary."

"Do you mean that, really?"

"Yes, Mary, I love you."

"I love you, also," she answered, totally disarmed. She hardly knew what to say. She felt utterly confused.

There was silence again as they left the main highway and headed off on a curve toward the airport. The lighted arches of the terminal could be seen about a mile ahead amidst a field of red and green lights.

"And, you know, I've been thinking," said Matt. "There's a much simpler way to do it, as far as figuring out when to see one another."

"How?" she said, arching in her seat.

"Two parts. One, each time we meet, we agree before we separate exactly when we are going to see one another again. Two, let's go steady, yea, yea, yea," he sang in his flat voice.

"Are you serious?" she said, observing him closely.

Months before, she had gotten used to his flat humor. Now she realized that he had not displayed it once in their visit. It was as if he had left it behind.

"Yes, I'm serious. I know it's important," he said,

"So when exactly will we meet then?"

"At Christmas. I plan to come home for Christmas."

"Really? To Minnesota? For how long?"

"Maybe for a week."

"Won't that be grand!"

Later, when he drove away, he kept thinking about how her eyes had welled with tears when she kissed him goodbye. He felt an emptiness, not having her beside him.

He thought about how he had said, "I love you." He had wanted to say those three words to her for such a long time.

[Chapter 38 notes]

39. Combat trainee Morris follows the national debate on the war

On Wednesday, October 25, 1967, after about six weeks of combat training, Lt. Jim Morris came upon two copies of the *New York Times*, for consecutive days, lying together on a study table in the airman's lounge. He paused to read them, standing with notebook in hand.

He first noticed a front page article pertaining to the air war. "U.S. ATTACK LINKED TO ACTION BY MIG'S," the headline said. "Pentagon Asserts Increase in Foe's Air Successes Led to Raid on Base in North." Above the headline was a small, one-column map of Vietnam with a cross showing the location of the airbase, just north of Hanoi. "AIR WAR INTENSIFIED," the caption said. "U.S. planes bombed Phueyen base for first time."

Further into the article, he found this paragraph: "In a formal statement on the increased air war activity, the Pentagon reported that while there were only six engagements with MIG's in July and seven in August, this number increased to 14 in September and 10 in the first half of this month."

This statement confirmed Morris's personal assessment, made over the previous few months, that the war, in general, and the air war, in particular, would continue to escalate until there was a more satisfactory military result. It would continue to escalate for maybe another whole year. He would be in the midst of this build-up.

In the column next to the paragraph he had just read, immediately across from it, was another headline, "GORE BIDS NATION QUIT WAR MORASS," it said. "Urges 'Honorable Exit' with Neutralization of Asia."

"Neutralization!" Morris commented to himself. "The whole area would be Communist within ten years!"

He was familiar with Albert Gore, a Democrat from Tennessee. He knew that Gore was one of a small but vociferous group of senators calling repeatedly for an end to the war. Lyndon Johnson, the president, was also a Democrat, but apparently he was unable to silence the discord within his own party.

Following the article onto another page, Morris found this quote from the senator's speech: "The Administration had misled itself and the public as to our real national interests and intentions... Our national interests and even our existence are tied to the future of our relations with the Soviet Union and with Communist China. The war is causing our relations with both of these countries to deteriorate...

"We are bogged down in a land war in Asia fighting not Chinese but Vietnamese armed with Soviet equipment; dissipating that most precious national resource of all—American lives—as well as hard-earned

American money; damaging our relations with the two other most powerful countries in the world; and risking the danger that they will be dragged into the quagmire with us and cause a wider war—perhaps the war which will be the final holocaust."

Morris took silent note of all this. The idea that it was in the interest of the United States to be on good terms with the Soviet Union and Communist China had never explicitly occurred to him before. He had simply regarded them both as enemies of the American way. He did understand, though, that the situation was grave in its potential to build into a wider conflict, the world war that everyone feared.

Setting that newspaper aside, Morris picked up the other, which was for the current day—Thursday, October 26, 1967. He immediately noticed the headline, "U.S. Planes Attack MIG Base in North for Second Day."

"United States planes attacked the Phueyen MIG air base today for the second consecutive day," the article said, "and bombed the Longbien bridge, Hanoi's only rail and road link with the port of Haiphong and the Chinese border.

"Air Force F-105 Thunderchiefs from bases in Thailand, protected by F-4 Phantom fighters, fought off attacking MIG's to bomb the runway, taxiway and parking areas of the Phueyen base, 18 miles north of Hanoi.

"A spokesman said that United States planes had fought with MIG's twice over Phueyen, but there was no immediate reports of damage on either side.

"The attack on the Longbien bridge met heavy antiaircraft fire and numerous surface-to-air missiles, the spokesman said. There were no reports of lost planes."

On the front page, next to this article, Morris saw another headline of interest: "EISENHOWER JOINS TRUMAN IN GROUP BACKING THE WAR. New Committee Formed by Douglas and Bradley Gives Strong Vietnam Support."

Eisenhower and Bradley, two of the most prestigious, most honorable commanders of the Second World War, Morris observed. Eisenhower had been a Republican president, moreover.

"The committee is backing 'the office of the president'," the article said, "but 'is not committed to support Lyndon Johnson.'

"This report extended to the idea, repeatedly emphasized in the last two weeks by the President, Vice President Humphrey and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, that the United States has a 'vital national interest' at stake in Vietnam because of the aggressive, expansionist policy of Communist China."

Well, here was the other side of it, thought Morris. People like Eisenhower and Bradley and the present, highest officers of the United

States saying it was in the national interest to contain China on the battlefield, seemingly at any cost. Surely these people had the experience and knowledge to know what was in the best interest of the country. They had the historical scope. Why couldn't the country line up behind them?

Why couldn't there be a national consensus when so much was at stake, when American lives were being expended?

He got up with a disgusted shake of his head, and noticed a small headline on the inner page of the first newspaper he had looked at. The headline said, "Sit-in at U. of Minnesota Protests Dow Recruiting."

"An estimated total of 50 students held a sit-in at the University of Minnesota today," the article said, "to protest the presence of a job recruiter from the Dow Chemical Company, which produces the napalm jelly used in bombs by the United States armed forces in Vietnam.

"Students first sat in the hall outside the placement office at the College of Liberal Arts and later moved into the placement director's office.

"A scuffle broke out between pro and antiwar factions, but the fighting was quickly stopped by spectators."

Morris kept thinking about this article as he walked the several blocks from the airmen's lounge to the building where he had an afternoon class in aerodynamics.

Maybe the same idiots who had confronted him in the parking lot, he thought. They were still at it, hanging around the campus, not really doing anything to better the situation on either side. He had started to hate these people.

He thought back to the scuffle where the big jerk with the peace sign on his forehead had gotten the better of him. He felt ashamed still that Matthew Brandt had had to intervene. He felt that, given that same situation again, he would do better in it. He would be tougher, more prepared. He would not make the mistake of standing there and letting himself get pushed.

His thoughts went in a tumble from Brandt to Mary Kass to Ellen Kass—and stopped there with a sense of sadness and longing. He had heard from the pretty girl only twice,—childlike letters in which she quickly described the latest or upcoming events in her active, sociable life. There was hardly any affection in them except at the end where she always signed, "Loves and kisses! Ellie."

He expected that she would fade off more and more as time went on. Maybe there would be another tryst or two when he returned home. But she would never be a true love, as his mother had been for his father. Maybe that kind of thing just didn't happen anymore. Yet he had heard fellow airmen talk of sweethearts back home who wrote them almost

daily letters and were loyal in an old-fashioned way.

Ellie Kass wasn't that type. He wasn't sure he would even want her to be. Why did he even think about her?

Coming into the classroom, he found several familiar faces there—Jamie Growe from Arkansas with his amiable, mustachioed face; "Bang" Bork from Toledo, long-faced and serious with keen, contemplative eyes; Marty Sardo from New York City, dark and Italian in appearance, with a compact, small build. He had just qualified at the minimum height allowed for a pilot.

"Jimbo!" they shouted in greeting when he came in.

Morris quickly surmised that they were in the midst of an unusually serious discussion, apparently brought on by the news report that the U.S. was about to hit closer to populated areas around Hanoi.

"There's one inescapable fact," said Bork, the lean, determined airman with the long, mirthless face.

"And what is that?" the others asked.

"North Vietnam, probably under the direction of the Russians, has deliberately put these strategic facilities, like Gialam, near populated areas."

Morris knew he was talking about a base very close to Hanoi that was capable of handling MIGs. He had heard there were as many as 40 MIG 17's there.

"They're using their own people as a shield," Bork continued. "They win either way. If we don't attack, the MIGs stay unharmed. If we attack, they cry 'war crime,' the Russians have something to talk about at the U.N."

"Why do we even need to go after them?" said Growe. "Monyer said just yesterday, quote, we have driven the MIGs from the sky." (Monyer was Commander of the Seventh Air Force in Vietnam.) "Those were his exact words as I remember."

"That remains to be seen," Bork answered, moving over to the side of the room where large windows looked out to the long warehouses on the perimeter of the base. Beyond them was a flat, Texas landscape with scraggly, bushlike trees. "And, anyway, if they are truly routed, aren't we making the basic military mistake of allowing them an orderly retreat? Why not hit Gialam? Why not hit Bacmai and Campha? Now's the time when we should be going in on them full bore!"

The others recognized the sites he had named as all strategic sites that had not been approved as targets by central command. They were all near or in densely populated areas. Campha was a port near Haiphong.

Morris sat on a desktop, listening as his colleagues talked. He had a high regard for these young men, as high a regard as he had ever had for anyone. These were men of courage and idealism who hardly had any

flaw except maybe their ambition to be the best pilots.

"Ultimately, it won't be our decision," he said quietly when the others had worn the subject out. "Our job is to get ready for whatever we're required to do. We're just a little piece of this. We have to do our piece well. Aren't there similar situations in every war? It can't be cut and dry. It's a messy business, deciding and doing."

The others nodded in agreement. They were glad to have Morris in their midst. He was level-headed and would keep them a11 on focus. What he said was true—this would be a messy business. They had better get used to it.

[Chapter 39 notes]

40. Morris warms to a fervent description of Air Force ideals

About two weeks after Jim Morris and his fellow trainees had their discussion about sanctioned targets, the entire group of trainees heard a speech by Lt. Gen. Lawrence Moynihan, the base commander. In this speech the general addressed similar issues in the context of national policy and the role of the individual pilot.

The occasion was a ceremonial bachelor dinner held for the trainees and their instructors to mark the third of the way point in the F-105 combat training program.

Gen. Moynihan spoke from a lectern at the head table. He was a solidly built, imposing World War Two and Korean War veteran, erect in stature, meticulous in dress, with neatly trimmed silver gray hair. On the breast of his beige dress uniform was an impressive array of ribbons including the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Force Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal, and Purple Heart, all bedecked with clusters.

"Gentlemen," he began, "in just a few months, you will be fighter pilots. I want to talk to you tonight about what you can expect in this role, in terms of the tradition of the United States Air Force, and in terms, also, of the obligations, challenges, and opportunities which your role as fighter pilots may bring."

He paused to take a sip of water from a glass on the lectern, and looked around the room from man to man as if addressing a much smaller audience.

He was a square-jawed, handsome man, respected for his service record and personable, direct manner. His face was wind-burned from his frequent visits to every site of base activity including the sunbaked airfields and parade grounds.

"As you are aware," he said, "we are a nation at war. You knew this when you joined this combat training program, just as you knew then, and know today, that, in a time of war, those who graduate from this program are likely to test their skills in actual combat."

War whoops went up among the men. In response the general nodded and smiled. He quickly became serious again, however, when he scanned the attentive young faces of the trainees.

"In your willingness to take on this responsibility," he continued, "you fall within a long tradition of Air Force men who have shown the same willingness in other wars.

"I need not tell you, though, that this war in which you may enter is a war unlike any other in American history—except for maybe, in some respects, the so-called Korean Conflict.

"To begin with, this war in Vietnam is a war that does not enjoy popular support. It is a war that has been denounced and vilified by many

of our fellow Americans, including especially the younger generation of which you are part, and including even many members of our congress.

"This is a war, moreover, in which we, as a nation, have not sought a military victory. Instead we have pursued a policy of what has been called 'sustained reprisal,' for the purpose of exacting political rather than military objectives."

He paused again to take a sip of water as several waitresses came in the room and began to circulate among the tables with pots of coffee. "For those of you who wish to hear them again," he resumed, "these objectives, as I understand them, have been: first, to force North Vietnam to abandon its logistical support of the Viet Cong; second, to force North Vietnam to sue for peace with the southern government intact as an independent democracy aligned with the West; and, third, to advance toward these first two objectives without widening the war to include the Soviets and Chinese.

"The United States Air Force, assigned to a mission of intermittent, highly selective destruction of targets of political rather than military significance, has been the point man of this effort. This mission has required us to fight in a non-traditional, conservative manner, to the frustration of some of our fellow airmen.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, raising his index finger, "lest I be misunderstood, let me declare at once, I do not stand before you tonight to question the policies of our national leaders and commander-in-chief. Neither is it proper for you, as American soldiers, to question these policies.

"It does behoove me, however, as your senior officer, to consider how these policies will affect your ability to dispatch your duties. And it behooves you to consider these effects, also—truthfully, and with a tough-minded determination to uphold your own honor and the best interests of our country.

"In this spirit, gentlemen, let us consider the situations at home and in Vietnam as they are likely to develop in the next couple of years. How will these developments affect you as men and as pilots? How can you best fulfill your duties? What are your prospects for the future, looking beyond the war to the wider role of the United States Air Force in the final decades of this century, indeed, of this millennium?"

Having got this far in his presentation, the general broke off again and looked around the room with a detached, curious expression. In the midst of the look, the eyes focused again and began to engage one by one with individual men.

"Turning first, then, to the situation at home," he continued. "In my opinion, the present atmosphere of dissent and discord will continue. It will continue, quite simply, because all the elements that have brought it

about will continue,—including the war itself, in some form, the current, national policy of containment of Communism and avoidance of widespread war, and also the draft, which has mobilized and unified a subgroup of our young.

"Many would also say that, given the normal development of conflict, the schism that presently divides our nation can only widen. The sides have just formed. The dynamic of coalescence has just begun. We are on the rising side of the curve with the peak nowhere in sight. We can only hope that the long-term effect upon our nation will not be worse than can be repaired.

"I say this in all gravity, with no intent at false drama.

"But, in any case, our object here is not to consider the problems of the entire society, but rather to consider the effects upon you on a personal basis as you go forward to perform your duties.

"What will the national atmosphere mean, in this regard? Gentlemen, I think it will mean a psychological burden beyond what soldiers have endured before in any war. With full respect for your willingness to fight, I want to warn you about this. You will face a situation where you are called to summon your utmost in physical readiness and courage, as in any war, at the same time as your good will and intentions are questioned and disparaged by many people your own age and by many prominent people on the national scene.

"I can only compare this, in my own mind, with the situation faced by my youngest brother, who is a Catholic priest. As has been required of Catholic priests for centuries, he has taken a vow of chastity. This is, in itself, a considerable burden. But now, in this secular age, he has the additional burden of remaining celibate in face of outright scorn and even of claims of psychological abnormality.

"Likewise, for you, if you participate in this war. In addition to the centuries old burden of going into battle, you will have this burden of indifference and accusation. And for you, as well as for my brother, there is no remedy except in going more strongly into the original grounds of your conviction. You must be strong in yourself, knowing the reasons for your actions."

Here Gen. Moynihan paused again and looked down, as if to look at notes, though he was speaking without them. Morris, seated in the second row of tables, with his colleagues, Jamie Growe, Marty Sardo, and "Bang" Bork, noticed that throughout the room the 200 or so trainees were quiet and attentive. Bork, who had put forth the strong opinions about "going in on them full bore," wore a serious, thoughtful expression.

"Turning next to Vietnam," the general continued, making another visual scan of the room. "Gentlemen, as I see it, the present campaign of

highly selective, politically-oriented bombings, known as Operation Rolling Thunder, will continue much along the same lines as it has been pursued in the past two years.

"At the same time, and perhaps eventually replacing the bombing campaign, we will see a continuation—and, likely, an intensification—of our program of interdiction and close air support. This will take, principally, three forms: air-supported electronic surveillance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail; air support of the interlocking strongpoints along the demilitarized zone; and close air support in the traditional form.

"Here, too, as in the bombing campaign, the action, from our perspective as airmen, will be characterized by target restriction. And I expect, also, that the enemy will continue to take advantage of our selectiveness by proliferating industries and defensive facilities.

"Meaning more flack, more SAMs, when we do go in. Meaning you may have the experience that some others have described of flying over a prize of a target that has nor been approved to reach a target that, from our perspective, appears much less worth the taking, and all the while under heavy fire or perhaps seeing one of your buddies downed.

"Gentlemen, you will be frustrated, many of you. Maybe you will even begin to scheme or criticize in your own mind.

"But, again, I can only tell you, your only proper response, your only hope for solidity and integrity, is to clear away the irrelevant notions here, and go deeper into the reasoning and idealism that brought you into the Air Force in the first place. Our mission, as soldiers, is not to make national policy. Our mission is to further it with armed force, when circumstances require it. We must remember that—whatever might be the specific effect on the battlefield, on our own experienced battlefields—the policy of our nation has been arrived at by a democratic process, by duly elected representatives, under law. Only in this great nation could there be such a vigorous debate, such tolerance of opposing points of view, as we have experienced regarding this war in Vietnam. The energy of dissent and debate shows our strength as a truly democratic society, and we, in the Armed Forces, uphold that strength by standing ready to implement the policies arrived at by the democratic process."

Again the general paused. He took another sip of water and looked around the room.

"I would also caution you, gentlemen," he went on, "to be on guard lest your larger sense of the Air Force becomes a casualty of this war. Willingness to fight for our country, cheerful acceptance of adversity, are an important part of the Air Force tradition, without a doubt. But intellectual curiosity, exploration, and the pure and simple adventure of flying, are also an important part of this tradition.

"And all the more so, gentlemen, as we enter together into what has been called the 'Space Age.' Less than a hundred years ago, man could not fly. We were held down by gravity, but even more so by our inability to make the leap of faith into the sky. We, of this nation, of this Air Force, have made that leap now.

"Last month, for example, our unmanned lunar probe, Surveyor V, landed on the moon and transmitted back our first chemical analysis of lunar soil. And just days ago, our Saturn rocket, carrying the Apollo spacecraft, launched successfully after more than ten months without a launch. This Apollo spacecraft was unmanned, unlike its ill-fated counterpart that burned with a loss of three lives last January. Still it demonstrates our ability as a nation to leave that tragedy behind.

"Consider, also, gentlemen, this Saturn rocket is no Kitty Hawk. 36 stories high! Equal in weight to a U.S. Navy destroyer! Generating seven and a half million pounds of thrust! How would you like to ride on that?"

Again several whoops came up from the men, and again the general nodded and smiled. This time the smile lingered.

"You well may ride it," he remarked, looking around at the erect rows of lean, sun-tanned young men. "You well may ride it. For this, too, is part of the tradition you inherit, this yearning for what lies beyond the normal experience."

He stood up erect, as at attention, with his hands firmly planted on the lectern.

"Gentlemen, based on my experience of you from training, 1 think you will be worthy of this tradition. There is no greater compliment I can give you tonight. Happy skies to you! And thank you for your contribution thus far, and for your future contributions, to the United States Air Force and to the great and free nation we serve."

There was a moment of silence after this, followed by applause. The applause began at one or two tables, and then grew in area and volume to include all the tables. Then "Bang" Borg, seated immediately next to Jim Morris, jumped up from his seat and shouted, "Hear! Hear!" The call was taken up by several others and then by the whole assembly of young airmen. They stood clapping and yelling, "Hear! Hear!" while the general nodded in approval and gestured with his fist.

41. Morris, coached by Tom Pitt, overcomes a crisis of self-doubt

Gen. Moynihan's remarks about battle duty confirmed what almost all of the trainees already assumed, that they would be sent to Vietnam after graduation. The discussion among them had already gone further to specific units of command. The most likely assignments were the tactical fighter wings at Takhli and Korat in southern Thailand.

The trainees heard more about these Thailand bases in a course on aerial refueling that began a few days after the general's speech. Maj. Thomas Pitt, the course instructor, spoke of the conditions that made aerial refueling a necessity.

Pitt, a balding officer of about 40 years of age, had a look of solitary sadness. He had done a hundred missions in 1965 flying out of Korat, and was generally known to have had problems in resuming normal life in the states. He was a bachelor who was self-conscious in the presence of young women.

"Gentlemen," he said, pacing back and forth, "the bases in Thailand are about 700 miles southeast of the Package 6 area around Hanoi. That means a round trip distance of about 1500 miles. The range of a fully-loaded Thud is about 500 miles. Simple arithmetic will disclose..."

"Two refuelings, sir," called "Bang" Bork from the back of the room, where he sat with Sardo, Growe, and Morris.

"Bork, you demonstrate your genius once again. What do you think happens if you can't make that connection?"

"Shit out of luck, sir," said Bork, "in love and war."

"Astuteness again," said the major, "and combined with eloquence. But, let me tell you, gentlemen, a time will come when you find yourself on bingo with miles to go to that ARCP. I saw a man go down because he couldn't make that connection."

He went on to present technical details. "The boom receptacle, as you're all aware, is located in front and slightly to the left of the cockpit. The force of the boom socking into the receptacle tends to push the plane into a rightward roll. You can counter that with slight stick left, right rudder. Other factors, such as turbulence, may enter the equation, also."

"I'm doing a double-pump on this one," Morris remarked to Sardo that evening as they readied for bed in the room they shared in the bachelor officers' quarters.

"Hey, Morris, relax," replied the ever-confident Sardo. "You've been doing fine. You'll make the rest of us look clumsy."

Morris was sorry that he had expressed such self-doubt to his roommate. He knew that he had been doing fine, as Sardo said. He had already excelled in dive bombing and strafing. Still he had been unable to get a feel for the plane such as in his earlier years of flying.

The instruction books stacked three feet high on his desk had been part of the problem, he knew. He had applied himself well to them—maybe too well. The electronic systems, in particular, had left him stymied. The more he learned about them, the more remote they seemed from his own experience of flying.

"I'm controlling the damn plane with a ten-foot pole," he thought to himself after Sardo fell asleep.

He arrived at the flight briefing the next morning to learn that the weather office was predicting patchy turbulence. The training flight, dubbed Bear, headed up anyhow, with no one willing to object.

Morris and his trainer, Capt. Jim Bradley, were in the third plane, element lead, position in the standard four-plane formation. Morris, in the front seat, kept his eyes fixed on the right wing of the number two plane, struggling to remain in formation.

About 30 miles out, the tanker appeared on the radar scope on the main instrument panel. Maj. Pitt, from the instructor seat of the lead plane, made radio contact and got a terse "five-by" clear transmission okay from the tanker captain. Within minutes the tanker was in view, glimmering in the early morning sunlight against a backdrop of gray clouds.

"Goose Buddy, this is Bear Leader," said Maj. Pitt. "We have a tallyho. Coming in low from your five o'clock, over."

"Roger, Bear flight, we see you. Four F-105s..."

Morris watched the tanker as he and his colleagues moved up on it. From directly below, it looked like a big semi rumbling down the freeway. The wind had risen again, causing a slight back and forth motion of the massive wings.

The bottom of the tanker opened, revealing a window from which the boomer watched as the boom dropped down. It hung in mid-air, rocking as the tanker rode out a patch of rough air. Then suddenly the air was calm. The first plane, piloted by Sardo, moved forward to take the boom. There was a pause and a slight backing away, then the plane went forward again and settled in firmly.

"That's it, Sardo," said Pitt. "You made it look easy. You were countering well. You other guys see that?"

Morris, sweating inside his helmet, watched as Bang Bork went up next and connected just as solidly despite another chop that rocked the plane sideways. He was acutely aware of the interaction between the air conditions and the STAB AUG (stability augmentation) system, trying to determine to what extent he could trust it. He concluded that it was reacting well.

"Roger, closing up," he returned when Pitt called for him to go forward.

He accelerated slightly to take the boom and drew up directly below it. But just when the boom appeared to be about to slide in, the tanker surged forward in a swell of air that pushed up abruptly on his rudder pedals. He fell back about 10 feet from the nozzle.

“Bear three, you hit a chop,” said Pitt. “You were doing fine. Try it again, maybe a little more airspeed.”

“Come on in, little buddy,” the boomer said.

Morris moved forward carefully with his left hand on the throttle and his right hand and right foot poised for the impact of the boom.

The turbulence rose again with the boom inches from the receptacle. Then, in the same instant, Morris applied more to the throttle, the boomer stabbed with the boom, and a sudden air current pushed from the left side. The odd constellation of forces caught the STAB AUG off-guard. The plane rocked to the right, with the boom inside the receptacle.

Morris countered with left stick and right rudder, as forewarned, but he realized at once that he had overcorrected as the plane rocked violently in the opposite direction.

That was motion clearly outside of the engagement envelope, but the receptacle jaws failed to release as they were supposed to. Forced into a second split-second reaction, Morris overcorrected again.

The third roll was more than the receptacle could absorb. With a snap, the boom broke loose, leaving the receptacle broken and the boom bent to the right side.

“Looks like that does it for today,” said the boomer.

“Bear flight, you got enough to get back?” asked the tanker captain.

“Roger, Goose Buddy,” said Pitt. “Sorry to see you hurting.”

That night, in the stag bar, there were jokes all around. Morris took the razzing as best he could. He could see that there was humor in what had happened, but his anxiety about his ability to handle the complexities of the plane had reached a crisis level.

Maj. Pitt, dressed neatly in a sport shirt and tan slacks, with his precious strands of black hair combed carefully back, came up to him as he stood by the end of the bar near a pinball machine where Bork and Sardo were engaged in a noisy contest.

“Listen, Morris,” Pitt said, sitting down on a barstool, “the system failed. The jaws should have disengaged.”

“I should have been ready for it,” Morris replied.

“Yes, well, I agree with that... But the one thing I can tell you, when you’re dealing with an airplane of this complexity, you learn it in pieces—the systems being pieces, as are you. But there will come a day when the pieces come together. I’m talking about electronical, mechanical, physical, you...”

“I’d like to hurry that day along,” said Morris.

"One other thing I thought of," Pitt continued, "remember in class I talked about cross-control..."

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, it's more than reaction, Morris, it's anticipation, too. The plane, because of its size, has a physical memory, almost. It tends to return to its previous state. So, if you go in there already left stick, already right rudder, slightly, the boom tends to push you back to that center, rather than to throw you off-balance. I mean, the plane remembers that position and wants to go back to it. I wish I could explain it better."

"You explained it fine, sir. I understand," said Morris, seeing the hope of bringing together some notions of his own that he had been unable to draw into a total picture.

Pitt threw up his glass to empty it and rose from the barstool. "Well, Morris, you'll be getting another chance at it day after tomorrow. You can set your sights on that. Anything else I can do for you?"

"Actually, sir, yes, there is, maybe."

"What's that?"

"I'd like to go up alone."

Pitt considered. "I do have a few hours available," he said. There was one single-seat F-105D currently on base with its pilot, who had ferried it back for electronic refitting after completing a tour in Takhli.

"I'd like to go up tomorrow morning, sir, if you can arrange it."

"Okay, Morris, I'll call Sgt. Baines from the lobby. You'll need to call yourself a little later to work out the details."

"Thank you, sir. I will."

Morris watched as Pitt went off through the smoky bar, apparently on his way to a date and loaded down with the burden of fitting in with the stateside social scene. He liked Pitt and trusted his sense of what needed to be done. He had begun already to reorient his understanding based on Pitt's concepts.

Next morning, at break of dawn, he was in the F-105D at the start of the runway, with both feet on the brakes as the big plane strained to be released. The J-75 engine roared behind him, sucking in air with a high whining noise through the air intakes just below the wings on either side of the cockpit.

"Roger, rolling," he said when the tower cleared him for takeoff. He pushed the throttle forward and outward and felt himself pushed back against the seat as the long flame of the afterburn shot out behind.

At 1000 feet, he switched on the water injection and watched ahead for the 2000 foot marker. He had more than the 110 knots needed to proceed to a takeoff. He was at 195 knots 3000 feet later when he pulled back on the stick. The nose wheel lifted and he was in the air, banking to the left with the neon lights of the Las Vegas Strip fading below him.

Never before had he felt such excitement in this particular craft, though he had felt it in other aircrafts of his youth. Heading northwest into the Nellis proving grounds, per his pre-established flight plan, he descended low, at 500 knots, and followed the line of a dry run into the brown hills.

This was where the Thud was at its best, he had heard, flying low and fast, jinking to outmaneuver enemy guns. Getting his fill of that, he pulled up the nose abruptly and shot like a rocket straight up to 10,000 feet. Then he pulled back the stick again to flip the aircraft over unto its back and straight down into a nose dive.

At 6,000 feet he pulled out the dive hard to push against the G's, then got down to business, deliberately rocking the plane to get a sense of its "memory," as Pitt called it. By the time he headed in, he knew that he indeed "understood"—not just with his mind, but with his whole body and intuition of flying.

He was ready the next day when he and Pitt, in the lead plane, took position between the tanker. Conditions were choppy again. He was glad for the opportunity to be tested in the same circumstances as those in which he had failed.

Coming up on the boom, he applied left stick, right rudder, to give the plane the center position to remember as he connected with the boom. There was a chop then, as on the day before. He was ready for it in the same instant with confident finesse.

"All right, Morris. Let's not be greedy. We're just practicing here," radioed Pitt. "Goddam Morris, he gets in there and he wants to drink up the whole thing himself."

"Roger, sir, backing off," Morris replied in a matter-of-fact voice, but inside he was rejoicing.

They headed back soon, banking in a leftward arc, with the gleaming waters and shadowed, rugged shores of Lake Mead below them. The sun could be seen now, just above the horizon in a bank of clouds.

Morris looked at the sun, thinking to himself that it was a star, a lovely star. For the first time in his life, he felt detached from the earth, a part of the sky. He was a traveler in space, he thought to himself, an integral part of his rocketlike machine.

Back at the base, helmet under arm, he crossed the wide expanse of the airfield, looking with new pride at the immense sheet metal hangers and neatly lined-up silver planes.

[Chapter 41 notes]

42. Steward charges into community work with an ideal of service

After his VISTA predecessor, Stan Yeshe, left, Tom Steward took to his assigned community of Dulatown with the enthusiasm of a young priest presented with his first parish.

He had, in fact, dreamed of being a priest throughout his years in grade school. The dream had been a casualty of his growing skepticism about religion, but the ambition to be a "servant of the people" had survived.

"Never in my life have I felt so much that everything is so right, so just right for me, and for my abilities, as I do now," he wrote to Barbie Carpenter, his friend from college. "I feel like I'm where I supposed to be, I'm learning what I'm supposed to learn, at this time in my life."

He was still living in Yeshe's idyllic cabin. However, by a previous arrangement, the cabin was slated to return to its benefactor owner in a couple of weeks, at the end of November. He had also inherited Yeshe's government car, a white, 1963 Ford Fairlane station wagon. He had more independence, more freedom, than he had ever known.

Every day he got up at the break of dawn, put on his sweat suit, and drove to a golf course where he ran six miles. He returned to the cabin, shaved and showered, and was at the Dulatown community center by about nine o'clock.

He was healthy and tan, with his long legs and arms ready to spring into action at any time. He was cheerful and happy, and patient with the children. He was respectful to adults, whatever their station. Despite his new responsibilities, he didn't quite think he was an adult himself.

Where to live was an immediate problem. He thought about what to do, and in late November announced to the two neighborhood aides, Frances Banner and Samanta Sorren, that he intended to find a place in Dulatown itself.

"Why you want to come down here and live with all these crazy niggers?" drawled Frances, with a smile aside at her colleague. "You live down here, you going to be crazy yourself."

"I just think it will give me a better sense of the problems," replied Steward in his earnest manner.

He had learned that to test his responses the aides spoke in an exaggerated Negro accent and made disparaging comments about the people in the community. In general, he had found that the people of Dulatown made disparaging comments about one another and themselves. He was also aware that not only Yeshe but also the two previous VISTAs, who were all white, had all lived outside Dulatown in white communities because of an unspoken understanding that that was the "best" arrangement. But he was determined to pursue his own quiet

course of action.

He stood outside the small office where the aides spent a good part of their day filling out forms. He was dressed in his usual white tennis shoes with no socks, white jeans, and T-shirt, in this case a yellow Air Force T-shirt that he had brought back from camp.

The aides were making coffee and setting out cookies for the mid-afternoon sewing class.

"Ain't no problems around here except a bunch of peoples acting foolish," Samanta said with a coy smile. "You ever know crazy peoples like this back when you was coming up?"

"People around here seem alright to me," Steward replied.

"Ain't no room around here no how," Samanta said, settling down on a chair with a cookie. "Who you going to live with, Mr. Lenny?"

The aides both laughed, with Steward acquiescing with a grin. Lenny was the old, white-bearded handyman who did general maintenance at the center. He was known for scratching his balls beneath his coveralls in public view.

Steward went out undaunted and walked up the rutted road, stopping to talk to everyone he saw. After talking to several people, he decided that the aides had given him correct information. There were no vacancies anywhere, not even a room available for rent. In fact, when he considered where people lived, he realized that the little, almost rural looking community, with pigs and chickens in backyards, was actually densely populated. Every lot within reach of the road was taken.

He observed that there were several other structures where people apparently lived but that could not really qualify as houses—a tiny, aluminum-colored trailer in another house's backyard, a one-room cabin down below the hill where a trail led into the woods, and another one room shelter built of new lumber and situated between several houses. Outside the latter he saw a tall, lanky young man, about 30 years of age, pounding tar paper on the roof.

"Looks like that will keep the rain out," he said as he came by.

"Yes, sir," replied the man with a brief glance, smiling. "Least I hope so."

Steward noticed at once that the man spoke with a handicap that caused him to slur his speech. Also, he had a problem with his left hand. He appeared to be unable to open it fully though he was able to pick up and hold nails in the bent fingers.

"I should introduce myself," said Steward in his courteous, formal manner. "I work down at the community center."

"Oh, I know who you is," the man replied with another quick smile. "You just don't know me."

"And I'm sorry I don't," said Steward. "What's your name?"

"Sammy. Sammy Lane."

"Well, my name is Tom Steward. I'm pleased to meet you."

"Likewise."

In a few minutes of halting conversation, Steward learned that Sammy Lane was from a small town in Georgia. He had come up to North Carolina to look for work in the furniture factories. He had two cousins, Clyde and Harold Moore, that lived on either side of him. The cousins had helped him build his little house.

"Had any luck looking for work?" Steward asked.

"No, not just yet. But I's still hoping."

On leaving, Steward extended his hand, which the other took limply. He shook the hand, but there was no exchange of firmness of the kind he was used to from his Midwestern upbringing.

Steward thought about that as he walked back to the community center. He wondered what had been behind the lack of firmness in the handshake—physical weakness, or a lack of character or determination, or maybe anger or resentment. He wondered also about the distribution of property in Dulatown. It seemed almost like a first come first serve arrangement. He remembered what Stanley Yeshe had said about the people of Dulatown being descendants of slaves and living on land granted to them by their former white owners.

"That Sammy Lane," Frances Banner commented when Steward related his activities, "he's a real, old-time Negro from the Deep South."

"Way down Deep South," said Samanta. "Says things like 'us'es all gwine to town'."

"And, oh, that man is black," said Frances.

"Uh-huh," said Samanta. "Can't hardly see that skinny nigger when it's dark."

"Uh-huh. 'Cept them big white eyes."

Steward opened the back door of the large general room of the center and stood on the little porch there, watching the kids playing in the clay playground below. The only equipment the playground had was two basketball hoops on leaning poles. The sun was low in the western sky above the pine-covered hills in the distance.

"Now, Thomas Steward, you look like you're feeling perplexed," said Frances, coming out with a cup of coffee and a cookie. "You better have you some nourishment now to get that old head clear."

"Thank you," Steward answered, smiling. "I am kind of hungry."

"See, what you got to understand about this chere community," said Frances, "well, I just think somebody like you from up North, you come here and you see all these people all living together, and you think they all settled down here together because they like it here or they're kin or something, which is true in some cases. But the way it mostly is around

here, see, there's just a few places, really, where black folks can live without getting shot or just plain brow beaten down."

"How about Lenoir?" Steward asked.

"There is one neighborhood there, on the west end, that's black," Frances replied. "And that is the only place, really, where black folks can live. You don't see the boundaries, Tom, but the boundaries are there."

Steward was silent, listening. He hadn't thought much about the social arrangement in Lenoir and the surrounding areas. He had just observed that the races lived in different places.

"So what you have here, in Dulatown, it's really a hodge-podge," Frances went on. "Guess you could say it's a real mess. You got people here, like me and my husband, that went to college. Then you got people like Sammy Lane, real, old-time backward people. Now I ain't saying that makes him bad. But you just got a mix here of some people that want to do good and can do good and other people that just seem all sullen and spiteful and want to hold the others down. I don't know what I'm trying to tell you, really. Just that for a lot of people, living here is hard because you can't ever make no progress, people want to hold you back, and the whole community together is just like a big anchor, at least that's the way it's been."

"I'd like to see that change," said Steward softly. "I'd like to help change that around, so the good people can be good and the other people can be brought along."

"Well, maybe you can just help that happen, Tom," Frances replied. "There's a whole lot of work needs to be done. There's a lot of real needs here. Samanta and I, you know, we was just kidding about the crazy peoples acting foolish."

"Yes, I know that."

"We're awfully glad you're here."

"Thank you, Frances."

"You eat you that cookie now."

"Thank you. I will."

"Got some more inside."

"Thank you. I'll come and get one later."

He left soon afterwards. The impressions of the day remained in his mind. He understood that he would have a different kind of relationship with Dulatown than he had expected. He would be more distant. He would have a separate life. But there was still much to do, as Frances Banner had said.

He followed a familiar route, down the clay road to the little store on the corner, then around the corner along a part of the road that bent back toward Dulatown through a thick stand of pines.

He noticed that there was a power line corridor there, cleared through

the woods on the side of the hill. It appeared to be an unofficial boundary such as the aide had described.

43. Steward tries to help Sammy Lane and ends up resented

A few days after meeting Sammy Lane, Tom Steward arranged to rent a two-bedroom house in a white, working class neighborhood about three miles from Dulatown. About the same time, he was working with the two Dulatown neighborhood aides to organize a community supper at the community center, with the proceeds going to the teen club and other activities. It was to be a "real soul food dinner," as Delores Harper called it, with chitter- lings, biscuits and gravy, and sweet potato pie.

The house that Steward rented was a one-and-a-half story house with the second bedroom being the only room upstairs. The house had a stucco exterior and forest green trim. It was on a dead-end street off the main highway on a block with two other plain houses. It had an open front porch and a small, exterior garage.

The house came partially furnished with kitchen and dining room tables and chairs. There were a couch and easy chair in the living room, and a single bed and a dresser in the downstairs bedroom. The floors were of pine planks, painted enamel mocha brown, without any rugs.

Steward moved in with his entire belongings in less than an hour. His wardrobe consisted of several shirts and pairs of jeans, a jacket, a winter coat, and two sweaters. In addition, he had about a dozen under- pants and T-shirts, one toothbrush, one tube of toothpaste, a razor, two bars of soap, one bottle of shampoo, one kettle, one frying pan, three plates, two bowls, one cup, one glass, two knives, three forks, two spoons, and a cardboard box containing books, notebooks, and pens. He carried two chairs upstairs into the second bedroom to use as an exercise bench. He had that area generally set side for his habitual exercise. The other furniture he left exactly where he found it.

He made no effort to improve his surroundings in any way. The white walls remained bare. The chairs were never sat in except for the one chair in the kitchen that he sat in to eat and also to study. He ate foods that were easy to cook like hot dogs and beans. He studied whatever was next in his private intellectual explorations, which had nothing to do with his work or any practical application. He was presently reading philosophy and theology—Martin Buber, Reinhold Neibuhr, Soren Kierkegaard, and so on.

The chitterling supper proved to be quite an undertaking. There were maybe a dozen people involved in preparing various parts of it. An old woman named "Ma Florence," who was apparently everyone's grandmother or great grandmother, had agreed to make the sweet potato pies.

Steward offered to go down to Ma Florence's house to talk to her about the pies since he had never met her. He had learned enough about the matriarchal structure of black families to appreciate her position in

the community. He figured she would be a good person to know in getting approval for projects.

The aides had described Ma Florence to him as "very skinny, very black, just as nice as can be." Steward went down in the hollow to where they said her house was and found her, true to that description, next to a pile of sticks and scrap wood. She had a handful of wood that she was bringing in for heating fuel, she explained.

"So you're Mister Tom," she said. "I heard how those childrens like you. They say they just love you to death!"

"They are awfully good to me," Steward replied in his diffident manner. "And I heard you're the one that can bake the best pies in Caldwell County."

"Child, I can't say I bake them good," she replied with a bashful smile. "But I sure do bake a bunch of them. And they sure do get et. Got some right now if you like to taste some."

"How's that?" Steward answered, not quite following.

"Got some right now, right chere inside. You come on in now and I give you a big piece right now. See how you like it. You ever et sweet potato pie?"

"No, I guess I never have."

"Well, you see, it's kindly like punkin. You come in right now and you eat yourself a big piece. See how you like it."

"Well, thank you. If you don't mind."

"Lord, no! I'se glad for the company."

"Well, thank you then."

"You come on right in."

She lived in a little, white, one-story house with a gray shingled roof and a small brown brick chimney. The area around it was mostly clay with untrimmed tall weeds and shrubbery. He followed her through a tiny back porch cluttered with bottles and cans to a kitchen just large enough for a white, six-burner wood stove and two tables loaded with carefully covered food.

He saw a dark object scurrying across the floor as he came in and traced its course to a jagged hole, about four inches across, in the wall between the stove and one of the tables. Two rats looked out boldly from the hole, as if waiting impatiently for him to be gone.

"Them ol' rats gets some," she said with a smile. "Don't get no good stuff though. I covers it up real good. Figure better to let them have some. Won't come nibbling on no toes then."

"They really nibble on toes?" Steward asked, regarding the rats matter-of-factly without aversion. He had never imagined that rats would actually live like this inside a person's house.

"Oh, yes! They was nibbling one night. Had my old foot sticking out

of the covers. Lord, that scared me, child! Don't let no toes be sticking out no more!"

Steward nodded, taking all of this into consideration. He sat down at the second table at a chair she provided and continued to look at the rats as she hustled around the little kitchen, cutting a piece of pie and putting whipping cream on it.

"It does taste like pumpkin pie," he said. "Get you another piece if you want it."

"Oh, no. But thank you. That was real good."

Back at the community center, he heard from the aides that there had been a fire in Sammy Lane's little house the previous night about midnight. Most of his things had been ruined by smoke.

"How did it happen?" asked Steward.

"That ol' nigger gets to drinking," said Samanta. "He's just lucky he didn't burn hisself up, too."

"He drinks?" said Steward.

"So I heard," Samanta replied.

"Can't believe no stories around here," Delores threw in. "Next thing you know, the story's going to be on you."

"Story on me, hell," said Samanta. "What they going to story me? Don't do nothing but eat and sit around here. Got drunk and the lantern fell over, or got kicked over, is probably what happened, when he was stumbling around."

"He doesn't have electricity up there?" said Steward.

"Not yet," Delores answered. "His cousin up there, Harold, he told me they were planning to put it in, but they ain't done it. Yet. Can't blame ol' Sammy, really. Sits up there by his lonesome in that little cabin."

"Ain't nobody making him sit up there," said Samanta.

Steward went up the hill later and found Lane outside his cabin. The cabin was badly charred on one side, where there was a black stove pipe extending from the tar papered roof. The basic structure was still intact, however, though the interior walls, visible through the open door, were covered with black soot.

Lane didn't smile this time when Steward approached. He looked up as if ashamed at his predicament. He had rescued some items such as a coffee pot and kettles. He was washing them, using a pail of water and some rags. He had placed the washed objects neatly in a cardboard box.

"Did you get your clothes out?" Steward asked, squatting down beside him.

"Got smoked up pretty bad," Lane replied.

Steward came up the next morning in the government car to take Lane into a charity place in town that the aides had suggested. Lane

considered for a long time without responding when Steward mentioned the possibility of going there.

"Well, I guess I will go in there," Lane replied. "Sure you got time now?"

"Yes, I'm sure," Steward said, thinking to himself that, of course, he had time since he was merely doing his job. But Lane treated the matter like a personal favor and was deferential toward him as if he didn't consider himself to be on an equal standing.

At the charity place, Lane went back and forth down the rows of clean second-hand clothes and found two pairs of tan work pants, two work shirts of the same color, a pair of ankle-high brown leather work boots, and assorted other items.

"Thank you, ladies," he said, smiling all around. "Thank you'all very much. Much obliged. Much obliged."

Coming back from town, with Lane dressed in a newly acquired blue denim jacket, Steward stopped at home for his own jacket. The skies had clouded over and the weather had turned suddenly windy and cold.

Lane came in behind Steward, at his invitation. He stood in the plain living room, looking all around at the rooms without moving a step in any direction.

Steward realized that Lane was feeling envious of the little house, which he himself had regarded as a hardship. He was sorry he had brought Lane in as if to show it off. He thought for a moment of offering Lane the second bedroom. But he held back from the idea—anticipating problems. The reasons kept presenting themselves in his mind—differences in race, differences in background and education, possible conflict about Lane's drinking problem, if he did indeed have one.

Steward was standing at a serving table at the chitterling supper when Lane showed up the following Saturday evening, dressed in one of the tan work suits that he had gotten downtown. Lane was badly drunk and wore a mean expression that Steward had not seen on him before.

"Sammy!" Steward called good-naturedly with his easy, first name, collegiate informality, "you're just in time. We were just about to close down."

There were about 20 people still in the center—the two aides, Steward, Lane, a half dozen or so adults, and a group of older teenagers, mostly boys.

Lane took some food and seemed unsure where to go with it. He was unsteady on his feet, evoking some humorous comments from the boys. He went to a corner table and sat down on one end of it, about 10 feet down from several well-dressed adults.

Next thing Steward knew, Lane was in some kind of argument with the boys. He got up suddenly from his table and went over where the

boys were sitting in the next row of tables. There was a further exchange with some of the boys laughing. Lane pushed the table, knocking several plates on the floor.

"Now, look what you done, you ol' drunk nigger," said one of the boys, picking up his plate. "Why you got to come down here, acting like an ol' fool?"

"You'all boys is the fools," Lane responded.

Steward went over at once. He was in charge of discipline when any of the youth were involved. Overseeing the kids in the evenings was the one job that everyone seemed just naturally to expect of him since all the VISTAs had been involved in youth work.

"Hey, fellows," he said softly, holding up his hands. "If you want to argue, you're going to have to take it outside."

His scan of faces included Lane's.

"Ain't going nowhere," Lane replied with a scowl, glaring around at Steward and the boys. "Ain't et my food yet."

"Ain't drunk his ol' bottle neiffer," said one of the boys. "Look, ain't he got another bottle in his pocket."

"Ain't got no bottle nohow!" Lane yelled, getting up. "Y'all boys is liars!"

He pushed the table again harder, knocking it over. All the plates, foods, and drinks fell on the floor.

"Sam, I'm going to have to ask you to leave," Steward said sadly. "We can't allow this here. You boys can go, too."

"God damn it, Tom, how come?"

"You're egging him on."

"Egging him on, shit."

Everyone was standing now, of those involved in the altercation. Those who were not were watching closely, ready to spring up at any moment. Steward moved toward Lane and the boys to route them out the door. "Ain't going nowhere!" Lane hollered.

He pulled a small knife from his pocket and charged at Steward with it. Steward caught his wrist and they spun around together into the wall with everyone crowding around.

"Let's quit this, Sam," Steward said softly to Lane. "I don't want to fight you. I'm just trying to keep order here."

"Who you bossing me?" Lane replied with gritted teeth. "I'se a man, too."

Steward let go of him at once, but enough others were there now to prevent any further struggle. The aides and several adult men started to lead him toward the door, but he spun away from them and went on his own accord.

"Y'all boys come up the hill, I whoop you good," he yelled back at

the boys.

"Ain't nobody coming up there," Samanta, the aide, said to Lane as he went out.

"Who's he think he's fooling, acting bad," she added after Lane slammed the door behind him.

Next day, in mid-morning. Steward found Lane waiting outside the center when he came out to get in his car. Lane was sober and looked like his old obeisant self.

"Harol' says, you'se going to the law," Lane said at once.

"How's that?" said Steward. "I don't understand."

"Harol' says, you'se going to the law," Lane repeated, saying the words more distinctly and leaning toward Steward as he spoke. "Says you going to get the law on me, to sue me or something, or put me in jail."

"That's not true," Steward replied. "I don't know where he got that."

"Ain't never been in no trouble like this," Lane said.

"You're not in any trouble," Steward responded, starting to get a sense of why Lane appeared so agitated. "As far as I'm concerned, that thing last night, it's over. I'm sorry if I offended you, Sam. Sometimes I don't know how to act, how to do things right."

"I'se sorry, too," Lane replied, backing off as if to avoid another handshake.

Next day Steward heard that Sammy Lane had deserted the little cabin. No one knew where he had gone.

44. Steward and Doug Thomasek visit a ghost town in Tennessee

After Sammy Lane left, Tom Steward persisted in his plan of getting out into Dulatown to talk to people and help with chores. His goal was the same, to build rapport and lay the groundwork for community projects such as the water cooperative that he and Stanley Yeshe had talked about. But despite this continuity in his own activities, he felt that something was amiss in how he was proceeding, and that this had been made clear by his encounter with Lane.

He pinned it down to attitude. “My attitude, my whole mode of action was gratuitous,” he told himself in his formal manner.

When he tried to translate this perception into action, however, he wound up with nothing that would change his general plan for how to proceed in Dulatown. He still needed to get out and talk to people. He still needed to build rapport. He still needed to let the community take the lead itself. If there was an alternative way of doing things, he didn’t see it.

He found himself also getting lonely and wishing for someone to talk to more like himself. Sometimes he thought over the whole course of his life, especially with regard to women. He was sorry that he had gone on so long without any real relationship of any kind, except for his half-formed relationship with Barbara Carpenter. He wondered if he would ever meet someone and fall in love like everyone else seemed to do. He felt that his social ineptness was a real handicap in this regard since he hardly even knew how to talk to women of his own age that were potential romantic involvements.

On the Saturday following the chitterling supper, after hanging around all day at the center without much to do, he decided on an impulse to head up into the Blue Ridge Mountains where there was another VISTA volunteer named Douglas Thomasek.

Steward had just met Thomasek one time at a CAP meeting, but he and Thomasek had hit it off pretty well and Thomasek had extended an open invitation for Steward to come up and see him.

Thomasek worked in a white Appalachian community called Porcupine in a thickly wooded area next to a federal forest. He was unusual among the volunteers in having never been to college. He was about the same age as Steward, 23, and had worked in construction for several years before joining VISTA. He had his own vehicle that he had driven down from Maryland, a brand new 1967 Ford half-ton pickup.

Driving up the winding two-lane highway into the thick woods, Steward noticed how the deciduous trees amidst the pines had all nearly lost their leaves.

He found Porcupine to be a tiny, unincorporated town with no

downtown except for a post office and general store. He located the CAP office, which was in an old school, about a block from the post office, and found Thomasek there mixing cement in a weeded over playground in the back yard.

Thomasek was tall and lean with the raw good looks of a Hollywood cowboy. “Hey, Mr. Steward, what are you doing up here in the mountains?” he chimed when Steward came walking across from his government car. “You’re just in time to do some work.”

Steward laughed good-naturedly. “Are you serious?”

“God damn right, I’m serious. I’m not making mudpies.”

“Where’s everybody else?”

“Hey, man, this is Saturday. Real people are tired. Real people got jobs. You and me, we’re a couple of government bums. It won’t hurt us to do a little actual work.”

Steward went back to the car to get some work clothes. He had come prepared with extra clothes and blankets, thinking he might wind up staying overnight at Thomasek’s place or in the community center.

By dark they had completed a cement foundation and had set pipes into it to serve as anchoring poles for some swings and a slide. They showered in the center and then headed over to where Thomasek lived with a married couple of about 50 whose son was away in the Coast Guard.

Thomasek sat on the bed as Steward prepared himself a place on the floor. Thomasek had a space heater that was needed now because the nights had turned cold. His room was in a walk-out basement. The window looked out to a plowed over garden surrounded by tall pines.

They talked about how they had each come to join up in VISTA.

“I never did expect to get into anything like this,” Thomasek said. “But my job ran out and I couldn’t get in the service.”

“Why not?” asked Steward.

“High arches,” Thomasek replied, pointing to his feet, which were long and thin like his legs and arms. “Then I saw an ad for a VISTA program. So I headed on down there and signed up and lo and behold here I am.” He raised up his arms and smiled.

“What do you think of it?”

“Hell of a lot easier than construction. And I guess it beats the Army. Nobody has tried to shoot me. At least, not yet.”

The next day they headed up in Thomasek’s pickup to a ghost-town that Thomasek had heard about. It was supposedly almost in Tennessee, on the other side of the mountains. He had heard that there had been a church community there that had all died of some unknown sickness and all in the same winter.

“No one ever settled down in there again,” Thomasek said. “I guess

because of superstition. They say the houses are still there exactly as they were built. No one has ever laid claim to them."

They got to the little town nearby that Thomasek had been given as a point of reference. The name of the town was Harrison's Mine. They stopped there at a filling station and got some instructions that led them up a dirt road to another dirt road that dead-ended by a steep bank above a stream.

They went down the steep bank on foot, as instructed, and followed the stream for about a quarter mile, going with the flow of the water, to a narrow valley with high, densely wooded hills on either side. There they found the former settlement, a group of about six or so houses and some other buildings that appeared to be common buildings. The houses were made of hand-hewn planks, painted white, with the paint peeling below the wood- shingled roofs.

"Now things like this, I never expected I would see," Thomasek said, lighting up a cigarette. He offered one to Steward, who took it, and leaned over to give him a light. "Just think, Tom, lives were lived here. People had their whole lives at stake in this and probably whole families died here together, the mothers and fathers with their children."

Steward had taken Thomasek at first for a rough-neck character who had joined VISTA without any idealism, simply to get a job. But, at times like this, Thomasek showed a dreamer's disposition. Steward concluded that there was a level of thought there beyond what he had expected.

They were heading out together along the same trail when they saw a man standing up further on the trail with a shotgun in his hand. He was a big fellow dressed for the outdoors in a waist length corduroy farmer's coat and a tan baseball cap.

"Looks like a guy out hunting," said Steward.

"Or we're on his land," Thomasek said.

They watched the man as he approached them steadily, looking in their direction, until he was right in front of them. Without saying a word, the man stopped, looked at them, and let out a big fart. Without a smile or any kind of acknowledgement, he then continued on.

"Well, that's something for the memories," Thomasek said.

The two VISTA volunteers ate supper together at a bar and drank a few beers. Then they bought a six pack over the counter and headed home after dark in Thomasek's comfortable, new-smelling pickup.

Thomasek remained energetic despite the long day and the beer. He sat erectly at the wheel, looking as if there was some new adventure waiting on the other side of every dark turn on the deserted road.

Steward sipped on his beer, feeling in a peaceful mood. When no topic presented itself, he talked about Sammy Lane. He described Lane's

small cabin, the fire, and his own attempts to help after the fire. Also, he described the altercation with the knife and how Lane had whispered that he was a man too.

"I thought a lot about that, and I came to the conclusion that my whole mode of action was gratuitous," he said, saying the exact words that he had formulated in his mind.

"Gratuitous? What does that mean?" Thomasek threw in impatiently when Steward finished his account.

"I don't know... Given freely, having an attitude of giving freely, but somehow also in a spirit of condescension," Steward replied, surprised by Thomasek's irritated tone.

"Steward, you know what your problem is?" Thomasek continued, his inflection rising. "You spent too many years in school. You can't even talk anymore in plain English, or plain American. What you're trying to say, you killed the man with kindness."

Steward shrugged. "Whatever I did, I didn't intend."

"Hey, Tom, you know what?" said Thomasek, his voice suddenly growing softer. "Intentions are worthless. Intentions are shit. You killed him with kindness. Kindness as in, it made you feel good. Killed as in, death to the spirit. You killed the man's spirit so you could feel good."

Thomasek concluded in his best cowboy pose, a cigarette jutting from his lips. Steward could see now that there was some self- consciousness in the pose, but he took the criticism seriously nonetheless.

"Well, what can I say," he responded. "I think you have a valid point. Whatever I did, did break his spirit."

He paused, looking off to the lights of a small town nestled in the dark hills.

"I still have the problem, though," he went on, "of still being there, where I made a mistake, and having to act. And when I consider how I should act, I come back to pretty much the same strategy as I've had all along of talking to people, and so on, as I think I've told you before."

That led to the topic of Steward's idea for a community project and how he expected that a water project might arise from a "real felt need," as he put it.

Thomasek had heard about this idea before, at the CAP meeting where he and Steward had met. When Steward launched into the details of going around to ask people leading questions, Thomasek broke in.

"Listen, Tom," he said, "don't you already know that this water project could work?"

"Yes, in my own heart I do," Steward replied.

"Don't you already know that it would be good for Dulatown?"

"Yes."

"So what exactly are you waiting for then?"

"Doug, as I explained..."

"I can tell you the reason."

"So what is the reason then?"

"Gratuitous, to use a big word I just learned. Your whole way of proceeding is out of textbook. It's what you learned in training, and so on, about letting the people lead themselves. But if you would put yourself truly on their level, if you would make yourself one of these people, as if you just grew up among them, or lived there yourself with a family, then why would you hold back? There's absolutely no reason for holding back except out of an attitude of superiority that says you know what to do but they have to find out, like a bunch of little kids."

Steward stared ahead, considering.

"These people are not little kids," said Thomasek.

"I never said they were little kids," Steward replied.

He let the topic rest there, glad that Thomasek did not pursue it any further. They continued down the road in silence. Ten miles or so of winding, dark turns and a town of a dozen or so dark houses had appeared in their route before Thomasek spoke again.

"You know," he said, "I look off at these lovely, round forms of hills, and I think about something else."

"What's that?" Steward asked, having not the slightest idea where the allusion pointed.

"Well, all has not been entirely quiet up in my ol' mountains," Thomasek said. "I met this girl, this waitress down in Lenville, in a little coffee shop there."

"You've been seeing her?" Steward inquired, turning to look at the lean, self-satisfied face illumined in the light of the dashboard.

"I've been seeing everything," Thomasek answered with a grin. "It's been totally wild."

"When do you see her?"

"Just about every night lately. She lives in a trailer down there, just outside of town. She's pretty young, only about 19. Has a little girl. Dark-haired, pretty little thing. Looks just like her mama.'"

"Where's the little girl's father?"

"He was never really around much, I gather," Thomasek said. "One-night affair kind of thing."

They rode along in silence again. Steward thought to himself that he knew the reason now for Thomasek's continual excitement.

"You ever get into anything like that yourself?" Thomasek said, looking over to Steward with a comradely smile.

"No, I guess I never really did," Steward answered softly.

"Never had any of that snookie, huh?"

"No, I never did."

Again, they elapsed into silence, leaving Steward in an unsettled state of mind.

[Chapter 44 notes]

45. Brandt observes a strip mine demonstration and assaults a deputy

The appointed day for the strip mine demonstration brought overcast skies and a cold wind. Matthew Brandt left the Bourne household at daybreak, and headed up the winding, two-lane highway to the adjacent county where the demonstration was being held.

Along the way, he took in the sight that had become familiar—steep, wooded hills; narrow valleys, some with fields plowed over for winter; isolated, humble houses, half-hidden in trees; row towns beside weeded over railroad tracks; streams rutted with erosion and sometimes cluttered with old cars or junk.

He wondered, as he drove along, if he had made a mistake by letting himself get pulled into the demonstration, even as an "observer." Despite the talk about the "dog cadre," and so on, he didn't trust Harris. He suspected that Harris's troops for this demonstration would somehow not be truly volunteers or not truly representative of the people who should stage such a demonstration.

His misgivings grew when he arrived and met Harris and Kelly and their volunteers.

There were about 20 people present, gathered under a tall basswood tree just off the highway where a dirt road led in to the strip mine. More than half were students from the community college where Harris taught. In addition to them, the group included two female MVs from another county, four men who described themselves as retired workers, several middle-aged women, and a pretty dark-haired girl who had a baby in her arms though she looked too young to be mother. The retired miners were lean men with sallow complexions. They seemed to be there to give the group some legitimacy with respect to mining.

They stood together laughing and drinking coffee with the signs that Harris had brought laying in a pile beside the immense trunk of the tree. From where they stood, they could see down the dirt road to the high wall itself, at the end of a tunnel-like lattice of autumn-leafless trees. It was a flat, rutted, clay-brown area like a site being cleared for a road. Now and then they saw a large machine passing by in the opening.

Soon everyone had a sign in hand, though there appeared to be no definite plan for how to proceed to the next step. The signs said "Stop Now" and "The People Say, Stop."

One of the retired workers, who identified himself as Birl Poling, a former union steward in a tool chest factory, soon emerged as an expert of sorts on demonstrations. He was a large, raw-boned man, in comparison to the others, though he looked small next to Brandt. He had gray hair, swept straight back, and weary, sunken eyes.

"No reason to think they're going to come after us now," he said to

Harris, in response to a question. “They got their work to do, and would like to just do it.”

“We want to stop them from working,” said Harris.

“Well, only way to do it, is get in their way,” the man replied. “That won’t be so easy now, you look at how much room they got to move around.”

“Well, we’ll stand arm to arm then all the way across, anywhere it’s narrow,” said Harris.

“That could do it,” said Birl Poling. “Least, it will make them pause.”

Soon the group headed out with their signs, up the dirt road to the opening in the distance.

“Well, have you got your observer cap on?” Harris asked Brandt as the group trudged up the road, still talking back and forth, though now in more muffled tones.

The blonde, handsome Harris was dressed very neatly as always, in crisp, ironed jeans and a red and blue plaid shirt with the sleeves neatly rolled up to the elbows.

“Yes, I have it on,” Brandt replied. “And my first question is, what’s the point?”

“Read your history books,” Harris said. “Big things start little, in any kind of social movement.”

Harris soon dropped back to converse with the others. Brandt found himself next to Birl Poling, the weary, raw-boned man who had been giving advice.

“You’ve done this before, I gather,” said Brandt.

“Done what before?” Poling retorted.

“Tried to stop them.”

“Years back,” Poling replied. He carried his sign at his side like a shovel. He shuffled as he walked and seemed tired from the exertion of walking up the road.

Beyond the trees, the road turned into the flat, rutted area on top of the high wall. There were maybe 20 men working there, dispersed over an expanse of what appeared to be more than a quarter mile. The workers were almost all in machines, either in bulldozers digging into the hill or in trucks waiting to be filled with coal to take to the processing area at the bottom of the hill.

There was a noticeable change in rhythm of machinery as the group with signs came onto the scene. The bulldozers came to a halt and one man climbed down and said to another: “Now what is this?”

The group strung themselves out across the flat area in a place where it was narrow due to an outgrowth of rock. They stood with their signs, waiting for some kind of reaction. Brandt stood to one side by himself, not holding a sign.

A man with a clipboard who appeared to be in charge came up to the bulldozers. “We got some kind of circus going on here,” he said. “Just keep up your work and stay away from them.”

The digging continued without a pause until a loaded truck came back in the direction of the demonstrators. They were standing hand in hand, by this time, with their signs dug in the dirt in front of them. Brandt had sat down below the outgrowth of rock.

“Now kindly let the driver pass and do his job,” said the man with the clipboard, coming across toward them. He looked no older than 35, but his dark hair was streaked with gray. The eyes showed no emotion. The jaw was firmly set.

“Where we stand, we stay,” Harris asserted with a dramatic toss of his blond head. “We intend to shut you down.”

He delivered this challenge with a note of false drama or self-importance, like lines poorly delivered in a play. Nonetheless, his charges held firmly to their places.

“You may shut us down for an hour or two,” the man replied. “But I don’t suppose you’ll be here at six tomorrow morning.”

He went back to the bulldozers. “Just keep on filling them up and wait here for a while, if you have to,” he told them.

Soon after, the man could be seen making his way down the steep slope below the high wall. The incline was so great that he went in bounds almost, each step taking him down half his height again on the weeded-over hillside.

Soon four sheriff cars with flashing red lights came up the dirt road and stopped on the other side of the line of demonstrators. Out came the sheriff himself and three deputies. With the exception of one who was tall and thin, they were all thickly built, corpulent men who appeared to be different versions of the same type strung out over an age span of 15 or 20 years.

The sheriff looked to be the oldest, at about age 45, and his wide face had a more contemptuous expression than the rest. He was smoking a stodgy cigar. “This here where you are is private property,” he announced, taking the cigar from his mouth. “You are going to have to move away from here where you are standing or you will be in violation of the law.”

“Where we stand, we stay,” Harris repeated in an oratorical tone.

The sheriff and his deputies walked away from the group to confer with the foreman in the area of the trucks. Their conversation could not be heard, but the trucks were apparently part of what was being discussed because the foreman gestured to them several times.

After a few minutes, the sheriff and deputies came back in a motley formation of gray uniforms, their tan hats bobbing up and down as they

crossed the rutted work area.

"Now listen up," said the sheriff. "I'm going to tell you again, this here is private property, belongs to Baltimore Coal. You are going to have to move out of the way here, to let the trucks go down, or you will be in violation of the law."

"Where we stand, we stay," Harris said again, dramatically.

The sheriff and his deputies conferred again, this time among themselves. Meanwhile, the bulldozers started again and work went on as normal except for the stranded trucks.

"Listen up," the sheriff said again. "Let me be clear, you are in violation of the law. You leave us no choice except to remove you, one by one. Nobody here is going to get hurt, ladies and gentlemen. Just keep in mind, if your object is to make a point, you can do it going easy just as well as by going hard. If you go hard, we got to go hard and we don't have no druther but to yank you around."

At the sheriff's command, the three middle guard deputies and the one who looked like an offensive end, began grimly removing people from the area, starting with the six women who were strung out hand in hand along the far side.

The first woman was one of the middle-aged contingent. She went without a struggle, as did a second. The third woman, who appeared to be their friend, held her place stubbornly. Next to her was the teen-age girl with the baby. They were grandmother, daughter, and grandson, it now became clear.

The deputy entrusted to the unpleasant task of removing the woman from the line pulled on one arm gently, with a disturbed expression owing to how the young mother and baby were welded on so firmly to the woman's other arm.

Brandt was on his feet by this time, acutely alert as he watched the scene unfold. From his vantage point, he wondered how this trio had gotten mixed up with Harris. They had gotten recruited somehow. There was some kind of not immediately obvious connection.

When the pulling continued, Poling went over tiredly and faced the deputies. "Is this the proof of your metal," he asked, "to contend with a grandma and a baby?"

"No, this is not the proof of my metal," the deputy replied. "And you're not the proof of it, either, for that matter. If you want to go first, I'll take you."

"I won't be so easy to push around," Poling answered.

"You're a worn-out old man," the deputy said.

He grabbed hold of Poling's wrist and tried to twist him around. Another deputy grabbed the other arm to push in the same direction. The yanking became more rough as Poling resisted, but after several rocking

motions back and forth the old man lost his balance in pulling away and fell to the ground.

"You guys are pretty sorry," Brandt said suddenly, coming forward from the side. "What's the point of pushing him down?"

"We didn't push him down," said the deputy. "He fell."

"Oh, yea. Funny how he fell for no reason," said Brandt. "I'm a little bigger. I don't fall."

In the ensuing fracas, the deputy who had exchanged words with Brandt fell suddenly backwards from the group and landed on the ground. Brandt and Poling were arrested and taken to the county jail. The other demonstrators were removed from the work area and released at their cars after an agreement was reached between the sheriff and Harris.

[Chapter 45 notes]

46. Brandt spends the night in county jail with Birl Poling

"What happens now?" Matt Brandt asked Birl Poling as they sat in the county jail eating a supper of hot dogs and beans.

"They file charges and set bail," Poling replied, dobbing his bread in the bean syrup. "And, mind you, they're a-going to set the bail high, to learn you a lesson."

Brandt considered this prospect, not quite grasping its significance. He had never been in jail before. So far it didn't seem bad. He and Poling were in adjoining cells. Each had a sink, an open toilet, and a concrete slab bed with a thin mattress and a brown wool blanket. A window looked out to a small town business street lined with elms.

"What will the charges be, do you think?" Brandt asked.

"Resisting arrest. Maybe disorderly conduct," Poling answered. "They could press you for assault. But I don't think they will press it."

"I never hit anyone," said Brandt.

"You pushed the man, Matthew. You pushed him right hard," Poling returned with a rise in inflection. "Now, for myself, I was proud to see it. And a push is not a hit, as you say." He took a final swipe of the plate with his bread, wiping it clean. "But you embarrassed the man. We will have just have to see what kind of price is put on that."

With that pronounced in a conclusive manner, Poling left off. He continued to look in Brandt's direction, but the eyes lost interest. They were dull, tired eyes, seeming never to show excitement.

Brandt regarded the old man's features, not knowing quite what to make of them. There was an integrity there of the Fletcher Bourne type, without a doubt, but the integrity seemed worn thin. The face was red at the cheeks, and yet seemed almost pale. The nose was bulbous and red. There were dark rings below the weary eyes.

Brandt sank back on his bed, feeling suddenly tired himself. He heard the door clink open as the guard came in to remove his plate and cup, but he didn't look in that direction. He was dressed in a T-shirt and his customary tan work pants, with his boots beside the bed. He had not taken time to shave before leaving for the demonstration early that same day. His beard was rough and scratchy, he noticed now, and his saliva was thick with the taste still in his mouth of hot dogs and beans. He could not muster the energy to rise from his bed to wash out his mouth at the sink.

He felt ashamed that he had pushed the officer. He had been brought up to respect civil authority, and had never had any reason to suspect it. The day had left him with an unfavorable impression, however. He had tried to work it out in his mind. What had impressed him most of all was that the sheriff and deputies had seemed to side emotionally with the coal company.

"I had the impression they were against us from the start," he said to Poling after lights out. "What do you think was behind that?"

"And did you think they were there in behalf of justice and the common man?" the old man replied softly, with an aspiration of breath that sounded almost like a laugh though the voice remained flat. "The sheriff and deputies are the guardians of property, like security guards in a big building. You are I are the common man, and look what it has brought us. We would not be here, in this jail, if we were men of property."

The next morning, early, Brandt was awakened by someone shaking his door. It was a new guard.

"Get your things together. You're going," the guard said.

"Going where?" asked Brandt sleepily.

"On out of here," the guard answered. "Gentleman is here to pick you up. He paid your bail."

Brandt reached beside the bed for his boots and sat up to put them on. Now who could this gentleman be, he thought to himself. Harris or Kelly? Bourne? Apparently the amount of bail had been established already, without a hearing before a judge. He didn't understand the technical details of why he was suddenly just walking out of the cell toward the closed door at the end of the cell block hallway.

Poling extended his hand as Brandt came by. "Well, thanks for the pleasure," he said. For the first time, his face showed a detectable emotion. He looked like an old soldier watching a comrade depart for another campaign.

"Same here," Brandt replied, taking Poling's hand.

"You're a young'un still, but you're settled," said Poling. "I'd like to see you again sometime. Come on out sometime and talk. I live in Edinburg, out there on 35. Used to be a row town. Still is, kindly."

"Yes, I know of it," said Brandt.

He remembered it as a straight row of two-story, box-frame houses, with the usual railroad track beside them, and with some kind of factory off to one side in the distance where the track curved around a steep hill. There were coke stoves there, also, as he recalled. He had seen them glowing one night when he was driving home after a late meeting.

"Well, you come on by," said Poling.

"I'll try to," Brandt answered.

Brandt followed the guard through the security door into a lobby where a bright swath of sunlight cut across a polished wood floor. Fletcher Bourne was standing there, looking like a sinewy, thoughtful old miner dressed up for Sunday church in a white shirt and tie. He had a sport coat slung over one shoulder and a notebook under his arm. He nodded toward Brandt with a whimsical smile and stepped off toward the

door with his left shoulder dipping as he planted his left foot.

"We can just walk out?" Brandt said.

"Far as I know," Bourne replied.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Well, I'm a newspaperman, you know."

"Was the bail high?"

"Higher than normal, as I understand."

"Where did you get the money?"

"Well, I do have some money, you know."

"I'm sorry you had to pay it, Mr. Bourne. I'll pay you back as soon as I get my next check," said Brandt contritely.

"No need for that. Just let it go by. And, by the way, your car was impounded, but I got that out, too, on behalf of the CAP."

"Was there a charge for that?"

"Just a little, Matt. Just let it go by."

They rode out of town along highway 35 and passed through the area that Poling had referred to. It locked pretty much as Brandt had recalled, but there was a small bridge there, with a creek running under it, that he hadn't remembered. There were children there playing football in a weeded over lot beside the railroad track.

"Bumper, he was worried about you," Bourne said. "Got me out of bed early. Said he didn't want you to have to worry all day about what was going to happen. Made you sound like a real hero, how you stood up for old Poling."

"How did he know that?"

"Oh, things get around fast."

"I was sorry I pushed the officer."

"Just let it go by."

Brandt sat forward in the seat, with one arm out the open window. He looked scruffy and out of sorts, with his clothes all matted and his young face shadowed with a stubby beard.

"I was surprised I pushed him," said Brandt. "I didn't intend to."

Bourne shrugged his shoulders. "It's the situation, Matt. It isn't you. You take a confrontation like that, people are divided into camps... I've seen it many times. There's an encouragement on each side to go up against the other side. The situation takes over. People act, and later they look back and they're surprised at what they did."

They rode along in silence. It was a beautiful late fall morning, with the trees stripped almost clean of their leaves, and the bright sun shining through them and sparkling on the slender limbs and on the last few flickering, stubborn leaves that still clung on.

"Poling said the sheriff and deputies are nothing more than the guardians of property," Brandt said, "like security guards in a big

building."

"What else would they guard?" Bourne answered with a sideways glance. "Property, under the law, is what people rightfully have. Their job is to uphold the law. And that is often a hard task. But I have seen the same men, the deputies, in situations where they go out of their way to help people, or where they endure abuse without meanness of spirit."

Brandt considered in silence.

"That man you pushed," Bourne went on. "His name is Haskell Smith. I saw him in a confrontation once where a man came at him with a shotgun. He got hold of the man's wrist and they wrestled around. Somehow, in the course of that, the man got positioned behind Haskell and shot him from behind, reaching over the shoulder, without even knowing the effect. Or maybe he figured he would fire once real close to give Haskell a scare. Well, the blow caught ol' Haskell right in the left chest. And you know what he did, Matt, he said just as calm as could be, 'John, you shot me, and I think I'm dying'.

"Well, then, this other man, John Jordan, who, incidentally, was a friend... you see, Haskell had gone there, of all things, to repossess an old refrigerator or something for which John was in arrears on his payments... he let off at once, and immediately tried to help him, best as he could. There was a whole group of us there by then and somehow Haskell walked over to his squad car and sat there just as calm as could be, with John beside him, radioing in for help."

They continued along the road, approaching near to the dirt road that led off to the Bourne homestead.

"There was never any rancor," Bourne said. "Luckily, the wound turned out to be superficial. They say Haskell said the whole thing had been an accident, he didn't think that Jordan had meant to hit him. He could have pressed charges, but he didn't."

"This Birl Poling," said Brandt. "Do you know him?"

"Well, of course, I know him. People up here, in these parts, know just about everyone that came up in the same county. And, see, when I was first starting out in the newspaper business and used to go around, I guess as what you would call a cub reporter, Mr. Poling was quite a firebrand then. He was the leader in several union demonstrations. He still is a leader, also, or was up until a few years ago. He was the shop steward in that factory that we passed on our way out, in Edinburg."

Brandt considered again. "You know, I spent the night next to him in jail," he remarked. "I couldn't figure him out. There's something about him. He seems all weighted down. He doesn't seem healthy. He seems so tired."

"Well, likely he is tired," Bourne answered softly. "And he deserves to be tired. He has done his share of work, and conflict. But the man

drinks, also. He has a reputation for putting them down. He had that reputation even years ago, when I first met him. And he has his story, too, like so many others. See, in his case, when he was young, he was quite a sight to behold, I mean, he was quite handsome, and he had just the prettiest wife. He was the envy of many a young man, I imagine. Then, in the course of all his union efforts, he lost his job—he had a good union job then—and, worse came to worse, and the girl left him, went off to Pittsburg or something, and took their child with her.

"Now, just for myself, I don't think ol' Birl ever really recovered from that... Oh, he has been a rounder, he has had his share of women, so they say, but nothing has ever happened, apparently, to make up for that loss. So I think there is a certain level of determination in him to keep up his old efforts, to prove to himself he wasn't wrong, or maybe to keep the old memories buried under present events."

Their conversation lapsed soon after that, with Brandt thinking that he would indeed visit Poling.

47. Brandt reads an editorial by Fletcher Bourne advising caution

As he passed through the *Miner-Mountaineer* newsroom several days later, Matt Brandt noticed a front page headline that said, “Protest at Strip Mine Sounds Alert for Us All.” Below the headline was the subtitle, “An Editorial by Fletcher Bourne.”

Brandt read the first paragraph of the article standing in the newsroom by himself. He was the only one left in the building. According to weather reports, a snow storm was coming in. Bourne had sent everyone home early and had left himself just a few minutes before.

“Ours is an area known for civil disturbances,” the article began. “Also, there have been episodes, in some cases justified, of deliberate disobedience of law. How long has it been since we have felt the stirrings of unrest?”

Brandt read just this far and moved into an adjoining small room where there was a table and refrigerator for Bourne’s employees to use.

The pot of coffee was still hot on a burner there. He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down at the table.

“Speaking just for myself,” Bourne continued in the article, “I remember the last time as in the late 1950’s, ten or so years ago. The situation then was the bitter UMW strike that divided families and left several people maimed before it was done.

“I can recollect, going back further than that, to when I was a boy, a strike that my father was involved in the mid-30’s. That strike continued through the long winter, in the midst of the Depression. We had plain bread with syrup on it for breakfast in those days and sometimes we were glad to have the same for supper, also.

“I was too much of a boy then to read the emotions in my father’s inexpressive face. Now, seeing that face in my mind’s eye, I can read the emotions as worry and sadness over the progress of the strike and over the prospect of seeing his wife and children hungry and without presents for Christmas.

“I did get a present for Christmas that year, a toy boat that my father carved himself out of pine. And I can remember how he watched me play with that boat and even supplied some sound effects himself. The strike was still on, and that face was still worried.

“That was a disturbance of years ago, known as a boy, recollected as a man. Last week brought disturbance again, in the form of a protest at the Harrisburg mine. The demonstration was not long-lived. It lasted only a few hours. It was not bitter, with the venom of the past. But it still resulted in a confrontation between the protesters and the Linfield County sheriff and deputies and ended in two people being jailed.

“Not long-lived. Not bitter. But many times of unrest in the past have

started just as quietly and soon intensified to bring in more people and have wider repercussions. With a history like that, unrest of this kind surely sounds an alert for us all to step back for a moment and consider what is happening.

"Let us ask first, who were the people who instigated this protest? We cannot help but notice, they were not local people, not Appalachians. They were young people, idealists, from outside of Appalachia, and in most cases, if not all, from family and social circumstances more privileged than most Appalachians enjoy.

"Even so, why should these circumstances and that background cause us to reject their cause if it is legitimate? And they had with them other people who were true Appalachians, including Birl Poling, who some may dismiss as a troublemaker, but who has displayed courage and conviction for many years in such conflicts.

"We cannot help but notice, also, that, whether intended or not, this isolated encounter in Linfield County is part of a national scene.

"With respect to the demonstrators, this must be apparent to anyone who reads the city newspapers or listens to the national news. This is a time of confrontation. Just this week, for example, in a "Stop the Draft Week" in Whitehall, New York, 583 people were arrested for creating a disturbance at an Army induction center. We have heard, also, about a 'poor people's campaign' scheduled for Washington, D.C. And last month, as I recall, there was a 'call to resist illegitimate authority,' signed by more than 200 prominent artists, writers, and teachers. This is all part of a spirit of the times that our young demonstrators share in.

"The sheriff and his deputies, acting alone in what they see as their sworn duty, are not alone, either. Rightly or wrongly, they are perceived as part of a national law and order structure, and as part of an overall 'establishment,' as the young people call it, that upholds the status quo and upholds 'illegitimate authority,' if, indeed, it exists. This perception places a burden on them as they try to dispatch their responsibilities.

"And all of this takes place against the backdrop of a national war that has divided this nation as not since the Civil War. There were stories then, during the Civil War, of families so torn in loyalties, in this state on the Mason-Dixon line, that brothers from the same families went off to fight for different sides. And so with this war. The battle lines are drawn.

"What then is the proper response? I say, this is a volatile situation and, as such, it calls for a tempered response.

"To the owners of Baltimore Coal, who run the strip mine, I say, consider, at least in your private thoughts, whether your operation can change so as to do less damage to these beautiful hills while still making a just profit. In this newspaper, and elsewhere, suggestions have been made as to how you could do this and how you could act to lessen the

load on the employees in your charge.

"To the sheriff and deputies, I say, consider how you can uphold the law while displaying courtesy and regard for the adversaries on both sides. You accomplish more good, ultimately, you effect more respect for the law, by staying your hand and holding your tongue.

"To the demonstrators, I say, consider whether your goals can be met with a less strident position, with less offense. No matter how pure the cause, it does not justify disregard for other people, and especially it does not justify disregard for the people who are obliged to uphold the law.

"Finally, to those of you demonstrators who are from outside this area, I say, remember those who must continue to live here after you are gone. You can walk away from a complication. They cannot."

Brandt rose after reading this article and went to look out the window at the snow swirling around the red water tower in the center of the small town. He drove home with the storm worsening, and was glad to enter the comfortable living room of the Bourne household. Father and son were seated there, occupying the living room together without speaking, as they often did. Fletcher sat with his small black bible, looking deep in thought. Bumper had a deck of cards fanned out in front of him on a kitchen chair brought in from the other room.

Brandt had learned this atmosphere. He found it to his liking, also. He nodded hello, got a smile of recognition from them both, and sat down on a chair near the back door to untie his wet boots.

"Rough one tonight," said Bumper with a nod. His black hair had grown increasingly long and jagged in appearance as he awaited his entry into the Army in several months. He had been accepted for mechanics training.

"Had to put the chains on," Brandt replied, peering at them, bright-eyed, with his face still red from looking out the side window to see around the iced-up windshield.

"Is that so?" said Fletcher, stirring. He was dressed in a heavy sweater with a blanket over his knees. "Where was that?"

"Coming up Covey Hill."

"Oh, yes. That's a rough one there," Bumper said.

"Tried it without them at first. Then, by Harlan's there, by the long turn, I started going the wrong way. I mean, backwards."

"Oh, and it ain't meant to do that," Bumper returned. "Even if it is a government car. Can't hardly look out backwards."

"And it ain't no sled," said Fletcher, taking up his son's inflection, as he sometimes did.

With this much said, they soon fell off into silence again, without any strain of trying to make conversation. Brandt thought of telling the elder Bourne that he had read the article, but he couldn't bring himself to do it.

He kept the article in his room, folded inside the book by Marcuse. In the next several days, he read it a couple of times more, pausing each time in two places, in particular—where Bourne talked about the spirit of the times and where he cautioned those from outside to remember those who would stay behind.

Also, he took the article with him on the following Monday when he went looking for Birl Poling in Edinburg.

48. Brandt receives a lesson in labor history from Birl Poling

Brandt stopped in Edinburg in the center of the roughhouses and asked directions of a man shoveling snow.

"Last house down," the man replied. "Around back. Right beside the creek there."

Brandt ascended three steps to an open back porch covered with snow. He knocked on the outside back door, which was still a screen door despite the onslaught of winter.

As he waited for a response to his knock, he looked around. The creek passed at an angle beside the small back porch. It was still unfrozen, bubbling in the morning sunlight. Where the road passed over, also at an angle, there was a concrete bridge with weeds and brush emerging from the drifted snow beneath it. Beyond the creek was a railroad track and a flat area with round protuberances that he assumed were coke stoves. Further in the distance, against a steep hill, was the factory, a two-story, red-brick building from which came forth a cacophony of metallic sounds.

"Matthew Brandt!" Poling exclaimed as he opened the back door.

The old man was unshaven. He looked like he had had a rough night. His eyes were sunken and tired, but showed a definite interest and regard. He was dressed in tan work pants and a white, sleeveless T-shirt, torn on one side. He smelled of cigarettes.

"Well, I'm honored," he said. "So you came after all. Well, Mr. Brandt, please come in."

Brandt followed him into a large kitchen with a flowered linoleum floor and immense white cabinets. In the middle of the room was a white table with white chairs. On the table were some potted plants with variegated leaves, a cup half filled with coffee, and the very newspaper that Brandt had in his pocket, with Bourne's article facing up.

"I suppose you have seen this, too," Poling commented wearily after they had talked briefly about other subjects. He pointed to the article.

"Yes. What did you make of it?" queried Brandt.

"What I saw in it, was a long tradition," Poling answered, looking out the window as a train horn rose up in the distance. "The tradition of talking and being reasonable instead of taking a place in the line."

He paused to take cognizance of the fresh, bright-eyed face peering seriously in his direction. "Maybe you, being a young man, have no sense yet of what I mean," he continued. "But, trust me, when there is a conflict, some will rise to the conflict and some will go to the side. I, being an old man, have seen it many times. And those who go to the side, who stay at the side, are often the most gifted of speech, or of written speech, as is Mr. Bourne. But talking and writing are not doing."

"He said he knew you, years ago," Brandt ventured, watching out the

window as the intense yellow-white headlight of the train appeared at a distant bend against the new white snow on the hillside.

"Oh, yes, we knew one another, in a professional way, as I suppose he told you. And, believe me, I would never accuse the man of telling a falsehood or of being dishonest in any way. He is much too good for that, he is, but in many of these things there is a personal cost."

"Yes," Brandt responded with a nod, recalling what Bourne had said about how Poling's wife had deserted him and had taken their child. He wondered whether Poling had ever caught up to them to reestablish contact, with the child, at least, or whether the years had gone by with Poling uninformed of the child's progress.

The train roared past with a clatter of metal wheels hitting the junctures of the rails. It was a long time in passing, pulling what Brandt figured must have been more than a hundred coal hoppers. Likely some of that coal was from the very strip mine where he and Poling had been arrested.

Poling said nothing about that, but later offered to take Brandt to see the factory that was in view from the window. "Matthew, you need not tell me where your mind is at," he said, eyeing the young face keenly. "I have a sense of you, already, as someone who wants to learn, who is at a stage in his life where he needs to learn, in order to go on honestly and strongly, as I sense that you want to do. Well, let me tell you, if you want to understand these hills, if you want to understand the people who live here, you must understand how they work, where they work, what kind of struggles they have had, with respect to work. There are maybe 14 or 16 awake hours in a day, and a good ten or 12 of these hours are spent at work, or in going to and from work. Work is the substance of life, especially for those, like these, who are hard pressed on every side, to make ends meet for their families."

They rode together in Brandt's government car over the bridge and up a gentle incline to a service road that led around to the back of the factory through a grove of pines covered with snow. There were about 40 cars parked in a parking lot there, beside the mountains of snow that had been cleared away. Most of the cars were of an older vintage and appeared to be in poor condition. Brandt took this into stock as an indication of how much the people earned who worked inside.

Poling was roundly recognized as they came in. Some of the workers stopped at their stations to wave hello. The factory was too loud for many words to be exchanged. There was a crew of 50 or more there, mostly men, with a scattering of women, dispersed over the two floors. They were cutting sheet metal, shaping it with huge machines, and stamping the shaped parts together with spot welders.

"What do they make here?" Brandt yelled.

"Tool chests," Poling shouted back, with a hand to his mouth. "Like you see in auto repair shops. The red ones with wheels."

They stood near a station where a young man of about Brandt's age, with an impassive expression, was soldering drawers. To do one, he lifted a shaped, unwelded drawer off of a conveyor belt, swung it over onto a brace immediately in front of him, and then stepped on a foot pedal that activated the stamp. The stamp was a large apparatus with two arms, one for each side of the drawer. After stamping one end of the drawer, he flipped it over in a semi-circular motion onto the brace again to stamp the other end. Then he placed the drawer on top of a neat pile of drawers beside him, and swung over to pick up another drawer from the conveyor belt. He did this a half dozen or so times, in rapid succession, as Brandt and Poling watched. Then he looked suddenly toward Brandt, raised his eyebrows, and smiled with a bashful, unaffected smile that reminded Brandt of Bumper Bourne.

Poling gestured to Brandt with his hand and led him over to a nearby dock area where it was quieter and easier to talk.

"As you can see, Matt, this is not college," Poling said. "Yet and still, conditions here are much better than when I began. I worked here myself, in this very plant, for 33 years. Years ago, before we started the union, we earned so little that people were in dire straights, those with families, even working full-time. People were forced to work overtime without getting paid. I did that myself, many a day, when I was a young man. Then we brought in the union, and we had a fight of it, too, but we brought it in strong, and we got a just wage."

Brandt merely listened. He had never been in a factory before. He was impressed by the noise and apparent monotony. But he noticed, also, that people shouted back and forth and laughed in the midst of their tasks. One woman returning to her work station was pelted with a crumpled up piece of paper. She looked over her shoulder and shook her head in mock disgust.

"Conditions here would never have been improved by being polite," Poling said as they walked out to Brandt's car. He studied Brandt's inexpressive face. "Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I can see it's a serious business here," Brandt replied. "Sometimes, with Harris, it just seems like a game."

"Harris!" shut back the old man, with an expulsion of breath. "You can find better than he, I assure you. He is more interested in Harris than in anything else. But you soon learn, Matthew, in this kind of concern, you are thrown in with all kinds of people, some of the Harris type, some with poorly disguised self-motives of one kind or another. But you have to separate people from their ideas. The ideas are what hold it together, and being willing to fight for them."

They reached the car and got in. Brandt swung it around and they headed out again through the snow-covered pines.

"So you think what we're pushing for is valid, though?" Brandt said, looking across at Poling's face, which had become more pale, as if drained of blood from the exertion of touring the plant.

"Of course, it's valid!" Poling retorted with an angry scowl. "How many more people must die a slow death here? How many more hills will be stripped away, and creeks filled with mud? I can remember these same hills when I was a boy! Such a beautiful place this was then, all around, round over the country where I went. We ought not just to let them waste it away!"

They turned from the service road and headed back down the hill to the Edinburg roughhouses.

Brandt drove with a concerned, worried expression. "I've always had this attitude that I'm from outside," he said, "so I just go easy. I don't know, I don't want to come on too strong. It doesn't seem right for me. It doesn't seem like me."

"Whether you are from outside,—and I know Mr. Bourne, in his article, cautioned on that,—whether it is right for you, or whether you feel right, as you say, this is something that I suppose someone your age, coming from outside of here, and from your background, must go through," Poling answered softly, pausing in deliberation.

"But, in the end, what are these?" he continued, casting Brandt a direct glance that seemed both stern and kind. "These are your private, personal concerns, and the issues at stake here are larger than you. They are larger than Harris. They are larger than me. They are larger than whether you fit into the picture exactly. But, as I speak, let me assure you, there will come a day when the picture will be there all around you and you will either have to force yourself into it, because it is right, or run away from it. But I have seen already, I know, you are not the type to run away or stand by the side."

Brandt left Poling off at his row house.

"No need to accompany me in," Poling said as he moved his body stiffly from the seat, "You're a good one, Matthew. 1 appreciate that you came to see me. I hope I didn't run you down too hard."

"No, you didn't," Brandt replied, but he was glad to drive away down the sunny highway. It was a beautiful scene, with the hills covered with snow and branches glazed with ice.

On an impulse, he continued past the turnoff point back home, and headed toward the town called Valley Spring where he had been in jail with Poling. Being the county seat, it had a faint trace of the commotion of a larger city with title companies, law firms, banks, and other businesses associated with county courts and functions.

Reaching the familiar scene, he drove down the main street of the town and parked his car across the street from the jail to look at it. Then he walked up the street, looking for a place to have lunch.

At a dime store there, about a block up from the jail, he happened on the grandmother and teenaged mother who had been at the demonstration. They were coming out of the store with a bag of merchandise. The young mother had her baby cradled against her chest.

"Matthew! Matthew Brandt!" they exclaimed on seeing him,—with genuine good feeling in their voices.

"We hear'd you was put in jail," the dark-haired girl said sweetly. "Hope they wasn't too hard on you now."

"Oh, no, it wasn't too bad. They had some good hot dogs," Brandt answered.

That brought a laugh all around followed by expressions of how much the girl and her mother appreciated what Brandt had done.

Sitting later at lunch by himself, Brandt thought to himself that people saw him in a different light now. He didn't want to fall short of their expectations.

49. Steward travels home, contemplating changes in himself and his peers

On Friday, December 22, 1967 (two weeks after his old rowing buddy Matt Brandt had stopped in Edinburg to talk to Birl Poling), Tom Steward flew to Minnesota to celebrate Christmas with his family and take part as best man in his older brother Arthur's wedding. The wedding was scheduled for Saturday, December 30. Steward would return to North Carolina on the following Tuesday, the day after New Year.

The Dulatown neighborhood aides, Delores Harper and Samanta Sorren, drove Steward to the airport, taking the opportunity to get away from the community center. On the books, the trip was for the purpose of touring a head start center in Charlotte (80 miles from Lenoir), where the nearest full-size airport was located. The aides had scheduled the tour for the afternoon hours after leaving off Steward.

"Y'all better come back now," said Delores in her languorous drawl as Steward got out of the government car at the airport.

"Yea, don't think you be stayin' on in Michigan, or whatever, leave us poor niggers alone," Samanta added.

"Minnesota," Steward replied.

"Don't mind her," threw in Delores. "You know her, Tom, she's just talkin' trash."

"Ain't talkin' no trash."

"Yes, you are."

"Well, I appreciate the ride."

"We're serious now, Tom, you better come back."

"Y' don't want that ass whooped."

"I'll be back. Don't worry."

"Well, you have a good time. Tell your mama Merry Christmas."

"Yes, I will."

"And your daddy, too."

"Yes, I will."

That was the extent of the farewell, and the comments were partly in jest, Steward knew; but he also knew that the wish of the aides to have him return was sincere. Other people like Ma Florence, the old woman who lived in the hollow, had expressed similar sentiments in the days before his departure.

Steward thought about that as he waited in line for his ticket, the expectation that people seemed to have that he would do something of value for their community. In the several weeks since his trip to the ghost town with his fellow volunteer, Doug Thomasek, he had decided that Thomasek had been right in advising him to trust his own judgment in promoting a water coop. Since then, with that in mind, he had visited a person suggested as a possible resource, a man named Howard Stern,

director of a federal “War on Poverty” program called the Office of Economic Development. He had left Stern’s office with the name of a water engineer employed by the federal government to help in such projects. He had written to the engineer, whose name was Gerald Ghent, and he expected to hear from him soon after returning to North Carolina from his Minnesota vacation.

Other thoughts passed through Steward’s mind later as he sat on the plane, watching as a scene of airport buildings faded below, succeeded by a scene of snow-covered mountains, below a stream of clouds. He had been on a plane just two times before on a trip of such distance. He took the occasion as a milestone.

His mind went back over the events that had occurred in his life since his graduation from college. That had been just seven months before, he counted. Only seven months, and yet so much had happened. He had gone from being a college student to being a man in the world.

He found himself thinking about the little room at Fairchild Air Force Base that he had shared with Orin Brown, the room that had looked out to the airfield with the giant B52s. He recalled himself trying to explain to Brown why he had decided to quit the Air Force program to join up with VISTA instead. He recalled himself saying, “I don’t belong in the Air Force. I’m not part of the team because I don’t believe in what the team is doing. I want to do something I can do strongly.”

In retrospect, that decision struck him as the key event of the whole period since college. Had he kept in the Air Force program, where would that have led? He would be in graduate school at the present, still on the same, old campus, studying a course of study, social work, that no doubt was of value to society, but that he really had little interest in. He would be locked for four years after grad school in the Air Force, a social worker in an organization that wasn’t a social work organization but an organization for war. He had done what he had told Orin; he had chosen the stronger, truer path. As a result of that, he had come into a situation ideal for his temperament and abilities, interacting with real people, dealing with real problems, walking the up-and-down paths of Dulatown each day instead of the sidewalks of a campus.

“And what if the draft board comes after you again?” Tom Steward recalled Orin Brown saying. “Then, whatever I do in response to that, I just do strongly, too,” he recalled himself replying.

In this way, Steward continued in a methodical self-analysis for the first part of his journey, the remembered words repeating in his mind as if they had been said the week before. Later his thoughts grew less structured as the view out his window brought scenes of snow-covered, patterned fields, and roads and towns, broken by meandering lines of rivers and streams.

He began then to reflect upon a subtle difference from his previous trip on a plane (which had been on the way to training in Baltimore just a few months before). The difference was in the number of people of his own age dressed in what he thought of as "hippie" outfits. There were more of such people than he had noticed on his previous trip. He had observed that difference in the airport lobby in Charlotte. Now he observed it again among his fellow passengers on his own plane.

One couple in particular he noticed, four rows ahead of him. They appeared to be in their mid-20s. Both had long hair. They were dressed in tunic-like shirts and spoke in soft voices. The man had round, wire-rim glasses and a refined, intellectual appearance.

Later, when Steward passed down the aisle on his way to the toilet at the rear of the plane, he noticed the man was holding a book with the title, printed in white on a black cover, *Where is Vietnam?* Below that was a subtitle, also in white letters, "American Poets Respond." Names of six poets were listed in red and violet letters: Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Levertov, Dickey, Kunitz, and Lowell.

Coming back up the aisle, Steward was halted next to the couple as a passenger blocked the aisle while retrieving something from an overhead storage compartment.

During this interval, Steward noticed a second book, held by the woman, who was sleeping. This second book had the title, *Trout Fishing in America*. On the cover was a photo of a man with a handlebar mustache, dressed hippie-like, in a way, but in what seemed an imitation of clothes of a different era. Waist jacket, vest, a tan fedora hat, hands on hips in an old-fashioned formal pose. A woman seated next to the man in the photo also looked like someone from a different era. The photo could have been of 19th century immigrants at Rikkers Island.

Back in his seat, Steward pondered that. These seeming hippies in the seat ahead of him were kindred spirits of a kind, he reflected, in their seriousness about the war and questioning about it. He liked the seriousness. He liked the intellectual aura of the books, the attitude of sincere consideration of intellectual matters. As for the book on "trout fishing" and the couple pictured on the cover, was the book really about trout fishing? He didn't think so. The title was put forward in the same manner as the dress, he surmised. It was tongue in cheek, but at the same time earnest. It implied an attempt to recover something lost from the American past, as the dress did, also.

Steward thought about that for a while. There seemed to be a common state of mind by which all these things were connected,—the war, hippie dress, questions about America and what it was, and so on. There was an intellectual unrest, a fermentation, and he was part of that, too, to some extent, because that was the way his own life had tended, in

the cultural exploration of his VISTA experience, and in contacts such as he had had through Doug Thomasek with the little town of Porcupine in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Activities like seeking out the ghost town, with its storied past, its mysterious disease that had brought it to an end, they figured into the quest, also. It was not just his own quest, but a general quest among people his own age to rediscover what America was and had been, and was meant to be, the best it could be. America was there to be secured amidst such places and stories.

Again, thinking of that, Steward felt glad about his decision to join VISTA. He felt as if had stepped through a door into a life bringing him into contact with something he had always wanted to understand, the American experience. He wanted to keep exploring and learning; he didn't know how.

In the airport lobby in Minneapolis, he proceeded across the lobby noticing again the same clash of style,-- some people conservatively dressed, older men in suits, women in dresses or neat slacks; others of his own age, with longer hair, dressed in jeans and brighter colors, often carrying books and, in general, projecting the same refined, intellectual quality as projected by the young couple in the plane. He was newly aware, also, that his own clothes typed him as being in the more conservative group with conventional clothes. He was dressed in pressed slacks and a Navy blue sweater. Over his arm, he carried a tan topcoat, freshly dry- cleaned for his trip.

Near the door, he again encountered some young people of the hippie type, standing with clipboards. A young woman from the group came directly out to him, as if recognizing him as being of the same camp despite his conventional appearance. She was girlish in appearance with straight bangs that reminded him of Barbara Carpenter, the girl that he had had the brief affair with in his last year of college.

She announced that she was taking signatures to protest some memo that had been sent from Gen. Hershey of the U.S. Selective Service to the head of the Minnesota state selective service system. "This same memo went out to all the local boards, also," she said, looking at him with her clear brown eyes. "In effect, it says that men who are involved in demonstrations should be drafted first."

"He's trying to use the boards as kangaroo courts," threw in a bristly-haired young man from several feet away. "To quiet dissent. It's pure and simple suppression."

"The petition says we don't feel that's a proper use of the draft boards," the young woman declared. "It says we're ready to demonstrate, we stand with the people who have already come forward."

Steward knew, at the moment of being approached, that he would sign the petition. Still he felt put upon in being expected to so readily

sign something he didn't fully understand.

"Have you been following the war lately?" asked the youth when Steward neither signed nor moved away.

"No, I haven't," Steward answered. Indeed, he realized, he had paid no attention to it at all since finding a safe haven in VISTA.

"This memo from Hershey, it has all the appearance of being part of a general tactic to quiet protest at home while revving up the war. They have a new policy in the air war,—hit the civilian areas, break the will of the common people. Like the Nazis in World War Two."

"We bombed people, too," said Steward.

"But that was a war everyone believed in," the clear-eyed young woman with the straight bangs replied. "This is colonial."

That claim seemed far-fetched, but Steward signed.

"Peace," the girl said, raising her hand in a peace sign.

"Peace," Steward replied, making the peace sign back.

He considered that as he stood outside the terminal after calling home to arrange a ride. He had never made the peace sign before, though it had become a common gesture among his fellow volunteers.

A glance at a newspaper box near the door confirmed the bristly-haired youth's account of the war. There was a reference, in a front-page article, to a new air war policy "going beyond tactical targets to the Viet will." The article said American planes had hit a bridge and railroad yard, both within three miles of downtown Hanoi. Two American fighter-bombers and two MIGs had been shot down in the past two days.

Reading that, Steward thought of his former rowing teammate, Jim Morris, the one person he knew who had made an unequivocal stand on the war. In Morris's case, the stand had been in favor. Morris had put his life on the line to back up his position.

From that, his thoughts went back to the clear-eyed young woman in the terminal, the one who had asked for his signature. Thinking of her, he thought again of Barbara Carpenter and how he and she had agreed never to resume a romantic relationship but nevertheless to remain as friends. She was a friend, wasn't she? A good friend. He resolved to call her sometime while he was home.

[Chapter 49 notes]

50. Steward discovers the changes do not extend to his family

Soon later, Tom Steward saw a familiar black Ford Mustang among the vehicles jostling for position as they approached the pick-up doors of the terminal. The driver was his older brother Arthur, the one getting married in a few days.

"So you made it okay," Arthur said with a grin as he came around the back of the car to open the trunk for his younger brother's suitcase.

"Yes, I did. Nice to see you," said Tom, extending his hand for a handshake.

"Nice to see you, too."

They shook hands for a moment, grinning into one another's faces, then, as neither was glib of speech and both knew it, they went around into the car and were under way.

"Big day coming," said the younger brother. "You got that right."

"You nervous about it?" "Naw, I'm fine."

On first glance, Arthur Steward bore a strong family resemblance to his younger brother. The close-set eyes, the Nordic cheekbones, the small nose and mouth were almost the same, as were the voice inflection and the mannerisms of reticence and smiles. On closer examination, though, the subtle differences grew. The older brother's face was broader and squarer in shape than that of his younger brother, and his eyes lacked the absent- minded, inaccessible look that was a chief characteristic of the younger brother. The older brother had a down-to-earth, approachable look. He appeared and was, in fact, more comfortable remaining on a practical level. This had been a difference between them since childhood.

As the freeway system through the Twin Cities was at this time, in winter of 1967, still under construction, an immediate, practical concern was which route to take to the Steward home, located about 20 miles way in the suburb of Little Canada north of St Paul.

"Figure we might as well straight head straight out 7th all the way to Payne," said Arthur.

"Sounds fine," the younger brother replied.

"Little taste of the old neighborhood."

"Yea, I'd like that."

Following this plan, the Steward brothers, Art and Tom, headed out from the airport along the bluffs above the Minnesota River, then across the West 7th Street Bridge, above the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, then through the Highland neighborhood where they both had gone to high school, at a Catholic military academy they had commuted to from the East Side on city bus each day (following 7th Street, in fact, for most of the 12 mile ride). On West 7th, near Randolph, they passed the familiar, brown-bricked Schmidt brewery with its castle-

like central tower and its single tall smokestack, from which gray smoke tumbled into an ice- blue sky. A few miles beyond that, another single tall smokestack came into view, with gray smoke tumbling from it, also. That was the chimney of the Northern States Power plant. Four red lights blinked on its facing side. Next came the 7th and Smith intersection, where traffic crossed from the High Bridge, which the brothers had climbed up to once on the stairs from the river road below the bridge. Then downtown St. Paul, humble looking, no big city skyline, but still possessing the magic it had had when the brothers, then 12 and 10, had used to walk there from the old neighborhood to buy stamps for their stamp collections. Then the East 7th Street hill leading up to Dayton's Bluff where the family had lived when the brothers were boys. Turning up Payne Avenue through the East Side, they continued past the Hamm's brewery. Art had thrown coins through an open window there, one hot summer day, feeling sorry for the workers at the machines. Six blocks further was the corner where their grandfather Art, their father's father, young Art's namesake, had owned a bar. Then came the area, once rural, by this time (1967) urban, where their other grandfather, their mother's father, a carpenter, had owned land that he and his sons had parceled out for lots as they had built houses and sold them. In short, for the Steward brothers, there were mutual memories and connections throughout this area, some recognized and mentioned as they rode past, some not thought of at the moment but providing an unspoken sense of shared past.

In the course of the ride, there was some catching up to do on both sides, also. Tom Steward learned that his brother and his brother's bride, Nancy, would travel to New Orleans for their honeymoon, then would return to an apartment near the University of Minnesota campus where they would live while Art completed his last half-year of medical school. Art had already arranged a one-year internship after that—in Santa Barbara, California, at the Santa Barbara County Hospital.

"They've got this setup there, all in one building, like a motel, "the older brother informed. "All the interns live together."

"And California weather."

"Another little bennie. There's an inner courtyard with a swimming pool. Again, like a motel."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

In the course of this conversation, the brothers quickly reaffirmed their bond with the exchanges of commonalities, while also re-establishing a dynamic that had existed since their childhood. The dynamic was that of a protective older brother giving unsolicited advice, often with a slight hint of condescension or sarcasm, to a younger brother who ignored the advice with a note of irritation.

That dynamic asserted itself just once, on the long ride home, when the younger brother had his turn to tell the details of his own situation. “Well, it sounds like you’ve got things all arranged then,” was the older brother’s comment. On the face, it was a positive, or, at worst, a neutral comment, but it was delivered with a hint of condescension that, for the younger brother, brought a deflation of mood.

At home, in the living room overlooking the lake, Tom Steward was alert to another family dynamic relating to his father’s manic depressive cycles of moods. His father was on an upswing, he concluded, having to do with the family importance of Arthur’s wedding.

“Maybe by next Christmas, we’ll have another little one here,” the father said, scrunching down, as he had a habit of doing, while rubbing his hands together. It was a posture that made him look smaller than his physical size. The eyes behind the dark-framed glasses remained intense with what seemed a steady anticipation, as often of good as of bad but always overwrought.

“Dad, don’t rush him,” Tom said. “He’s not even married yet.”

“I’ll second that,” said Arthur.

“Well, sometimes things don’t happen the way you expect,” the father persisted.

“Yes, I know that.”

There was family history in that, too. The two brothers had come quickly in their parent’s marriage, both in the first three years, with only a year and five months between them.

“Well, I’m proud of both of you,” Joseph said.

“Thank you,” both brothers said.

“You’re both talented. You’re both smart. You could’ve just watched out for yourselves. But you’ve both found something where you’ll be of service.”

“Service how?” Arthur asked with a quizzical expression.

“Service to the community.”

That brought a quiet laugh from Art.

“Well, I hate to disappoint you, Dad, but for me, the main thing I want is a good job.”

“Oh, ya?” the father returned. “Seems like I remember reading what you said about Dr. Johansen and how he helped everyone, how he was such a person to respect, how everyone respected him.”

“That was to get into med school.”

“You were lying then?”

“No, I did respect him.”

“Alright.”

The three of them were quiet, looking out to the winter scene. The iced-over, snow-covered lake looked like a frozen plain. Gusts of wind

threw up wisps of snow, making it appear almost as if it was snowing. On the far side of the lake, red lights blinked off and on on three radio towers on a snow-covered hill.

"And Tom, you, too," the father continued, undeterred. "Where would this country be without young people like you willing to make sacrifices, going off a thousand miles away to work with poor people. That's pretty good, if you ask me."

Art laughed and shook his head. "A thousand miles away. You mean, we don't have poor people here?"

"Sure we have poor people here."

"They don't have people down there that could work with them?

""I suppose they do."

"So it's really something for the volunteers, the so-called 'young people' like Tom. To give them an experience, or whatever."

"Sure, in part."

"You got to wonder, they keep talking about how they don't have enough money for these government programs. Maybe that's one place they could start, by not shipping people around."

"I suppose. It's still a sacrifice, though."

"And how is that?"

"Going off to work with poor people."

"Going off. That's the key concept, I guess. If there was no going off, it would just be a job."

Tom Steward had been quiet this whole time, amused by the interaction between his brother and father.

"Art, what's the point?" he said. "You want to prove it's not a sacrifice?"

"I don't know. Why call it what it's not?"

"Well, for my part, I never called it a sacrifice, or service either, for that matter."

"I never said you did."

"Well, it's not worth arguing over," said the father.

"On that I agree," Arthur replied.

Later, after Art Steward left to meet his fiancée somewhere, the younger brother thought about this exchange as he sat by himself in the same living room. He knew that his brother had just been playing devil's advocate, as Art was inclined to do, for sport, almost, rather than out of any real meanness. Still the comments had left him with a sense of further devaluation, building on the effect of his brother's dismissive comments on the ride home. He had told his brother that he didn't really think that what he was doing was a "service" or "sacrifice," but, to some extent, he knew, he had laid claim to both,—at least, in his private assessment of what he was doing. He wanted to serve. He wanted to

sacrifice. He didn't want to just do a job.

His thoughts went back to the young people at the airport, the ones who had asked for his signature. The truth was, many people such as they, of his and Art's generation, were indeed idealistic with a concept of service that Art could never understand. Art was not a bad person. He was a good person, in fact. But Art dismissed things too easily. He was smart, but he chopped off ideas before they had full play.

Thinking of the youths at the airport, Tom Steward thought again of Barbara Carpenter. She was a person, he told himself, who would not be so quick to put down his idealistic thoughts about Dulatown.

He went to the phone, determined to call her, but he could not get himself to do it. He realized that he no longer felt so proud of what he was doing as he had on the plane. Despite his self-defense of his own activities, he felt worn down.

51. Brandt, also visiting home, notices the farm scene is fading

Unknown to Tom Steward, Matthew Brandt, in keeping with his promise to Mart Kass, also flew to Minnesota for Christmas. He arrived a day after Steward and crossed through the same terminal with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder. He was wearing a dark blue Navy Peabody coat, his hair long and scraggly, with his usual baggy tan work pants and brown construction boots visible as he walked. He looked exactly as he would have back in Kentucky going out to meet people on his garden project.

Foremost on his mind was his imminent reunion with Mary Kass. He had written to her telling the day of his arrival, but not the exact time. He wanted to avoid an emotional scene. Also, he had thought a lot about where the relationship could go under the present circumstances, with her in Minnesota while he remained in Kentucky. Obviously, he couldn't marry her, he couldn't propose marriage, in such a situation. He didn't even have a real job or any prospect for getting after VISTA.

On the plane, Brandt had also mulled over other aspects of his life in Kentucky. He had observed to himself that the conflict he had been feeling for some time—between Fletcher Bourne, on one side, and Bruce Harris, Dennis Kelly, and now Birl Poling, on the other,—was becoming more intense. Eventually he would have to disappoint or maybe antagonize someone. He did not like that prospect.

With him, carried in his left hand as he crossed the terminal, was a book that Dennis Kelly had given him, The *Politics of Experience* by R.D. Laing. Kelly had written a personal note on the front page, followed by a scribbled quote of Herbert Marcuse.

Standing outside the terminal, Brandt read the note that Kelly had written to him on the inside cover: "Esteemed Bomb Dog, Our experience is political, unavoidably, in the spirit of the times. By experience we are comrades and more importantly friends. Keep up the good fight, S.D." The quote said: "We are again confronted with one of the most vexing aspects of advanced industrial civilization: the rational character of its irrationality.... Today the private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality."

Brandt had no idea what the quote had to do with the book, though he had read the quote several times. He had not been able to get himself to look further into the book on the plane flight, as he had resolved to do before the flight began.

He had also not opened a report on black lung that Kelly had given him. He knew that Kelly was trying to organize committees of local miners to press for black lung legislation. As usual he had no doubt that Kelly was sincere and on solid ground. But, at the moment, he felt tired

of the whole business of organizing people.

Outside the terminal, he watched as his parents' red station wagon pulled to the curb with his younger brother, Ned, dressed in a maroon and gold jersey, at the steering wheel.

He noticed, to his amusement, that his younger brother had gotten his head shorn clean in the buzz style cut that he himself had sported the previous spring.

"You go long. I go short," said Ned, gesturing at his brother's long hair.

"There may be a beard coming, too," said Brandt.

"Oh, no! Really?"

"You never know."

He didn't really have any intention of growing a beard, but he figured he would play the hippie routine to the limit for his brother's amusement.

As they crossed the Mendota Bridge, just down the river from the 7th Street Bridge that the Steward brothers had crossed the day before, Brandt looked off and saw that the water was still open between the snow- covered bluffs on either side.

There, about a mile downstream, were the concrete foundations of the bridge that was being built for the new interstate highway. They had been the seven-mile turnaround point for the crew in their practices. Brandt thought about Bill 0'Rourke in his red stocking cap shouting exhortations as they sat in the shell waiting to start on their way back to the boat house. Where was 0'Rourke now? He had heard that 0'Rourke wanted to enlist in the Army, if that could be believed. And where was Jim Morris? Wherever he was, he was likely aware of the two American planes that had gone down in the past two days. And how about Tom Steward? He was in North Carolina, thought Brandt, unaware that, in reality, Steward was ten miles away. A VISTA volunteer like himself, thought Brandt, and just as deep in bullshit, probably. Who would have ever thought that things would have turned out like this, with not even a year gone by since graduation.

On the other side of the bridge, about two miles from the farm, Brandt looked for a familiar pine-covered knoll. The pine trees had been bulldozed down. Where there had once been a hill, the area had been flattened out.

"Putting in a warehouse," Ned offered.

"Warehouse for what?"

"Warehouse for trucks. Semi--trailers. Just back there, by 55 and 13, the interstates are going to cross, east-west and north-south, so this is a logical hold-over place. All around here."

"All around here?"

"That's what they say. There's another one going in over by Brad

Riley's, in that big pasture with the trees."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

It all seemed logical enough, as Ned said, but Matt hated to see the old places giving way to change. He had gone sliding on the hill as a boy. He thought of the quote by Marcuse that Kelly had written in the book, "the rational character of its irrationality."

Coming over another hill about a mile further down the road, they saw the Brandt farm in the distance. It looked like an island in the snow with the blue house and red outbuildings clustered amidst the evergreens and bare-limbed trees. Gray smoke swirled up from the house into a cloudless blue sky.

Matt saw his parents standing at the large picture window when he and his brother pulled into the yard. His father came sloshing across in unbuckled boots, his gray hair bare in the sharp wind.

"Sure is nice to see you again, Matt," he said. "I'm looking forward to hearing about your gardens."

There was plenty of talk about that, down to the technical details of fertilizer and lime, as Mrs. Brandt served coffee and apple pie. Matt told his parents, also, about the Bourne's, the company towns, the coke stoves, and the various activities of the Tri-County CAP. But he didn't mention the strip mine demonstration or his brief stint in jail.

"Well, there's certainly a lot going on," his mother said. "You can see it on the TV. Demonstrations, sit-downs, people marching around."

"Yes, there is a lot of unrest," Buster Brandt agreed. "Do you ever get any of that down there?"

"Lazy ol" Kentucky comes along a little more slowly," Matthew replied.

When the talking was over, he got up and went to the kitchen window to look out at the immense, snow-covered pines between the pole shed and barn. He knew he had been dishonest in not owning up to the unrest he had been involved in himself. His mind hummed with recollections and ideas. tall doors. Brandt had spent many pleasant hours in and around the barn as a boy, helping his father with stacking hay and other chores. The barn had been a refuge from his typical growing up concerns with girls, school, and wanting to be physically strong. He had always found relief in physical work.

"Matthew, if you need to make a phone call, and need privacy, you can use the phone in the big bedroom," his mother said from the sink.

He knew that she was trying to be subtle in referring to Mary Kass. Her tone of voice implied that he ought to call her at once since Mary knew his time of arrival and would be waiting to hear from him.

"Naw, I don't need to, right now," he replied, deliberately

withholding the details that he knew she was anxious to hear.

He put on his parka and arctic boots, which he hadn't taken to Kentucky, and trudged down the hill to the barn, following the path of footprints left by his father in going back and forth to feed the animals. Coming into the immense, vaulted hayloft, he noticed at once that the sliding panel was missing on the big, square window that overlooked the barnyard. He crossed the straw-strewn floor and saw the panel below, propped up against the side of the barn by the Dutch doors to the barn cellar. Apparently, the panel had been torn off by the wind.

There were sheep in the barnyard, standing on the long wooden feeder and picking around for hay sticks in the crusted, brown snow. They baahed loudly when they saw him overhead. He carried across a bale of hay from the haystack, broke it open with his knee, and threw a piece down. Then he stood watching the sheep contend for the hay as he considered how the panel could be gotten back up where it belonged.

The panel was a fairly large, framed construction, about five feet square, made of the same heavy elm as the rest of the barn. He figured it weighed several hundred pounds. It was too big to be fitted into the window opening from the inside of the barn since it normally hung on the outside, overlapping the window frame. It would have to be lifted up somehow from outside. The distance up from the barnyard to the bottom of the window frame was about 15 feet.

With no solution forthcoming, he went back into the barn to sit on the fresh-smelling haystack. Long swaths of sunlight, projected through the vertical planks on the western side of the building, made a parallel pattern on the matted hay beside him. He leaned back against the inner wall of bales, and watched the swallows going in and out of the barn through the sheet metal ventilators at the inner peak of the roof.

Again, he thought to himself that he was so glad to be away from Kentucky for a little while. How strangely tired he felt,—not to lie down but to rest his mind. Even Mary Kass could wait—for a while, at least. For a moment he closed his eyes, trying to calm his thoughts, but his mind remained active.

Buster Brandt came down an hour or so later and found his son standing up on the window frame with a wrench and vise grip. He had fitted a 3 X 6 between the two studs above the window frame, and had drilled a hole through it to hold the long bolt that he was presently fastening. On the floor below him lay a large pulley and a thick rope that he had found in the pole shed.

The father understood at once what the son had in mind. Soon they had the rope through the pulley with one end attached to the panel and the other end to the back of the old pickup truck that was reserved for farm duty.

"That's the stuff!" Buster called from beside the truck as Matthew swung the hanger wheels into place on the trolley rail. He returned to the barn loft by way of the house and came in carrying a six-pack of beer and a bottle opener.

"I drink these, and I know you do, too, when I'm not around," he said, "so we might as well have a few together."

Father and son sat on the haystack together in the warmth of the swaths of sunlight. The sun could be seen now through the wide cracks in the planks. It was low in the sky and had begun to take on its sunset colors. The panel was securely in place on the window and left half open to provide a view of the landscape below. From where they sat, only the drifting cirrus clouds could be seen. They were a subdued pink, almost the color of cantaloupe now, with highlights of orange.

Buster Brandt talked about the farm conditions of the previous year, as seen from his perspective as an agriculture extension agent. 1967 had been a bumper year, he said. The main problem had been where to put all the harvest. Feed corn was being stored in piles outside the elevators because the storage space inside was filled. Just down the road, Leo Mielke had gotten 125 bushels per acre using the new close-planting, high yield methods.

"The only problem with the good crops is the price of land goes up, too," he observed. "That brings a temptation to sell the land, especially lately with the warehouses coming in."

"Yes," Matt replied. "Ned showed me one, up by Polski's hill."

"Now we call it Polski's parking lot."

"You ever think of selling some of this land yourself?"

"Me? Hell, no. Matt, you won't see that 'til the whole farm goes. It'll be the whole farm at the same time, or nothing. But others will sell, you can be sure of that. For a lot of people, the land is their investment, you know. You can't blame them for selling when the price is right."

Matthew got up and looked out the window at the snow-covered fields lined with the long rows of chopped off, dry corn stalks left from the harvest. The wind rustled through them, in the low sloping area beyond the barnyard, swirling the light snow above and through the frayed, beige- colored leaves in the waning orange light.

"Hey, Dad, did you know, back in 1910, or whatever, when they came through Kentucky buying up land for coal, these guys came through from out East, lawyers and bankers, actually with bags of gold," said Matthew, looking back to his father. "Or I guess they were gold coins. And they bought up the land underneath the surface, if you can believe it. So the people who lived there still owned the land on top and still had to pay the property taxes."

"And the lawyers and bankers got the coal," said the elder Brandt,

shaking his head.

"Yes, that's what I heard."

"Now why all of a sudden did they come through right then?" Buster asked, opening himself another bottle of beer.

"Well, the way I heard it," said Matt, "they developed this new way to make coal, the Bessemer process. So all of a sudden they had a use for soft coal, bituminous coal, like they have in Appalachia. That cranked up a huge demand for it. Then the railroad came through there, with all kinds little spurs up into the hollows, so they could get the coal our. They were in on it somehow, too, the people who built the railroad."

"Well, that was certainly the case around here," said the father. "And there's a whole history around that, with the Grange. I'm not too up on it, though. But I do remember, back in the 30's, when I was growing up, lots of people losing their land on account of liens on it or taxes. And there were people who waited around to take an opportunity when others had hard times—I mean, to go out and claim the land to collect what was due, and lot of times it was laud that had been in the family for generations, that had been homesteaded originally. You know, my dad, your grandfather, never would take a loan from a bank because of that, because he remembered those times."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Matthew nodded and was quiet as he took this into consideration. So his own people had been in a struggle similar to that of the people he was working with. He had never understood his own past in that perspective.

The recognition relieved him somewhat from the distance he had felt earlier in the afternoon. He understood that he was not departing from what his family believed in but continuing in a long tradition.

He went over to get himself another beer, but his mother's voice from atop the hill brought the conversation to an end.

"Matthew! Telephone!" she called. "It's Mary Kass!"

52. Matt finds Mary ready to address all obstacles to marriage

"What is this, some kind of torture?" began Mary Kass when Matthew Brandt took the phone.

"What do you mean, torture?" he replied, at once contrite when he heard the familiar richness of her voice. That voice, with its inherent tension of earnestness and determination,—softened, in his case, by feminine interest,—brought him directly back to the intensity of his and her last farewell, in Louisville, Kentucky.

"I'm been waiting all afternoon for you to call," she said forlornly, unable to put up a pretense of not caring.

"I was going to call, Mary," he answered softly.

"Well, that's nice to hear.... I thought it was more important."

"It is important."

There was a moment of silence.

"When can I see you then?" she said.

"When do you want to see me?"

"Now."

He dressed, shaved, and showered at once, and not with his customary lack of concern about his appearance. He washed and combed his long hair and wore his best shirt and pants.

Across town, in her parents' yellow bungalow, Mary Kass stood at the window, watching for his arrival. She had spent an anxious day, beginning hours before his arrival. She was puzzled by her high level of anxiety, though she knew that her emotional involvement had been on a steady climb since he had said "I love you" at the Louisville airport.

She was sorry that she hadn't waited longer for him to call, rather than calling herself. Surely he would have called—eventually—just as he had faithfully written a letter per week since their last meeting. She was certain now that she loved him and wanted to marry him.

She wanted to expedite that outcome in every possible way. But also, she had resolved that the relation would be based on straightforwardness or not proceed at all. She had resolved that she would not feign any emotion that she did not feel, that she would not hide any emotion that she did feel. Who would have thought, though, that the emotions would get so strong that the ultimate goal would be threatened. She just hoped that she wouldn't scare him away!

Stepping back from the window, she saw her reflection there in the dark glass. She had arranged her long, black hair in a French-braid pony tail, set off with a red ribbon. Her blue cardigan had a crescent moon design of the same red color. In her hip-length sweater and black jeans, she looked slender, almost svelte, she knew,—but, as always, subdued. Maybe he had grown tired of her understatement. Maybe he was starting

to wish for something more sensational like her sister Ellen. But he never hinted at that. He had never expressed any attitude toward her appearance other than approval... Then why did she persist in worrying?

A flash of car lights, beyond her own reflected image, alerted her to his arrival. She watched as he emerged from the car in an open letter jacket, as if on his way to a football game on a chilly fall evening. He slammed the car door and bounded up the stairs toward the house.

She grabbed her black Peabody jacket and threw it on as she hurried down the hall to answer the door.

They met with an embrace that lingered in the dark front hall. Arm in arm, they walked down to the car and went around to the driver side together. She got in and slid over to the middle of the seat. He slid in beside her with his arm pressed against her.

He had an immediate sense of the familiar rightness and naturalness of her presence beside him.

"Where to?" he said as they pulled out into traffic.

"Well," she answered with a quick glance of her dark, intelligent eyes, "in my characteristic way, for better or worse, I have given this a great deal of thought."

She smiled, as if to render that beginning as a joke, but somehow the smile conveyed a more serious meaning.

"What I would like to do, Matthew, I would like to go back to the West Bank, because that was the first time we made a commitment to one another, kind of."

He returned the serious smile with an amused look of puzzled assessment.

"Sure? Why not?" he said. "What was all the thought about?"

She laughed. "I guess, about us, about what does all of this mean. I warn you, Matt, pretty soon I'm going to have to figure this out or your sweet, little Mary is going to go up like a rocket."

It was a mild winter evening with a light snow falling under cloudy skies that reflected the glow of the Minneapolis skyline. They parked on the perimeter of the West Bank area, near the railroad tracks where they had parked before. The building where they had attended the play, months before, was now dark and looked deserted. It was apparently no longer being used as a theater.

Brandt strode along beside Kass, not at all taken aback by her serious warnings. He had gotten used to an environment where people made sensational, serious comments. Also, he had no reservations about her except for the practical concerns that had been much on his mind.

"Do you ever hear from that fellow, Sam Copening, the one who spoke at the play?" asked Brandt as they walked along. He had retained a good impression of Copening, and even a kind of distant fondness, owing

to how the black man had understood his need to stand his own ground.

"Just once since then, right over here on Cedar, in a bookstore," Mary answered. "He was in a thoughtful mood. He was on his way out, to D.C."

"What he's going to do there?" said Brandt.

"He didn't say, specifically," Mary replied. "He just said that that's where all the action is now, for blacks. He said that he had an understanding now that this is a time of great change, maybe even of revolution. He said he didn't want it to be violent, but sometimes he wondered if there was any way to hold it back."

"Do you think that, too?" Brandt inquired, glancing at her as she walked with her eyes lowered in thought, "that there will be some kind of revolution, non-violent or not?"

The concept was not so foreign or far-fetched to him now, after all his talks with Harris and Kelly. He realized that he could just as well be having this conversation in Kentucky.

"In the sense of a violent upheaval, I don't know, I hope not," Mary responded softly. "I think maybe the times don't call for that. But then again I'm not black."

They stopped at a red light near an open bar door from which the words of a Bob Dylan song carried out into the street: "In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come a-following you."

"One thing I do think, though," said Mary, nodding thoughtfully, "this is a time of great cultural change, cultural revitalization. Culture being politics. Culture being the anti-war movement. Culture being art and music. Like that song. Who knows what it all contains. Language, too, the way people talk, the hippie talk, you know. I can't pretend to it myself, but I hear it, I listen, and in my mind I repeat certain phrases. It's like it's digging in. It's happening all around us, Matt. I'm just starting to see all the dimensions of it myself. A counterculture, I've heard it called, if you want to give it a name."

Matt had never heard the term before, but he felt that, without further explanation, he understood what this "counterculture" included. He had observed its presence before in the West Bank, Now the presence was more pervasive—young people dressed in frayed blue jeans and Army or Navy jackets, almost as in a common uniform; others dressed more flamboyantly, in the bell-bottomed, brightly-colored, peasant-like style of the San Francisco "flower children"; storefront shops with handmade candles, pottery, tie-dyed shirts, jewelry, drug paraphernalia, artwork, crafts; coffee shops with candle-lit tables and poetry readings; lampposts and telephone posts adorned with posters and announcements.

They found a place in the bar where they had gone on the night of the play, at the exact same table by the window where they had sat with

Morris. Here, too, a Dylan song was playing: “Don’t stand in the doorway, don’t block up the hall. The times they are rapidly changing.”

Brandt sat drinking a beer, admiring Mary’s pretty face, as he continued along in the same line of thought. Yes, the music was part of it, too, he thought. And the MVs were part of it, and the whole crew in Kentucky.

Mary, in the meanwhile, had gone off in another direction, talking about her sister, Ellen, and Jim Morris, and how she thought that Ellie was still crazy about Morris, though she wouldn’t admit it.

“She thinks she can just go on,” she said with an earnest frown. “She’s been dating this other guy, but he’s no Jim Morris, if you know what I mean. She knows it, too. I can see it in her eye. Still, what can she do? She doesn’t have any definite commitment from Jimbo. She can’t just wait, wait, wait. It’ll break her apart.”

Brandt listened to this, thinking it wasn’t really suited well to Ellie, who didn’t seem like the type to wait and who was in fact not waiting. No, it seemed almost as if Mary was talking about herself. He could see that she was adrift and wanted to attach herself to him somehow. Which meant marriage, and the thought of it was no longer out of question in his mind. But how exactly could he propose it? What could he offer? He didn’t even have a place of his own. And what could he do, really, other than being a volunteer? To merely go into a conventional job, after the MVs, seemed almost unbearable.

Outside later he threw his arm around his shoulder when she walked along again in an unusually silent, almost depressed mood.

“Don’t worry, Mar,” he said, “We’ll work out something.”

“Do you really think so?” she replied, turning toward him to study his eyes.

“Yes, I do think so.”

With that said, he observed an immediate effect. She was obviously buoyed up by his comments.

They walked to the bridge where they had gone after Matt’s fight. They stood arm in arm, watching the dark water passing below, aflicker with the reflection of the street lamps. The snow was still falling, now in large, moist flakes that melted when they hit the concrete surface of the shoveled off sidewalk that crossed the bridge.

“I’m sorry I seem to press for a resolution,” Mary said, touching Matt’s hand. “I can tell you read that, somehow between the lines, by what you said to me walking over here. And you’re right about that, I’m pressing inside. I don’t mean to, though. It’s just that every time you go, it just gets harder. You would think I could be more carefree about it. But every time it happens, I feel it more, and in the aftermath I keep wishing I had something more definite to go on, instead of just going another

round. And yet what could you say, for sure? You can't say you'll be here because you can't be here. And you can't say..."

She stopped herself short. "I'm sorry, Matt," she said pitifully after a pause.

"Sorry for what?"

She sighed. "I don't even know."

He thought for a long time in silence as they watched the pretty winter scene.

"Mary," he said finally, "I'd like something definite, too. I try to figure out what I should do. Like, you know, in the old days, propose or whatever. But what do I have to offer, Mary?"

She smiled sweetly. "Yourself."

He considered again in silence.

"Well, let me put it this way," he ventured. "From my point of view, between here and there are practical obstacles. Practical obstacles, Mary. Things I don't know how to work out. That's all that stands in the way."

"Is that really true?"

"Yes, Mary, so help me, God, I love you, it's true."

"Then, Matthew, tell me," she said, taking his hand. "Just tell me then. Let me work on them, too."

He began, item by item, presenting his practical concerns. She listened attentively and had a solution for every one.

53. Former crew gathers to celebrate Matt and Mary's engagement

On Thursday, December 28, five days after Matt Brandt and Mary Kass had gotten engaged, Tom Steward (still unaware that Matt was in the Twin Cities) decided to call the Brandt family to find out any news they had of his old rowing friend.

To his surprise, Mary Kass answered the phone. She told him at once about the engagement.

"It's been just crazy!" she said. "And I'm glad you called, Stewie, because we're arranging a celebration, kind of a New Year's Eve party, and we'd sure like you to come, if you can make it. Bill 0'Rourke will be there, and Ellie, and some of the guys from the crew! And guess where we're going to have it?"

"Where?"

"At the Red Garter! Rorkie arranged it."

"Wow! That sounds great." Steward answered. "I'm sure I can come." He was excited about the prospect of seeing his old friends, but the thought occurred to him at once that this would be an occasion where you were supposed to bring a date. As usual, he would be empty-handed. He would have preferred to meet Mary and Matt alone in a quiet bar.

He thought again of Barbara Carpenter. He had wanted to call her to talk, just for old time's sake. Maybe he could combine that with the crew party. He went down in the basement, to a phone in the most secluded part of the house, and dialed the number she had sent him of the hospital dormitory where she had been living while pursuing her nursing studies. This was a quite different setting than the house where her parents had placed her the previous year, Barbie had mentioned, but it was no less chaperoned, being run by Catholic nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, known for their strict rules.

"There's going to be a whole bunch of people. You don't even have to contend with me alone," he told her.

"Tom, you're very engaging, you're very appealing alone," she replied softly in her sweet, girlish voice. "The problem's not you, it's me."

"You'd be doing me a great favor, Barb."

"When exactly is this party?"

"Saturday night."

"They have a curfew here..."

"I understand."

"One condition."

"What's that?"

"You've got to dance."

Steward was there at the appointed time three days later, the day after

his brother's wedding, driving through the Riverside area of bars and coffee house where St. Mary Hospital was located amidst several other hospitals in a single large campus. She came running out from a side door of the dark brick hospital building dressed in a knee-length gray coat and knee- high black boots with a puffy black knitted cap and matching black mittens.

She no longer had her straight bangs. Her brow was bare with the brown hair curled into ringlets below the black cap. She sat down on the other side of the front seat, as far away as possible. The gray coat and red serge dress below extended to about mid-thigh. She was wearing black hose with a netlike pattern.

"How are your studies going?" Steward asked as they drove toward the boat house.

"They are going constantly," she said, looking at him brightly with her mischievous blue eyes. "Classes, rotations in the hospital, a lot of hand's on training."

"And you're doing well."

" I'm half way there already! I'11 be done about a year from now."

"And then, what will you be?"

"A Registered Nurse and about to be commissioned in the Army."

"That's amazing."

"I've been surprising myself."

Soon they pulled up at the boat house where music could be heard from the Red Garter. There were about a dozen cars already parked in the plowed off lot below the immense girders of the bridge.

"Remember you promised to dance," she said as they ascended the exterior steps together.

"Okay," he said. "I'll try."

Within the bar, they found about 30 people present in the half- dark, red-lighted room. Most of the men Steward recognized as current and former members of the St. Thomas crew. Many of their dates he recognized, also, though he knew few of them firsthand.

Matthew Brandt and Mary Kass were standing in a small group by a table up front that had been set up with chips, punch, and liquor for mixed drinks. Matthew, clean-shaven, his dark hair neatly combed, was dressed in new black slacks and a new, dark blue sweater. He had a new camera slung over his shoulder, his Christmas present from Mary, he was explaining to Dennis Nolan, the former stroke oar. Mary stood close by in a simple green dress with tufted shoulders that gave her a look of substance and understated beauty.

"Stewballo, compadre bravo," said Brandt in greeting, raising his hand. He had taken Spanish in college but used it only for humor. "Back from los campos, from his work with the pobre pesanos. And with a

beautiful lady, as always."

He nodded at Carpenter, who smiled.

"Hey, how you doing, Matthew?" replied Steward. "You're looking like a married man already."

"Oh, don't say that!" chimed Mary. "You might scare him away."

Bill O'Rourke, the coxswain, was at Brandt's side, next to Dennis Nolan, the former stroke oar. O'Rourke was with the petite, dark girl that he had been with at the Memorial Day Regatta, the same who had been with him at the bulletin board on the day he had run into Mary.

Ellen Kass was there, also, with her date, Gordy Evans. He was the business school friend that she had dated since Jim Morris had left. She looked stunning, as always, dressed in dark slacks and a purple sweater, with her vibrant, full chestnut hair cascaded over slender shoulders and shapely breasts.

The topic of central interest was Matthew and Mary's wedding and future plans. Steward soon learned the details of that. The marriage was scheduled for July. It would take place at St. Luke's parish where Mary had gone to grade school. For a honeymoon, Matt and Mary would hike and camp along the Appalachian Trail.

"Just one detail we arranged!" Mary said, laughing.

She knew in her own mind that she might as well have said "I." This had been one of her solutions to the concerns that Matt had brought up on the bridge.

"El amor de los pobres" threw in Matthew, raising his beer. "But, hey, what me, worry? I'm going to get the best tent in the book, you can count on that."

Mary said that after the honeymoon she would join Matt in Kentucky. He would find them a house or apartment. She would not become a Mountain Volunteer. She would assist in the MV activities on her own time, to the extent that she wanted to.

"I can hardly wait to get to the mountains!" she said, smiling all around. "I'd like to help with Matthew's gardens, or maybe just go around and visit people and see what needs to be done—with or without government funds. I don't expect to get bored!"

"Sounds interesting, huh?" remarked Ellen to her companion, Gordy Evans, with an amused, slightly malicious expression directed at her sister. "Lots of problems!"

"Yes," he answered, nodding at Mary, "but I think I'll leave them up to you. I've got enough problems just getting through school."

The comment displayed Evans at once for what Ellie well knew him to be, a practical young man with no aspirations or pretensions to be for anyone except himself. Lately she had begun to find fault in Evans, however. Compared to Jim Morris, he was sadly lacking. There was no

adventurousness, no boldness, just a steady determination to situate himself in life and enjoy it.

She had thought at times that these qualities that Evans had that she didn't feel comfortable with were the same qualities that Jim Morris had found fault with in herself, in his gentlemanly way. She remembered how Morris had been so amused by her ignorance of the war, on the night that they had had supper together, looking out to the river in Council Bluffs. She recalled his exact words at times, "How could it be, someone your age, living in a country at war, and hardly even knowing about it?" Since that evening, she had been more alert to news of the war. She had hoped for Morris to come home for Christmas, which he had not, to her great disappointment.

The greetings and talking soon gave way to a merry atmosphere with music and voluminous booze. If there was any problem between Ellen Kass and Gordy Evans, it was not apparent then. She and he were both excellent dancers, and they danced well together, with just the right amount of wildness, just the right amount of refinement.

True to his promise, Steward made an attempt at dancing, also, as though running in place. After a few beers, he started throwing in some kicks and angular arm motions.

Later in the evening, O'Rourke routed everyone up in front of the tables to do "the Punch." The story behind the punch had been handed down to current members of the crew, though the dance itself had gone by the wayside until this occasion.

"Get in line here! Get in line!" O'Rourke called, shifting into his coxswain mode. "Steward, get that goddam beer out of your hand! We used to couldn't get it in, and now we can't get it out! Bring that pretty lady over here with the fishnet hams!"

Hours later, with the party winding down, the old group, minus Morris, sat at a table together, laughing and talking. The group included Matt and Mary, Denny Nolan and his new girlfriend, Bill O'Rourke, Tom Steward, Barbie Carpenter, Ellen Kass, and Gordy Evans.

Evans was the odd man out in the group, having no shared history or common interests with most of the others, except for youth in general. He had a distant look at times, as if not in agreement with the conversation or even in slight contempt of it.

Ellie, seated beside him, somewhat removed from the others, was clearly not central to the group, also. But she looked at each speaker with her lovely green eyes and seemed amused by many of the comments. Her sparkling presence was appreciated all around, especially by her sister, who was proud that such beauty came in the family (not thinking herself equal in that department).

O'Rourke told everyone about his experience in Georgia, working in

the medical outreach program. He said he had gone out in a government van, usually with a nurse and paramedic, to rural areas where there were migrant workers. His main job had been to set up the tables and equipment and keep records of vaccinations. Also, toward the end of his month down there, he had been allowed to help with some simple medical procedures such as taking pulse and blood pressure.

"And how did you like that?" asked Barbara Carpenter, who had followed his description closely.

"I liked it, I liked it a lot," O'Rourke replied, glad for the chance to convey his impressions, especially to Carpenter who he had noticed with her new more mature pulled back hair was very striking and determined looking, though she still retained her overall girlish impression. "You know, you hear about 'laying on of hands,'" he remarked, directing his eyes to her, "and all that, especially down south, and I got a sense of that, of the power of that, as a means of communication. I wish I could explain it. I didn't want to stop. I wanted to keep at it."

From there the conversation went on to O'Rourke's interest in going to Vietnam as a medic. Carpenter picked up on that at once, owing to her own expectation of going to Vietnam. She told everyone about her nursing studies and that she expected she would be in Vietnam by early in 1969, just a year away.

"Wow, Barbie, that's amazing progress," O'Rourke observed, glad for the chance to have something further to say to her. "You should be really proud of that."

"I am."

Gordy Evans, who had followed the conversation with an expression of remote detachment, came into it at this point.

"I assure you, you can find a place to be needed without going into a war zone," he said.

"Then again, this is a country at war," Ellie replied, gaining the curious attention of her sister.

"We all know there's a war," said Evans. "What's the relevance to being needed?"

Ellie smiled and swished around her mixed drink. "I guess I don't know," she answered with a pretty shrug. She looked around at the others and shrugged again, as if to say that she had made a point, she thought, but had lost it somewhere.

"I think she means, the war puts everything in a different light," Mary said, coming to her sister's rescue. "You may be needed here in all kinds of things, but they aren't things of the same order of need, because the war is something of the utmost need and gravity."

"Thank you, big sister," Ellie replied with a little bow.

"How is the war of the utmost need and gravity when everyone says it

doesn't make any sense?" Evans retorted. "Need is defined by ultimate good. I do as much good for the nation being in the National Guard."

Ellie listened to this interaction, disliking what Evans said. She knew from his own account that he had gotten in the National Guard through some kind of connection. He went to weekend exercises and summer camp, but he had no idealism about it.

"It's just not the same kind of sacrifice," she said, looking directly at him. "You don't put your life on the line."

Evans puzzled at Ellie's cold stare for a moment, then directed his glance at O'Rourke and Carpenter. "I'll grant you that the wounded are important," he said. "More power to you."

"For my part, I think the people who are making sacrifices here, in this country, are doing something just as important," O'Rourke answered. "Like Brandt and Stewie."

Steward thought then of what his brother, Art, had said, that the whole VISTA program was set up to benefit the volunteers rather than the people served.

"There's really no sacrifice at all," Brandt threw in. "Sorry to disappoint you."

"Still it's a way of responding to the heart of the matter," said Mary. "There's a battle going on over there, and another one here. You can't ignore either one."

"I can ignore them," Evans replied.

"Well, yes, you can," Mary persisted. "And you certainly have a right to. It's just a matter of level of involvement."

"Well, yea, you got me there, Mary," said Evans. "But could it be, you presume you're in the know, maybe, a little too much? This isn't a matter of gospel, is it?"

"No, it isn't," Mary answered softly. "And you're right, Gordy, I don't have any right to lay my own concept on you. Forgive me, really. I get carried away."

"And so do I," said Evans. "I guess we can both still learn."

Later, when Steward left with Carpenter, he noticed that Ellen Kass was still sitting next to her sister, talking. Evans had moved off to another side of the room, where he looked a little out of place as he joked around with some of the other guests.

54. Steward makes a move on Barbie Carpenter and gets rebuffed

Tom Steward and Barbie Carpenter left the party at about 11:30 p.m. Carpenter had to be back at her rooming house by 12:30. This was a rule that had been established by her parents after her pregnancy and other problems the previous spring. The management of the rooming house had agreed to enforce the rule, as they did for similar rules for other parents.

As they rode along, Steward talked about Bill O'Rourke and Ellie's date, Gordy Evans. Steward said O'Rourke and Evans were polar opposites. O'Rourke was gearing up to put himself in the midst of the action.

"Evans is just trying to make arrangements," he said.

"How about your arrangements?" replied Carpenter, sensing a moral presumption. "You've made arrangements, too."

Steward accepted the admonishment in quiet. "Yea, maybe I have," he answered. "I guess everyone has to make choices. I guess I don't blame him, really."

"You do blame him!"

"Okay, then, I blame him."

She laughed. "I blame him, too."

They pulled to the curb about a half block from Carpenter's door in the hospital in a dark area where cars were parked so densely that their presence wasn't noticed.

For a moment, they sat in silence while Steward struggled with what to do next. She was sitting on the other side of the car, as far away from him as possible on the front seat.

"Why don't you come over by me?" he said.

"Why do you want me to?" she answered.

"You're just so far away."

"I have to go in, Tom."

"Okay then, go."

She slid across the seat to him.

"We really shouldn't do this," she said.

"Why?" he said, whisking back a long strand of brown hair on one side of her pretty face and then resting his hand on her shoulder. His eyes surveyed her lowered eyebrows, slightly parted lips, and softly veiled form, leading down to the shapely thighs in fishnet hose.

His glance seemed to cause an emission of a faint perfume. It had a sweet, girlish scent like candy.

"Just for this very reason," she answered taking his hand firmly and setting it back in his own domain.

Just as soon as the hand was pushed away, it came back again to her

forearm and drifted down toward her thighs. He pressed his lips against her cheek. She turned toward him and presented her lips to be kissed. He kissed her and lifted her over and around toward him. She was now between his legs with her back against the steering wheel and still kissing.

His hand found its way to her thighs again and began a slow ascent toward her hemline. The hemline had been pulled back anyhow by her changes in position to nearly her hips.

"See, there's that reason again," she said with an impish smile, taking hold of his hand and holding it firmly.

He tried to keep the hand moving in its original direction despite her grasp.

"Just watch it, buster!" she said. "You're getting carried away!"

"I just want to look," he whispered.

She whipped up her dress, revealing panties with a floral pattern. The fishnet hose ended there, on her upper thighs, with black elastic bands. Between the bands and the panties was an area of pink flesh.

"Do you see?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Okay," she said, lowering her dress. "Let's go."

He laughed. "That's pretty provocative, you know."

"Why is it so provocative?"

"I don't know. It just does a number on me."

"What kind of number?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want to look again?"

"Actually, yes."

She lifted up her dress again, wriggled her hips back and forth, and laughed. She flipped down the dress again.

"Well, show is over for tonight." She made as if to go.

He took her firmly by the shoulders. "What if I won't let you?"

"Don't be funny," she said.

"Maybe this is what you like," he said, pushing his lips so hard against her that he was pushing into her teeth.

"Don't do that," she said. "It hurts."

She made as if to go again, pushing aside his hands.

He took her by the shoulders and rammed her into the door by the steering wheel. He grabbed her below her left thigh and pushed her leg up into the air against the windshield, pressing his lips hard against her.

"How about this? Do you like this?" he whispered.

She pushed him back with both her hands with a force that surprised him. "Stop, Tom!" she said. "Stop! You're scaring me! I can't stand this! It makes me feel crazy!"

He relented as suddenly as he had begun. He was his usual self again, shaking his head in exasperation. She disengaged herself from his arms and slid around from him to the middle of the seat. She lifted up her hips and smoothed out her skirt.

"It's my fault, too," she said. "I was teasing you. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I thought I was being funny."

"It was kind of funny," he answered softly.

They both laughed.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Twelve thirty."

"What time do you have to be in?"

"Twelve thirty."

"They enforce it that strictly?"

"Oh, yes."

"Guess you were dealing with an old horny toad."

She shrugged and drew closer to him, looking up at him with her girlish eyes. "You're just normal, Tom," she said. "We're both just normal."

"I don't know what normal is anymore," he replied. "Sometimes I think there's something wrong with me. That's why nothing ever happens to me, with respect to women."

She laughed. "Well, I don't know everything about you, Thomas. But I do know some intimate details. And, based on my personal knowledge, I can verify that everything works just fine."

He shrugged and smiled and looked across the parking lot to the cheerfully lighted street about a block away. Young people were still moving up and down the sidewalks there amidst the restaurants and amusements that catered to the campus crowd.

"And you know what else I think, Tom?" she continued, taking his hand. She raised it to her face, rubbed it against her cheek, and then kissed it.

"No, what do you think, Barb?"

"I think you're a regular Prince Charming, and some little princess is going to come along and snatch you right up!"

"Oh, yea, I can imagine! I better be on my guard."

"Just you wait and see."

"Okay, I will."

"I've loved all your letters, Tom. Will you still write me?"

"Yes."

"If I go to Vietnam?"

"All the more so."

"I will really appreciate it if you do. When you write, when I read your words, it's like someone is talking to me that I've always known,

that is out of my childhood somehow, and yet you're not. I just take a great comfort from it."

"I want to comfort you," he said. "I really do care about you."

"And I care about you."

"I might even love you."

"I might even love you, too."

Again, they both laughed.

"I think what you're doing in Vista, Tom, the things you told me about, they're so grand, so important! The little town or village or whatever in the mountains. It sounds so beautiful!"

"It is."

"I know you have some things you're thinking about, where you're not sure what to do, and all, but I just feel you will do what's right, Tom. I have faith in you. I really do."

She left soon afterwards with a sweet, lingering kiss. He drove away trying to sort out the strong feelings of the evening. He felt as if his whole being had been brought to a state of romantic longing and sexual hunger by the brief, confused physical interaction. It was as if he had been drawn to her by a magnetic force and had collided with her, only to be repelled again by the surprising counterforce of her arms. Getting out of the car, he noticed that the muscles in his back and between his ribs were strained as if by tremendous exertion.

In the house, he went down to the bedroom in the basement, the one he had shared with Arthur just the previous week for a last time. Arthur had left on his honeymoon the day before. He felt sad, feeling his brother absent. Art had become an adult, he thought, while he himself remained in the netherworld of transition.

"Without a relationship with a woman ever in my whole life, really," he said to himself. "Except for Barb."

He thought back to the events of the evening, how Carpenter had flipped up her dress, and shook his head, laughing to himself.

"She's quite a case, really," he said to himself.

Upstairs he found his father sitting alone in the living room by the windows overlooking the lake.

"Well, Arthur is gone," the father said.

"Well, not really, totally gone."

"That's true."

"You know, coming up from the basement, I was thinking about how Art used to stand below trees when I used to jump off." That brought a hearty laugh from the father. "When you had that thing about jumping off."

"Yes."

"What was the reason for that, really?"

"I don't know. I just wanted to prove I could jump off from a high height, you know."

"That you weren't scared."

"Yes."

"By now they're already halfway down to New Orleans."

"Having a good time, I bet."

"Oh, ya."

"You ever been down there?"

"Just one time."

"You like it?"

"Oh, ya. All kinds of places where they play music, you know."

"Big place for jazz."

"Dixieland jazz."

"You bet."

They were quiet for a moment, during which the son noticed that his father had settled more into the slumped posture of his downswings in his cycle of moods. His hand rubbing had become more intense. Now and then he rapped the knuckles of his left hand (he was left-handed) on the entable next to him, a rapid, nervous knock, about six times in a row, that the son was familiar with.

"You'll be the next one, I suppose," the father said.

"That I doubt."

"You wait and see."

"Dad, I don't even have a girlfriend."

"How about this one tonight?"

"She's just an old friend."

"Well, you wait and see, sometimes it happens fast."

The father went to sleep soon later. Tom Steward was left thinking that what his father had said was what Barbara Carpenter had said, also, that things would turn around suddenly somehow and he would find himself in love. He thought to himself, also, that his father, obviously, judging from his posture, hand wringing, and knocking, was at the start of the downswing that he had suspected would happen after Art's marriage. He wished that somehow he could protect his father against that, but he didn't know how.

For a long time, he sat by himself, looking out to the lake. It was a peaceful sight, with the streetlights relieved like candles against the wide, frozen darkness of the lake. He thought about Barbie Carpenter some more. In his mind, he could still see her trusting, girlish eyes. He recalled what she had said about his work in Dulatown, that it was so grand, so important, and that she knew he would take the right course of action.

From there, his thoughts went to the interaction that had occurred in the Red Garter between Gordy Evans and Mary Kass. Mary had

defended the importance of activities such as his own in Dulatown, he thought, as no one else could.

"A way of responding to the heart of the matter," he said out loud, recalling her words. That's exactly what it was. "There's a battle going on over there, and another one here," he said to himself, repeating her words. "You can't ignore either one."

He thought of Douglas Thomasek, his fellow VISTA, and how Thomasek has said, give up the schoolbook approach, move ahead based on the obvious need. Once more he resolved that, as soon as he got back to Dulatown, he would begin in earnest on the water project. "All the elements are in place," he said to himself. "I have to believe in myself and take the responsibility to bring this to fruition."

55. Steward researches the options for a water coop in Dulatown

Soon after returning to North Carolina, Tom Steward received a call from Gerald Ghent, the water engineer he had written to regarding setting up a water coop in Dulatown. The call came to the Dulatown community center where Steward was in the midst of loading up sewing machines in his government car to take them up to another center that shared them. Ghent offered to drive up from his base in Atlanta, Georgia, to go over the various options in person.

"What kind of community is that, anyhow?" he asked

"Rural black community of about 400 people, just on the outskirts of Lenoir."

"How far from Lenoir?"

"About a quarter mile."

"Oh," said the engineer with a note of apprehension.

Steward didn't know what to make of that. He wondered what could have been a cause of alarm in the information exchanged, which had barely gone into specifics.

Ghent came up about a week later, on a bleak January morning. He rode around with Steward in Steward's car, soberly assessing the snow-covered hills and small homes.

Ghent said that he had spent two years in the Peace Corps, working as a water engineer in Peru, after which he had spent five years working for A.I.D. (the Agency for International Development) in other parts of South America. He was 31 years old, but he could have passed for another VISTA volunteer. He looked 25 and in his manner and dress still seemed like someone just out of college.

He showed Steward where the likely place for the community well and pump would be, on the top of the hill, at the perimeter of Dulatown, where there was a pine forest. He said that the water would be pumped up into a water tank and would then gravity-feed down the hill to everyone in the area.

"You immediately have a problem, though," Ghent observed, "with disparate incomes such as you have here, judging by the houses."

"How's that?" said Steward.

"What do you do about the people who can't pay, who can't buy in?" Ghent asked rhetorically. "Do other people absorb the cost, as part of the general cost? If so, their own fees are higher. It's a possible source of tension."

"Yes," said Steward, seeing the implications.

"Then, if you decide to supply water to everyone, do you lay pipe into shacks?" Ghent continued. "Some of these houses are just shacks. They're really not suitable for plumbing."

That night, at Ghent's invitation, Steward ate supper with him in the hotel where Ghent was staying in Morganton, a city about 20 miles from Lenoir. They sat at a back table in a quiet restaurant, talking about the places where Ghent had worked in South America.

Ghent talked energetically and intensely, staring directly into Steward's eyes.

"All these places were up in the Andes Mountains. Just the most beautiful settings you can imagine," he said, with a sweep of his thin hand. "You stand there sometimes, looking off at these green valleys and snow-covered peaks, and you think to yourself, there's no problem here, how could there be a problem? Then you start seeing below the surface a little to people's day to day lives, and you start understanding how much of a grind their lives are just to make ends meet. You start seeing that people are fighting all the time with poor health and sickness... That's where clean water comes in. Contaminated water is the main cause of sickness throughout many parts of South America."

He paused for a moment and considered, tipping his glass of water back and forth in his hand.

"Clean water everywhere, as we know it here, in the States, is a luxury," he said. "Most people in the world don't have it, and yet, when I think of those situations that I worked in there, they appear easier, almost, from the standpoint of organization."

"And why is that?" said Steward, who was following along closely. "Because those situations, from a community organizing standpoint, are rather straightforward to deal with. The communities are rural, for the most part, completely removed from any urban center, totally alone in terms of their needs and what they might be able to do about them. That has even been the case in the communities in North Carolina where I've worked in the mountains down south of here. They have been rural, self-contained communities. Dulatown, here, is something else, right on the edge of a city."

Steward understood then why Ghent had earlier, in his phone call, expressed alarm at the proximity of Dulatown to a nearby city. The problem was the "political question" of incorporation that the previous volunteer Stanley Karnow had warned him about as being at heart a problem of racial divisions.

"But the reality I keep coming back to," he said, "in my own mind, is what do you do if, realistically, there's no prospect of incorporation,—I mean, of Dulatown into Lenoir,—in the near future? Wouldn't it be better for the community to stop waiting, for the time being, and take the problem into our own hands, to the extent we can solve it?"

"You say 'we.'" Ghent replied. Do you really think you're part of the community to that extent? I don't mean to be facetious."

"Well, more and more I do," Steward answered, aware that he was tapping now into the ideas that he had obtained from Douglas Thomasek, the VISTA friend that he had gone with to the ghost town. "I feel I'm accepted as simply someone working there who cares about the community. I have a role that's accepted. I have the time to look into prospects that others don't have the time to look into."

"That well could be," said Ghent. "Really, for myself, I've never been able to take the orthodox approach that you learn in the textbooks of worker here, community there. And you are in a real situation with a real need. If you could sell people on the idea enough to get them to pick up on it and do it themselves, what's wrong with that? The project is well within the reach of success."

"They would have the experience of success," said Steward, "instead of constantly being confronted with what they don't have and can't do. And there are ways to maybe work around the other problems, of whether to share the water, and so on."

"Yes, there maybe would be," said Ghent. "Well, let me think this over, Tom, and outline the options. After I get back, within a couple of days, I'll send you a complete report with hard numbers."

The report came four days, addressed to Steward at the Dulatown Center. Steward read it sitting on the back steps of the center as some teens, by this time used to him and generally in acceptance, played basketball and lifted weights on the clay playground.

The report presented two options. The first option was a limited membership serving just the main paying members, who would all have water into their houses. The second option had two tiers of membership, with one tier having water into their houses and another tier getting water from community hydrants.

"Along with the two tiers of water availability, there would be two tiers of fees," Ghent wrote. "The second tier members would maybe be hard to collect from, being realistic. The second option takes into account that first tier members would maybe be assuming part of the cost of the community hydrants."

The hard numbers were there as promised: probable depth of the well (185 feet); volume of water usage (120,000 gallons per month); power consumption for pumping (550 kilowatts per month); number of feet of main line pipe required (7450); number of residential drop-offs (102); number of community hydrants (7, if used). Initial development cost would be $86,325.73, covered in part by a government grant and in part by a loan from some government or private source. Membership fees would be $25 a month for first-tier members, plus a usage surcharge, in both options. Second tier members, in the second option, would pay $10 per month. The membership fees would cover the cost of billing, loan

repayment, power consumption, and ongoing maintenance. The members, collectively and individually, would be accountable for repayment of the loans.

Steward brought the report down to the Community Development Corporation, and went over it with Howard Stern, the regional director, the one who had first provided him with the water engineer's name and phone number. Stern, a "southern gentleman" as always, listened attentively as Steward presented the details.

Sara Cargill, Stern's gracious, pretty secretary also listened in. She took a great interest in Steward and his activities when he stopped in to talk about them, though she had been careful to inform him at the outset that she was engaged to be married in June.

"What you have here, Thomas, is the start of something grand," Stern pronounced in his refined mountain twang when Steward completed his informal presentation. "Something genuinely grand."

"And it would be such a great service, Tom," Sara threw in with an appreciative glance of her direct brown eyes. She had a look of creamy fairness with her pale but healthful light complexion and brownish blonde, finely textured hair.

"This loan you're looking for could come from us, you know," Stern said. "We are always on the look for projects just like this that grow self-reliance."

He said that he expected that legal assistance, if needed, could be gotten from another government agency.

"There are so many of these programs now, with LBJ and his war on poverty," he said. "And there is a little contention, too, between the various programs, for projects that get the public eye. Your boss, ol' Hyland Wentworth, has a liking for that kind of thing, as you probably know. You can just bet he will be interested in this."

For this very reason, wary of premature publicity, Steward made a point, after leaving, of not going to the CAP office, as he had originally planned. In fact, the notion grew, as the day progressed, that maybe he had pushed things too far along by himself, while putting off the hard task of presenting the report to the people of Dulatown.

[Chapter 55 notes]

56. Steward goes around Dulatown explaining and promoting the water coop

After meeting with Stern, Steward headed to his solitary home and ate a typical supper of hot dogs and beans cooked in a kettle. The house had hardly changed since he had moved in. The walls were still bare. The same furniture was still there, arranged in the same way as on his first day in the house.

He felt too restless to read or write notes in his journal as he often did. Soon after supper, he left for Dulatown, determined to go around and talk to people about the water coop proposal.

Coming around by the little Dulatown store, past the stand of tall pines on the corner, he saw that the lights in the community center were on, creating a faint sheen on the snow-covered playground.

He found the aides, Frances Banner and Samantha Sorren, at work in the office, with a group of young teens taking advantage of their presence to play the juke box. There were about ten youngsters there, seven girls and several boys, dancing together, without pairing off, to the Motown rhythm of the Supremes.

They laughed and shouted when Steward came in. “Come on, now, Tom, get your ol’ ass in here and dance!”

“Not right now,” Steward answered good-naturedly, going past them toward the office.

“Never do dance!” said one of the girls.

“Someday maybe.”

“Don’t be telling them lies!”

Frances looked up cheerfully from her paperwork when he came in. “Now look what we got here! Tom, don’t you ever take a night off?”

“Got nothing else to do,” Steward replied, peering over her shoulder at the paperwork before her. She was tallying up counts for the various activities, as she was required to do monthly. “Thought I’d go around and talk to people about the coop.”

“These ol’ niggers ‘round here ain’t gwine to coop nothing,” said Samanta, laughing, “except maybe to town and get them a bottle.”

“Just thought I’d try anyhow,” Steward answered, not taking the bait. “I brought stuff to show around.”

He showed them two illustrations from Gerald Ghent’s report that he had copied at Stern’s office. One showed the proposed pipe route through Dulatown. Another was a cross-section of the pump works, showing the well depth and expected rock substratums.

“Look like some kind of bug,” said Samanta, picking up a picture of the pipe route.

Undeterred, Steward headed up the rutted town road where snowmelt had run and then frozen again in a recent thaw. Passing the cement block

Church of God, he saw that the Wednesday prayer meeting had started. He thought to himself that he would stop at the church on his way back down the hill to talk to Rev. Jackson. He believed that the preacher was an essential person to have on board in any community effort.

At the "Y" in the road, he turned left onto the loop road that led along the ridge through the closely-packed houses toward the hollow below. He expected he would see someone he could talk to, though many of the houses were already dark.

A knocking noise drew his attention to the side, between a winter-bare tree and the charred ruins of the little cabin that had belonged to Sammy Lee, the young man with the crippled arm who had come at him with a knife. Lee's cousin, Lonnie Moore, was standing there in the half-light, hitting at the roof of his house with an axe.

Steward went up to Moore with a friendly hello and saw that he was trying to break off backlog of ice that had dammed up along the edge of the roof.

"Roof's gwine to come down on my head, I don't get this out a'chere," said Moore.

Moore was a dark, pleasant middle-aged man with a wife and a grown-up daughter who had already left home. He worked in the furniture factory in Lenoir and played guitar as a hobby. Steward had talked to him before and listened to his music.

"Let me have a swing at it," said Steward.

He chopped away with gusto and soon had most of the ice off. Then, at Moore's invitation, he went inside for coffee and sat in the cluttered kitchen listening to a blues song that Moore picked out on his guitar using a broken off section of a pop bottle to slide out the chords.

"This chere's the real bottle necking," Moore said, smiling.

After that and small talk, Steward moved the conversation in his intended direction. "Got some more information on that water coop I was telling you about," he said as a beginning. "Care to hear about it?"

"Sure do," Moore replied in his obliging manner. "That's something we all better hear about, you know that?"

"Yes."

Steward patiently explained again, in more simple terms, the basic facts that he had presented earlier that same day to Howard Stern and Sara Cargill. He had already talked at least one time to almost everyone in the community about the basic concept, so Moore was familiar with the general plan already. The new information was mainly in the layout of the pipes, the membership options, and the cost per month to the members.

Moore listened closely, displaying a more serious side that Steward had not seen before. "Well, some peoples are just not gwine to pay, you

know that," he said, "so us that's paying gwine to pay more."

"Yes, I know that," Steward answered. "It has been figured in, though, to some extent, with the two levels of membership."

"Yes."

They sat in silence for a moment, Moore nodding in thought. His wife was not home, apparently. Steward assumed that she was at the prayer meeting since she was a common sight at any church gathering.

"Yet and still, we can use the water, no denying that," said Moore. "Got a well here—now. Who knows, though, tomorrow or next day, that 'ol well might dry right up. You know that? Then we be down at the spring like ever'body else."

"You've got your own well?" said Steward. He had never thought of that complication, that some people had wells already and would thus would wind up paying for water twice.

"Oh, yes," Moore answered, observing the change in Steward's face as this information sunk in. "Still do need some kin' o' sumpin', though, Mr. Tom. Peoples keep moving in, in this chere little town. How long that water going to last down there, below all these houses? Y'all talking about a deeper down, bigger well up on top the hill, ain't that true?"

"Yes," said Steward, encouraged.

"Yes, sir, y' get down there deep in the groun', plenty of water down there, like a big lake or sumpin'," Moore said, fingering the frets on his guitar.

The conversation drifted from the water coop to the cousin who had left so mysteriously after his altercation with Steward. Dula said that he had heard that Sammy had wound up in Detroit, working in a Ford factory and living on the south side.

"Thems some crazy niggers up there, runnin' around, burnin' stuff down," said Moore. "Get 'em back chere, they's jes' as mean as can be. Seem like they get that city in them, they can't get it out."

Steward had seen examples of that, he thought to himself, young men coming back to Dulatown with an attitude of contempt for the old ways and old racial predicament. The one or two that he had tried to talked to had rejected his overtures with angry, clipped responses.

He said goodbye soon after that and turned back toward the church, thinking about what Moore had said. He could understand the meanness that Moore had referred to as a legitimate response to a social situation that never got better. The water coop would hopefully be a step in the right direction, he thought, though he could see that some people might find fault with it as not being political enough, as being too much of an avoidance of the other issue of incorporation that lingered in the background.

Coming into the plain little church, he found Rev. Jackson leading a

group of about 25 people, including a half-dozen or so of his own ten children, in a spirited rendition of “At the Cross.”

The preacher nodded at him as he came down the aisle. Almost all of the others also turned around and nodded and smiled. He knew most of them from his frequent attendance at Sunday services.

Compared to the Methodist church on the other side of the main road, at the base of the hill, this church had a less refined, poorer, more emotional congregation.

Near the front, swaying to the music, was a meek little woman who always smiled at Steward when she walked by with her lame brother, who was either retarded or handicapped in speech. The brother swayed with the music, also, clapping, with his mouth wide open in a characteristic foolish expression.

Steward found the atmosphere a mental and spiritual comfort as he listened to the heartfelt chorus: “At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light and a vision of my life was revealed...”

Standing there amidst the others, without joining in the singing, he prayed in his odd agnostic yet believing way for the strength and understanding to proceed correctly with the water coop.

He saw in the people around him a further justification of the need for the project. These were good, humble people, honest and hardworking, though lacking in the technical understanding to put together a feasible plan. He had that understanding, thanks to the opportunity of a college education. What Doug Thomasek, his Vista friend, had said was true, his best response in this situation was to simply contribute whatever he had. His “talent,” in the Christian sense, he thought to himself, was his technical understanding.

At the coffee reception after the prayer meeting, he didn’t find it necessary to initiate a conversation with Rev. Jackson. The preacher came across to him at once with his hand extended.

“So nice to see you, young man, in the midst of all your many duties,” said the preacher with a smile, though the pink-hued dark eyes remained troubled as always. “But ‘the glory of young men is their strength,’ as the proverb says.”

Steward set out at once, in his direct, gentle manner, explaining his purpose in seeking the preacher’s approval of the envisioned project. He briefly overviewed the arrangement and the involved costs, and spoke with his habitual straightforwardness about his own ambiguity regarding his own role in the project.

“I don’t want to push too much,” he said, “and yet I don’t want to, it doesn’t seem right, to hold back just on the principle of the thing, when I see something I can do to help.”

The preacher listened closely, nodding. “Brother Thomas,” he said in

his deep, authoritative voice, “I can’t see no wrong in you taking the matter into your own hands, to the extent you can, as you have been doing, to get the facts, and present the facts, and even state an opinion. Lord knows, working here, being here, as you are, six or seven days a week, from morning to night, you’re bound to have an opinion, you deserve to have an opinion.”

Several people standing nearby were listening in, including a few parents of kids who hung out at the center and an old, dignified lady who had taught in the old “negro school” in the very same building that now served as the community center.

“Isn’t that so, children?” said the preacher, looking around at their faces.

“Amen,” they responded. “Brother Tom is good.”

Among them was the preacher’s oldest son, who was slow-witted but courteous and kind. “Amen,” he pronounced more loudly than the others, after their exclamations fell from the air.

“Thank you,” Steward said, touched by the show of acceptance. He left off at that and relaxed for a moment with coffee and a roll before going up to the preacher again to broach the idea of a community meeting to discuss the water coop. “I’d go around first and present the idea to everyone,” he said, “but I would need help to get people to come.”

“Yes, by all means, brother, go around,” said the preacher. “Tell it to them straight just like you told me. I’ll do what I can to persuade people to come. Then we got to sit down, just like you say, just like in the Book of Kings. There will be much to consider, and let me warn you, brother, some will think we lack the resources, some will think we lack the good will, and so on. And some maybe will be cautious out of wisdom. We have that here, too, wisdom, and we should let it play.”

“Yes, I do know that,” Steward replied,” and I’ll do my best to give it a proper forum.”

He went away encouraged by the prospect of a full-scale community meeting about the water project. He was eager to present the plan to everyone at the same time so that people could exchange reactions and ideas. Despite the preacher’s words of caution, he felt sure in his own mind that the weight of evidence would fall on the side of the plan as being the only immediate, realistic solution for getting a good water supply in Dulatown.

57. Morris recommits himself to his ideals while missing Ellen Kass

Following his success at aerial refueling, Jim Morris entered into a new period of self-confidence and love of his new life. He felt sure now that he would become an F-105 pilot. He would be part of an elite corps of athlete warriors, fighting for his country in the best tradition of the United States Air Force.

Regarding this tradition and how it related to the ongoing debate about the war in Vietnam, he felt a new sureness, also, fortified as he was by the philosophy obtained from Gen. Moynihan's speech. The Air Force tradition, as he understood it, was to remain outside of this debate in order to defend the freedom that made it possible.

He expected that there would be some opposed to the war who would question his willingness to submit to orders, as the general had warned. He was determined to steel himself intellectually in order to remain steady in his own convictions.

He remembered almost verbatim one comment in particular that the general had made: "Your only proper response, your only hope for solidity and integrity, is to go deeper into the idealism and reasoning that brought you into the Air Force in the first place."

Morris had thought about that, and he had gone deeper,—back into the legacy of his father's wartime experience, back into his familial roots in the Oregon Trail, back into his boyhood ambitions and dreams. He had found there an ideal of a generous, strong man willing to undertake hardship or even give up life for the sake of freedom. It was the same ideal that Gen. Moynihan had appealed to in his speech.

Flying up each day at dawn, in formation with his comrades in arms, the immense machines surging forward in acrobatic cohesion into the ragged pink and purple or mountainous golden morning clouds, he felt himself as one with the plane, as one with the brave men who pursued the old ideal. He was ready to die with these men if only to be worthy of his presence among them.

The camaraderie had a social side, also, and Morris took part in it as well as the rest. The social side took the form of informal gatherings at the officers' club or at known locations on the Las Vegas Strip. The booze flowed freely at these gatherings. There were plenty of young women around to meet the dashing young pilots. They included waitresses and dancers who worked on the Strip and coeds from local colleges.

Morris did his share of drinking and flirting around in the bars. But when his friends, Sardo, Growe, and Bork, arranged an occasional all-nighter, he just shrugged and said he wasn't interested.

He still thought a lot about Ellen Kass. He couldn't get his mind off

of her despite contact limited to an occasional exchange of letters. She still always signed her letters, “Love and Kisses, Ellie.” There was an emotional charge there, in the girlish words, a hint of contained passion waiting to be released.

He often recalled the evening in the Red Garter when they had first met, how she had saluted at him and called him, “Captain.” Man, what a knock-out she had been that night, with those long slender legs and that mane of splendid hair! He thought about how she sometimes started at making love by arching down like a cat with her buttocks raised and her sweet-scented hair falling around him. He thought about how at times, when she was lying beside him, she recoiled backward from his every touch as if the pleasure of it was too much to bear and then rocked forward to be touched again until her body was writhing. He thought about their last evening together in Council Bluffs, how she had said, “You know I’ll be thinking about you.”

Whenever he remembered that, he remembered how she had said the same words at their good-bye the next day and had been so embarrassed about it. He remembered how he had been unable then to say the words that he had known she wanted to hear,—the simple words, “I love you. You know I’ll be thinking about you, also.”

He was aware that, oddly enough, that moment of awkwardness on her part, the tears it had brought to those green eyes, had endeared her to him and made him feel tender toward her more than any other moment they had shared together.

He left early from a bar on the Strip one evening, preoccupied with thoughts of this kind, leaving behind a pretty brunette who had shown an obvious interest. Marty Sardo, the voluble Italian, caught up with him the next morning in the room they shared in the officers’ barracks.

“Let me get this straight,” he said “She wanted you too much? She looked like too much fun?”

“Yea, that’s it,” Morris replied.

“You don’t know what you missed, Jim. It was all systems go.”

“I can imagine,” said Morris.

He went over to a window that overlooked the parking lot, where there was a phone booth that the trainees used. He had often looked at that phone booth, thinking how easy it would be to put in a call to Ellie. He had never been able to get himself to do it.

Actually, Sardo knew the nature of his room-mate’s mood, from previous conversations. He got around to the subject of Ellie Kass by talking about a one-week break that was coming up in a few days at the completion of four months of training.

“Hey, if you’re thinking about you know who, and maybe asking her down, now would be the ideal time to do it,” he ventured. “You’ll have

an entire week to just unwind together. Then, after that, who knows? They've been saying maybe orders will come down."

"Yes, I heard that, too," Morris replied thoughtfully. "Some kind of orders, official or otherwise."

Morris let the subject end there and headed out for a long run through the spacious, arid landscape that he had come to know and love. As he ran along, he thought about what Sardo had suggested. He had been thinking along the same lines himself.

His thoughts took him back to the historical site at Scott's Bluff where had had stopped with Ellie on their trip together out west. How far off the life of a fighter pilot had seemed then, how hard to achieve, and now he had almost achieved it! He thought to himself that he had been very much taken by Ellen Kass then but had had no idea how strongly she would persist in his mind and affection.

Back to the barracks, before even going for a shower, he went over to the phone booth and put in a call to Ellie's house in Minnesota. It was Saturday morning, about eleven o'clock, so the chances were good he could catch her at home. Her mother answered and said she was in her room.

"Jimmy!" chimed Ellen when she came to the phone. "Is that really you? Are you in the Twin Cities?"

"Oh, no," Morris answered in his matter-of-fact way. "Just thought I'd give you a ring to see how you're doing. I'm still down in Nevada here, at Nellis."

"Oh, too bad! I was just starting to think I would get to see you! Just crazy hoping, you know!"

In a few sentences the conversation went from how Morris was wondering what to do on his upcoming break to how Ellie just happened to have time off. Actually, she was scheduled to work every day at a new job but she decided at once to be available even if it meant getting fired.

"It sure would be nice to see you!" she said again, and the deal was set. She would fly down the next day, on Sunday, if she could arrange an evening flight.

"I can get a hotel room," she said in her girlish voice. "Maybe you can come by to visit."

"I think I could be persuaded," Morris replied.

He started planning at once for the time they would have together. He wanted to head south through California and Arizona to the state of Sonora in Mexico. He had heard that there was a little town there called Puerto Penasco where there were beachside hotels that catered to Americans. He figured that he had enough money saved up from training to show Ellie a good time.

She emerged from the plane in a bright red dress, looking like a trim,

gorgeous athlete, with her beautiful, shining hair curled in tiny ringlets and fluffed out as wide as her shoulders. She came running from the ramp with unabashed joy and continued into his arms the way he had sometimes seen wives of soldiers do on their arrival back home. Her long legs and arms were perfectly tanned. Her pretty, moist face, sparkling with health and good cheer, pressed up into his own, the green eyes shining.

"Ellie, you look wonderful!" he said. "You look absolutely stunning!"

"And you look wonderful, too! I've been so excited to see you!" she whispered, kissing him softly on the lips. "But I thought you would have your uniform on! You don't have to wear it?"

"Once in a while, we get a little break."

"Well, I do want to see it!"

"Sometime before you go, I'll wear it for you."

"Promise?"

"Yes. But eventually you just might get tired of seeing it."

"Well, if that means, you have in mind to see more of me, I guess I can't find any fault with that!"

Within an hour they were in a hotel. This time there was no holding back as on their vacation together of six months before. Morris thought to himself later, with Ellie asleep in his arms, that she had reentered his life as if never absent.

He went over quietly to a dark corner of the room and turned on the television without sound. The screen lit up to a news clip of American soldiers firing from a thick stand of trees pockmarked with shells.

Turning up the volume, he learned that the embattled soldiers were Marines in Khesanh, just south of the North Vietnamese border.

He had not followed news of the war in the past several days, but he had heard of the ongoing battle at Khesanh. The battle was described as having grown more intense, with organized North Vietnamese units coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail despite a unilateral American cease fire in observance of the Vietnamese lunar new year, Tet.

"The U.S. Army is shifting 15,000 paratroops and other men to the area around Khesanh," the announcer said. "Their mission is to help the Marines there meet what Gen. Westmoreland has described as a 'sizable invasion' by North Vietnamese forces."

"Invasion!" he thought. The concept was strikingly at odds with official claims that the North had been demoralized and impaired by the Rolling Thunder campaign. He recalled what Gen. Moynihan had said about how the selective bombing had left the North with too much time to react and rearm.

From his couch near the window, he could hear the sound of planes, he assumed from Nellis, just a mile away. He returned to bed and took

Ellie in his arms, wondering where the war would take him and how she would figure into it, if at all.

[Chapter 57 notes]

58. Morris and Ellen, enroute to Mexico, hear of Tet Offensive

Jim Morris and Ellie Kass were off at about noon the next morning in Morris's newly-polished red Pinto. They drove with the windows open, laughing and talking, with Ellie's long hair flying back in the wind and sparkling in the sunlight. The hot air off the desert had a faint, aromatic scent like cedar.

"I can't believe we're actually going to Mexico!" Ellie said. "Don't we need passports?"

"No, I don't think so," Morris answered. "But, what the heck, if they won't let us in, we won't go in."

"Yea, too bad for them!"

Their conversation seldom waned as they drove along through rugged brown landscapes below a cloudless blue sky. They talked about Morris's training, then about Ellie's business classes, then about Ellie's sister, Mary, and Matt Brandt, then about Tom Steward, Bill O'Rourke, and other mutual acquaintances.

When Morris touched briefly on the problems he had had with aerial refueling and how he had overcome them, Ellie listened closely with the utmost respect. After five months with her business school boyfriend, she had forgotten what a man this was,—so strong and determined, with a fervent idealism like a dashing soldier in the movies!

They drove southeast toward Boulder City through a landscape of sand dunes and cliffs, then turned due south on 95 through the dry valley between the McCollough Range and the Black Mountains. 150 miles south, the highway turned east and then south again through an area of low mountains covered with pines. They stopped there in a little town nestled in the mountains and found a log construction bar and grill with a deck that overlooked a narrow, shallow river where the water swirled between outgrowths of rock.

"Well, what is it, six months, since we were doing this last time?" Morris said as they sipped on their drinks.

"Yes," Ellie replied. "We don't get together a lot, but we sure make up for it when we do!"

In Morris's eyes, she was lovely beyond comparison in this quaint setting of bare wood and pines with the gurgling creek in the background. Her pretty face, set off by the dazzling green eyes, glowed with good feeling and animation.

"You know, I've missed you, Ellie," he said.

"Have you really?"

"I've thought of you often."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

He had had these same words in his mind the previous night, but had not been able to say them. She had, also, stated little about her feelings for him and what their reunion meant, though her eyes and passion had said a great deal.

After supper they walked through the small town and came upon a woody, hillside resort with cabins that had electricity and a shower, but no television.

"What do you think?" said Morris, eager to be alone with her but concerned that the place would not meet her classy standards. He had always taken care to find the best arrangements for her, thinking she deserved to be treated corresponding to her physical elegance.

"Just as long as I'm with you," she responded cheerfully, putting her arm around his waist.

That night she said, "I love you," for the first time. It was while they were making love, and could have been interpreted as meaning, "I love how you make love." Morris wondered if she had meant that or "I love you all the time." He didn't ask her what she had meant or say that he loved her also.

They were off again late the next morning, heading down 95 along a long, rocky wash below the pine-covered slopes of a mountain called Black Peak. Then came a dry valley where there was an Indian reservation, and a series of deeply wooded mountain ranges that looked like they could have been the setting for an old cowboy movie.

Morris was exquisitely happy, driving through the rough, beautiful country with Ellie beside him. Her presence made everything complete with a completeness such as he had never experienced before.

After driving for several hours, they stopped to climb to the top of a peak called Castle Dome. From there they stood, arm in arm, looking off toward a distant peak that a sign said was Sheep Mountain, 20 miles north of the Mexican border.

"I think from the border it's only about 100 miles or so to Puerto Penasco, the town I was telling you about," Morris said to Ellie, planting a soft kiss on her temple.

"Will we go there still today?"

"How about if we spend tonight in Yuma, one more night in the ol' U.S.A.?" Morris replied. "Tomorrow we can head over the border and go on down to the gulf."

"Won't that be grand!"

They found an elegant motel in Yuma with air-conditioned rooms and an immense outdoor pool. Ellie showered and went for a swim while Morris got ready himself with the television on to catch any news.

The news that he heard brought him dripping wet from the bathroom to stare at images of burning buildings with troops exchanging gunfire in

city streets. “Vietcong raiders waged a surprise attack today, driving into the centers of seven South Vietnamese cities,” the announcer was saying. “They set fire to government buildings and assaulted military installations and airfields with rockets and mortars.”

“We’re still in the process of evaluating these developments and responding to them,” an American military spokesman was shown saying in response to questions from the press. “Obviously, this is a significant development. We’re rushing in troops to assist our allies, who are seriously beleaguered in some cities.”

“Where could this show of force be coming from, with the North and the Vietcong supposedly so weakened by our bombings?” someone asked from the group of reporters.

“Well, that is obviously something which we must consider and assess, in due order,” the spokesman said. “For the time being, as I already said, our focus is on the need for immediate assistance.”

“When did these attacks begin, sir?” someone called.

“Apparently, almost precisely at midnight, in Danang.”

“What is the situation there?”

“The air base there was caught by surprise. Six planes, I believe, were blown up on the ground, four F-4 Phantoms and two A-6 Intruders. That situation now is secured, but the attacks are still occurring.”

The report went on to list the cities that had been attacked. In addition to Danang, they included Nhatrang, Quinhon, Kontum, Plieku, and Quangngai. Shown on a map of Vietnam, the invasion route fanned out in seven thrusts from a point near Khesanh where the Ho Chi Minh Trail entered South Vietnam.

So that was the reason for the buildup near Khesanh, Morris thought.

Ellie came in, wet from swimming, to find Morris still standing before the television, watching news clips of a battle that had taken place the previous day at Camp Carroll, 15 miles northeast of Khesanh, as North Vietnamese troops poured down the trail for the invasion. 19 Marines had been killed and 90 wounded.

The news clips showed the Marines under fire. One clip showed two soldiers carrying a comrade from battle. The wounded soldier had a bandage wrapped around his head like a bandanna, but blood was still flowing from beneath the bandage, running down his neck toward his outstretched arms.

He rode listlessly in the arms of his fellow soldiers, with his head thrown back and his mouth open as if gasping for breath.

Ellie was visibly upset by the picture of the wounded soldier. “What’s going on?” she asked, gauging Morris’s mood.

“Big attack,” said Morris. “Big attack where?”

“Everywhere. They’re coming in all over the place.”

"How can they do that?"

"I don't know. A lot of people are going to be asking that," he said, turning off the TV.

He crossed the room to where his belongings were neatly arranged in a corner, with his clothes folded in an open suitcase and his shoes side by side on the floor.

"Do you think the war will get worse?" she said, sitting down on the bed beside him as he dressed.

He laughed. "Well, it's pretty bad already."

She came up to him and kissed him. "I do worry about you, you know."

"Yes, I know you do," he said, taking her into his arms. "But, as far as myself individually is concerned, this doesn't really make any difference. I can only fly one plane. I'll be there flying one somewhere, whatever happens."

"Yes, I know," she answered softly.

She had put off the thought of that, despite knowing it, and had just focused on her time together with him. It had been such a glorious time, and sometimes she thought to herself that she just ought to admit it, she was hopelessly in love.

They had a tender, pleasant supper together in a restaurant in downtown Yuma, then went for a walk together through a quaint Hispanic section of the city where they stopped to listen to a Mexican band. From there, Morris could occasionally see what appeared to be military planes and helicopters in the sky south of the city. He had heard there was a Marine bombing range close to the border there somewhere.

Late that night, after making love, they lay together with the windows open, watching the moonlit sky above the waving branches of a palm tree.

"Sometimes I think I'm crazy about you," she whispered.

"Crazy, huh?" he responded. "I'm not sure if that's good or bad." He did recall, though, he thought to himself, that his mother, on the evening when he had talked to her by the High Bridge, had said that she had been "just crazy" about this father.

"It's good," she said. "I like feeling crazy once in a while."

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Well, Ellie, I guess I'm crazy about you, too."

"Are you really?"

"I guess so. Yes."

"You think I wouldn't wait for you, don't you?"

"Wait for me when?"

"If you go overseas."

"I don't know, Ellie," he said. "I guess what I think, you're a girl who loves fun. You like things to be happening all the time. You told me that

yourself."

"Yes, I did," she replied with laughing eyes. "I'm not saying I wouldn't have fun."

"You're something else," he said, taking her pretty face into his hands. He kissed her on the forehead like a father does to his little girl. "Any kind of waiting you do, I'll be glad for it, Ellen."

They fell sleep soon after in one another's arms.

[Chapters 58-61 notes]

59. Morris and Ellen romance in Mexico as Tet reports continue

Jim Morris and Ellen Kass were off the next morning early, excited with romance and adventure as on the day before, but the soldier's mind was churning with thoughts and images from the television news of the previous night and Ellie's emotional reaction.

Morris wasn't sure what to make of her comments about being crazy about him and willing to wait if he went to Vietnam. Could she be trusted to make a commitment like that? He smiled to himself thinking about what she had said about having fun—whether he was there or not. Of course, she should have fun. She deserved to have fun. But it made him jealous just to think of it. He didn't know if he could bear up under that.

Just the same, he was glad for the moment and glad for her company and affection. She was a constant delight, always fresh and pretty and smelling of perfume, with her green eyes filled with admiration and satisfied desire.

For the trip into Mexico, she had picked out a blue sundress that displayed her perfect form. Her pretty face had a healthy glow from their hike up the peak on the previous afternoon. She sat forward on the seat, gesturing with her clean, neatly cared for hands, as they headed through the Yuma desert toward the Mexican border.

Morris, dressed in tan shorts and a white T-shirt, with his blond hair combed neatly back, listened with a bemused expression to her light, airy comments. His thoughts moved restlessly from the happy world of the moving car to the troubling news reports of the previous night.

Ellie had been mulling over the news reports, also, thinking that they meant that the war would get worse with Morris more in trouble of being wounded or losing his life.

"You know, Jimmy, when I said I'd be willing to wait for you, I meant, be exclusive," she said without any lead-up. "You don't think I could do that, do you?"

"I think you could if you wanted to," he answered.

"Well, say I did want to," she persisted, "would you want me to?"

"No," he said, smiling.

"Hah! You would too! Why wouldn't you want me to?"

"Because what could be gained from it, Ellie? I might go over there and not come back. You would be left here while I go over there to just waste your youth away."

"Like your mother?"

"Those were different times."

That was as far as the discussion went. Morris turned back to the road, determined to leave the future and the war until a later time. But images from the televised scenes of the previous night came forward into

his mind—in particular, a vivid image of the bloody soldier being carried from battle at Khesanh.

He had turned on the television again before leaving the motel and had learned from the morning news coverage that the Vietcong assault was not only continuing but expanding. Street fighting was occurring in all major cities in South Vietnam. The provincial capitol of Hue, where the U.S. Embassy was located, was the scene of a fierce struggle.

"American officials have scarcely been able to mask their alarm at the scope and success of the campaign," a reporter had said. "More than 40,000 Vietcong troops have been involved. Rocket, artillery, engineering, and other support units bring the total to 10,000 more."

They passed through the Mexican border station without incident and continued over the border into a crowded open air market where adults and children hawked food and goods of every imaginable kind including rugs, clothes, paintings, pots and pans, and used appliances.

A little boy with dark, urgent eyes came up to the Ellie's window selling little boxes of gum.

"Oh, isn't he a darling!" she exclaimed, reaching out to give him some change.

She was in an excited mood, looking with great interest at the mish-mash of card table stalls where cars and donkeys shared the crowded street between dirty adobe buildings.

Outside the little town, the landscape gave way to the tedium of the desert—miles and miles of brown land under a relentless sun with only the tall saguaros to add a touch of green.

Ellie brought out refreshments that she had kept fresh in a cooler. She handed Morris a sandwich and a bottle of pop and sat eating a sandwich herself as she read aloud from a tourist brochure that she had picked up at the Mexican station.

"Puerto Penasco is renowned for its beautiful beaches and fresh fish and shrimp," she read. "Visit the old town and walk along Malecon Avenue beside a wide boulevard beside the gulf. Quaint shops, sunshine, and palms! Stroll on a white sandy beach that stretches for miles."

"I could take that," said Morris.

At the next town, Sonyota, the press for tourist business was less intense. Without stopping, they turned south through a rolling desert that broke into black hills as they neared the gulf.

Just outside of Puerto Penasco the road crossed a ridge below which the patterned, tree-lined streets of the town could be seen extending for about a mile beside a long, L-shaped beach. The road became a wide, palm- lined boulevard bordered by graceful, pastel-colored buildings.

Following the main flow of traffic, they turned to the right and saw the gleaming water of the gulf about a quarter mile ahead.

There, on a beach of white sand, was the hotel, Villa Hermosa, that Morris had heard about. Inside the hotel, behind an immense, carved wood counter, was a ruffled, perspiring manager with a large stomach that bulged out from his open suit coat.

"Do you have any rooms available with a view?" Morris asked.

"All the rooms have a view," the manager replied irritably. "I will show you one, if you want to see."

Morris followed the weary figure down a long hall to an interior door. The door was opened revealing a large room with a large bed, clean and well-furnished, but not grand as Morris had hoped for.

Another door on the other side of the room opened to the beach, the manager demonstrated. He opened the door to find Ellen Kass standing there on the sand,—in no particular pose, but looking as pretty as a spring flower in her blue sundress with her long, lovely hair blown back in the wind. In her hands was a seashell that she had apparently just found.

"Oh, is this our room?" she inquired with a bright smile, seeing Morris in the background.

"No, I don't think so," Morris replied, turning to the manager. "I was hoping for something bigger, higher up."

"Ah, senor, si," said the manager, reassessing the situation. "Come look at this. I think you will like."

It was his best room, actually a set of two rooms, situated on the corner with a view of the old town area that Ellie had read about in the brochure. The street below ended in a cul-de-sac bordered with graceful, arching palms that nearly touched the balcony, swaying in the wind.

"Yes," said Morris. "This will be fine."

He looked with satisfaction at the sparkling water visible between the swaying branches, and thought what a pleasure it would be to sit here with Ellie having drinks.

The manager, too, seemed satisfied with the arrangement that he had set up. He displayed a different side with Ellie present. He was full of suggestions for places to visit and talked to Morris in a friendly manner when they walked together back to the lobby to register the room and get the keys.

That evening, at the manager's suggestion, Morris and Ellie walked to the old town for supper. Their walk took them across sand dunes teeming with seagulls, then around a small bay where fishing ships rocked in the lapping waves, then along a wide beachside mall beside a long concrete breakwater that extended out into the surf.

On the gulf side, the mall was lined with concrete planters with flowers and tall palms from which the beach stretched outward for more than a hundred yards. On the inland side were shops, bars, and

restaurants with signs in both English and Spanish.

Indians in outdoor stands were selling basketry, artwork, and fresh fish. Vendors came by with pails slung on ropes from their shoulders, crying, “Burritos! Tamales!”

In the midst of this melee they found a quiet restaurant with outdoor tables that faced the beach. They ordered drinks and sat eating and laughing amidst a dinner crowd that included a group of hippies in peasant dress.

Across the street, beyond the tall, arching palms, waves lapped in on the beach. Sandpipers skitted in the damp, dark stretch of sand left as the taller waves retreated. On the horizon was a gold-lined mountain of clouds from which long rays of sunlight extended above a tiny ship that rocked up and down on the water.

“See, Jimmy, everything always turns out right for us!” said Ellie, looking at Morris adoringly as she ran her fingers softly up and down his hands. “We must be doing something right!”

“You’re the right part,” Morris answered.

Later, with the sky still bright with twilight, they strolled down the mall and happened upon an old church where there was a gift store with hand-carved Indian dolls. With a smile Ellie went in to look at them while Morris, never one to indulge in shopping, explored outside. Finding there a side garden with flowers and external steps that led upward to the roof, he climbed for a view.

While still on the stone steps, just a few steps from the top, he heard a squealing noise from one side and looked to see a man dragging a pig through a walled yard. The man, apparently a butcher, stuck an object of some kind into the neck of the pig and positioned a pail to catch the blood that streamed out.

When Morris saw this, he thought again of the wounded soldier at Khesanh, riding in the arms of his comrades, with blood flowing down his neck toward his outstretched arms. Without continuing to the top of the steps, he descended again to the side garden.

Walking back with Ellie through the darkening streets, he was suddenly conscious of a more sinister aspect of a scene that minutes before had seemed wholly benign.

Ellie caught the same mood though he made no attempt to communicate his feelings. Seeing a group of men outside a noisy bar, she drew closer to his side.

He threw his arm around her, thinking what a girl she was still and how much he wanted to protect her. They walked quietly, without speaking, feeling alone and dependent on one another.

Back at the hotel, in the cheerful glow of lamplight, they ordered another round of drinks. Ellie went to the bathroom to put on the special

lingerie that she had brought for their first night at the beach.

Morris turned on the television then, not expecting to learn much since the programming was in Spanish only. To his astonishment the screen lit up to an image of embattled American MPs firing out from inside an official building that appeared to be the American consulate in Hue. Another news clip, apparently taken later, showed a body of a dead soldier being carried out from the building beside a sign that said, unmistakably, “United States Consulate.”

Could it be? Such a supposedly secure official building had been attacked? He went down to the lobby immediately, looking for an English-language newspaper, but couldn’t find one.

A different manager was on duty. He spoke only halting English but in response to Morris’s questions confirmed that the embassy had been attacked.

“Six hours,” he said, holding up six fingers. “Very bad.”

“Six hours they were fighting?”

“Si, senhor. They wear like South soldier.”

“Disguised themselves as South Vietnamese!”

“Si. Se van muy cerca, bang-bang-bang.”

Morris returned to the perfume-scented room and joined Ellie on the balcony for drinks, with the dark gulf stretching out below them toward a distant horizon of swelling water and starlit sky.

He considered telling her then about the new developments in the war and about the odd spectacle of the killed pig that he had seen from the church rooftop. But, with the memory still fresh in his mind of how she had clung to him on their walk back to the hotel, he kept these matters to himself.

[Chapters 58-61 notes]

60. Morris and Ellen return; Morris is assigned to combat duty

During the next five days, James Morris and Ellen Kass explored the little town of Puerto Penasco, both by car and walking, first along the docks and shore, then inland along the promenade of palm trees and pastel buildings that they had driven in on their first day. At the same time, their sense of intimacy and understanding of one another grew, while the question loomed in the background of what they would do, with respect to one another, once their vacation was through.

Going beyond the promenade, into the side streets, they discovered that the town had a squalid, poor section, also, where barefoot children played in muddy streets littered with debris and garbage.

Seeing this section, Morris concluded that the town had one side that it presented to tourists and another side where the majority of its own people lived. The side presented to tourists, mostly Americans, was replete with everything that could be had in America. The side reserved for its own people, except for the richest few, was marked by a lack of basic goods that in America were taken for granted.

He also observed that there was another group in the town that in his own mind he labeled as “hippies.” These people were Americans, also, but clearly not part of the tourist scene. They had less money, judging by their blue jeans or blue jean shorts and T-shirts. They seemed to set themselves deliberately off from the tourists by their long hair and complete disregard for conventional norms.

In fact, in this little town so removed from the American scene, the same tension seemed to exist, on a more subdued level, as existed in America itself between the hippie element and conventional Americans, Morris observed.

He kept away from these hippie types whenever he saw them, but Ellie drew him into a conversation one morning as he and she stood in an open market waiting with a group of others to buy pastry.

The young woman that Ellie struck up a conversation with had a red bandanna around her freckled forehead and long red hair. She was with a young man with blond hair as long as hers and a blond beard tied with a ribbon like a ponytail.

In the course of the conversation, the young woman inquired what Morris did.

“Oh, Jimmy? He’s in the Air Force,” Ellie answered proudly. “He flies airplanes. Don’t ask me about it! It’s too technical for me!”

“What kind of airplanes do you fly?” the woman asked Morris.

“Thunderchief F-105,” replied Morris matter-of-factly, without inflection. “It’s a jet fighter used in Vietnam.”

“Jet fighter! Wow!”

The look that came to the young woman's face then was something to behold, from Morris's point of view. She looked at him as if he belonged to an alien realm.

The young man with the blond beard in a ponytail had shown little interest in the conversation until this came to light.

"Hey, man, far fucking out," he said, "like flying and diving and dropping bombs!"

He made a motion with both hands as if holding a steering wheel on a vibrating car. "Eh-eh-eh-eh," he said, making a sound like a jack hammer. "Right down the groove, man."

"How's that?" Morris replied.

"Right down the party line, man. Don't you ever get tired of kissing LBJ's ass?"

"What I get tired of is uninformed opinions," Morris answered.

He didn't feel that the remark deserved any further discussion than that. Even so, it ate on him as he walked away with Ellie following behind him. The nerve, he thought, to put down what he was doing, when what was the jerk doing himself?—hanging out in a little resort town, laying on the beach, when other people were making sacrifices.

The whole mess of recent war news came forward into his mind,—the scraps of it that he had managed to obtain from the Spanish telecasts and occasional English language newspapers that he had found. After a week of fierce fighting, the Americans, with their inept South Vietnamese allies, had reestablished order in the cities that had been attacked. But the damage had been done to American esteem.

More than 500 American soldiers had lost their lives, he had heard. Who could say what the repercussion would be in terms of strategic goals? The air war would be affected, obviously.

"He's got his grooves, too," Ellie remarked, noticing Morris's continued grim mood as he walked along in silence.

"These people have no sense of reality," Morris said softly. "They live in their little sheltered world as if nothing else exists while meanwhile things are going on on a worldwide scale. They think they can escape. Nobody can escape. We live in the world."

Back at the hotel, Ellie made coffee and set it out with the pastry on a side table with white and yellow flowers in a sunny, airy corner of the living room. A window there overlooked a jagged line of white-capped, lapping waves that extended northward toward a low hill against an ever-changing backdrop of sea, sky, and seagulls.

In this cheerful atmosphere, Morris's mood was quickly dispelled. He was comforted by Ellie's remark. He thought to himself that she had come a long way in always expressing support for what he was doing. It was an odd migration, though, in his estimation, affecting her sense of

him and his activities without really affecting her sense of herself and her own activities. She was still the party girl, enjoying her days in the sun, refining her lovely appearance in the mirror.

She sat on his lap later, with her large green eyes so close that he could see the little specks of yellow and blue in them that made them so extraordinarily lovely. “Just two more days!” she said, referring to the end of their vacation together.

“Yes, I know,” he answered. “I’m sorry to see it come to an end, Ellie. It’s been a great time.”

He drew her toward him while his mind went on. He would be sorry, truly, but the freedom and self-indulgence had started to get on his nerves, especially when he considered these hippie types that made a vocation of it.

The next day, from the hilltop where they had first seen the little town coming in, they took their last look at it. Hours later, they saw the glorious red, white, and blue flag flapping in the breeze above the American border station.

Beyond that flag, conditions changed at once. Roads and buildings were cleaner and in better condition. Traffic and people moved about in a more orderly fashion. Three green helicopters, apparently from the base at Yuma, flew past in formation, chopping the air with impressive power.

He felt as if he had been away from America for a long time. How amazing it was, really, he thought to himself, that he had been born into citizenship in this richest country in the world, how amazing that he was one of those who manned such powerful machines!

Closer to Nellis, a quiet mood set in, with thoughts that the time for Ellie’s departure was close at hand with the subject never broached of their mutual future, if any. She was scheduled to leave on a plane the next day.

Had orders come out, Morris wondered. What did people make of Tet? He was anxious to talk to his buddies.

He went over to the base after he and Ellie were settled in a hotel room. He found Sardo in the barracks, carefully combing his black mustache in front of a mirror.

“Hey, amigo, how was Mexico?” Sardo said, throwing out his hand.

“It was wonderful,” said Morris, taking the hand firmly. “I’m glad to get back, though.”

“How’s the beautiful lady?”

“She’s doing fine.”

“Got another nice trip for you. How about sunny Thailand? Little place called Takhli?”

“Is that right? All right! How about you?”

“Tahkli tambien, amigo!”

"Hey, all right!"

They shook hands again, smiling into one another's faces.

Bork and Growe had been assigned to Korat, Morris soon learned.

They would be reporting right after training, in mid-May. The group that was headed to Takhli would not begin until July, for what reason no one knew.

"Who else is going to Takhli?" Morris asked. "Hank Johnson and would you believe, Pitt?"

"Tom Pitt!"

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

"I don't know. He wants to go. Said he put in for it a long time ago. He was just keeping it quiet."

"Pitt! That's something else!" Morris exclaimed.

"What do you make of Tet?" said Sardo.

"Well, it doesn't say a lot for Rolling Thunder."

"How about the whole war?"

"You think the bombing will stop?"

"Stop or get worse."

"That's what I think, too."

Others from the training group had been assigned to other bases, including six in total to Korat, five to Japan, and three to Clark AFB in the Philippines.

Near the end of the long, polished hall, Morris ran into Pitt. The major looked somewhat distracted as always. He was dressed in wrinkled Air Force tans with his sparse strands of dark hair matted down on his shiny bald head.

"I heard," said Morris. "They ought to give you a Congressional medal."

"Hey, Jim, this is not heroic," Pitt replied. "I've been thinking about this a long time. I'm bored. I'm single. I'm tired of getting drunk. Over there, I had a sense of mission. I'm a soldier, Morris. It's the only goddam thing I can do."

"Well, more power to you, sir," Morris said, extending his hand. "Looks like we'll be flying together."

"Yes, I'm glad for that, Morris," said the major, returning the handshake.

At the bulletin board by the door, Morris discovered something else. He and his three buddies had all been promoted to 1st Lieutenant. He headed out into the hot Nevada sun, started up his car, and drove in a daze back to the hotel to meet up again with Ellie.

He realized then how sad he felt that he would be saying goodbye to Ellie in less than 24 hours. He was glad for the extra month stateside due

to the July start date in Thailand. Maybe he would have an opportunity to spend another week or two with Ellie in early June.

"Too bad, though," he said to himself. "I'm going to miss that little girl until then."

[Chapters 58-61 notes]

61. Morris and Ellen separate, but Ellen makes her own arrangements

Ellie was freshly showered and combed and dressed in a yellow mid-thigh skirt and matching sleeveless blouse when Morris entered the hotel room. She came across to him with a bright smile.

"Well, it's final," he said. "Thailand in July!"

"Thailand!" she exclaimed, clasping her pretty hands together at her chin.

"Yes."

"That's the bases you were talking about then, the ones in the jungle?" she asked, taking hold of his hands, as she peered into his blue eyes.

"Yes."

"Just think, Jimmy, you're going to be in a war!"

"Yes, I know. It's starting to sink in."

"Oh, I don't want you to get hurt!" she whispered, pressing into him for a kiss.

"Well, I don't plan on that."

He went over to the window to look down at Las Vegas Boulevard, ten stories below. Cars passed in a stream of white and red lights. Neon signs flashed against a twilight sky. In the distance loomed the gray outline of the Spring Mountains. Hearing the roar of jets, he looked up and saw four F-100 Thunderbirds with white plumes crossing obliquely below a swirled purple cloud.

"I was thinking," he said, returning across the room, "let's go somewhere really nice tonight, Ellie. Let's make it one more night of vacation. What do you say?"

"Sounds okay to me!"

"I heard about a place on Lake Mead, about two miles up from the dam. They have some outside decks there."

"And when we get back, we can order room service," she said. "We can have a little party all by ourselves!"

"I won't need any convincing," he answered.

That was the way to do it, he thought as he took a shower, just a nice evening together followed by a night of love. There would be no need to define the relationship going on into the future. There was nothing to say. What could be said? Could he propose marriage? Would she want him to? No. Definitely not. Could he just ask her to stay? Where would she stay? What would she do when he was busy from morning to night with the last phase of training? Better to just aim for a happy goodbye.

He felt relieved to know for sure at last that he would be going to Vietnam. He felt proud that he had been promoted. 1st Lieutenant! Just think of that! Ellie was still a girl. If she hung on in affection, there

would be plenty of time to set things right—if he made it back with all his limbs intact.

The sun had set by the time they arrived at the restaurant on the side of the hill. An orange glow lingered above the jagged hills on the far side of Lake Mead. They sat at an outdoor table on one of the upper decks, sipping their drinks below a yellow lamp that swung slowly in a mild breeze. Below them were other decks, also illumined by yellow lamps, and connected by rustic wooden steps.

They were both aware of the significance of sitting outdoors in a veranda setting. They had met in such a setting at the Red Garter and had confirmed their relationship and intensified its romance in other such settings—in Council Bluffs and on their just completed vacation.

"I guess we're the vacation kids," she said, said, taking his hand.

“Well, here’s to many more!” he replied, raising his glass.

She raised her own glass and clinked it against his, but the cheer faded from her eyes even as he looked in them. Something beyond cheer was communicated then. He could see that she was sad at having to be a vacation girl only.

Lake Mead stretched below them, dark except for the occasional lights of passing boats. A full moon had risen behind them, casting a faint silver glow on the rugged distant shores.

Sitting with hands joined across the candlelit table, they talked about people and places they had seen together in their past week together the wide beach at Puerto Penasco, the fish markets along the oceanside boulevard, the vendors with pails calling, “Burritos! Tamales!”

Morris had tried a hot one. Ellie reminded him of that. “Well, I learned what ‘muy picante’ means, at least,” Morris observed wryly.

He told her later that he had been promoted to 1st Lieutenant.

“Well, congratulations!” she exclaimed. “Why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

“I don’t know. Just didn’t get around to it.”

“Just didn’t get around to it!”

She had no idea of what the promotion meant, in terms of his career in the Air Force. But she understood that it was a new, more important rank. She was sure that he deserved it. He deserved much more, she thought, and would get much more eventually.

The evening continued in an atmosphere of intimacy and romance, as it had begun, but without any talk about the future. On the drive back to the hotel, the desert night seemed so vast all around with the headlights of the car charging bravely through it. They both grew silent then under the strain of what had not been said.

They arrived at the motel and headed in together, not arm in arm as usual, but with Ellie several steps ahead. Morris followed behind, trying

to sort out his thoughts.

"Ellie, you know, I've been trying to think of what I could propose or say to you," he said when they had settled in the room. He regretted even as he spoke that he had said the word, "propose."

"There's no need for you to say anything, Jim," she replied.

"I just want to clarify," he said. "I feel that I owe you an explanation."

"You don't owe me anything," she answered softly but with a note of irritation.

When he reached for her shoulder to pull her down toward him, she jerked away. He drew back from her, contemplating that she had rejected his physical advances for the first time.

She got up and picked up her purse.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Just out," she replied. "I just need fresh air. I just need to be myself."

He got up to try to react somehow, but she had already opened the door. With no further word, she went out. He was left alone, wondering whether he had said too little or too much.

She had had a strong emotion on her face as she turned out of view. She had either been near tears or consumed with anger.

He thought about going after her, but he resisted. He stood at the window, watching for her on the street below the hotel. She was nowhere to be seen. He threw himself down on the bed with his arms behind his head.

He had come to take her for granted, maybe, he mused to himself. He wanted to make peace with her somehow, he thought. Did that mean being more specific about the future or not talking about it at all and merely trying to recapture an intimate mood? He didn't know what to do, but he wanted to blunder through something, if she ever got back.

At last she returned, contrite and teasing like her normal self, as if the previous interchange had not happened.

"Hey, guess what I saw downstairs?" she said. "Big sign, 'Waitress Needed.' Wouldn't that just drive you nuts if I got a job here and moved into my own apartment!"

He considered and said, "Ellie, let's talk."

She sat down on the couch and looked at him seriously—very seriously for her. "Okay, I'm all ears! she said, breaking into a smile. "Shoot away!"

"The thing I want to say," he began haltingly, "is I've considered that, that you could just come down and live here, and I could help you out some way, and we could see one another... But the thing that has me stymied, I'm going into the final four weeks, it's going to be intense. You leave your whole life and come down here, and how often could we

really be together? We've gotten used to constant excitement."

She was favorably impressed with what he said. She understood his dilemma for the first time. He had always shown her a good time. He was worried that the romance would cool in circumstances less intense. She didn't know what to make of that, on the face of it. She didn't know if they had something that could withstand an ordinary day-to-day routine. She could see, though, that he did care about her, that he wanted to be right with her.

"Well, okay, Jimmy," she answered softly. "Let's just be lovers for the moment. We don't have to work out the details. Who would have thought a year ago, even two months ago, that we would have gotten this far? Let's just follow along with whatever happens."

The next morning she mulled over what he had said. In her heart she wasn't convinced that he wanted her to go away. But he woke up and started making arrangements at once for the airport, putting on his uniform as she had requested. She could see that he had his mind set. She decided not to broach the subject again.

She wore what she had planned all along to wear for the farewell, a blue dress with a mid-thigh, snug-fitting skirt and white lace edging. The dress was perfect to make her look girlish and sexy at the same time.

Morris hardly noticed the details, but he was aware of her feminine power as she sat beside him, sweetly scented with perfume. He looked over toward her lovely face and saw that it was suffused with emotion as if she was crying inside without producing tears. Her forehead and cheeks were flushed.

At the airport she did break into tears, as they said a farewell by the ramp to the plane. She gave him such a long, unabashed, emotional kiss that everyone within view could not help but look on at this sight of the handsome young pilot, dressed crisply in Air Force tan, and the lovely young woman with perfect dress and body and flowing chestnut hair.

She paused at the entrance to the ramp, blew him a tearful kiss, and just like that was gone. He watched as the plane taxied onto the runway. Soon after, it lifted into the air, rolled to the right, and disappeared from view.

Immediately he felt a tremendous loss. He headed back into town and stopped at a coffee shop for coffee. He sat alone and tried to sort out his thoughts.

"Why did I send her away?" he said to himself.

He was at the base the next morning to begin training again. There was a new atmosphere in the classes, with much talk about Tet and upcoming duties. He had expected that the routine would bring him quickly back to normal but his sense of loss remained.

Three days later, after an intense day of training, he received a phone

call in the lobby of the officers' barracks. It was Ellen Kass.

"Jimmy," she said. "Guess what? I'm calling you from downtown."

"Downtown where?"

"Downtown here. Las Vegas."

"You're kidding!"

"No, I am not kidding. Can you meet me this evening?"

"Can I meet you? Of course."

"How about at the hotel? At the little restaurant downstairs?"

He arrived at the little restaurant—called the "Good Luck Cafe"-- and found it empty except for a gray-haired couple in a distant corner. He took several steps to peer into another, dimly lit niche, of which the little place had several. Ellie was nowhere to be seen.

"Could I help you, captain?" said a familiar voice.

It was Ellen dressed in a blue and white waitress uniform.

Morris laughed. "Ellie, you work here?"

She came over toward him, her green eyes lit up with glee. "How do I look?" She spun gracefully around with her dainty hands held out to the side.

"Pretty good," said Morris. "Absolutely gorgeous!"

On her the standard waitress's blue apron, tied behind into a pretty bow, had all the allure of a dancer's costume.

"Are you glad to see me?"

"Well, what do you think?" he said. "Of course. But I don't get it, Ellie. How did you arrange all this?"

She said she had flown to Chicago and had sat there in the lobby by herself crying. "Then I heard them saying, "Flight to Las Vegas," leaves in twenty minutes," she explained. "I changed my ticket, took a cab in from the airport, applied for the job... remember I told you?"

"Yes."

"Got the job and here I am!"

"You're staying upstairs?"

"No. Other surprise! I've got an apartment. Little place, you know, but big enough for one—or two."

[Chapters 58-61 notes]

62. Harris leaves; Brandt and Kelly attend an MVs general meeting

At the monthly "dog cadre" meeting in February, 1968, Bruce Harris, in his capacity as lead volunteer, announced that a workshop gathering of all the Mountain Volunteers, previously only tentatively scheduled, would go forward as planned in the second week of March. He told his colleagues Matthew Brandt and Dennis Kelly that the gathering would take place in Covington, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Ohio, where Brandt and Kelly had trained for VISTA.

At this same meeting, Harris also casually announced that he himself would possibly not be attending the meeting. "Something else has come up, "he said, "a chance at a teaching assistantship in Washington D.C. At George Washington University. If it pans out, I may be leaving out of here early, maybe even next month."

"How could it come up so suddenly?" Dennis Kelly asked, stunned by the sudden defection.

"This other guy got sick. I guess I was second in line," Harris answered. "I might not get another chance. This is something I applied for a long time before VISTA."

Brandt was at the counter, pouring himself a cup of coffee, when Harris broke this news. As usual, Harris was neatly dressed,—on this particular day, in freshly pressed slacks and a crisp white shirt open at the collar beneath his carefully combed blond hair. By contrast, Brandt was dressed in his customary work pants and work shirt and had a several days' growth of beard. His dark hair was jaggedly cut; he had taken to cutting it himself to save money.

Over the months Brandt had gotten to know Harris on a personal basis and had started to like him at times, but he had never been able to feel really comfortable with Harris or to trust him fully. Also, he had never quite forgiven Harris for standing by while he and Birl Poling had been hauled off to jail.

"What happened to the revolution?" Brandt asked, gesturing toward the Che Guevara poster on the wall. "I thought you were so big on confrontation."

"If what you're trying to say is I've made a commitment here that should keep me here the rest of my life, I'm not willing to accept that," Harris replied. "I have a commitment to myself, also, to develop my abilities as best I can."

"I never said you're doing time," Brandt returned. "I was just thinking, too bad you're going to miss the revolution."

"I can assure you, Matthew, if there's ever a revolution, you won't have to go around looking for it. In any case, I don't intend to give up on confronting a problem wherever I find one. The campus has been in the

vanguard all along."

"That's good," said Brandt, "because I know that's where you want to be."

Driving down the hill later, Brandt thought about the cabin that Harris would maybe be leaving behind. Now that he knew that Mary Kass would be coming to live with him in early summer, as his bride, he had been looking for possible places. Harris's cabin, with its mountaintop view, would be ideal. Brandt was starting to want to get away from Fletcher Bourne, also. The kindly newspaperman had displayed a more irritable and anxious side since the departure of his son for the service. Brandt had been waiting for a chance to make his break to a more independent situation that would be more accommodating for Kass.

When the appointed time for the MVs' workshop arrived, with Harris absent, Brandt and Kelly drove down to Covington in Kelly's jeep. It was a bright spring day with snow melting on the hillsides and the aspen trees sprouting into buds along the winding two-lane highway. They were in great spirits, excited with the prospect of returning to places where they had hung out in training and talking with dozens of MVs that they had never met before.

"So what do you think," Brandt said, "we going to meet us some more Harrises down there to show us the way."

He had been mulling this over, feeling almost relieved that Harris would be gone and wondering to what extent he and Kelly would keep up the more confrontive activities like the strip mine demonstrations. He was aware that he had always played the wise guy when Harris promoted such activities—maybe the wise guys days were over now.

"Well, I imagine we might meet some people with some good ideas," replied the ever-earnest Kelly. "You know, Matt, this is going to be some pretty important stuff."

"Yea, I know that," Brandt answered. "You and me, Sad Dog, we're going to get it all figured out."

They found the ten-story brick hotel where the workshops were being held and went up to their appointed room on the eighth floor. The windows looked out to an industrial area of the river front with railroad tracks, warehouses, elevators, and barge docks. On the other side of the river was a sports stadium and the Cincinnati downtown.

That evening, as more people arrived, Brandt and Kelly went up and down the ornate, wood-paneled halls of the old hotel, visiting with other volunteers, who occupied the entire eighth and ninth floors.

There were more than 150 volunteers present from more than 60 Appalachian counties in Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Most of them were just out of college, but the group also included two retired couples and a dozen or so middle-aged "indigenous"

volunteers who had been recruited within Appalachia to work in their own communities.

Stories passed back and forth of literacy and child care programs, gardening projects, craft industries, housing and water cooperatives, and labor organizing efforts, both within the pervasive United Mine Workers union and in non-union mines and factories. One group composed of local people and volunteers was going around picketing at mines that weren't paying into the union benefits program.

There was, also, a wide range of ideas about what to do about the poverty that all the volunteers had become familiar with. Some talked about the War on Poverty as if it was a vast church project to help the less fortunate, and nothing more. Others talked in strategic terms, as if the poor were one army and those who held them back another. Others, a vociferous few, threw into the discussions phrases like "worker ownership of the means of productions," "the people's right to the land," and "the oligarchy of the rich."

Next morning, in the first official meeting, held in a top floor conference hall that overlooked the river front, Daniel Hodapp, the tall, lanky MVs director, gave his own perspective in a historical account of the Mountain Volunteers going back to their beginning in 1963. He said that the MVs from the start had been closely tied to the OEO community action programs.

"And, related to that," he said, "there was an implicit goal of facilitating social change through helping poor people obtain decision-making power in institutions that affect their social position. In fact, the original official objective for the community action programs was to have poor people in at least 50 percent of the decision-making positions. The idea was to have the CAPs function as a kind of an institutional end run around institutions that were, for all practical purposes, closed to the poor.

"Now five years later, where has this led?" he asked rhetorically. "In some of the CAPs, maybe a fourth of them, poor people do compose the target half, and decisions have been made, but affecting what? Affecting disbursement of the government funds provided through the CAPs. Meanwhile real institutions, such as welfare agencies and school boards, that really affect poor people's day-to-day lives, have remained outside the CAP structure. I guess, you could say, if anything has been our hard, collective experience, it has been that these real institutions have hardly been touched.

"People, a lot of people, a lot of us here, saw the flaw in the OEO approach a considerable time back, and the result has been what anyone might have foreseen, a broad effort to reach outside of the scope of the CAPs to affect change in real institutions. That has meant something that

you can summarize in one word, organization, with respect to action, and in another word, opposition, with respect to the powers that are already in place, because any kind of organization in Appalachia, as you know, evokes a lot of memories from the past. This is an area that has been baptized in struggle."

He paused with his hands on his hips to look around at the young, attentive faces of the volunteers, most of whom were dressed casually, in various combinations of jeans, plaid shirts, or cotton work clothes. He himself was dressed in blue jeans, a red and blue plaid shirt, and construction boots, as if about to go out timber cutting.

"Now I don't mean to discount our other projects like the coops, I don't mean to discount them at all," he continued, "because, on a human level, you people, with your dedicated hard work, have done a tremendous amount of good, a tremendous amount of good.... But I think we all agree that the best situation is to remove people entirely from a condition where they have to be beholden... I think that's really what we have to set our sights on and consider in these few days together."

He paused again as if his talk was over, and stood with his hand on his hips again, as if in thought. "And I might add, also," he went on, "in this election year, the structure outside of the CAPs also obviously involves the bottom rock structure of American society, the political structure of elected offices. This is maybe something we also need to consider. I'm not talking about promoting candidates, though maybe I wouldn't be above making some helpful suggestions. I'm talking about getting people registered so they can take their rightful place in the democratic process. That's something I expect we will get around to chewing over, also, while we're here..."

"Ever think of a possible situation where the CAPs might not like that?" someone called out.

A few people laughed, and others nodded, as if to say that that was an understatement.

"Yes, I have thought of such an outcome, and I have seen similar problems, with regard to other activities," Hodapp said. "So, thanks for the opportunity to make this point clear: the Mountain Volunteers, as an organization, is ready and willing, at any time, to take over as your sponsoring organization if, in the course of any such legitimate effort, you get cut off by the CAP. We've done this in a couple of cases already. We wouldn't hesitate to do it again."

Brandt took this all in, thinking that there were indeed a lot of Bruce Harrises around at this MVs gathering, more than he had expected, and many of them more convincing than Harris himself. In fact, the people that seemed the most substantial in both ideas and commitment were those that talked the Harris line, including the radical types with the high-

flown phrases. He wasn't sure want to make of all the ramifications.

That evening, with the sun setting over the Ohio River, he stood on the small porch outside of his and Kelly's room, taking pictures with the camera he had received from Mary Kass for Christmas. As he did so, he kept looking back in the room where Kelly lay fully dressed with his glasses still on and his long arms behind his head.

Brandt knew by that alert position what was going on. Behind the glasses the doctor's son was thinking hard, as he had a tendency to do when presented with facts such as they had been submitted to all day, starting with the MV director's comments.

"You know, continuing with the football analogy," Kelly remarked when Brandt ducked his head under the window to return to the room, "the end run of the CAPs didn't work, like Hodapp said. And I don't know what a pass would be, but if up the middle is an option, I guess the most promising play is exactly what he suggested."

"What's that?" said Brandt.

"Voter registration."

Brandt had also been thinking about the voter registration idea—in his typical way, without mentioning his thoughts to anyone. He had expected that eventually Kelly would seek out his opinion since this had come to be the nature of how they developed ideas together, with Kelly bringing up the subject first and with Brandt then reluctantly expressing his own thoughts and finding that Kelly had trapped him somehow into carrying them out to their logical conclusion.

Stepping into the room, he saw that Kelly was watching a television news clip showing what appeared to be two college-aged women knocking at a door. The door was opened by an old woman, who smiled and talked back and forth with them. In the background, an announcer was saying, "Encounters like this, at thousands of doors, by an army of volunteers such as these, may be turning the tide in McCarthy's favor, this despite an organized, top-level party effort to promote a write-in vote for Lyndon Johnson."

Brandt realized that the announcer was talking about Eugene McCarthy, the Democratic senator from his own state, Minnesota. He knew that McCarthy had presented himself as a peace candidate in opposition to Johnson, the sitting president, who had orchestrated the build-up of American forces in Vietnam.

"So what if McCarthy wins, Johnson's going to get in anyhow. How could he not get in?" said Brandt.

"Well, yea, that's true," Kelly replied, sitting up energetically with his clear eyes ready for an intellectual discussion. "That's true, Matt. I won't dispute that. But can't you see, this is part of a whole national effort of people pressing the powers that be to actually represent their

interests? I mean, if McCarthy just makes a show, maybe gets 25 percent, there's a message there. Johnson has to heed...."

Brandt shrugged his shoulders. "He hasn't heeded so far."

"Well, in any case," said Kelly, nodding his head, "the thing I'm starting to understand is we have to be more conscious of politics, back in Kentucky. We got to think about this, Matt."

"I am thinking about it," Brandt replied as he reset the stops on his camera to go out for another set of pictures. He could see that Kelly was in for a long-winded discussion which he wasn't sure he cared to listen to at the moment.

"I heard about this one guy we just got to talk to while we're here," Kelly yelled when Brandt was stepping out of the window.

"Who's that?" Brandt replied, taking sight on a tiny white tugboat pushing a massive load of eight tied-together barges downriver below a railroad trestle bridge. The sunset lighting was perfect with the bridge projecting a elongated pattern of shadows on the quiet water.

"This Catholic priest from down in West Virginia somewhere. He's really been involved in this voter thing, from what I hear."

"Sure, let's do that," Brandt answered, but his mind had drifted to another memory that the river brought to mind, a young lady with dark hair that he had walked with one evening when a spring rain had left the river banks smelling of moist soil and leaves.

[Chapter 62 notes]

63. Brandt and Kelly attend a lecture by Father Dan Riley

Matthew Brandt was still thinking about Mary Kass the next morning when he and Dennis Kelly, in tennis shoes and sweat clothes, dipped under a railroad trestle bridge and headed out for a nostalgic run along an area of the Ohio River that they remembered from VISTA training. Kelly, true to form, had remained focused on the business topic of the previous evening, voter registration.

"Turns out this priest, his name is Father Dan, Riley, I think, is from Wisconsin, or so I heard last night in the hall," Kelly remarked as he struggled to keep abreast of Brandt.

"No one is perfect," Brandt replied.

They were running northwest along a river front road, with the sun just rising above the downtown buildings of Cincinnati on the other side of the river. Brandt noticed a branch riding the swift current downstream and thought of how he had thrown such a branch into the Mississippi River on the evening when he and Kass had made their deal to see one another every four months.

"He was teaching at Marquette, I heard," said Kelly, kicking up his heels in an exaggerated manner as he pulled forward again beside Brandt's shoulder. "Got tired of the whole academic scene, headed out to work in a mission, or something, and after a while, the way I heard it, he thought the whole situation would take a little bit more than prayer, if you know what I mean. So he headed into the social issues, the voter drives, the whole populist process, coming at it from the perspective of the people, the Wisconsin Lafollette tradition, I guess you could say."

"And here I heard he was in the infantry," said Brandt, running along with no expression. from Wisconsin. You maybe never heard of him, Bomb Dog, being from a backwards state like Minnesota."

"Just hope he never played football, so he didn't get his ass kicked," Brandt replied.

In his private thoughts, however, he had been mulling over the ideas of the previous day.

The two young men were in the group of thirty or so volunteers about two hours later that listened to Father Dan Riley as he introduced himself, describing an odyssey from campus to mission similar to what Kelly had described on the morning run.

Father Riley was a man of about 55 years of age with thick glasses set in a horn-rim frame and a rough-hewn, pleasant appearance, like a kind, old farmer. He was dressed in tan slacks and a white shirt open at the collar, with no visible sign of his clerical role.

The priest said that, after several years in West Virginia, he had seen the need to "go to the roots of social problems." He said that he had then begun to educate people to deal with social institutions like school boards

and welfare departments.

"I was at that point, in realization, when John Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey came to West Virginia in spring of 1960 to participate in the presidential primary of that year. I suppose some of you remember that. It was a really charged scene. Similar to what we've got this year in New Hampshire, with Eugene McCarthy. I went up to Charlestown and heard them debate. Issues like safety in the mines and the need to develop local jobs. It was all new to me, let me tell you. But I went away that day a different guy. Suddenly I understood what politics could do. Politics could remove you from a situation of having to accommodate to institutions as they are. Politics could put you in a position from which you could shape those institutions to be more responsive to people's legitimate needs. I wish I could explain this better."

He went on to present some statistical details. In about 70 percent of local and county elections all throughout Appalachia, he claimed, the people running for office were unopposed, "essentially hand-picked by the existing power structure." Voting in elections was often light, as low as 40 percent of all eligible voters. Poor people were, in many cases, not even a part of the process. They seldom went to the ballot box, unless paid. Often they were not even registered to vote.

"Consider what would happen then if candidates emerged who offered an actual alternative to the usual way of doing business – for example, candidates who favored strict restrictions on strip mining or extensive retraining of the unemployed. Consider what would happen if those who have not participated at the ballot box would suddenly participate on the basis of their true needs. Then, truly, we would have a revolution in the best sense of the word, without violence, lawful, and in the best tradition of the Jeffersonian ideal of full democratic participation."

That evening, with the workshops winding down, Brandt and Kelly came upon the thickset, affable priest in the front lobby of the hotel. They invited him to go along with them over the bridge into Cincinnati to the neighborhood where they had trained as VISTAs.

"I'd love to," Fr. Riley replied.

He took the front passenger seat at Brandt's insistence, sliding in with a heavy motion, cigarette in hand. "No need to call me 'Father,'" he said. "Just call me plain 'Dan.'"

They drove through the monumental entry arch of Suspension Bridge and along the lighted ramp toward the downtown skyline, then alongside a riverside railroad yard with an immense roundhouse to the job relocation center where Brandt and Kelly had lived as trainees. They found the two- story, white storefront boarded up, an apparent casualty of shrinking government funds.

"Well, that's too bad," Brandt remarked, looking off into the small backyard where he had sat with Raymond Lauk, the troubled ex-miner whose car had broken down enroute to Chicago. He was sorry that it was already after dark and that he didn't know how to take a picture in scarce light conditions.

From the boarded up center, the two young men and the priest headed to the sports bar where Brandt and Kelly had wiled away many evenings as trainees. Televisions on opposite sides of the room showed basketball highlights and reports on voter results from New Hampshire.

Early returns coming in showed Eugene McCarthy getting about 40 percent of the vote due to a door-to-door final appeal by his army of volunteers, carried forth despite a snow storm that had buried the state in near blizzard conditions.

"If things go as well for McCarthy as projected, these young people will send a strong message to Washington, D.C.," the announcer said. "That message says, in the young people's own language: Peace now, stop the war, turn the attention to the problems at home."

Brandt felt a deep pride watching the news clips of young men like himself, in stocking caps and coats, braving the storm to convey the importance of the election to anyone inclined to stay at home.

"From the start, this was a campaign that pitted the New Hampshire political establishment against the politics of never-say-die idealism," the announcer continued. "McCarthy had the advantage of having his name on the ballot. Johnson did not, but he had the backing of Governor King and the party organization plus enough of a war chest to wage a media campaign against his quixotic foe. Ads aired all throughout the state suggested that a vote for McCarthy was a slap in the face of American soldiers in Vietnam."

"That's what you're up against," Father Riley, cigarette in hand, pronounced over his third coke and brandy. "Anytime, anywhere you defy the powers that be, they will say you're unpatriotic, you're somehow against the American way!"

By the time they left the bar, Brandt was addressing the priest as "Plain Dan." They arrived at the hotel with Kelly and the priest singing a rousing rendition of "On Wisconsin" while Brandt bellowed the Minnesota rouser at the same time.

Brandt and Kelly drove home the next day, with Kelly in an excited state of mind about the prospect of putting into action what Father Riley had suggested. The priest had offered to come over the mountains sometime in late summer to assist with more ideas for a voter drive, and Kelly had readily accepted.

"I'm going to need your help on this," he said, looking across at Brandt. "You're not going to find me going after you like Harris, though.

This has got to be on your own initiative, Matt, with you in it as much as me. On the strip mines, too. Harris has another demonstration set up for next month. We have to sit down and talk these things out. We have to decide if we're going to do these things, and, if so, how."

Brandt was a little tired of the whole business, and his thoughts had drifted back to Mary Kass, but he knew that Kelly was right in saying that it was time to stop being coy and join in without being goaded.

"Okay, Denny, I will do that," he said.

"Do what?" Kelly replied, peering at him from behind his wire-rim glasses.

"Relate to you in a serious vein, with respect to our mutual modi."

"Mutual modi! Ha! Bomb Dog, you could be a rapier if you had a mind to!"

They rode along in silence into the land of steep, narrow valleys that Brandt had regarded as foreign only eight months before. He thought to himself that he had come to think of it as home and that he had come to think of Dennis Kelly with the same regard as he had felt for his rowing teammates in college.

"Hey, how about this evening?" ventured Kelly. "Let's have a meeting this evening at my place to talk it out. You can stay over and head home tomorrow."

"You got any beer?"

"Two six-packs, compadre."

"You got a deal."

[Chapter 63 notes]

64. Brandt and Kelly re-start the dog cadre with a new direction

"Well, let me officially declare, this meeting of the dog cadre is convened," pronounced Dennis Kelly that evening as he and Matthew Brandt sat at his kitchen table, each with a bottle of beer.

On the table before Kelly was a notebook open to a page on which he had listed the items he wanted to discuss. Brandt looked at the notebook wondering just how long Kelly would go on.

"Hey, Denny, maybe with Harris leaving, we can dispense with this dog cadre routine," he commented with a swig of beer, scratching his two- day growth of beard.

"Aw, really? I kind of like it," Kelly answered. He, too, had grown a little rough around the edges, with his brown hair long enough to cover his ears. "I was even thinking of getting up a little newsletter—'Dog Days,' or something. They were saying at the meeting we may be getting more volunteers this summer."

"Let me make a motion then, to keep the concept of dog cadre," said Brandt.

"Motion seconded," Kelly answered, raising his beer.

"All in favor say 'Aye.'"

"Aye!

"Aye!"

"Motion passed!"

So the meeting began, but Kelly established a serious tone as he moved on to his list. "First item. Strip mine demonstration," he said. "The issue is, should we take over for Bruce, and proceed with this if he's not around."

"He won't be around," said Brandt with a flick of his hand. "The man is already sentenced, life in college with no parole. And, as far as this demonstration, let me tell you what I think of this whole thing..." He got up and walked into the adjoining room, where Kelly had a couch and bed.

"Well, of course," said Kelly. "That's our whole purpose..."

"What I think is this, that last thing we had up there," said Brandt, "with Birl Poling and company, to put it bluntly, it was a bunch of bullshit, Den... it was a total put-on."

He stopped at the window on the far side of the room and looked out to the stone-buttressed creek, three stories below, that ran immediately behind Kelly's building in a narrow gorge. On the other side of the creek, set up on a cement foundation, were several red and brown brick buildings, part of the downtown section of the small town, called Kensington, where Kelly lived. Beyond that, above another cluster of brick buildings, gray smoke rose from a tall smokestack into a blue sky

etched with white clouds.

"Harris manufactured the whole thing," he said, looking back to the kitchen.

"And that's a legitimate concern," Kelly replied.

"Sure, Birl Poling defended it later. People were impressed because I went to jail," Brandt went on. "But, you know what, Denny, none of those people would have even been there if they hadn't been pushed... That's my honest take on the whole thing, Den. I don't like pushing. I'm not going to push."

"I don't like pushing either," Kelly answered softly with a thoughtful frown. "It's contrary to my whole concept of how things should be done."

"What is your concept?" said Brandt, coming back into the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator to get himself another bottle of beer and stood at the counter looking at his friend.

"My concept?" said Kelly, straightening up in his chair. "My concept is this. Our role as MVs is to present possible options of what people could do. Our role is to help them—help them—do whatever they decide to do, assuming it's something we believe in ourselves."

"Agreed," said Brandt, sitting down again at the table. "So how do we proceed?"

"Well, how about this?" Kelly ventured. "Let's just not push, Matthew, simple as that... Let's go around, one by one, to everyone that's been involved so far, and see where they stand... Leave it up to them. If they want to continue, fine, then we will be there to help them, with rides or whatever. Same for the voter drive. Let's put forward the idea to take up and carry, or leave alone."

"Well, did you ever consider," said Brandt, "what if all these people don't really want to do these things? Then how about you and me, huh? How about the big revolution?"

"Then you got your gardens, Matt," Kelly answered calmly. "I've got my worker committees, here in Kensington. I've got black lung. Let it end there if it has to."

Brandt considered.

"So it's out to Poling's tomorrow?" he said.

"Yes, I would like to do that," Kelly replied.

"Motion seconded."

"Aye! Aye!"

Next morning, with gray clouds overhead and mist enough to require windshield wipers, the two of them headed over to the company town by the Edinburg factory. They found Poling there, in his row house, apparently just risen and with a pot of coffee perking on his large stove.

"Well, Matthew Brandt and Dennis Kelly!" the old man exclaimed,

opening the door wide. He was dressed in a white sleeveless T-shirt and tan, baggy trousers. “What’s the occasion for the honor?”

“Came to get your opinion,” Brandt replied.

“Well, opinions I got plenty of!” Poling responded. “Come on in and set down! You’re just in time for a cup of coffee.”

Soon Brandt and Kelly were seated at the kitchen table, each with a cup of coffee. Poling opened the refrigerator and took out the only object within it, a white paper bag. From the bag he drew out two cinnamon rolls and five white powder doughnuts. He set them in the center of the table on a chipped plate with a floral pattern.

“Well, what the point of business, boys?” he said, sitting down heavily with a cup of coffee of his own, held in both hands. “Got an iron in the fire, I imagine.”

In businesslike manner, Kelly immediately presented the issue of whether to continue with the strip mine demonstration scheduled for the next month. From that he went on to the voter drive and the need of having candidates that would provide an alternative to the current state of affairs.

“Whatever we go forward on, we want to be on a true democratic basis,” he said. “We don’t want to be cajoling people or pushing people into confrontations.”

Brandt watched Poling’s blanched, red-cheeked face to gauge his reaction as Kelly spoke. His impression was that the old man appreciated being taken into counsel. The sunken, shadowed gray eyes were alert and appeared to energize more when the subject of the voter drive came up.

“Well, you boys are good boys,” Poling remarked when Kelly ended his presentation. “I don’t short you on that. No, I surely do not. But, when I hear you talking about confrontation... and not wanting to push people, and all that... well, now, with due respect, maybe you been thinking your own part was bigger than it really is.”

“What I mean,” he continued, raising his sonorous voice louder as a coal train came past with clanging rails, “these people ‘round here been dealing in demonstrations, and what not, for many years back. Many years back. And they’ll keep right on a-dealing in ‘em ever when they see fit. Now that’ll be the case, boys, if’s you’re with ‘em or not.”

“I appreciate your saying that,” Kelly answered. “I appreciate your frankness. And the direction we want to go is exactly that, we want to count ourselves less and count on local people more. If we’ve thought our own part in it was too big, that’s a fault, truly. I agree.”

“The immediate thing we’re trying to decide on is the demonstration that Bruce already has scheduled,” Brandt threw in, speaking for the first time. “Would you be inclined to lead it yourself?”

“Me?” Poling retorted. “Ha! My days for that are gone! But if it’s a

direction you want, I might can help you with that."

He went with shuffling steps into another room from which the sound of a dresser drawer opening could be heard. Soon he shuffled back with a pocket-size notebook in hand.

"In here you will find a precious commodity," he declared with a flourish, raising his index finger. "Names! Names of people who would be inclined to help in an effort of this kind."

Brandt took the notebook and opened it to look at the scribbled names, with Kelly looking over his shoulder. Some of the names had phone numbers with them. Others were identified by places only.

"You were talking up a voter drive, also," Poling said, sitting down again at the table. "These same good people could help with that. If I were you, I would start with Lois Roan, the grandma that was at the strip mine, that wouldn't let go. You'll find her a little different, maybe, then what you suppose. She's been a leader in the past. She may just be ready to be a leader again."

"Well, we may just head up there today still," said Brandt, looking to Kelly for a confirmation, which he readily received. He had not known the woman's name but he remembered well how she and her daughter had hung together with the little boy in the daughter's hand. "You wouldn't be inclined to participate in the voter drive either, then, yourself?"

"No, boys," said Poling, facing them squarely, "and I'll tell you why... Back in '52, I ran for county commissioner, here in Letcher County, and damn near won. Maybe, now, if there's going to be a voter drive, I just might run again."

His anemic, weary face seemed to well with new blood when he made this announcement. He looked directly at the two young men, nodding his head several times.

"Well, that would be splendid!" said Kelly without hesitation. "You would be an ideal candidate, I think. And that's an element in the whole picture, as I was saying, to have an alternative at the ballot box to the present offerings."

"They's plenty would vote for me, I expect, if they make it to the polling places," said Poling. "And I can fight, now, I tell you. I never been a-feared of a fight!"

Brandt and Kelly left soon after, with an agreement reached with Poling to stay in touch as friends but to keep separate in activities so as not to be seen as giving assistance, as government-funded volunteers, in a political campaign.

They headed off immediately to talk with Lois Roan, as Poling had suggested, following the directions he had given and stopping only for a brief lunch in the next town.

On the way they talked about Poling. Would he follow through and actually file for office?

Kelly thought yes. “That man has been in it a long time,” he remarked. “He likes a rhetorical flourish, but I don’t think he’s a bullshitter.”

“Neither do I,” Brandt answered. “He’s too good for that. I think he’ll do it if his energy holds out.”

“Yes, that will be a factor,” Kelly agreed.

Poling’s directions took them over a one-lane trestle bridge and through a little town then out a winding dirt road for several miles to a dilapidated, weatherworn house on the side of the hill above a heavily wooded gorge.

The woman and her teenage daughter were both at home and waiting outside to see what was causing the motor noise on the deserted road. They were both bare-legged and dressed in house dresses, with the little boy hiding behind his mother’s thigh.

“Matthew, Matthew Brandt! What you doing up this way?” the older woman said, when she recognized who it was. Her wary look changed to one of warm recognition, as for a brother or cousin.

“Came up to talk to you,” Brandt replied. “Remember Denny Kelly here? He was at the demonstration.”

“Why, yes, of course! Won’t you all come in?”

They followed her into a small living room cluttered with baby clothes and toys. A television in the corner continued to display a soap opera of some kind with the volume turned low.

“Y’all boys remember my daughter, don’t you?” the woman asked, pointing toward her dark-haired, pretty daughter who had retreated shyly to the door by the kitchen.

“Yes, of course,” said Brandt.

“Her name is Darla.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said Brandt, nodding to the girl. “My name is Matthew and this is Dennis.”

“Pleased to meet you, too,” the girl answered.

“Just had her birthday.” Lois said. “Sweet seventeen.”

“Is that right? Well, happy birthday!”

“Thanks,” she said, as her son clung to her leg. “And this one here is ‘Delmar.’ We call him ‘Hodie.’”

“Well, how do you do, Hodie? Pleased to meet you,” Kelly said.

“He don’t talk much, but he’s pleased, too.”

A moment of silence followed as everyone smiled.

“The reason we came up here is,” said Kelly, “is to talk about the demonstration. We’d like to get your opinion of if we should do anything else, anything more.”

"Why, sure, I'd be glad to give my opinion, for what it's worth," the woman said.

"We think it's worth a lot," Kelly said.

"And Darla's, too," said Brandt.

"Well, come on out here in the kitchen. I got some coffee going. Jes' made it fresh."

Soon Lois Roan and the two young men were seated at the kitchen table with Darla leaning on the stove while Hodie moved around on the floor or stood with one hand on a chair. He was a blue-eyed boy with a single, upward curl of brown hair in the center of his forehead.

Brandt repeated what Kelly had told Poling and added on what Poling had said in reply. "Said maybe you'd be interested in leading the strip mine or the voter drive," Brandt said. "Said you had lot of experience."

"That what he said?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's right I used to do it," she said softly. "And he's right I care, I care a mighty lot. I ride around here sometimes, places I used to know, as a child, and I feel real mad. And I think they's lots like me would do something, if'n they could."

Talking to Lois Roan on this face to face basis, Brandt began to see another, more thoughtful dimension to the gritty mountain woman he had encountered at the strip mine demonstration. Her face also began to take on a new cognizance in his mind. He could see that in her youth she had been a pretty woman with dark hair and dark eyes. The eyes were still pretty at times, though the brow was furrowed and the cheeks tautly drawn. He also noticed that she had a lovely feminine voice with soft mountain accents and with what seemed a complete lack of pretense.

The girl said nothing but she maintained a steady look of interest, directed toward the table. Now and then, she nodded her head.

Some kind of organization was needed, Lois Roan remarked after they had bandied the various options around. "First thing, now, we got to go round, round up people, get them to a meeting. Then we can all set down and study on it, what to do. And, like you was saying, let people do ever what they want to do, let it go like that."

"You would be willing to lead then?" Kelly asked.

"They ain't no question about it. I would. And I know a good place to meet, in an ol' coal town, and lot of folks to talk to about it. Some of them's hard to get them at it, even when they know for theirselves. Ain't that right, Darla?"

"That's a fact," the girl responded. "They got their thoughts goin' on, but y'got to pry 'em out."

"After you talk a spell," the mother said, "y' know they want to get on it. You gonna help me carry people that need it?"

"Yes, we can do that," said Brandt.

"And shush up at the meetings?"

"Yes, that too," Kelly threw in quickly, with Brandt beside him nodding his head and laughing.

65. Brandt argues with Fletcher and strikes out on his own

On the drive from the Roan's house to Kelly's apartment, Matthew Brandt started thinking about Fletcher Bourne. He wondered how the old man would accept all these new developments, with more demonstrations likely at the strip mines and people being organized to vote. He expected that Bourne would object on some level, though exactly why he didn't know.

The more he thought about this, the more worried he got. He didn't want to have a confrontation with Bourne. Yet he felt that at some point he would have to claim his independence.

His first thought was that he would head back to Crabtree that same night, as soon as he got back to Kelly's apartment. His government car was parked there in the street outside, where he had left it before going to Cincinnati. When he got to the apartment, however, he had a cold beer and curled up on the floor in his sleeping bag, leaving Bourne for the next day.

He woke up early in the morning, thinking of Bourne and what he would say to him. He went over to the window and looked out. It was still dark, though traffic was already passing on the commercial street that fronted the buildings on the other side of the creek. The lights reminded him of the evening when he had gone with Bourne to the meeting at the Tri- County CAP. He thought of how kind Bourne had been to him at that time. He wanted to keep that in mind, but he felt strangely agitated about his upcoming meeting.

"Just be direct and honest," he told himself.

Kelly was asleep on the couch in the same room. Without waking him, he went to the kitchen and wrote a note thanking him for his hospitality. Then he went outside into the crisp morning air and turned the key in the ignition. With a roar of the motor he was off, through the quiet streets of the little town to the dark two-lane highway that led to Crabtree.

He went first to Bourne's house. Inside the unlocked back door, he found the usual assortment of food, papers, and other items on the kitchen table, though with no mechanical parts among them, indicating the absence of Bumper Bourne. Somehow, because of that, the room that had once been so cheerful had an almost palpable sadness. Continuing into the living room, he found it strangely neat with no personal items such as cards or clothes laying around, again indicating the younger Bourne's absence.

The coal stove in the living room was still warm, but the elder Bourne was nowhere to be found. Apparently he had already left for the office.

Brandt cleaned up and changed and drove to Crabtree to the church where the community action program was headquartered in town.

Finding the old man not there, also, he went over to the newspaper office where the secretary informed him that Bourne was off on a story.

From the office he headed into the newspaper darkroom to develop the photos he had taken at the MVs workshop. Bourne had made the darkroom available to him for his general use and had taught him the process of developing film.

About an hour later, Brandt heard Bourne's gentle voice in the press room. Soon the dark room door opened and Bourne looked in.

"That you, Matthew?"

"Yes, sir."

"Saw your car outside."

"Just got back this morning."

"Glad to see you."

"Thanks."

Bourne stepped into the dark room, his left shoulder dipping as he limped to the table where Brandt was working. Brandt had two entire rolls of film developed in two long unbroken lines of black and white exposures. First among them was the shot Brandt had taken from the hotel balcony of the tow boat pushing eight barges down the Ohio River through water marked by the long sunset shadows of a trestle bridge.

"You've got a talent for this kind of thing, Matthew," Bourne said. "I think because you're not inclined to words, your eyes see better, are closer to your thought process, than is the case with most people."

"Thank you," Brandt answered softly, "but, Mr. Bourne, I came here with a specific purpose, to inform you of what went on at the workshop and what has happened since then. A lot has been going on."

"Is that so?" said Bourne, looking more closely at his face. "Well, let's sit down in the break room and talk. I think by this time everyone is done with lunch hour."

Soon they were seated in the break room by the window that looked out to the red water tower in the center of Crabtree. The sky above it was a deep, almost violet blue with the green pine trees on the side of the hill waving back and forth in the wind.

In terse, direct terms, Brandt laid out the developments in detail including Bruce Harris's probable departure, the emphasis placed at the workshop on improving poor people participation, the discussions about voter registration, his and Kelly's decision to involve local people more strongly in project decisions, the likely prospect of further strip mine demonstrations and a voter drive, with local people leading the effort, and Birl Poling's stated intention to run for county office.

Bourne sat in a metal chair, with a stolid, thoughtful expression. As he listened, he rocked back and forth on the back legs of the chair with his thin hands folded on his lap.

"First off, let me ask you something," he said when Brandt stopped talking, "you came over here to talk to me, soon as you got back, as if you felt that this was important to do. What was the reason for that? I would just like to know your state of mind."

"I thought maybe you would have an objection or concern," Brandt answered in his blunt manner. "I wanted to work it out."

"Well, I appreciate that, Matthew," said Bourne, "that you came over to talk it out man to man."

They sat in silence, each waiting for the other to begin again. Bourne was tired from a long morning of tedious interviews, but the topics presented by Brandt had brought a lively attention to his shadowed eyes.

He understood the possibility of conflict and wanted to avoid it, yet he was determined to hold his own ground.

"Well, this voter drive idea," he began, breaking the silence, "with Poling putting himself up for office, you're right, I do have a concern about that. You and he had a direct relationship, being in the last demonstration and in jail together, and you and Kelly get government money, so ought not to be political in this way, opposing people who are in office now."

Brandt considered, sitting not at the same table but at the table next to it, opposite the tall, factory-like windows. It was a mild day; the bottom sections of the windows had been swung outward on their metal hinges to let in the spring air.

"Well, Mr. Bourne," he said, turning to face him directly, "first, I have to admit, I didn't realize that, the extent of what you're saying. But Kelly did, right away. And for that matter, Poling also. For that very reason we agreed, like I told you, that Poling and us would part company until after the election."

"Still the perception is there," Bourne remarked.

"Perceptions don't concern me," Brandt replied, his voice becoming more tense.

Bourne sighed with exasperation. "Perceptions don't concern you, Matt! Well, they do concern me!"

"And why is that?" Brandt returned.

For the first time ever, in speaking to Bourne, his eyes acquired a glare of anger. The old man noticed the anger and resolved at once to quell it.

He replied in a softer voice: "Because, Matthew, what you don't understand, I think, to the extent of its importance to me, is that I've worked many years to establish a position here where people trust my fairness and restraint. Only if people on all sides trust that, can a newspaperman, such as I, affect any change or offer anything at all to the general exchange of ideas. These activities that you are planning put my

position in jeopardy because supposedly you're under my charge and you don't show the same restraint."

Brandt was quiet, sensing a hold coming down on him that he didn't like. He had deferred to Bourne throughout his six months as a volunteer, but had never before encountered a situation where his inclinations were opposed in this manner.

"Maybe you try to be in charge too much," he said.

"Oh, no, I haven't tried to be in charge, and that is precisely the problem!" Bourne responded, rocking forward in his chair and clasping his bony fingers more tightly together. "It is not in my nature to try to be in charge, or even to want to be, for that matter! I just have my work, and my position, which mean a lot to me."

"What has your position got, Mr. Bourne?" said Brandt. "What has all the holding back accomplished? You've been at it, holding back, how many years? Conditions haven't changed."

"Some have changed, Matt. You don't know all," Bourne answered, chafing at the disparagement of his efforts.

"The basic conditions have not changed, of people not owning the land, not having a say on what happens to it," Brandt shot back, "not owning their own means of production."

He was thinking about what he had read in Marcuse and had heard at the workshop from some of the more radical types, but his statements came out sounding more doctrinaire than he had expected.

"Listen to your words!" Bourne exclaimed. "Do you know what kind of words these are, where people will say they came from? And you're right, the basic conditions have not changed. Short of some violent upheaval, they will not change, either, on the level that you refer to. The land, the mines, the factories, are owned, and, under the law, changing ownership involves an exchange of money, or some kind of compensation. There are remedies, surely, but not on the level that you refer to."

Brandt stared out the window, confused by his inability to express his ideas clearly. There was a point he had wanted to make, but he had lost track of it somehow. He knew that he had pushed too far in a wrong direction using the wrong words. His face grew sullen as he tried to formulate a response.

Bourne rose from his chair, struggling to contain his emotions as the gravity of what Brandt had said grew in his mind. "You show a lack of restraint even in saying things like that," he declared, "which had, you don't know, such untold repercussions!"

"I just say it to you, Mr. Bourne, just to you," Brandt protested with a hint of contrition though he was still determined to prevail in asserting his independence.

"Oh, yes, I know that," Bourne answered. "You just say it to me, in confidence. Or you say it to Kelly, or maybe to Poling, and somehow, eventually, the word gets around. And you combine that with demonstrations that go to the edge of the law, and with roundings up of people..."

"To vote, Mr. Bourne! To vote!"

"Oh, yes, to vote. With candidates like Poling expressing Lord knows what the man will come up with, in his bitterness, and you in cahoots with him!"

"I am not in cahoots with him."

"Well, see, here we go again, back to perceptions –- which you say you don't care about and which I do care about because, as I say, my whole work and position is tied up in this, for good or for bad!"

"Your work! Your position!" Brandt asserted, rising. "It's your job, your safe little kingdom, that you care about! Why make it sound like it's something noble and grand?"

"Well, time will tell, Matthew, time will tell just what it was or was not, and most likely you won't even be here or anywhere near here to tally up the result."

"Still, I am here now. I have to act now. I can't think in terms of when I may be here, or not here, who knows when down the road."

"That well may be, but you don't have to act under me or through me, let's be clear about that."

"I am clear about that. Maybe I can find another way."

"You just go ahead."

"I intend to."

"Find yourself another home, too."

"I intend to."

"Good enough."

Saying that, Brandt turned and stormed out without looking back. Only minutes later, as he drove down the highway, did he begin to understand the ramifications of what he had said and done.

Not wanting to have another encounter with Bourne, he went immediately to the old man's house, gathered his belongings in two cardboard boxes, and drove to Kensington, to Kelly's apartment.

66. Steward has a disappointing show for his water coop meeting

On the same afternoon as Matthew Brandt was driving away from Fletcher Bourne's house with his two cardboard boxes full of belongings, Thomas Steward, on the other side of the Appalachian Mountains, was driving to Dulatown for the meeting he had organized to discuss the proposed water cooperative.

The meeting was scheduled for 7:30 p.m. He arrived at the center at about 4:15 p.m., looking lean and healthy, and dressed in a blue sweater, white jeans, and white tennis shoes, like a college student attending an evening class.

Encountering several eager children at the door, he walked inside with them to the main room of the community center and sat on the side bench, an old church pew, talking and helping with homework as he did every day after school. Then, at about 5 p.m., he met with a group of teenagers in the newly-painted brown and gray library as they tried to bring themselves to order for their monthly teen meeting.

"Ya'll boys, listen up, now, will you?" Larry Banner, the elected president, implored. "Ya'll's actin' like a bunch of fools!"

He was the same serious boy who had been so concerned that Steward would get a bad impression of how the kids talked on Steward's first day in Dulatown.

"You's the fool!" another boy shot back. "Look at him up there with that ol' skinny head! Thinks he President Johnson."

The put-down was just a joke, accepted as such by everyone, and yet Steward, with his mind on his upcoming meeting, saw in it a reflection of a dynamic he had noticed in the adults, also. Some, like the teen leader, were eager to improve and get ahead. Others held back and criticized anyone who stepped forward in any kind of personal or collective effort at improvement.

In the previous several weeks, he had visited every dwelling in the little community, from modern house to shack, listening patiently to such criticism whenever he encountered it, and trying to keep the focus on the positive aspects of what could be accomplished. More than 40 homeowners, by his own calculations, had expressed an interest in the coop and had said they planned to attend the meeting.

He wondered about that, as he sat watching the teens. He wondered if people, out of politeness, had merely said what they thought he wanted to hear, or if they had expressed an interest in the coop without really understanding the details. He was afraid that the details, such as the need for some people to use shared outdoor hydrants, would turn some people away once they fully understood them.

The teen club ended in a rare moment of harmony, with the result

having been achieved, finally, of a club outing to be held sometime the following month.

"We need us some committees now," one of the youngsters threw out as they headed up from the library and across the main room.

"Just one committee, food," threw in another.

"Yes, we'll get right on that next week," Steward replied in his soft, friendly voice. "Meanwhile, start thinking about what we should bring."

He watched the youngsters go off, some up the dirt road to the houses on the hill, some down the path to the cabins in the hollow, thinking again of the problems inherent in the physical differences in dwellings. He was anxious for the meeting to begin so that the problems could be discussed in the open with all groups present.

With the building now vacant and as quiet as a chapel, he hauled up folding chairs from the equipment room, set them up in long rows across the main room, and at the side of the room set up three long tables for refreshments. Then he looked at the clock on the wall above the refreshment tables. It was 6:30 p.m.

"One hour to meeting time," he thought.

Opening the back door of the center, he walked out onto the back porch and saw a young man sitting below, smoking a cigarette, at the bottom of the steps that led down to the rutted clay playground.

He recognized the young man at once as Reggie Dula, grandson of the retired school teacher, Miss Eveline Dula, who for many years had taught in the community center when it had been a "colored school."

The young Dula twisted around to see who had come out, then turned away without speaking.

Steward was also aware that this young man belonged to a group of young men who seemed to have nothing but contempt for the government anti- poverty program. He had never quite figured out where this resentment came from, though he placed in the context of a big city racial animosity that did not exist in Dulatown. He knew that Dula and others in his group had lived in big cities like Washington D.C.

He stood for moment without talking and then determined in his mind not to allow the situation to continue. "You're Reggie Dula, aren't you?" he called out.

"Yes, I am," the young man replied, looking around.

"I'm Tom Steward, the VISTA here."

"I know who you are," the young man said, turning away again toward the playground.

Again there was a moment of silence and again Steward determined to forge ahead. He walked down the stairs.

"I know your mother and grandmother," he said from several steps above Dula. "Your grandmother used to teach school here, right?"

"Yes, that is correct," the young man said. He turned around again and looked at Steward with a look of disregard.

"She's a good woman," said Steward. "She's done a lot for this community."

"If you say so, I guess it must be true."

Steward paused. "We're having a meeting tonight here in the center, Reggie. About a water coop. I know you don't think much of the center. I can understand how you would think we're moving too slow. But you're exactly the kind of person we need."

"How do you know that?"

"I know you're young and intelligent."

"You don't know shit, man."

Steward paused and looked down, then looked up again directly into the young man's condescending eyes. "I'm don't mean to be contentious," he said. "I'm just trying to make a sincere appeal to you. You represent a group in the community that, for me, is hard to reach. I'm just trying, respectfully, to ask your presence at this meeting."

The young man smiled and shook his head. "Now why you think I want to come to your meeting?"

"To hear about it. To express your opinion."

"Tell you my opinion," said Dula, getting up. "I think that's some goddam funky bullshit. That's my opinion."

With a dismissive flick of his head, he threw down his cigarette, jumped up from the steps, and headed down the path toward the hollow.

Steward remained behind, bewildered by the word "funky," which he had not heard before. It seemed to imply that the whole idea of the water coop was naive, somehow, or sappy.

He went up the steps and into the main room of the center. The two neighborhood aides, Delores Harper and Samanta Sorren, were there, setting out plates of cookies on the refreshment tables beside large aluminum canisters of coffee.

"There's the boy," said Samanta. She was dressed in a sleek green dress, tight on her narrow hips, with her black hair freshly ironed and curled up below her ears. "Look at him, all bright-eyed."

"Well, I'm hoping," Steward answered.

The room looked cheerier now, more like a meeting would actually happen.

"Don't you be surprised, Tom, these people don't show up," threw in Delores maternally in her languorous drawl. She was also dressed for the occasion, in a full blue dress that suited her ample form. "Some of these people don't want to make things better."

"That's the truth," said Samanta. "You try to holp 'em, they'se going to bite you like dogs."

With only ten minutes remaining to meeting time, the first guest arrived. It was Delores's husband, Tony, looking large and comfortable in black slacks and a white shirt open at the collar.

"Looks like I won't have to fight for a seat," he said with a smile.

"No, I'm afraid not," Steward replied, looking anxiously out the window to see if anyone else was coming down the clay road. No one else was in sight, though there were several cars parked in the clay parking lot next to the cement block Church of God.

Miss Eveline Dula, the former schoolteacher, grandmother of Reggie Dula, was the next to arrive. She was dressed as if for church, in a refined, dark blue suit with a white collar.

"Well, this is an important occasion," she said, holding out her hand to Steward. "I hope your hard work is rewarded, young man."

"I just saw Reggie, your grandson, outside," said Steward. "Is that so?" she said, turning toward him with heightened interest. "Well, I don't imagine he's coming to this meeting."

"No, he's not," Steward answered. "I asked him. He said he wasn't interested."

She smiled and touched his arm. "And that's to put it mildly!"

The several people in attendance, hearing this, laughed softly and exchanged glances.

"Well, these young people coming up, they got to do their own thinking," said Delores. "They got to set their own course of action."

"Oh, yes," agreed Miss Dula. "And they are confronted with so many possible courses of action! So many opinions about what to do!"

"Still we're all family," said Tony Harper.

"Yes, that's true," Miss Dula replied.

Within five minutes, a few others had arrived including the parents of one of the teenage girls who frequented the center, two older people who lived in a house just adjacent to the community center, and the woman who ran the corner store.

Five more minutes passed. So this is the entire group, thought Steward, eight people—after having visited more than 60 houses. "Well, I'm not sure what to do," he said to those sitting before him. "We don't have enough people to really make any decisions."

"Hardly got enough to play cards," said Samanta Sorren.

"Well, you done your best, Tom," Delores Harper threw in. "Only so much you can do."

"That's the truth," said someone.

"Uh-huh," echoed several others.

"You want to know where your meeting is, I think it's up the hill there," Tony Harper remarked, looking out the window. He opened up the door. "Look like the Rev's got something going."

Steward came up behind him and listened. There was something going on in the church, all right, with lots of prayers and shouting.

67. Coop meeting reconvenes with addition of Church of God people

"I think, if you all don't mind, I'll go up to the church and see what's going on up there," Tom Steward said to the group gathered in the Dulatown center for the water coop meeting. "Maybe I can get some of them to come down."

"Yes, Tom, you do that," said Samanta. "Go on up there and see is they dyin' or something."

"Reverend Jackson might not take too kindly to you taking people out of his church," Miss Dula remarked.

"Maybe it's almost over," Steward answered.

"That meeting ain't ever over," said Samanta.

"We be here long as there's cookies," Tony Harper called out from the refreshment table.

"Well, okay, then," said Steward, never diverging from his serious state of mind. "I'll be back in a little while."

He went out in the fresh evening air and up the clay road, glad to be away from the scene of his organizational failure. As he approached the little church, he could hear the preacher praying in a loud voice with other people calling out affirmations in the background.

Entering the unadorned place of worship, he discovered that the voices were coming from a small room, next to the sanctuary, that was used for praying for sick or troubled people.

Packed into the room were a dozen or so people including the preacher and a woman he was praying for, judging by his posture. Steward recognized her at once as the meek little woman who always smiled at him when she walked by with her lame, retarded brother. The brother was there, also, with his hand on his sister's shoulder. was shouting.

"We ask for your power! In Jesus' name! We can feel your power, Lord! We can feel it going in! Let it go in, Lord! We ask in Jesus' name!"

In the background others were yelling affirmations: "Yes, Lord!", "Please, Lord!", "Amen!"

Steward had seen such prayer sessions before since similar sessions often occurred after the Sunday morning service. He sat down in a front pew and waited with bowed head.

Within a few minutes, the praying ended and people emerged from the room with dazed, concerned faces. Several people smiled and nodded hello. Everyone he saw he had talked to about the meeting. Apparently they had forgotten about it.

The preacher and the woman who had been the object of the prayer were the last to emerge, the preacher in a neatly pressed dark blue suit

with a white shirt and brown patterned tie, the woman smiling widely and accompanied by her open-mouthed brother.

"Brother Tom!" exclaimed the preacher with serious eyes. "Your meeting! I'm so sorry! I thought of it this afternoon, and then, Lord knows, we got swept up here, with Sister Ruby."

"The people that came are still down there," said Steward. "I told them I was going up to try to get you."

"How many are there?"

"Eight."

"Brothers and sisters!" shouted the preacher to the others, who were still lingering in the church. "This is the evening of Brother Tom's meeting. Please, come with us, y'all that can. We are going to head down there right now."

The entire group headed down the road together with Rev. Jackson in the lead, his brown tie flying in the breeze. Behind him came Tom Steward, moving along with long strides in his white tennis shoes, followed by the woman that the preacher had referred to as "Sister Ruby," her limping brother, and the other people who had been at the prayer session.

They came into the center with an air of enthusiasm that surprised the others, who by this time were getting ready to leave. Soon everyone was seated with cookies and coffee as a hubbub of greetings and pleasantries filled the room.

The preacher then rose with his cup of coffee in hand, at which the assemblage grew silent.

"Well, first let me say," he intoned, "I promised our young man here, Brother Tom, that I would be at this meeting, and I guess that means on time. So I apologize to him and to you all that was waiting. Seem like you all been busy, though, or did them cookie trays start out empty?"

"No, they did not," said Samanta. "And, yes, Tony has been busy."

"Haw!" said Tony. "She's the one that ate them."

The preacher joined in the general laughter, then grew serious again. "Well, I for one am ready to hear more about this here idea that Brother Tom's been working on so hard. And this young man here is a hard worker, ain't that so?"

"Uh-huh," "Sure is," came the chorus of replies.

Steward stood up obligingly and started in once again, reviewing the details that he had presented individually to everyone present in the room, including even the ever-smiling little woman and her open-mouthed brother.

He said the words almost from memory, expecting that people would listen the way people listen who are hearing the same information a second time. To his surprise, however, they listened to the problematic

details as if they were entirely new.

"Some of the houses won't get plumbing then," Rev. Jackson remarked with a thoughtful expression. "Well, of course, that do make sense now. I just never thought about it."

Why he hadn't thought about it, Steward didn't know. He was almost certain that he had gone over that particular issue with the preacher one evening in church just several days before.

As the description extended to the two types of membership, the two types of dues, the need for some people to use shared hydrants, the issue of who would assume responsibility if some failed to pay, and so on, the faces in the crowd grew more grim.

"Well, this is a serious undertaking," Miss Dula pronounced with a dignified backward toss of her head.

"Uh-huh, real serious," Delores Harper replied. "Ain't that what Tom's been saying? This here ain't no chitterling supper."

"That's the truth now," agreed a dark-skinned serious man who had come down with the preacher from the church. "This chere thing's going to be going on a long time, which I don't think a lot of peoples has really studied on it hard."

A moment of silence intervened while Steward waited with a look of boyish expectation. He thought to himself that for the coop to work, the group had to understand the complexity of the arrangement and take it forcefully in hand. Maybe that was finally starting to happen.

"Well," said the preacher, "seems kindly like we have talked about this far as we can. There's a lot of studying to do on it, like Brother Lenny says, and a lot of talking, and a lot more peoples need to be involved."

"Yes," said the man that the preacher had referred to as Brother Lenny (his name was Lenny Moore). "Don't make no difference some say yes, when other peoples don't say nothing. Everyone's got to say yes at the same time."

"That's the truth now," Samanta threw in. "You know you going to do that before you gets my money."

"Uh-huh," Mrs. Dula assented, smiling. "Or my money, either."

Again there was a moment of silence.

"Well, I'm not sure where to go with it," Steward said softly. "I could go around again to everyone, set up another meeting. But I already did that once. I don't know why they would come next time if they didn't come this time."

"Well, you need help, child," Miss Dula said.

"Yes, you may be willing to bear the burden, son, but Miss Dula's right, it's all of our burden."

"Yes, that's the truth."

“Amen.”

“Well, we do need another meeting then,” said Delores Harper. “Only difference is this time let’s give Tom a better hand.”

“Yes, ma’am, that’s true,” the preacher replied. “He ain’t short on strength... or on faith neither... we all know that. But sometime it take more than one person, even so.”

“Amen.”

Another meeting date was set, for exactly one week away. Several people, including the preacher, volunteered to help in telling people about the meeting and encouraging them to attend.

Using a map that Steward had drawn by hand in his spiral notebook, they divided the 70 or so dwellings in the community into groups of 10, with Steward, the preacher, two others from his church, and the two neighborhood aides each taking one group apiece.

68. Steward reflects on the outcome of the water coop meeting

When Thomas Steward woke up the next morning, his first thought was not about the water cooperative meeting but about his chance encounter on the community center steps with Reggie Dula, the young black man who had expressed such contempt of the whole proceeding.

"That's some goddam funky bullshit," he heard the young man saying. That statement, and the look of disdain that had gone with it, seemed to imply that the meeting had not only been of questionable success but that he had also been wrong somehow for even attempting it.

He tried to sort out in his mind just where all this animosity had come from. It was obviously partially an indication of a racial animosity such as he had heard existed in the big cities, but which he never before had encountered himself. Also, he supposed, the animosity carried with it a confrontive political attitude such as he had heard existed in the big cities in such groups as the Black Panthers.

He was not sure really what to do with respect to this animosity since it existed in an area of black society that he seldom came into contact with.

As he did his regular morning exercises, showered, and shaved, he continued to mull over these matters, thinking in particular about how complex the little community of Dulatown had grown to be in his mind compared to his initial impression.

At the outset, he thought to himself, he had assumed that all the people in Dulatown, being all black, were basically of the same type. But he had come to see that, instead, the community encompassed really quite a wide range of different types. This was reflected even in the range of language, from the "Br'er Rabbit" idiom of the poorest and most uneducated, like Pearlie Moore, to the formally correct English of those, like Miss Dula and Florence Harper, who had gone to college.

On the level of ideas, he had also misperceived the complexity of the community, Steward thought to himself. He had assumed that the more extreme ideas found in the cities were not present here, in the sleepy South. He had learned, however, that such ideas were indeed present in Dulatown, in the "family" mind, just as young Dula's angry ideas were present in the tempered mind of his grandmother.

He got dressed and headed out to his government car, not sure of where he was going. He started toward Dulatown but instead drove into the city of Lenoir, with no particular plan.

On the way into town, he passed through the black neighborhood of West End, looking at it with more than his usual interest because of the recent events. It was a poor neighborhood, but by no means a slum such as he had seen a few years before in New York City. Unkempt, grassless

yards suggested a lack of means or ambition.

Stopping at a red light there, on a street littered with paper and cans, he met the gaze of two young black men standing outside a store. In their eyes he saw the same look of disdain that he had seen the previous evening in the eyes of Reggie Dula.

Continuing toward the center of town, he crossed through a white, working class neighborhood such as he had grown up in himself. The houses there were humble, also, but cheerfully painted and in generally better condition, with neat, well-watered shrubbery and lawns.

He took this into consideration in his young mind, turning it over with his native idealism and inclination to see the best in everyone. What was the reason for this disparity? Were black people so trodden down? If so, why didn't they simply pick themselves up and apply the same effort that poor white people seemed to apply?

He thought to himself that he truly didn't want to think poorly of black people. Rather, he wanted to understand their predicament and enlist himself in their aid in the best way possible.

In the prosperous downtown, consisting of an area about ten blocks long and three or four blocks deep, he parked his car on a busy, sunlit street and walked along with no particular destination, looking at the colorful displays in the storefront windows.

Lamps, furniture, clothes, recreational items were displayed there. None of them were of much interest to him as things to buy, but he was struck by the apparent plenty of these things compared to the dearth of them in the poorer houses of Dulatown.

His walk took him past the government building where Howard Stern had his Economic Development office. On an impulse he went in and found Sterne's pretty secretary, Sara Cargill, by herself there typing out some papers as she sat trim and erect in a mocha-colored silky dress with a pattern of green, swirled leaves and tiny blue flowers.

She welcomed him brightly, as always, rising at once to fix him a cup of coffee. Then she listened attentively, her lovely face creamy fair, as he gave an account of his efforts to organize the meeting and what had become of them.

"Well, Tommy," she remarked in her pleasant voice when he paused, "seems to me like you did just about as much as you could. You did your part. They didn't do theirs. You can't do it all for them. Those people have got to help themselves a little bit, too."

There was no meanness or judgement in her gentile drawl when she pronounced this opinion, yet in the words "those people" he detected a subtle racial division that he had never noticed before.

The gray-haired director, Howard Stern, came in soon later, looking lean and comfortable in a neatly pressed, finely tailored blue pin-stripe

suit with a narrow green tie. He greeted them cheerfully, graciously accepted the cup of coffee placed in his hands, and sat down to look at them from a reclined position in his leather chair, as if nothing in the world was more important than whatever they had to say.

Sara Cargill, with her genial good manners, recapitulated the previous conversation to bring him up to the point where it had been when he walked in the room.

"I told Tommy he has done all that could be expected," she said, completing her account with an upraised hand as fair in tone as her pale, rosy face. "I said, little bit has got to come from them, too."

"And I concur," Sterne replied, peering at Steward with his hands folded on his lap. "Thomas, you go back out there and say, 'I've got you a good arrangement here. Now are you with me or not?' Those people have got to do their part, also. Sara is right."

With Stern, as with his pretty secretary, there was a subtle emphasis placed on the words "those people," carrying what seemed to Steward to be a connotation of racial distinction.

Or was it that, really? Steward asked himself later as he walked down the sunlit street again past the storefronts with their colorful displays. Maybe the "do their part" requirement that Howard Stern had expressed was nothing more than what he would have expected of any group applying for government help.

Reaching his car, Steward continued past it to the city library, which was several blocks in the other direction. There he discovered a Charlotte newspaper and sat down to read it at a quiet table that afforded a view of a courtyard set out with new flowers.

In the newspaper, on the second page, he discovered an article on a "poor people's campaign" being organized by the black civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He had heard of such a campaign before, but had not paid much attention to it since he had no television in his house and no radio in his government car.

The sense of the campaign that he got from the article was that King intended to build a shanty town in Washington D.C. with a group of demonstrators who would remain there for several months. "To dramatize to Congress and the government the plight of America's poor," the article said.

King was described as saying that the campaign would begin with a disciplined group of 3000 people trained in non-violence. "We need an alternative to violence and to timid supplication," he was quoted as saying. "Non-violence is our most potent weapon."

The original 3000 was expected to grow eventually to many more, in King's estimation, the article said. "It will be a sit-in, wait-in campaign," he was quoted as saying.

According to the article, the determined civil rights leader had been going around the country to drum up support for his campaign. He had been out in New York City, in Harlem, where he had gotten his biggest applause when he had denounced the war in Vietnam and had linked the war in Asia to the struggle against poverty in America.

"We've got to de-escalate and end that evil, unjust war," King was quoted as saying.

The article said that King was going next to Memphis, Tennessee, where he planned to stage a march in support of striking garbage workers. "He will be expected there to confront extremists among blacks as well as among whites, since on both sides of the confrontation there are proponents of a more violent solution," the article said.

Later, as he drove toward Dulatown, Steward tried to put the water cooperative meeting into perspective within the wider picture of the civil right leader's activities and statements that he had obtained from the article.

He thought to himself that he could understand how someone like Reggie Dula could take a position that the type of remedy proposed was too "timid," as King had said, that it did not squarely enough confront the larger political situation in Lenoir with respect to the extension of the city boundary. But could a march or confrontation suffice in every circumstance where there was a social problem?

No, certainly not, he concluded. The whole situation was obscured by race. Any poor community anywhere might be faced with this predicament of an inadequate supply of water. The best remedy still seemed to be a collective effort contained within the little community itself.

But, obviously, he himself, being not truly a member of the community, and being not black, was in no position to make this decision himself. Therefore, what was required, what was completely necessary still, was for the remedy, the cooperative, to be clearly explained to the people of Dulatown in such a way that all understood it—and with all sitting face to face so as to reach a considered decision together.

Buoyed by that thought, he resolved to make a fresh, wholehearted attempt to promote the upcoming meeting.

Would Rev. Jackson and the others really help to the extent that they had indicated at the meeting? He hoped so. He hoped that the stage was now set for a genuine community effort at understanding and consideration, if nothing else.

[Chapter 68 notes]

69. Steward encounters skepticism and exclusion at his second coop meeting

Six days later Thomas Steward stood again in the Dulatown Community Center, with the two neighborhood aides, watching the road for anyone approaching for the second water cooperative meeting.

With only ten minutes to go until meeting time, there were just two people present, in addition to the Steward and the aides. The two people were "Ma Florence," the lady from the hollow who several months before had made sweet potato pies for the chitterling supper, and her neighbor, Pearlie Moore.

Steward had picked up Ma Florence himself, and she had managed to drag along her neighbor. She had become quite supportive of everything he did since he often stopped down to talk to her and sometimes ate supper at her house. In exchange, he brought her to town now and then when she needed a ride and helped her pay for groceries.

Ma Florence had dressed up for the meeting in a gray dress with a white collar and cuffs. She sat holding the cup of coffee that Steward had gotten for her, smiling and talking to the aides.

"Lord, Tom, you look so nervous!" she declared. "Don't he look nervous?"

"Uh-huh, he nervous," Frances replied sympathetically.

"Got a reason," said Samanta. "Ain't nobody comin' t' this chere meeting."

The two aides were also neatly attired for the meeting, Frances in a full green dress to accommodate her full form, Samanta in a white blouse with a mid-thigh dark skirt that showed off her shapely legs. Steward was wearing his usual white jeans and white tennis shoes with a purple T-shirt that said "Purdue Crew."

Pearlie Moore, who all knew was from one of the humblest shacks in the hollow, was dressed in a clean pink and white house dress that had a look of being second-hand. She was a young, dark woman with tightly knit hair, the mother of four children, all under the age of ten. When spoken to, she answered softly in a self-conscious manner.

The previous week had progressed with promising signs. Rev. Vannoy Jackson, his two church volunteers, and the two neighborhood aides, had together visited more than 50 families. Steward had gone around to the remaining 20 families. So everyone had been visited a second time.

In response to a request from Frances Banner, Steward had also gone to talk to Russell Patterson, the mild-mannered minister at the Methodist Church that Frances and most of the more educated, conservative families attended. He had listened politely to Steward's presentation and had promised to be at the meeting.

With only five minutes to meeting time, Steward saw the compact, always serious-looking Rev. Jackson, dressed in black pants and a waist-length beige jacket, coming down the hill with his two volunteers. The volunteers looked serious, also, as if about to undertake a difficult task.

Just outside the door, the preacher and the volunteers joined paths coincidentally with the Methodist minister, Rev. Patterson. He was an older man, maybe in his early sixties. They bowed as they shook his hand, and opened the door for him as they approached the community center.

"I spent many a day in this building, back when I was coming up," said the Methodist minister to Rev. Jackson as they entered the room. "Back in them days, I needed a little tending now and then."

"Is that so?" Rev. Jackson responded with a smile. "I hope no whooping, though."

"Some of that whooping, too. If it warn't for that, now, 'spect I mighta gone fu'ther astray."

The dignified Miss Dula, her gray hair set neatly back, came up behind the preachers at this moment and stood, purse in hand, her pretty eyes twinkling. She had seniority on all of them, being about ten years older than the Methodist minister; and she had a good knowledge of most of them, also, from her years as the sole teacher in the very building they were at the moment entering.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Rev. Patterson, taking a little hop. "Look, here she come now, going to whoop me again!"

"I won't be doing any whooping tonight," Miss Dula replied.

Within another 15 minutes, the scene in the community center was quite different than it had been the week before. Steward counted more than 40 people in the room. With heightened sprits, he recognized them as the most responsible, hardest working members of the community, the people who were the backbone of the churches and of any community project.

Seeing several people watching him expectantly, Steward stood up and waited until the group came to silence.

"Well, I hardly know where to start," he said. "You've all heard this before. I was thinking maybe the best thing I could do, at this point, is to highlight some of the main issues that we would need to resolve if we go forward."

"Yes, young man, why don't you do that," Rev. Jackson remarked from his seat in the front row. "I think that would be helpful to everyone."

"Yes, it certainly would," seconded Miss Dula, who was seated beside the preacher.

Steward nodded thoughtfully and proceeded through a quick review,

starting with the proposed physical set-up of well, tank, and downhill delivery system, and ending up with the problem of not being able to install interior pipe in some houses.

"As a result of this, as you already know, some people would have to get water from outdoor hydrants," he said. "And related to that, we would need to have two types of membership."

At this juncture, he paused to determine how his remarks were being received and saw many grave faces. Pearlie Moore, the poor lady from the hollow, met his gaze briefly and looked down in embarrassment.

"Those are really the main issues," he continued. "On the work side, well, I guess you all know what would need to be done. First big job is we would need to get people signed on. That would be done just once. Then there would be an ongoing job, for some kind of officers, of collecting fees and overseeing any kind of maintenance."

After he ended, there was a moment of silence.

"Well," said Rev. Jackson, rising, "first off, I just want to say, I think we all appreciate all the hard work this young man has done, getting this meeting together, and getting all these facts."

"That's for sure," said Miss Dula, clapping.

Everyone joined in a round of applause while Steward stood at the side, mouthing the words "Thank you" several times.

"And now that we got the facts, looks like we got a lot of thinking and talking to do, because the facts are just the first step," said Rev. Jackson, nodding thoughtfully as he sat down.

Again there was an interval of silence.

Rev. Patterson rose next, pushing back his narrow glasses from the tip of his nose. "Well, like the good preacher says, my friend, Rev. Jackson, we got a lot of thinking and talking to do, before going into a project of this kind. And being a preacher myself, working with a church, trying to make it go, I seen lot of projects comin' and goin'. And some that start comin', they don't go, that's a fact, too."

"I hear you, brother," said Rev. Jackson with a smile.

"That's why, anyone come to me with a project, saying, look here what all we can do, first thing I say is, 'Who's 'we?'' 'Cuz a lot of times this 'we' is coming up with plans... oh, some good plans, oh, some grand plans..."

Rev. Jackson began chuckling in the background.

"But where's this 'we' when it comes roun' to doin'? Sometimes, you know, ain't no 'we' to be found."

"Well, I know that, too," said Rev. Jackson, nodding, as his face clouded with concern.

He rose to his feet again and faced the assemblage. "But maybe... children," he said, "let's get to the heart of this matter... We have here a

serious consideration, laid before us, for us to decide on. I know for myself, goin' 'round, I sensed the seriousness, I sensed apprehension, I sensed fear, almost."

"Uh-huh, that's true," said Miss Dula, nodding.

"Because what we're speaking about here, Brother Tom, this ain't no ordinary project now, this is a complex affair."

A light-complexioned young man with dark curly hair stood up next. It was Lester Copening, one of the deacons at the Church of God. He was a married man, father of four well-behaved children, and known for his good humor. He worked in the furniture factory in Lenoir and lived in a small, tidy white house on the crest of the hill.

"Well, like the Rev says, I 'preciate all what you have done, Tom," said the young man. "And, Rev, what you was saying about fear, I think that was me."

The man's pretty, neatly dressed wife smiled in response. There was subdued laughter from the preacher and others in the room.

"But, look it, Tom," Copening went on, "I ain't scared about you. And I ain't scared about nobody right chere in this room. If you'all's the 'we,' then that's okay. But I tell you who scares me, and that's the 'we' that ain't here... They's the 'we' I'se scared about, cuz them that ain't here ain't going to be here, neifer."

"Amen, that's true," went a hearty chorus.

"Cuz this here is just a meeting, which it don't take no work to sit here talking, but this water coop, that ain't just talkin', that's some real pipe we going to be laying."

Everyone laughed.

"And I ain't no plumber, true, but I can tell you'all this, I got some real pipe in my house, and real pipe breaks, real pipe needs fixing, and you'all brothers and sisters may be willing and all, but fixing real pipes, that costs money, lots and lots of real money. That's what I keep thinking here, that's some real money I don't have."

Laughter again. "Amen! Amen!"

Tom Steward rose. "I think that's certainly a valid concern," he said. "But the cost of maintenance, to fix the pipes if needed, that's included. It's covered under the membership dues."

"Well, yes, that's true, Brother Tom," Copening replied, "and I don't mean to be contrary, now, but some of these peoples, once't they get water now, they ain't going to pay no dues, no way. And that's just the truth, so help me, God. I come up chere in this community, and I know they's some good people and they's some that, well, they's good, too, maybe, 'cept when it comes to bills."

"That is the sad truth, now," Frances Banner threw in.

"And who's going to be the police then?" asked Miss Dula. "Who's

going to go around and do the collecting?"

"One thing I know," said Copening. "It ain't going to be me."

"You do go 'round, better bring your shotgun," said Samanta.

"And that's true, too," said Rev. Patterson, who had been quiet since his initial comments. "And I am so sorry that these things are such that we must discuss them tonight, but I think we got to think and say these things, maybe, before we get too fur along."

The meeting wore on in this vein with Steward realizing by degrees that the coop idea was destined to go down to defeat without a single champion except himself. Rev. Jackson summarized the outcome when the airing of opinion came to an end.

"Well, I been listening," he said. "I been listening hard, and what I hear, I know, for a whole lot of you this is fraught with anxieties and problems. Because, Brother Tom, what you got to understand, there's a whole lot of peoples just got enough to get by, and they may want to do this, but they can't hold it up alone. They try to do that, now, they going to go down, too."

"That's the truth, Reverend," said someone. "There's a whole lot here to hold up."

"A whole lot," echoed someone else.

"Yes, children," the preacher said, "maybe too much to hold up. And this whole situation here, being right next to the city, and not having access to city water and sewer. Won't them things be coming up, or shouldn't them things be coming up? Shouldn't we be petitioning or pressing somehow for that to happen?"

No one mentioned the events that were known by all to be happening in Memphis, with King now staging marches there in behalf of the garbage workers, yet those events were understood by all as contributing to this remark.

"Little less talking, little more pressing is what we ought to be doing," said someone.

"Yes, that's the truth, too," Rev. Jackson replied.

The discussion strayed further from the water coop into other prospects of political action. There was a possibility of combining with an existing black political union in the West End, the preacher said, to press for incorporation of Dulatown into Lenoir, as well as for advancement of certain petitions put forward by the people of West End, such as for better public housing.

"In fact," said the preacher, "this topic of our water coop came up over there just this last week, in our common council of Negro churches. Rev. Patterson and I were both there. You see, if we want to go forward, we got to hang together, we got to move forward together, I do believe that's true, like Dr. King says."

Hearing this, Steward understood in a flash that the decision about the fate of the water coop had been made before the meeting began, by this council of black churches that the preacher referred to. He had not been invited to the council because he was not black, and he would, of course, be excluded from any black political union for the same reason.

All the comments about his hard work had been staged almost, he thought to himself, to lessen the hurt of having his idea rejected.

The meeting soon adjourned and all filed out talking and laughing and saying goodbyes. Steward bid them all goodbye, remarking several times that he was sure that some solution would be found to the problems that had been discussed.

The preacher was last to go. He put on his jacket slowly, watching as Steward in his formal, courteous manner, came over toward him for the customary handshake.

"Young man, you must forgive us if we threw down your idea too harshly, or seemed as if to exclude," the preacher said, taking Steward's hand firmly.

He stood stolidly, as he was inclined to do, with his feet planted widely. His gaze was direct and troubled, the whites of the eyes colored with their characteristic pinkish hue.

"No, I didn't feel that," Steward replied, though an unintentional slight difference in tone betrayed his crestfallen mood.

"You have to understand, this is a time, well, surely, you know, of great change and confrontation," the preacher continued. "All over the nation, we hear it. And for black people, especially, it is a time of hope and tribulation. Look it now, in Memphis, with all the marching, a young man slain."

"Who was slain?" asked Steward.

"A youth running alongside. A black boy. Not marching. He was looting, they say. But was it necessary to kill him?"

"I wasn't aware."

"It shows the level of flustration, with the young men not satisfied with timidity, as in the days of Maccabeus. It makes it all the more important, indeed, it is a responsibility forced upon us, to find a middle ground, somewhere between timidity and riots. That's what I understand Dr. King has been trying to do. They say that this is the first time that one of these marches, these King marches, has turned violent. It does not augur well."

"Where was the violence?"

"Not in the march itself, but all around, among the young men. Who knows, before too long, the same unrest may come here. It creates reaction on all sides. That's why I think the political action is so important, Brother Tom, that's why we must push ourselves to be

political, against our contrary inclinations sometimes."

"Yes, I can imagine it must be hard," Steward replied. "I admire you for doing what you think is right."

He watched the determined preacher trudge up the dark road and out of sight, then locked the door and sat down in the empty room by himself, unable to muster the energy to take down the folding chairs.

70. Steward learns of the assassination of civil rights leader King

Thomas Steward was still mulling over the water coop meeting and what it had meant when, several days later, on April 4, 1968, he heard that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been slain.

"In the height of his influence as a civil rights leader, although confronted with growing discord among young blacks," an announcer remarked on a radio program playing in the background as Steward stood in a gas station convenience store waiting to pay for gas.

"There's some angry people out there, I can tell you that," the white cashier offered.

The comment was such that it could have been taken to mean either that black people were angry, and deserved to be, or that white people were angry about King and had done right in killing him to shut him up.

"Yes," Steward answered simply, not wanting to ask for an explanation.

Arriving at the center, where a sewing class was scheduled, he found Delores Harper locking the padlock on the front door. An exchange of eyes communicated that both had heard the news.

"You should see in the cities," Mrs. Harper said softly, "there's some trouble there now!"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Riots and looting, people marching around and burning things down! Detroit, Chicago, you name it, it's happening, Tom. People are angry. I can even feel it here."

With a free evening suddenly in front of him, Steward got back in his white government station wagon and rode up the road past the Church of God and across over the ridge toward the hollow.

There on a back porch he found a small group of young men and boys sitting with Frank Dula, the crippled man who gave haircuts. He exchanged the usual banter with them from an open car window, not even mentioning the King murder, and then bid them goodnight.

"Where you off to now?" one of them said.

"I don't know, really, with all that's happened," Steward replied.

"Better not go through West End. They's some crazy people over there, going to be looking for white faces."

"Uh-huh, that's true," said another man as the whole group laughed softly. "You pay attention now. We don't want you back in pieces."

The remark was a joke, typical of the light-hearted warnings that this particular group of irreverent youths always extended to the young volunteer. But there was a meaning here beyond the joke, of genuine danger.

Continuing down into the hollow, Steward saw Ma Florence out

behind her small white house, picking up firewood. He pulled up, got out of the car, and, without a word, went over and started helping her.

"Child, you don't need to do that," the old woman said, looking up with an armful of wood.

"I want to do it."

"Well, okay, then. I appreciate your help."

Steward helped her bring in several loads of wood and piled them up neatly in the little back porch next to an open box of cans labeled "U.S. Government Commodity Concentrated Milk."

Later he sat in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee that the old woman had immediately prepared. A bold rat watched from a hole in the wall beside the noisy refrigerator.

"Wish I had more to give you, child," she said with a helpless expression. "I'm plumb out of food and got no way to get to town."

"If you want to go now, I can take you," he offered. "Could you really? That would help me so much!" "Sure, I'd be glad to."

"Well, I got to get ready then. I'll go just as quick as I can."

"Sure, no hurry. Can I listen to the radio?" he said, pointing to the small radio on the kitchen table.

"Well, of course, child, you just go ahead."

He turned on the radio and immediately found a news report that confirmed what Delores Harper had said. There were riots in almost all major American cities, with a general breakdown of order, widespread looting, and many buildings afire.

Rev. Ralph Abernathy, heir apparent to King's vacated position as leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was quoted as calling on blacks to remember that King had advocated non-violence. A funeral date had already been set for Friday, April 7.

Ma Florence came bustling out of the living room several minutes later, dressed in a knee-length brown overcoat with a black pillbox hat, a black leather purse, and black laced shoes.

"Ain't that something?" she said, pointing to the radio. "Folks be getting so mean. Not just white folks, black folks, too."

"Yes, it's hard to know where it will end," Steward answered.

He understood that she had meant the statement of "not just white folks" as a courtesy to him. Still, as never before in his life, he felt implicated by the color of his skin. In the supermarket in town, he was newly aware of the curious stares from other whites as he went down the aisle beside her pushing the grocery cart.

Later, back in Dulatown, she asked him to come in for a meal.

"Can cook it up real quick," she said. "Got some good stuff now."

"No, I guess not, not this evening," he replied.

The next day he came over to Dulatown again and found the

community center still locked with a sign that said it would be closed until after the King funeral. He went back home and sat in his kitchen, feeling the dullness of the little house where he lived. He had grown more and more dissatisfied with how it fell short of his earlier ambition of being in some drastic situation that seemed worthy of a VISTA.

All day long he continued in a similar doldrum, listening now and then to radio reports, which continued along in the same vein analyzing the death of King and the aftermath of riots and bitterness that had engulfed black communities throughout the country.

That evening, anxious for news, he went downtown to the library to read the Charlotte newspaper. On the front page was a photograph taken just after the killing. The photograph showed King's body sprawled out on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel at the feet of his three aides, Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, and Hosea Williams. The aides were pointing slightly upward toward the distant location where they thought the shot had come from. Several policemen and onlookers stood below in the parking lot looking in that direction.

Below the picture, a headline said: "Riots Continue Across the Nation Amidst Widespread Looting and Destruction." A photograph showed a black youth emerging from a broken storefront window carrying a TV. A building in the distance was engulfed in flames.

Looking further into the paper, on the editorial page, Steward learned that the Johnson Administration was pushing an open housing bill in honor of King. It was expected to move rapidly through both houses of Congress and be signed into law before King's funeral, which was now scheduled for April 8. On another page he came upon a political commentary and learned for the first time that Lyndon Johnson, the current president, had announced he would not seek another four years in office. The race of the Democratic party nomination was wide open, with three main contenders: Vice President Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, Senator Robert Kennedy of New York, and Senator Eugene McCarthy, also of Minnesota.

"Ironically, Humphrey, the inveterate liberal, having now taken on Johnson's mantle, has been cast as the conservative, at least with respect to the war," the article said. "He has followed Johnson's line as an advocate of caution and international commitment while his contenders press for an abrupt withdrawal. With respect to domestic issues, Humphrey remains a liberal, pressed on that side by Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan and other Republican rivals, who continue to call for an end to Johnson's legacy of social programs. Meanwhile, in the background, the youth of the nation continue to demonstrate against the war as the pincer of the draft closes in around them."

Steward continued to read and learned of other developments that he

had been unaware of, including the Tet Offensive and the effect of that enemy imitative on the draft. As he understood, the United States and its ally, South Vietnam, were now actually in danger of losing the war, despite all the statistics put forth of enemy troops killed in battle. As he understood, also, that had had an effect on the draft, with the draft boards being pressed to provide troops for battle.

"Just a year ago, young men, especially those from the middle and upper classes, could select from a range of deferment options," the article said. "Now the range of options has narrowed to military programs such as the ROTC and certain forms of voluntary service such as the Peace Corps and Vista. The immediate result is the availability of more young men for the draft. A less immediate, more subtle result is that intensification of that struggle against the draft has brought intensification of other domestic struggles, a kind of general struggle against prevailing norms, named in the now familiar term, the Establishment.

"Consider this in light of what the murder of Dr. King has done to black youth, even those more radical youths who opposed his non-violent methods. These young people, too, have become 'radicalized,' opposing the current social order with more and more intensity. Ironically, as this has occurred, among white and black youth at the same time, their paths have become more divergent with less discourse between them."

Steward left the library thinking about the "year" that the article had mentioned, the year in which societal pressure had increased to find young men for the draft.

What had happened to himself in that year, he asked. Only a year before, he had still been in college, he had just received the letter pronouncing him 1-A. He recalled the bright, sunny spring afternoon when he had crossed the Wabasha Street Bridge, looking upriver for the crew and listening to radio reports about the war and the draft resistance.

He thought to himself that once again he had found a position that was removed from the fray of the battle, a situation where he was excluded from strong action, as in the Air Force, because of not belonging to the group that he was involved with.

For the first time, since starting his Vista assignment, he felt anxious to move on to something else. Just where he could go, he didn't know. He wanted to get in on the action somehow, to take his place in the battle line,—if indeed there would be a continuing battle about the war and the political state of the nation.

[Chapter 70 notes]

71. Steward drives up to Porcupine to talk with Doug Thomasek

The next morning, still feeling restless, Thomas Steward decided to drive up to the mountains to see his fellow volunteer, Douglas Thomasek. Within a few minutes of hitting upon this idea, he had packed some items in a paper bag and was on his way down the four-lane highway that led south from the city of Lenoir through the picturesque foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

It was a beautiful spring day, with trees everywhere in bud. Water from melted snow streamed down through moist green meadows. The sky was crystal blue and etched with white swirled clouds. Domes of sunlit rock, marked with jagged shadows, rose here and there above the densely wooded mountains. The mountains stretched to the north and south in an unbroken ridge on the western horizon as far as he could see.

He felt relieved to be getting away from the world of his VISTA service and excited about the prospect of seeing someone like himself. He had come to think of Thomasek as kind of a friend though, since their trip to the ghost town, he had only talked to him briefly a couple of times at the monthly CAP central meetings.

He passed through Morganton, where he had eaten supper with the water engineer, Gerald Ghent, thinking of how much excitement he had felt then regarding the water cooperative. He recalled how Ghent had questioned his use of the word “we” and how, in answer, he had said that he regarded himself as belonging to the Dulatown community.

From Morganton, he headed east up the winding two-lane highway into the forest. Along the sunny corridor of the road were thin-stemmed sumac, aspen, and beech, already in full leaf. Isolated houses, nestled in the trees, gave way to uninhabited forest.

Looking back behind him, as he rounded a long turn, he could see the city of Morganton 15 miles or so in the distance, a mosaic of red, brown, and white buildings, with several large columns of gray smoke streaming up on one side beside a wooded hill.

Further westward from that sight, in his view, were ridges as thick with trees, he imagined, as they had been in the days of Daniel Boone. He rolled down the car window and breathed in the spring air, watching ahead for the little town of Porcupine where Thomasek lived.

Soon, through an opening in the pine trees, he saw the dozen or so clustered buildings of Porcupine below him in a spoon-shaped cutout in the hills. Continuing down the winding road into the town, he proceeded past a white-steepled church to the redbrick former school where the local CAP office was located.

The matronly secretary in the front office recognized him from the monthly CAP meetings.

"You're looking for Doug, I bet," she said. "He's in the big room, whipping up a storm."

Steward headed down a long hall, past classrooms that had been converted into various CAP functions, to the "big room," as the secretary had called it. It was apparently the former gym.

The lanky Thomasek, dressed in T-shirt and jeans, was at the far end of the room, operating a power floor polisher in a back and forth rhythmic motion.

Steward went up beside him and waved his hand, at which Thomasek smiled and stopped the noisy machine.

"Goddam Steward, what are you doing up here?"

"Just thought I'd come up and see how you're doing."

"I'm doing fine."

"What you got going here?"

"What I got going here, man, is a brand new floor. I sanded this whole goddam gym down and put down a new coating of varnish. Now I'm waxing and buffing. I'm almost done."

"Looks wonderful."

"Thank you."

"Figured maybe I should make myself useful."

"Looks like you have."

"You want to try it?"

"Sure."

Steward took hold of the wide handle of the machine and soon had it going back and forth in a sweeping motion while Thomasek stood by grinning in approval.

"It's kind of fun," said Steward.

"Lot of things are fun if you give them a chance."

Together they completed the floor and put away the tools, then, at Thomasek's suggestion, took showers in the locker room next to the gym. Steward felt like he had returned to his rowing days.

"Hey, I hate to tell you this," said Thomasek, swinging his arms happily as they strode together out of the school, "but I'm not free this evening. I've got this part-time job here in town."

He had donned a black cowboy hat with a carefully creased brim that came to a crisp point just above his right eye. He took hold of the brim of the hat, as he said this, and tipped it down a little.

"Part-time job?"

"Yea, I work downtown at the gas station. Actually, it's kind of a general store. I pump gas and work the counter."

"How come you're doing that?"

"I make a little money, I've got something to do in my spare time. And, hey, it even helps from the standpoint of being a VISTA. I talk to

people, I find out what's going on."

"You still seeing that girl?"

"Stacey? Yes. In fact, tomorrow night, I'm supposed to go down there. I try to keep it at once a week, you know. I don't want to wind up hitched."

"You think she wants to get married?"

"Yes."

"How come you don't want to get married?"

"I got spurs that jingle, jingle, jingle."

"Want to keep your freedom."

"There's plenty of goddam things I haven't seen yet. And I intend to see them, me and that little pickup and Traveler, my dog."

Steward laughed. "Maybe you could bring her with you."

"Well, just between you and me," Thomasek replied, growing more serious, "I've thought of that, too. But while I continue to think, I'm trying to keep a little distance."

"Well, I'm impressed by your ability to keep your distance," Steward remarked. "I mean, I don't have a lot of experience, you know, but anytime anything happens, I go under hook and sinker."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Thomasek. "And then you scare them off!"

"Yea, that seems to be my story."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Hey, Tommie, let me tell you, you want to get some nookie, you better learn to be cool."

They left Steward's government car in the parking lot outside the CAP office and headed over to the gas station together.

"You know," said Thomasek. "Maybe, if you stay over tonight, you can come down and have supper with me and Stacey—and Julie, her daughter."

"Sure, I'd like to do that."

"You got a deal. And, hey, tomorrow, what do you say about a hike up Table Rock?"

"Sounds great to me."

"You got a deal."

They arrived at the store and went inside. Thomasek with a hearty greeting took over the cash register from the lady whose shift was ending. He went and got Steward and himself hot dogs from a steaming pot behind the counter, and pushed over a couple of folding chairs from the corner. Then he went over to a cooler and came back with two cokes.

"Don't worry about this stuff," Thomasek said. "I'll pay for it later."

For a while they talked about a trip Thomasek had made back home to Maryland, a conversation that took part in segments interrupted whenever a vehicle pulled up at the pump outside. Thomasek, now wearing a baseball cap with the service station logo, gave every customer

an elaborate full service routine including washing the front and rear windows, checking under the hood, and checking tire pressure if the tires looked low.

Inside the store, he was just as obliging, helping people to find things and exchanging small talk in his cheerful voice. The store had everything from hardware to groceries to farm supplies like seed, plus nickel and dime items like coffee cups, framed pictures, artificial flowers, and cosmetics.

After several changes in topic, Steward moved the conversation in the direction of Dulatown and the water coop, which he was anxious to talk about. He recounted the events leading up the final meeting where the idea had been rejected.

"Left you flat in the lurch, huh?" said Thomasek.

"Yes, I guess you could say."

"Well, they made a decision, that's their right."

"Yes, I agree."

That was apparently all Thomasek had to say about it, despite how strongly he had urged Steward to promote the coop. Steward was left in silence, pondering his own thoughts.

"I figure, I did what I could to the best of my ability," Steward continued, uninvited. 'But I was wrong about being part of the community. I thought I was, but I realize now, I've been realizing, I can never be that, Doug. It's a racial thing. I hate to say it, but it just is."

In response, Thomasek merely nodded.

"They gave me this big applause, for the work I did," said Steward, "but the truth of it is, I was not really part of the process or part of the decision, and I never will be, in Dulatown."

"Well, maybe you're right, Tom," Thomasek said, going to get the broom to sweep around the counter, "you can't be part of a political process there, among blacks. By the very definition, you can't do that. But there's kids there, all kinds of kids, high school dropouts, adults who can't read. There's a lot of things you can do."

"Yes, I know that."

"And there must be physical work to do, just fixing up the place, fixing up the playground."

"Yes, there is."

"Nothing wrong with that."

"Yes, I know that."

"You know what, though. Stewie? There's this big thing going on, this much bigger thing, with people like you and me, us dumb white guys, coming out of college, trying to get out of the draft.—That wasn't the case with me, truth be told, high arches, like I told you. But the general picture, you know.—We came out here, like you, all full of

spunk and vinegar, to get things going, and maybe you didn't really get going what you wanted to get going, but you got something going, didn't you? You got people thinking and, lo and behold, they went out and did it themselves."

"Well, I guess that's true. To some extent, at least."

It was the most complete statement of sociological speculation Steward had heard come forth from the self-styled cowboy's mouth. Steward was surprised by it and somewhat perturbed by how Thomasek so glibly dismissed the original notion he had preached about a few months before, that Steward should take matters into his own hands. Apparently Thomasek just threw these ideas off without the painful analysis Steward subjected them to.

Next day, on their way to Table Rock, the two fellow volunteers stopped in a small town store similar to the one that Thomasek worked at, but with a television set up on a shelf in the corner. For a few minutes there, while waiting for the restroom, Steward watched the live coverage of the King funeral march in Atlanta.

Several black leaders, including Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson, dressed in coveralls like sharecroppers, followed a mule-drawn wagon where the flower-strewn coffin was laid. Behind them came thousands of silent mourners, walking arm in arm, about 20 abreast, in a wide, disciplined formation like an army.

A close-up shot of the mourners showed a scattering of white faces set just as grimly as the black faces around them. Among them, Steward saw the faces of the three senators who were vying for the Democratic Party presidential nomination: Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy, both of Minnesota, and Robert Kennedy of Massachusetts.

Later, standing on Table Rock in bright sunlight, looking off to the forested peaks and valleys all around, Steward recalled the image of the mule-drawn wagon and the black leaders in coveralls, impressed by the solidarity shown with the poorest of black people.

He recalled, also, the white faces among the black. He thought to himself that there really was occasion still for a joining in spirit of white and black people. He was part of that, he thought, as a result of his service in Dulatown, just as, by the same token, he was part of the solidarity between privileged and deprived people.

He felt envious almost of the great cause that black people had to bring them together. There was no comparable cause among his own race and age group, he thought, except for opposition to the war. Maybe opposition to the war was indeed the "cause" of his own generation, he concluded in his own mind.

Leaving Table Rock, he and Thomasek drove to a little town called Haskellford where Thomasek's girlfriend lived in a trailer just down the

block from the school that her three-year-old daughter attended.

She was a petite, pretty brunette with sparkling blue eyes. She welcomed Thomasek into her cheerful, colorful home as if he belonged there. Little Julie, who had dark brown curly hair like her mother, welcomed him, also, holding his hand as he walked into the room.

"You bring me something?" she said.

He had remembered to get her something at the store, a little pink plastic bear with moveable legs. For the woman that he didn't want to get too attached to, he had brought a red rose.

Steward got a friendly reception, also, owing to his standing as Thomasek's friend. He kept up a lively conversation with the girl as he drew in the lovely world of mother and child that always had such an effect on his own inner longings.

Later, alone, he drove down from the mountains through the night-shrouded woods, thinking of all that had transpired. He felt at peace with his new expectations in Dulatown. He could tutor children, coach sports, do physical chores. There was no need for grandness. He no longer felt anxious to leave. Still he felt so excited for the future, also, for whatever it would bring in further involvement in the great changes that were happening all around him.

His excitement lingered for a long wind of the dark road, then a solitary house with a light in one window set him in a lonely mood. He found himself thinking about the dark-haired, pretty mother and how she and her daughter had welcomed Thomasek into their house. He thought to himself that he wanted so much to be worthy of such a welcome himself. Maybe the future would hold that, too, sometime.

[Chapter 71 notes]

72. Morris accepts Ellen in his life as world unrest continues

First Lieutenant James Morris of the United States Air Force no longer returned to a plain room in the officers' barracks each day after training. Instead he got into his little red Pinto and drove with windows open through the balmy Las Vegas desert air to a two-story white house bordered by acacia trees with yellow blossoms.

Opening one of two doors on the front porch there, at the white house, he climbed a straight stairway with no landing to a door with a square window veiled with a lace curtain. Unlocking this second door, he found waiting the chestnut-haired, lovely woman that he felt had no equal in feminine beauty and charm.

Ellen Kass always had a cheerful greeting for him as she came across the room, dressed in one of her stylish outfits. "Got home early!" she would say, or, "I was starting to get worried, waiting!" or, "Hi, Captain, think I could enlist you in a round of gymnastics?"

She kept him busy with pleasant evening activities, when he had time. There were shows on the Strip she had heard about, restaurants to sample, or simply a walk in a park or downtown. Many of the activities were with other people. She had demonstrated her ease in making friends. Men and women alike were drawn to her beauty, her social grace, and her love of a good time.

The nights were wonderful, also, not just in the obvious way of ready access to sex, but also in the unspeakable sweetness of intimacy and physical closeness.

She liked to sleep nestled against him, in front of him within his arms with her buttocks pressed against his groin, or beside or on top of him with her face pressed against him.

Waking sometimes, he turned to see the angelic, little girl's face, with the button nose like a bunny, directly in front of his eyes, the moist lips expelling breath that mingled with his own.

The whole world was distant then. He felt no anxiety regarding his upcoming combat service. He was content to let fate take that wherever it would. He realized, also, that much as she wanted him never to leave her, still part of his attraction for her was in his readiness to go.

His life with her was complete in itself, he thought, for the time being. Yet he was part of this other world of the Air Force. So it would be for a while, or, maybe, he thought sometimes, for his whole life. He would have to find the right balance.

He realized that, due to her presence, his way of relating to his pilot friends had changed. He was no longer as "buddy, buddy" with them as he had been before moving in with Ellie. Still, when he did see them, he sensed that he had a new stature. He was admired, maybe even envied, because of her, and welcomed with extra warmth when he was with her

because of how universally she was appreciated and liked.

"Bring the little lady with you," Marty Sardo would always say when getting together a group for a run at the clubs. That was the tone she was always referred to in, as that befitting a lady.

She had gained herself some extra points among the pilots, also, by quickly establishing a reputation as a ready matchmaker with pretty female friends. Even when she didn't have an available friend, exactly, she could set up an evening date at a moment's notice. Once, she had brought along someone she had met at the supermarket.

Morris soon projected in his own mind what a life with Ellen Kass would be like. So long as he held her admiration and affection, he would live in the glow of her happiness and beauty. By the same token, if that admiration and affection waned... Well, that was something to think about, also. He knew she would have no problem finding herself another man.

"You know, Ellie, sometimes I think you could be a hard package to handle," he said to her one evening in a joking tone, as they walked along a favorite path that led up the side of Spring Mountain in South Las Vegas to a promontory on a north slope overlooking the Strip.

She laughed heartily in response, throwing back her pretty head.

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, for one thing you get everyone's eye."

She came closer to him and whispered. "Yes, but yours are the only eyes that see."

He laughed. "At least, for the time being."

"No, Jimmy," she replied firmly, "for as long as you want."

"You're serious, aren't you?" he said.

"As serious as I'll ever be."

They sat together at the overlook with night descending on the neon lights below them. Beyond the lights, the desert stretched northward in a pink and brown haze broken here and there by the horizontal rays of the setting sun.

"You don't think I could be faithful, do you?" she said, giving him a long hard look that changed into a quizzical smile.

"Well, yes, I do, I suppose," he replied, returning the smile, "if you want to."

"Well, I know how you could find out for sure."

"How's that?"

"Give me a try."

He let the matter rest at that point, but this further interchange between them returned to his thoughts several times in the ensuing weeks. Had she meant she wanted him to ask her to get married? He didn't think so because she often expressed a contempt of people who

settled too quickly into a safe married life. But how else could he "give her a try?" He was scheduled to depart on July 1 for the Takhli Royal Air Force Base in Thailand. That was less than two months away.

Training was winding down, with the final two-week section due to start the following week, on May 12. Following that, there would be three weeks of survival training, ending on June 14. That coincided nicely with the scheduled wedding, on June 21, of Mary Kass and Matthew Brandt. He and Ellen would drive up to Minnesota for that, with Ellie slated to be the maid of honor.

After the wedding there would be just ten days before his scheduled departure for Thailand on July 1. He knew that this time, when he and Ellen said goodbye, there would be more expectations on both sides. He thought a lot about that as he went back and forth between the house and the base.

Meanwhile, it seemed to him sometimes that the whole country, and indeed the whole world, was going crazy with the anti-war fervor gaining ever increasing intensity.

To begin with, following President Lyndon Johnson's self-removal from the presidential primaries, the debate over the war had become more strident, with the heir apparent, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, trailing his two foes, Senators Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy. In Oregon and California, where races were presently going on, armies of young people had joined in with the two peace candidates, as in New Hampshire.

Elsewhere, other young people had taken to more radical actions against not just the war but the whole mainstream of American society. In New York City, just the previous week, hundreds of students had occupied buildings at Columbia University. After a week of occupation, they had been forcefully evicted by the city police in what amounted to almost a military battle.

The students had staged the demonstration, Morris had read, to protest the planned construction of a university gymnasium in Morningside Park in Harlem against the wishes of the Harlem community. They were also opposed to the presence on campus of a Department of Defense research agency called the Institute for Defense Analyses.

"The students' belief is that they are essentially revolutionaries, though they do not support the big name 'ism's' of the past like Marxism and Socialism," Morris had read.

In one newspaper Morris had also come upon excerpts from an open letter to the Columbia University president from Mark Ruud, one of the leaders of a group, the Students for a Democratic Society, that had recently gained a great deal of notice.

"You may want to know what is wrong with this society, since you live in a very tight, self-created dream world," Ruud had written. "We can point to the war in Vietnam as an example of the unimaginable wars of aggression you are prepared to fight... We can point to your using us as cannon fodder to fight your war.

"We can point out your mansion window to the ghetto below you've helped to create through your racist expansionist policies, through your unfair labor policies, through your city government and police...

"We can point in short to our meaningless studies, our identity crises, and our revulsion with being cogs in your corporate machines as a reaction to a basically sick society."

So it continued, with every social act and every lofty ideal thrown together into a muddle, Morris thought, until it was impossible to think through any one thing without bumping into all kinds of unexpected associations and accusations.

Every day, it seemed, more and more people were getting drawn into the act, as if unable to hold themselves back from the attractive forces of negativism and anarchy. On campuses everywhere students were staging demonstrations. Catholic priests were breaking into draft board offices and throwing blood on files.

He had watched a television special the previous Saturday evening. "Why We Won't Go." Much of the same thing. Students demonstrating and marching, gathering in groups around outside fires, lighting memorial candles. Ten of thousands had gone to Canada to escape the draft, setting up exile communities in cities like Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal.

There in Montreal and overseas, other movements like "Quebec Libre" had somehow also gotten mixed into the frenzy.

In France, strangest event of all, thousands of students had barricaded themselves in the streets of Paris, fighting against battalions of police in what amounted to an unreal war, overturning and burning cars, rolling burning cars downhill into police formations, and, like soldiers, suffering casualties that brought ambulances into the midst of the melee to carry away the wounded.

"Countless wounded students lay crying for help behind burning barricades," Morris had read, "with the Red Cross corpsmen unable to get there. The barricades were, in some places, ten feet high, constructed of overturned cars, felled trees, crate boxes, and garbage cans. Some paved streets in the Latin Quarter were entirely dug up to obtain cobblestones for ammunition."

And all this for what? "To press their demands," one article said, "for an end to certain academic practices like 'sudden death exams' and 'complete lack of contact between students and faculty'."

Morris doubted that. He was starting to suspect that the war was somehow the secret engine of all this turmoil, even in far-off France, with everyone on the entire globe lining up in camps, either for or against American involvement.

[Chapter 72 notes]

73. Morris follows the war while growing ever fonder of Ellen

As for the war itself, James Morris, since the Tet Offensive, had followed its progress on almost a daily basis, trying to get a sense of how various changes in status would affect his duties as a combat pilot when he went overseas.

The most startling change had occurred on March 31, 1968. On that day, in the same speech in which he had announced his intention to not seek renomination, President Johnson had also announced that U.S. forces would suspend bombing operations north of the 20th Parallel. The most populous areas of North Vietnam, including Hanoi and Haiphong, were outside the area of bombing activity.

Due to this change in operations, Thunderchief flights leaving from Thailand no longer followed the traditional Rolling Thunder route over "Thud Ridge" to industrial and transportation targets in the Red River Valley north of Hanoi. The Rolling Thunder campaign was now limited to air-to-ground support and interdiction in the North Vietnam panhandle, mostly along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Johnson had stated in the same speech that he intended restriction of bombing as a peace gesture. He had invited the North Vietnamese to begin negotiations for an end to the war.

This olive branch had had its desired effect in the start of peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam. Ironically, for Morris and his fellow trainees, the first day of talks occurred in Paris on May 12, the first day of their final two-week section of training.

The morning newspaper showed the U.S. representative, W. Averall Harriman, with his back to the camera, shaking hands with the broadly smiling representative of North Vietnam, Xuan Thuy.

Morris wondered, as he headed to class, whether the long-fought war was really coming to an end. Various newspaper articles that he had read suggested that the peace talks would go on for a long time. Some war analysts suspected that the North Vietnamese were merely using the talks to lull the U.S. into a waiting posture.

If that was the case, the North Vietnamese were going about it in a strange way, Morris thought. They had stepped up mortar and rocket attacks against allied bases, especially in the panhandle area, just below the Demilitarized Zone. Also, they had launched an offensive against the southern capital, Saigon. The attack, still in progress, had been contained with the enemy losing ground.

Whatever might be the outcome in these small skirmishes, one thing was clear, the air war had been demoted, Morris observed to himself. He would be over there fighting in a hamstringed, less glorious phase of whatever was left of it.

He said nothing of his thoughts about this to his fellow trainees. They were also keeping their thoughts private, judging by their complete lack of comments about the war. Still their thoughts were manifest in an obvious dampening of spirits. The gusto that might have been expected in the final days of training, after eight intense months, was just not there.

On Friday afternoon in the stag bar, Marty Sardo finally got around to saying what was on everyone's mind.

"Things are cooking down just when we're cooking up," he remarked in a joking tone after his third martini. "Maybe, by the time we get over there, there won't be anything left to shoot at."

The war situation had come up in conversation due to the presence of an honored guest, Col. Thomas Byers, who wore a hundred missions patch earned at Takhli in 1966. Byers, a weather-worn, plain-talking man, 45 years of age, was a generation older than the other men at his table.

"I wouldn't say 'cooking down' exactly," Byers replied. "To the opposite, you've got the NVs bringing down supplies heavier than ever, to take advantage of the restrictions. I've heard as many as 20,000 troops came down in just the past two months. April was especially bad."

All within earshot paid attention when this colonel spoke. He was regarded as being in the inner circle due to rank and age. He had served as a squadron commander at Takhli (as a Lt. Col.), and was headed for war school. Chances were good that after that he would be in line to replace the eagle on his cap with a star.

"Sharp said something to that effect," "Bang" Bork commented. "I heard he's been asking LBJ to lift the restrictions."

Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, to whom Bork referred, was commander-in- chief of the Pacific forces. In that capacity, he had responsibility for the air war against North Vietnam.

"Yes, and not just him, essentially you've got all the big brass, in a single chorus, saying the same thing," Byers answered. "And that's, one, this buildup has to be stopped, and, two, from the looks of it the NVs are beefing up for another Tet. Or maybe it's already begun with all the fighting that's going on."

"The peace talks are not going to make a big difference, as far as I see it," said Bork, echoing the same suspicion that Morris had read about in the press. "To me, that's just a stalling tactic. Assuming we just don't out and out quit, we're looking at the long haul."

"Yes, I think that's really true," the colonel replied, aware that he was talking to a group of young pilots eager to be tested. "And the other thing you have to keep in mind, this is a suspension, a conditional suspension in the full-scale air war, contingent on real progress in the talks. If the talks prove to be just a stalling tactic, you may see a return to full-scale

bombing, at least for the duration of the current Administration in D.C."

That remark brought a palpable, collective sense of relief to everyone in earshot.

"I'll drink to that!" Harvey Growe called out.

All the glasses were raised in response to that. Someone yelled, "Let's at 'em!"

"At the very least," the colonel declared, "you'll see an increase in sorties over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I can assure you, boys, there'll be enough activity to keep you busy for a hundred missions."

He paused and took a sip of his drink.

"Another part of this, and don't think it wasn't thought out," he continued, "it's rainy season over there. This time of year you have a lot of flights cancelled due to bad weather. We're not losing a lot, tactically, by suspending the bombing now."

There was a general silence, with all eyes remaining on the guest colonel, as the junior officers took this into consideration.

"Something else, and you don't get this over here, with the liberal press, is the NVs are desperate after Tet. What you get over here, and it alarms me when I read it, is that Tet was somehow a big American defeat. Well, that's not the way it looks from over there, let me tell you. Tet was a disaster from their standpoint. They made a big show of it, but ended up with practically zero gains. They lost a lot of their best officers in reckless attacks."

"Is that the case?" asked someone.

"Oh, yes. And not only that, they didn't get what they expected out of South Vietnam. They expected the South Vietnamese to rise up in revolt and join in with them. Well, that didn't happen, obviously, and the South Vietnamese army, the ARVN, as we like to call them, they performed a lot better than anyone expected. They showed they can take over the war, if we give them the chance."

Again, there was general silence as this sunk in. No one asked the further, obvious question: how the North Vietnamese could possibly have staged such a wide scale operation from the debilitated state to which Rolling Thunder had supposedly reduced them.

As Morris walked out of the stag bar, mulling all this over, Maj. Tom Pitt, the training officer who had helped him with his problems in aerial refueling, came up beside him. Pitt had also been in the bar, sitting by himself on a stool.

The balding, often harried-looking major had a personal interest in the air war, also, due to his surprise decision to go for a second tour of combat duty. He and Morris had become more friendly in the days since that had been learned owing to his being assigned to the same base, Takhli, and same squadron, the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing, that Morris,

Sardo, and Bork were assigned to. Growe, the other of Morris's buddies, would be staying at Nellis for five months of Weasel training.

Why Pitt had volunteered for an extraordinary second tour, no one knew for sure, though it was generally known that he was somewhat lost living the bachelor life in the states after serving overseas. He didn't mix well with the other pilots, many of whom were younger, and he was awkward with women. His baldness and frazzled demeanor didn't serve him well with the opposite sex. Ellie had set him up with a couple of dates that hadn't gone well.

"Well, Jim, what did you make of the colonel's comments?" Pitt asked, eyeing Morris keenly.

"I'd like to believe them," Morris replied. "I'd like to believe we still want to win. I want to do this war right, sir. I want to do it so much I can taste it."

"I know you do," responded Pitt with a quick, intense glance. "To give you my take on it, this war we're going over to fight in, it may seem like everything now, but it's just a little piece of the whole battle. The real battle, the big battle, is for the whole world. And South Vietnam is not just an isolated, pro-Western country, it's the keystone to that whole corner of Southeast Asia. That's why it's so important to keep our current position as we go into these talks. If we can keep the position we've got now, we'll wind up with a peace that keeps the free South in existence, at least. It will never be a pure democracy, maybe, but if they can learn to fight for themselves, maybe they can learn democracy, too."

"Well, I appreciate that sentiment," said Morris. "I'm looking forward to our tour together."

"So am I," said Pitt, with another quick, intense look, extending his hand.

Morris shook the major's hand firmly and watched him go off across the parking lot by himself with his head bowed. Some pilots standing by a car said nothing to him as he passed.

Coming home, he found Ellie doing her stretching exercises in the Mexican-style, adobe-walled backyard behind their duplex. She was, as usual, a visual delight; she seemed to have no bad moments in physical appearance.

She was dressed in a neatly pressed white T-shirt and pink running shorts, with one slender leg bent back in a runner's stretch, the other extended straight forward, and her forehead nearly touching her thigh. She looked up joyfully when she heard his footsteps, throwing her hair back in the glittering sunlight with a graceful, upward motion of her pretty head.

"Home early!" she chimed. "I know a heartsick girl who's hoping for a date!"

"Yes? Who's that?" he said, meeting her green eyes. They were shy, almost, in returning his direct glance, the pupils widening.

"This poor one here! She's crazy about you!"

"What did you have in mind?"

"Little restaurant I heard about. Out by some kind of pass into the mountains. Cheri at work gave me directions. She's going to be there with her boyfriend and this other girl from work. Thought we might meet her."

"Well, if you're saying I get to go with you, you got a deal, kid," Morris replied.

Life together on a day to day basis, despite the occasional mundane details of laundry, bills, and housecleaning, had done nothing to dampen the ardor of their romance. They had never had an out and out fight. Ellie got huffy once in a while, when Morris seemed to take her for granted, but for both of them the intensity of making up more than compensated for any momentary discord.

The outing was as pleasant as the many others that Ellen so easily arranged. A scenic ride up a rugged canyon led to a cliffside restaurant where her friends and their dates were waiting on an outdoor deck. With his lovely darling beside him, spicing the conversation with humor and laughter, Morris had merely to eat and drink and throw off an occasional remark. Then a romantic ride back down the dark canyon led through the moonlit night to a passionate finale.

Only the next morning over coffee, with Ellie still sleeping, did the world of the war and the craziness of half-baked revolutions intrude on his thoughts again.

Picking up the newspaper then, he learned that the student radicals at Columbia had occupied another building. In far-off France, the strike begun by students had spread to the unions. "Red flags were hoisted over the large chemical company, Rhone Poulenc, in Lyon. Berliet, France's big truck builder, and Rhodiaceta, a large synthetic textiles manufacturer, both in Lyon, were also occupied."

Meanwhile, skirmishes continued in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. An article noted that the two weeks ending May 11, with a total of 1100 Americans killed in action, had been the costliest two weeks of the war. "Enemy forces, in what amounted to a small scale replay of Tet, continued to stage mortar and rocket attack on key bases."

Only mention of the air war was that a MIG-17 had been destroyed on the ground in an air base at Vinh. The plane, under camouflage, had been discovered when a bomb exploding nearby blew off part of its cover. The American pilot who had discovered the plane had then destroyed it.

"Observers here were puzzled by the disclosure," the article said.

“The military has consistently maintained that the Vinh airfield was not operational for jets because of its short runway and because it has been heavily bombed almost daily for the past two months.”

[Chapter 73 notes]

74. Morris, in isolation training, hears about the "inner home" concept

During his last three days of F-105 combat training, James Morris had occasion to reflect on how the great change that was about to occur in his life,—going overseas to fight in a war,—would affect the most important person in his life, Ellen Kass.

These last three days, devoted to night flying, situated him in the sky in the middle of the night above the city where he knew Ellie was at the same moment sleeping.

From his plane, as he descended for a landing, Las Vegas appeared as a constellation of white and amber lights scored through its center by a string of beadlike neon signs. Beyond the last far-flung white and amber lights, the dark desert spread to the curved horizon. There the land was almost black in color, the sky a deep indigo blue. Distant islands of light shimmered in the darkness, cities with names he didn't know.

The world seemed so vast and alien from this perspective. Ellen was his point of reference. She was constantly in the back of his mind. Words she had said, images of her pretty face when she smiled or laughed, images of her graceful movement when she walked or ran, the remembered feeling of her body when she made love, rose from memory to conscious thought in the midst of his surface actions.

He wondered how she would fare without him. She was independent, obviously, and certainly would have no problem keeping herself supplied with friends. But, also, she pined for him when he was absent. She seemed dependent on him, ultimately, for her joyful mood. He knew that she would miss him greatly. He was afraid that her enthusiasm would wane, after a while, living in a strange city by herself, with him and her family so distant.

She was determined to stay in Las Vegas. Her parents had not looked kindly on her living arrangements with Morris. She was not willing to go back to them to resume a life as a child.

"What will you do when I'm gone?" he asked her on the last morning of training when he found her awake, waiting for him, when he got home from his last night flight.

She sat on his lap and placed her arms around his neck, peering at him with her lovely green eyes.

"I'll work my job. I'll keep in shape," she answered cheerfully. "I'll visit with my friends. And, most of all, I'll wait for you to come back."

"What if I don't come back?" he said.

He knew that she knew what he meant by that, that he meant due to being killed not to lack of interest.

"I know you'll come back," she replied simply. "And I'll be right here when you do."

There was no use in discussing it further. He would go. She would stay. They would remain committed in feelings; presumably, with no more formal commitment. It had all been worked out in the course of their four months together—in pieces, without the whole arrangement ever being discussed in any thorough manner.

Determined to make the most of their last weekend together before Morris's departure for survival training, they drove to Mt. Whitney in California the next day and hiked the scenic trail above Kings Canyon. It was a romantic trip such as their previous trips together, but weighted down on the long drive back with the prospect of another goodbye.

The trip to survival camp would take Morris only 400 miles away to Stead Air Force Base near Reno, still it would be their longest separation since the day when Ellie had called Morris to inform him that she had returned to Las Vegas.

"You take care of yourself now," she said the next day as she kissed him farewell. "I don't want you to get eaten by some ol' mean bear."

Morris laughed. "I don't think they have bears up there, Ellie. It's the high desert."

"Or lizard either," said Ellie. "You run up against some big ol' lizard, you tell him you belong to me."

Morris felt a pang of emotion when he looked into Ellen's tearful eyes, but soon he was surrounded again by the virile world that he had lived in before meeting her.

Hours later, as he sat with his buddies in the belly of a K-135 as it droned to Stead, he realized how much he needed to get away from her feminine influence and sort out his thoughts.

"She'll have a rough time of it, maybe," he said to himself. "I'll make it up to her when I get back."

Next morning Morris and his fellow trainees, a group of about 65, gathered in a classroom to hear a guest speaker, Maj. Dugald McDonnel, give introductory remarks.

MacDonnel, an F-4 Phantom pilot, had evaded enemy troops for five days after ejecting from his plane over southern Laos. He had then been picked up by a search and rescue team that had flown in close to a tree he had climbed to get a sense of the terrain.

"Survival is partially a matter of skills," he said, "and we intend to teach you some of the required skills here, but I will tell you this once, and remember it well, gentlemen, survival is first and foremost a matter of will.

"One thing I am going to emphasize, gentlemen, is this. To endure just about any major hardship in captivity, you will need to have things you believe in that you can hold up against the hardship, that you can return to in your mind. These things that you can return to in your mind

should be carefully chosen to be of the best material, so to speak, and carefully put together as in a well-constructed house. The name of this that I want you to adopt and think about is 'inner home.'

"During this experience, whenever you feel stress, I want you to think about your inner home and what you can build it from. I want you to start to lay the foundation. I want you to build up your inner home as far as you can."

This same major also provided some statistics on the odds of being downed. From March 2, 1965, he said, when the first Rolling Thunder sortie had flown, to March 31, 1968, when Johnson had restricted the campaign, over 900 American planes had been downed, over 700 men had been killed or were missing in action. 1966 had been the worst year, with 111 planes downed. 87 planes had been downed in the previous year, 1967.

"For a while, in 1966, the odds of getting hit, before completing a hundred missions, were about fifty percent," Maj. McDonnel said. "The odds have improved since then—but, gentlemen, consider this, if you're the one that goes down, your personal chances have suddenly increased to 100 percent.

"Then consider, gentlemen, what will happen if you don't make an immediate connection and you wind up trying to evade the enemy alone on the ground. The odds are fairly good that you will have been injured in ejecting or coming down. If that's the case, you'll have to contend with not just survival but pain. Again, what this requires most of all is mental preparedness, mental firmness."

The major went from that to the sobering details of what it would be like to be captured. "Most of you already know what to expect," he said. "You can expect they're going to try to break you. You can expect you're going to be humiliated and tortured."

Few in the room needed to hear more about that. Stories had come back of pilots paraded through Hanoi before crowds that spat on them and jeered them. The trainees had already heard, at Nellis, of common torture methods such as applying electrodes to genitals and pulling the arms together behind the back until in some cases the collarbone was broken.

After completing the classroom portion of the training, in the week that followed, Morris and his fellow trainees headed out for the first of two first experiences. It consisted of being dropped individually into a desert area and trying to evade "enemy" forces.

For an entire day, he avoided being caught by moving carefully on his stomach in the shadows of huge cliffside rocks. Near sundown he was discovered by troops who did a good acting job of speaking in a foreign language and treating him rudely.

Within an hour, after a jolting ride through the desert in a hot, windowless van, he found himself in a dark enclosure that was a cave on three sides with a wooden wall and door on the fourth side.

Long dark hours of waiting followed. After sleeping for he knew not how long, he awoke not knowing whether it was day or night. He started to panic, doubting his ability to keep calm. Then, recalling Maj. McDonnel's comment about will, he turned to mind control and self-examination, going one by one through various aspects of his life.

Morris had dismissed the idea of the "inner home," on hearing of it a few days before, as a crutch of weak people that he would never need to resort to himself. But, under the stress of the darkness and isolation, he began to cast about for what he would put in his own inner home, if he did construct one. Surely his darling Ellen would be at the center of it. His mother would be there and the house on the bluffs in St. Paul. The scene from the bluff would be there, with the High Bridge and the power plant and the cathedral and state capitol on the other side of the river. The boat club and race course and his rowing team mates would be there. And, of course, the hero father he had never seen would be there, Morris thought, and the heritage that he had through his father of the Oregon Trail as he had heard about it as a boy and as he had seen it with Ellen at Scott's Bluff.

Having determined this, Morris went directly to the center of his inner home to try to connect somehow with his wife. For a moment he saw her clearly in his mind, sitting beside him at the cliffside restaurant where they had gone together several weeks before. The image was so vivid that he felt a deep desire to reach out and touch her. In just a week, he thought, he would be able to do that again, but then, after a reunion of less than two weeks' duration, he would not see her again for a period of at least a half year.

Morris then methodically evoked the other components of his inner home: his mother, the High Bridge, the river, the boat club, his rowing team mates, his father, the Oregon Trail.

After two days in captivity, his first field experience ended with a mock interrogation and a bizarre, sudden conversion from the mock camp to a waiting van where an instructor informed him that his mock captivity was over.

The second field experience, in wilderness survival, began two days later. It was more pleasant, with campfires under starry skies, but he yearned for Ellie throughout and was glad when the training was over.

By order no girlfriend or wives were permitted at the ramp when the trainees arrived back from their training. She was waiting in the parking lot outside, dressed in a black silk pants suit with a white blouse. She greeted him with a wide smile and an emotional hug.

As usual, she looked stunning. In physical appearance she never let him down. But he learned on the drive back to their apartment that she had not spent his time away sitting home alone thinking about him.

She had had an active three weeks hiking and playing tennis with her friends and going out to restaurants as the odd girl out with other couples. She had even gone up to the cliffside restaurant in the canyon where he and she had had such a romantic evening.

"I missed you so much that night!" she exclaimed in her cheerful voice. "I just had to sit by my lonesome there when Cheri and Dave were dancing!"

He listened to that, wanting to believe that she had missed him as much as he had missed her. But the conclusion was obvious. The missing on his side had been intensified by forced time alone without diversion while on her side there had been plenty of opportunities to distract herself from her feelings.

He told himself he didn't care, she had a right to her freedom, he didn't expect her to sit home alone, and so on. Hadn't she warned him long before that she could and would be faithful but that she had never said she wouldn't have fun?

Those were her exact words, as he recalled them, "I never said I wouldn't have fun!"

He thought about this considerably his first night home, after she fell asleep contentedly after making love. It began to eat on him despite her obvious joy in having him back. He had misgauged her ability to keep up her spirits without him, he said to himself. She didn't need him to be happy. She didn't need him to have fun. It was just her nature to be happy and have fun. What did he want her to be, anyhow, a miserable wreck waiting with rings under her eyes in a rumpled bathrobe?

He was surprised and disturbed by his feelings. He hadn't realized that he was so vulnerable, that he could be so upset. What was going on anyhow? Was he jealous? Jealous of what? There wasn't even another man in sight, at least for the time being.

He got a bottle of whisky from the kitchen, poured himself a strong drink, and drank it fast. Maybe he had gotten himself into a psychological mess, he thought. Why had he allowed himself to become so entangled before going overseas? He ought to break up with her somehow before he went over, give her her freedom and free himself from the burden of worrying about who was hustling her at home.

Even as he said the words in his own mind, though, he knew in his heart that the day had long passed when he could simply say goodbye.

"I'm in love with her. That's what it is," he said out loud as he poured himself another drink.

[Chapter 74 notes]

75. Steward, O'Rourke, and Morris re-unite for Matt and Mary's wedding

The wedding of Matthew Brandt and Mary Kass on Saturday, June 21, 1968, brought some key members of the old St. Thomas rowing crew together again, including Jim Morris, Tom Steward, and Bill O'Rourke,—plus, of course, Brandt himself.

Standing together in black tuxedos with red cordovans, the former team-mates looked much the same as they might have looked at a similar occasion the year before, except for length of hair. Morris's hair was still clipped short, in the old crew style, but Brandt, Steward, and O'Rourke all had hair that covered their ears.

All of the young men, by this time, recognized length of hair as indicating not only a difference in style but also a difference in philosophy. Long hair had come to symbolize alienation from the status quo-- generally speaking, the longer the hair, the greater the alienation.

Morris treated the whole matter as a joke.

"Looks like I'm odd man out on the Beatles," he said, referring to the popular rock band that was generally regarded as having started the long-haired fashion among the disenchanted.

"That's okay," Bill O'Rourke replied. "You can be the manager."

"Thanks a lot."

The scene of the wedding was St. Luke's Catholic Church, where the Kass girls had both gone to grade school. Father Timothy Wheeler, who had known them both from baptism to young adulthood was in a worse state than the groom, informing everyone several times of the choreographic details of arranging themselves in the sanctuary and presenting the ring.

Upstairs in the vestibule, Mary Kass, dressed in her well-deserved white gown, stood with her father, Edward Kass, waiting for the call to come forward to the altar. Her hair was arranged in an elaborate French braid beneath her white veil. It was the same hair-do that her mother, also a brunette, had worn years before at her own wedding.

That similarity was not lost on her father, who was greatly touched emotionally by the occasion and by having both of this daughters back home again temporarily. He was happy for Mary, whom he had always regarded as stable and sensible, and concerned about Ellen, whom he knew was volatile and too prone to take off after every passing fancy.

Was Morris that? He hoped not, for her sake. He had observed Morris from a distance, being polite but without any personal warmth. Morris, he thought, was a decent young man who treated his daughter with respect. He just wished things were on a basis that afforded Ellie more protection from being left adrift by herself.

Edward Kass also appreciated and respected Morris's willingness to

fight for his country. He himself had served in the 101st Airborne during the Second World War. There was something of that experience still left in his face and eyes, which showed a resolute determination, much like that that showed in the eyes of his daughter, Mary.

"How are you doing there, honey?" he said to her.

"Good as could be expected. I just hope he doesn't change his mind at the altar," Mary replied.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. Matthew doesn't have that in him," he said. "When he sets his mind to something, he does it with all his strength."

He said this not merely to reassure his daughter, Mary, but out of genuine regard for his son-in-law-to-be. He had observed Matthew, also, and had come to the conclusion that she had shown good judgment in picking him.

Throughout the time of waiting, as the young men stood together in the basement, the conversation remained carefully removed from any topic that would create any bad feeling on any side. Even so, all were aware of a backdrop of disturbing events on the national scene, including the assassination of Sen. Robert Kennedy in California several weeks before, in early June. Newspapers everywhere had displayed a photograph taken in the crowded kitchen of the hotel where he had been celebrating his primary victory in California. The photograph showed him lying on the floor, his shirt and tie splattered with blood, lifting up his head in an effort to say something to an aide.

"All right, boys! All right!" Father Timothy said, coming with a rustle of white vestments into the basement room where the men were standing around joking and laughing.

"Bow four, bring it around" O'Rourke said, pushing Steward into line. "Stewball, you catch a crab on this one, you're going to answer to Mrs. Kass."

Matthew Brandt moved forward amidst his tuxedoed body guard into the vaulting immensity of the church. All the pews were filling with smiling people craning their necks to see him.

His younger brother, on his right arm, leaned toward him and whispered, "It's okay, big guy. It'll be over in no time."

With the young men properly arranged at the flower-bedecked altar, and the priest and four servers turned toward the rear of the church in waiting, Mary Kass came forward triumphantly on her father's arm to the strains of "Here Comes the Bride."

Catherine Kass, Mary's mother, watched from the front pew as her daughter and husband came forward. She was overwhelmed with emotion, seeing her eldest daughter in bridal white while her other daughter, also a young woman, waited at the altar in an elegant red gown.

Next to her in the pew was Matthew Brandt's father, "Buster." He had set aside his farmer's coveralls for the moment to don the required tuxedo, but the thick, brown hands that held the pew rail firmly were callused from physical work.

Brand's mother, Dixie, stood beside him, in a floor-length golden gown, as overwhelmed with emotion as her counterpart, Mrs. Kass. As the bride and groom met on the altar, she placed her hand on top of her husband's hand, which remained firmly secured to the pew rail.

"Beloved, we are gathered here together," Father Timothy began, and all stood in silence watching as the two young people listened to the ceremonial words. Mary's "I do" was loud and firm. Matthew's "I do" was softer as if said for the bride and priest only.

"Ladies and gentlemen, may I present to you, Matthew and Mary Brandt," Father Timothy said, extending his arm toward them. Catherine Kass's tears came then despite her determination not to show them, and even the veteran of the Normandy Invasion was only able to hold his composure by looking away for a moment.

From there the wedding ceremony took the usual course with the vows of marriage followed by the liturgy of the mass, which Matthew and Mary Brandt attended together for the first time as husband and wife.

After receiving communion, Mary knelt with her head bowed, in the respectful posture of a schoolgirl, praying for the strength and wisdom to be a good wife. She had an idealistic conception of religion, in keeping with her whole conception of life. She regarded her vows as meaning, without doubt, that she would be her husband's lover, companion, and helpmate for the rest of her life.

Matthew knelt beside her, overwhelmed by the occasion, but with no words in his mind. He prayed no prayer at all of his own making. He merely followed along, somewhat absently, with the words of the liturgy, now and then looking up at the engineering marvel of the vaulted ceiling, where rays of light crossed from the tall windows on either side.

After successfully completing the ordeal of exiting the church with his new bride, he became his old self again.

"Well, now, I'm an old married man," he said to Morris.

"Yea," Morris replied. "It's all downhill from here. What you guys got planned anyhow?"

"Week in Shenandoah, camping," said Brandt. "Honeymoon thing, you know, budget plan."

"Ha!" said Morris. "I can appreciate that!"

"Where you going to live?" asked Steward, who was somewhat part of the conversation, but slightly removed from it, as usual, due to his habitual absent-mindedness.

"Well, that worked out," Brandt answered.

He told them all about the cabin vacated by Bruce Harris that he had just "lucked into," as he put it.

Bill O'Rourke was also in the group walking along beside Brandt, and Barbara Carpenter, the girlish, former girlfriend of Tom Steward, who had just come up alongside them. She had attended the wedding alone as a guest of the bride.

"Really beautiful view of the valley," Brandt said. "I think Mary will really like it."

"Well, look at that!" threw in Carpenter, who by this time was readily accepted as part of the group of friend. "Just starting out and you got it better than some rich people!"

She was close to completion in the accelerated, hospital-base program she had entered the previous year. She was scheduled to go to Vietnam in the near future as a nurse and a second lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps.

That impressed everyone.

"Well, maybe I'll see you over there," said Morris.

"Yes, sir, you bet," O'Rourke replied with a smart salute.

Along with these situational changes, Barbie had carried along a few steps further the physical transformation that Steward and the others had noticed at the Brandt's engagement party the previous winter. Her hair was longer and pulled back from her brow, leaving her without her former girlish bangs. She had lost weight. She looked as keen and alert as someone training for an athletic contest.

Talk came around later to Matt and Mary's near penniless financial situation and Brandt's ex-teammates took a step toward resolving that as soon as the guests had all arrived at the restaurant for the wedding reception. Word went out that the bride had been kidnapped, with the ransom set at $500. Wallets and purses emerged at the long tables as the basket came round. Mary returned about a half hour later to mirthful applause.

Morris, seated at the front table with Ellen Kass, detected an unusual level of emotion in his companion, who he had assumed was so negative about marriage.

"It's all so beautiful," she commented softly.

"What?" asked Morris.

"Everything."

Later Ellie surprised everyone by leaping up athletically to catch the traditional bouquet of flowers when Mary threw it to the unmarried women. That set Morris to wondering just what was going on.

Barbie Carpenter had been directly in line for the bouquet. When it sailed in her direction, she stumbled backward and looked relieved when Ellie intercepted it.

Later, with the older guests mostly all departed, the newlyweds and their young friends, including some who had not been in the wedding party, gathered in the bar for a final round of drinks and conversation. Denny Nolan, the former stroke oar, had joined the group by this time.

All had something interesting to offer, in terms of future plans. Nolan had been accepted for graduate school in political science. Tom Steward, home temporarily from Vista, would return for another half year. After that, he wasn't sure what he would do. Bill O'Rourke was headed back to Georgia for another volunteer stint in the medical outreach program he had been in the previous fall. He still had another 20 credits to complete before graduation. He planned to complete them by the end of the year. Then he would enlist in the Army as a medic—if he could arrange to serve in Vietnam. He had already made some preliminary arrangements with a local recruiter. Barbie Carpenter, after her basic training, would presumably be off for Vietnam, also, and this had obviously created a sense of kinship between O'Rourke and Carpenter as they were often seen talking to one another.

Jim Morris and Ellen Kass received by far the most attention due to Morris's imminent departure for combat and the general knowledge that the two of them were a "hot item," as someone put it.

Everyone listened attentively as Morris relayed some facts about the base in Thailand where he would be assigned and the current state of the air war with the bombing campaign against the North now restricted.

"One thing I can tell you," Steward remarked. "I may not agree with everything, as far as the war, but I really respect your courage, Jim, I really do."

There was a chorus of comments along the same lines, leaving Morris deeply touched by the good feelings that everyone felt toward him despite the division he had observed among people his own age.

"Well, I truly appreciate the support," he said. "I've got to tell you, though, being honest, sometimes it seems like everything is going out of control. I know some of you think it's all for the best. For myself, I wonder."

"Thing you got to remember, Jim, is one thing you're fighting for, one thing we all owe you for, owe people like you for, is this society where people can express themselves freely," said Steward earnestly. "I hope you keep that in mind."

"I will try to keep that in mind," said Morris, and in fact he felt emotionally moved by the thought of that, at the moment, with his old friends beside him.

76. Morris and his mother talk about Ellen Kass and marriage

Next morning, before leaving with Ellen Kass to go back to Nevada, Jim Morris went over to see his mother, who still lived in the house on the West Side of St. Paul where he had grown up.

Out of deference for what he assumed was his mother's view of what was proper before marriage, he and Ellie had spent their three nights in Minnesota in a motel. His mother had not asked for this arrangement, but she seemed to think it was best for everyone concerned.

Except for this formality, the three of them were on a good basis, however. They had gone out to dinner together the first evening, and the next day Morris had cut up a storm-felled branch in the backyard, giving his mother and girlfriend an opportunity to visit with one another by themselves.

While Morris went to see his mother, Ellie went to see her parents, also. Morris dropped her off at the Kass's yellow bungalow before heading down West 7th and across the High Bridge toward the picturesque bluffs of his old neighborhood.

As he exited the bridge, he looked off to the familiar ball fields and picnic areas of the city park that overlooked the river. There was a stand of birch and pine trees there where he had played as a boy. On one side of the trees, next to a steep gully, he could see the trampled-down grass of a path he had often taken with boyhood friends. The path led down through thick woods and around one side of the bluff then below the bluff to a railroad trestle that spanned the river.

He had hoped, while back home, to go for a morning run down that path and along the river, as he had often done in college, but, amidst all the business of the wedding, he had been unable to find the time.

As he turned the corner onto his old street, he saw the two-story brick house where he had grown up. The front yard was shaded with dappled light filtering through the leaves of a tall basswood tree that he had often looked out to from his bedroom window.

The tree had grown so large that the bark had split open in a wide swathe, he noticed as he walked up to the front steps of the house. There was some kind of mushrooms or fungus growing in the cracks. Bugs crawled up and down in the long crevices of the old wood.

Jane Morris greeted her son at the door with a cheerful hello. She had allowed her hair to turn gray since his departure, though she seemed to have gained strength and new health since the low period just following her operation. The only trace of her previous ill health was in the area around her eyes, blue like his own, where the skin still had a taut, thin appearance etched with a faint pattern of purple veins.

Soon he sat with a cup of coffee in the familiar ambiance of the

kitchen where he had eaten so many meals as a boy. His mother, seated across from him, studied his face and eyes, as if to gather his image strongly into her mind.

"Well, how was the wedding?" she asked.

"It was very nice," he replied simply.

"I think Ellie told me Mary wore a white gown, the traditional thing?"

"Oh, yea, the whole shebang."

"She must have looked beautiful."

"Yes, she did."

"Did she wear a veil?"

"Oh, yes."

"And Ellie wore a red gown, I think she told me."

"Yea, all the party wore that."

"She must have looked beautiful."

"Yes, she did."

"She is a beautiful girl."

"Yes, she is."

They sat drinking coffee silently. Morris looked around the kitchen and out the window, feeling a deep sense of nostalgia for the common, familiar items that met his eyes.

"What will Ellie do now, when you're overseas?" Mrs. Morris ventured.

"She plans to stay in Vegas."

"All by herself?"

"So she says."

"Poor girl!"

Morris laughed.

"I wouldn't call her poor," he replied. "Ellen Kass is no sad sack. She's got tons of friends. She keeps active. She goes around like crazy, let me tell you."

"Haw!" said Mrs. Morris with a flick of her hand. "Don't let her fool you, Jim! She's going to be sore pressed without you."

He laughed again, more heartedly. "Why would she want to fool me?" he said. "She's got no reason to fool me. She says herself she's going to miss me. She just doesn't intend to mope about it. I think that's in her favor, really."

"Granted she has no reason to fool you," Mrs. Morris said. "Maybe she's fooling herself."

"I don't think so," Morris answered with a more serious expression. "I think she's a person who's determined to have a happy life. With or without me, she'll have that."

"Well, she's still a young woman in love," said Mrs. Morris. "And I think I can vouch for that. It's going to be very hard for her, without any

definite commitment. She's in love. She knows she's in love. But what can she do? She doesn't know where she stands."

Morris expected more to come, after that, but his mother left off and got up to do the dishes.

"Mother, we have, in effect, made a commitment to one another," he said, following her with his eyes as she walked across the room to the sink and turned on the faucet. "Not a formal commitment, but she says she wants to wait, I say I'm glad for it. She's said many times, not regarding us, but regarding other people, she thinks people are crazy for getting engaged or married before they understand what's going on. I don't think she wants that. I really don't."

"Have you asked her?"

"No."

"Well, see. Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"You're saying I should propose?"

"What I'm saying, Jimmy, is follow your heart," said Mrs. Morris, turning around. "You do have a heart, don't you?"

Morris laughed and shook his head. "The heart part of it, even I can figure out," he said. "Arrangements are something else."

"Well, as far as arrangements," she said, coming over toward him to gather up the dishes, "people made all kinds of arrangements, in similar situations, when I was your age. People got engaged, people got married even, on the spur of the moment. All the trappings are nice, but you don't need the trappings."

He lifted up his cup to drink the last few drops of the sweet swirl at the bottom. Where could it lead, he thought, with a week to go before his departure? He didn't want to cloud up the picture with a rejection or complication at the wrong moment. He didn't want to so something drastic that both he and Ellie would regret.

"Got to go," he said. "I appreciate your thoughts."

"Well, I hope I didn't say too much."

"You can never say too much, Mom. It's just you and me. We've always been direct with one another."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I think that, too."

"You like Ellie, don't you?"

"I think she's just the sweetest girl I ever met."

"She can be that, all right."

"Yes, she can."

He got up and went into the other room and stood by the dining room table, the same table where some six months before he had looked at this father's letters. On the cabinet there, he discovered that one photograph that he had seen in the letters, of his parents' wedding, had been placed in a frame.

For a moment he paused to look at it, noticing that his mother was not dressed in a white gown and veil with "all the trappings," as she had said. Instead she wore a simple brown dress, with a single white corsage on her left breast. Even so, she looked so pretty, and happy, also. There was no doubt about that. And there was his father beside her, the man he had never known. His father had gotten married like that.

On the way back to get Ellie, he stopped at the park on an impulse and headed past the stand of birch and pine trees to his boyhood path. He followed the path, pushing branches aside as he passed through the thick foliage at the crest of the hill.

Just beyond that, there was an outgrowth of rock where he had often sat and looked off as a boy. He sat down there on a fallen log and looked out to the river scene of bridge span, railroad tracks, and parked barges, with the green dome of the cathedral beyond them above the houses on the side of the hill. His life was moving forward so rapidly, he thought, with so much of importance happening. He could hardly keep up with it. What should he do?

Back at the yellow bungalow, he saw that Ellen was not in the yard, as she had promised to be at the appointed time. He thought of going past and returning later, so as not to encounter her parents again, though he had talked with them as necessary in the course of the wedding events of the past several days. With a shrug he parked and walked up to the front door.

Edward Kass, the father, opened the door.

"Ellie will be right out," he said.

"Thank you."

"You can step in, if you'd like."

"Thank you."

Morris followed the elder Kass into to the tidy, little house but was left alone in the entry. Soon the girls' mother, Jean, came in to say hello and make small talk, with the same politeness combined with lack of warmth that the father showed, also.

"Would you care for some coffee?" she said.

"No, just had some."

Ellie came into the hall next, with her father beside her, carrying her bags. She looked beautiful as always, and hugged her parents with tearful eyes. The mother's eyes were tearful, too. The father wore a stolid expression.

"Well, you have a nice trip now," said Mrs. Kass.

"And young man, the best to you in your duties," said Mr. Kass, extending his hand. "Take care of yourself over there."

For the first time their eyes met directly with a hint of mutual understanding.

"I intend to," said Morris. "Thank you very much."

Heading off with Ellen beside him, Morris felt gratified that her parents had not shown any overt resentment toward him in the brief meeting in the hall. He didn't blame them for being suspicious of his interests with respect to their daughter. Someday he would set that right, he told himself.

77. Morris and Ellen exchange wedding vows in a roadside chapel

With Ellie Kass sitting in the middle of the seat, snug up against him, Jim Morris headed down the new interstate freeway toward Des Moines, Iowa, about 250 miles south of the Twin Cities. At Des Moines, they would switch to another new freeway that would take them west another 130 miles to Council Bluffs, Iowa. There they planned to spend the night and also to revisit the riverfront restaurant where they had dined together on their first cross-country trip.

It was by this time early afternoon with a bright sun high overhead in a blue sky etched with swirls of cirrus clouds. The freeway looked off to vistas of lush, rolling farmland dotted with placid lakes and isolated stands of oaks, maple, birch, and evergreens, mostly pine.

"Well, one more trip together," he said.

"For the time being," she whispered softly, planting a kiss on his cheek. "Don't forget that!"

"Looks like we're in for good weather."

"Yes, it does."

That was as much as either of them felt like saying at the moment. They both felt tired from the emotional highs and lows of meeting again with family and old friends. Within a half hour Ellie was sound asleep with her head on Morris's shoulder.

He soon found himself struggling to stay awake, also. After trying to fight off sleep for about fifty miles, he pulled off the freeway at a small town and stopped at a Dairy Queen for a cup of coffee.

"Hey, Jimmy," said Ellie, coming up behind him with a gentle tug as he stood in line, "just in general, you know, if you're going to get ice cream, let me know."

They sat at a picnic table out behind the stand in a grassy area with several trees. From there they could see a Midwestern small town scene of railroad tracks, grain elevator, water tower, several brick commercial buildings, and a ballpark with bleacher seats and overhead lights.

"How did it go with your folks, anyhow?" he said, siting erectly at the table with both hands on the paper coffee cup.

"Not bad at all," she replied. "Not bad at all. Actually, much better than I expected."

"They don't disapprove?"

"Oh, no, they do, they still do. Maybe they just accepted it. They're tired of fighting it."

Morris nodded but made no comment.

"Kind of brought out the peace pipe, you know," Ellie went on.

"How was that?"

"Just gave up on the preaching. Gave up on the circumstances of what

if I did this or that."

"They never said anything at all?"

"No, they did. My mother said, well, she could see I was in love and she was happy for me, for that. And my dad said he didn't like the situation, he hoped I wouldn't get hurt, but he could see that you were a decent guy. I think, actually, he likes you."

"Why do you say that?"

"I just read it in his eyes and I heard him telling my mom of all of you guys on the crew he thought you and Brandt were the best—the guys with the most integrity, he put it."

"He really said that?"

"Yes, he did. And you do have integrity."

"Thank you."

As they headed out again on the sparkling new freeway, Ellie turned the conversation around and asked if Morris's mother had expressed any opinions about the whole situation.

"Along the same lines," he answered. "She understands. She doesn't look for fault. She likes you a lot, also."

"She does?"

"Oh, yes."

"She give you any opinion?"

"Yes, she did. She said, 'Follow your heart.'"

Ellie laughed and leaned over to kiss Morris on the cheek again. "Well, that does sound like good advice," she said, "assuming your heart is in the right place."

Hours later they sat on the outside veranda in Council Bluffs, at the very same table where they had sat on their previous visit. The sun was low in a misty brown and yellow sky above the downtown buildings of Omaha, Nebraska, on the other side of the river.

"I was thinking back to the last time," Morris remarked, holding Ellie's left hand in both of his hands, "you seemed like such a girl then."

"I don't anymore?"

"Oh, you'll always be my little girl, I guess, but you're much more than that."

"How's that?"

"You're more formidable. I respect you more as a woman. I wasn't aware of your strengths."

"What are my strengths?"

"Your ability to see the bright side. Your ability to make friends. The way people take to you and trust you. You're a person who comes in a room and everyone's glad you're there."

"Well, thank you, Jim."

"Not a lot of people could do that."

Their interactions had entered a new phase of exquisite tenderness toward one another. The tenderness was also present in how they made love. In that sphere, once so marked by heat and passion, a new dimension had been added of soft touching and prolonged direct glances.

Next day they made a little side trip to South Pass, Wyoming, where the wagon trains had gone through. This time Ellen did not remain behind in comfort as she had done at Scottsbluff on their previous trip. Instead she put on jeans and Morris's olive drab army jacket and walked out with him in a cold drizzle to look at the wheel ruts that were still visible there in the red clay soil.

It was late in the day with the sun evident only as a occasional bright spot in swiftly moving, rain-heavy clouds above a silhouette of jagged peaks on the western horizon. Despite the steady drizzle, they walked a distance along the wagon ruts, taken by the grandness of the vast, open space around them and the drama of the gathering storm.

Ellen Kass walked with her hands in her pockets. She had turned up her collar to protect her neck from the pelting raindrops which felt like tiny pieces of ice.

She was determined to demonstrate to Morris that she wanted to know and understand anything of importance to him.

"They must have been very excited at times, and scared," she said softly, stopping to rest by a rock as high as her shoulder. "They were always moving to new places. They never knew quite what to expect."

"Yes," Morris answered. "I suppose that was so."

Ellen was shivering in the raw wind, but she wore a mature, womanly expression, with the Kass trademark thick brows lowered over her eyes in a gesture that reminded Morris of her older sister, Mary. In the plain Army jacket, with her long hair matted down from the rain, she looked like a pretty rancher out on an outing in the back country.

Morris noticed this with curiosity since he had never before seen her in this light. This is what she might have looked like had he and she been born a hundred years before, he thought, had they been among those who made the trek west together. Would she have been beside him in such circumstances? He wouldn't have thought so, previously, but he answered himself, yes.

The storm came in just as they returned to the car, throwing such a flood on the windshield it was impossible to drive. Then, just as suddenly as the storm had begun, it was past. The dark clouds lumbered off toward the flat eastern horizon.

As they headed out again, the sun broke through the clouds in the west, above the silhouetted mountains, bathing the vast scene in a surreal golden light. Cool air, pure from the rain, blew through the open windows of the car with a scent of wet earth and vegetation. Long

shadows loomed beside tall, jagged rocks.

They spent the night in Salt Lake City, and on the day after drove just 300 miles, to Cedar City, where they went hiking in Zion National Park. Meanwhile, the tension grew of the imminent departure.

"Just two days more together!" she said the next day as they neared Las Vegas. "I can hardly believe it! The time has gone so fast!"

"I'm sorry I have to leave, for your sake. I mean, I know I have to, I want to, but I never thought it would be so hard."

"It will be hard for me, too."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes, Jimmy. I try to put on a happy face, you know. But it will be so hard without you."

He thought of what his mother had said about giving her something to be sure of. Within himself, he struggled over what to do.

Soon Las Vegas came into view in the plainness of midday light. It appeared as a collection of white and pastel buildings flat to the flat surface of the desert with Spring Mountain floating behind in the shimmering heat waves of the dry, hot landscape.

Just on the outskirts of the city, they stopped for a late lunch, and found themselves standing in line across the street from a garishly ornate building about the size of a single garage with a white steeple like a church.

The building had a sign on it that said: "The Little Chapel in the Desert. Completely Legal Marriage. Arranged in a Moment. Photographs Available."

"Just think, in fifteen minutes, we could be married," said Ellen bumping her shoulder against Morris.

"Yes, wouldn't that be something," Morris said.

"Well, look at that!" cried Ellie, laughing. "I never thought I'd see my soldier scared!"

"It doesn't scare me," said Morris. "I'd marry you in a minute."

"You would, huh?"

"Yes."

Her face grew more serious. "Well, guess what, Jimmy, I'd marry you in a minute, too."

They were both silent.

"It would seem crazy, wouldn't it?" said Morris.

"I don't know," said Ellie. "In a way, you know, it's really us."

"Yes, in a way it is," said Morris.

"Married in shorts and a halter," she laughed, looking down at her clothes.

"You look as beautiful as a woman could be," Morris answered. They walked over to the chapel and peered inside.

"You know what I'd like to do," said Morris.

"What?"

"I'd like for each of us to take a half hour, one half hour apart from one another, to really think this out. Then, meet back here, and if it's a go, let's go."

She laughed. "What if I change my mind?"

"Ellie, if you change your mind that easily, or if I do, then it's good we took the time to think."

She shook his hand.

"You got a deal, buddy. And you better be back here!"

"See you in a half hour."

Morris walked down the street a way, looking around idly at the odd assortment of shops. Apparently this was a kind of bargain basement strip with every conceivable type of merchandise including T-shirts, black silk paintings, and electronic equipment.

Despite the concept of a half hour of reflection, he had no doubt that he would want to go ahead. The idea of getting married struck him now as the best possible arrangement. It would give Ellie an official status. For himself, it would ease the strain of being overseas without her and wondering where he stood. In any case, what sane man in the world would turn her down? She was a lady, a treasure, a joy, everyone said so.

Walking down the street further, he came upon a pawn shop. In the window were watches, musical instruments, chains, and jewelry of one kind or another. The idea struck him of getting Ellie a ring. He went inside and found a diamond ring displayed inside a glass counter.

Arriving back at the chapel with the ring in his pocket, he saw Ellie standing on the sidewalk. She was in a different outfit, a white, mid-thigh dress with a blue collar and cuffs.

She smiled as he came up. "Hint, hint."

Morris laughed. "Well, I'm determined to do this right," he said, kneeling down on one knee. "Ellen Kass, will you marry me?"

"James Morris, I accept," she answered softly, lifting him up by the hand.

"And in honor of the occasion..." He took out on the ring.

"Now where did you get that?" she exclaimed. She had always dreamt of having one, despite her putdowns of marriage.

"Just bought it now, in a pawn shop."

"You're a darling, Jim! I'm really touched!"

"What if it doesn't fit?"

"I'll make it fit!" she declared.

But there was no need to. The ring slipped on her pretty finger just as snug as could be like it was meant to be there.

78. Steward and his father Joe visit the old neighborhood together

On the evening Jim Morris and Ellen Kass got married in Las Vegas, Tom Steward went with his father, Joseph Steward, to visit the house where the family had lived before moving out to the lake. This was something the son suggested and the father readily agreed to since both had been looking for some kind of activity to do together before young Steward returned to North Carolina.

As is often the case with a son coming into adulthood, Tom Steward saw things in his father that he liked and others that he disliked. The thing he most liked in his father was his father's ability to interact with other people, an ability in which he regarded himself as deficient. The thing he most disliked in his father was his father's lack of physical strength and fitness. He had never been able to see his father as a model of masculinity such as he aspired to himself. Between these extremes of likes and dislikes, there were many variations complicated by the convolutions of his father's cyclical bouts with depression.

Father and son set out on a beautiful summer evening, with young Steward at the wheel of a new Ford Thunderbird bought just the previous month on the upswing of a mood cycle. Since then, Joe Steward had begun saying that buying the car had been a mistake, an omen that a downswing was in progress. With every passing day, the downswing had seemed to dig in deeper, with the son knowing that his upcoming departure was part of the dynamic (as a perception, in his father, of imminent loss).

They drove along with windows open as the lakeshore resounded with the familiar shrill call of redwing blackbirds from their perches in the cattails. A rainfall the previous night had left a patchy mist, like fog, in the woods that bordered the lake on the other side of the road.

Leaving the rural ambience of the lake behind them, they continued through progressively less rural neighborhoods to a neighborhood of tidy, modest houses. A commercial street there, with brick buildings, led to a bridge from which a complex of factories, railroad tracks, and hillside houses could be seen. This was the old neighborhood as they both remembered it.

Three blocks further they stopped at the top of an elm-lined hill. Without getting out of the car, they hunched over in the front seat to look at the old family house on the other side of the street.

The house was a two-story frame structure with white siding, set in a small yard, with a low cement block wall. It had an enclosed front porch with a red shingled roof. Above the roof were two windows, one of which had been young Steward's bedroom window in grade school and for part of high school. Beyond the house, between it and another, the

back wall of a neighborhood tavern could be seen, with cars parked in a grassless lot. Beyond that still was a skyline composed of the flat roofs, smoke stacks, and red water tower of the same factories that had been visible from the bridge.

"Looks the same as always," said Steward, nodding at the house.

"Oh, no, it's run down," his father replied. "They don't take care of it."

"Who lives there now?"

"I don't even know anymore. It's changed hands."

Tom Steward had many memories associated with this house, but one in particular came to his mind at this moment. He remembered sitting on the back porch with his father on a lovely June evening, watching his grandfather, Arthur, his father's father, approaching on the narrow walk that led between the tavern and an adjoining yard. His grandfather walked with a limp and carried a paper bag. "Looks like he might have that holster," young Steward recalled his father saying. The "holster," received a few minutes later, was a toy black leather cowboy holster with white tassels and metal studs.

"One thing I'll always remember about this place is we waited so goldang long to have that fireplace put in," Joe Steward said. "Then we finally got it and we sold the house."

"Well, it helped to sell it, I suppose," young Steward said.

"What a waste, though."

"Yea, I guess it was."

"We should have never sold it."

"You regret it?"

"All the time."

Negative comments like these—seemingly put forward to be denied,—young Steward accepted as normal for his father's state of mind. Over the years, he had become familiar with his father's moods; and he had become accustomed to, at times, fulfilling this role of emotional support and counselor, even as his father strove, from the other side, to be an emotional support and counselor to him, also.

With their trip's stated purpose of visiting of the old house thus completed in a few minutes, father and son continued past other places of family interest: first, a store-front shop, just a couple of blocks from the old house, where the same grandfather, Art, had had a shoe and leather business with neatly-arranged work tables, leather-buffing machines, and windows looking out to passing streetcars; then, a truck warehouse below a chopped off hill that formed a kind of clay bluff above it (in this grim building beside a brewery, Joe Steward had worked as a trucking dispatcher in a cabin-like building perched on a loading dock); then, a corner of two commercial streets where Art Steward had owned a tavern,

and where Joe, as a boy, had attended his mother's tee-totaling Baptist church on the other side of the street; then, several other storefront shops where Art Steward had had other businesses, at various times, and in the last of which he had died of a heart attack two days before Christmas in 1956.

"Now one thing about your grandfather, you know, his whole life he never punched a time clock," the father remarked as they drove away from Arthur Steward's last shop, the one he had died in.

"I never realized that," the son responded.

"He could have found an easier way a lot of times, but he stuck it out on his own. You got to give him credit for that. Half the time he was living in the same place he used as a business, sleeping in the back."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, ya. For a while he just had a kind of screen, you know, like people change clothes behind, not a real wall."

"I think I remember that vaguely," young Steward said, summoning a distant memory of a shop with such a screen, behind which were a bed and a table with chairs. He remembered a time when a man had brought in a block of ice from a truck, with the ice held with a large pincers, and had gone behind the screen to put the ice in an icebox.

The son soon learned more, also, about how his father had fit into this world of stubborn independence. He heard for the first time that his father had worked in the shoe and leather shop himself, for a period of about a year and a half, during a time when he was recovering from what, in the family, was called his "nervous breakdown," which had occurred sometime just after World War Two.

"You were thinking on going into business with your dad?" young Steward asked.

"Well, I guess it was questionable if I was thinking at all," Joe Steward replied with a tentative smile. "I was so down, you know. I couldn't get going. I couldn't get myself out of bed. And I think my dad, he was just trying to help me get into a schedule, you know, something to get up for, that I had to be at, at the same time each day. He set it up like that." He paused and tapped his fingers on the dashboard. "I always appreciated that, looking back. He got me back on my feet. He helped me realize I could still work."

The exact details of this young Steward didn't explore any further. He had never understood the so-called "nervous breakdown," and what really it had been, in modern medical terms. He sensed that it was related to his father's current problems with mood cycles somehow, that maybe it had been the first big down, but he hesitated to probe into this too deeply, not wanting to treat his father like an invalid.

Last place on the unofficial family tour was a park overlooking the

Mississippi River, a bluff top park in many respects like the park dear to Jim Morris, but a few miles further downstream, on the other side of the St. Paul downtown, and with views looking out to a wider floodplain. At a flagstone wall there, Tom and Joe Steward got out of the car and looked out toward a southeastern bend of the river.

Just below the bluff was a railroad yard with 20 or more parallel tracks and a spokelike pattern of tracks leading into a roundhouse. To the left of that, from their viewpoint, a two-lane highway, busy with trucks and cars, extended as far as the eye could see through a corridor of small towns and farms. Further to the right, a two-lane road diverged from the highway and wound down through the partially wooded, partially industrial area beside the railroad yard, where there was a concrete bridge (passing over the main tracks), a fish hatchery with round pools, and a grain elevator with three blue silos.

Here, too, there was family history that Tom Steward was aware of. The early Steward family, consisting of himself, his parents, and his brother Art (the doctor brother, named after his grandfather, the one that by this time had gone on to his new residency in Santa Barbara) had often had picnics on the bluffs and then had often driven around below the bluffs to the fish hatchery to watch the trains in the railroad yard by the river—this was before the two younger Steward children, Tom's sister and kid brother, had been born.

Also, as Tom Steward knew, his father as a boy had spent a lot of time around the fish hatchery, hanging out with a friend whose family lived in a house beside the ponds. The house was still there below the bluff, a large house with yellow siding, situated in a grove of large trees like a farmhouse.

"You know," said young Steward, "I remember there being some kind of hotel down there by the tracks."

"Oh, ya," said his father. "Burlington Hotel."

"What was that anyhow?"

"Just a place for the railroad workers to stay, the engineers and brakemen."

"What ever happened to it?"

"It just got old. They tore it down."

"You ever go down there?"

"Oh, ya. Many times. They had a great restaurant. Great big steaks. Covered the whole plate."

"Is that so?"

"35 cents, if you can believe it."

"That's what it cost?"

"35 cents. Big 'porter house' steaks, they used to call them. You wouldn't believe it, Tom. Covered the whole plate."

"Wow, that must have been something."

"Money was worth something in them days."

As if by habit, they got in the car again and drove down below the bluff toward where the hotel had been and the railroad yard.

"We were up there one time, by that hotel, my friend and me," said Joseph Steward, "and we got to talking to this old engineer, really hit it off with him, you know, and we wound up riding along with him all the way down to Chicago."

"Wow, is that right?"

"Right in the locomotive. Trying to see the world, you know. I was about 17 then, in high school."

"That must have been something."

"Ya, it really was."

At the railroad yard, they stopped in an uneven, dirt parking lot, same place they had used to watch the trains years before, and got out to get a drink of water. There was a venetian well there, behind the railroad office, with a big iron spout for turning on the water and an L-shaped pipe that could be turned up to drink.

"Ah! Good water!" said Joe Steward, as he had said years before.

A green diesel came by with a blinking yellow light, pushing a line of freight cars to the "hump," as it was called, from which the cars were let go to travel by force of gravity into the back of the larger line of freight cars that they were being joined to. The diesel came to a halt and an engineer, dressed in coveralls, came out in their direction.

"Nice one tonight," said Joe Steward, nodding at the sunset.

"Yes, it is. That rain left it nice," replied the engineer.

"Where you getting that one ready for?"

"Got quite a mish-mash. Going to sort it down line."

Watching his father at this moment, Tom Steward recalled a similar look that as a boy on such outings he had often observed on his father's face. It was a look of adventure, a look of joy in life. He seldom saw a look like that on his father's face anymore, even in the upswings of his mood cycles.

79. Steward stops at the boat club and runs into O'Rourke

On the evening after his trip back to the old neighborhood with his father, Tom Steward decided to drive down to the Minnesota Boat Club. He did this on an impulse, not expecting to encounter any of his old friends, just wanting to taste the old atmosphere again that had been so much a part of his life in college.

Crossing the Wabasha Street Bridge, he looked upriver toward the High Bridge to see if any crews were coming downstream. No crews were in sight, but as he came around below the bridge he saw that one eight-man crew was just pulling into the dock.

They were a junior light crew, he concluded from their small size and the unfamiliarity of their faces. He pulled into the boat club parking lot and went around to the dock just as the crew threw the boat overhead with water draining down over their heads and shoulders.

"All right. Let's bring her in!" the coxswain shouted. "Come on, Murphy, you look like you're going to die!"

"He already did," someone answered.

There were a few recognizable faces in the group that passed by Steward as he stood watching. They belonged to oarsmen that Steward had been on a couple of rowing trips with, though, as an older oarsman, he hadn't mingled much socially with the younger oarsmen.

"Steward," called one of them that Steward recognized as an underclassmen from St. Thomas. "What are you doing here?"

"Just came to look around," Steward replied, smiling.

"That senior eight could use you," the other said.

"Is that so?" said Steward, complimented.

"Yea, they got some old oars they want to break."

That brought a round of laugher since Steward had gained notoriety by breaking an oar one time when he had "caught a crab,"—failed to clean his oar and got it stuck in the water.

A few moments later, after the boat had been secured inside the boat club, the same youth came out again to say that a friend of Steward's was upriver in a single scull.

"Who's that?" said Steward.

"Bill O'Rourke, your old coxie."

"Is that right? He's rowing now?"

"Oh, yea, he's been in a couple of regattas. Won the singles up in Regina."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

This news gave the upcoming evening a promise of interest. Steward strolled back and forth on the concrete embankment behind the boat club, watching upriver for O'Rourke as the junior oarsmen showered and left,

shouting goodbye.

As he stood there, a tugboat with a load of barges came past with a young man, apparently a barge worker, waving hello from the lead barge. Steward returned the wave and watched the barge as it passed beyond the immense pillars of the bridge and out of sight.

Watching this ruddy, apparently adventurous young man about his own age traveling down the river, Steward felt a feeling he had been feeling a great deal lately, a feeling of wanderlust and constraint. While at home, he had told everyone, including family and friends, that he intended to reenlist for another year as a VISTA in Dulatown, which he assumed he would have to do in order to stay out of the draft. More and more, that arrangement seemed like being trapped in something he didn't have his heart in anymore.

A glint of oars drew his attention upriver to a shimmering area of the river just beyond the shadow of the High Bridge. Soon a single scull came into view manned by a rower with the unmistakable red hair of Bill O'Rourke. He was rowing at a high cadence with good balance and long strokes that left splashless washes.

"Steward! God damn!" called O'Rourke when he saw his lean, tussle-haired former teammate standing on the dock.

"You're looking pretty good out there," Steward said. "I watched you coming down."

"Hey, just coincidentally, I've been meaning to call you," said O'Rourke, raising his voice louder as his scull, with oars feathering, glided in the current downstream.

"Oh, yea? How's that?" Steward called after him.

"Got a proposition," O'Rourke yelled back. "Tell you more when I get in."

O'Rourke was by this time already beyond the pillars of the Wabasha Street Bridge and moving swiftly toward a railroad trestle bridge further downstream. Steward watched as he port-sided the shell around and did a practice start with short, choppy strokes to get the shell moving against the current.

Soon the still-grinning former coxswain was alongside the dock and slightly above it with the current pulling him down as he wedged with his starboard oar to bring himself in.

"What kind of proposition?" asked Steward, squatting down to grab hold of the gunnels.

"You're going to North Carolina. I'm going to Georgia. Nice coincidence, huh?" said O'Rourke, balancing his oars with one hand as he lifted himself out of the shell.

"Yea, but I'm not driving," Steward answered, taking O'Rourke's oars as the former coxswain swung his boat overhead, drenching his long

red hair as with a half bucket of water.

Steward was used to this suspenseful way that O'Rourke presented information. O'Rourke had often used the same teasing manner in presenting information to the crew.

Back then, just a year in the past, O'Rourke had often seemed like a feisty leprechaun, but the young man before Steward no longer had the same diminutive stature. He had grown a few inches and looked like he had been lifting weights or something to get up his body bulk. His freckled face had lost its boyish, impish appearance. A manly, more serious face peered out from the drenched red hair.

Within a few minutes, on the dock and in the locker room, O'Rourke conveyed his "proposition" in considerable detail. He planned to hitchhike down to Georgia and wanted Steward to come along as far as Tennessee. He even had a backpack that Steward could use since he had just bought a new one for himself. There were no expenses involved, hardly, except for food. When night came on, he just walked off from the highway somewhere and put down his sleeping bag.

"Only trouble is, I'm supposed to be back in North Carolina in three days," Steward remarked after listening intently to O'Rourke's description.

"Supposed to be, says who?" O'Rourke countered from the other side of the half-wall behind which he was taking a shower.

"Supposed to be, says me, I guess," said Steward. "It's a pretty loose arrangement."

"So make it a little looser then! Make it a week or so looser! They can't fire you, can they? They don't pay you squat!"

Steward laughed. "Well, that's true."

O'Rourke came around from the shower and snapped Steward with his towel. "So let's do it then! It'll be a blast!"

"I just might," said Steward.

"What's to decide?"

"You got a pack, huh?"

"Stewball, it's yours. You can use my old sleeping bag, too, if you need it."

"Might buy my own."

"Suit yourself."

"Okay, then, let's do it."

They shook hands, grinning into one another's faces.

"I got a brother down in Chicago," said O'Rourke, yanking a comb roughly through his long locks of red hair. "We get a ride that way, maybe we'll stop there. Give us a place to stay one night, at least."

"What's he doing down there?"

"Grad school. Loyola."

"When exactly will we leave?"

"Day after tomorrow."

O'Rourke had dressed by this time, which had not involved much, since he had on only cut-off jeans and a T-shirt, with some old tennis shoes that he didn't bother to tie, and no socks.

They went out together to the parking lot where the family cars that both were using were parked side by side.

"If I ever find a good, old jalopy, I'm going to buy it," said O'Rourke. "Then I'll really do some traveling."

It was by this time just past sunset. The lights had just come on the river road on the other side of the river. Cars were streaming along, headlights projected into the dark shadow of the bluff. A train with a long line of boxcars passed behind the grain docks.

"You still planning on going in the service?" Steward asked.

"Oh, yea, it's virtually arranged, virtually arranged," O'Rourke replied. "Another half year of school. Three months off. Then base camp, next April or so."

"Nine months away."

"Most scheduled out I ever been in my life," O'Rourke said, shaking his head. "I hope I'm doing the right thing. But, hey, amigo, now I gotta head out. Little date tonight."

"Oh, yea?" said Steward. "What's her name... Marcia?"

"Marcia? Oh, no. She's long gone. This one's a friend of yours. Barbie Carpenter."

"Barbie Carpenter?"

"Yea. No big deal. Just talking."

"Well, say hello for me," said Steward.

"No hard feelings?"

"Hard feelings? Naw. We're not romantic anymore, you know."

"She thinks the world of you, though."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yea."

Steward took this in silently.

"Well, I gotta go," said O'Rourke.

They shook hands again, with O'Rourke grabbing Steward's hand in the thumbs-up "we're in this together" grip that had become fashionable among the younger generation.

Steward drove off with a final look at the old scene. He couldn't help thinking about Carpenter and feeling jealous despite what O'Rourke had said about him and her just being friends. She had interrupted her busy schedule to meet with O'Rourke the evening before he was leaving on his little journey. That said a lot right there.

80. Steward listens as his father cautions him about his plans

Tom Steward arrived back at his parent's home after dark to find his father sitting alone in the family room, apparently waiting for his return. He wasn't surprised; he knew his father was anxious about his upcoming departure and wanted to make himself available to talk.

Joe Steward roused himself as if from sleep, pushing back his glasses, when his energetic son came through the door. The television was on in front of him, with no sound, displaying an image of someone talking into a microphone while in the background people stood with signs.

"Well, how are things at the boat club?" he asked.

"Good, same as always," the son replied, crossing with long steps to the adjoining kitchen. He opened the refrigerator door, as he always did when first coming into this room, and stared inside at the neatly ordered, plentiful food.

"See any of your old buddies down there?"

"Yea, actually, Bill O'Rourke, the coxswain."

"The one with the red hair?"

"Yes, none other, scheming as usual."

"What's he up to these days?"

"Oh, I don't know... He's rowing. He's bigger. He's been lifting weights or something. And he's getting ready to go down to Georgia, to some kind of program for migrants. He works as a medic, kind of."

"Well, you young people keep busy, that's for sure."

"Yea, I guess we do."

Thomas could see now where the conversation was headed, to more talk about O'Rourke and then to talk about his own plans. He decided to tell his father at once of his plans to hitchhike with O'Rourke. His father would object, of course. He pushed around some milk cartons, looking for something to drink.

"There's some apple juice in there," Joe Steward said.

"Care for some yourself?"

"Sure, if you don't mind."

"O'Rourke is hitching down there," young Steward ventured, coming across with two glasses of apple juice. He held out one glass for his father, who took it carefully with both hands.

"Hitching? All the way to Georgia?"

"Yes."

"Where does he sleep then?"

"Wherever he winds up, on the side of the road."

"Is that so?" said the elder Steward, considering.

"He wants me to hitch with him, as far as North Carolina," the son continued. "I figure, why not? I told everyone I'd be back on Wednesday, but I don't think anybody cares, really. He's been hitching all around

lately. He says we could make it in five or six days."

"That's a whole work week, Tom," the father declared.

"Yea, but, like I said, who cares?"

"Well, they must have a director or something."

"Yes, they do, and, let me tell you, Dad, he has been to Dulatown twice in the entire time I've been there."

"He may still inquire, though."

"I doubt it, really."

Joe Steward moved back and forth in his chair and rubbed his hands together. He was dressed in wrinkled pajamas with his hair uncombed.

"Tom, what would you do if you got fired?" he said with a sudden alert glance. "You'd be in a sorry state with the draft!"

"I don't think getting fired would ever happen," Tom replied. "I mean, everything is so loose, Dad. You have no idea."

"Well, sometimes people get caught unawares. I've seen it happen. I've seen some sorry people."

"Well, I don't think so, in this case."

They watched the fireplace where the embers of a log still burned from the earlier efforts of the youngest Steward, Nate. The boy was long since asleep, being at this time only 12 years old.

"Put another one on there, why don't you," Joe Steward said.

Thomas got up immediately, went over to the garage door, on the far side of the family room, and came back with an armful of wood. He put a log on the fire and piled the rest next to the fireplace.

"Dad, remember you told me about how that time you and Rol Husman, your buddy in high school, were down around the tracks there, below the bluffs, and you wound up riding down with the train crew to Chicago?"

"Yes, I do. That was ol' Husman who arranged that. He was always looking for excitement. I kind of got dragged along."

"But you still enjoyed it."

"Yes."

"That's what this is like for me. I don't know how else to explain it. I just want to see things. I just want some kind of adventure."

"If you get laid off down there because of it and you lose your deferment, I'd say you paid a high price."

They stared at the fireplace as the flames leapt up from the new log with the television playing soundlessly beside it. A late night talk show had claimed the screen—Johnny Carson and some character wearing black silk pants and a scarf.

"Well, to tell you the truth now, and I know you're going to think this is crazy," Tom Steward said, "sometimes I think if I was denied that deferment, that would be the best thing for me. Really, I do."

He had given this line of thought a great deal of consideration lately, as the constraint of the draft and the deferment became more and more unbearable in his mind.

Joe Steward frowned at that. “That doesn’t make sense,” he said, throwing his son a quizzical glance. “How could it be a good thing, to have the whole situation thrown out of kilter?”

“It would force me to a decision,” young Steward answered. “The way things are now, I never have to decide.”

“Decide on what?”

“On the war.”

“Decide on the war? I don’t get it. You’ve already decided, haven’t you, by what you’ve chosen to do? You’re there in a good situation, doing good for people, like you want to.”

“I never decided. I just fell into it. I’m hiding, really.”

“Hiding! Huh! Well, everybody’s hiding then! All your friends in college, all your friends in VISTA, they’re all hiding, aren’t they, if they’re not carrying a gun?”

Having said that with much drama and an uplifted hand, Joe Steward settled back in the chair again and shook his head. He had never served in a war himself, having been excused from service in World War Two due to uncorrectable vision problems.

Young Steward laughed. “Yea, well, that’s a thought.”

“So you might as well take your share of it while you can.”

“I’m sick of it, Dad. I really am.”

“So you come out of hiding, then, I don’t get it, what happens? You let yourself get drafted?”

“Maybe, yes.”

“Then what happens? Think it out, Tom, think it out!”

“I face the issue squarely. Is the war right or wrong? If the war is right, I go off and fight in it. Why not?”

“Yes, and maybe get your head blown off! And if it’s wrong?”

“If it’s wrong, then I file as a conscientious objector or I just refuse to go... if I can’t file, conscientiously.”

“Conscientiously! Well, I don’t know about the conscience part, but I do know what happens if you refuse induction. They put you in jail. You become a felon, Tom, and, years from now, people won’t give a darn what you went to jail for. Everybody in there’s got a reason, you know, if you’re willing to listen.”

They watched the fire in silence.

“Think it through, Tom,” Joe Steward repeated.

“I have thought it through, believe me.”

“You talk about the open road, Tom, you say you want freedom. Well, coming out of ‘hiding,’ as you say, that’s not going to bring you

that, I can tell you! You do that, you're going to get all tied up in something, worse than now!"

Again, the elder Steward sat back, studying the inscrutable clear brown eyes of his son. A memory flashed into his mind of those same eyes looking at him when the face that held them was that of a little boy.

"Well, I admit the inconsistency," Tom said. "I haven't thought it all through, with respect to that. I just know that more and more I feel like I'm hiding... and to come out of hiding... it just seems like it would be a breakthrough, somehow."

"Breakthrough! Breakthrough to what? Think it through, Tom. On the other side of that breakthrough, there's a prison cell or a gun, you said it yourself. Whereas, what do you have now? You're doing something you believe in."

"I don't know if I can really say that, that I believe in it so much," young Steward replied.

They fell quiet again until the elder Steward patted his son on the shoulder. "Well, I'm going to hit the sack, I guess," he said. "I enjoyed talking to you, Tom. I always do."

He rose stiffly from the chair into which he had sunk quite deeply and stretched his legs for a moment before shuffling off in his slippers toward the hall that led to the bathroom and bedrooms.

Tom Steward, left alone, replayed the conversation in his mind and came to the end of it all the more determined to continue with his plans to hitchhike with O'Rourke. Likewise, despite all his father had said, he could not dismiss the appeal of confronting the draft squarely, somehow, instead of continuing to seeks deferments.

He had a high regard for his father, in many respects; however, he saw no romance in his father's office-based world as an insurance agent. He had heard his father talk about selling insurance as a service to the community, but he saw no service there, only a phony friendliness that seemed to intensify his father's psychological problems.

His father came shuffling down the hall soon, on his way from the bathroom to his bedroom.

"Think it over, Tom. Please promise me you'll do that," his father implored, looking into the room.

"Okay, I promise I will," the son answered

"I worry about you."

"I know you do. Thanks."

Young Steward moved into the living room soon after that and sat a long time in the dark, staring out the windows that overlooked the lake. Street lights on the other side of the lake marked the lakeshore and road. Now and then a car passed with headlights probing ahead below scattered lit windows of houses. On a distant hill, red lights on a trio of radio

towers blinked off and on.

His mind was filled with conflicting images—heading out with Bill O'Rourke to the unknown highway, sleeping at night with the stars overhead, moving through a dense jungle with a gun in hand, standing before a stern judge and explaining his position against the war in eloquent terms.

81. Steward and O'Rourke hit the road to hitch to Chicago

Tom Steward called Bill O'Rourke the next morning to make the final arrangements for hitchhiking with him to North Carolina, then notified his father, who accepted the news as a foregone conclusion. Next he started making phone calls to locate a store that sold a good, cheap sleeping bag. He figured he could spend 30 dollars; he had 45 left of the money he had brought home for use on his vacation.

"I'd like to go looking with you," Joe Steward said. "That Army store on White Bear Avenue has some good deals."

Tom Steward found a sleeping bag in the store that he felt, at 26 dollars, was a good buy. Meanwhile, his father had found another "arctic quality" bag that costed 45.

"Let me get this for you, as a going away present," he said.

"Maybe it will be too warm," young Steward replied.

"Oh, no, it's warmer in cold weather and cooler in hot weather, that's the beauty of the down," a clerk interjected.

They went out with it, along with some other items including a flashlight, waterproof matches, and a plastic rain suit.

"Might as well be prepared," Joe Steward said.

Next morning O'Rourke came by the Steward house, dropped off by a friend, with his orange backpack neatly tied and his black sleeping bag fastened below it on the aluminum frame. His red hair and beard were freshly washed and combed.

The original plan was for the two youths to walk with their packs on their backs to the north-south freeway, I-35, less than a mile away, from which they would need to hitch five miles or so to the east-west freeway, I-94, to Chicago. But Joe Steward insisted on driving them directly to I-94. At the onramp there, he got out of the car to help them get their packs out of the trunk and on their backs.

"Is everything okay?" he asked his son.

"Yes, everything's fine," young Steward replied.

"Got your money?"

"Yes."

Joe Steward drove off after that but a little later showed up again at the ramp again to roll down the window. The two youths had by this time set up their packs against a pole and O'Rourke was holding a hand-printed cardboard sign that said "CHICAGO."

"You know, when we were talking last night, I didn't mean to ride you, Tom," Joe Steward said out the window. "I just worry about you. I don't want to see you get in a situation you can't get out of."

"I know, Dad. I appreciate your concern.

Sure you got your money now?"

"Yes, it's right here."

"Everything okay?"

"Yes, everything's fine."

Once more the elder Steward departed, making a U-turn a ways down the road and then coming past again with a final wave as he turned onto the freeway in the opposite direction toward home.

"Think we'll make Chicago today?" young Steward asked O'Rourke as he watched his father's car pass out of sight below an overpass on a distant turn of the freeway.

"Good chance of it," his cheerful companion answered. "We'll play it by ear. If we don't make it, what the hell, we'll camp out."

As they said this, a van pulled to a stop just ahead of them. The driver was a heavy-set man of about 35 with sweptback hair and dark glasses. He was going as far as Menomonie, Wisconsin, he said, 90 miles east of the Twin Cities.

The two youths jumped into the van with their packs. Soon they were watching as the houses of St. Paul sped past and faded behind, followed by lush fields of soybeans and corn, and then the bridge that spanned the St. Croix River between Minnesota and Wisconsin. Soon after that, the land turned hilly, with picturesque farms tucked in the wooded bottoms.

The man soon informed them that he was a doughnut salesman. He had been up to the Cities to visit a family member in the hospital. Now he was on his way back home to pick up his afternoon supply of doughnuts.

"Don't think the humble doughnut don't make a buck!" he declared. "See that little town over there, in them trees? There's some dunking going on there right now! I know, believe me. That little town is Woodville, four dozen per day."

"What's the favorite doughnut?" O'Rourke inquired, to make conversation.

"The good, old fashioned cake doughnut, if you can believe it," the man replied with gusto. "The plain ol' plain jane doughnut, that's the best dunking of all!"

Young Steward looked off to the farms and small towns, now and then visible in the distance, thinking to himself that he was seeing the "real America." He felt a tremendous desire to keep on going into it as far as he could go, to see as much of it as he could see. He wanted to draw it into himself and absorb it.

In Menomonie, after the salesman left, Steward and O'Rourke found themselves on a corner with a service station and a root beer stand. They bought crackers and cheese in the service station, then sat on the cement pedestal by the air pump, watching the carhops in their brown and yellow outfits as they paraded back and forth between the customer cars and the narrow shade of an overhanging roof.

"This is the life!" O'Rourke exclaimed, leaning back with cracker crumbs in the wild curls of his red beard. "Damn, Stew, it's a beautiful day, ain't it?"

"Sure is," Steward answered, looking up at the fluttering leaves of the immense poplar trees by the root beer stand. The pretty carhops with their girlish forms and graceful, hip swaying movement added to the effect, also.

"Goddam perfect day!"

"Sure is."

Soon they shouldered their packs again and walked the block or so to the onramp to find it already occupied by a young man and woman about their own age.

The young man had an Amish-style beard with his face shaved clean around his mouth. He wore bell-bottom jeans, hand-broidered with pink and blue flowers, a tan Army shirt with sleeves rolled up to this elbows, and a round brown hat with a narrow brim. The young woman was also dressed in bell-bottom jeans, embroidered with the same pink and blue flowers. She wore a sleeveless white blouse, and had straight blonde hair long enough to reach her waist.

"Good day to you!" O'Rourke called happily.

"Good day to you, also," the young man replied in a subdued manner.

Within a few minutes, shared youth, long hair, and hitchhiking had established enough of a bond for an exchange of information. The Amish-looking young man and long-haired young woman were enroute to Virginia where they planned to join a communal farm.

"We went the program route for a while," the young man commented, after listening to Steward's description of his duties in North Carolina. "The problem with that, you just wind up advancing the middle class."

"You wind up advancing materialism," the young woman added. "It's so 'bourshie,' you know."

"Yea, it's like, 'Wow, it's so cool to be middle class. You can be middle class, too. I'll show you how.'"

Steward made no defense of his activities. He merely listened. But, after the young couple snagged a ride in a pickup and went off waving, he continued to think about what they had said. He had never before thought of what he had been doing as advancing middle class values. He could see there was sense in that argument, however. He wasn't drawn to the middle class life as he had experienced it in his own family.

Steward and O'Rourke soon got a ride, also, from a farm kid who was on his way to a meeting of the Future Farmers of America in Madison. The farm kid talked vaguely about bankers and government programs, or lack of them, that were threatening his family's farm.

"They think they can just flush it down the toilet," the farm kid said.

He was a clean-cut, wholesome-looking young man, tanned brown from his work outdoors. “Well, I’m young. I’m a fighter. I’m not going to let them do that. That’s one reason why I’m going to this meeting.”

The young farmer didn’t elaborate on what he planned to do at the FFA meeting, before he dropped the two hitchers off at a freeway off-ramp in Madison, but Steward was left with the impression of a vaguely-defined resistance against the status quo—a resistance that he himself was part of somehow—gathering force and spreading out even to the rural enclaves of farms, to people like this All-American-looking kid who previously would not have been expected to voice such sentiments.

O’Rourke, on the roadside just after that, cast himself as fitting in with that general scene, also. He talked about the poor people’s campaign and how some people he had worked with as a medic had walked all the way from Georgia to D.C. to dramatize the condition that poor people were in.

“Some things just aren’t right in this county,” he said. “Thank God some people are willing to put themselves on the line like that. Without people like that, things would never change.”

Next to stop was a man in a pickup hauling a trailer with horses. He asked a few perfunctory questions in a sad, tired voice, and then fell into silence as the monotony of the road settled in. Under its influence, the two young hitchers fell asleep to wake up again at a freeway “oasis” in northern Illinois.

“Have to let you off here, boys,” the quiet man said. “I’m going on into town here, deliver these horses.”

“Well, we appreciate your help,” said Steward.

“Glad I could help you along, son.”

“How far are we from Chicago?”

“Oh, I’d say, not too far now, maybe 80 miles.”

Next came an air conditioning and heating repairman, an athletic-looking fellow, about 30 years old, cleanly shaved and dressed neatly in tan work pants and a freshly-ironed blue work shirt. He was going to Chicago for training, he said.

“Where to in Chicago?” O’Rourke asked.

“Down in the Loop, just south of Printing House Row.”

“We’re going to Loyola, place called Rogers Park.”

“That’s north of the Loop, about ten miles up the shore.”

“Well, if you don’t mind, we’ll just come on with you downtown. We can work it out from there.”

“Fine with me. There’s an L-train goes up there. I’ll show you where you can get it.”

The freeway grew busier as the Chicago skyline came into view, with the sleek, tall buildings partially hidden in clouds. Cars, semis, buses, and

cabs competed for the six, pot-hole-riddled lanes, plunging ahead between the vast stretches of closely-quartered buildings.

82. Steward and O'Rourke travel through Chicago to Rogers Park

In Chicago Steward and O'Rourke's last driver of the day, the air conditioning and heating repairman, exited onto the Eisenhower Expressway, where a silver commuter train proceeded in a parallel course along a track in the median between the traffic lanes on either side. The two sides of the expressway converged into a regular street soon after that, with the commuter tracks arcing leftward toward the downtown area.

"You said you're going to Evanston, right?" the repairman said as a green light turned yellow at the stoplight just ahead of him.

"Yes," O'Rourke and Steward both answered.

"Well, this street here is Dearborn. Next street up there, to the left, is Van Buren. You can catch the "L" train there, direct to Rogers Park, I think. I'm turning right here, down that way."

"All right!" O'Rourke returned. "Hey, thanks a lot!"

The two travelers jumped out, yanked their packs out of the back seat, and trotted across the intersection in front of the waiting cars, holding their packs sideways like suitcases. They were just behind the silver train, which was turning up the same street toward the tall buildings in the downtown area.

A steady stream of pedestrians was crossing the street, also. They were mostly young men and women in neat, casual dress, apparently office workers from the brick buildings on the other side of the expressway.

"We'll be out there in an hour, if lady fuck is with us!" O'Rourke declared as they reached the sidewalk.

He squatted down to stuff a book and map into his pack, then jumped up again and swung the pack to his shoulders. With his hands on the straps, he peered at Steward with a crazy, exuberant expression.

"Think we need to get change?" Steward asked, shouldering his pack slowly as he studied the street ahead.

He could see the L-train platform where the driver had said it would be, at the next corner. It was an oblong, roofed structure, like a covered bridge, about a story high at its bottom, and supported on iron girders like a bridge. Stairways, covered with roofs, led straight up from the sidewalk on both sides.

"Change? Hell, no! It's like a railroad station!" O'Rourke shot back. "Come on, Stew, let's get going here! We can be out there in an hour, if we ever get going!"

Steward nodded gamely and set out behind his former crew master, taking in the whole scene. They were in an "old town area" of immense granite and brick buildings. Columns of bay windows, 10 or 15 stories

high, rose overhead. It was by this time late in the day, at the height of the rush hour. Trucks, cars, and taxis contended for position in a cacophony of motors and horns.

A train was in the station at present, Steward observed, seeing its green sides, and yellow windows and roof, on the left side of the station canopy, below the windowed brick wall of the corner of a building. There was a whooshing noise of doors closing, then the train left the station with a one-two clunking sound of wheels on tracks, gaining speed as it trailed past on the right side of the canopy.

"Damn!" said O'Rourke. "Maybe that was it!"

"They come every five minutes," said a nearby pedestrian, a young man about their age, carrying books.

"Is that so? Well, thanks for the information," O'Rourke replied, courteously. "Come on, Stewmeat, get your ass moving."

They followed the stream of people up the clattering stairwell onto the platform, finding there an immense boarding area, three blocks long. Would-be passengers waited all down the wood-slatted walk in the high-walled corridor formed by the tall buildings on either side.

O'Rourke went immediately to a phone booth to let his brother know he was already in town. There, behind the closed door, the red-haired, red-bearded ex-coxswain could be seen grinning, nodding, gesturing with his hands, and finally jotting down directions on his map.

Soon a train appeared at the arc of the track about four blocks to the left, an intense, white pinpoint of light swiftly rounding the turn with a line of green and yellow cars behind.

"That's it!" O'Rourke called, yanking his friend's arm, as the train drew nearer.

Within minutes they were crammed into a "standing only" car with their packs still on their backs. The doors whooshed closed. The train gained speed with a quickening, clunking beat, clinging tightly to the tracks as it accelerated around the southeastern bend of the Loop and headed north through the heart of downtown area.

Steward, from his standing position, with the top section of the train, above the windows, blocking out the upper part of his view, saw a series of brick walls and windows with railings, fire escapes, and signs, then for an instant, a wide, traffic-jammed street with buildings rising out of view. The sun was low in the sky, in the distance, above an overpass streaming with faster traffic.

More walls and windows followed that, and another wide, sun-bathed street crowded with traffic. The train came to a stop. The doors whooshed open. People crowded in. Then, with a whoosh of the doors closing and a jolt of the engine, they were off again, speeding through the corridor between the buildings.

Another arc in the tracks taking the train westward brought a view of a red and white excursion boat proceeding slowly up the Chicago River below a low, shallow-arched bridge buttressed by concrete walls.

"Now there's a river that runs backward," O'Rourke remarked with a sudden smile. The steady progress of the train toward his brother's apartment had restored the playful side of his personality. He had not seen this particular brother in over a year. He was from a large family with three other brothers and three sisters.

"How's that?" said Steward, turning toward his friend. Despite his many hours under O'Rourke's leadership on the crew, he had never really gotten a full sense of where O'Rourke the feisty coxswain left off and O'Rourke the ordinary, sometimes surprisingly contemplative, young man began. O'Rourke had always seemed a little strange, a little extreme, with his orangish red hair and beard and his firehouse red outfits.

"Well, the way I heard it, the river ran the other way, toward Lake Michigan," O'Rourke answered, leaning closer to peer at Steward with his intense blue eyes. "Which meant, see, they were losing fresh water all the time into the lake. So they dredged out the river downstream to make it drain that way, you know. So now the water runs that way, bringing Lake Michigan inland."

"Yea, that's true," threw in a man with a briefcase, standing right next to Steward. "Your friend's got it right."

"Engineering marvel!" said O'Rourke.

"Oh, yes," said the man. "One of many."

"You have to forgive my friend," said O'Rourke, gesturing at Steward. "He's kind of slow."

"Is that right?" said the man, smiling.

Another station stop followed soon after this, then another stretch of buildings and windows, then a change in direction onto a trestle bridge across the river. Here four other downtown bridges could be seen from the lakeside windows of the train, all of them burdened with traffic and etched in light and shadow in the horizontal rays of the late day sun.

Steward looked down then to get a better view, and saw the 32-story Wrigley Building, several blocks upriver, with its gleaming white terra cotta cladding and two-story clock tower. Above that in the distance were the dual, conical towers of the 61-story Marina City complex, the windows there ablaze with reflected sunlight against a cloudless blue sky. Nearer in his view was an enormous structure, two blocks long, 25 stories high at its central tower, with limestone walls and parallel ribbons of windows gleaming in the same light.

There was an esplanade there, along the river front. People passed back and forth beside brightly-colored flags and stone pedestals

supporting what appeared to be busts of historical figures.

"Captains of industry," said the man with the newspaper, noticing that both O'Rourke and Steward were looking in that direction.

"Is that so?" said O'Rourke.

"Oh, yes. You've heard of Montgomery Ward?"

"Not exactly." O'Rourke replied. "But I think I read his book, the one with all the pictures."

"None but the same. Woolworth—of the dime stores—is there, too, I think."

"What do they do there?" asked Steward.

"Trading. Lots of trading. Different kinds of trade shows. That big building is the Merchandise Mart. Second largest building in the world, in square area, next to the Pentagon."

There was another station, an immense station, on the other side of the river. An enclosed, over-the-tracks pedestrian bridge brought a steady stream of people from the side of the gigantic building to the platforms alongside the tracks.

In the general exchange of passengers, Steward and O'Rourke managed to get seats, on the lake side of the tracks, but the train soon entered a long tunnel. They sat with their packs on their laps in front of them, watching the displays of graffiti on the concrete walls around them.

Soon, however, the train emerged from the tunnel. traveling along an elevated section again, through a neighborhood of nightclubs, theaters, and restaurants with facades of buildings tinted orange in the light of the setting sun. Neon lights were already lit there, some blinking off and on. On one, a green figure in a wide-brimmed hat poled a purple, Venetian-style gondola over curved blue lines coming on in succession to represent moving water. In the streets below the signs people moved in small groups or gathered in larger groups or lines outside ornamental doors.

Further out along the track came a park-like area with mansions and elegant apartment buildings and limousines waiting in flower-lined turn-arounds with roof-sheltered boarding areas. Then came vast neighborhoods of frame houses and flat-top commercial buildings with an endless checkerboard of tree-lined streets and parked cars.

The train public address system, in the meanwhile, announced a litany of station names: Sedgwick, Fullcolor, Belmont, Addison, Sheridan, Wilson, Lawrence, Argyle, Berwyn, Bryn Mayer. Names on billboards and signs said another litany comprised of the names of many types of people thrown together into a common heritage: Schneider and Sons Plumbing & Heating; Ho, Allen, and Gardner, Attorneys at Law; Kishamuro Seafood; Tinucci's Restaurant; Red Cloud Clinic; Hattie's Soul Food; Pechachek, Food Broker; Ngo Market; Nielson and Nielson, Jacks of All Trades.

"Thorndale, Granville."

Steward and O'Rourke exited with their packs and found themselves on a long, open-air, roofed transfer platform, with the train they had just left on one side. Toward the north and east, they could see some of the taller buildings of the Loyola campus as they descended the steps to a neighborhood of apartment buildings.

Here there were a stretch several blocks long with a coffee house, a counseling center, and other establishments catering to young people. Young people with the familiar long hair and deliberately non-conventional clothing of the counterculture passed along the street or stood in small groups talking. Many of them carried books and notebooks.

Walking down this youth town "main street", Steward and O'Rourke received some friendly hellos and uplifted thumbs as people observed their backpacks. They returned a hearty hello as they paraded past, looking at the store- front windows with their collection of candles, hand-made clothes and jewelry, tie-dye T-shirts, drug paraphernalia, and psychedelic art.

Signs on telephone poles told of "people's classes," musical events, and demonstrations. Rock and folk music came out from smoky interiors where people sat at tables.

The sun by this time had just gone down. The quaint street with its streetlights and multi-colored, illuminated signs, relieved against the twilight sky, seemed reassuring and familiar to the two travelers after their full day on the road. Here and there, however, they saw disquieting sights, among them teenagers, hang-arounds, with sad, vacant faces, and older men who looked like hippies at first glance but who on closer observation appeared to be ordinary winos with long hair.

[Chapter 82 notes]

83. Steward and O'Rourke find food for thought in Patrick's apartment

Bill O'Rourke and Tom Steward continued along the youth town main street for several blocks and then turned onto a side street for a half block to a five-story brick apartment building. There they pressed on the buzzer for apartment 512 and heard O'Rourke's brother, Patrick.

"Hey, Billy? Is that you? Come on up. I'll buzz you through."

On the fifth floor, about halfway down the hall, they found Patrick O'Rourke waiting with an expectant smile. He was about the same size as his younger brother, with a neatly trimmed, brown beard and hair of the same color plastered back in a 1950's style "duckback."

"Still the ol' greaseball," Bill O'Rourke remarked as he and his brother grinned into one another's faces. "Are you a greaseball or a hippy, or what the hell are you?"

"Sleazeball, is more like it," said a voice from inside the door. There were two other young men waiting there in a living room with a threadbare padded couch and chairs, white walls papered with political and artistic posters, and a coffee table strewn with books. One wall, opposite a hallway opening, presumably to other rooms, was entirely occupied by a turntable, stereo speaks, and rows of records arranged along a bookcase made of unpainted wood planks set on concrete blocks.

Introductions followed, with Bill O'Rourke first introducing Tom Steward to his brother, and his brother then introducing the two other young men, who he presented as his roommates. They were both soft-spoken types with a manner of intellectual refinement and shoulder-length hair. One was thin and blond with glasses. His name was Daren Helm. The other was larger in size with pockmarked cheeks and a dark mustache and hair. His name was Lee Cobus.

In the midst of the introductions, a young woman with dark red hair in a short, pixie cut style appeared from another room to be introduced, also. Her name was Marsha Collins and she appeared to be paired somehow with the dark-featured youth, Cobus.

"Well," said Patrick, "we killed the fatted calf, best as we could. Got some spaghetti cooking, and Lee went out and got some beer and wine. Got a couple of joints for later, too, if you care to indulge."

"We just might be convinced," said the younger brother. "Just to be sociable, you know."

"Spaghetti's ready now," said Marsha Collins.

"Well, hey, let's go!"

They filed out to a little blue kitchen with a white table set with plates, glasses, utensils, and an opened bottle of wine. There, too, there were posters on the wall, including one with a drawing of a hippie-like Jesus smoking a joint.

"WANTED for treason and sedition, Jesus of Nazareth, also known as Christ," the poster said, "known to associate with prostitutes and other suspicious characters, instigator of social unrest..."

On the refrigerator door was a collage of photographs, posters, and index cards with quotes of intellectual and religious figures including Camus, Kierkegaard, Teilhard de Chardin, and others.

One item in particular caught Steward's eye. It was a notebook- sized paper containing a dense outlay of typed text. "A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority," it was titled in all capital letters.

He paused for a moment to look at it more closely as he headed back to the living room with his plate of spaghetti and wine.

"To the young men of America, to the whole of the American people, to all men of good will everywhere," the document began.

"1. An ever growing number of young American men are finding that the American war in Vietnam so outrages their deepest moral and religious sense that they cannot contribute to it in any way. We share their moral outrage.

"2. We further believe that the war is unconstitutional and illegal. Congress has not declared a war as required by the Constitution..."

"Ever seen that before?" said Patrick O'Rourke, who was waiting behind

"No," Steward replied, looking in that direction.

"That's a statement put out by Dr. Spock and, I forget the other names, group of people who are on trial in New York."

"On trial for what?"

"Conspiring to subvert the draft, if you can believe that."

Steward merely nodded, taking the idea into mind.

"Got convicted, too."

"Lot of things are coming down," said Lee Cobus.

"If you ask me, it's surreal, it's Kafkaesque," Marsha Collins threw in. "The trial becomes its own rationale, because it's happening."

The conversation continued in the living room. The dark-haired Cobus and his red-haired girlfriend sat together on the couch. Bill O'Rourke lounged in the single padded chair. Patrick O'Rourke, Steward, and Daren Helm sat on the floor, with their plates and wine in front of them.

Someone had placed a stack of records on the turn-table. The stereo speakers filled the room with strident music, kept at low volume, while a black-and-white TV played without sound in the corner, displaying snippets of what appeared to be a detective story, with a man in a topcoat tailing another man on a city street.

"Tell you where this will all be coming down," said the blonde youth, Helm, "at the convention this summer."

The others were aware, without being told, that he was referring to the Democratic Party National Convention, to be held in Chicago in about six weeks, at the end of August. The press had been making much of the contest that was sure to develop there, between Vice President Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, who appeared to have the nomination locked up, and his main contender, Eugene McCarthy, also of that state.

"You got people here, young people, who are trying to figure a way to keep Humphrey back," said Helm, "but if it's a shut-up job, if they won't give the anti-war people a place at the table, then you're going to see it coming out in the streets."

"How can they give them a place at the table?" asked Marsha. "You're either for it or against it, the war."

"Well, if that's the case, you will see it in the streets then, "declared Helm with finality.

About this time, coincidentally, the evening news came on on the TV, showing the familiar visage of the garrulous Vice President Hubert Humphrey, his mouth moving without sound.

"Hey, speak of the devil," said Patrick.

"Turn it up, Daren. The poor guy's trying to talk."

"Yea, like always."

"Our relationships are cordial, warm, and friendly," Humphrey was saying, "and, of course, I will be very honored, very honored, if I have his help and support. I can't speak for him; he will speak for himself."

"Groveling as usual," said Marsha. "Doesn't he get his fill with LBJ?"

Humphrey was referring to Senator Edward ("Teddy") Kennedy, it soon became clear, when the announcer went on talk about how the assassination of Ted Kennedy's brother, Robert, had resulted in Teddy's endorsement taking on "immense symbolic value."

From there the news coverage turned quickly to another political face familiar to those in the room. It was the tough, arrogant face of Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago.

"Here's another clown," said Cobus.

Daley had championed Humphrey over the weekend, at the Illinois Democratic Convention, the announcer said, where he had also championed Illinois Attorney General William Clark, as Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate seat held by the Republican, Everett Dirksen.

"Sure we're engaged in an unpopular war," Daley was shown saying as he stood stolidly at the lectern, "but Senator Dirksen had as much to do with shaping Viet policies as anybody else."

In another clip he gestured with his index finger, "Please do not make the mistake of believing that the Democratic Party is the party of war."

"Oh, yea. Please do not make the mistake," said Marsha, speaking to the TV. "Ever heard of a little thing called Commander-in-Chief? Ever heard of a little thing called majority in congress?"

"Meanwhile, as the debate over the war continued here, the war was continuing, also," the announcer went on, "as these soldiers found out in a battle near the village of Trangbang, 29 miles northwest of Saigon. U.S. reports claimed that 21 enemy soldiers had been killed. U.S. losses were three killed and 13 wounded.

"Elements of the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne also saw action in an area southwest of Saigon. They were said to have killed 34 enemy soldiers. No Americans were killed."

Scenes of troop movements and preparations faded then followed by close-up news clips of a battle in progress with an enemy soldier cut down as he ran through a swamplike area of waist-high, dense foliage.

"What's the point of looking at it?" Marsha protested.

"It's reality," someone answered. "It's what's going on."

"It doesn't have to go on," she replied.

But the screen image had already shifted to a U.S. scene again, a shot of a distinguished-looking gentleman in a finely tailored dark suit positioning himself behind a cluster of microphones to talk to reporters that didn't look like Americans.

"Senator Clariborne, Democrat of Rhode Island, visiting the peace talks in Paris, called for a third party nation, preferably the Soviet Union or France, to try to break the deadlock in the Vietnam talks," the announcer said. "He said the Viet strategy is obvious..."

"Enough is enough," said Helm, reaching over to pull the plug.

Cobus went over to the turn-table to rearrange the stack of records as the TV set went dark.

"Hey, here's something I think you're going to like," he said to Bill O'Rourke.

The joints came out at this juncture and Steward got up and went out to the kitchen to get himself another beer. Seeing there the statement on the door of the refrigerator, he read through it more closely.

"We also believe it is an unconstitutional denial of religious liberty and equal protection of the laws to withhold draft exemption from men whose religious or profound philosophical beliefs are opposed to what in the Western religious tradition have been long known as unjust wars.

"5. Therefore, we believe on all these grounds that every free man has a legal right and moral duty to exert every effort to end this war, to avoid collusion with it, and to encourage others to do the same. Young men in the armed forces or threatened with the draft face the most excruciating choices..."

He felt filled up to the brim. The events of the day, the images of this

road, were still vivid in his mind. Now this talk of politicians and the war and confrontations in the street. He felt incapable at the moment of sorting it out.

Coming back into the living room—without the beer—he thanked everyone and announced he was heading for bed, to the bedroom where he and O'Rourke had set up their sleeping bags.

"Hey, about the joint?" said Patrick. "It's damn good stuff."

"No, thanks," he answered.

Alone in his sleeping bag, he closed his eyes and repeated the words, "unjust war"... "legal right and moral duty"... "the most excruciating choices."

A distant, one-two metallic noise, as of train wheels clunking on tracks, drew his attention from that. He rose up from his bag and looked out the bedroom window.

Beyond the blinking, bright signs of the youth town main street, an L-train, with a single intense beam and a trail of lit-up windows behind it, was proceeding along a line of darkness between the myriad, multi-colored lights on either side. Further in the distance, at the horizon, the line of darkness led toward a silhouette of partly-illumined buildings, some with blinking lights on top of them, relieved against the glowing city sky.

He settled down into his sleeping bag after seeing that, and for a moment saw in his mind's eye again the concrete, cantilevered spirals of the Marina Towers, windows ablaze in sunlight.

[Chapter 83 notes]

84. Steward and O'Rourke talk on a roof top in Indiana

"You know what really perplexes me?" remarked Tom Steward to Bill O'Rourke the following evening. "You sit in a place like your brother's, watching the news, talking about the war, all these political things, and you think, the anti-war movement, the counterculture, or whatever, it's so important, then you get out here, on the road, and it all gets dissipated. Where is it anyhow? It's gone."

"Is it, though?" O'Rourke replied. "Maybe the ideas are still here. Maybe they're in people's minds. They hear the news reports. They see TV. They see the demonstrations. They see what's going on."

O'Rourke at these moments displayed a degree of intellect and range of speculation that impressed his young friend. He had just turned 21 the month before. His newly-gained size (he was now 5-10), and the twenty or so additional pounds of lean, hard flesh around his shoulders, arms, and legs, gave him a manly appearance. With his newly mature, ruddy face, and inquisitive, often merry blue eyes, set off by his always luxuriant red hair and beard, he had grown to be quite a formidable sight.

O'Rourke's personality, though, was somewhere in between. He was still at times the impish, brash coxswain ready with profanities and bossy counsel, then all of a sudden he would surprise everyone with a gentle, intellectual remark.

The site of this conversation was an unlikely spot on the flat roof of a warehouse in southern Indiana. Steward and O'Rourke had arrived at this place in late afternoon after getting a late start out of Chicago. They had walked off the road a quarter mile or so to this building, and had climbed up on the roof since O'Rourke said it was safer to put down their sleeping bags in unexpected places.

They had even built a little fire—in a far corner of the roof where a wooded hill on one side and a willow tree with overhanging branches formed an area secluded from view. They were sitting with their backs against the outer wall of the building, cooking hot dogs on sticks, and watching a can of baked beans coming to a boil next to the fire. The wall was about two feet high, low enough so they could see over it when sitting down.

The scene from here, looking away from the wooded hillside behind them, was of rolling farmland sectioned into areas of field corn, soy beans, and woods. Just below the first roll of the land, in a grove of oak and maple trees, was a gray-shingled, red brick farmhouse with a white barn and white outbuildings and two blue silos with aluminum caps that shone dully in the twilight.

"Well, what I wonder sometimes," said Steward, pulling up his hot dog closer to his face to see if it was done, "where will it all lead, if everyone is thinking these private thoughts?"

"Just where you would expect it would lead," O'Rourke answered, with a flick of his head, "to people having different opinions, and maybe forming into various camps. I don't think it's any different than any other time, really."

"Just the political process."

"Precisely."

For these two old rowing buddies to have this kind of intellectual conversation was a change from their old way of relating to one another. They spoke carefully, each listening to his own words as they came out sounding like the words of a mature, intelligent man.

"You can be sure there's a lot of people thinking, though," said O'Rourke. "All those people driving by in those pickups, they're thinking, too."

"Well, sometimes it seems to be taking on a real quality of bitterness," said Steward.

"Oh, that, too. No doubt about it."

O'Rourke placed his hot dog carefully on a bun and poured some beans onto the single tin plate that he used for every meal and kept in his backpack. He settled back again against the wall with the plate in both hands and spooned some beans into his mouth with his single spoon. Then he took a big bite of the hot dog and grinned at Steward.

"Little ketchup," he said, "this would be perfect."

"Yea, it's not bad. And came with a view."

"All-American meal."

"Just what I was thinking myself."

O'Rourke munched away on his hot dogs and beans, contemplating as he looked off at the distant farms, each marked by a single bright light in the growing darkness. The evening star was shining in the western sky. Scattered, dimmer stars were also now visible. A tractor with a blinking yellow light was proceeding slowly along a dark road toward a farmhouse where someone was crossing toward it with a flashlight.

"On the subject of bitterness, there's one story I can tell you," said O'Rourke. "I was out hitching in Wyoming early this summer, around Rock Springs, coming across there from Salt Lake, and I met this guy there, hippie type, you know, hitching without a pack, with just a duffel bag, you know, dragging it along the ground. Well, we got to talking, and what he told me was he had had a regular backpack just a couple of days before and this pickup truck had stopped for him and the guy gestured for him to throw his pack in the back of the truck. Then when he went around to get in, the guy just roared off."

"Took his pack with him?" Steward exclaimed.

"Goddam right." O'Rourke answered, laughing. "That was one sorry looking hippie, let me tell you."

"Why would anybody do that?"

"Cuz, Stewball, let me tell you, it's the bitterness, like we were saying," said O'Rourke. "Lot of people out there just hate the hell out of hippies, or out of anybody that looks remotely like one. And the more of this stuff they see on the TV... well, some people are thinking about it,

I guess you could say, and other people just foment about it. They just see a lot of stuff there they don't particularly like."

O'Rourke leaned over the wall, to a branch of the willow tree just behind his head, and broke off a dead limb. He snapped it into several pieces on his thigh and set the pieces on the fire.

"Got a worse horror story than that," he said, grinning.

"Another sad hippie?"

"Yea, except this one got his balls cut off."

"Now that I don't believe."

"Well, that was the story I heard on the road, from this longhair couple. They didn't seem like the type to bullshit."

"So what was the story there?" Steward inquired.

"Well, I don't know all of it," O'Rourke replied. "Just that there was this longhair guy, kind of tall and skinny, so he looked like a skinny girl from behind, and that was apparently what happened, these cowboys or whatever came up behind him, and couldn't forgive the guy apparently, for tricking them into feeling attracted, you know. So they took him off and actually strung him up and cut his balls off."

"That's pretty scary, Bill."

"You're telling me."

"That's why you got us up here on this rooftop?"

"Well, let me just say, it did come into mind. And, like I said, unexpected is a hell of a lot safer than camping alongside the road where every asshole coming past can see you. All you need is one crazy asshole in a bad mood."

"Well, that's the truth. I grant you that," said Steward. "I'm glad we're up here myself, come to think of it."

The hot dogs and beans were gone down to the last crumb of hot dog bun and last bean in the blackened can. Steward got up and stretched and walked a ways down along the wall to a smaller, higher area of the roof where there was a boxlike air conditioning unit.

"Might as well climb up for a view," said O'Rourke, coming up behind him.

O'Rourke shinnied up a metal pipe to the higher rooftop, which was about ten feet above the main roof. Steward followed with O'Rourke leaning over to cuss him on in typical coxswain style.

"Shit, Steward, I thought you were in shape," he said as Steward reached the edge of the higher roof, grunting, and grabbed onto a leg of

the air conditioning unit to pull himself up.

"I am for some things," Steward replied.

"For some things, shit."

They sat side by side on the air conditioning unit, looking off. From their new vantage point they could see beyond the ridge of a low hill to a cluster of lights that appeared to be a small town. A red light blinked from a tall smoke stack or tower.

"You know, Rorkie, the thing I haven't figured out about you is where you're at on this whole war thing," Steward said. "I mean, at your brother's place, from your various comments, you seem to be so much against it. And here you are, signed up to go in."

O'Rourke grew serious listening to this question.

"Well, let's just say, I'm no big fan of the war," he answered. "But I am an American citizen, that's the way I look at it, and my country is at war. So this is just a process I went through in my own mind, to come to terms with that. I figure, I'll finish school, which is the right thing to do, and then, if the war is still on, I'll go in. I'm at peace with that, and I'm at peace with the whole concept of not carrying a gun. I guess that's my compromise, that's how I handle being in between, by going over there and not carrying a gun."

"You'll still be in danger," said Steward. "The way I heard, there's not a lot of respect for red crosses."

"I know that," said O'Rourke. "And you know what, Stewie? I'm glad of it."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want any goddam asshole saying I'm a coward."

Steward took all this into consideration. There was that unexpected dimension of O'Rourke again, the new thoughtful O'Rourke that had gone through all this deliberation.

"You think the war will last until then, until you go over there, when would it be, anyhow?"

"Next spring."

"You think it will last?"

"Well, yes, I do, actually," O'Rourke said. "Even say, if they get somebody in there, for president, who tries to disengage. That will take a little time. Maybe even a couple of years, from what I've heard. That's what even people who want to get out are saying. I mean, there's not going to be any out and out peace, the way I heard it, at least. And am I at peace with that? Yes. If the war goes on, if the war ends, that's out of my hands. I'm talking about Bill O'Rourke here, and what Bill O'Rourke should do. If I don't wind up going, if it ends unexpectedly, well, that's not within my control. That's just something that's meant to be."

"Well, I got to ask you one more question, Bill," Steward ventured

after a pause, “in the interest of full disclosure.”

“And what is that?”

“Does a future nurse named Barbie have anything to do with your scheming?”

O’Rourke smiled and raised back his head. “Well, you know,” he said, “I was planning this before I met her.”

“Yea, I know that.”

“And, Stewball, true I went out with her on my last night in Minnesota, but that’s the only time I’ve gone out with her. She’s so damn busy. It took a half dozen phone calls to get that far. And there is no understanding about the future, you know. Are you jealous?”

“Yes.”

“Well, full disclosure: I have to admit I did ask at the recruiting office if a medic could socially interact with a nurse.”

“And what did they say?”

“Maybe, to a limited degree. It would be tricky, you know. A medic is just a regular soldier, a corporal or something, and a nurse is an officer. Still it would be possible to a limited degree, is what I was told. Like I say, tricky. Discrete. I agree with what you’re implying, though, it does admit a vested interest.”

“I’m not implying.”

“Oh, yes, you are.”

For a while again they were silent, watching the dark scene, where now there was no motion at all, just the vibration through air of light from widely scattered origins—the lights of farms, the cluster of lights in the distant town, and the stars overhead in the clear sky.

“But, all that aside,” Steward said. “I admire what you’re doing, Bill. As far as the war. I respect it a lot. I wish I could say I was so far along.”

The words came back into his mind that he had read the previous evening, “unjust war”... “legal right and moral duty”... “the most excruciating choices.”

“You seem to be doing okay,” O’Rourke remarked. “In my book you are, Stewie. You’re doing something of value.”

“Yea, but what do I have that you don’t have? A deferment. And what is a deferment? It’s a way out. A way out of really making a decision. That’s why I think, more and more, I’d like to give up this whole business of deferments. Just say, in effect, here I am, come and get me.”

It was the same idea he had expressed to his father at home, and O’Rourke answered with the same note of caution that defying the draft would simply lead to being drafted.

“Well, let them draft me then,” Steward replied, as he had at home, but with more confidence in winning approval. “And when they do,” he

said, “I’ll have to react. Either I accept it, and go in, be a soldier, or I say no, and then you know what, Bill? Then I face up to the prospect of maybe doing something that a lot of people would say is being a coward... I don’t like that prospect any more than you.”

“Well, so there you got it, though,” said O’Rourke. “Being able to take that, that would show a different kind of bravery, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, it would, I suppose,” Steward replied.

He realized, as he spoke, that the fear of being branded a coward was what had held him back. Now there was no doubt in his mind that he would have to confront the draft head-on as soon as his Vista term was over. That was just five months away.

85. Steward's trip ends with an order to report for induction

The next morning Tom Steward woke up at the first crack of dawn and thought to himself at once, "Five more months and I'll be out of the damn deferment."

Now that he had decided this, the logic of his reasoning had settled on him with all the firmness of a jail sentence. He felt it as a burden, and yet he felt a great relief at not having to argue it out anymore in his mind.

O'Rourke was already sitting up, rubbing his boots with linseed oil. His red pack was beside him, ready to go with his black sleeping bag curled up and secured on top of it with a yellow cord.

"Better get a move on before someone shows up for work," he said, nodding at the eastern sky.

Within minutes Steward was ready to go. They hung from the side of the building and dropped to the ground just as the headlights of a car turned into the road to the warehouse. By the time the headlights drew close, they were already out of sight in the woods.

Upon reaching the highway, they decided to hike for a while to get some exercise. The sun had just risen above a wood-covered ridge in the distance, projecting a long, evenly-lined shadow along one side of the corn field that fronted the road.

"Beautiful morning!" exclaimed O'Rourke.

"Yes, it is," Steward answered.

"Couldn't be more perfect!"

They set out happily with their eyes set on the next turn in the road where a vast field bordered with clover blossoms and dandelions stretched out toward a white farmhouse partially hidden in pines.

"Today is July 3rd, did you know?" said O'Rourke.

"Yea, kind of. Kind of forget, though," Steward answered.

"Fireworks tomorrow."

"Wonder where we'll be."

"I figure today will probably be our last day together. I was looking at the map before you woke up. Logical place to split up looks like around Knoxville—Knoxville, Tennessee."

"How far is that?"

"Looks like about 300 miles."

They reached the bend in the road, and continued past it up over the crest of a hill. In the treeless pasture below, a long line of cows was heading out from a red barn with a sign that said, "Arndt's Cattle Company." Just beyond that was a tractor lot with plows, discs, and other implements lined up in neat rows. Then came a rural bar with an outdoor volleyball court, a two-pump gas station, and a cluster of box-frame houses.

It was the town they had seen from the roof, Steward and O'Rourke

both realized when they saw a radio tower and hill to one side. Walking down the deserted main street, which was just three blocks long, they came upon a shop from which came the aroma of fresh coffee and bakery. They went in and found a pretty young lady, a brunette, standing behind the counter in a yellow waitress dress with a white apron.

"Out to see the world, I bet," she said, regarding them pleasantly with lovely dark eyes. "Or out to seek your fortune?"

"Little bit of both, I guess," O'Rourke replied.

"What can I do you for this morning?"

"Couple of them muffins would do us pretty good."

"Some coffee with that?"

"Yes, ma'am, two cups of coffee, too."

A little girl, dark and pretty like her mother, and holding a doll baby clad in a white diaper with red hearts, was yanking at the yellow dress this whole time, whispering loudly, "Mama! Mama! Mama!"

"What you want, Punk'in?" said the woman, looking down.

"I want one too!" the girl whispered.

"You going to eat it?"

"Yes!"

Steward and O'Rourke sat down at a table with their muffins and coffee. The girl set her doll down in a chair at the table next to them and sat down there, also, folding her hands like a little lady on her flouncy pink skirt.

When the two young men broke their muffins in half and started to eat them, she did the same with hers.

"What's your baby's name?" asked O'Rourke.

"Gwech-chun," the girl answered.

"Gretchen, she means. She don't say it right," said the mother, smiling, with a sideways tilt of her head.

"Her got an owwie," the girl said, pointing to the doll's leg, where the plastic was broken.

"Oh, I see that!" said O'Rourke. "That must hurt a lot!"

He took a clean white rag out of his pack and wrapped it around the doll's leg. "Think that's better?"

"Uh-huh," the girl answered, nodding.

An hour later, the two young men were fifty miles out on the road, with only the lingering image of the lovely waitress and the bright face of the girl to impress the little town into their minds.

They were moving along fast in a semi with a motor too loud to permit conversation in a normal tone.

The driver, a thickset man of about 40, with a bald head and brown mustache, had managed to holler out little pieces of his story, pausing between each item of information. He had worked as a parts manager in a

car dealership, he said, until he had realized one day that he could never again face that same, old customer counter and the parts bins behind it. Now he was “stuck in a truck,” as he put it.

He laughed at that, his thick hands firmly planted on the wheel, as the cab of the truck bumped up and down. The rig behind was a goose-neck trailer with a half dozen or so concrete forms that he said had been cast in Bloomington. He was bringing them down to Lexington, he said, where they would be used in storm sewers.

“Hell, I’m single, you know,” he shouted. “How many nights can you spend staring at the goddam walls? This way, I’m out moving around, seeing the country.” He laughed heartily, leaning over toward them to speak more softly. “Used to look at it a lot more,” he said, “six months or so ago, I grant you that. But I still have my moments now and then. The well ain’t run dry, not yet, at least. There’s a hell of a lot to see, if you keep your eyes open.”

Their progress across the Ohio River, through Louisville, Kentucky, and now cross-county through an area of gentleman horse farms, had given the two young men ample time to sort through their thoughts.

Steward’s concerns about the draft and unknown enemies on the road had been dispelled by the ever-unfolding panorama of the countryside and the graciousness of people met on the present day. He had been thinking about the pretty brunette and the little girl, dwelling again on the mystery of whether he would ever meet such a woman himself.

O’Rourke had been thinking about the pretty waitress, also, and about how gratified he had felt by the simple act of bandaging the doll’s leg and seeing the little girl’s reaction. He would be doing that with real people again soon, in Georgia; he was glad of that.

From there his mind had drifted again to Barbara Carpenter. Looking back to Matt and Mary’s wedding, he thought to himself that probably everyone, hearing of his and Carpenter’s separate plans to go to Vietnam, and seeing them so often talking, must have suspected how that something was brewing.

She had given him her forwarding address in Brownsville, Texas, and he had broached the possibility of maybe stopping by to see her, as he hitched around. It had taken a moment for that proposition to settle in, behind the girlish brown eyes. But, when it did, she had answered firmly, “No, I wouldn’t want that.” But then she had added, “Who knows, though, Bill, maybe we’ll meet in Vietnam... In some romantic place!” Just that one word, “romantic,” had resonated in his mind. As he saw it it implied the possibility of continuing and intensifying the relationship that as O’Rourke had told Steward and only thus far involved a single date with no commitments made afterwards. Even so, O’Rourke and Barbie had done some serious kissing the night before he left. The prospect of

how that kissing energy would translate into full-body action had entered his mind, though sex with her,—if it ever happened,—would apparently be months or even years away. He laughed to himself at that.

Hours later, in Berea, Kentucky, Steward and O'Rourke bought some lunch meat and bread, and sat eating sandwiches in a small park just across the street from the restaurant where Matt and Mary Brandt had eaten supper together on Mary's first visit to Kentucky, when she had still been Mary Kass.

Steward and O'Rourke didn't know that, of course, but they knew they were only a hundred miles or so from the Brandt's new home. They considered making a side trip up to see them, but Steward balked, not wanting to push it with his job.

"We oughta send them a card, at least," said O'Rourke.

At the post office down the street, they bought a blank post card. On the back of it, Steward drew a cartoon showing him and O'Rourke with their packs sitting on the roadside while a man in a cowboy hat aimed a shotgun at them from a pickup truck behind them.

With the card signed and mailed, they continued out of Kentucky into Tennessee, and around the outskirts of Nashville, arriving near sunset, after two more rides, in Knoxville.

"Well, guess this is the end of the line," said O'Rourke, studying the map. "Best for you to go on up toward Johnson City. Then from there you can go down toward Boone and Lenoir. I gotta head south from here, down into Georgia."

They camped that night under a fallen billboard with supports in an A-shape that held up the sign part of the billboard in a structure like a lean-to facing some woods.

They sat there in their quaint shelter with a small fire, talking late into the night. O'Rourke talked again about the poor people's march from Georgia to Washington D.C. and how he expected he would hear more about it when he got to his destination.

The two young men were up again at daybreak. They hiked together for a couple of miles to where O'Rourke's highway led off to the south from the highway Steward was heading off on.

There they shook hands.

"Hope to see you again soon, maybe in Minnesota," said O'Rourke. "You going back there from Georgia?"

"Maybe, I don't know. Maybe I'll stay a while in Chicago, with my brother. He said to come by."

Steward nodded. "Well, if you do, say hello."

"Great traveling with you, Stewball."

"Yea, you too, Rorkie."

With that O'Rourke waved and smiled and started down the highway,

holding out his hand to hitch as he walked along. The second vehicle to pass him, a gray van, stopped. O'Rourke waved a final goodbye and was gone.

Six hours later, after three rides, Steward was already in Boone, North Carolina. His last ride took him into Lenoir and out into the countryside only a mile from the CAP office where he had left his government car. He walked the last mile and found his car there in the parking lot, with the key under the front seat. On the other side of the front seat was a paper bag with his mail, much of which he still received at the CAP since had never notified anyone of his changes in address.

He drove away from the CAP office and through the long shadows of the sunset toward his home. His home was no longer the house where he had lived for the early part of his Vista service. He had moved from there a month or so before to a cabin about a mile from Dulatown. The cabin had cold running water and no heat. He had rigged up a garden hose outside, behind the cabin, where he could take a shower.

By the time he arrived at the cabin, he could see fireworks in the sky above the lights of Lenoir. He pushed open the door and flipped the switch to turn on a light bulb hanging from the ceiling on a cord. The light projected hard-edged shadows from an army cot and a metal folding chair, the only furniture in the room. Next to the cot were cardboard boxes containing his other belongings.

He set his pack down by the army cot, and walked into his adjoining kitchen to heat some water on his hotplate. In this room were a white kitchen table, a single white chair, and an open shelf containing a dozen or so cans of stew, beans, and similar items. He stood tired and lost in thought until the water boiled, then with a cup of instant coffee in hand returned to the other room and sat down on his cot to read his mail.

One item immediately caught his attention, as he sorted through the dozen or so pieces of mail. It was an official-looking envelope marked with the seal of his local draft board in St. Paul.

The letter inside contained a simple message: "From the President of the United States to Thomas Joseph Steward: Greetings: You are hereby ordered to report for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States."

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PART II: DIVERGING PATHS

86. O'Rourke begins as a volunteer medic, runs into Mark Chambers

Bill O'Rourke saw fireworks, also, on that night of July 4, 1968. He saw them from his third-floor window in a main street hotel in Latta, Georgia, where he had moved in just hours before.

His room had a twin size bed, a small writing desk, and a padded chair with a lamp. Room rent and other expenses were provided by his sponsor, the Georgia Rural Immunization Tour, commonly called by its acronym, GRIT.

GRIT operated a walk-in clinic located just down the street from the hotel. The clinic provided immunization services and served as the staging point for mobile teams that brought the same services to rural population centers such as migrant worker camps. Over its five years as a government-funded entity, GRIT had also managed to widen its funding sources to include other general health services (in addition to immunization) under the umbrella of "preventive health."

The fireworks were being shot off from the county fairgrounds, just south of town, O'Rourke observed. He could see some Roman candles arcing just above the flat roof of the high school, which was in that same direction.

He decided to walk down toward the fairgrounds to get a closer look, but only got as far as the restaurant on the bottom floor of the hotel. There he saw that the waitress of the evening was a woman who worked as a part-time volunteer for GRIT.

"Well, by God, if it isn't young William O'Rourke," she said, when he walked in. "You down here for another stint of GRIT?"

"Yes," he answered, "and all primed up for it."

"How long you going to be down here this time?"

"About six weeks."

"Well, ain't that grand! You staying upstairs?'

"Yes, on the third floor."

"Got a half dozen or so others up there."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. They're down here all the time. John Swearingen over here is one of them. Professor Swearingen, this is Bill O'Rourke."

John Swearingen, who then waved from a table at the window, was a pleasant, intellectual-looking man with glasses who appeared in his 60's. He was dressed in tan slacks, a burgundy sweater, and a brown corduroy sport coat.

"I teach over in Atlanta, at Camden College," he said. "Do things like this in the summer once in a while, gives me a little different perspective. Bring a few students with me."

"Glad to meet you," said O'Rourke.

"I need a little different perspective," said Swearingen. "I teach bugs."

"What kind of bugs?"

"All kinds of bugs. I'm an entomologist. But mostly bugs that cause problems in crops and timber."

"We don't want them little fellers eating everything up," remarked the waitress, whose name was Estelle Koeller. She was about 45, a pretty woman with blonde hair.

O'Rourke ordered coffee and a roll and sat down at a table midway between the professor's table and the counter where the waitress was standing.

"Well, looks like the whole town is over in the fairgrounds," he said.

"Not the whole town, now," replied Estelle. "There's a whole lot of them never forgot Sherman, especially the older ones."

"Yes, that's true," said Swearingen. "The world wars brought an end to that, for the most part. But some still remember, or they remember the family stories. There were no Fourth of July celebrations in Georgia, to speak of, for about 50 years after the Civil War."

"People were that keen on it?" said O'Rourke.

"Oh, yes," replied the waitress, leaning on the counter. "That's maybe four or five generations. Those stories must have been good or had some good venom in them."

"You never heard any yourself?" said O'Rourke.

"Well, yes, I did. Little bits and pieces. Like supposedly the bridge between here and Brunold was burned and the railroad tracks were all bent up and crops got burned and so on. I heard that from my grandaddy. He said there had been a lot more, but he couldn't remember all the details."

"Made a corridor 50 miles wide of pure destruction, is what he did," said Swearingen, "after he got tired of playing cat and mouse with Gen. Johnston. Davis, Jefferson Davis, sent Hood up to Tennessee—Gen. Hood, who took over for Johnston—thinking Sherman would follow the bait up there. But Sherman had his lunatic mind firmly set on destruction. He headed down to the coast instead, burning and pillaging everything he could find."

O'Rourke was silent.

"Architect of modern warfare, they call him," said the professor. "He was just a hundred years early. We could use him in Vietnam! Give him some napalm, he could really be something!"

"You don't think he was just fulfilling what war had to be?" asked O'Rourke. "I don't know a lot about it, but I saw a sign coming down here, about Sherman, in fact, and it said something to the effect that he was paying the rebs back for the battles up north, where tens of

thousands died."

"Oh, yes. That's true. But compare Sherman against Lee and Pickett at Gettysburg, then. Pickett's charge, that was war under the old rules. Some said that was the most beautiful thing they ever saw, those 15,000 men marching in formation under artillery fire."

"Why was that?"

"Because of the nobility of it, the courage! There was a grove of trees out there in the field, about a half mile out, where they were supposed to converge for the final assault. They could have all run out there, dodging and hitting the ground. They could have run out there in dark, before the sun came up to show their positions. But they didn't do that, any more than they would have attacked at night. Night was for resting. They didn't make war at night. Ol' crazy man Sherman threw all the rules away. He would have attacked at night, too, if he saw an advantage."

"He attacked at night?"

"No. But, God knows, he would have. He would have attacked women and children, too, if he had seen an advantage to it, like they're doing over in Vietnam."

"You think they're really doing that?"

"Hell, yes, I do, son. There are no heroes over there."

O'Rourke considered quietly. "I don't think that's true, really," he replied. "I think there's heroes. There's bound to be heroes on an individual basis, even if the overall concept is screwed up."

He was going to say, "fucked up," but he thought better, aware of the presence of a lady.

"Well, I grant you that, then, there's heroes," Swearingen replied. "Yes, son, I grant you that. It's a rough road to go, though, with the overall concept, as you call it, so screwed up."

"Were you ever a soldier yourself?"

"Yes, in World War Two."

"Where did you serve?"

"With the Navy in the South Seas... and, even then, there was a lot of hell to it, I grant you that. But we had a cause to fight for. I pity these poor fellows now."

A silence intervened then and O'Rourke let it grow, not wanting to press into the other obvious topic, of what he as a young man of draft age was doing in response to the Vietnam War. He felt drained of energy and unsure of the personal plans that he had described so surely to Tom Steward just two days before, on the rooftop in Indiana.

Going out later, after a courteous goodbye, O'Rourke found the sidewalk occupied by people walking back from the fireworks display. Among them was another person he recognized, a young, intense Methodist minister, about 30 years old, who O'Rourke had heard had

gone to Washington D.C. with the poor people contingent from Georgia.

That was true, the minister said, as they walked along together, catching up on one another's news, but he had come back from Washington because his father had gotten unexpectedly sick.

The minister's name was Mark Chambers. He had coarse brown hair and large, strongly drawn features, and was about the same height as his red- haired, red-bearded friend, but without the look of physical strength and health that O'Rourke had acquired in the previous year.

"How was it up there?" asked O'Rourke, eyeing the minister keenly, since from the start he had detected an unusual weariness in the other's usually buoyant voice.

"Well, to tell you the bald truth, it was not good at all, not good at all," Chambers replied.

"How was that?"

"Oh, the way up was fine, when we were walking," the minister answered softly. "But once we got there, and everything settled down... Well, for one thing, Bill, it was eventually tremendously boring, just sitting around the camp, listening to people make speeches, people that would be better off not making speeches, and there's the strain of living in a little crowded slum, is what it really amounts to. There's a lot of grumbling."

"Grumbling about what?"

"Grumbling about the management, you could almost say, the people in the tents looking at their leadership. No one has come forward that can take the place of King. People aren't happy with the new leadership, since King. There's grumbling that we ought to do more, force the issues more. There's grumbling about who gets what in the camp, which tent is better, and so on. And lately, the young ones, the young blacks, especially, are going off into the regular city areas, coming back stoned or drunk, and raising a big ruckus, saying it's time to hit the streets and fight, or just fighting one another... there's been some of that, too."

"So you had your fill of it?" said O'Rourke.

"Oh, not exactly. I would have stayed, if I hadn't been called home. But I was glad for an excuse to get out of there."

They had walked down the main street as far as the fire station at the very end of it where there was a water tower and a baseball field with unlit night lights.

"It's quite an experience, in a way, overwhelming, I wish I could explain it," said the minister, shaking his head. "You walk down the big mall there, in D.C., stop at Jefferson, Lincoln. You read all the words, 'It is rather for us the living to be here dedicated,' then, you go back to that odd contrast of a little, artificial shantytown that's been put there more as a show, as I guess what you would call political theater, than as a

financial necessity... I mean, no one really needs to live there. You're left in between.... Seeing those monuments, it's like seeing the fireworks tonight, it makes you so proud for an instant to be an American, then you walk back down the street into your thoughts, and little parts of those long-winded speeches come back... "

The minister paused, his dark brows lowering. "Like that the slaves were freed, but they just moved over socially... down here in Georgia... to become tenant farmers with whites still owning the land. So there's an illusion of social progress... You look at it good and it's not really there... I don't know, Bill, I'm just feeling tired."

"You're just in a mood, man," said O'Rourke with a hardy pat on the shoulder. "Let's go have a beer together and work it out."

"Oh, not tonight," replied Chambers with a smile. "I'm not at that point yet. I guess, ultimately, I do have some inner resources."

"Well, resort to them, man," grinned O'Rourke. "You're a damn good man, if I can say that to a preacher."

"Yes, you can, Bill," said Chambers, clasping O'Rourke on the shoulder. "And maybe see you tomorrow?"

"You coming down to GRIT?"

"Leading a day trip. Care to come along?"

"Yes, very much."

"See you tomorrow then, eight or so?"

"Yes."

With that, O'Rourke watched his minister friend go off, youthful in appearance and gait, but with a carriage of the head and shoulders that suggested an older man.

He himself felt strangely burdened with all the talk of Sherman and modern war and the inglorious field of battle that he would presumably be walking upon himself within a year. Now this talk of the taintedness of the poor people's campaign. He had held that so high in his mind.

He would need to do some claiming of inner resources, also, he cautioned himself as he walked back to his room.

87. O'Rourke works in a rural clinic for migrant farm workers

Bill O'Rourke was at the GRIT office at 730 the next morning, ready to be off on his first assignment. While waiting for Rev. Mark Chambers to arrive, he learned that the day trip was down to Bacon County, near Alma, Georgia. There were a couple of dozen migrants down there working in the tobacco harvest. They were Hispanics who had come over from picking Vidalia onions in Tattnall County.

Besides Chambers and O'Rourke, the contingent included Prof. John Swearingen and three college students that he had brought with him. In addition, there were three paid staff members, including a registered nurse and two licensed practical nurses, all young women.

The trip had an educational purpose for the three students, as well as being a volunteer activity. They were doing an internship on "Effects of Technology on American Land and Culture."

Chambers, who had regained his normal buoyant spirits, got started on that on the way down, telling the students about a labor contractor who was being investigated by the U.S. Labor Department.

"He said something to the effect, 'If you have a dog in your yard, and you treat the dog wrong, the dog leaves. Same with these people. If they're being treated wrong, why do they keep coming back?'

"Well, that seems true, to some extent," answered one of the students, a young man of about 19. "They enter into the contracts out of free choice, don't they?"

"Well, yes, but it's like any labor contract," Chambers remarked. "The employer has an obligation to provide a safe, humane workplace. The migrant worker doesn't really have a choice to choose better conditions, because no better conditions exist on any of these farms."

So the conversation went, with the young minister eager to educate the new volunteers, and they eager to hear what he had to say. Meanwhile, a splendid but steamy day was developing outside the open windows of the van. The sun had just climbed above the low haze on the eastern horizon, projecting a sudden flood of light across the lush expanse of rolling wooded hills and fertile bottoms lined with row upon row of perfect tobacco plants.

That sight of technological mastery of nature was the professor's cue to begin his own instruction. "There are some little varmints I know of that could spoil that perfect picture," he said, "flee beetles, aphids, cabbage loopers, budworms, hornworms, to name a few... And pesticides have been developed for every one of them... like acephate, which is a good, wide-spectrum pesticide. Methomyl, oyamyl, the list goes on."

"And to go with that list, you could list the health conditions that come with exposure, like dermatitis and respiratory problems," remarked

one of the young nurses in the contingent.

"Oh, yes, and, of course, from this experience, I'm aware of that," the professor replied, "though I was not, sufficiently, for many years. But therein lies the crux of the problem, in my opinion, because, look at those fields, hardly a flaw in sight... you couldn't possibly have such perfection without chemicals. But it's a delicate balance, I grant you. There's a way to maintain the right balance... That's where your generation is so much ahead of mine. We've come to this late."

At a bend in the road where a wide field of tobacco plants butted up against a pine wood, the contingent of GRIT personnel turned off the main road unto a gravel road.

About a quarter mile into the woods, there was a cluster of single-wide trailers, with two dirt streets like a little town, located beside a creek bordered by pines. In the midst of the town was a cement block building that appeared to be a latrine and shower house.

Several dark-haired young women, each with several dark-haired children, were walking from the cement building toward a large barn at the end of one of the dirt roads. That was where the clinic would be held, said Chambers, who had been to the same camp several times before.

Within the barn, the GRIT workers found a well-lighted area with a freshly swept and oiled gray concrete floor and fold-out tables arranged into two sections of three tables each separated by a yellow rope.

A group of eight pregnant women, most with babies or young children in their arms, stood in one section. Boys and girls ranging in age from about two to about 11 or 12 laughed and played in the other section, some holding white immunization forms.

The barn was hot and humid, and cooled with several large fans that pushed through air heavy with the rich aroma of freshly harvested tobacco. Onion-shaped bunches of the greenish-yellow leaves, each bunch about half the size of a man, hung in neat rows in the rear of the barn behind the sections set up as a temporary clinic.

An amiable-looking, middle-aged man with graying brown hair, neatly dressed in a white shirt and tan slacks, gave a brief introduction before the clinic began. He identified himself as Virgil Hudson, owner of the farm, and addressed most of his comments to the GRIT workers.

"We hope the way we have accommodated your needs today will dispel the notion you sometimes get in the news that a farm like this is mean to people somehow, or doesn't care about its workers, or doesn't give them a good job," the farm owner said in a soft, friendly voice. "Many of these people, like Juanita here, have been working on this farm for many years. Juanita used to come here with her parents when she was just a little girl like some of them over there running around. On the way out, if you look to the left in the woods, you will see a yellow house, an

ordinary house. That's my house. I'm an ordinary man. These people here live in trailers while they're here, but most of them have houses of their own back down in Florida, mostly, where they live for the winter. They got a house, I got a house, it's an arrangement that works out good for all of us. So we're glad to see you fine young people here today to attend to the medical needs of our fine workers."

The young minister, the professor, and Bill O'Rourke worked in the same section together, as the clinic began, with Prof. Swearingen taking down names and filling out forms, and O'Rourke giving immunization shots, while Chambers assisted him by handing him new needles and disposing of the used ones.

"You have a penchant for that type of thing," Swearingen remarked as he watched O'Rourke interacting with the children and administering shots with solicitous concern for any possible pain. "You ought to get into that line somehow."

"Well, I do plan to do that," O'Rourke answered softly, smiling at the dark little girl who was next in line. "This'll be really fast. You'll hardly know it happens," he said to the girl. "What's your name?"

"Lupita," she replied, smiling back with a smile that revealed several teeth missing in the front of her mouth.

O'Rourke truly looked in his element in this role, with his red hair and beard neatly combed, and his blue eyes sparkling with interest and concern.

"How do you plan to do it?" the professor persisted.

Pressed, O'Rourke, in a humble, tentative voice, described the plan he had disclosed to Tom Steward—enlistment in the Army the following spring, followed by service as a medic, maybe in Vietnam.

"So that's where the defense came from of there being a possibility of heroism over there," Swearingen commented, after O'Rourke's description sunk in. "Well, if there are any heroes over there, Bill, I think they'll be of your metal."

O'Rourke glanced at him, surprised. "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes."

Next in line was a stocky boy of about four years of age, dressed in black tennis shoes, cutoff jeans, and a black T-shirt with a cartoon baseball player with the number, 8. The boy had black hair parted in the middle, hanging over his eye on one side.

He was a tough, little guy, determined not to show any fear of the needle. He took a deep breath and watched the point of the needle as it went into his arm.

"You're a brave one," said O'Rourke. Seeing in the boy's eyes that he did not comprehend, he switched to Spanish, which he had made a great effort to learn on his previous stints with GRIT. "Muy bravo!

Campeon! Como te llama?"

"Jorge."

"Jorge? Jorge que?"

"Jorge Hilberto Hidalgo Martin," replied the boy proudly, peering at O'Rourke with his dark eyes.

"Que nombre! Vas ser baseball player?" said O'Rourke. Not finding the words, he gestured with his arms as though holding a bat.

"No. Presidente!" said the boy with a smile.

"Presidente! Presidente de que?"

"Presidente del pais!" said the boy.

"Que grande! De este pais?"

"Si!"

"Es Americano?"

"Mis padres no. Pero yo, si!"

The boy's comments drew the attention of everyone in earshot and drew laughter and exclamations of approval from the women in the adjoining line.

O'Rourke thought about that later as he walked to the trailers to deliver a signed immunization form that the boy had forgotten. The boy was an American merely by having been born in the United States—only four years old, a first generation American, already grasping the idea that the highest office in the land was available to common people.

A pregnant woman who had been at the clinic smiled at him as he passed by and directed him to the boy's trailer. It was a silver trailer in the shade of a long, drooping pine branch.

Arriving there, he knocked on the door and peered inside as the smiling boy took his form. He saw four mattresses lined up side by side on the floor in what appeared to be the main room of the trailer. One of the mattresses was the boy's, he gathered. There were baseball cards, toy trucks, and plastic monsters arranged neatly along the back of it, against the wall, as if to make the mattress serve as a room.

Within the trailer, on one side, a large standing fan was moving back and forth, blowing at full force, but the air inside was stiflingly hot and smelled of body odors.

Back at the barn, O'Rourke helped to pile up the tables and chairs, taking the lead role naturally that he was used to from rowing. "Probably if we stack the tables in the back there, and the chairs more to the front, it will be a better arrangement for them," he said to the college students working with him. "They probably use the chairs for meetings, without the tables."

They fell readily in with him, doing what he directed as if he was a sergeant in the Army.

"You've got some fine leadership qualities there, too," the professor

said as they walked in.

"Now you're buttering me up again."

"No, I mean it."

O'Rourke thought about this, also, as they drove from the tobacco farm with the little girl, Lupita, and many of the women and children who had been at the clinic, waving goodbye. A group of boys including Jorge ran beside the van laughing and yelling, "Andale! Andale! Race car!"

He was aware of his leadership abilities as a legacy of his days as a coxswain. Part of the coxswain personality he wanted to leave behind, in particular the profane, juvenile language, but he didn't want to leave the whole personality behind. He wanted to retain the best parts of it, whatever they were.

That night he kept thinking about how hard it was to find anything not fraught with ambiguity. The day had left him with the impression that the migrant situation, like the war and the poor people's march, was so full of complexities it could not be sorted out.

There was Swearingen working to combat unhealthy conditions that he had helped to cause. He knew he had helped to cause them. He continued to cause them, content to stumble on in the gray area of benefit versus harm. There was Chambers, continuing to advocate for poor people despite seeing at close range that they were not always right or good, either. There was the farm owner, claiming mutual benefit despite the shabby housing conditions on his farm... Most likely the farmer, too, was accepting the bad along with the good. What was wrong with that?

There was nothing wrong with it, he concluded. Still he yearned for something purer like the obvious idealism of the college students and the keen purpose of the young boy.

Remembering the boy's clear eyes, he thought of Barbara Carpenter's eyes and how she had looked at him on their last night together with the same clarity of purpose.

[Chapter 87 notes]

88. Matt and Mary settle into their new life in Kentucky

The sound of a motor,—a car or truck laboring up the hill, and probably still a mile or so away,—caught Mary Brandt's attention in mid- morning on July 8, 1968. She paused to listen to it at the refrigerator door, with a creamer filled with milk held in both hands.

The refrigerator door served as a bulletin board for her new husband, Matthew, and herself. A paper there listed the phone numbers of the current Mountain Volunteers, including two new volunteers, young women just out of college, who had joined the group in June.

Next to the list of phone numbers was the postcard sent by Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke. It contained the cartoon that Steward had drawn showing him and O'Rourke sitting by a fire, with a cowboy in the background aiming a shotgun at them from a pickup.

Mary set the creamer on the large table in the kitchen side of the cabin, which had no interior walls. The table was neatly set with cups and saucers and small plates, all with the same floral pattern as the creamer. Under her feminine influence, the spacious cabin had undergone a change in ambiance from the hunter decor of Bruce Harris, the previous owner.

The former lead volunteer had completed his move to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., leaving behind a bookshelf of books on political and sociological subjects. Dennis Kelly had taken over Harris' former role, at Matthew's insistence. Matthew himself had also been considered.

Dressed in blue jeans and a navy blue T-shirt, with her long dark hair trailing in the wind, Mary headed out of the cabin and around back of it through the tall grass to a lean-to wood shed attached to the back of the cabin. Matthew was there, cleaning it out to use as a dark room.

She found him on top of a free-standing structure that he had built from logs just to one side of the original wood shed. He was tacking down a strip of corrugated tin. She smiled and looked up at him, raising one hand to shield her eyes from the sun.

"Sounds like they're coming up the hill," she said.

The "they" she referred to was Dennis Kelly and the two new volunteers, whose names were Janet Harlan and Karen Holm. They were coming up for the monthly MVs organizational meeting.

"Good," he answered simply in his brief manner, peering off toward the open, grassy slope just below the cabin where the road emerged from the woods.

He came down the structure in two giant steps, and glanced back to the inside of the wood shed. His plan was to clean the shed out entirely and then build tables to use for his chemicals and equipment.

"When will you build the tables?" she asked, looking at his healthy,

animated face.

He had grown a thick mustache, dark as his hair, since the wedding. The mustache gave him an older, more manly appearance. His hair was still about the same length, clipped off just below the ears. It was no longer jaggedly cut, however, since his pretty wife cut it.

"Maybe start tomorrow."

"I'm always amazed at what you can do!"

He gave her a kiss for that and threw his arm around her shoulder. Together they came around the cabin, arm in arm, as Kelly's jeep appeared at the edge of the woods. Several beeps of the horn sounded out in greeting as three hands waved from the open window.

The three volunteers, all dressed in blue jeans and plaid flannel shirts, got out of the car with banging doors and shouts of greeting as Matthew and Mary came across to them through the long grass.

"Got it done yet?" said Kelly. "Getting there," Brandt replied.

Immediately the women went across to embrace Mary Brandt. They were sturdy, plain women, not her equal in beauty, as well they knew, but they had quickly become good friends. Both were of medium height with shoulder length brown hair. Janet Harlan had a thin face that often showed a slight strain, as of some undisclosed worry. Karen Holm was round-faced, self-conscious in her speech, and quick to smile.

Inside the cabin, Kelly went over to the wall by the fireplace and looked through the chest-high opening, meant for passing through wood, that now served a kind of half-window into Brandt's dark room.

"You want some help with the building, I could come up tomorrow," he said in his formal way.

"You're hired," Brandt replied.

The two young men, so different in their intellectual dispositions, constantly found a bond in this way, in their common heritage of the family farm and being used to physical labor.

Soon the group was seated at the cheerful table, joking back and forth as Mary served coffee.

"Mary, you're going to spoil us," remarked Kelly with a smile. "Harris never did this."

"I enjoy it," Mary replied in her pleasant voice. "I enjoy serving my friends. We think we're very lucky to have such good friends."

"Yea, all except for Sad Dog," Matthew threw in. "It's such an effort to cheer him up."

The "dog cadre" theme had carried forward into this new group, as a running joke at times, and at times as an agent of cohesion. Kelly had distributed the first of his little "Dog Daze" newsletters, which had described the group's main activities including the newly-initiated voter drive and a strip mine demonstration planned for the following week, on

July 17.

True to their resolution following the MVs' convention, Kelly and Brandt had let the local group, under Lois MacRoan, call the shots for the strip mine demonstration. The group had gotten off to a strong start, with more than 20 people attending a meeting held the previous week.

Matthew Brandt was now free to participate as he wanted in these activities. He had severed his ties with Fletcher Bourne's Tri-Country CAP, and now worked directly under the MVs.

Further small talk continued for a few minutes regarding the two new members' new apartment in the small town of Hassox, where they lived in an adjoining county. Then a moment of silence intervened and all eyes turned to Kelly, who had come to the meeting prepared as always with a typed agenda.

In response, Dennis Kelly smiled ever so slightly, bowed in his formal manner, and handed out copies of his agenda to everyone, including Mary Brandt. She was not a member of the MVs, but she had been declared a bona fide member of this particular group, with the understanding that she would participate on a voluntary, full-time basis. She had not applied to become a paid member.

The agenda was titled, "Mountain Volunteers Meeting, July, 1968." Four items were listed. Item 1 was, "Generalize?" Items 2 and 3 were the voter drive and strip mine demonstration. Item 4 was the garden project, which for the current year was directly funded through the MVs to avoid any further dependence on Fletcher Bourne. For each item, there were one or two lines of descriptive text.

In contrast to many of the other MVs, Kelly had never taken up with any kind of "hippie" look. He had a different identification, as he had just recently told the Brandt's, a historical one, with various activists of the past, such as W.E.B. DuBois, and with people of the present such as the Berrigan brothers, Phillip and Daniel, the two Roman Catholic priests who had recently achieved notice by pouring blood on draft board files. With his fine brown hair, neatly trimmed and combed, and his earnest manner, so free of anything that might have been called "ego," he could have been a priest himself, or some kind of true servant of the people like a dedicated physician.

"Well, if you will forgive me, I organized the agenda today around a theme," Kelly said. "The theme is 'generalize,'—as you will see, the first item—and where I got this theme is from this letter I got just last week from Fr. Dan Riley, kind of a friend of me and Matt... Works over in West Virginia, very much involved and experienced in efforts like ours... We met him at the MVs convention last spring... Quite a good man, wouldn't you agree, Matt?"

"Read the damn thing, Denny," said Brandt, getting up for coffee. He

poured Mary a cup first and then went around to the others, ending at Kelly, who nodded as he held up the page he wanted to read.

"Okay, here it is," said Kelly. "Just to give you a little preface, they've got a voter drive going like ours, only further along, with more people involved, maybe a dozen or so people.

"'The response has been pretty good,' he writes, 'and that has got me thinking, what about the adjoining counties where none of this is going on? If we could only generalize the process somehow. The word stuck in my mind. Generalize, generalize! By which I mean, go out to other groups in those other areas, try to bring them into the same strategy. Doing this, maybe we'll maybe have a ripple effect. Throughout the whole region, throughout the whole state...'"

Kelly set the letter down. "Well, this is not a new concept, as you know. Same kind of things came up in the meeting last spring. But I was thinking, for us it still is a new concept, isn't it? And why couldn't we do it more at the same time as we do our own activities."

"Meaning?" said Brandt.

"Meaning, simply, as we go forward, in our own activities, at the same time, try to coordinate with other groups of MVs, or other groups, aim for a joint action wherever possible. Just get in touch with them somehow, that would be a start."

Kelly stopped and looked around for a response. He was met with silence.

"On the strip mine, I'd say 'okay' so long as we present it to the group and let them take the initiative," said Brandt.

"Agreed, totally agreed," Kelly replied. "As for the voter drive, on that, well, I think it's obvious, this is our own effort, so if we generalize, that's our own effort, too."

"Yes, okay," said Brandt. "But let's get other people involved in it, I mean, around here."

"Matthew, in my mind, that is always our goal."

Seeing that this interchange left the women with blank expressions, Kelly took a moment to describe the history of the previous demonstration and how he and Matt had felt that Harris had pushed too hard, and so on.

To this and other strategy parts of the meeting, the women merely listened. They became more animated and involved, however, when the details of implementation were discussed.

The details agreed on were as follows:

Janet Harlan and Karen Holm would work on voter registration in the adjacent county where they were living. They would attend the strip mine demonstration, and would help with giving rides, but that would be the extent of their involvement.

Mary Brandt would work on voter registration in the county around the cabin. She would also only take part in the demonstration on the day itself.

Matthew Brandt and Dennis Kelly would work with helping the local group to organize the strip mine demonstration. They would not work in voter registration for the time being.

In addition, Matthew would continue on the garden project, which now provided supplies and advice to more than 20 families. Mary would go with him to meet some of the people and maybe would get involved, also.

"The way I see it, this arrangement will just be for the next few months," Kelly said. "After that, we can all get more into one another's areas, especially as we 'generalize,' if that happens."

After the meeting formally ended, the group sat at the table for a while talking.

First topic to come up was Birl Poling, Brandt's jailhouse friend. The old firebrand had put up his name for county commissioner, as he had said he would do.

"The man has a gift at public speaking," Kelly remarked. "He has a flare for the dramatic statement. Just so he doesn't get himself in trouble."

"In trouble, how?" said Janet Harlan.

"Making promises that make a lot of people uncomfortable. Like lately, I heard, he's been saying there ought to be a way to tax the coal companies somehow to make them pay for the price of restoring the hills after they strip them out."

"Oh, the coal companies will love that," said Brandt.

"Well, let's just say, it perks up a lot of people's ears," said Kelly. "Then he's been talking about public servants using public resources for private means, like getting their private roads graded, and so on."

"Harris used to talk about that," said Brandt.

"Well, yea... Only when Harris talked, he turned people off with his little prince act. Poling doesn't do that. Poling is one of them. Everybody knows he's been through the grind."

Fletcher Bourne was also mentioned at the meeting. He had caught wind of early efforts in the voter drive, and had written an editorial expressing approval. Matthew had been totally out of touch with Bourne since moving out of the Bourne household.

That evening, with a fire burning in the fireplace, Matt and Mary cuddled in their idyllic cabin, reading some newspapers that Kelly had dropped off.

In Vietnam, Matthew read, 33 Americans had been killed in a battle near Khesanh. The peace talks in Paris were stalled. Vice President

Hubert Humphrey, from the Brandt's' native state, Minnesota, continued to predict victory at the Democratic convention in Chicago. Student activist groups continued to threaten mass demonstrations against his nomination.

89. Brandt and Kelly attend a planning meeting in Simers Branch

The following week, on Tuesday evening, Matthew Brandt and Dennis Kelly drove over to a little coal town named Simers Branch for the meeting that Lois Roan had arranged to discuss the details of the strip mine demonstration planned for Thursday evening.

They had expected to help with transporting people to the meeting, but the determined committee chairman had called them the previous day to announce that she had made all the arrangements herself.

Their trip took them out a winding, two-lane highway, looking for a sign that said, “Simers Creek Mine No. 3.” They found the sign in a long, narrow valley at a place where the road dipped below a railroad overpass. Turning left onto a gravel road, they followed alongside the single track and creek past a coal cleaning plant with a huge pile of discarded “gob.” The next turn took them to a crest in the road from which Simers Branch could be seen directly below at the upper end of the valley.

The little town had a typical layout such as both young men had become familiar with. Row houses, identical in structure, fronted the main road at an oblique angle from their point of view. Each house had four same-sized rectangular windows on the facing side, with gray roofs, two chimneys, and an open porch smack dab against the road. Almost all were painted white. Just in front of them was a square, plain building that looked like a small railroad depot. That was the bath house, both men knew. Beyond the houses, on the thickly wooded hillside, was a rusty coal chute leading down to a metal-sided tipple.

The mine opening above the coal chute was covered over with dirt and the two side tracks below the tipple were empty. The mine was obviously closed.

On the top of the mountain, above the creek, about a third of the wooded ridge within view had been chopped off to form a flat treeless plateau.

“That’s the strip mine they’re targeting, I think,” said Kelly. “Top removal type. Lois said it was right above the town.”

The town and even the strip mine were a picturesque sight in the long evening shadows. It was a delightful, balmy summer evening, with the sun just above a western ridge on the other side of the valley from the strip mine.

Continuing down the road into the town, the two young men passed the mine supervisor’s house, located on a tree-shaded lawn by itself. Up the road further, past a long line of row houses, they found the appointed meeting place, a white church with a single steeple.

Getting out of the car, they saw Lois Roan getting out her car with her teenage daughter Darla and her toddler grandson “Hodie.” She was

dressed in an ankle-length black skirt and a black jacket with a blue satin collar. Her dark hair was freshly permed. Darla, the pretty, dark-haired daughter, was dressed in tight white stirrup pants and a blue fleece tunic. The blue-eyed boy, with his single brown curl in the middle of his forehead, was dressed in white, bibbed shorts and a red T-shirt with a Detroit Tigers logo. He was holding a toy frontier rifle.

They all waved and came walking toward them smiling.

"Well, I talked to a lot of folks," said Lois. "We'll just see now if it done any good."

"Where are they from?" asked Kelly, with a polite nod to the girl who smiled and nodded back.

"Oh, lot of them from here. Lot from around here, up in the hills all around."

"How do you know them?"

"Oh, people here... we used to live here ourselves, and Darla, she come up here," Lois said, pointing at her daughter.

"Is that right?" said Kelly.

"Oh, yes. See, they was a big explosion in this here mine, back in 1963, and the mine was closed on account of that."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

The girl's face clouded over at the mention of this. She nodded again, shyly, and said, "Well, me and my little boy here, we're goin' down the street there to that little park."

"Not coming to the meeting?" said Kelly.

"Oh, no, my girl here," said Lois, "she don't like sittin' around listenin' to people talk."

"Ah'll be there when they's doin'," said Darla, smiling.

"Well, we appreciate that," said Kelly.

"See, her daddy died in that explosion," the mother explained after the daughter had gone off with her little armed escort.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Kelly replied. "I didn't know."

"That was a sad day in this little town," Mrs. Roan said, "with the explosion and the fire—they was a fire in there, too. Who knows now if some of them in there didn't burn—then lot of folks knowin' the mine'd close down. This ol' mine was pretty much waitin' on closin' anyhow. They was rumors, you know."

"How did you get this church to meet in?" Matthew inquired as the three of them walked up the church steps together, Lois with a spiral notebook in her hands.

"Well, see, I was a member, and my husband, too, until the church closed down, then I was one of 'em that helped turn it into this center. My husband and me, we met here. At a 'pie social',' they call 'em, when

he bought my pie. Back in them days, we used to sing in here, too. Used to sing up a whole lot of glory, that's a fact."

Inside the two young men found a single, large room divided into a front area with rows of folding chairs and a rear area with refreshment tables and open space to stand. The room had an A-frame roof and freshly oiled pinewood floors with no ornaments or wall hangings to suggest its previous function as a church.

There were about 20 or so people in the church: crusty-looking old men in workclothes and bib overalls, old women in full skirts, and four or five young adults—native Appalachians, judging by their mountain twang and bashful manner. They were dressed in neatly-pressed blue jeans and sweaters like college students.

On the side of the room near the door, there was also a bulletin board with what appeared to be a display on mine and union activities. The display consisted of photographs and accompanying text descriptions. Most of the photographs appeared to be from the 1920s and 1930s.

Lois Roan immediately brought an old man with a dignified face up to meet the two volunteers. His name was Virgil Wallins, she said, and he was one of the most active members of the group. Wallins shook hands courteously with the two visitors then stood beside them silent.

Brandt watched Wallins as he exchanged a greeting with someone else then looked to the bulletin board beside him. Next to displays on "Bloody Harlan" and "Mother Jones" were the typed lyrics of a song titled "Minin' in Harlan" by Phillip Ochs. The part his eyes fell on went like this:

Well, minin' is a hazard in Hazard, Kentucky,
And if you ain't minin' there,
Well, my friends, you're awful lucky,
'Cause if you don't get silicosis or pay that's just atrocious
You'll be screamin' for a Union that will care.
Well, the badge of Sheriff Combs always shines
And when duty calls he seldom ever whines.
Well, I don't like raisin' thunder, but it sort of makes you wonder
When he runs the law and also runs the mines.

This was the first reference ever that Brandt had seen to the union being any less than the complete champion of the miners. Also, in reading the little bit about the sheriff, he recalled his jail stint with Birl Poling and how the old man had claimed that the sheriff and his deputies were in effect custodians of the mine.

By an uncanny association, just as this thought passed through his mind, he noticed a photograph just to the side of the song lyrics, and saw there an image of a handsome young man with dark hair that looked a lot like Birl Poling.

"This man here, do you know him?" he said to Wallins.

"Well, yes, of course. That's young Birl, Birl Poling," said the old man. "Ol' Birl, he was a terror in them days."

"You worked with him?"

"Worked with him? No. Heard him, that's all," said Wallins with a steady gaze that he maintained for a considerable time without apparently any inclination to say anything further. Then he added, as with an afterthought, "There's a man now, blessed with a gift of speech."

"You thought he was all right?"

"Oh, yes. Birl, he could start with a lot of people just standin' around, wonderin' what to do, and when he left, they knew what to do, they was ready to do it."

By this time, people were settling into seats at Mrs. Roan's behest. Brandt and Kelly took seats, also, allowing the old man to ease off from them to more familiar people.

"You folks out there and me, we been through this kind of thing many times before," Mrs. Roan said after her preliminary comments were done. "And one thing we always do, first off, is talk about 'objective.' So that's what I wanta ask here right off, what's our 'objective' up at that mine? Do we wanta shut 'em down?"

"No, we do not want to shut them down," Virgil Wallins shot back without hesitation. "People up there got jobs, good jobs outdoors. Got a nephew up there myself, brother's boy, with young 'uns to take care of, too. We don't want that boy out of work. Nobody wants that."

"What do we want then?"

"We want 'em to clean it up when they're done," said someone else. "Put it back like it was... before they started."

"Yes, that's all, yes," chorused several voices.

"And how's this, what we're plannin' to do, how's this goin' to 'complish that?"

"Best we can expect, best we can aim for," said Wallins, "is do like they're doing on TV. 'The whole world's watchin'.' Ain't that what they say? Call attention to it. Get in the press and TV. Stop that mine for a while long enough to do that."

"Anyone else here got an opinion on that?"

"No, Virgil is right," said a man right next to him. "We don't want to shut down no jobs, that's a fact."

Thus, in a few minutes, as Brandt observed, more was established here, with more firmness and commonness of conviction, that Bruce Harris had established in months of rhetoric and posing. He felt impressed and encouraged, seeing the drift of it.

Other items came up and were resolved with the efficiency of a group of people used to the method of protest. How would the press and TV be

informed? Someone was delegated to do that, and cautioned to do it at the last moment to keep the coal company and the sheriff in the dark as long as possible. Could the UMW be called on to help? No, the union was focused on health and safety issues, everyone agreed. Strip mine stuff would divert them from that. No one expected or wanted that to happen. Would the union try to get in the way, seeing a possible threat to income from dues? That was the first item to cause the people in the room to pause in silent thought.

"No, I don't think so," said Wallins, breaking the silence. "Tony Boyle is a crook, ever'one knows that." (Boyle was the current president of the union, as everyone knew.) "But I don't think he would send in goons. Maybe the companies will, eventually, if they see this thing kind of thing spreading around. But not this first time. This time I think we're going to catch 'em off guard."

"Even so, that's another reason to have the newspapers there, and the TV, keep 'em actin' pretty, if you know what I mean," Lois Roan threw in.

That brought a round of laughter and led soon to another concern, of whether the two "government volunteers" should be actively involved in the demonstration.

"Whatever you think you want us to do, that's what we want to do," Kelly declared, rising. "We want to help, any way we can. We don't want to hold anyone back."

"And we don't want to hold you back, boys, that's what people are thinkin', with you people out there roundin' up people to vote," Wallins remarked. "Best for you to do is lie low, for the time bein'."

"Yes, that's true," someone else said, as heads throughout the group nodded in agreement.

"Don't take it personal now."

"No, we don't," said Kelly.

"We just wanta keep you out of that jail," Lois Roan threw in, slapping Brandt on the shoulder.

Again, there was a round of laughter by which Brandt understood for the first time the extent to which he was recognized and accepted by this group of people.

The meeting ended soon after that following friendly conversation and promises all around to meet at the strip mine. Brandt and Kelly were enlisted, also, to help in transporting people who had been unable to attend the meeting but wanted to come on Thursday evening.

Going outdoors after that, Brandt and Kelly found the little town dark, with the flat plateau of the strip mine looking like a peaceful outgrowth of rock below a starry sky.

[Chapter 89 notes]

90. Brandt and Kelly stop to see Birl Poling in Edinburg

"Well, I guess we asked for it," Dennis Kelly remarked when he and Brandt had gone a way on the dark gravel road out of town.

"How's that?" said Brandt.

"Said we wanted them to do it on their own, and they are."

"Yes, they are, Sad Dog. Are you feeling left out?"

"No, actually, you know, Matt, this is kind of exciting. It really is. They're doing it themselves. They want to do it. We was singing up a whole lot of glory, that's a fact."

"I gotta admit, it went right well."

They had begun in this way to mimic the mountain cadence and choice of words, partly as a running joke and partly out of admiration for the plainness and strength of it.

"And, better still, you know what we've done, Matt, or what they've done, I should say, they've set up a kind of model. I mean, thinking in terms of 'generalizing,' like we were talking about, this is something that could fly, Matt, this thing could fly."

"Yes, it could."

"I think, assuming some measure of success, Lois and this Wallins guy, I could see them wanting to do that," Kelly exclaimed, "wanting to 'generalize' this whole process... See what they've done, they've built the thing up on the union structure that's already there. Once that's done, there's a whole network of people. Experienced people! All they gotta do is agree on their objective, as Lois said."

"They got the wheels turning, I grant you that."

"This could turn out to be some goddam fun, Brandt! Riding around through all these goddam hills!"

"Riding around for what?"

"Getting together with other MVs, setting up meetings. All through these mountains! The way I look at it, that's where we come in, setting up the lines of communication."

"The riding part I'll take. You can set up the lines."

"No, we, Bomb Dog, we!"

Reaching the two-lane highway, they headed out into the backwoods darkness that had become so familiar, now and then passing the solitary lights of hillside dwellings carefully placed for maximum aloneness. The scene around them no longer seemed hostile, as it had seemed months before to their uninitiated eyes. They knew that many of the lights marked homes of people like Lois Roan who had borne hard lives clinging to their mountain freedom.

Ten or so miles later, they passed through the little town where Brandt and Birl Poling had been in jail together. The main street of the town was deserted. Below the street lamps all the storefronts were dark.

The jail windows were dark, also. Only people to be seen were at the two-pump gas station on the outskirts of town. An attendant in a visor cap and cover-alls was leaning down to talk to someone through the open window of a beat-up car. In the parking lot, several teenage boys with cigarettes in their hands sat together on the concrete tire stops.

"You know, one thing that bothers me considerable much is this whole business of being a 'government' volunteer, as they said," Dennis Kelly commented as they headed out in the dark countryside again.

"You don't like being a government agent, huh, Sad Dog?"

"No, actually, I don't."

"I don't think they meant you're a spy or you're going to ax down their still or something."

"Yea, I realize that. Then again, what they said is true, we are here as, in fact, representatives of the government, paid directly by the government."

"Is that true, Den? We get paid by the MVs."

"Okay, we're one level down from it, from being directly paid by the government, and these are people who by nature almost are very removed from the government, who have always been removed from the government and suspicious of it. Probably their forebears came here for that exact reason."

"Wrong again, Kelly. Lot of them came here to work in the mines, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"Lot of them get welfare checks, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Seems like Uncle Sam has his paws in that."

"Yes, yes, that's true. But, Matthew, you have to admit, that's a necessity of existence here. They couldn't remain here without that. They would find another way, those who take it, if they possibly could. And just about all of these people here, even if they came in to work in the mines, originally, have adopted the mountain mentality. I really think they have. Because the original mountain mentality, the Daniel Boone thing, I just think it's stronger somehow. And where it leads eventually is right back to that suspicion of government. The government is far away. It's not their true friend, they know that."

"You talk about necessity of existence, isn't the government that for us, also? We wouldn't be here, Denny, if it weren't for the government, all of this wouldn't be happening at all."

"Okay, I grant you that. All I'm saying, Bomb Dog, is I see a day coming when I'm going to throw that off. I'm going to be here doing what I do now, and not getting paid by the government."

"How could you do that?"

"How does everybody else do it? How did Poling do it? Just get a regular job, become a regular worker, and do the political stuff from inside of that."

"Be a union activist."

"Yea, or maybe just a citizen, Matt. Just a citizen exercising the full rights of democracy. I could get into that."

"Aren't you a citizen now?"

"Well, I am, but, see, that's what those people were talking about. When you work for the government, your hands are tied in so far as certain actions, political actions, are not allowed. That's what I want to get away from, eventually."

Brandt saw that the discussion could go on forever. He was getting tired of hearing Kelly's discourse. What it came down to, he thought, was that Kelly was more disappointed than he had let on about not being able to participate in the demonstration himself.

Silence settled in again, and the hum of Kelly's jeep rolling down the dark highway, until a familiar sight came into view. It was Edinburg, Birl Poling's little factory town, with the coke stoves glowing behind the row of identical old houses.

Coming closer, near the bridge, they saw that the rear lights in Poling's end house were lit. All of the other houses were dark.

"Looks like 'ol Birl is having a party," said Kelly.

"Let's stop and see him," said Brandt.

"The government agents stopping to see the candidate for county commissioner—that might not go over too big."

"Too big with who?"

"I don't know, with whoever's watching."

"Kelly, you are getting too serious, way too serious. More serious even than you used to be. This is not good, Sad Dog... I'm starting to worry about you."

"Okay, goddam it, let's stop and see him."

They parked in the grassy parking lot between Poling's house and the bridge and went around to the back porch. They could see the old man, in a sleeveless undershirt, peering out at them between the curtains.

"Dang if it ain't Brandt and Kelly," said Poling when he opened the door. "What brings you boys this way?"

"Just passing by. Saw your lights on."

"Well, come on in!"

"We're not disturbing you?"

"What's to disturb?"

They entered the spacious kitchen to find four items on the white table: a water glass, a bottle of beer, a shot glass, and a bottle of brandy.

"Well, as you can see, you caught me at a weak moment," Poling

remarked with a sideways tilt of his head.

"Looks kind of inviting," said Brandt.

"Well, I wouldn't be one to promote it for young people, unless you already imbibe."

"Do we imbibe? We inhale."

Poling laughed. "Well, sit down then, fellows! Old Kentucky tradition! Beer with a chaser. Let me get some more glasses. That I do have!"

Brandt obtained permission first to use Poling's phone to call his new wife. With that squared away, he sat down and threw down the shot of brandy in a single gulp.

"Ha!" said Poling. "The man needs another already! Try some beer with this one."

"I intend to."

"Plenty of both where that came from. I've got enough for an army in the back room."

Poling set several more bottles of beer and a bottle opener on the table and went to the cupboard to get the only item within it, a box of saltine crackers. He brought out a wax-paper enclosed package of those, also, and opened it on a plate.

"Weak moment, yes," he said, sitting down. "But I've not been weak lately, boys. Oh, no! This man is stronger than for many years."

He did indeed look more vigorous and healthy than on the two young men's previous visit. His face looked tauter and flushed with a healthy ruddiness throughout. The eyes were still underlined with dark bags but they looked keener, more alert.

"We heard you've been whipping up a storm," Kelly answered.

A train came past at that moment with a long line of coal hoppers, their irregular shapes creating a flicker of red light from the glowing coke stoves behind them.

"Now, let me ask you boys this," said Poling, throwing down a shot of brandy, "in 1963, 33 percent of all coal mines in America were strip mines. What would you say the comparable number is this year?"

"I would say the number has increased," Kelly answered.

"38 percent," said Brandt.

"Raise that number that much again, and more!" Poling declared with a shake of his head, "Raise it to 45!"

"45 percent?"

"Yes, up 12 percent in five years! Now, as I say, that number is for all America, but I reckon a number something like that holds true in Kentucky, too. Five years down the line, will it be 12 percent more? That would be what? 57 percent? 57 percent of the mines in strip mines! There will be a right lot of chopping to get to that!"

"Where did you get your numbers?" Kelly inquired.

"Oh, never mind that! Just mind you, Dennis, the numbers are true! I've been busy at work, at my own work, rounding up numbers like that. Did you know, for example, one state has a law of sorts against strip mining already?"

"No, I didn't know that," said Brandt.

"West Virginia it is. Our neighbor next door! And when do you think that law was passed?" Poling said, leaning over the table to reach for the bottle of brandy. "1939."

"1939?"

"Yes, 1939. Before the Second World War."

"Just exactly what do you propose to do?" asked Kelly.

"Ha!" the old man exclaimed. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Some may think I have a plan, but I have no plan at all! No plan! Because the truth of the matter is, I don't know what could be done."

"What will you say then, when you go out campaigning, when people ask you?" said Brandt.

"I'll say this, boys, pure and simple, I'll say, 'My fellow citizens, I don't have a plan, I don't know what I can do, but I'm on your side, I'm on the good side, and I intend to try.' I'll say, 'My fellow citizens, I don't know what I can do, but I've got some good ideas and I've got some good questions.' Like why isn't material wealth under the ground assessed for our county property taxes? It's property, isn't it? It's in our county, isn't it?"

"Would it be legal, though?" asked Kelly.

"I don't know, Dennis! I don't know! All I'm saying is, I intend to ask the right questions, I intend to find the answers. That is what I plan to say on my campaign!"

He lifted his bottle of beer for a long swig.

"Here are some other good questions," he went on, leaning his big, wrinkled face down toward Kelly. "If a creek is ruined, who should pay? Somebody should pay, should they not? And, how about this, if you've sold me the mineral rights to your land, as many around here have to the coal companies, the understanding being the mining will be underground, and I come along now, Dennis, and I want to mine on top of the ground, is that fair?"

"Can they do that now?" Kelly asked.

"Oh, yes, they can! They can say, 'We own the minerals. We have got to get to them the cheapest way we can.' And your house sitting right next to that big hole in the hill, right next to all that noise and coal dust and all that debris pushed down the side of the hill! And you paying the taxes! Is that right?"

"Doesn't seem right to me," said Brandt.

"And here's another good question, here's the clincher of all," the old man said, tilting his head to the side and allowing a dramatic pause. "Is it possible to deal with such problems, land and tax problems, here in our own county? Maybe the answer to that question is no. If so, then on what level is it possible to deal with them? On a state level? On a federal level?"

He slammed his hand down on the table.

"Well, like I say, I don't know! I don't know! All I can say, boys, I intend to find out!"

In this vein the conversation continued, with the old man bringing out a couple of more rounds of beers and pouring chasers and getting more heated in his arguments with each new drink.

The two volunteers were a little lightheaded by the time they left, their minds humming with the prospects of where all this could lead, with the strip mining protest off to such a strong start and Poling set to hit the union halls and bars—asking questions, as he said.

[Chapter 90 notes]

91. MVs and Bourne attend the demonstration at Simers Branch mine

The strip mine demonstration on Thursday, July 17, 1968, brought an odd constellation of people to the windswept, plateau-like operations area high above Simers Branch.

Standing hand in hand across the entire width of the narrowest area through which the hauling trucks had to pass were 30 or so members of Lois Roan's organization. At the center of the line was Virgil Wallins, the taciturn old gentleman that Matt Brandt and Dennis Kelly had met at the meeting. Directly across from Wallins were the mine supervisor and truck foreman. They were backed up by the local sheriff, J. D. Meyers, his four deputies, and five squad cars with red lights blinking. Back further stood a group of 20 or so workers, some of them grim-faced, some of them laughing and joking.

A half dozen or so members of the local media, including Fletcher Bourne with a notepad and a TV crew with a camera on a tripod, stood to one side of the line of demonstrators. On the other side stood the entire contingent of local MVs, including Kelly, Matt and Mary Brandt, Karen Holm, and Janet Harlan.

The demonstrators had politely broken their line and moved aside to allow the sheriff and his deputies to drive through to the other side to confer with the mine supervisor. Also, the MVs had already been approached by a reporter from the TV station, a young woman about their own age with a facial expression that suggested sympathy with their position.

"We are here to support this local group in whatever they feel is needed to protect their own land and environment," said Kelly, speaking into a mike thrust before his mouth. "As we understand, this will be a peaceful demonstration in the best tradition of our democracy."

With all mindful of the eye of the camera upon them, the dramatis personae on this strange stage soon began fulfilling their assumed roles. First to speak was the mine supervisor, whose name was Delmar Hugh.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, using a megaphone provided by the sheriff, "we've got work to do at this mine. You are preventing us from doing our work. On behalf of the Consolidated Coal Company, owners and operators of this mine, I respectfully ask you to move out of the way to allow the trucks to pass."

The megaphone was then passed to Virgil Wallins, who was dressed in neatly pressed blue jeans and a blue work shirt. Like all of the other participants, he had worn his best work clothes to participate in the demonstration.

"Mr. Hugh, and you others workin' here," he said, "I know a fair lot of you firsthand. We come up together, some of us, or I come up with

your mommies and dads. Reason we're here today, we're gonna shut down this mine. Not for all day now, jus' for two hours. We're gonna shut it down to send out a call that this mine here, and many others like it, are ruinin' our hills. He who's got a mind to listen, let 'im hear! Now here's some reasons why we all here in this line decided to do this."

He then read out a list of six reasons why the demonstrators were opposed to the mine, including permanent damage to the hills, mine refuse on the hillside, acid runoff into Simers Creek below the hill, disregard for the land owners (who had sold the mineral rights many years before), dust pollution in the air, and noise that continued day and night.

The sheriff spoke next, coming forward to stand beside the mine supervisor. you are well aware.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this here is private property, as you are well aware. Belongs to Consolidated Coal, as Mr. Hugh here said. You are therefore in violation of the law, being here without permission of Consolidated Coal. In keeping with my obligation as sheriff, we will be required to remove you by force, if you don't leave on your own accord. Now we don't want to do that, ladies and gentlemen, but we's a-gonna do ever what we have to, simple as that."

This exchange completed, all parties on the rutted dirt truck run stood their ground silently for a moment as everybody waited for someone to act.

The sheriff, assessing that the line was not about to move, shook his head in exasperation and walked several steps back to exchange words with his deputies in a muffled tone. They had apparently just reached a decision when the mine supervisor joined the huddle and said something that caused a visible reaction on the sheriff's face.

"I have just been notified by Mr. Hugh," the sheriff said, taking the megaphone again, "that he will not proceed to have you demonstrators removed by force on condition that you leave peacefully, as promised, after the two hours are up."

This proposition was promptly agreed on by Mr. Wallins and Lois Roan on behalf of the demonstrators, bringing a sudden change in mood from tensed to relaxed on all sides. The demonstrators unlinked their hands.

The mining supervisor and foreman went back to arrange work on their side of the line.

Sheriff Meyers discussed with Wallins exactly at what time the two hours would expire, then went to his squad car to radio somewhere. Two deputies then went down the line taking the names of everyone there. They hardly needed to ask anyone's names, being familiar with everyone.

Darla Roan's little boy "Hodie," who had been hanging on his mother's knee the whole while, came to center stage then, asking for a ride in a truck to the amusement of both sides. One of the drivers took the boy over to his truck and let him sit in the cab. Then the driver drove the truck around in a circle a couple of times as the boy waved out the window.

Shortly before the end of the two hours, Sheriff Meyers moved his squad car to the center of the line, directly across from Virgil Wallins and Lois Roan. His deputies then moved their cars, also, two to either side of the sheriff's, forming a "V" formation pointed at the line. Soon eight coal trucks pulled up in a single line, the first truck positioned inside the formation of squad cars. For the sake of the TV camera, the demonstrators also dressed up their line and linked hands again as they had done at the start.

Precisely at the appointed time, Mrs. Roan and Mr. Wallins, in the center of the line, unlinked their hands, dividing the line into two parts that broke to either side. The squad cars then moved forward with red lights blinking, followed by the line of coal trucks. Next came the demonstrators who converged into the center again and followed behind the trucks up toward the county road where they had left their own vehicles. Behind them came the MVs and then the members of the media, with the TV camera filming the procession as it moved up the narrow road below a canopy of trees.

Finding Fletcher Bourne immediately behind her, Mary dropped back to talk to him. She had not talked to Bourne since coming to Kentucky to live with Matthew, owing to how the two men were still at odds with one another. They had never spoken to one another since their falling out a couple of months before.

"Young lady, how are you? So good to see you again," the sinewy old editor called out with a smile, seeing her approaching. "Are you settled in now with your new husband?"

"Yes, we are, up on the hill, in Bruce Harris's old cabin," Mary replied in her hardy, good-natured manner.

She was dressed in neatly polished construction boots, blue jeans, and a red and blue flannel shirt, in the typical plain style that made her unadorned face look so substantial and lovely by contrast. Her thick black hair was pulled straight back from her broad forehead, the dark eyebrows raised in an expression of welcome as she gazed into the old man's keen eyes.

"Yes, so I heard," he returned cheerily. "That must be grand!"

"You know, Mr. Bourne, I was watching you standing over there, on the other side, as this whole thing unfolded," she said in her direct manner. "I was wondering what you made of it, with all of your

experience."

"What did I make of it?" Bourne answered, smiling. "Well, now that it's all played out, it looks to me like this is one demonstration where everybody won."

"Do you really think that?"

"Yes, for the time being."

"You think there'll be problems later on?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. All I know, this was all done here for the sake of the camera. Everyone knew that that camera was there. But there are plenty of places where that camera can't see. That's where I'd be looking, if I was looking for problems."

"What kind of problems?"

"Well, that I don't know. But you saw them taking down names. That means, if anybody wants to do something, and gets a hold of those names, well, they know who to do it to, don't they?"

"You think there'll be some kind of reprisals?"

"I don't know, Mary. There are good people on both sides of this, as in many other situations. All it takes is one or two bad people, though, for something to ensue when the camera isn't there."

They continued up the road further without speaking and then turned to other subjects such as how Bourne's son, Bumper, was doing in the Army. Bumper had completed his basic training, the father said, and had begun a six-month course in truck mechanics.

"You know, young lady, before we part," said Bourne as they neared the main road, with the other MVs twenty or so yards ahead, "I just want to say, I don't bear Matt any ill will, though we did have to part ways, as far as being in the same organization. You tell him for me, please, I like him, I respect him, I don't want to be enemies with him."

"I will tell him that," Mary answered softly. "I know he respects you, too."

"And tell him, if ever he needs a dark room for his pictures, just feel free to use mine, in the newspaper office. Tell him just come after hours, when I'm not there, if he wants to. He knows where the key is. I haven't moved it. Just tell him for me, go on in. He's got a talent there, with his photos. I'd like to see him get ahead in it. I'd like to contribute to his progress in that little way."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Bourne."

"Thank you, young lady."

They parted with a handshake and smile.

Mary watched the wiry old editor as he limped toward his car with a sprightly, quick gait. Observing him earlier during the demonstration, she had thought to herself that he looked worn down. Their conversation had lifted his spirits, she thought.

After going a short distance, he turned around and looked to see if she was still in earshot.

"Say, Mary!" he called. "Meant to tell you, ol' Hattie Beecher is always asking about you."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. You made quite a good impression on her."

"Well, thank you very much."

"As I recall, your background is nutrition, right?"

"Yes, my major in college."

"Well, she would be a good one to help you with that."

"Do you think she would?"

"Yes, I do. She helped with something on those lines when she was younger, little cookbook, kind of, that they handed around through the churches."

"Is that right? I've always wanted to do that kind of project."

They stood at a distance, regarding one another for a moment without speaking.

"Well, you stop on by to see her sometime," said Bourne.

"I think I will. Will you tell her I might?"

"Sure, I'd be glad to. Tell her what you're up to, with your nutrition, too."

"I'd appreciate that very much."

Again, they turned away from one another. The young wife, with a light, graceful movement, quickened her pace to catch up with her new husband and new circle of friends.

92. Mary visits Hattie Beecher to discuss a cook book project

On Tuesday morning after the strip mine demonstration, Mary Brandt drove down to Letcher County to see Hattie Beecher. She chose this day to make the visit because her new husband, Matthew, had gone off with Dennis Kelly to a meeting with the MVs in another county, leaving her with the keys to the government car.

Although she had responded almost casually to Fletcher Bourne's suggestion to go see Hattie, Mary had high hopes for this visit as a first step in bringing her college background in nutrition into her work as a volunteer. Since coming to Kentucky, she had thought a great deal about how to do this. Even before coming, she had dreamed of a project such as Bourne had mentioned—working with local women to compile a book of traditional recipes with hints on nutrition.

She left the cabin in mid-morning, excited with the prospect of striking out on her own for the first time in her new life. Following a map that Matt had drawn for her, she traversed the winding two-lane county roads over two ridges and through two narrow valleys, densely wooded on both sides. A sprawling junk yard of old cars and trucks alerted her to watch for the dirt road leading to Hattie's place.

She found the road and turned down it around the bottom of a hill. The little white house that she remembered came into view soon after that, with the outdoor table still in the plum grove where she had sat with Hattie, Matthew, and the Bourne's on her previous visit.

Turning into the grassed-over driveway, she saw Hattie looking out toward her from a vegetable garden set into some limestone cliffs in the very back of the yard. Hattie came across at once, carrying a wicker basket piled high with freshly picked green beans.

"Fletcher said you'uz comin' down," the old woman said without a smile. "Said he see'd you at the mine."

"Yes, he did," Mary replied in her pleasant voice, standing beside the car. "He said I should stop down to see you."

"Ain't no 'should' about it," Hattie answered, her face set in a contrary pose that Mary now remembered, also, from the previous meeting. "If I'uz you, I'd do what I want."

"I do want to," Mary replied.

"Said you you'uz workin' on a cookbook, or somethin'," Hattie said, "to hand around to the young ones, to help them with their families."

"Yes, I was thinking of that," Mary answered, understanding now that Bourne had prepared the ground. "It wouldn't be just my cookbook, though. It would be ours, all of ours that work on it. That's what I was hoping for, a joint project."

The old woman's eyes changed slightly at that, as if taking it in. They

seemed to indicate that she liked the sense of it. “Well, I told Fletcher, same as I’m tellin’ you now,” she said. “I’m an old lady but I’ll do what I can.”

“Well, I’m very glad to hear that,” said Mary.

The two women stood toe to toe, almost, looking steadily into one another’s faces. The short, squat Hattie was dressed in an ankle-length, full-skirted blue dress, with her gray hair pinned straight back. Mary, a head taller, looked slender and shapely in blue jeans and a red sweater. Her thick dark hair was pinned back, also, above her clean, wholesome features and clear brown eyes. She was holding a spiral notebook containing her notes from Matthew’s garden project.

“Well, like I said, I’ll do all I can,” Hattie said again. “Come on in, why don’t you, and we can talk.”

“I’d like to.”

“You can see my little house.”

“I’d like to, very much.”

“It ain’t much, I warn you.”

“Oh, I love your place! It’s so beautiful here!”

“Thank you. Come on in.”

Thus began a several hours’ meeting that afterwards Mary would regard as a great success. In the course of this meeting, Hattie Beecher, in an informal, motherly manner, pointed out various ways she had of preparing and storing food. Also, in the course of this meeting, the slight initial strain of dealing with one another on a one-to-one basis gave way to an increasingly warm, mutual regard—as trust and common interests were established.

The lessons began at once in Hattie’s large, pine-boarded kitchen, where she placed her pile of green beans on the table beside other green beans that had already been cut and cleaned.

“Planted ‘em just right, on the new moon,” said the old woman, “so they come up fast. They was right by the signs.”

“You cook them, too?” replied Mary with her patent frown of mental concentration as she stood by the table, notebook in hand.

“No, you just putch’ya beans in real nice in that big’ ol crock jar there. Put a little salt on ‘em, between each row. Add a little water on top of that, t’ fill up the jar. And that’s just about all they’s to it, true. You just let ‘em set.”

“They get pickled, then?”

“Yes, get pickled, and ever when you want ‘em, you just take ‘em out, fry ‘em up in hog grease. Y’ just try that, young Mary. You’ll see. That’ll be the’ best tastin’ beans you ever et.”

“That sounds real good!”

“Oh, yes.”

"And healthy, too!"

Mary got a little lesson there, also, regarding the stove, where a loaf of bread was baking in the oven. It was a stove such as Mary had seen in pictures of pioneer days, with a wood-burning chamber on the left side, the oven next to it, and six burners on top, covered with black lids with coiled handles. A black pipe emerged from the back, went straight up, and then turned backwards at a right angle and out of the wall.

"See, that syrup bread I told you about, when you come by with your young man, I'm makin' some of that now," Hattie explained with a motion of her hand toward a large piece of bread dough, streaked with dark syrup, that sat on the counter beside a sink with no spout.

"Oh, yes, I see," Mary responded. "You cook with wood?"

"Oh, yes, and you're a-gonna find out, they's a whole bunch of 'em still do. Green wood, 'cuz it burns slow. Sometimes coal. That burns slow, too. But mostly I use coal in th'other room to heat up the house, 'cuz it burns all night."

Mary nodded attentively, trying to take it all in.

"Makes some dirty dust, though," said Hattie, "that ol' coal, if the wind blows down the pipe the wrong way."

"Oh, I can imagine!"

From the kitchen they advanced into the "other room" that Hattie had referred to. It was a kind of living room, or sitting room, with a worn, floral-patterned couch, two padded chairs of fake brown leather, and a round-bellied black stove with a black pipe that extended up like the one in the kitchen and at a right angle through the wall. Windows with lace curtains looked out to the dirt road in front of the house and the apple trees in the side yard. The walls here were of pine boards, also, painted white and adorned with two large, framed pictures and several smaller pictures that appeared to be family portraits.

"It's a lovely room!" said Mary, following Hattie through the door. "And these pictures, are they your family?"

"Yes."

The pictures served as a structure to bring out details of the old woman's life. She had grown up in the same county, just ten miles away. In her entire life she had only been out of the county three times. She had never been out of the mountain states of Kentucky and Tennessee. She had been to a big city, Nashville, once, on her honeymoon.

Yes, she had been married, too, and she had had a son, but both her husband and son had been dead for many years. "My husband was a good man," she said. "Ever'body up here'll tell you that. He died in a winter storm. Car turned over on a hill. And my son, Clyde, he was a good one, too. He died in the Army, in the Korean War."

"He was your only child?"

"Yes, see, after that first one... he didn't come easy. I was all scarred up. The granny woman, we call her, that come around..."

"A midwife?"

"Yes... She done her best, but some of my insides come out with the baby, see, and she didn't know what to do... And, after that, they got me lookin' all right, outside, but I cou'n't have no other children."

Later the two women talked about how other women could be recruited to help with the project. Hattie said she knew of several within walking distance of where she lived.

"That's three," she said, "and then they's an old woman lives yonder, o'er that hill, down by the Buford church. That's four. And they's two more I know of, comes to church sometime. That's six, if they're willing, and I think they will."

Mary also showed Hattie the notebook she had brought. She had it divided into sections for each of the various types of vegetables grown in Matthew's garden project. Within each section she had drawings done in pen and colored pencil along with recipes and hints on nutrition. She had drawn the pictures from life, sitting beside the gardens as Matt went about his explaining and chores.

"Well, see, you got a talent there the Lord give you," Hattie said as she looked at the book. "Now you know what he says about talents, don't you?"

Mary did know, but she said, "What?"

"He says not to bury 'em away. He says to use 'em."

"Yes, now I remember that."

"So you're on the right track."

Driving away later, after a supper of fried beans, fried commodity spam, and freshly baked bread, Mary kept turning the new project over in her mind.

Who would have thought that her visit would have turned up such promise of a truly important project with such potential for involvement of many different women!

She thought to herself, also, that it would be a reciprocal project as she had told herself it ought to be. The name "Nutrition Exchange" came to her mind—that, or "Kentucky Women's Exchange," or something on that order. And the book would say on the first page, "recipes by mountain women" and list all their names.

She would list herself there as a "mountain woman," also. That gave her a smile.

It was by this time late in the day with the sun still visible from the higher ridges of the winding highway and the narrow valleys below the ridges already in dusk. The little sunsets of each descent had an effect on her of increasing loneliness.

That was one unexpected aspect of her new life, she thought, that she still felt lonely at times—despite being happy in her new married life.

Especially at times she felt lonely for the company of other women. She had tried to form friendships with the other two female MVs, Karen Holm and Janet Harlan, but they had held back from her somewhat, maybe because she was married and they still single, she suspected.

That reflection brought her back again in her mind to Hattie Beecher. She thought to herself that most likely the old woman was lonely and glad for the prospect of company through the cookbook project, though there was a genuine interest there, also, in preserving some of the old mountain ways.

She thought of one comment Hattie had made, that there were plenty of young women who got married right out of high school, or even before, and found themselves with children and not knowing how to "do right for their babies."

"And they do want to know how to do right," Hattie had declared. "They want to know just like you or me would. I di'n't know how myself when I was coming up. I had to learn, too."

There was a teacher there, and a strain of altruism, and motherly concern, Mary observed to herself.

Her roaming, lonely thoughts took her, a valley later, to thoughts of her own family back in Minnesota, her father, mother, and sister Ellen. She had received regular letters from her mother. From her father she had gotten one letter, since leaving home. From her elegant sister she had not heard at all, since Ellie's unexpected marriage to Jim Morris, followed so quickly by Morris's departure for duty overseas.

Arriving at home, at the junction of the highway and the dirt road that led up to the cabin, she looked in the mailbox and found within a letter with her own name written on it in a flowing feminine hand. She recognized the handwriting as that of her sister.

She tore open the letter at once and read it in the car with the motor running. The letter began, "Mary, dear sister, are you still out there in the wilds of Kentucky?"

It was a typical letter such as her active younger sister wrote, when she could get herself to do it. It quickly listed the usual litany of social events,—parties, walks and work-outs with female friends, shopping at new stores.

Even so, all through the letter, the big sister detected what only came out in the last few lines: "You may think, gee, Ellie's been doing so much, doesn't she miss Jimmy? Well, surprise, surprise, Mary, I do! I miss my darling pilot! I miss him so much! And I'm trying to be brave, Mary, I'm trying to be happy go lucky, you know—but the happy go lucky isn't going, if you know what I mean. I'm what keeps going—

places, you know—but everywhere I go, sweet Jimmy's not there..."

"Do write me, please!" the letter ended. "Your little sister, Ellen."

Mary was so taken by these last few lines of the letter that her eyes watered as she read them. She began to compose a reply even as she drove up the road to the cabin.

She entered the cabin to find a note from Matthew on the kitchen table. "Big party tonight!" the note said in Matthew's big, scrawled letters. "People we met today are coming up. Janet and Karen too. Denny and I went for beer. See you soon."

Fighting off fatigue, she sat down at once to write her letter to Ellen. She had just completed the letter and sealed it when she heard the motor hum of Kelly's jeep ascending the long, steep hill.

[Chapter 92 notes]

93. Morris and Pitt attend an intelligence briefing on the war

Several more weeks passed before 1st Lt. James Morris, stationed at the Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base in southeast Thailand, received any word of the loneliness that his new wife, Ellen, had communicated to her sister, Mary Brandt.

When it did come out, though, it came in an emotional burst. The letter, received on August 26, 1968, began like this:

"Dear Jimmy, you maybe wonder how I'm getting along without you. I haven't really said much about it to you, in my letters so far. Well, the truth is this,—I love you, I desire you, I miss you every morning and every night. And never do I go anywhere without wishing all the time that you were there. I've tried to keep myself busy. I think others seeing me must think I'm doing well. But something I need and want so much is missing, and that something is you."

Morris folded up this letter carefully and tucked it into his hip pocket as he exited from his chalet-like "hooch," shared with five other junior officers, to the blazing heat of the tropical sun. He looked ruddy and trim in a crisp tan casual uniform. He wore dark glasses and a garrison cap that bore the two silver bars denoting his rank.

Looking over toward the trailers where the senior officers lived, he saw a familiar figure, with cap removed, sweeping back a few precious strands of dark hair over his bald head. It was Maj. Thomas Pitt, his former flight trainer from Nellis.

Pitt, seeing Morris, waved a cheerful hello. He was a different man in the charged environment of the war. He even got along better with Thai women than he had with American women.

Morris and Pitt had both been assigned to the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing. The 357th squadron, dubbed the "Licking Dragons," consisted entirely of Republic F-105 ("Thud") pilots.

Since being assigned to the 355th, Morris had done some research on his fighter wing's history. In the course of this, verifying by mail with his mother, he had discovered that his father had flown in the same unit (then called the 355th Fighter Group) in World War Two. In fact, his father had flown in the same squadron, the 357th.

"I can't tell you how proud this makes me," Morris had written in a letter to Ellen. "In my dad's day, the unit was called the 'Steeple Morden Strafers' because they flew out of Steeple Morden, England."

Morris had also learned some other statistics about the 355th's history. The unit had first been deployed to combat in Southeast Asia on July 21, 1964. It had been headquartered in Takhli since November 8, 1965. Since 1964, the 355th had lost 76 pilots, including 44 killed in

action, 24 missing in action, and eight in non-hostile incidents such as on-base crashes. The wing has been credited with 30 kills of MiG-17s, all except three accomplished with the Vulcan M-61 cannon (the others with air intercept missiles).

There was no need for Morris to ask Pitt where he was going. There was an intelligence briefing for the entire unit in the wing briefing room scheduled to begin in a few minutes, at 1500 hours. Several other pilots, emerging from others in the row of brown hooches, were heading up the sidewalk in the same direction.

The scheduled briefing officer, Col. Estes Collard, was the same blond, articulate officer who had spoken to Tom Steward's training flight the previous summer on the legacy of World War Two. He had come out from 7th Air Force central headquarters in conjunction with the recent change of command from Lt. Gen. William Momyer to Lt. Gen. George Brown.

Neither Pitt nor Morris had met Collard before, but Pitt had heard of him. "This guy has a reputation for thoroughness," he said with a flick of his hand. "Enough to take him from major to colonel very fast."

"You got to wonder about that," Morris remarked. "Guy gets a bird by talking."

"Yea," Pitt responded. "But we get all the fun."

"Speaking of fun, you seen the schedule?"

"We're on the early go. You and I together."

"Where we going to?"

"Doghouse, Region II."

"That's all the rage lately."

"Ain't that the truth? I was down low last time, looking at all the bomb holes out there. Looks like the goddam moon."

"They keep coming back, though."

"Gritty little bastards. You gotta give 'em that."

Within the wing operations building, they joined with the couple of dozen or so pilots taking seats, with shouted greetings, in the briefing room. The thin, ascetic-looking blond colonel was already there, nodding hello to some but not laughing at the jokes flying back and forth within the noisy room.

Among the pilots in the room were a few others who had been with Morris at Nellis, including Morris's ex-roommate Marty Sardo and Hank Johnson, in addition to Pitt.

"Well, I'm looking forward to this," said Pitt, as he took a seat next to Morris. "I haven't followed up on the details, since the bombing halt. This is supposed to be the big picture."

"So I hear," Morris replied.

Morris had kept up on the details himself, reading newspapers sent

once a week or so by his mother. She typically sent over the entire week of the St. Paul newspaper, the *Pioneer Press*, plus occasional copies of the *New York Times*, which she picked up in a hotel news stand.

His general sense of the war, based on what he had read, was that the peace talks in Paris were completely stalled, with the bombing halt in the meantime allowing the North Vietnamese to rebuild facilities damaged by the Rolling Thunder campaign.

This was indeed the understanding that Col. Collard conveyed when he began his description of the war. First, however, he touched briefly on an international event of about five days before that all the men were aware of, the sudden and unexpected invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union.

"Czechoslovakia, a nominally 'independent' state, and represented as such in the United Nations," said Col. Collard, "showed the world just how nominal its independence really was, when the Soviet tanks rolled in. The so-called 'Prague Spring' of free expression came to an end under the same kind of heavy boots that would march in around here were it not for your presence."

Facts then followed about the extent, since the bombing halt, of the North Vietnamese reconstruction, facts that Morris and most of the men in the room had not heard before.

The rail line linking Hanoi with its main seaport, Haiphong, had been repaired, Col. Collard declared. Imports at Haiphong in June had risen to a monthly record of almost 250,000 tons. The rail line from Hanoi to China had been repaired, also. All major bridges north of the 20th Parallel had been rebuilt. In addition, 12 principal rail centers had been rebuilt.

"The enemy is hedging his bets this time," Collard noted. "Bypasses have been constructed around all likely major targets, such as bridges, to provide alternate routes in case of future bombing. With routes in working order, for the time being, an estimated 7000 to 8000 trucks have been freed up to haul cargo down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, between the 17th and 19th Parallels."

"So that's the reason for all the traffic," said someone.

"Yes," Collard replied. "Those are trucks that were tied up in the North for the duration of the Rolling Thunder campaign... And the trucks are not the only things heading south. About 300,000 to 500,000 workers, in our estimate, those that did the repair work in the North, have been freed to go south, also. As have an unknown number of MiGs, many of them by rail from the sanctuary of China. As have a quarter of the enemy air defense systems, including SAMs. As have 250,000 gallons of fuel in 55-gallon barrels, and not to a single depot, but to multiple locations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail ... to make your job a

little more difficult, gentlemen, in your Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger campaigns. The North Vietnamese supply center, in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, has moved south, also, about 90 miles, to Thanhhoa, near the 20th Parallel.

"In addition," the colonel continued, "during the last dry season, ending in May, we saw considerable Communist road-building activity in northern Laos and down into the Lao Panhandle along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Six new east-west roads were constructed. Probably you've seen evidence of that from the air. The purpose of these roads is to move supplies, mainly food, across from Laos to the Ho Chi Minh trail and then north to meet the needs of the North Vietnamese army. Approximately 250 tons of food are required each day, of which about 75 tons comes from Laos. The rest comes from South Vietnam or by sea and then through Cambodia.

"So, in summary, 250,000 gallons of fuel located down along the trail, supply center moved southward, trucks freed up, east-west roads, planes moved south... put all this together, and what do you have, gentlemen? You have the ability, on the part of Hanoi, to move two to eight divisions and all of their supplies to the DMZ literally overnight. Do they plan to do that? Another Tet? Let's just say, gentlemen, they are prepared to do whatever they may have to do—if they fail to get what they want at the peace talks, or if bombing resumes in the North."

The articulate colonel paused and, with all looking at him, faced a large pulldown map of Southeast Asia. "Now let's consider for a moment our neighbor to the north and east here, Laos," he said, "where you've all been involved lately in air support and interdiction missions in our Military Regions II, III, and IV."

He pointed to the green-colored, pork chop form of Laos on the map, with its broad upper area tucked below the "Thud Ridge" range of mountains just southwest of Hanoi and its narrow panhandle area extending down along the Ho Chi Minh Trail 200 miles or so south of the DMZ, as far south as the town of Pleiku in South Vietnam.

"Gentlemen, as you are no doubt aware, Laos is,—by virtue of the Geneva Accords of 1962,—a neutral, democratic monarchy with a figurehead king, a royal prime minister (the king's son, Souvanna Phouma), and a national unity government composed of all political factions including a Communist faction, the Pathet Lao. That national unity government has never operated as such, however, for various reasons beyond our scope here. The seats reserved for the Pathet Lao in the national assembly were occupied only for the first session of the government in 1963. Since then the Pathet Lao, under Prince Soupanouvang, Souvanna's half brother, has operated as a government in opposition, with a standing army, and in a civil war with the central

government under Prince Souvanna. At the same time, North Vietnam, Thailand, and the United States have all participated in this civil war, the North Vietnamese and Thailand with regular army units, we through military advisors and through the CIA-funded Air America operation. You, many of you, know many of the Air America pilots well and regard them as fellow soldiers, though they are officially civilians. They have served as our forward air controllers in many missions on the Plain of Jars and in the Lao Corridor. Many of them are retired U.S. Air Force pilots, including some who served here in Takhli.

"As you are probably aware, also, the war in Laos – known as such, as a war, by the United States, North Vietnam, and Thailand, as well as by the Soviet Union and China, but acknowledged as such, as a war, by none of these parties—has for years been characterized by the ebb and flow of the annual dry and wet seasons. In the dry season, the Communists advance, taking advantage of good roads and camp-able terrain to re-take lost areas, often just in time to seize the rice harvest. In the wet season, we and our allies push them back, taking advantage of our air power. So it has gone. Compared to this trend, however, this past dry season, ending in May, was unique in bringing Communist gains that we in this wet season have not been able to undo.

"To be more specific, in the past dry season, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese, fighting together, took Nam Bac, Tha Thom, and Muong Phalane. In addition, on March 11, they overran our radar navigational installation at Phou Pha Ti, commonly called Site 85. They nearly also took Saravane, Luang Prabang, and Attopeu, and now largely control our Military Region II. In most areas of the south, just 150 miles to the east of this base, Laotian central government forces have been forced by enemy pressure to move into defensive alignments around major population centers.

"Rural, agricultural areas have been left relatively unprotected. Enemy raids in these areas have severely hampered USAID and other rural development activities. Moreover, the enemy retains the capability to simultaneously attack Saravane, Lao Ngam, and Attopeu.

"Of our original three TACAN/QS-81 sites (Site 85 being one of them), only Site 36 remains operational, and it, too, is in danger of being overrun.

"Some interesting questions have been asked. Had the Tet Offensive been more successful in its early hours, would the Communists have then launched attacks against population centers in Laos? Should the Communists launch another Tet-type offensive, would it be coordinated with such attacks in Laos, or with a Communist drive to the Mekong? Such a scenario is not far-fetched. We estimate that at present there are about 47,000 North Vietnamese combat and support personnel in Laos,

and about 51,000 Pathet Lao, for a grand Communist total of 98,000, compared to 72,000 just a year ago. Opposing them are 46,000 troops of the so-called FAR (the Royal Lao Army), 8,500 troops of the FLN (the Pro-government Neutralist Forces), and 44,000 guerilla soldiers, including 22,000 Meo tribesmen under one of the few non-corruptible leaders, the Meo general, Vang Pao. These forces also have a grand total of about 100,000. The Lao regular troops have poor ratings as soldiers, however, and General Vang Pao, despite good results in the past, is fighting now with a depleted army composed in part of boys as young as 10 years of age.

"So we could well say, the Communists have the odds in this 'secret war' theater. But will they push their advantage to the limit? All indications are, the answer is 'No.' Hanoi seems focused now on winning certain concessions at the bargaining table, most importantly, for them, the inclusion of the Viet Cong, the legitimization of the Viet Cong, that is, by their inclusion at the bargaining table. Hanoi is focused, too, on obtaining a complete bombing halt, complete in Vietnam, though of course the secret war would still go on despite that, and would maybe even increase in intensity. Strategically, militarily, Hanoi's current strategy seems to be to maintain and consolidate its present territorial gains, in the Plain of Jars, especially, for the purpose of allowing political indoctrination, while also maintaining and improving its new east-west roads to provide a means of quick logistical support if the talks fail and the bombing restarts full-scale, or if a deterioration in the talks requires, from Hanoi's perspective, a hotting up of the war in all of Indochina at once.

"This is where your Steel Tiger and Barrel Roll interdiction has assumed such vast importance. Through your efforts, combined with those of the Prairie Fire guerilla actions and the Commando Hunt interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, truck sightings along the trail, which peaked at more than 6000 at the end of this last dry season, in May, have consistently decreased, admittedly partially because of wet weather, to only about 2000 last month.

"Gentlemen, Gen. Brown told me just this morning to convey to you how much he appreciates your contribution in this regard. He will be out here himself, within a few weeks, to convey a similar message, he told me to tell you."

The pilots filed out soon after that, leaving the precise-speaking blond colonel alone by the map in front of the unadorned room. No warmth of comradeship was extended toward him by anyone.

"Quaint how he speaks for the general," Marty Sardo said to Morris and Pitt as the Nellis contingent walked out together.

"Well, I suppose he does know him," said Morris.

Pitt and Morris went directly to the nearby 537th TFS operations building for their pre-flight briefing for the mission scheduled the next morning.

They would be targeting a reported truck column near the Ben Karai Pass, the briefing officer said. Flak and mobile SAMs had been reported in that area, with maybe some MiGs patrolling from the Thanhhoa area in North Vietnam.

[Chapter 93 notes]

94. Morris, with Pitt as flight leader, flies his ninth mission

"Well, Dad, here we go again. This is number nine," 1st. Lieut. Jim Morris said to himself the next morning as he sat in the cockpit of his F-105D, crammed into the seat in his G-suit, survival vest, and helmet. He had gotten into the habit, when anxious, of talking out loud like this to his father, though he didn't really believe his father was present.

With both feet on the brakes, he held the plane back as his crew chief stood before him, arms overhead, holding a bundle of red streamers to show that the arming pins had been removed from the external weapons attached to the fuselage and wings.

His weapons for this, his ninth mission, consisted of 14 M-715 750-pound bombs, loaded on the inner and centerline pylons, and four AIM-9 air intercept missiles, loaded two each on the outer pylons. The missiles had been substituted for bombs at the last moment in response to further sighting of MiGs.

Maj. Tom Pitt, as flight leader, called for the cockpit canopies to be lowered, and for radios to be switched to Channel 2, the tower control channel. Then came another countdown, from leader to number four plane, using "Hawkeye," the designated call name.

"Hawkeye Two," Morris said to indicate he was ready to go.

As number two plane, he would fly on his former trainer's left wing in the order of battle determined for this particular flight. Pilots three and four were Guy Lorentz and Tim Marne, both the same rank, Captain, and flying with Morris for the first time.

"Roger, Hawkeye. Cleared into position and hold. Winds are 15 out of the southeast, altimeter two-nine-seven-one, EPR two-five-four," the tower said. "Copy?"

"Roger, tower, Hawkeye copies. Leader has pins, canopy, lanyard." Morris, Lorentz, and Marne, in sequence, returned the same final clearance that the arming pins had been removed, the canopy locked, and the lanyard connected for the emergency parachute.

"Hawkeye, bring them up," was Pitt's response.

Morris switched on the brake antiskid system and shoved forward the throttle to the full power position. The immense Pratt & Whitney J-75-P-

19W engine, stretching out for 20 feet behind him, responded with a roar of air rushing into the inlet valves on the upper aspect of the wings, just behind the cockpit on either side. He pressed down hard on the brakes, his legs trembling.

"Hawkeye Flight, you are cleared for takeoff," called the tower. "Your mission control is button three."

"Roger, tower," Pitt replied. "Hawkeye is rolling."

Morris watched as Pitt's plane shot up the dark runway, afterburner blazing behind it, the power of the discharge rocking his own plane. The

sky was still dark above the eastern horizon except for a long, low band of rusty-purple haze, the first sign of dawn.

Five seconds later, measuring by the timer on the instrument panel, he lifted his feet off the brake and shoved the throttle outward to ignite the afterburner. It lit with a bang, propelling the plane forward down the long, dark runway. He felt the counterforce of the engine's 24,500 pounds of thrust as the plane accelerated, pressing him backward against the seat.

A half mile further up the runway, Pitt's plane, at full rudder, was lifting off.

Morris switched on the water ejection system and watched for the 2000 foot marker to check his air speed. "120 knots," he said to himself. "Okay."

At the fly-or-die sign, his speed was 190 knots... "Okay." He pulled back on the stick and felt the plane skip once and lift off.

At 200 feet altitude, he retracted the landing gear and pointed the nose down to increase his acceleration. In the sky ahead, against a bank of dark clouds, he could see the blue-white plume of the lead plane as Pitt banked it left to allow the flight to form up beside him.

Morris closed in on his former trainer's left wing and applied the air brakes to bring his plane into the prescribed position. Lorentz and Marne, in planes three and four, soon settled in behind them, also, counterpoised to them as if held by invisible cords.

"Hawkeye Flight, this is Hawkeye Leader," said Pitt. "Current time, 537 hours; time on target, 615. We'll be checking in with Cricket at about 600. Check your systems. Enjoy the ride."

Morris leaned back in the cockpit, expelled his breath, and tried to calm himself down as he applied a slight leftward pressure on the stick to allow his right wing to drift off to the left from the left wing of the flight leader.

He looked to his checklist, and began to go through it methodically, aware that a dysfunction could provide havoc for the mission.

Beyond the nose of the plane, a golden sun had emerged with rays of light projected through strands of gray clouds. Below him on all sides a dense green jungle spread, marked by long shadows of rock-cliffed hills. Brown threads of roads, and blue veins of rivers and streams, cut across the landscape. They were fading away fast as the flight continued its steady climb to the prescribed cruising altitude of 30,000 feet.

For a moment he allowed his thoughts to drift to where they wanted to go—to a bright, pretty face with happy, hopeful green eyes. In his mind he saw a table by a window, arranged with white and yellow flowers. Beyond the window was a white-sand beach. Waves rolled in there, in a long, jagged line. It was the beach in Puerto Penasco where he

and Ellen had stayed on their vacation in Mexico. He recalled how Ellen has sat on his lap, her green eyes so close that he could see the little specks of yellow and blue in them that made them so lovely.

Would he see her again? He banished that thought from his mind and with diligence returned to his checklist. Completing the checklist, with all systems okay, he reviewed the battle plan in his mind, as he did on every mission.

It was simple, in concept. The truck convoy that they had been ordered to hit was expected to be somewhere on the west, Laotian, side of the Ben Karai Pass. They would locate the target with the help of an Air- America forward air controller (FAC). The FAC would mark the area with white phosphorus smoke. Using the standard attack strategy for such a target, they would dive in, drop their bombs, and be out, hopefully, before any enemy gunners, if present, had a chance to react.

If gunners were present and reacted, there would be a time span of less than a minute when evasive skill contended with gun skill and chance to determine the fate of the mission—Morris knew that well. If anyone was hit, or if SAM missiles were present, or MiGs, then the fast drop would become an air skirmish requiring the utmost skill to survive.

He rehearsed mentally what he would do in all possible situations. In face of flak, at the low point of the dive, he would "jink" the plane back and forth to provide a more difficult target. Upon seeing the white rocket trail of a SAM, he would dive below it to a low altitude where the SAM was ineffective. Upon sight of a MiG, he would head for low altitude, also. Only at low altitude could an F-105 contend on an equal basis with the more nimble MiG. Yes, he knew it all, he thought to himself, sighing. The trick was to apply it instinctively in an instant, an instant that could mean life or death.

They were flying about 2000 feet above a sealike swirl of broken clouds when Tom Pitt called for the flight to switch over to TACAN Channel 79 for Cricket. "Cricket" was the ground navigation system that provided range and bearing in southern Laos for the Air America FACs. The FACs controlled all strikes in Laos, to identify targets and minimize collateral damage, a sensitive matter in the "secret war."

"Hawkeye Flight, you are six minutes from target," Cricket called. "Take up a heading of one-four-one. Look for your FAC at 2,000, at one o'clock. 01-A Bird Dog. Call sign, Raven 31. Copy?"

"Roger, copy," Pitt answered. "Hawkeye flight, green them up."

"Green them up" meant to prepare the planes for battle.

In response, Morris went through his pre-battle checklist: armament panel, trigger pins, gun sight, oxygen... all systems ready. Last of all, he pulled down his visor and tried again to prepare his mind.

Another countdown, from Leader to Four, verified that all the planes

had been prepared.

At 2,500 feet, as they descended to the prescribed altitude, they saw the FAC on radar, at one o'clock, and banked in that direction. Within a few minutes the plane came into view against a blue sky about three miles distant.

"Cricket, this is Hawkeye Leader," Pitt said. "We have a tally-ho."

"Roger, Hawkeye," Cricket returned. "That is Raven 31. He sees you coming in. Cleared for contact on strike frequency. Make contact at once. Good luck, Hawkeye. Cricket, out."

"Roger, Cricket. Over and out," Pitt answered.

The FAC came in at once. "Hawkeye, this is Raven 31. How do you read me?"

"Raven, this is Hawkeye Leader," said Pitt. "I read you five-by. How's it looking from there?"

"Hawkeye, your target is confirmed. 15 trucks in a line. Directly below where I will mark is a road arcing left. Follow up that road to the left, into the valley, about one mile. Strike at once. There is no other traffic at the present time."

"Roger, Raven, confirm! We are set to go!"

"Hawkeye, beware, this whole area around here is being armed. Drew no fire today, last week got some a few miles away."

"Roger, Raven. Thanks."

They could see the plane clearly now, a mile or so in the distance, gliding noiselessly about 1000 feet above the road, with its trail of white marker smoke behind it.

It was a Cessna 01-A Bird Dog, as ground control had said, a small, high-wing, single-propeller type such as Morris had flown as a kid when first learning to fly.

The landscape below was pockmarked with bomb craters, some of them filled with water like ponds. Truck tracks wound in and out among the craters and splintered trees.

"Hawkeye, a MiG-17 was sighted yesterday near Tchepone, 15 miles north of here."

"Roger, Raven, copy. Hawkeye flight, tuck them in!"

"Hawkeye, the valley you're diving into is long and thin. Goes due east about a half mile, then curves to the southeast, about another two miles. The trucks should be in that second part. Y-shaped opening at the far end, around both sides of a karst there."

"Roger, Raven, copy."

They had already left the little plane behind. The bend of the road was coming up fast as Morris watched Pitt's wing for the roll into the target.

[Chapters 94-95 notes]

95. Morris, on his way to rescue Pitt, downs a MiG 17

"Hawkeye flight, listen up!" called Maj. Tom Pitt as the four bomb-loaded Thuds proceeded toward the valley pointed out by the FAC. "Here's the plan. We will dive into the first part of the valley, out of sight of the trucks, then bank to the right, into the second part, in single line formation. Hawkeye flight, confirm!"

"Hawkeye two, confirm!"... "Hawkeye three, confirm!"... Hawkeye four, confirm!" came back the quick responses from Jim Morris, Guy Lorentz, and Tim Marne.

The first, tree-covered ridge at the opening into the valley was coming up fast. The morning shadows there—jagged, vertical lines—were darkly marked in the rocky cliffs on the side of the hill.

"Hawkeye flight, here we go!" said Pitt. "I'm rolling now!"

Pitt banked sharply left then, from an altitude of about 2500 feet, and began a rapid dive into the center of the first part of the valley, where no human activity could be seen. Just the winding, rutted road was in evidence there, in a narrow, bomb-gouged area beside a rock-strewn ravine.

Morris, on Pitt's left wing, was directly behind, struggling under high Gs to maintain his position. In his rear view mirrors, he observed that Lorentz, in plane three, had drifted away from the correct element position.

"Tuck them in!" reminded Pitt as the four planes passed just above the treetops into the valley.

At 500 feet they leveled off, charging at 500 knots airspeed toward the opening where the valley curved right and then out of sight. It was a narrow opening, not more than a football field wide.

Without bothering to put his thoughts into words, Morris understood that Pitt has applied his instinct for battle, from his previous tour, to give the flight an advantage over a direct dive. They would burst into the second part of the valley and be upon the trucks before the drivers had a chance to react.

Morris was close on Pitt's wing, slung by centrifugal force against the left side of the cockpit, as his former trainer banked right through the narrow pass. He could see the convoy now, a motley mix of army brown and civilian-looking trucks strung out in a line for a mile or so in the valley ahead. Beyond that, the valley ended at a high, cliff-walled karst, with openings on both sides, as the FAC had described.

"Hawkeye two, dropping back," he said. "Hawkeye three and four, beware!"

He applied the air brake slightly to drop behind Pitt into single line formation, as Pitt had directed. The two element planes behind him took his lead and dropped behind, also, stretching out the flight, by about a

plane length each, in the prescribed formation.

The truck drivers had been caught by surprise, all right. They were racing from the trucks, with the doors left hanging open, trying to reach the shelter of the ditches on either side of the road. There were soldiers in the group, also, several groups of them, a few dozen or more, scurrying for cover as the planes closed upon them fast.

"String 'em out one at a time," Pitt said. "Let's let 'em know why we came."

"Ooh-eey, we got 'em!" came from someone, not Morris, either Lorentz or Marne.

"Hawkeye flight, fire at will," Pitt said. "Spread them out." Morris, right hand on the pylon jettison buttons, followed Pitt up along the trucks, at an altitude of about 400 feet. He banked slightly to the left and released the entire load of four bombs from the right wing inner pylon, relying on natural drop order to distribute the bombs along the convoy. In quick order, moving first to the right and then straight down the road, he released the remaining ten bombs from the left wing inner pylon and centerline pylon.

The planes were at an altitude of about 500 feet. Morris could hear behind him the explosions of the bombs as they landed. They had scored big time, he thought to himself. Maybe they had got them all.

"Sock it to 'em, Hawkeye," Pitt called out.

Suddenly, from the karst at the far end of the valley, a volley of gunfire flared out, with pinpoints of light popping like flashbulbs in crevices of the rocks. Rocket-like shells with long streamers burst in their direction, crisscrossing from both sides and up and down.

"Incoming! Flak! Flak!" shouted Pitt.

They were already at the end of the valley, so close to the cliffs that Morris could see soldiers working frenetically behind the artillery pieces. Pitt feinted to the left, then banked right sharply, catching at that moment what appeared to be a glancing blow to the forward bottom section of the fuselage.

Morris, focused on Pitt's left wing, banked to the left when it dipped and sailed off in that direction, unable to bank back to the right to follow the flight leader. Looking behind him, he saw he had carried the two element planes with him.

Within a few seconds, Morris and the two planes behind him were out of range of the flak, charging into another long, narrow valley with high cliffs on either side.

Pitt, the flight leader, was mysteriously silent. Either he had been hit and had gone down without time to call in his predicament, or else he had lost use of the radio somehow.

That was a definite possibility, Morris concluded, thinking quickly.

The glancing blow that he had observed had hit the bottom of the fuselage in the area of the TACAN and UHF ADF antennas.

"Hawkeye three and four, this is Hawkeye Two," Morris said. "I'm going for vertical to look for Pitt."

Morris pulled back on the stick to bring up the nose of the plane into a nearly vertical alignment, with the two other Thuds following in a spread out formation behind him.

Rising quickly to an altitude that commanded a wide view, he looked in the direction where he imagined Pitt would be, and saw not one, but two planes, about a mile directly ahead of him. A glimpse at the Radar Homing and Warning display confirmed the configuration. Pitt was in the front, it appeared. Behind him, closing in on him fast, was a MiG 17.

In a flash, Morris understood that a narrow window of opportunity existed in which he would be aware of the MiG and the MiG unaware of him. Either he would use it wisely or Pitt would go down.

He shoved the throttle forward and outward to bring the plane to full throttle with afterburner, sighting at the same time. The planes were passing obliquely in from of him, separated from left to right from his point of view.

The MiG 17 was flying smack into the crosshairs, unaware of his presence! There it was! Now! He pushed the buttons to release his four AIM-9 air intercept missiles, and watched the missiles shoot out with white streams behind them.

The first of the missiles missed high. The second was a direct hit to the center fuselage of the MiG, blowing it into fragments. The pilot had not even had a chance to react. The ball of fire left behind tumbled down into the valley below.

"Ooh-eey!" said Marne.

"I think that was a hit," said Lorenz.

Morris, in the meanwhile, was scanning the skies all around to see if another MiG was in the vicinity. It looked like the MiG had been alone, a chance encounter, apparently, with the MiG pilot finding Pitt alone and closing in fast on easy prey.

Pitt, still without his radio, had seen the explosion and the three other planes behind him. Banking to the left to allow them to join up with him, he executed two wing-over-wing rolls.

Morris drew up next to him to find him grinning and gesturing with two thumbs-up hands. Morris raised both fists and shook them.

Pitt pointed at his radio and shrugged. He signaled with his index finger for Morris to take the lead position.

"Hawkeye flight," said Morris. "Pitt wants me to lead us back in."

"You deserve it, boy. You take it," said Lorenz.

"Coming down on bingo fast," said Marne.

"Bingo" meant out of a fuel. They were scheduled to rendezvous with a K-135 tanker just on the other side of the Lao-Thai border.

From the FAC they would get a report on the result of their action. Morris scanned the sky and saw the small plane about a mile away at about 10 o'clock.

"Hawkeye flight, this is Raven 31," the FAC called. "I thought I saw a strike back there. What was that that anyhow?"

"Raven, Hawkeye Leader," Morris replied.

"That was a MiG 17."

"Haleluja! That's a feather in somebody's hat!"

"How was it on the ground?" said Morris.

"Total destroy, Hawkeye, total destroy."

"Thanks for your help, sir."

"Thank you, compadre."

In response to the FAC signoff, there was another exchange of grins and pumped fists between cockpits. Soon after that, they saw the silver form of the K-135 about five miles ahead, glinting with sunlight.

Just a simple hook-up and they would be on their way home, Morris thought to himself. Months before, when his problems with aerial refueling had been so oppressive, he would have regarded the prospect of such a hook-up with apprehension. Things had changed. He was a combat pilot now, with feelings of pride and competence that he could not even have imagined before his first taste of combat.

Watching the wide, green landscape below him, touched with lovely light, he gave a moment's thought, also, to the enemy pilot who had gone down in flames without even an instant to react. Who was he? Was there a girl like Ellie waiting somewhere who would soon get the notice that he had died?

"I did my best, Dad," he said out loud. "I did the best I know how. It's a rough world, Dad. I'm sure you must have known that yourself."

[Chapters 94-95 notes]

96. Back at Takhli, Morris and Pitt hear Sardo is dead

Arriving back at the base, the Hawkeye flight members expected that the news of the MiG kill, traveling ahead of them, would bring a jubilant reception. Instead, they found grim faces.

For Jim Morris, the first such face encountered was that of his normally cheerful crew chief, who climbed the ladder to help him extricate from the cockpit.

"Heard you had a good mission, sir," said the crew chief.

"Yes, chief, we did."

"There's a man down, sir. Everyone's waiting to hear. They're doing a search and rescue operation right now."

"Who's down?"

"Lieutenant Sardo."

"Marty Sardo?"

"Yes."

Marty Sardo, his ex-roommate! The news hit Morris hard. He hardly had a desire to get out of the plane, despite having been drenched by sweat inside his suit from the rigors of combat.

"What's the word on it?"

"He was seen alive, sir, surrounded by enemy."

The grim faces continued on the crew bus, with the pilots debarking at the equipment room to hear a report that Sardo had radioed in that he had been hit while returning fire.

"What exactly did he say?" said Morris to the intelligence officer who forwarded the report.

"Said he was hit bad, Jim. He thought it was fatal."

"That's the last word from him?"

"Yes."

Morris continued into the equipment room to find about a dozen or so pilots there, in various stages of removing their gear.

"There was a FAC out there in a Bird Dog, trying to 'rescap.' Said he was trying to land close to him, on a road there," remarked someone. "Said he couldn't get in. There was a lot of fire."

Morris, dressed in the yellow flight suit of the 537th squadron, walked in a daze to the squadron briefing room, where Pitt, Lorenz, and Marne were already seated around a table with the intelligence officer assigned to do the post-flight report.

"This one was a success, in most respects," said Pitt, sweeping back his few strands of hair. "Except for where I jinked left and right there, and lost you... I should have given you a warning, Jim."

"Yes, sir, I suppose. It all happened so fast."

"Yes, it did. But that's the game, isn't it? That's when I needed to get out the most essential information, of the direction of the flight. I should

have said, “Hawkeye, banking right,’ or something as simple as that. Just a few words.”

“Yes, sir, I agree.”

“I’ll do that next time, let me tell you.”

“You did a damn good job, sir.”

“Thank you, Morris,” said Pitt, nodding his head. “And, by the way, Morris, good shot on the MiG.”

“It was an easy set-up, sir. He moved right into the crosshairs.”

“But you reacted in an instant. That’s the key. In an instant. That’s what we got to keep focused on, that goddam instant when it all comes down.”

The flight members remained in the briefing room a little longer to try to pinpoint on a relief map where the karst had been that was armed and where the MiG had come from.

Back at his hooch, Morris found a pile of mail brought from the base exchange by one of his hooch-mates. He looked through the items, finding no letter from Ellen. There was the usual package from his mother, however, containing a letter, the St. Paul newspapers of the past week, and two recent copies of the *New York Times*.

The letter brought more disturbing news. “I had a checkup last week, and it showed more cancer,” his mother said simply. “I expect I’ll need to go in for some kind of fix, if they’ve got one. I have an appointment about it early next week.”

Alone in the hooch, Morris showered and then shaved, as he often did just to bolster his morale, even when he had no place to go. Coming into the bunk room, dressed in his underwear, he threw himself down on his cot with no desire to proceed any further with anything. He fell asleep, to be awakened by a knock on the hooch door about four hours later, in early evening.

The knock was just a formality. Maj. Pitt, the knocker, opened the door and looked in. He was freshly showered and shaved, also, and dressed in tan fatigues.

“Jim, I was thinking of going on into town, to the Airmen’s Home, or somewhere,” said the major softly. “Just for a quiet dinner. I’d be glad for your company, if you’d care to come along.”

Morris stirred and sat up on the side of the bed, rubbing his eyes with his hands.

“Sure, I could go for that, sir,” he said.

“No need for the ‘sir’ all the time,” said Pitt, waving his hand. “We’ve been through a lot together. I’d be honored if you call me ‘Tom’ outside of official function.”

“Okay, Tom, I’ll do that.”

“I wouldn’t be here talking to you, Jim, if it weren’t for you. I figure I

was about three seconds away from kingdom come."

"I'm just glad I was there," Morris declared, pulling on his tan fatigues. "I'm just glad I was there."

Within a few minutes, Morris was dressed, also, and they headed out together into the steamy jungle heat. At the base gate, they rounded up a taxi and sat quietly, looking out at the lush, rolling countryside as the taxi bumped along on the eight mile trip into town. "Town," in the base jargon, was the Thai village, Ban Takhli, which served as a gathering place for the numerous soldiers of all types serving at the air base.

"You know, what's been sinking in and sinking in, Marty Sardo is probably dead," Morris remarked.

"Either dead or maybe in a worse circumstance, God help him," Pitt replied, "if they got him alive and wounded. You can bet they won't waste any resources keeping him out of pain."

"Almost better if he's dead," Morris said softly. "Goddam Marty! That's too bad."

They sat in silence as the taxi continued into town, passing the thatch-like huts of the local people.

The traffic on the road consisted mostly of people of all ages on bicycles, some doubled up with one passenger sitting on the central rail of the bike just behind the handlebars. Weaving between the bikes were banged up old trucks and cars, and huge-wheeled wooden carts drawn by water buffalo, often with a straw-hatted peasant behind, swatting the rumps of the animals with a long stick to keep them moving.

In downtown Takhli, they found the usual scene, a main street about a half mile long, with unadorned one-story establishments on either side, most of them with signs in English aimed at bringing in the yankee dollar. The street was busy with Americans walking back and forth or calling to one another. Some of them had Thai girlfriends under their arms.

At the Airman's Home, the taxi stopped. Pitt, pushing back Morris's money, paid the fare.

"This evening is on me," he said.

Inside the restaurant, they sat at a private booth, looking out to the street scene. The young GIs in view had a collegiate look, almost, as they moved up and down the street in groups, joking with one another and making catcalls at girls.

There were a fair number of dark, pretty Thai girls, also, on the street, willing to tolerate the attention or, in some cases, to give their favors for pay. Many of them were dressed in sleek Western clothes, blue jeans or mini-skirts that showed off their long, slender legs.

"You know what I keep thinking about Marty," said Morris, settled back over his third rusty nail. "I keep thinking about how he told me to

take a chance on calling Ellie, when I wasn't sure if I should go ahead with her. If it weren't for Sardo, I'd probably still be a single man."

"And she's been good for you—Ellie—hasn't she?" Pitt asked.

"Oh, yea. Oh, yea. Goddam best thing that ever happened to me," Morris replied, slurring his speech slightly.

"She's a lovely woman, no doubt about that," said Pitt. "You know, I could even say, she's about the loveliest gal I ever saw."

"You really mean that?"

"Oh, yea."

Morris merely took this in. He watched the young women passing down the street, feeling a normal male appreciation of their beauty, but in his mind all such thoughts led back to Ellen. He had never even countenanced directing his attentions toward anyone else, ever since that first evening when he had met her on the veranda at the boat club.

It was not a matter of discipline, he knew that well; it was simply a matter of all inclination and desire leading in that direction only. In his mind, everyone else paled before her.

"How about yourself?" Morris said, looking back to Pitt. "You never got hitched up with anyone yourself?"

"Yes, I did, kind of," Pitt replied. "Knocked up some girl when I was eighteen."

"What ever happened to her?"

"She wouldn't get married. Said she wasn't ready for it. I offered to marry her. I guess what it came down to, the sex had come too fast, the sex had killed the potential romance in it, if you know what I mean. Too heavy, too fast, too much psychological stuff for a couple of kids."

"How old was she?"

"Year younger than me."

"What happened with the pregnancy?"

"She got it terminated somehow."

"That's too bad."

"Yea, I think of that sometimes. That was my kid."

"You never pursue anything else?"

"No, not really. See, in high school, I was a big jock, you know. I realize now, that hid a lot of my imperfections. It gave me a standing, I guess you could say, where I could bungle up everything else and I was still convincing. Without that, hell, you know it, Jim, I'm a big oaf, really, when it comes to women. I can't get to first base with them."

"I've seen some of them show an interest in you here."

"Yea, maybe that's the standing again, in being a pilot. It carries over here. In the states, I don't know. I guess I can't deal with all the complexities of the modern American woman."

Morris stirred his fourth drink with his straw, watching a lovely, long-

haired Thai maiden, with one child in hand and another on her back, as she floated up the street toward him in a white sarong. Reaching the window, she peered in with a curious expression and, seeing him looking, smiled—an innocent, friendly smile, not a come on.

"You've given up on the dream, then?" Morris said.

"What dream is that?" Pitt inquired from his thoughtful, relaxed position, with arms extended on top the seat in both directions on his side of the booth.

"The American dream. Wife and children, little house you can come home to and be happy in."

"You want that?"

"Yes, I think I do. Someday. You don't?"

"No, I do, I guess. I guess the dream is still there, if it could ever be conceivable for an old, bald guy like me."

"You're a good-looking man, Tom. Lot of women like bald. Or so I'm told. More virile."

Pitt laughed heartily. "Well, if bald is virile, I guess I'm it."

They headed back later, both a fair amount under the influence and needing to negotiate together, laughing, as they tried to round up a taxi home on the dark street.

Back at the hooch, Morris settled down with his newspapers and noticed at once that there were many articles having to do with the then current (1968) Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Some of the articles were about expected nomination of Vice President Hubert Horatio Humphrey of Minnesota as the party's candidate for president. Other articles dealt with the expected influx into Chicago of more than 100,000 protesters intent on participating in demonstrations against the expected rejection of an anti-war plank to be submitted by party dissidents.

The articles were all from the week of August 18-24. Owing to the lag time in overseas delivery, it was at this time, as Morris read them, already Tuesday, August 27. One article said that the convention was due to begin on Monday, August 26. In other words, the convention had begun already, Morris thought to himself.

Much was made in several articles regarding the potential for civil unrest. Photos accompanying one article showed hundreds of young people, many with backpacks, hunkered down in Lincoln Park. Many of them had no arrangements for lodging, the article said. The city had denied requests for camping permits made in behalf of the young people by the organizations that had organized the demonstrations.

The protestors were expected to be from all ranges of the political spectrum, another article said, but with the common cause of being against the war. They were expected to push, also, for other, less

common efforts at party reform, such as for greater inclusion of racial minorities and greater disposition of funds to inner city problems. These efforts at an "anti-war, anti-Establishment, alternate path," the article said, would almost surely, by all accounts, be finally and convincingly defeated by the delegates arriving at the Conrad Hilton Hotel.

"Considering the great energy, the youthful exuberance, of many of these efforts," the article said, "one can only wonder where this energy, rejected by the self-defined 'party of the people,' will be deflected to then. Where can it go except into the 'non-Establishment' netherworld of 'the streets,' the netherworld of political and artistic extremes?"

Turning onto another front page, of the *New York Times*, Morris saw what he thought was an example of that. A photograph there showed three longhaired youths being arrested in the Chicago Civic Center Plaza on August 23. According to the photo description, they were members of the "Youth in Protest (Yippie)" Party and had deliberately tied up Friday rush hour traffic, without a permit, to nominate a pig called "Pigasus" as their presidential candidate.

Morris had never heard of the group before. They were involved in some kind of tongue-in-cheek, political theater, obviously, judging by their gleeful, contemptuous expressions in the midst of being arrested. The pig, the description said, had also been taken into custody. Several hundred youths stood in the background, some with their hands to their mouths, jeering at the police.

Even in his drunk state, Morris could not help but be disturbed by what he saw. He saw no humor in the situation at all. He had no regard for the jeering faces. What he saw was a blasphemy of something he had always held sacred, the democratic process.

Didn't these idiot kids know what was going on? he thought. Didn't they know that people like Marty Sardo were giving up their lives so they could stand there in the street spouting off their mouths?

[Chapter 96 notes]

97. O'Rourke returns to Chicago to find it abuzz with politics

Had Jim Morris looked more closely at the photograph of the Yippies nominating their pig candidate on the front page of the *New York Times*, he would have seen a familiar face midway back in the crowd, the face of a young, bearded man who appeared to be alertly watching the police officer in charge of the arrest. That alert, bearded face belonged to William O'Rourke.

O'Rourke, hitching back from Georgia after completing his six-week volunteer stint with GRIT, had stopped in Chicago to visit his brother in Rogers Park, not even knowing that the convention was at hand. Dropped off by his last ride downtown, he had been on his way to catch the L-train when he had happened on the Yippie demonstration and had stopped to see what was going on.

Since then, three more days had gone by. It was now Tuesday, August 27—in Chicago—about 14 hours after the evening on which Morris, in his hooch in Thailand, had come upon the photograph.

O'Rourke was by this time established temporarily in a storage room in his brother Patrick's apartment just south of the Loyola campus. He was waiting in the kitchen for his brother to come home from a late afternoon class. He and Patrick had made arrangements to go together to the Chicago Coliseum to a gala event billed as "an unbirthday party" for President Johnson, who was generally blamed for the quagmire in Vietnam.

The "unbirthday party" was being staged by "MOBE" (the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam). MOBE was the group that had organized the Chicago demonstrations, beginning its efforts months before. Admission was free, with thousands of young people expected to fill the cavernous old building to capacity.

In the kitchen young O'Rourke had added his own contribution to the notices and sayings attached to the refrigerator door. It was a printed statement that he had come home with from the Yippies' Pigasus the Pig nomination, part of a nominating speech by one of the Yippies.

The statement said: "Pigassus was born in Montana, is 35 years old, studied law by candlelight for three years, and walked five miles through the snow to school, plus he is affiliated with the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, in addition to being a Jew."

For O'Rourke, who looked for humor in everything, this statement represented the bizarre, carnival side of the events that he had found himself in the midst of during his current stay in Chicago. Still, he was aware of the serious side, also. He had been following the news of the convention and the events in the street, often relying on the more thorough knowledge of his intellectual older brother.

Patrick arrived at the apartment at about 6 p.m. With sandwiches in hand, the two brothers headed out at once, talking about the clash of the previous night between the demonstrators camped at Lincoln Park and the police who had come to clear them out at the 11 p.m. curfew.

According to accounts aired on the TV, the clash had started when a police car had nosed into a barricade set up by the campers and had been pelted by rocks. The police had countered with tear gas and clubs.

Photos in the morning paper had shown groups of young people, many of them just teens, racing across open areas amidst billows of tear gas. Some carried Viet Cong flags.

"This guy in one of my classes was down there," said Patrick.

"What did he say?"

"Said it was absolute madness. The police went wild."

Their route took them along the youth town "main street" that Bill O'Rourke had passed through weeks before with Tom Steward, then up to the Granville L-train platform, then down along the same north-south route that O'Rourke and Steward had traveled on that day, past the De Paul University campus and the Wrigley Stadium of the Chicago Cubs baseball team.

Under the influence of the passing scene, as the train continued downtown, the conversation of the two brothers turned to the convention presently in process at the International Amphitheatre south of the Loop. Patrick, in keeping with his graduate studies in political science, had been following the events closely. The big news there, he said, was that the platform committee, just the night before, had adopted a pro-Administration Vietnam plank, thereby rejecting the anti-war plank put forward by a coalition of dissidents.

"The plank they adopted is exactly what the Administration wants," he explained. "It calls for a conditional halt in the bombing, with the out that if there's any setback in the field, if Hanoi doesn't do this or that, then the bombing can begin again."

"What does anti-war plank call for?" asked the younger brother.

"It calls for a bombing halt, period," Patrick replied. "It calls for a good faith effort to include the Viet Cong in negotiations. So far they've been excluded."

"So it's over then?" queried the former coxswain.

"Over? Haw!" said Patrick. "No way is it over, boy! This plank is going to the floor!"

"So what's the significance of that, taking it to the floor?" the younger brother asked, trying to follow. These nuances of politics were new to him.

"The significance is this," the older brother replied importantly. "First, why did this plank get defeated in committee? Were the individual

committee members all in conscience against it? No, they were not. The truth of the matter is, about two-thirds of them are, in effect, owned. And who is the owner? None other than Hubert Horatio Humphrey, Triple H, as we call him. Take the case to the floor and that forces the issue on Triple H. Will he release his delegates to vote based on conscience? We've got, here in Chicago, two and a half thousand 'representatives' of a hundred and fifty million people... speaking on behalf of one of our great political parties, a party that calls itself 'democratic.' And will they be allowed to vote on conscience on a matter as important as the Vietnam War? Bill, can you think of anything more important, in politics at the moment, than the Vietnam War?"

"No, I can't," the younger brother answered.

"Well, that's the significance, Billy. Eugene McCarthy said it well, 'What we have done is to take the theory of democracy and put it into practice.' That's what we're doing here, democracy! The older generation fought to win it, then they forgot what it is. We've remembered what it is. We're fighting for it, too, in our own way."

Having said that with finality, Patrick O'Rourke fell into silence as the train passed the Merchandise Mart, crossed the Chicago River, and continued south along the west side of the Loop beside the architectural wonders of the Chicago downtown. By the time they reached their transfer point at the Van Buren Dearborn station, however, the older brother had gone on to another subject that he apparently thought was related, the assault of the youth culture on what he called "the old stale ways of doing business."

"You even have it in the arts," he expounded, "in an area that you would expect would be most free of staleness. You have, – or, at least until a few years ago, you had,—dry, old literary and artistic canons, stifling any kind of innovation or free expression. You have commercial companies, the big publishing houses, controlling access to the public, controlling what can be published... or in the case of art, elite museums controlling what can be displayed as art. And there, too, the crucial issue—well, you might as well call it 'democracy,' too, because it's a matter of finding a way for the individual voice to break out."

This twist in the development of the argument had left the former coxswain behind. He nodded gravely, trying to absorb the importance of what his older brother was saying.

"You got these guys here, Allen Ginsberg, William Borroughs, Jean Genet, these guys are all part of it," Patrick O'Rourke went on. "That's the amazing thing to me, Bill, how this convention, this anti-war thing, has pulled in all these people."

"Who's this Ginsberg?" said the former coxswain, as the train sped along between the sheer cliffs of Victorian sandstone buildings. "I saw

something about him. He was chanting in the park, or something."

"Oh, yea! The great mantra! 'Om mani padme hum!' That's part of it, too, tying into these things outside of the Western, the northern European experience," Patrick replied, gesturing with both hands. "That's what he was chanting. 'Om mani padme hum...' But the idea of it, Bill, the idea is, you let go of your ego and you surrender to this larger sense... I can't explain it... But, see, Ginsberg, Borroughs, these guys are 'beatniks.' You ever heard of them?"

"Yea, I have, somewhat."

"See, these beatnik guys, they were the first ones, really, to really recognize how stifling everything was. They were the first ones to try to break out. Ginsberg, Borroughs, Jack Kerouac—you know, "On the Road"—Neal Cassady, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, I can't remember all their names ... And the amazing thing is, these guys were just a little group of guys that hung around together in New York, back in the Fifties, trying to be writers and poets. Trying to break out. Kerouac, for instance, I heard he wrote *On the Road* on a continuous roll of paper, from a newspaper press or something. So he didn't have to deal with 'pages.' These guys were pushing, pushing, all the time to break out! Blasted out of their minds on drugs, half the time, too!"

"You think that was part of it?"

"Was that part of it?" Patrick replied, frowning fiercely. "Goddam right that was part of it, for them! I don't know, though, Bill, I guess the best you could say, it's a calculated gamble. It's like Dylan Thomas drinking to be poetic, and what did he drink? 90 straight shots of whiskey or something, the night he keeled over... That's what Ginsberg says, too, in the 'Howl.' 'I saw the best minds of my generation wasted,' or something like that."

Reaching the Jefferson Polk station, a mile south of the Loop, they exited again and descended the metal stairs to South Wabash Street, which ran parallel to the tracks below the platform. From here, it was just a few blocks to the coliseum, Patrick informed his brother.

From midway down the platform, looking south in the direction of the coliseum, they could see flashing red lights.

"Looks like the cops are there, too," said Patrick. "On the outside, at least. And maybe inside...plain clothes men."

"What's their problem anyhow?" the younger brother said.

"Well, obviously, they feel threatened."

"They're being antagonized, too, though, don't you think?" said young O'Rourke, trying to think it through.

"Well, yea, being called 'pigs,' I don't think that improves their attitude," said Patrick. "I grant you, some are pretty corrupt. But this is a tough city, Chicago. They learn to be tough, they gotta be tough... they

come up against something like this... People disobeying the law. Flagrant disobedience, really. And that's it, I think, in their minds. I don't know, Billy. I've watched these guys... I don't think they discriminate..."

Reaching the immense, two-block-long structure of the coliseum, with its odd, brick-towered entry way, consisting of a transplanted Civil War prison, they saw the police had set up lines of squad cars on either side. The lines were on the coliseum side of Wabash Street, not blocking traffic, but in a position to, if the need arose. Officers in white shirts and white helmets, with clubs in hands, stood outside the cars, watching as groups of young people passed by, laughing and shouting.

One smooth-faced young man with hair down to his waist gestured with an upraised middle finger and shouted "Off the pigs!" as he swung past. When two officers moved in his direction, he dashed to the entry way, wiggling his rear end at them before he disappeared inside.

[Chapter 97 notes]

98. O'Rourke brothers attend an "unbirthday party" for Lyndon Johnson

Inside the coliseum the O'Rourke brothers, Bill and Pat, found the immense inner area divided into two parts. On one side, on their right, was a normally lit exhibition area, as at a trade show, with walkways formed by dividers. On the other side, on their left, was a dark area, pulsing with red strobe lights, where a rock band was playing at full volume on a stage illumined in blue and green.

A sign at the door said that the band, "The Holocaust," would play at every half hour throughout the evening. At 9 p.m., there would be a "wind-up celebration." That was apparently the extent of the "party." There appeared to be no further organization or events.

Enthusiastic throngs of young people milled around in the exhibits or huddled in groups in the rows of seats in the dark, strobe-lit arena. Flashes of light there, moving in staccato increments, marked joints being passed from hand to hand. The smell of marihuana wafted through the drafty air. Rivulets of smoke drifted up toward the bizarre, dancing shadows of girders and catwalks on the dark ceiling overhead.

The gaunt-faced lead singer of the band was screaming out some song about a "master of hate," presumably the president, Lyndon Baines Johnson. "Suicide is an evil thing," he sang, "but at times it is good. If you've been where the master lives, I think you surely would."

"How many you think are here?" Bill O'Rourke asked his brother.

"I don't know, thousands," Pat O'Rourke answered.

Together they ventured into the crowded exhibition area, turning to their right to an exhibit of photographs that extended about a hundred feet along the yellow brick wall along the east side of the arena. The photos were arranged into several sets.

Stopping at the first set, labeled, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" the brothers saw scenes of the Vietnam War –- mutilated people, devastated villages, bodies of women and children sprawled beside napalm-charred buildings.

One photo among these showed a group of grinning South Vietnamese soldiers, several with bicycles, looking at the corpse of a young woman. The woman had apparently died from a point blank shot to the side of her face. The bottom half of her body was covered with a sheet of folded-over plastic. The top half was uncovered, with the blouse pulled up to her shoulders to reveal her breasts.

A description by the photographer, Steven Curtis, read as follows: "We found this woman, in her early 20's at most, lying on the road as we swept it for mines... It was alleged that she was a Viet Cong sympathizer and had been stripped of her clothing as a further embarrassment to her family. Someone had covered her over in plastic, but as we arrived the

soldiers had removed part of it and were having a good laugh."

A second set of photos provided a sympathetic look at life among the Viet Cong.

The first photo among these showed boyish soldiers heading out for battle with a group of school children beside them, smiling and holding their hands. Another photo showed women leaving for night duty with faces covered by scarves. A caption explained that they hid their identities from one another so as not to be able to betray one another under torture. A third photo showed a captured Viet Cong soldier seated on a road amidst South Vietnamese troops. His shorts had been pulled down around his knees to provide access to his genitals for beating.

Further down the wall was a set of photos showing confrontations between police and civilians, in most cases black. These photos were arranged into groups with labels: "Birmingham, May, 1962," "Watts, August, 1965," "Detroit and Newark, August, 1967," "After King's Death, April, 1968," and so on.

Here the first photo, taken in Birmingham, Alabama, showed a young, neatly dressed black man being bitten on the stomach by a police dog, with a police officer grabbing the man by the collar at the same time. A second photo, also in Birmingham, showed middle-aged black women, dressed as if for church, sinking to the ground under the force of fire hoses. Other photos, taken in other cities, showed formations of police in riot gear moving forward with clubs, police shooting tear gas, and so on.

Posted with these photos was an excerpt from a report published by the McCone Commission, the California state commission established to investigate the Watts Riot: "The bitter criticism we have heard evidences a deep and long-standing schism between a substantial portion of the Negro community and the Police Department. 'Police brutality' has been the recurring charge. One witness after another has recounted instances in which, in their opinion, the police have used excessive force or have been disrespectful and abusive in their language or manner."

Closing out the display of photos was a set labeled, "Chicago, August, 1968." Here Bill O'Rourke saw photos he had seen in the Chicago Tribune in the past few days, including photos of officers surrounding defenseless youths and beating them with clubs. In one photo a police sergeant lunged at the photographer with club raised overhead.

Proceeding into the coliseum, to the adjacent area set up with rows of dividers, the O'Rourke brothers found displays of posters and printed text, on the order of 4-H exhibits at a county fair. Many of the printed entries were hand-written, with a youthful verve and an appearance of having been hurriedly prepared.

Here there was an eclectic mix of quoted voices, including those of William Penn, Robert Burns, and Mark Twain. The quote of Twain was hand- written in a flowing feminine hand: “There has never been a just war,” it read. “The state will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked and every man will be glad of these conscience-soothing vanities and will diligently study them and refuse to examine any refutation.”

The O’Rourke brothers were poring through all of this when a sudden movement of all bodies in one direction, toward the strobe-lighted arena, alerted them that the “wind-up” was about to begin. They took seats from the few remaining in the last several rows and listened to introductory remarks by a young man, wild-haired and bearded like many of the others, who identified himself as one of the organizers of the event.

“We’re hoping that this event will put a little joy in what has been a week of terror,” he said.

Following his comments came a series of musical performances and spoken statements. The music was, for the most part, apocalyptic or social critical in tone. The spoken statements were plain and serious, with no attempts at humor.

Among the first speakers to be introduced was the novelist, William Borroughs. Young O’Rourke, remembering his older brother’s description of how the beatniks had striven so hard to “break out,” watched to see what a real beatnik would look like. The dour, bespectacled, middle-aged man who stepped forward, however, dressed in a gray suit with a white shirt and blue tie, looked more like a banker than a rebellious writer. He had a pale, anemic complexion. He looked like he seldom ventured out into daylight.

Standing stiffly at the lectern, he read a prepared statement in an uninflected voice: “Regarding conduct of police in clearing Lincoln Park of young people assembled there for the purpose of sleeping, in violation of a municipal ordinance,” he said. “The police acted like vicious guard dogs attacking everyone in sight. I do not protest. I am not surprised. The police acted after the manner of their species... The point is why were they not controlled by their handlers? Is there not a municipal ordinance requiring that vicious dogs be muzzled and controlled?”

Other statements by other notables of the moment, including Jean Genet, the French playwright, and an American journalist named Terry Southern, continued along in the same vein.

The diminutive Genet looked fragile and old in the harsh stage light. “Hippies,” he said in French, with someone beside him translating his words into English, “you have responded to the clownlike convention—which indeed is conventional, the Democratic Convention—by your demonstrations in the park, charged with poetry.”

Highlight of the evening was the guitarist and folk singer, Phillip Ochs. He brought the young people to their feet when he sang his anthem, “I Ain’t Marching Anymore.”

“It always the old who lead us to war,” he sang. “It’s always the young who fall.”

The crowd clapped in time with the singer and raised their hands in the V-for-victory peace sign. The O’Rourke brothers rose also, clapping and swaying back and forth with the others.

Seeing some friends from school on the other side of the assembly, Patrick greeted them with two hands raised overhead in peace signs. They made the sign back at him, laughing.

Immediately after the song ended, a little group on one side of the stage began shouting the familiar chant, “Hell, no! We won’t go!” Soon the whole crowd had joined in chanting.

The crowd streamed out of the coliseum shouting and laughing. The police were there, waiting, the red lights of their squad cars flashing beneath a twilight sky.

“Off the pigs! Off the pigs!” a small group of young men and women was chanting in unison.

“Why don’t you go back to the station,” yelled someone. “It’s time to suck Daley’s cock!”

That remark brought laughter and wary looks from many of those in hearing, but the police made no move to respond. Standing in parade rest position, with their white batons held in both hands, they watched in silence as the taunting crowd passed by.

There appeared to be at least a hundred officers present, arranged into three lines. Two of the lines, east of the coliseum, on 17th and 18th Streets, blocked the route to Grant Park, on the Lake Michigan waterfront, where many youths were already assembled. The third line, south of the coliseum, on Wabash, blocked the route to the stockyards, where the convention was in process in the International Amphitheatre near South 35th Street.

With nowhere to turn other than into the downtown area or north on Wabash, the rambunctious crowd surged in that direction. A long-haired youth with a megaphone stood there on a wooden box, exhorting people to continue north to Lincoln Park.

“Grant’s the place to go!” yelled someone. “They’ve got the TV cameras there!”

Bill O’Rourke thought to himself that that was true. Grant Park was just across the street from the Conrad Hilton Hotel, where the convention delegates were staying. The previous night he had watched scenes on TV of the assembled protesters, identified as being shot from cameras set up on an upper floor of the hotel. No doubt thousands of American

households, tuned into the convention, had seen the huge crowd of protesters and their signs.

"Yea, Grant's the place, if we can get through!" said someone.

"Just go around the police!" yelled someone else. "They can't block us everywhere!"

"The big battle's going to be at Lincoln Park," answered the young man with the megaphone. "The police are all lined up there. They're going to go in again at curfew and the people in the park aren't going to move."

"Let everyone make up their own mind," someone pronounced. "People are needed in both places."

With that shout, those who had stopped to argue began moving away. Regardless of the destination, they were all headed in the same direction anyhow, north toward the Loop.

The O'Rourke brothers had stopped to listen to the youth with the megaphone, though a look between them communicated that neither cared to get involved in the actions that had been promoted.

"Either place there'll be war," said Patrick.

Bill O'Rourke assented with a silent nod of the head. He had taken in the events of the evening, feeling that somehow the case against the war and the police had been overstated. Still he was aware that he had become more questioning and critical of the use of force in both circumstances.

Back in the Evanston apartment, the brothers turned on the TV and saw that the protesters and police had clashed in both places where the crowds had headed. The fray had been worse at Lincoln Park where the police had once again attacked with tear gas and clubs.

"Another battle is forming on the convention floor," the announcer said, "where the coalition of anti-war camps will present their plank for a floor vote, scheduled for sometime tomorrow afternoon. Meanwhile, anti-war leaders have been calling for a massive demonstration in Grant Park tomorrow to show of support for the plank."

"That's what we should go to," said Patrick, watching. "What do you think, Bill?"

"Sure, sounds fine. I'd like to."

O'Rourke's roommates, Darin Helm and Lee Cobus, and Cobus's live-in girlfriend, Marsha Collins, were in the sitting room when this proposal came up. Soon they had all agreed to meet in mid-afternoon to go down together to the demonstration.

[Chapter 98 notes]

99. O'Rourke brothers and friends join the demonstration in Grant Park

In addition to news on the confrontations between police and anti-war demonstrators at Lincoln Park and Grant Park, the *Chicago Tribune* the next morning (Wednesday, August 28), carried a front page article about a speech at Lincoln Park the previous evening by Bobby G. Seale, founder and then chairman of the nationally known black political group, the Black Panther Party.

Bill O'Rourke read this article at a side table in a bakery store in the Rogers Park neighborhood where his brother lived. According to the article, Seale had encouraged his audience, "including many college-aged protestors against violence," to use violence in response to the police actions.

"These comments," the article continued, "came forth in the midst of a rambling, street jargon monologue about 'power,' specifically, 'power to the people,' a saying that Seale attributed to his fellow Black Panther, Eldridge Cleaver.

"Seale rhetorically asked, 'What is power?' and answered that power is 'the ability to defend phenomena and make it act right.'

"As examples of phenomena needing correction, he cited 'racist, brutal murders that pigs have committed upon black people' and 'lynchings that have been going down for four hundred years.' He also brought the term closer to home, saying, "We're talking about the occupation troops, right here in Chicago, occupying the black community, and even occupying this park where the people have come forth.'

"'The phenomenal situation is this,' he declared, standing behind a cordon of body guards wearing black berets. 'It's that we have too many hogs in every facet of government that exists in this country.'

"'How do you make the social phenomena act in a desired manner?' Seale asked, rhetorically again. "I am saying this here... If a pig comes up to you, and you sit down and start singin', 'We Shall Overcome,' like a lot of these Toms want us to do, we're jivin'. But if a pig comes up to us, and starts swingin' a billy club, and you check around and you got your piece, you got to down that pig in defense of yourself. You got to take that club, whip him over his head, lay him on the ground, and then this pig is actin' in a desired manner. All right.'

"Seale later declared, 'Don't be out there jivin,' wondering whether the wall is real or not. Make sure if you want to coalesce, work, functionally organize, that you pick up a crowbar. Pick up a piece. Pick up a gun. And pull that spike out from the wall. Because if you pull it on out and you shoot well, all I'm gonna do is pat you on the back and say, 'Keep shootin.' You dig? We won't be jivin'.'"

The article concluded: “Whether the young audience understood the full ramification of these remarks, was not clear from their faces. Some greeted the exhortations to arms with raised fists, while others sat on the grass with calm faces as if listening to a lecture in college.”

Reading this article, O’Rourke realized for the first time that the wide spectrum of groups opposed to the war included groups that wanted to take up arms in an armed rebellion.

“I don’t think this is just political theater,” he remarked to his brother later at the apartment.

“Oh, no,” said Patrick, shaking his head. “These black guys are ready to fight.”

“I’m not ready for that, against my own country.”

“Neither am I. But how about if we were black?”

“I don’t know, even then.”

“To them, it’s a different country, Bill.”

“And, you know what?” said Marsha Collins, coming out from a back bedroom. “They’re the ones who are fighting the war. They’re the ones who are dying.”

“That’s the truth, too,” Patrick agreed.

Soon Darin Helm and Lee Cobus, Patrick’s other room-mates, joined them in the kitchen. Together they headed out, dressed in various counter- cultural styles. Slim-hipped Marsha Collins was wearing skin-tight, bell- bottomed jeans, with a red bandanna around her forehead. Her boyfriend, Cobus, wore several necklaces of multi-colored beads and a T-shirt with a large, clenched fist and the words, “Hell, No!” Helm wore army fatigue and a wide-visored “grunt cap,” gotten from someone who had served in Vietnam. The O’Rourke brothers looked the part, also, with their full beards and shoulder-length hair.

Disembarking from the L-train at the Adams Street Station, they saw exuberant people, most of them young, streaming toward the lake front in pairs and small groups like their own. Above the noise of traffic, they could hear the thumping bass of a rock band and the rhythmic wail of an electric guitar.

Their route took them one block south along Wabash Street below the L-train pillars, then a block east along Jackson Street to the bridge that crossed the railroad tracks into the park.

From the bridge they could see that the assembly of demonstrators, though not of a consistent density, extended from the park side base of the bridge to the band shell about a quarter mile to the east. They could see, also, that the Illinois National Guard and the Chicago police were both present. The guardsmen, armed with rifles, were positioned north to south three deep along the western border of the park for almost a mile, with a wing of the formation extending east for about a quarter mile to

the lake shore marina. The police, in their white shirts and helmets, were positioned in several formations along Michigan Avenue, outside of the park, apparently to prevent the crowd from approaching the convention headquarters in the Conrad Hilton Hotel. At the hotel, three blocks south of the bridge, taxis and other vehicles arrived and left in quick succession.

Heading into the park, the O'Rourke brothers and their friends made their way through the crowd toward the band shell. The crowd at this point was only loosely oriented toward the band shell, with many sitting in small groups, talking or smoking grass. One group of about a dozen young men to the side of the crowd was tossing a frizbee.

About 4 p.m. a more formal part of the rally began with a statement by one of the MOBE organizers, whose name was muffled as it came out of the public address system. "Even as we speak, only three miles away, 2000 delegates, supposedly the delegates of our people, are casting their votes on a resolution to bring to an immediate end an unconscionable war," the organizer said. "From this park, from our hearts, we say to you, if you can hear us, vote with your conscience, vote against this war! From this park, we call out to you, vote for peace, vote for democracy!"

This statement brought a roar of approval from the crowd, who had closed in more tightly around the band shell.

Next to step forward was one of the Yippies, who read "the initial call for all you good people to come to Chicago, sent out months ago and brought up to now."

"Come all you rebels, youth spirits, rock minstrels, truth-seekers, peacock-freaks," he began, "poets, barricade jumpers, dancers, lovers, and artists! It is the last week in August and the National Death Party has met to bless Lyndon Johnson... We are here!" A roar rose up from the crowd again.

"There are 50,000 of us here, in this city," he continued, "dancing in the streets, throbbing with amplifiers and harmony. We are making love in the parks."

A roar rose up again with laughter and shouts.

"We are reading, singing, laughing, printing newspapers, groping, and making a mock convention, and celebrating the birth of free America in our own time. The threats of LBJ, Mayor Daley, and J. Edgar Freako will not stop us!"

Applause and shouts again.

"The life of America is being torn asunder by the forces of violence, decay, and the napalm-cancer fiend," the Yippie continued. "We demand the politics of ecstasy! We are the delicate spores of the new fierceness that will change America! We will create our own reality! We are free America, and we will not accept the false theater of the Death

Convention!"

He had hardly completed his Whitmanesque statement when a message moved in waves through the crowd, originating from people here and there with portable radios. The anti-war plank had been defeated.

Soon several of the MOBE organizers on the band shell went to the side and bent down to hear the news from someone in the crowd.

At once one of the MOBE organizers, the one who had made the formal announcement at the start of the rally, came to the microphone again. "It is my truly sad duty now," he said, "to convey to you what we all feared and yet suspected would happen. By a vote of 1567 to 1041, the anti-war plank has been defeated."

Cries went up from the crowd and then, to one side of the crowd, a motion of people and shouting occurred in the area of a flagpole. People there were yelling for the American flag to be lowered in shame.

One youth went forward. From where the O'Rourke's were standing, he could not be seen clearly. He was pushed back by someone. Another flurry of motion followed. Several more people went forward. The flag was lowered slowly to cheers from the group around the flagpole.

It was not clear why there had been a struggle, suggesting that all in the crowd were not of the same mind. Soon a white T-shirt smeared with red ascended the flag pole and flew there like a flag.

"Good people, good people, people of peace," one of the organizers said from the band shell. "We came here today determined to march on the convention if the war plank failed. Are you ready to march with us now?"

"Yes! Yes!" many people shouted, but also some people began leaving the crowd on all sides, heading eastward toward the lake front, away from the guardsmen posted along the western side of the park.

"You who will march with us, we will be forming our ranks just to the south in the area of the fountain," the announcer went on. "This will be a peaceful march down Michigan to the stockyards, if we can get through the lines."

Another announcer came forward, a young woman with long blonde hair. "If the police attack again," she said, "and you or any of your friends is hurt, you can find help at the northwest corner of the park. We have an emergency clinic set up there, staffed by volunteers. They will assist you."

The mood grew more tense as this announcement went out. Many had left, but still thousands remained, massing by the fountain. Within the group that included Bill O'Rourke and his brother's apartment mates, a brief exchange established that all would join the march. They walked over together to the formation of marchers and stood about half way back

in the sea of bodies, waiting for someone to give the signal for the march to begin.

No command was given, but somehow, amidst shouts and confusion, the crowd began to move forward. Coming over a high point in the grass, Bill O'Rourke could see that a line of MOBE organizers was in the lead, their arms locked together.

Amidst the mass of protesters, a dozen or so flags were flying, including several one-starred red and blue Viet Cong flags and one solid black flag, the flag of the anarchism movement. One man carried an upside down American flag. Several other people carried American flags flown correctly.

They were heading toward the bridges at Congress Street and Balboa Street that spanned the railroad tracks between the park and Michigan Avenue. The park had only three points of egress onto Michigan, those two bridges and the bridge behind them at Jackson Street.

As the crowd drew closer to the bridges, however, the guardsmen in the long line on the west side of the park, moving together in military units, positioned themselves in front of the bridges with their bayonets fixed on their rifles. Some in the back rows had automatic weapons and grenade launchers loaded with tear gas canisters.

"You're soldiers against democracy!" someone shouted from amidst the marchers. "You're soldiers on the wrong side!"

There was no response from the guardsmen. Many of them were college students who had joined the guard to avoid the draft. They held their positions grimly, waiting for orders.

[Chapter 99 notes]

100. O'Rourke group, fleeing tear gas, winds up in SCLC march

After the marchers and guardsmen in Grant Park had stood facing one another for several minutes, an officer of the guard stepped forward with a megaphone and read a statement saying the marchers were in violation of a Chicago city ordinance prohibiting marches without permit.

"I have therefore been instructed to inform you, you must disperse and exit the park at this time," the officer concluded.

"That's the craziest goddamn thing I ever heard," someone remarked from the row of people behind the O'Rourke's and their party. "Exit where? They got all the bridges blocked."

Actually, of the three bridge over the railroad tracks to Michigan Avenue, there was one bridge, at Jackson Street, three blocks behind them, that was not blocked. But the general assumption was that that bridge was blocked, too. The instruction to "exit the park" was, therefore, taken to mean "exit by way of Columbus Avenue" on the lake side of the park. From there the bulk of the people in the crowd would need to double back to the Loop to catch an L-train or bus (assuming dispersal, as asked).

Irritation arose at that prospect, and some murmuring within the ranks of the marchers. Two MOBE organizers went forward to confer with the officer.

From where he was standing, midway back in the waiting assembly of thousands of marchers, Bill O'Rourke could see the officer shaking his head repeatedly as the MOBE organizers presented their argument with expansive gestures and outstretched arms.

The MOBE organizers came back to their own ranks, shaking their heads in disgust. The other organizers in the front row closed in a huddle with them.

After a few minutes, the officer came forward another time.

"Again, I must tell you, you are in violation of the law," he said into the megaphone.

"Whose law is that?" someone shouted.

"You must disperse at once or we will be required to remove you by force," the officer continued with an impassive expression.

"Fuck your goddam force!"

"You can stick it up your ass!"

A volley of other taunts and epithets erupted from the ranks of the marchers, as some among the group moved forward toward the National Guard lines. In response, several officers, positioned in different places along the lines, shouted military commands, at almost exactly the same moment. Popping sounds were heard; fumes of yellow tear gas billowed up from the ground in front of the marchers.

The uneven rows of marchers broke up in disarray as the guardsmen advanced, pushing them back with successive rings of tear gas toward the band shell where the rally had begun.

Bill O'Rourke, running beside his brother and Marsha Collins, found himself in an area where the gas was too thick to avoid. Another blast of it, directly in front of him, brought such a sting to his eyes that he could hardly open them to see.

Marsha Collins, who had run directly into the same blast, fell to the ground, sobbing.

Lee Cobus, coming up behind her, yelled. "Come on, Marsha, it's just gonna get worse here!"

She remained clumped on the ground, so Cobus and Bill O'Rourke each grabbed one arm and dragged her along trying to get her legs moving. She broke into a weary trot with her eyes closed, depending on Cobus to lead her away from the gas.

"What the fuck do they think they're doing?" she wailed.

"They think they're clearin' us out of here," Cobus replied, "and right now it's workin' pretty good."

"This is so weird! It's Kafkaesque!"

In the area of the band shell, now out of range of the tear gas, the disorganized crowd broke into two groups, one heading eastward toward the lake shore, the other streaming over the bridge to Jackson Street, which by this time had been discovered to be open.

The O'Rourke brothers, Lee Cobus, and Marsha Collins, coughing and rubbing their eyes, were walking along silently by this time, dazed by the rapid turn of events. Coming near the bridge, along with dozens of others more or less in the same state, they heard what sounded like hundreds of people chanting.

"Join us! Join us!" they were saying.

As he came down with the others to Michigan Avenue, Bill O'Rourke, trying to figure out what was going on, saw a strange sight. There was a group of mostly black people there, some in formal attire such as suits and ties, moving along slowly behind a wagon drawn by mules. Converging into this group was a steady stream of mostly white young people, dressed mostly in counterculture styles, many of them still rubbing their eyes from the tear gas attack in the park.

"My God, look at that!" Patrick exclaimed. "That's the SCLC. They got a permit to march!"

"March where?" said Bill.

"All the way out to the convention hall, I think."

Bill O'Rourke by this time had put two and two together, recalling that SCLC stood for "Southern Christian Leadership Conference," the group that Martin Luther King had brought into the national news so

often. The mule-drawn wagon was the same, apparently, that had led the King funeral in Atlanta. Yes, there was King's assistant, Ralph Abernathy, walking just behind the wagon beside Jesse Jackson of the Chicago PUSH program. Several in the group held signs saying, "Justice Won't Wait."

"Join us! Join us!" the group in the street kept chanting with a volume rising steadily as the marchers expelled from the park streamed into their ranks.

"Hey, let's go!" said Patrick. "This could be interesting! They're going right past the hotel!"

Soon the O'Rourke contingent was in marching position near the back of the group, with others coming steadily in behind them. The total group filled the entire width of the broad, tree-lined street for more than two city blocks behind the mule wagon.

The chant now changed to "Stop the War! Stop the War!" It rose to an ecstatic, triumphant volume as the young people routed from the park realized that they had foiled the National Guard by joining up with a legitimate march with a permit.

Bill O'Rourke, walking near the curb on the east side of Michigan Avenue, chanced upon a wooden crate on the sidewalk and jumped up on it to get a glimpse of what lay ahead. The front row of marchers with the mule wagon was approaching the hotel with the police looking on but not trying to stop them. Several dozen people wearing black arm bands were joining into the march from the sidewalk just before the hotel. Nurses in white uniforms with Red Cross insignias on their caps were standing on the other side of the street with a contingent of Chicago firemen.

From his older brother young O'Rourke learned that the black arm bands had been adopted by the McCarthy camp following the defeat of the anti-war plank.

"I heard that at the rally," his brother shouted to be heard above the chanting. "Some guy with a radio!"

The young people involved in the traditional political process were obviously of a different type, young O'Rourke observed. They were neater in appearance with generally shorter hair. Some of the men were wearing suits, and they were accompanied by a contingent of about a half dozen young women dressed in well-tailored, knee-length dresses.

The exuberant marchers continued along for several minutes and then came to an abrupt halt. O'Rourke climbed up a light pole to see what was going on. The lead line of the march and the mule wagon had stopped at a police barricade spanning Michigan Avenue just beyond the far end of the hotel. There was a huddle of a dozen or so people talking with a police officer. From another light pole, a block or so closer to the hotel, a long-haired young man in an olive drab Chinese People's Army cap was

waving a red and blue Viet Cong flag.

"I thought there was a permit," said someone.

"The pigs probably stole it somehow," someone else replied.

"Now what happens?"

"Who knows?"

The crowd started chanting, "The street belongs to the people! The street belongs to the people!"

The same situation continued for a half hour or so more with some kind of negotiations apparently still going on. Then, suddenly, the lines moved forward again.

"The pigs are letting us through!" someone shouted.

The chanting had subsided. Now it rose up again with new energy as the marchers approached the front façade of the hotel. A small group of conventioneers watched there from behind the ranks of policemen. Other people watched from the lobby and upper story windows. Some television cameras were in view on the upper stories also, panning back and forth slowly.

There was a new chant this time. "The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!"

The O'Rourke brothers and their contingent had advanced as far as the corner just before the hotel. Marsha Collins, fully recovered from the gas by this time, adjusted her head band with the help of a small mirror, then turned toward the cameras and shook her small, white fist in time with the chant.

After moving only about a block, the marchers came to another halt. It appeared that the police had closed the barricade again on the south side of the hotel at Balboa Street.

"Looks like they let the SCLC through," someone said. "They're stopping everyone else."

Bill O'Rourke pulled himself up by the overhanging limb of a tree on the boulevard and verified that the report was correct. The mule wagon and its mostly black-skinned entourage had proceeded beyond the barricade and were moving down Michigan Avenue, presumably to the convention hall, with an escort of squad cards clearing the street in front of them.

On the near side of the barricade the mostly white-skinned anti-war marchers stood restlessly in place or milled around yelling and gesturing to one another. The crowd appeared to number in the thousands, occupying Michigan Avenue north and south for two blocks in front of the hotel and sprawling west onto Balboa Street next to the hotel. Young people, in small groups or individually, were established on every object in sight including trees, light poles, stop lights, trash cans, doorways, and walls. Flags and signs waved back and forth.

An air of celebration, almost, like a giant party, young O'Rourke thought, but with an undercurrent of apprehension regarding whether the police would attack.

There were signs that events were indeed heading in that direction. For more than an hour, with darkness now falling and the street lights all coming on, the police had been quietly reinforcing and rearranging their formations on the south side of the crowd on Michigan Avenue and on the west side near Balboa and Wabash. Hundreds of them, in white shirts and helmets, their faces impassive, watched from behind the barricades, now and then exchanging comments with one another. Meanwhile, a boisterous group of young people, positioned near the barricades, where most of the extremes of language and costume could be found, kept up a stream of insults and taunts.

Pig calls and grunts, emitted as loudly as possible, were the most common taunts.

A pretty, wild-haired brunette, directly in front of the police, bared her shoulders and upper breasts, shouting, "Like some, wouldn't you? Well, you can't have it cuz' you're a pig!"

About 10 p.m., the mood grew more intense as the police dressed up their lines and an officer came forward to speak into a speaker mounted on a squad car. He said what people expected to hear, that the crowd was blocking the street illegally and had to disperse.

"If you refuse to leave peacefully," he said, "we will be required to remove you by force."

Ten minutes of expectant waiting followed that, with the taunts and challenges growing more livid and the crowd ending up in a chant again of "the street belongs to the people."

Soon after that, the popping sounds of tear gas canisters could be heard exploding amidst the crowd in all directions. At the same time, the police came forward in full force from three directions at once, driving the three wings of the crowd into one another with no way to escape.

[Chapter 100 notes]

101. O'Rourke runs into Barbara Carpenter at a parkside clinic

Bill O'Rourke was caught by surprise, like many of the others, when the Chicago city police, with clubs swinging, descended on the thousands of young people taunting them from beyond the barricades. Later, though, that same night, he had a greater surprise still as he stood in line at parkside clinic with his brother, Patrick, who had sustained several blows to the head. At a triage table, on the far side of a parking lot divided into treatment stations, was a person he was almost sure he recognized who had been much on his mind.

Leaving his brother momentarily, he wound his way around trucks and trailer-like mobile units to get a better look, emerging from the last of them to find the object of his interest staring back at him from about a hundred feet away. It was Barbara Carpenter, dressed in a white nurse's uniform with a red cross armband on her right arm.

She came across to him at once, shaking her head in disbelief and smiling. "Bill O'Rourke!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

O'Rourke was a sight to behold with his red hair and red beard in wild disarray and matted down with sweat, the result of his afternoon of running away from tear gas and police.

"I was just going to ask you the same thing myself!" he answered, unable to come up quickly with a more clever response. His mind had gone suddenly blank.

O'Rourke had been diligent in sending her letters every few days or so though he had not updated her on what he had gone since leaving Georgia and he had received no word back from her, though he knew she had continued in her nursing program in Minneapolis.

O'Rourke had never before seen Barbie in a nurse's uniform. There was something about it that brought out the natural empathy in her girlish brown eyes. He had forgotten how pretty she was, and she looked so feminine, so womanly in the white dress.

She was in Chicago, she explained, with three other women from her program. They had completed one section of their training and during a brief break had come down as volunteers to work in the medical station set up to deal with any injuries resulting from clashes between protestors and police.

"There was an ad on the bulletin board in our dorm," she explained in her tentative voice, which always had a note of self-consciousness. "This will count as a clinic unit in our hands-on experience. We were here last night, too. But we won't be around for long, I'm sorry to say. We're leaving tomorrow for Wisconsin. Then, from there, Minnesota. We're going around to everyone's families. One of the girls has family here. Meanwhile, though, it's been a good experience."

"Well, good for you," said O'Rourke.

He was also heading up to Minnesota, he was thinking, and at about the same time. Maybe he ought to invite her to hitchhike up with him for the adventure of it. She maybe would be game for that. But he held back from asking.

"I need to get back to my station soon," Carpenter said after a moment of silence.

"Oh," O'Rourke replied, struggling again. "Well, I'm glad I got to see you a little bit, at least."

"I'll be off in an hour or so, if you care to wait around. We could go out for a coffee or something."

"I'd love to, Barb. I'll hang around."

Just like that, the unexpected event was arranged, and, an hour or so later, Bill O'Rourke was strolling toward the lake shore with Barbara Carpenter beside him. His brother had gallantly headed home by himself.

Soon they talking about the events of the past summer and Carpenter's experience in training.

"It's been fun at times," she said. "Such good people... And we're all good friends now, like team mates. But, sometimes, I don't know, I look ahead at going overseas, which I expect I will and I feel scared about it. Not about the war so much, though that surely is a reason to be scared. I think what it is is I am scared of being uprooted. Daughter of the soil. Sad sack. You get the picture!"

"Oh, we all get like that sometimes," returned O'Rourke, realizing that she was confiding in him with a new tone of trust. He wanted to show himself sensitive as a listener. "I do, too. Especially, sometimes, when I'm on the road by myself."

"O'Rourke, the merry Irishman?"

"Oh, yea, sure. I'm not always merry. I'm not Santa Claus."

She laughed. "Gleeful, then. It's a good quality, Bill."

They had passed beyond the side of the art museum to an open area from which the lights of Michigan Avenue could be seen on the other side of the park. O'Rourke looked back toward the scene where the police had attacked. A new crowd of demonstrators had gathered there, and a new phalanx of police.

He felt no urge at all to join the fray. He thought to himself that he hardly understood why he had been there in the first place or whether he fully believed in what he had been marching for. He had just gotten caught up in it somehow. There was much about it still unresolved in his mind, including the obvious excesses of the demonstrators, on the one hand, and the strange virulence of the police, on the other.

Leaving that behind, they walked along the lakefront, between the illuminated towers of the downtown skyline and the dark water lapping

against the piers.

"I want you to know, though," said Carpenter softly, "when there were sad times, your letters were always there to sustain. It's been so nice to find them in the mail."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes."

She was sincere in what she said. Tom Steward's letters, once a mainstay, had faded off, O'Rourke had taken up the empty space left behind. With O'Rourke she was aware of a more romantic feeling.

They walked in silence again.

"Well, thank you," said O'Rourke. "I didn't think I was much of a letter writer."

"I wasn't talking about your writing," Carpenter remarked with a smile. She took his right hand with her left hand and shook it firmly. "And you knew that, too!"

"I did not."

"Ha, Mr. O'Rourke. You don't fool me. Don't pretend to be naïve with women."

"I never claimed to be."

"How many other pen pals do you have, Bill?"

"None, Barbie. Just you."

"Don't bother to write, huh? Just go right on in?"

"Not that, either."

"A tad of blarney, Mr. O'Rourke?"

"No blarney. Honest."

O'Rourke walked along, nodding and smiling at her ribbing. He had learned, on his previous occasions with Carpenter, that she used humor, and sometimes craziness, to reestablish distance when she felt herself being drawn in. She often seemed in a tug of war with herself, pushing the interaction in a romantic direction and then pulling back with a scolding expression, as if the direction was his fault not hers.

O'Rourke wasn't put off by her sudden changes in disposition. He found them amusing. They made her affection seem all the more formidable a goal. Also, he put all of this in context with other information about her that he had learned from Tom Steward on his and Steward's hitchhiking trip of the previous summer. Steward, on the last night of the trip, had told O'Rourke the whole story of his involvement with Carpenter.

Out of Steward's story, told as the two rowing buddies had sat together by a fire under a railroad bridge in Tennessee, O'Rourke had retained two intriguing facts. The first was that Carpenter had initiated the physical part of her relationship with Steward by kneeling on a couch next to him as if to look out a window, in his campus apartment, and then

plopping on his lap. The second was that Carpenter had apparently gotten in over her head in trying to portray herself as a Christian sex counselor when the truth was she had never had sex. To resolve that, she had initiated a feeling session with a fellow counselor, a young man, and had wound up pregnant, and surprised and overwhelmed by how she had lost control.

Add to that the bizarre finale of the other counselor's attempted suicide by injecting his veins with ether, Steward's offer to marry Carpenter and be the child's father, and the miscarriage that had brought to an end the pregnancy itself and any talk of unplanned parental roles. The general impression left from all of that, in O'Rourke's mind, was that she had played with fire, and had gotten burned, and was now on constant alert against creating any similar experience,—though obviously there was a healthy sexual drive in the girlish body that pulled back from his touch at times like a coiled spring.

She was the one who had wanted to walk by way of the shore, to give herself a moment, she said, to clear out her mind.

"You see things," she remarked softly, "and one of them alone isn't enough to overwhelm you, but they all add up. You hardly know how they're adding, you know, and then you realize you're very tired."

"You think sometimes you're doing the wrong thing?" said O'Rourke.

"Oh, no! I'm glad I have the ability to do it," she answered with a lingering gaze of the large brown eyes. "I like doing it, Bill. It's a blessing, really. I just have to pace myself, you know, so I don't get take in more than I can handle."

O'Rourke was also aware that Carpenter, since her miscarriage, had been seeing a psychiatrist and was under a regimen agreed on in therapy. Steward had told him that, also. O'Rourke had gotten used to the nurse's frequent self-assessments, usually conveyed in psychological terms.

Later they ate a pizza together in a walkdown restaurant with red and white checkered tablecloths and curtains of the same pattern on high half-windows that showed only the bottom parts of passing legs before a backdrop of neon signs. Inside the restaurant the lighting was subdued, with candles flickering in glass containers like votive cups.

In that tranquil atmosphere, their conversation turned once more to their common plans to serve in Vietnam,—a topic that had been a mainstay in their relationship since drawing them into their first conversation with one another, more than eight months before, at the Brandt's engagement party in the Red Garter bar above the boat club.

"I expect in Vietnam," he said. "There will be much of the same as what you were talking about, that you said you were experiencing this evening, the same intensity."

"Oh, yes!" she answered. "But I'm determined, you know..."

She let the sentence fall off.

Determined, yes, he was thinking in his own mind. That was another quality in her that he had learned to appreciate, the determination that kept her headed toward her dream of "being of real service in a situation of real need," as she had described it to him once.

She asked him whether he still was entirely sure he wanted to go to Vietnam himself and he answered, without hesitation, yes, giving much the same reasons that he remembered giving to Tom Steward at their rooftop campsite in Indiana.

"Ultimately, the way I look at it," he said, "we're one nation and that war over there is what my nation is doing."

"Well, I think that's noble," she remarked.

His mind drifted back then to that rooftop where he and Steward had eaten hot dogs and beans together ten weeks before. He observed to himself that not much had changed, not much at all, since then, despite all that had transpired in just a few days in the madness of Chicago. He realized from that, too, that, as far as the war was concerned, he was on an inexorable course. His personal destiny was intertwined with it, almost. He had to go. He would go. He already knew all the arguments, pro and con.

Leaving the restaurant behind, they headed out, hand in hand, onto the sign-lit streets. He threw his arm around her shoulders. She made no effort to push him away.

"I meant to tell you, I'm heading up to Minnesota myself," he ventured. "The way it looks not, the day after tomorrow."

"How are you going?"

"The mighty thumb."

"Traveling in style, huh?"

"You bet, it's the best."

"I can see how it would have its moments, the freedom."

"You're welcome to come with me, Barb. We can camp out on the way up, if we have to."

She laughed. "Alone on a starry night with a romantic guy? I don't think so, Bill!"

That was a compliment and rejection at the same time, to the extent he could figure it out, but he put it into context, in his mind, with her tug of war in general. With matters being resolved as they were, he just wanted the evening to end on a good note.

"I would like to get together with you again maybe, when we're both back in Minnesota," she said at the front door of the building where she was staying with her friends.

He managed to get a prolonged kiss before she opened the door to go

in. She began backing away from him as soon as he began the second kiss.

The door closed behind her after that, and O'Rourke was left on the Chicago streets alone, with the aloneness that he had grown accustomed to on his nights by himself on the road. On this occasion the aloneness was harder to bear.

Back in his brother's apartment, the events of the day—from the initial gathering in Grant Park, to the chanting crowd, to the charge of the police, to his chance meeting with Barbara Carpenter—rushed through his mind, seeming to focus at the candlelit table where the topic of conversation between him and her had been once again Vietnam.

More strongly than ever then, he realized the extent to which his life and hers had been bound together by that war, a war that had entered his life so remotely in college and that now had become the center point in his expectations regarding his future.

102. Steward prepares his statement to file as a conscientious objector

Thomas Steward, in North Carolina, read of the result of the 1968 Democratic Party Convention on Monday, September 2, three evenings after the Friday evening acceptance speech of the party's affirmed candidate, Hubert Horatio Humphrey of Minnesota. He read of it in the Lenoir Public Library, where he had come by himself with a spiral notebook and a stack of books.

An article that Steward found there, in a local newspaper, assessed the situation as follows: "With victory gained at the convention, Humphrey now faces the formidable task of regaining the hearts and energy of the disenchanted young people who battled police in the streets of Chicago. They must be brought back into the fold, as must their counterparts on campuses and in 'war on poverty' projects spawned by Humphrey's boss, Lyndon Johnson.

"Can they be brought back, is another matter. The only hope now for such a reconciliation appears to be a cease fire in Vietnam. A cease fire would make moot one persistent question that now alienates the young, of whether or not the cease fire should be offered without conditions. A cease fire would perhaps allow the party to gather and redirect, for its own purposes, some of the young people's energy now directed against the war, energy that would be just what the doctor ordered for a campaign that limped out of Chicago with a bad case of 'the same old stuff.' Humphrey's chances of success would be helped, also, by a decision, on the part of LBJ, to yield to Communist demands for the Viet Cong to be brought into the peace talks, as a de facto political power in South Vietnam. But an offer of that kind is unlikely, considering Johnson's present position that such involvement would legitimize the rebel forces."

Steward thought to himself, as he read that article, that he was one of the "disenchanted young people" described as needing to be brought back into the political fold. Soon, however, his attention turned to the notebook that lay before him on the table. Inside it, taped on several consecutive pages, was a photocopy of an official form that he had requested and received from his local draft board on July 21, six weeks before.

The form was entitled "Selective Service System Special Form for Conscientious Objector." Its purpose was summarized in several paragraphs of "Instructions" printed in small print just below the title.

"A registrant who claims to be a conscientious objector," the instructions said, "shall offer information in substantiation of his claim on this special form, which when filed shall become a part of his Classification Questionnaire (SSS Form 100). The items in Series II

through V of this form are intended to obtain evidence of the genuineness of the claim made in Series I, and the answers given by the registrant shall be for the information of only the officials duly authorized under the regulations to examine them."

Series I, entitled "Claim for Exemption," provided a choice between two alternative statements, both beginning with the same words: "I am, by reason of my religious training and belief, conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form." The first statement, however, went on to claim exemption from "combatant" training and service only (allowing for "noncombatant" training and service); while the second statement claimed exemption from both combatant and noncombatant training and service.

Series II, entitled "Religious Training and Belief," consisted of two items. The first item was a simple question: "Do you believe in a Supreme Being?" The second item instructed: "Describe the nature of your belief which is the basis of your claim made in Series I above, and state whether or not your belief in a Supreme Being involves duties which to you are superior to those arising from any human relation."

Series III and IV called for evidential support in the form of a description of previous activities and published statements. Section V provided room for naming character references who could substantiate the claim.

Steward had not expected to file as a conscientious objector since, without ever having examined the issue fully, he suspected that he would have been willing to fight in World War Two. He had sent for the form on the insistence of a counselor from the American Friends Service Committee. That counselor, upon hearing that he was thinking of refusing induction, had insisted that that was basis enough to file.

"I don't even know if my reasons are religious," Steward had said to the counselor, pronouncing each word distinctly in his characteristic manner. "I think the main thing for me is, I just want to act in an ethical manner. I just want to be intellectually consistent."

"Yes, and that's the very definition of conscience, isn't it?" the counselor had replied. "Intellectual integrity incumbent upon action. That's the root of conscience, the responsible, lucid mind."

The responsible, lucid mind. Steward had repeated that phrase many times in his thoughts as he took to heart the counselor's admonition that to think through his stand on the war was a social obligation.

He was glad for the time provided by the form for sorting out his thoughts. He had never anticipated, though, that his reasoning about what to do in response to his order for induction would transpire in such a religious domain as the form tended to place it. Now that the form had landed in his hands, however, he was determined to respond to it on its

own terms; and that had led inexorably to a self-examination, from the ground up, of his entire ethical framework of belief.

Before him in his notebook on the table, he could see the result of that effort, now reaching a stage of completion. His response was due in 20 days, on September 22.

His thoughts, recorded in neat, stiff longhand, had begun on the fundamental level suggested by the form: did he believe in a "Supreme Being"? He had decided, yes. "Based on intuition rather than on any logical argument," he had noted. "The main thing is, I pray. I pray naturally, often, when I am most alone with myself."

From there he had gone on to the great religious figure of his childhood, Jesus Christ. "It doesn't even matter, in this context, if Christ was what he claimed to be, the son of God," he had written to himself. "Let him be, for purposes of this inquiry, simply what John Stuart Mill said he was, 'a person of moral grandeur.' Let him be simply what he has been to me personally, representative of the greatest moral good. Let him be simply what he is in our society, the centerpiece of moral thought."

From there he had proceeded to a crucial question, in his own mind: had Christ been a pacifist, had he prescribed non-violence in all human interaction?

It seemed without question that he had. There was the well-known dictum to "turn the other cheek." There was the dictum to give one's coat away when someone demanded it. And, beyond that, most difficult to understand, was the dictum to "resist not the evildoer," which Steward understood to mean that all kinds of negative action, even good force applied against evil, were to be eschewed.

So Christ had been a pacifist, Steward had decided, but the further question at hand was whether the absolute negation of violence on Christ's part could ever be brought into reconciliation with the practical world, with the necessity of law enforcement officers, for example. Steward had decided that it could not, and he had written to himself: "Better to keep Christ as he was rather than to try to water him down, better to accept that he offered an impossible ideal rather than to bend what he said to make it conform to our social conceptions."

That conclusion had led him, from the purely religious domain, to a consideration of modern Christian thinkers in related domains of ethics, sociology, and politics. Among them were Soren Kierkegaard, Reinhold Neibuhr, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonheoffer, people he had read about but had never looked at closely before. How had they dealt with this question, he had asked himself.

Here he had found a shared belief, sometimes stated explicitly, but more often assumed as an operative principle, that Christ, the impossible to follow, was the foundation for a "Christian humanist tradition" of

seeking to apply Christian ideas as purely as possible (but never completely purely) within the practical world. Here he had found a recognition of the disparity between the ideal and the possible action that in his own view Christ would never have accepted. Here he had found a realm of "indeterminate possibilities," as Paul Tillich had described it, where the ethical person had to slog on without a moral compass derived from absolute guidelines.

This was the messy world of politics and human decisions and human endeavors conducted in pride. This was the "existential world" described by Kierkegaard, as well as by agnostics like Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre, where "good" and "evil" were sketchily drawn, but where the ethical person was nonetheless obligated to be as "good" as possible.

World War Two and the fascist period leading up to it had emerged from this line of inquiry in strong detail, however; for there there had been, without doubt, evil regimes suppressing justice and free discourse to advance the interests of specific groups of people and totalitarian ideologies.

In fact, many of these liberal humanist authors that Steward had come upon in his readings had had their integrity tested and proved by their response to fascism,—in Nazi Germany, in particular. Tillich had had his books banned and burned. Bonhoeffer had been jailed. Camus and Sartre had participated in the French Resistance. All had not merely thought about right and wrong; they had put their lives on the line in defense of their conclusions.

Steward had been especially impressed by a book called *Not Peace But a Sword*, by Vincent Sheean, describing the American, British, and Canadian volunteers who had taken part in the Spanish Civil War, fighting for the fledgling Spanish Republic against the fascist forces led by Francisco Franco.

"They left their dead at Jarma, at Brunete, at Truel and on the Ebro," one passage read, "their dust mixed with the Spanish earth, their memory an eternal part of the unconquerable soul of Spain. In an army of a half million men they had been the merest handful; all the internationals together did not come to much more than twelve thousand at the end and the English-speaking units were less than half of that total; but in the long epic of the war they not only did more than their material share, but suffused their total effort with a moral value more precious than their lives, the sense of a world not altogether lost, of peoples not completely stultified by their governments, of a common conscience in which whatever hope there is for any possible future must rise again."

Contemplating that, Steward had thought to himself that, in that time, he could well have been one of those volunteers; he would have been willing to engage in violence under such circumstances, when such ideals

were being defended.

That had been a different time, though, he had also told himself. This war being thrust on him now, was it was worthy of such an effort? He doubted that it was. To the contrary, the bravest action would be to do whatever he had to do to advance similar ideals within this different situation.

[Chapter 102 notes]

103. Steward considers whether to object to the "Vietnam war only"

After reaching a conclusion that he could have in conscience fought in World War Two, Thomas Steward had confronted two other questions in his inquiry regarding what to do in response to his order for induction. The first question was whether the Vietnam War was a "just war" that he could in conscience fight in. The second question was: if the war was not just, did he have a right and an obligation to refuse to fight in it (in other words, did he have the right and obligation of "civil disobedience," as that kind of action had come to be called)?

To answer the first question, Steward had read histories of Vietnam and autobiographical writings of the North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh. To answer the second question, he had read writings by proponents of civil disobedience including Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King.

In his study of Vietnamese history, Steward had been impressed early on with what seemed an inescapable fact, that the struggle of the war in Vietnam, from the perspective of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, was primarily a struggle for national identity, and only secondarily a struggle for a socialist state.

This struggle for national identity was not something concocted for political purposes in modern times, Steward had learned. To the contrary, it had had its origins as far back in history as 207 B.C. when Vietnam had been a territory of imperial China. In that year a rebel Chinese general named Trieu Da had exploited the chaos of the decadent Chi'in Dynasty to win independence for a non-Chinese state called Nam Viet. This prototype Vietnam had contained Canton, the Red River delta, and coastal lands as far south as the current city of Da Nang.

Nam Viet had existed independently for only 96 years, but it had given birth to a sense of peoplehood that had endured thereafter for a millennium of Chinese rule. During that period of cultural subordination, the Vietnamese people, though adopting some Chinese customs and words, had maintained their own language and a sense of being a separate nation.

These centuries, while the West experienced the Roman and Byzantine empires, the Dark Ages, and the Black Plague, had seen several Vietnamese attempts at regaining independence, Steward had learned.

The first attempt, under the sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, had gained independence for the Vietnamese people for three years, from 40 to 43 A.D. The Han Dynasty had then regained control. A second attempt, under the "Vietnamese Joan of Arc," Trieu Au, in 248, against the emergent T'ang Dynasty, had been defeated before an independent

state could be restored. Trieu Quang Phuc, “the Swamp Fighter,” and Vo Nguyen Giap had led two other rebellions that were defeated.

Independence had finally been gained in 938 in the disordered last years of the T’ang Dynasty. The provincial mandarin, Ngo Quyen, who had won that rebellion, had employed guerrilla tactics, impaling Chinese ships on spikes concealed by high tide. Dai Co Viet, the Kingdom of the Watchful Hawk, established in 967 under a Vietnamese emperor, Dinh Bo Linh, had followed from Ngo Quyen’s success, securing an independence thereafter retained by payments of tribute to the Chinese.

Le Thanh Tong was another name Steward had come upon in his study as he read of the ongoing struggle between the Vietnamese people and the Chinese empire. Under Le Thanh Tong’s rule, Vietnam had evolved, in the fifteenth century, into a complex, Confucian society organized into 13 provinces, each divided into districts, and then again into local communes. Art, literature, and science had flourished, as well as a Chinese-style civil service and a legal code with progressive elements such as the ability of women to own property.

In that evolution, in the ongoing mythification and lionization of peoplehood and independence, Steward had encountered a persistent strain of idealism and public service. That strain had given way,—in subsequent centuries,—to internecine struggle between Vietnamese factions, but it had remained there for other popular heroes who in key historical moments had invoked it to rebuild the Vietnamese nation.

How was it that this nation, with a sense of itself derived from centuries of fighting for independence, had become eventually a puppet of colonization, under France, organized with a model developed for use with unorganized primitive peoples? That was another key question that Steward had asked himself in his study, and the answer seemed to be simply that France, seeing an opportunity in Vietnamese fictionalization, had entered Vietnamese history, presumably “invited,” as the presumed champion of the “civilized faction,” and thereafter had imposed its typical model on a country that it presumed was a typical country, a mistake discovered eventually in French defeat.

The French had hardly established a foothold, in fact, with the capture of Saigon, in 1859, when partisan forces had begun to form, not only on the periphery of French control, but also within the controlled area, as the “invisible army” later to become too familiar to American soldiers in South Vietnam. “Rebel bands disturb the country everywhere,” Admiral Bonhard, French commander of Cochin, had reported in 1862.

Truong Cong Dinh, Ham Ngi, Ton That Thuyet, Dinh Cong Tranh, Phan Dinh Phung, and many others less known, had come forward, in a century of French rule, to assume the legacy of insurrection, a legacy that the poet Nguyen Huu Huan had described as a debt of infinite weight. “A

man worthy of his name must blush," he had written, "if he cannot pay the debt with his life,"—as he himself had later done, and many of his partisan comrades.

That century of French rule, under a people with a self-proclaimed tradition of "liberte," had produced no such liberty in Vietnam. Neither had it produced a local middle class, while draining the country of its natural and human resources,—so Steward had learned.

Nguyen Ai Quoc ("Nguyen Who Loves His Country") and Nguyen O Phac ("Nguyen Who Hates the French") had been early assumed names of the next patriot to continue the tradition of resistance: Nguyen That Thanh by birth name, later to be known as Ho Chi Minh ("He Who Enlightens").

Active in the resistance, and hunted, since the age of 13, Ho Chi Minh (to use that final name) had devoted his life to self-development as the leader who would lead Vietnam once again to independence. Intent on that task, he had, already as a young man, assimilated the cultures and knowledge of his country's potential enemies and allies, becoming fluent in French, English, Russian, and Chinese, living in France, Russia, and China, while participating in their political parties of liberation, a path that had led him to socialism as a revolutionary model.

Had there been another path, within the twentieth century socio-political milieu, leading to independence and social justice for Vietnam? If so, Ho Chi Minh had not found it. To the contrary, he had found that, in his native land, all Western institutions known to the populace, including the Roman Catholic Church, were involved in appropriating the land and exploiting the peasantry for labor, while only Communism defended the right of the people to control their own land and labor.

As a contributor to Communist newspapers in France, he had, in 1924, listed the multifarious resources exported from Indochina: rice, coal, cement, corn, fish, zinc, cattle, sugar, cobra, rubber, dyestuffs, cotton, pepper, beans, hides, rattan, lac, coffee, tea, cinnamon, anise, and silk; amounting in total to 7,152,910 tons in the year quoted, 1922; 807,739,362 francs worth of exports in the previous year, 1921. He had documented the methods by which the French colonists had driven out the peasants to take over millions of acres of their land, and the methods by which they had afterwards forced the people into serfdom working lands previously their own. He had documented the methods by which the Catholic Church had used high interest loans, offered in bad agricultural years, to bring the peasants into a condition of debt from which they had been later unable to free themselves, resulting in large scale surrenders of land from the hands of the peasants to the hands of the clerics who had taught them the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

He had documented, also, the progression by which countries forced to grow non-cereal crops had then become dependent upon exports for food and at times lacking in basic goods of life that once had been available in plenty.

"In all the French colonies, famine is on the increase," he had written in 1924, "and so is the people's hatred. The native peasants are ripe for insurrection. In many colonies, they have risen many times but their uprisings have all been drowned in blood. If the peasants still have a passive attitude, the reason is they still lack organization and leaders. The Communist International must help them to revolution and liberation."

This Ho Chi Minh who had turned to the Communists for assistance, even to the ruthless Stalin, in the years between the world wars, had, after returning to Vietnam, become a partner of the Allies in World War Two, rescuing pilots downed by the Japanese—such had been his readiness to adopt any means that he had seen as potentially leading to his people's independence. The day of the Japanese surrender on the U.S.S. Missouri, however, accompanied though it had been with an American-type declaration of independence in Vietnam, had been succeeded only by French success in reestablishing its Indochinese colony after withdrawal of the Japanese forces.

Promises by France to remain for only a temporary postwar period,—accepted by Ho Chi Minh as a means of expelling the Chinese forces who had also remained after the Japanese surrender,—had been broken as France reestablished itself for a stay of indeterminate duration.

French withdrawal, following the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, had been succeeded, in turn, not by a complete Vietnamese independence, but instead by the Western-driven, internecine struggle between North and South Vietnam. Nationwide elections, promised by the Geneva Accords of 1954, had never occurred because of Western fear of a ballot box victory by the Viet Minh. The United States, taking up where the French had left off, had supported the colonial structure and non-responsive political practices of South Vietnam while claiming democratic motives.

Only in the context of the cold war between the democratic free world and the non-democratic totalitarian world could American involvement be justified, Steward had concluded. It certainly could not be justified in terms of the long struggle of the Vietnamese people, and it was highly questionable whether such an ideological struggle justified the continued subjugation of the common people by the privileged classes who had inherited colonial privilege in South Vietnam.

Add to that the litany of abuses perpetrated by the French and then by the Americans and South Vietnamese to contain the chronic insurrection—torture, wholesale destruction of villages, forced

movement of people to areas of pacification, and so on,—and the case against the war became incontestable, in Steward's estimation. It was not a war, like World War Two, against tyranny and fascism. If anything, America was on the other side here, on the side of the tyrant, and Ho Chi Minh and his compatriots akin to the Resistance fighters who had fought against the fascist occupation forces throughout Europe.

Considering all that, what could one do, confronted with the prospect of being forced to participate in such a war? There, in Steward's mind, the proponents of civil disobedience came to the fore; and they spoke with one voice regarding the right and obligation of all citizens to withhold themselves from state-sponsored immoral action.

"Armies will only be diminished and abolished," went a typical passage (this one in Tolstoy), "when people cease to trust governments and themselves seek salvation... in the simple fulfillment of the law, binding upon every man, inscribed in all religious teachings, and present in every heart, not to do unto others what you wish them not to do unto you,—above all, not to slay your neighbors."

Reading such statements, often couched in religious terms, Steward had not come to the conclusion, however, that he ought to act in a certain way based on religion. He felt more comfortable with statements that were ethical in nature.

In Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience he had found the statement that spoke most strongly to his own temperament regarding the appropriate response to an injustice built into a government institution.

"If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government," the statement said, "let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine."

[Chapter 103 notes]

104. Steward completes and mails in his claim of conscientious objection

On September 16, 1968, a day before his conscientious objector form was due, Thomas Steward ensconced himself in the Dulatown Community Center in early evening to type out his entries.

To do this, he used the same old Corona typewriter that he had been using in the previous months to type out a community newspaper called the "Good Neighbor Times." But he felt that his activity of this particular evening was more serious business, more becoming of what he ought to be doing as a young man in a conflicted society.

He settled down at the desk in the community center office with a pot of coffee brewing beside him. Finally he was taking a stand, he said to himself. He felt relieved to be doing it at last.

With the form on the desk in front of him, he turned his attention first to the fundamental questions presented on the first page, in the section entitled, "Series I.--Claim for Exemption."

In the first area of this section, where the form required a selection of either exemption from combatant training and service only, or exemption from both combatant and noncombatant training and service, he made a large, firmly-pressed "X" in the box by the "both" selection.

In the second area of the section, where the form required acceptance, by attachment of signature, of the key statement, "I am, by reason of religious training and belief, conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form," he crossed out the words, "war in any form," and substituted for them, in hand-printed letters, "the war in Vietnam." He then signed his name on the prescribed line.

Having made this momentous start, in his own estimation, he rose from the desk to look out the window.

Outside, the humble houses of Dulatown looked peaceful in the light of a golden sunset. Children on bikes raced down the dirt road toward the little store on the corner.

Returning to the task at hand, Steward turned his attention next to the second section, entitled "Series II.--Religious Training and Belief." In reply to the lead question, "Do you believe in a Supreme Being?" he made an "X" in the "yes" box.

He then opened his spiral notebook, the one in which he had kept his notes of the summer, and positioned the form on the typewriter to type out his response to the next question, the crucial question of the form: "Describe the nature of your belief which is the basis of your claim made in Series I above, and state whether or not your belief in a Supreme Being involves duties which to you are superior to those arising from any human relation."

He began as follows: "I feel that I have no choice at this point except

to take an individual stand against what I regard as the immoral nature of our participation and conduct in the war in Vietnam."

Having already used the entire space provided on the form for the answer, he put the allowed "extra sheet" in the typewriter, and paused for a moment to consider his outline, jotted down a few days before.

"This is a stance in opposition to that of my country," he went on, "and until recently I had never expected that it could arise. It involves not only the question of whether the conflict in Vietnam is a just conflict, but also questions of far more consequence for our society. The first of these is the question of whether any group of men or government has the right to force human beings to engage in acts of war against their will. Beyond this, there is the question of whether an individual has the right to take a stand on the basis of conscience which places him at odds with the law of his land."

He had thought a great deal about this beginning, and had decided that he had to begin his statement on this fundamental level, with the questions of the justness of the war to follow from that start.

"It is my firm belief that it is the first responsibility of any man to follow what he feels is right regardless of what others or his society may say and despite the consequences," he continued. "Some have said that this is a belief leading to chaos or anarchy, but it seems to me wholly in keeping with our political and ethical traditions..."

He then made an effort to bring into this context his understanding of the tradition of liberal humanism, obtained from his summer readings. "As I see it," he wrote, "the entire effort of liberal humanism in the Western World these past centuries has been to create a society in which every person is conscious of his value as a person, and participates not blindly but as a creative agent in the give-and-take of democracy."

That was heady stuff and he paused for a moment to consider what he had said. He then took pains to emphasize that he didn't mean to indicate by all this that he didn't believe in the "necessity of collective action or the worth of patriotism."

"It's obvious that an individual, in participating in society, must at times sacrifice his interests to the common good," he typed. "And, of course, we owe a great debt to the country and culture that nourished and helped to form us, especially when we have undergone this development in an atmosphere that permitted freedom and dignity. But, in my opinion, collective and cooperative action should never infringe upon the basic right of every person to maintain and follow an individual conscience. In combining with others in joint action, in being a member of a nation or society, we do not and ought not to surrender our individuality, in my opinion."

He now felt that he had arrived at a point where he could begin to

state his case against the draft.

"To my thinking conscription is a grievous and unjustified infringement upon personal liberty," he typed, "and upon the operation of individuality in an area in which individuality ought to be operative. I say this because it seems to me we have arrived at a critical point in history in so far as war and the military are concerned. It is crucial, first of all, because the increasingly grave social and economic problems besetting our world raise up the prospect that once again mankind in small and large conflicts shall attempt to resolve its conflicts through war. It is crucial, secondly, because as even General Eisenhower has stated, it is no longer conceivable—in taking account of the power and destructive capability of modern weaponry—that either side shall be victorious in modern war. This point in history is crucial, thirdly, because this seems to be an era of awakening moral consciousness, a time in which men are looking hopefully to alternatives to war as a solution to problems: alternatives, for instance, like those of Gandhi and King (and Christ?), which assert that it is possible for men to defend their dignity and overcome problems without violating their basic obligation to respect life. In this crucial time, I think, it is of great importance that men be free to consider these alternatives. And, I believe, that in this time in which human beings shall perhaps progress toward a real sensitivity to the seriousness of war, the question of war vs. peace ought not be entrusted to the hands of the few men who control national policies. Violence, it seems to me, is too negative and destructive (perhaps utterly destructive) a course of action to be approached without conscience, and no nation can be conscience for an individual man."

Having made this point as best he could, although dissatisfied with the causal mechanics and phrasiness of his presentation, he pushed ahead to the next subject, of the war in Vietnam.

"It is for this reason," he typed, "that I have applied my conscience to the question of Vietnam. I see no way that participating in, or even assenting to, our involvement and conduct in this conflict can be reconciled with any hope I have to assist in constructing a better world. And participation is therefore alien to my entire concept of what I want to do in life and where my life draws meaning, since I regard working toward a better world as a natural wish and responsibility of every man, and because I have a special interest in assisting in this endeavor."

He then went on to list four reasons why he felt that the war in Vietnam was unjustified, drawing on his readings of the past two months. These reasons were: (1) that the war was primarily a war for independence rather than an ideological struggle; (2) that Vietnam had unjustly been subjected for more than two centuries to various forms of colonialism, depleting it of its birthright wealth; (3) that Vietnam's

legitimate attempts to achieve independence and to verify its independence through popular elections had been foiled and betrayed by its World War Two Allies, by signatories of the 1954 Geneva Accords, and by the United States acting primarily to maintain a cold war balance of power; and (4) that the American-supported government of South Vietnam appeared not to have popular support or true democratic processes while the government of North Vietnam and the southern rebel forces, the Viet Cong, appeared to have the support of the people.

"This is not to say that I sympathize with either Communism or Ho Chi Minh," Steward wrote. "Indeed I look upon the negativism of Communism as something that must be countered, and I am aware that Ho Chi Minh the patriot is the same man that formed a working alliance with Joseph Stalin. Rather, my objections arise from my belief that we have something in the Western World, namely liberal humanism, which is worth preserving, and that we cannot preserve this if in the course of defending it we subordinate our principles to the desire for victory."

He went on to say that he felt that America had "compromised far too many principles in the war in Vietnam."

"Since 1954," he typed, "we have supported a succession of suppressive and dictatorial regimes and thereby have caused a great number of sincere advocates of freedom and democracy to join forces with Communism.

"In the course of fighting terror and of opposing Communism on the ground that it degrades human dignity, we have increasingly resorted to terror in our own methods and to disproportionate use of weaponry. In a war in which it is difficult to tell combatants from civilians, we have resorted to warfare which is indiscriminate of civilians. In the hope of killing a few soldiers, we have subjected immense areas to heavy bombardment.

"This is a war that is not leading to a preservation of principles we hold dear, but rather in a subtle way in the opposite direction."

He had by this time filled two of the allowed extra sheets with single-spaced typing. He inserted a third sheet to type in his final paragraphs.

"This is the reason why I have taken this stand, a stand which I feel is unavoidable because of what I belief and because I feel I must follow my beliefs," he typed. "There only remains to be said a word about the consequences of this belief.

"First, I am aware that some would regard my stand as defiance of the law. I can only say, I have never sought to challenge the law. To the contrary, I have been brought to challenge it only because the law in this case presented itself as wholly irreconcilable with my innermost ideas of what I must do to act responsibly and morally in the world. Far from defying the law, I submit to it without bitterness because of a deep

respect. Hopefully, my stand shall do a small part in leading other Americans to reassess their laws in relation to war.

"Second, I am aware that some Americans, especially those serving in Vietnam, may look upon my stand as unpatriotic. Let me just say, I have no dislike or despite for our men in Vietnam. I realize that, for many of them, what they are doing requires sacrifice and effort to a degree that I shall never approach. I respect that and find it very difficult personally to take up a position against them. But any American is wrong who says I do not love America. I love America and all it stands for in the way of traditional liberty and dignity. It is this very feeling that had brought me to this position.

"Therefore, I hope to maintain it despite what it may bring in personal discomfort."

Steward completed the form in early morning after having worked on it all night. He made three copies of the form on the copy machine in the office and then drove at once to the main post office in the nearby city of Lenoir to mail the form to his local board.

[Chapter 104 notes]

105. Steward visits Doug Thomasek to show him his CO statement

As he headed home to the cabin where he had been living since the previous spring, Tom Steward mulled over what he had said about hoping to maintain his stance regarding the draft "despite what it might bring in personal discomfort." He had a good idea of what that discomfort might turn out to be. At best, there would be misunderstanding—and occasional contempt—from people who would regard him as an intellectual snob or as a draft dodger or coward. At worst, there would be prison and a prison record, as his father had warned several months before.

He would have to make some kind of alternative living arrangements soon, also, he thought to himself as he took his usual cold shower behind the cabin, beneath a garden hose rigged up there on a branch in a thick stand of pines. With September half gone, the sumacs on the hillside had already turned red, the air had the chill of autumn. In his three months in the cabin, he had made no improvements at all. Some of the windows had only screens. The only source of heat was a hot plate.

Soon, though, the sun rose above the tops of the pine trees with a warm glow. He forgot about his concerns about cold weather and where his draft statement would ultimately take him. Despite having stayed up all night, he didn't feel sleepy. He felt weary and drained but exhilarated with a sense of regained freedom now that the task of preparing his statement was at last behind him.

He dressed again and got in his government station wagon and rode, not knowing where he was going. His wanderings took him out of the rolling foothills and into the green pine highlands. At that point he thought of Douglas Thomasek, his VISTA friend in the mountains, and headed in that direction.

He located his colleague eventually at the farmhouse where Thomasek lived with his retired couple sponsors. The lean, lanky volunteer, dressed in a red cotton shirt, cowboy boots, and flare boot jeans, with his black cowboy hat perched on his head, had gone a step further toward his cowboy image. He was leading a horse from a little barn behind the house to a fenced area teeming with lush tuffs of purple-flowered clover.

As Steward drove in, Thomasek smiled, holding the horse firmly by a halter as it reined back in a neigh. The horse was a beautiful nut-brown mare with a dark brown mane and tail, a white diamond on its forehead, and white markings like white socks on its forelegs. It tapped a front hoof lightly and snorted as Steward came over.

"Mr. Steward," said Thomasek in greeting. "How do you do?"

"Where you'd get that?" Steward replied.

"Down about ten miles from here. Some old people moving out to travel around in a truck. Bought a stallion, too."

"Where's the stallion?"

"Out back in the barn."

Steward looked off at the scene around, drawing in the pine-scented mountain air. Through a crook in the steep hills he could see down across several wooded ridges to a meadowlike bottom with a golden-brown crop of some kind that looked like wheat or oats. He felt like he had been caged up for two months, preparing his form for the draft board, and had just stepped outside to realize again how big and beautiful the world was and how little of it he had experienced firsthand.

"Trying to get a little romance going," said Thomasek, grinning. "Maybe I'll wind up with some little colts."

"What would you do with them all?"

"I don't know. Bring them back to Tennessee, maybe. I got a truck already. All's I need is a trailer."

"What about that romance of your own? That girl, what's her name, Stacey?"

"Stacey Jens? Seems like I just saw her last night, and the night before. Seems like I see her just about every night lately."

"What does she think of the horses?'

"She loves the horses. She brings her daughter out here sometimes to ride. Just said last night, 'Let's find a house out in the country somewhere where we can keep the horses.' Said we don't need to be married."

"You planning to do that?"

"I don't know, amigo. It's getting goddam close. Maybe I'll even marry her. I don't want to give her a bad reputation. Or the girl, either, Julie. They don't deserve that."

"That's your reason?"

"That's part of the reason. There's more to it, Stewball, but I'll keep the mushy part to myself."

Steward considered all of this with the wonder of a young man who had never experienced sex or intimacy with a woman beyond some fervent kissing and hugging on an apartment couch or in the front seat of a car. Barbara Carpenter had been the furthest reach of his experience.

Soon after this, the topic came up of what Steward had been doing over the summer. Thomasek had not even known that Steward had received an order for induction. Steward recounted how he had decided to file as a conscientious objector and had spent much of the summer preparing his statement. He went out to his car to get a copy of his statement for Thomasek to read.

Thomasek read the letter standing, with his cowboy hat pushed back,

now and then grinning and shaking his head.

"I don't know, Stewie," he remarked when he was done, shaking his head again. "I look at you, and I look at this, and somehow I can't put the two together."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. The way I see you, you're kind of a yokel Midwestern nice guy. I mean, you don't talk like this, do you? Why should you write like this?"

"This is a serious matter, Tom. It required a serious statement."

"Oh, yea, serious, I'll grant you that. But why not just say, 'I won't fight in this war because I think it's unjust.' There's no need to embellish, is there?"

"I don't think of it as embellishment."

"What is it then?"

"Clarification."

"You think they're going to read this?"

"Yea, I guess so. I don't know."

"Haw! You'll be lucky if it gets 30 seconds."

With that Thomasek walked off a little, looking at his horse, with an attitude that suggested he wanted that topic to be done.

"Nice day today," he said, coming back. "We ought to take a ride. You ever ride a horse?"

"Once."

"Where was that?"

"At a riding stable."

"This is the real thing. You up for a try?"

"Sure. If you tell me what to do."

"Nothing to do. Just get on and ride."

Within a half hour, the horses were saddled and ready. They headed down a path through a stand of fluttering birches then along a ridge above a valley with a winding creek at its bottom.

After several miles, they reached a point of the ridge overlooking miles of mountains covered by pine with a border of birch and aspens on the lower slopes.

There they dismounted and sat in silence looking off.

"Hey, I didn't mean to be so hard on you," Thomasek said. "You're a smart guy, Stewie. Your smartness comes through. I guess. Maybe I wasn't aware of the extent of your thought process. And you take your thoughts seriously. If they lead somewhere, you go. There's a lot of integrity in that."

"Thank you," Steward replied.

They fell back into silence again, watching as a brown and white hawk flew across the valley trailed by a phalanx of little birds that were

pecking at its head.

"Just tell me one thing, Stewie," Thomasek resumed, "what happens if they turn you down?"

"I don't know. The way I understand, they send you another letter. For induction. They ask you to step forward, to accept induction, and instead you step backward. It's a symbolic refusal."

"What happens then?"

"They arrest you."

"Then presumably you have a trial."

"Yes, at some point."

"What a goddam nightmare! You really want to do that?"

"Do I want to do it? No."

Thomasek shook his head again, munching on a piece of long grass as he looked out across the beautiful valley.

"You know what you're looking at?" Thomasek said, turning his gaze back to Steward. "I'll tell you what you're looking at. You're looking at a year or two of waiting for a trial, then maybe, almost without a doubt, a criminal conviction, then two to five years in jail. Five years or so, maybe, down the drain. You'll be a goddam old man when you get out! And you come out with a criminal record. You can't get a decent job. That's what you're looking at, Stewball. And nobody's gonna give a fuckin' rip what you said in your goddam statement."

Steward was surprised to find his friend of the same age taking up the same line of objection as his father had months before, but he didn't feel the same level of resistance toward Thomasek as he had felt toward his father. He was glad the topic had come up because the same concerns had been on his mind again throughout the ride. He was glad to have the chance to formulate a personal stance regarding what to do.

"Well, I'm at the point now of no choice," he answered. "I mean, I made my choice. I made it the best I could. And now all that remains is to accept the result."

Thomasek got up impatiently.

"Well, look, Stewie, integrity aside for a minute," he said, "you don't need to accept it. No one's forcing you to go there, to the armory or whatever, to take your fuckin' backward step. No one's forcing you to show up for that trial. You're sitting there right now as a free man, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, fight to stay free then," Thomasek said, his voice rising. "Fight to stay free! People came to America, to places like this, like this scene right here, the so-called 'wilderness,' because they were being put in jail back where they came from. They came here to be free, they came here to get to open spaces. And lot of them, when the spaces got cramped,

they moved off again to find the open spaces again. That's what Dan'l Boone did... went over these very mountains, from the Carolina side here to ol' Kentuck', to find land that was open, where people could be free."

Steward sighed. "If you mean, run off to Canada or something, I thought about that, Doug, I'm not going to do that."

"Stewie, you are going to ruin your goddam life to make a point that nobody is going to even pay any attention to. You're going to be standing there making a speech and nobody is listening."

"Well, let it be that way then," Steward replied wearily. "I just think there's a tradition of resistance, too, of taking an intellectual stand. That's part of America, too. Look at Sacco and Vanzetti, King in the Birmingham jail."

"Sacco and Vanzetti! Oh, ho! Let's get intellectual now! Well, I just happen to know something about that. They were accused of murder, as I recall. They were wrongly accused, so they say, your radical friends, but they were not in jail as the result of a political belief."

"Well, I guess it's irrelevant anyhow," Steward said, getting up. "I've got to do what I've got to do, Doug. I wish you were with me more, in spirit. But I've got to do what I've got to do."

"I am with you!" Thomasek retorted. "If I wasn't with you, I wouldn't waste my breath."

"Okay, Dan'l. Much obliged."

They let the topic go, at that point, and mounted the horses for the ride back to the farm.

On the way back, Thomasek chatted cheerfully about the house in the country that Stacey Jens had proposed. She had showed him an example, he said, a little, two-story house with horses eating grass in a fenced-in pasture and green mountain tops in the distance. He said without a doubt a life like that had attractions.

"Who knows, though, maybe when I'm done with VISTA, we'll leave the horses here for a while and just get in the truck and look around, maybe we'll wind up out West or something. There's a big world out there."

"Yes," Steward answered. "I know."

As often occurred when he visited Thomasek, he left with a wettened appetite for adventure and an awakened desire for family life and female companionship.

A long time would pass before he had any of that, he told himself as he drove down the mountain, especially if he wound up in prison. His thoughts went back to his conversation with Barbara Carpenter, more than a year before, and how she had admonished him for waiting and waiting without taking a stand.

"Well, I took a stand, at least," he said to himself.

He went over again the reasoning that had led to his statement to the draft board, and replayed in his mind the conversation he had had with Thomasek, repeating word for word, in his thoughts, the comments he had made to Thomasek regarding the tradition of resistance.

106. Matt and Mary discuss Steward's statement and their MV projects

Matt and Mary Brandt also eventually came upon Steward's statement, mailed within a letter from Bill O'Rourke, who had received the statement from Steward. It was, by this time, Wednesday, October 9, 1968, two weeks and one day after Steward had mailed in the form.

Matt's first impression of the statement was much like that of Doug Thomasek, Steward's North Carolina friend. The statement struck him as a "little too much," as he told Mary. It was "just plain overdone." He was immediately aware, though, of what Thomasek had also hit upon, that if Steward stuck to the statement and refused induction he would probably wind up in prison.

"You've got to wonder about the rationale of that," he remarked to his alert, pretty wife as they ate supper together at the big table in their cabin. "It just doesn't add up, really."

"Why not?" asked Mary, who was always ready for an intellectual discussion.

They were both dressed in blue jeans and flannel shirts, having spent the day together transporting people to the county courthouse to register to vote. Matt, by this time, had grown a goatee. With his hair grown longer, also, just over his ears, he had the look of a trapper or backwoodsman. Mary's luxuriant, dark hair had grown longer, also, below her shoulders. During the day she wore it pulled back in a bun. In the evening, when alone with Matthew, she untied it and let it flow down around her lovely face and hazel eyes.

"Because if the war's so bad, like he says," Matthew answered, "why throw yourself at the mercy of the same power structure that's conducting the war? Why not go underground in New York, or go off in the hills, or something, where you can retain your freedom to actively resist? People are doing that, aren't they? What's to be gained by sitting in jail?"

He was surprised himself at the radical tone of these words as they came out, though he shared the general sense of Steward's statement, that the war was essentially a neocolonial war, as he had heard many say, and not really a war for democracy or justice. He felt at times so mired in the rhetoric slung around by his fellow volunteers that he hardly knew what he thought anymore. He found himself going back and forth between feeling radical and wanting to be free of the whole business.

"Well, I thought he explained that very well," Mary replied. "He's saying that he believes in our legal system. He's saying he wants to work within our legal system to call attention to an unjust law."

Matthew said nothing to that, as his mind stuck on the concept that a legal system could have an unjust law. The table before him, set with

their wedding present tableware, with two candles flickering beside a vase of purple-blossomed iron weed that his newlywed wife had picked on the side of the hill, was more conducive to staring into one another's eyes than to long-winded discussions, although Mary seemed to regard the intellectual talk as part of the proper ambiance of the meal. She had brought an air of culture into her husband's life.

"I think there's a lot of integrity in what he's doing," she said to keep the discussion going.

"I don't fault him for integrity. I fault him for common sense," Matt answered, getting up to get himself and his wife a second cup of coffee. "Or maybe I don't even fault him for that. I guess he's just Stewie. He's always had his head in the clouds."

"There have got to be some of us like that, that think things out completely logically, completely ethically, and stick to it no matter what. Dennis Kelly is the exact same way," said Mary.

"Ain't that the truth," Matthew exclaimed. "I can see it now, Sad Dog and Stewball sharing a jail cell together." "They'd have some interesting talks."

"Oh, yea. You can be sure of that."

Their conversation after that went to Bill O'Rourke's letter, in which the former coxswain had described his involvement in the Chicago demonstrations, ending with a casual remark about how he had run into Barbie Carpenter at the clinic across from Grant Park. Just by chance, he had seen the war-bound nurse again in the Twin Cities since a friend had asked him to give her an article on the nurses' corps in Vietnam.

"She and I have gotten to be good friends," O'Rourke said in his letter. "I don't know if she'll ever be more."

Mary Brandt had her own ideas about that. She had observed the spark of interest in O'Rourke's eyes whenever the shy, girlish nurse entered the room. She had observed, also, that, in social gatherings, Carpenter often positioned her next to O'Rourke and laughed heartily whenever he made one of his irreverent comments.

"Tell you what I think," she said, her hazel eyes lighting with peculiar mischief, for her. "I think they'll get engaged in Vietnam."

"Think he's got a design on her, huh?"

"Design? Oh, no! I don't think poor Rorkie is aware of what's happening," she remarked with the same mischievous eyes. "We women have our ways, you know."

"Is that so?" he said. "I wasn't aware."

Their conversation often continued in this way, moving back and forth between serious topics and light banter, as they spent their quiet evenings together in their cheery cabin. They were still very much in the honeymoon of their marriage. They had not yet had a rift or argument of

any consequence. They loved and admired one another wholeheartedly.

While doing the dishes together after supper, they talked about their other activities. The summer had been busy with all of the MVs' projects going at full tilt.

Central among the activities was the voter registration drive. More than a thousand new voters had been registered in a county of only 18,000 people. Birl Poling, in his race for county commissioner, operating wholly separately from the MVs, as previously agreed between himself, Matt, and Dennis Kelly, had won strong support among the poor and among mine and factory workers.

Fr. Daniel Riley, the priest from Wisconsin who had promoted the voter registration drive at the MVs' meeting the previous spring, had become a one man clearinghouse for ideas on the election. He had come across the previous month from his West Virginia parish to meet with the Matt and Dennis Kelly. Matt and Dennis were slated to return the visit sometime as yet undetermined, probably early in the next week.

Also going strong was a "general" strip mine demonstration planned to be staged simultaneously in 15 Kentucky and West Virginia counties in the third week of October, just before the election, to draw attention to the strip mines as an election issue. Lois Roan and her group of retired miner volunteers had promoted the demonstration locally pretty much on their own, with Matthew and Dennis helping in setting up lines of communication with other local groups across the mountains.

Most successful of all was the cook book cooperative that Mary had started with Fletcher Bourne's friend, Hattie Beecher. It had grown to encompass mountain crafts as well, and had gained the interest of female MVs and local women all across the Appalachians, with the cook book and a companion craft book being prepared for publication sometime in late fall. The "Mountain Women's Cooperative," as it had come to be called, had been widely touted as a model of how outside volunteers could work closely with indigenous people. In reality, thanks to Mary's influence, it had simply become a group like a sewing bee where interaction among the participants blurred the distinction between individuals and put everyone on the same congenial basis. The women met twice a month for coffee and cookies and spent the time coloring in recipe pages and exchanging ideas.

Later in the evening, as Mary sat quietly at the table, drawing arrangements of vegetables for the recipe pages, Matthew brought in wood for the fireplace and got a good fire going. Then, as he settled down with a beer, watching the flames dance up from pungent wood, his mind returned to Steward's statement. In particular one sentence came forward that had stuck in his mind, "I feel that I have no choice except to take an individual stand at this time."

He thought to himself that there was something to look up to in that. Steward could have taken the easy route of declaring himself an objector to war in any form. Instead he had labored over his carefully thought out statement and had decided to stick with it at the cost of maybe eventually being branded as a con.

From Steward, Brandt's thoughts drifted to other news he had heard regarding how his various friends and former associates were reacting to the war. Jim Morris had just completed his 20th mission, he had learned from Mary, who had gotten that information from her sister, Ellen. Denny Nolan, former stroke oar of the crew, had surprised everyone by quitting school and enlisting, and by then in effect letting himself be placed in the infantry by not expressing any interest in anything else. Bumper Bourne, Fletcher's car-loving son, had passed his mechanics courses and was assigned to duty in some Army truck depot in South Vietnam.

Then there was Bill O'Rourke and Barbie Carpenter, joined in a bond over their feeling of having a shared destiny in both wanting to go the war to do medical duty. O'Rourke had said something to that effect, of course understated, in his letter.

On the other side, Brandt had heard stories of people he had known in college who had managed to get out of the war by going to grad school or by getting into the National Guard or in one case by having a kid. For those people, he had far less respect, he thought to himself, than for the types like Steward and Nolan who were purists pro or con. He himself, he thought, was among these people who had avoided the war rather than confronting it head on. He harbored no sentiments about his volunteer service being a "sacrifice" as some were inclined to regard it.

He broke off from such thoughts after a few minutes, weary of the familiar burden of sorting out arguments and conclusions, a task which had once been the official play of college, and which he now felt compelled to carry on in his day-to-day life. He accepted the burden without question; but, even so, he had become aware, in the past few months, of a weariness of words that had grown steadily inside of him as a reaction to the incessant meetings and political discussions that his new life had brought.

He could accept the words, and return them in earnest, when they came from people that he regarded as unassuming and substantial; chief among them, Mary, Dennis Kelly, and lately the priest, Fr. Dan, who had become a friend. Words from others, especially rhetorical flourishes, often turned him away in scorn.

Seeing Mary stir in the kitchen to put on a pot of tea as she often did in the evening, Matthew rose from the sofa by the fireplace and walked across the single, open room toward her, stopping at a bulletin board by

the door where she had arranged a display of his black and white 35 mm photographs.

Glancing at them, he felt a burst of new energy. The practice of this avocation of photography had lately become an escape from the aspects of his volunteer life that had begun to wear on him. He had come to think lately that he was honest in the photographs in a way that he could never be in speech. He had a feeling often that he wanted to express something in the photographs but he wasn't sure what it was. He had taken many straight-on, deliberately unary shots of mountain life.

"Out to the darkroom tonight?" said Mary, coming over.

"No," he answered. "I guess not, tonight."

Passing over Fletcher Bourne's offer of the newspaper darkroom, he had constructed his own dark room, It was in a lean-to woodshed in back of the cabin. He had cleaned it all up and set up his equipment there, using a hinged sheet metal opening into the cabin (originally meant for passing through wood) to thread through an orange extension cord for power. He left the metal flap open to let heat out into the dark room from inside the cabin. He was able, also, to look through the opening, as through a small window, to talk his wife when needed as she went about her own business inside the cabin.

But he was in no mood for that on this particular night.

I was thinking of a walk," he said, "along the top of the hill there. Care to come along?"

"I think I could be persuaded. Should I bring a blanket?"

They sometimes made love outside on a blanket, in a spot they liked, a moss-covered outgrowth of rock overlooking the valley.

"Yes," said Matthew. "And let's bring some chips and beer."

"Beer bash!"

"Yea!"

Later, after they had made love, Matthew lay awake, with Mary asleep beside him, looking off at the far-flung lights of the valley, and above them at the starry sky. As always, despite the look of wilderness in the forested stretches below, a distant sound of machinery could be heard, a reminder that the mountains and the machines seldom relaxed from their interaction with one another.

107. Brandt drives over the mountains to visit Fr. Dan Riley

On Wednesday, October 16, Matt Brandt drove over the mountains by himself to see Fr. Dan Riley. Dennis Kelly and Mary Brandt had both been unable to free themselves from their schedules to come along. Dennis had meetings for his black lung project that had come up unexpectedly. Mary, on invitation, had gone with a group of women on an overnight outing to Berea, Kentucky, to attend a crafts conference organized by a fellow volunteer that she had just met.

Matthew could have waited a few more days to a day when the others could have come along, but he had told Mary and Dennis that he welcomed the prospect of a day or two alone to sort out his thoughts. Mary had, of course, been quite understanding of that. She acted toward him at times like a mother to a son, encouraging him to go forward into any activity that seemed as if it would contribute to his development.

"You deserve some time off," she told him.

The official reason for Matthew's visit was to exchange news of the election. The priest had been through the election process a couple of times before and always had sage comments on how to proceed. Matthew also had an unofficial reason. He had learned, during the priest's visit a few weeks before, that Fr. Dan had an interest in photography. He had seen a couple of the priest's photographs. They were of the direct, documentary type that he was interested in himself.

Brandt had from the start been drawn to the priest. Fr. Dan had a gruff, plain manner that reminded Brandt of men he had met accompanying his father on his father's rounds as an agriculture extension agent.

Brandt left at daybreak, taking a northwesterly route up Highway 119 through Floyd and Pike counties.

The route wound over successive ridges yielding views of miles upon miles of wooded mountains, resplendent in autumn colors. Here and there amidst the woods were the usual reminders of the presence of people: junk strewn along creek beds, coal-processing plants with huge piles of gob, coal towns with rusted tipples, mountain tops cut off by strip mines, hillsides covered with discarded rock and shattered trees.

Brandt found himself thinking back to the evening, more than a year before, when he had traveled through similar country on his first official function as a volunteer, the Tri-County CAP meeting that he had attended with his then new sponsor, Fletcher Bourne. He recalled how alone in a strange, new world he had felt at that time, and how Bourne, in his kind, fatherly manner, had taken him in like a son.

"Too bad it got so nasty," he remarked out loud. "I did the man wrong with all my foul comments."

He had said as much to Mary on several occasions, and he knew his

wife well enough to know that she had conveyed the same sentiment, either directly to Bourne himself or indirectly through Bourne's long-standing friend, Hattie Beecher. Even so, he still felt bad at times that he had never apologized. He had been unable to get himself to do it, just as he had been unable to get himself to accept Bourne's offer of the newspaper darkroom.

Brandt had seen the plain-spoken journalist only one time since the strip mine demonstration,—at a parking lot in a little town where by chance he and Bourne had both stopped to hear Birl Poling deliver one of his campaign speeches. On that occasion, he and Bourne had exchanged glances and nodded hello, but no words had passed between them.

Brandt found himself thinking back, also, to Bruce Harris, the handsome, articulate former MV leader. He had heard from Dennis Kelly that Harris was now established in a research project that involved studying the effects of the war on minority political groups such as the NAACP and Martin Luther King's group, the SCLC. Brandt had also heard that Harris was involved in organizing demonstrations in Washington D.C.

So Harris had managed to stay in the "revolution," Brandt thought to himself with a smile. He was less critical of that lately, with him and Mary planning to leave the MVs, and probably, also, to go back to school, after the election was over, maybe in December sometime.

He went over those plans in his mind. The agreement he and Mary had worked out was that Mary would go to grad school in nutrition starting in the first semester of the next year, in January, 1969. She had pretty much of a guarantee that she would be accepted into a program at Georgetown.

One of her former college instructors was the dean of the program there and had asked her to apply. The program was oriented to nutrition in public health. Matt would maybe go to grad school, also, maybe in photography, to stay out of the draft.

Yes, that was the reason, he thought to himself, to stay out of the draft. He had joined up with VISTA because of the draft, and now he found himself in this unlikely site of wooded mountains, living and looking like a woodsman, like Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, because of the draft.

He would go to grad school probably, something he had never expected or wanted to do, (though he had no idea what else he would want to do, either),—all because of the draft. The draft had shaped his whole life since college.

His thoughts went on to the CAP meeting that he had attended where he had first met Harris. That was the meeting where Harris had gone on and on about people selling government commodities. Harris had been

right about that, Brandt had later discovered himself. People bought and sold commodities, and, in general, worked the system in every conceivable way to persist in their lives, including taking on various kinds of self- employment to bring in money under the table while welfare benefits continued.

Lois Roan, the former UMW organizer who had taken over the strip mine demonstration, had such employment as that, Brand had learned on a recent visit. Lois and her daughter, the teenage mother, did seamstress work in their home while watching the soap operas on TV.

Harris had also probably been right, Brandt had learned, regarding Stanley Denton, the dual-office-holding county commissioner and school superintendent who Harris had said was arranging construction work for his own company in county buildings and schools. Other people had come forward to make those same accusations, and now Denton was opposed for his county commissioner office by a rough-hewn contender of a similar type to Birl Poling, though lacking in Poling's charisma.

Coming down on the West Virginia side of the mountains hours later, in early afternoon, Brandt saw below him, in a narrow valley, the little town called McCollums Mill where the priest lived and had his parish and center of operations for his social and political projects. At the far end of the valley, against a hillside crisp in autumn colors, was a red-brick church with a square bell tower. Next to it was two-story school and a two-story box-frame house, both with the same red-brick exterior. Those buildings belonged to Fr. Dan's parish, and the brick house was the rectory, Brandt supposed, based on a description conveyed in a recent letter.

At a winding bend of the road, next to a ramshackle house with gray siding, Brandt noticed a lean, sallow man with a hammer looking at a roof in obvious need of repair. Another curve of the road brought a iron-frame bridge, with a narrow, rock-strewn river below it and beside it an old stone mill. Water poured through broken red boards in the unmoving water wheel. The town center, a typical small town main street, had a look of hard times. Several buildings were boarded up. Store fronts had empty display areas with hand-printed signs.

Brandt pulled into the rectory yard and got out of the car to see the bespectacled, compactly-built priest coming across the small front yard in his direction.

The priest was dressed in tan pants and a white shirt open at the collar. With his thick hands and forearms, and general appearance of weather-worn toughness, he looked more like a dairy farmer than like a man of God.

"Matthew Brandt! So you found it!" the priest called out.

"Asked around for the crazy, old priest, and they sent me right here,"

Brandt replied in his flat voice.

"Haw! Great to see you!"

Brandt took the priest's extended hand and shook it firmly. For a moment they stood staring into one another's faces.

"Got a little tour lined up for you, if you care to go," said the priest.

"Does it include the liquor store?"

"Haw! I already picked up some good wine. Gonna fix for you, Mr. Brandt, the West Virginia Roman Catholic Lasagna Special."

"My main concern is how much, not what," said Brandt.

"Much, you got, Mr. Brandt!" replied the priest, laughing. "I fixed up a whole cake pan! I won't promise you Mary-quality, though! Too bad you couldn't bring the little lady along."

Fr. Dan had spent an evening at the Brandt cabin, treated like an uncle by the attentive Mary Brandt. Like Fletcher Bourne, he had formed an immediate good opinion of his wholesome, articulate hostess, comparing her in his mind with young women that he had admired as a boy in the farm community where he had grown up.

The young volunteer and the middle-aged priest were off in a few minutes, walking along with swinging arms in the filtered light streaming down through the autumn-colored leaves. Down the road a few blocks, beside the river, where it curved around the base of a hill, was a new house that had been built up as far as the wall-frame, with the roof joists assembled and setting on one side. Near by were three completed, brightly-painted houses of similar design.

Exuberant children shouted and played beside them. Freshly-laundered clothes flapped in the wind, on clothes lines, like multi-colored flags.

"This is us doing our little bit to resolve the housing crisis in West Virginia," the priest explained. "We've got a crew of volunteers that come in on weekends. I get down here myself as much as I can during the week, put my hands to the lumber. I figure, if Jesus and his dad were carpenters, you can't do too bad with that."

"You can get a little too comfortable sometimes in that old rectory, with your food never in question and your heating bill paid by the parish."

After pausing to tug at the solid studs of the house in process, the two of them hiked down the road further to a pole-frame building where they found several men making chairs and tables at benches with table saws and other power equipment. There was a hardy hello when the priest came in. Brandt easily took up the masculine give and take of the conversation. "We can't compete with the big furniture companies in price," said the priest. "Make the stuff a little better, though."

"On a good day," one of the workers threw in.

There were tomato hothouses to visit after that. By then they were traveling in the priest's car. Then came a church basement, belonging to another congregation, where women worked on repairing clothes that the priest said were redistributed to people throughout the county.

"This county here has rather a dire situation," he explained. "It was coaled and timbered out years ago, but people hang on."

In the course of the tour, Fr. Dan had become more serious, a mood that Brandt took up, also. He observed without comment the grim reality of the little towns that he and the priest passed through, placing them into the context of similar scenes on the other side of the mountains.

Coming back into the McCollum Mills, with the sun setting behind a wooded ridge high above them, the priest and volunteer made their last stop in the basement of the priest's own church where a room was devoted to the election effort.

There the young volunteer and his priest friend stood looking at a large wall map of the Appalachian Mountains. The map was the type showing county boundaries without topological details. Counties with voter drives had been marked with green pins. Counties with candidates challenging the status quo candidates were marked with blue pins. The white space within the county boundaries had been used to list the names of the challenger candidates as well as of voter drive leaders.

"We have, last count, something like 42 or 43 challengers all across the mountains, in 15 different counties," the priest remarked. "If a third or fourth even of those candidates are elected, to me, well, I would regard that as a great success."

Brandt looked at the wall map, seeing there, among the voter drive leaders, a number of names of people that he and Dennis Kelly had worked with in their effort to create a network of workers.

Brandt, Kelly, and all the MVs, while active in the voter drives, had carefully avoided any contact with any of the challenger candidates, so as not to create a perception of tax-payer money winding up in the service of a political goal. By the same token, there could be no doubt that the sympathies of the volunteers were with the challengers, many of whom came from the ranks of other organizations with which the volunteers were involved.

"There has not been political activity, political controversy, on this scale since the days of the Depression," the priest said as he and Brandt left the church basement and headed over to the rectory for the lasagna supper that the priest had promised. "Don't think this kind of thing has gone unnoticed, or the strip mine demonstrations, either. There's bound to some kind of reaction, and, in fact, it's started already."

"How's that?" asked Brandt.

"I'll show you over at the house," the priest replied.

The sun had gone down, by this time, behind the wooded ridge high above the town. The narrow valley had grown dark with the lights from houses shining out into the tiny yards strewn with fallen leaves.

108. Brandt and Fr. Dan discuss political change and "sobering clarity"

"Now you will see how a priest lives," Fr. Dan Riley said to Matt Brandt as they entered the rectory together. "Or maybe you will just see how an old, single farm boy lives when given a big house with more rooms than he knows what to do with."

The door opened to a large, oak-paneled, oak-floored sitting room with five chairs arranged in a semi-circle around a coffee table, as if for a meeting. On the walls were portraits of clerical figures including one man in the dress of a bishop and two in the dress of priests.

"My boss and my predecessors," Fr. Dan remarked with a wave of his hand. "This is a formal room for small meetings or consultations. It's not my room, really. It's an extension of the parish. When I'm in this room, I'm in an official capacity."

A door from that room led into another room with an immense sturdy table surrounded by eight sturdy chairs. Brass-bordered paintings of flowers hung on white walls between tall windows covered with lace curtains. This room also had a look of formality.

"Dining room. For official functions, also, such as when the bishop visits," the priest explained. "I sit at this table, Matthew, maybe six times a year."

A further door led to a blue-walled kitchen with a white table upon which sat a clay coffee mug partly filled with coffee and a notebook left open with a pen beside it. Adjoining the kitchen, with double doors open, was a small den with a TV, a comfortable-looking, blanket-covered couch, and a coffee table strewn with books.

"This is my little abode," said the priest. "This is where I spend the great part of my free time. Upstairs are three bedrooms of which I really need only one. Downstairs, in the basement, is my photography workshop. We'll get around to that, later."

"I'd like to," Brandt replied.

"Now, Mr. Brandt, if you will have a seat at the table, I will pop the cork on this bottle of wine. I've had it since last Christmas. It was a present from my mother, who still lives, God bless her, back in Plum City, Wisconsin."

The priest popped the cork with a flourish and poured out the wine into two water glasses, which he filled to the brim. He picked up one glass and gestured for Brandt to pick up the other.

"To our friendship," said the priest.

"Yes, to that," Brandt returned.

"To our common struggle."

"Yes to that, also."

Fr. Dan Riley took a healthy swig of the wine, as if taking a swig of

water. He smiled at Brandt, gesturing to a picture that hung on the wall near where Brandt was sitting.

"That's me as a young lad there," he said, sitting down.

"Which one?"

"Crazy looking one in the middle there, with the blond hair."

"Crazy then, crazy still."

"Not much has changed."

"Who are the others?"

"My three brothers."

"Is that so?"

"Mike, Joe, and Lar."

The four brothers, who appeared to range in age from about eight to about 16, were standing in front of a hay wagon, partly loaded with square bales. The blond boy who was destined to become a man of God was standing in the middle with a pitchfork. He was about middle in the range of ages, also. He looked to be about 12.

"Had you working," said Brandt.

"Oh, yes. It was so bad at times, Matthew, I resorted to the priesthood to escape it."

"Figured you were safe in a church."

"Precisely."

With a hardy laugh, the priest rose heavily from the chair, and crossed the kitchen to the refrigerator to take out his ready-to-bake lasagna hot dish.

"What was it you were going to show me?" said Brandt, as he watched the priest place the lasagna in the oven.

"How's that?" said the priest. "Something with the voter drive."

"Oh, yes. Of course. I have it right here."

From his notebook, now pushed to the side of the table, Fr. Dan drew out a clipped out newspaper article.

"Here's what we're up against," he said with a significant nod, handing the article to Brandt.

Brandt took the article and immediately saw the headline, "County Commissioner Calls Voter Drive 'Pinko.'"

The first paragraph said: "County commissioner Carter Kullen of district 5 told a reporter Tuesday that he thinks the current voter drive being conducted throughout Landon County is the result of 'misguided pinko sympathies.'

"Pinko?" said Brandt. "What's that?"

"Commie. Fellow-traveler," the priest replied. "You know, not quite 'red,' so 'pink.'

Brandt took a sip of his wine and read on, quite interested in this development, which seemed like the stuff of real politics such as he had

read about in college but had never personally been involved in.

"Kullen said all you had to do to 'get a sense of who these people really are' was to 'look at who they are allied with and where they get their support.' He said that their allies were 'the spate of new leftist candidates throughout the mountains that have been encouraged by them' to stand for office. 'Indirectly and legally,' he added, 'I grant you that, but with a strong hand.' Their supporters, he said were, 'in many cases, from outside the area, eastern intellectuals, radical types such as you hear so much about on the news. That's where all the overblown phrases come from like ""the land belongs to the people," for instance.'"

"So what's the problem?" Brandt retorted. "The land does belong to the people, last time I heard."

In fact, Brandt remembered seeing these exact words in an article that his co-volunteer, Dennis Kelly, had written about the upcoming strip mine demonstration. The article had appeared in Kelly's newsletter, "Dog Daze," which was now distributed to all the MVs in the mountain counties of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The "dog cadre" concept had gained widespread acceptance among the volunteers, in a sometimes serious vein but more often as a running joke. They had started referring to one another as "mountain dogs," with variations such as "MDs (instead of MVs) or lately just plain "dogs."

"Read on, read on," the priest said.

Brandt read on.

"Kullen went on to say, 'This "land belongs to the people" notion sounds pretty good until you start wondering what these organizers really mean... I'll tell you what they mean. What they mean is they want private property rights to be thrown aside. They think they can just go on in and occupy a work site, and refuse to leave until it comes around to doing as they see fit. They think they can take over the ballot box, too, signing up people that hardly know what's going on. Election day you'll see them trucking these people in, giving them hints who to vote for.'"

Brandt set the article down on the table. "Talk about overblown phrases," he said with a flick of his hand.

"Well, we're going to see more of things like this, I expect," the priest remarked.

"You think so?"

"Yes."

Brandt reached over and poured himself some more wine. Seeing the priest glance at the bottle, he filled up his glass, also.

"This Kellum guy is not your typical local yokel," Fr. Dan went on. "He grew up in this area, but he was away for a number of years getting a degree in Virginia. He's a professor over in the county mentioned in the article, Landon County, at a Bible college over there. I don't think much

of his theology, either. He's a fundamentalist type, insists that the world was created in seven days exactly like the Bible says."

"You don't believe that yourself?"

"No, I don't, Matthew. There's a lot of things I don't believe, to tell you the truth. And a lot of things I do. I do believe, for example, after living in this mountain country for, what is it, twenty odd years, that people like this Kellum are the most dangerous type to the general well-being of the people."

"And why is that?"

"Because what he does is provides a rationale,—a rationale for the status quo, all decked out in religious terms. That's what you run up against around here, often, people who really consider themselves 'good' for holding to some philosophy that in the final analysis keeps other people down."

"The pious type."

"Sometimes I think downright bad would be a relief."

The priest enjoyed another hearty laugh as he got up again to check the lasagna. He stood by the stove a moment in a thoughtful posture with his hands clasped in front of him.

"You see, Matthew," he said, "Tell you my theory... Most people want to be good, even when they begin with an action that at the onset seems bad. So they search around, unconsciously, for a rationale, and when they find it, they build a case around it, internally, and then they proceed with an action. Now, to do that is not 'wrong' or a 'sin' because in the end you've convinced yourself you're doing good, but the result of it is wrong, nonetheless... That's what you run into in these social and political competitions where a share of resources is at stake. And don't mistake it, Matt, there are many people here, in Appalachia, that have a great deal at stake in keeping things as they are, at not seeing things change, and a lot of these people are looking for their reasons right now, or have already found them, thanks to men like Kellum that are ready to give them the verbal trappings. Then, add to those people the ones that are downright nasty, you've got quite a force arrayed against you."

"You think we'll see that before the election?" said Brandt.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt. People will find a reason why it is the best interest of everyone for the status quo to go on. They will talk that up amidst one another, and will come forward eventually with some kind of strategy, all for good reasons, in their own minds. And, if the situation involves outside connections, as is the case often now, with you young people from all over the country such an obvious presence... Well, outside connections, in Appalachia, are always suspect. It's something they can hang their attack on."

The lasagna supper, soon after that, was everything the priest had

billed it to be. The conversation turned to other topics including Birl Poling and his comments that he "didn't know, but intended to find out," which he had repeated so often in his speeches that it had become almost a campaign theme. The priest laughed at that, though he had heard it before on his visit to the Brandt's.

"This is a case, though, of the type I was mentioning, where outside influence is suspect." Fr. Dan said. "Because, consider, here is someone inside the region who appears to be going outside, to various government agencies, legal aid lawyers, and so on, to 'find out what to do,' as he says. There are many who will think hard about that... about just what ol' Poling might come up with, if he keeps on unchecked."

Next came the photography workshop, located in a large, clean room with high ceilings and a glossy painted cement floor on one side of the basement. In the middle of the room was a green metal, government-issue desk where there was material for cutting and matting photographs. An adjoining room that had apparently once been a coal room served as a dark room. It was also neatly organized with chemicals and trays arranged on shelves made of 2x12 planks. Below the shelves was a work table that reached from wall to wall.

"Well, as you can see, I have taken some care in setting this up," the priest said.

He said that he had always considered photography his avocation and had been interested, especially, in what he called a "realistic style." He said the main point of it was to make the presence of the photographer as unfelt as possible through a viewpoint and sharp focus exactly like that of the eye, without use of clever angles, fussing of images, or other "special effects."

"I've heard it called 'sobering clarity,'" he said. "There was a school of photographers who followed this style, back in the Depression years. Most of them had their start with the FSA, the Farm Security Administration, started by FDR. Dorothea Lange, James Curtis, Arthur Rothstein, and, of course, Walker Evans. I have a book upstairs with some of his photos. I'll show it to you later."

Brandt listened thoughtfully as Fr. Dan spoke. He realized that the priest was describing the style that he had been trying to learn himself. He went over to a bulletin board on one side of the room where there was an arrangement of photos.

"Are these yours?" he asked.

"Yes," said the priest. "My favorites from over the years."

The photos were almost all eye-level shots of people looking back into the camera. The subjects were a varied representation of the people of the region: grim, coal-sooted miners standing outside a mine shaft, a waitress at a restaurant counter, a service station attendant looking out

from under the hood of a card, three women seated at sewing machines in what appeared to a millinery factory, and so on.

Among the photos, also, were two shots of soldiers in combat gear standing before a backdrop of low, treeless hill.

"Korea," said the priest. "I served there as a chaplain."

"When was that?" Brandt asked.

"During the Korean War," the priest replied. 'I came of age for the draft just as World War II was winding down. Then I went to college and the seminary in the late 40's and wound up being ordained just as the Korean War kicked in, in 1952. They were asking for volunteers. I was as yet unassigned anywhere else. So I took that as a sign, so to speak, and decided to go in."

"How long were you over there?"

"One year."

"You were in a combat zone?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"It was an opportunity to help people who truly needed help. It was an introduction to the work of the spirit in a situation where the work of the spirit is quite clear. I learned a lot in a short time."

He had learned a lot himself, Matthew Brandt thought as he climbed the stairs with his priest mentor before him,—a lot about the business of social change that he now found himself in, and a lot, too, about this man of God who made so light of his official duties and yet seemed so serious about them.

109. Brandt and Fr. Dan watch a program on national discord

That evening, seated with Fr. Dan Riley in the priest's comfortable den next to the kitchen, Matthew Brandt began to understand, for the first time, that the rancor and divisiveness that Fr. Dan had described as being beneath the surface in Appalachia was in evidence throughout the country in the political races taking place in that election year.

An announcer said as much in a TV program on the national campaign that the priest had selected in advance as entertainment for the evening for him and his young friend.

"Arguably not since the Civil War has this democratic nation known such division, pitting parents against sons and daughters, whites against blacks, 'haves' against 'have-nots,' 'hawks' against 'doves,' as in this embattled election year," were the exact words spoken.

"One highly visible side of this national division," the announcer continued, "embodied in the young people all across this country who have taken up a position against the war, has been at center stage throughout this campaign. Determined not to become foot soldiers in a war they claim not to believe in, they have become foot soldiers in another war, a war for political change."

The TV screen then displayed scenes such as Brandt had seen before of young people his own age taking part in the electoral process: knocking on doors in a New Hampshire snowstorm in their effort to win the primary for Eugene McCarthy; cheering for Robert Kennedy in California outside the hotel where their champion was soon to be shot; chanting "Peace Now!" as they marched down Michigan Avenue in Chicago with the police watching grimly. There were scenes, also, of young people throwing rocks and carrying battle flags as they dashed through plumes of tear gas.

"Where are these young people now, with all their energy and vocal presence?" the announcer asked. "In many areas of the nation, they are strangely absent, their voice is strangely muted, in a campaign they seemed to care so much about."

The scene that showed then was of Hubert Humphrey standing before a group of college students, some with signs. The students were neatly-dressed, mostly quiet types such as might have been seen in the campaigns of the 1950's. They were not the long-haired, ebullient types who had occupied the screen a moment before.

A college professor brought into the program talked of a "palpable absence" in the youth political scene. "I read an article in the *New York Times*, by Doug Kneeland, just today that made that point very well," the professor remarked. "The article spoke of 'an absence as real as presence, called by many names'—meaning, of course, names of candidates

favored by young people and now gone from the scene... Robert F. Kennedy, Eugene J. McCarthy, even, sometimes, Nelson A. Rockefeller, the article said.—The article said that young people have left the national campaign because they don't have a sense anymore of anyone caring back about the things they care about themselves."

"So the energy is gone then, this great energy that we saw in the spring and summer, that was so evident in New Hampshire, California, and Chicago?" an interviewer asked.

"Gone? Lord, no," the professor replied. He was himself a young man with a refined hippie-like appearance, though dressed in a sport coat and tie. "The energy is not gone. The idealism is not gone. It has just been redirected."

"Redirected where?"

"Well, first to qualify, some of it does remain in the traditional process. Some of it has gone over to Humphrey's campaign... But the bulk of it has gone elsewhere. And where to? In part, to local campaigns where issues of community control, People's Park in Berkeley, for example, are more clearly drawn. In part, to intensified opposition to the Vietnam War, into national rallies planned for this fall, for example,... regardless of who occupies the White House. In part to more radical parties, the Black Panthers, Students for a Democratic Society, and so on. In part, outside of the system entirely, to communes and other forms of dropping out. I think we will see more of that as time goes by, due to frustration in being unable to change the system from within."

"That certainly seems true, that more and more young people have gone outside of the system," the priest remarked as the program broke for commercials. His whole bearing throughout the first section of the program had suggested his strong interest in such issues. "I know you're not part of that yourself, Matthew, you and Mary, consciously. But unconsciously, you are part of it, living far away from the 'One-Dimensional Man' society, in your cabin in the woods."

"Yes, we are, in a way," Brandt answered.

He hadn't thought of himself and Mary before as living outside of normal society, but the claim seemed true.

The program resumed with a section on the influence of the youth culture on other areas of society. Another professor, this one of the older generation, spoke here of the spill-over from student opposition to the war to related non-youth movements, "such as the advent into the political mainstream of people previously outside, people that you almost might have described as disenfranchised. Minorities, poor people, people who have long been silent members of our society, and who now all of a sudden are loud in making demands."

"And with that," the interviewer threw in, "there has been, would you

agree, a reaction?"

"Oh, yes, a 'backlash,' as some have been calling it recently," the professor replied, "a backlash that some in the current campaign have been exploiting to further their own causes."

That was the first time that Brandt had encountered this term, but he understood at once that it referred to the phenomenon that the priest had described in Appalachia of people quietly gathering up resentment of unwanted changes and plotting a reaction.

The importance of backlash, in the current campaign, was gone into further as a pollster summarized the effect of backlash on the national campaign, using a bar graph. The bar graph showed the third-party Wallace- Lemay American Independent Party ticket, polling an unexpected 15 percent, leaving the Humphrey-Muskie Democratic ticket with only 31 percent, eight points behind the Nixon-Agnew Republican ticket, which had the support of 39 percent of voters.

"In my opinion, much of the support that has gone to George Wallace has resulted from backlash," the pollster said. "And, if you want a sense of that, you can note some of the main points of their platform and their speeches put forth yesterday in their party convention in San Francisco. Greater use of police to maintain domestic order. An end to what they called 'minority appeasement.' An end to 'federal intervention in schools,' and so on. You have to say those kinds of appeals are at the heart of their strength, as well as their being, really, the only party to call for an all-out effort to win the war, if negotiations fail. I suppose you could lump that in, as backlash, too, against the strident groups that are calling for what many Wallace supporters consider outright capitulation."

The pollster went on to comment that part of the support going to Richard Nixon appeared to have come from backlash, also. "Nixon himself has taken the high road," the pollster said, "but his lieutenant, Spiro Agnew, the Maryland governor, has made direct appeals."

There was a transition again, on the TV screen, to a news clip of the Maryland governor, in a typical supercilious manner, talking to reporters holding mikes.

"This is what I would say to these people pushing their demands," Agnew was saying. "Yes, we will listen to your complaints. You may give us your symptoms, but we will make the diagnosis, and we, the Establishment, for which I make no apologies for being a part of, will implement the cure."

When pressed more by reporters in the footage shown, Agnew went on to declare: "I think the thrust of government today is too much along the lines of talking about people in the sense that people must be satisfied if the job is to get done for them. I don't believe this follows, because all you have to do is look at some of the programs, particularly at the federal

level, in the OEO area, and you will see that people are heavily involved. Programs that are supposed to be of assistance to the poor are sent to the poor and the poor are involved as managers... This is something like telling a person who is going to a surgeon, 'Would you like to participate in the decision relating to where we cut you and how deep?'"

"Lot of people are glad to hear this kind of thing from Agnew," Fr. Dan interjected, glancing at Brandt with a look of keen interest. "Some of them around here, too, sitting in my church over there, the ones that are better off. They don't mind giving charity. In fact, they give it freely. But they don't like it when poor people start taking matters into their own hands."

Brandt listened without comment as he was often inclined to. He had heard before that OEO programs were controversial in some circles, but he was surprised by the extent of awareness and opposition. It struck him as odd that anyone would object to poor people having a hand in their own programs.

Another image of Spiro Agnew, this time standing before a crowd of supporters in a college gymnasium, had occupied the screen when Brandt turned his attention back to the TV. Agnew was being heckled by young people of a type that Brandt was familiar with, hippie types with long hair and ragged jeans. One youth was wearing a cap with a five-pointed star such as worn by the People's Army in Communist China.

"How many of you sick people are from the Students for a Democratic Society?" Agnew asked in the footage shown.

The young people responded with loud cheers and taunts while the governor's supporters chanted "We want Ted!" using his nickname.

"These young people are not representative of the vast majority of young people in this country," Agnew was then shown remarking in response to a question posed outside in the hall. "Look at them. Talk to them. They have never done a productive thing in their lives. They take their tactics from Castro and their money from Daddy. Their parents must be saddened by their conduct. They are rude and deplorable, in my opinion."

"Meanwhile," the announcer went on, "attention in the main part of the campaign, in the daily interactions between Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, has remained on the topic lately of whether Nixon will risk his lead by participating in national debates."

Hubert Humphrey, his right arm pumping for emphasis, was shown then speaking to a group of well-dressed investors outside of the Wall Street Market in New York City. "Richard the Lion-Hearted is Richard the Chicken- Hearted," he was saying. "He is afraid!"

"To do justice to Nixon," the announcer continued as Humphrey's voice faded off, "the former vice president has agreed, in principle, at

least, to debate Humphrey alone, without Wallace present. Meanwhile, Congress appears likely to adjourn tomorrow, with the Democrats unable to garner support for their bill to use public funds to finance a three-way debate. Lacking public funds, Humphrey has proposed that each party pay one third of the cost. Nixon has declined, leaving the prospect of no debates at all in this election year of turmoil and dissent."

"I do not know how it can be done," Nixon was then shown saying. "My analysis of the law indicates that, whether it's paid time or free time, a television network cannot put on two candidates without providing an opportunity to a third-party candidate if he is willing to pay. I will not allow debates to be used to build up a third-party candidate and thereby fragment the two-party system."

"Meanwhile Humphrey, the tireless campaigner, is far from conceding defeat," the announcer said. "Elsewhere, such as in Kansas City yesterday, at the predominantly black Central High, he has turned to the traditional Democratic bastions of support, minorities and union workers, trying to counteract the apathy in these areas noted by many observers in this election year."

Humphrey was saying that government programs essential for equality and social progress would be lost if Nixon was elected. Nixon, following on the screen, expounded on his own social policy, which he said would not endanger Social Security, Medicare, education, and "other core social programs."

Brandt noticed that Nixon omitted mention of anti-poverty programs such as he was involved in himself. In his mind he combined that omission with the statements of Nixon's V.P candidate, Agnew, regarding involvement of poor people in management of their own programs. He combined it, also, with the statements he had heard from the American Independence platform, swearing off "minority appeasement." From all of that, the conclusion was clear. Government-funded programs like his own, and many such programs across the country, would not survive a change of administration in Washington.

Brandt left for home the next day with a renewed sense of a battle being waged between those advocating "social change" and those opposed to it. He wondered if the battle lines would soon be drawn more strongly on his own side of the mountains, as Fr. Dan predicted.

[Chapter 109 notes]

110. Brandt returns to find growing political tension in Lecher County

Fr. Riley's predictions turned out to be true. Local resistance to Birl Poling appeared, soon after Matthew Brandt's visit, in the form of an editorial in the *Kensington Herald*, the newspaper in the small town where Brandt's fellow volunteer, Dennis Kelly, lived.

The editorial said that Poling was getting help and encouragement, in his campaign for county commissioner, from people outside of Kentucky. "This man who, without question, has roots here and a long history in this area, has allowed himself to become the pawn of an elite group of know-it-alls promoting their own political agenda," the editorial declared. "This political agenda is not in our best interests, fellow citizens. It is an agenda designed to whip up the fervor of disadvantaged people who don't understand the full complexity of our economic problems."

Further manifestation of a local backlash came two days later in a train of events that began with a hand-written note from Fletcher Bourne. The note came to Matthew by way of his wife, Mary, who had received the note from Fletcher's friend, Hattie Beecher.

"Matthew, first, forgive me if there is any lingering resentment," Bourne wrote. "Second, if you can permit it, please stop down to see me. There are some developments I've heard about that I think you should know about, with respect to the upcoming demonstration."

Matthew knew that the "upcoming demonstration" that Bourne referred to was the "general" strip mine demonstration planned for the following week, on Thursday, October 24, 1968, in 15 counties in Kentucky and West Virginia. The strike was no secret. It had been widely discussed, with Lois Roan and her retired miner volunteers doing almost all of the organizing work themselves, except for help with transportation.

Fletcher Bourne was alone in his office when Matthew showed up at the *Miner-Mountaineer* building that had once been so familiar. Brandt had not been back to it since his altercation with Bourne several months before.

"Matthew! Thank you for stopping by," said the jaundiced, sinewy editor when Brandt stuck his head in the office door.

Bourne was his usual rumpled self with his necktie knot slid down and his shirt open at the collar. He limped across the room to shake the young volunteer's hand.

"Matt, the reason I called you," Bourne announced at once, "letters have been going out from the county welfare to people involved in the last demonstration, asking them to verify they don't have income outside of welfare, over the limit allowed."

Brandt had no immediate reply. He sensed that something was wrong in that, but he wasn't sure what it was.

"It's legal, but it's a scare tactic," Bourne went on. "And I think it's working, Matt. People are scared of being discovered in their various arrangements. Like Lois Roan, your leader. She has that seamstress work she does in her house. Claims she does it all herself. But her daughter does a good part of it. Everyone knows that, that knows her. And you got that girl getting a check, as a single mom. They'd be hard-pressed without it."

"How can they target just certain people?" Brandt asked.

"Well, they don't. They throw in a scattering of other people, too, enough to confound an impression of that... It's been done before. I wondered about it when I saw them taking down names."

Brandt called Dennis Kelly and met Kelly in a little town about midway between them. Together they rode in Kelly's jeep through miles of woods up the winding narrow road to Lois Roan's house on the side of the mountain.

Coming around the final bend, through a stand of aspens with yellow leaves, they saw Lois Roan, her daughter, Darla, and Darla's little boy, "Hodie," out in the front yard, looking down toward them to see who was coming up the road. Lois was wearing a blue house dress, tied at the waist. Her dark hair was pinned back from her forehead. Darla was dressed in a flowered blouse and jeans. Her long, dark hair was blown to one side by the wind. The boy had his toy rifle, the same he had had at the meeting at Simers Branch.

Lois Roan came forward with one hand raised in greeting when she recognized Kelly's jeep. Her face and eyes looked strained, but she seemed glad to see them.

"Y' hear'd," she said.

"What does it say exactly?"

"Come on in."

Together they headed across the front lean-to porch into the living room stocked neatly with the cloth and new clothes that were the material of Roan's business. A television with images of what appeared to be a soap opera flickered in the back corner with the volume turned so low the voices of the actors could not be clearly heard. A long swath of sunlight cut across the room, illuminating a curio shelf set off with arrangements of autumn-colored sumacs and dried wild flowers.

"How y'all boys getting on?" asked the girl brightly.

"Oh, we're doin' all right, Darla," Brandt answered in the assumed mountain cadence that had become second nature to him.

"Purty day, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is."

Months before, at the first strip mine demonstration, when Brandt had first met Lois and her daughter, before he had been arrested, he had been aware of a slight hint of wariness in the glances they had shot at him and in their brief spoken interactions. In his mind he compared that wariness to the obvious welcome that he and Kelly were being accorded at the moment. The Roan women acted now as if he and Kelly were almost kin. He felt touched and humbled by that. He thought to himself that he wanted to be worthy of their confidence.

"Hardly enough to have coffee over," said Lois, handing the letter to them as they followed her into her cheerful little kitchen set with blue and yellow curtains with a pattern of red berries. "But we'll have coffee anyhow. Would you like some?"

"Oh, yes," Kelly answered, sitting down at the table.

Even Kelly, the intense, socially awkward intellectual, seemed at ease in the homey country kitchen. He showed a different side of himself here at the sun-dappled table with the wooded hillside visible outside. He was like a big farm boy come in from the field. In fact, he had spent many boyhood summer hours in a similar setting in his grandmother's kitchen, after coming in from haying on the family farm in the hill country of southwestern Wisconsin.

The letter, set with an official heading, said simply: 'Due to reports of fraud with respect to income, we have been directed by the country commissioners to conduct a sample review of income outside of welfare. Please fill out the attached form and report with it to the county office within the appointed time."

"It don't say much," Lois said. "But what it means is, if you're doin' right when they talk to you, they'll look the other way. If you ain't doin' right, they'll come 'roun' investigatin'."

"And doing right mean not taking part in the demonstration," Kelly remarked.

"Yes, that's the whole of it," said Lois. "It ain't hard to figure out. Don't take no genius. We been through this before."

"When was that?"

"Oh, years before, in the union days, when I was a child."

"What do you think people will do?"

"Some of 'em will be scared away," Lois answered. "Some of 'em will not. It's a question of how many, if they's enough left after the scarin' to do any good."

"What are you going to do yourself?"

"Oh, we'll be there jus' the same," said Lois.

"We don't take no scarin'," Darla, the daughter, threw in. "My little boy here, he's a reg'lar pioneer. Ain't you, Hodie?"

The little boy with the curl in the middle of his forehead, ignored up

to this point, smiled shyly and lifted up his toy rifle. He was dressed in a diaper and a red T-shirt with a cartoon dog.

"Me neither," he said.

The boy was there with his rifle on the appointed morning for the demonstration, also, but the mood around him was less defiant. Only eight people had showed up to demonstrate. The other 20 or so who had promised to participate had either given excuses or else had admitted outright that they couldn't take a chance on losing their full incomes. They had all received letters and they all had known at once what the letters meant without any need for interpretation.

Virgil Wallins, the taciturn old man who had been at the meeting at Simers Branch, was the first to suggest that the demonstration should not go ahead as planned. "No sense in us puttin' our own situations on the line. Ain't no way we could stop the trucks, this few of us here."

"We're beat then," said Lois Roan.

"No, we ain't beat, long as we're still here in these hills," the old man answered. "We got an election comin' and looks to me like ol' Birl will get in. Let 'im get in and ask his questions. When he gets some answers, we'll go from there."

That outcome and hope were agreed on with nods of heads all around. The eight demonstrators then walked up the mine entry road a distance from where they had gathered to return to their cars. With them were Matt and Mary Brandt and Dennis Kelly, representing the MVs, and Fletcher Bourne, representing the press. Lois Roan, foreseeing the poor showing, had not called other members of the media.

On the way out, Mary dropped back to talk to Fletcher Bourne, as at the previous demonstration. Their conversation began with pleasantries and turned quickly to the apparent connection between the taking of names and the letters sent out by the county welfare department.

"I've heard about stuff like this, but I never thought I would see it firsthand," Mary said. "I find it hard to believe, almost."

"Well, there's always a need for vigilance," Bourne replied. "Even among good people."

"What do you think will happen now?"

"I think people will retrench, and wait to see the outcome of the election, as Mr. Wallins said," Bourne answered. "Then, eventually, those with staying power will come out with another plan. That's the nature of the business. Win some, lose them. It's been going on around here, Mary, long as I can remember, since I was a little boy."

Dennis Kelly came by to the Brandt's cabin the next morning to show Matt and Mary that Bourne had placed an article on the front page of the *Miner-Mountaineer* reporting the sending out of the letters and the result on the strip mine demonstration. Bourne had gone over the county

welfare office, apparently, and had asked the head of the department why letters had gone out at the present time and why they had gone out to almost all participants in the previous demonstration while not going out generally to other people. The department head had said that the letters had gone out to more people, but she had refused to provide names or other proof of a general mailing. The article said that that refusal had been "taken by some" to indicate that the letters "had, in fact, not been part of a general mailing" and had been "an effort to scare people away from any further involvement in the demonstrations."

Inside the paper, on the editorial page, was a signed editorial by Fletcher Bourne entitled, "Time for Reform?" The article began with the question: "With allegations floating around that county welfare letters are being used to scare people away from demonstrations at our strip mines, is it time for reform?"

The editorial went on: "For those of you who think the allegations are true, or who have seen other evidence of a county government watching out for its own interests instead of the people's interest, one candidate has come forward who promises to 'ask questions.' His name is Birl Poling, and this newspaper thinks it is time to vote him in, to let him ask his questions on all of our behalf."

Not much harm could be done by one such commissioner among six, the editorial continued, while maybe a lot of good could come from it. "Even for the good people who retain their offices, Poling's questions may lead to a clearer vision of what to do about some of our common problems.

The answer to the questions may never be to close the mines down. Most of us agree that too many people earning a living in the mines would suffer from that. But the right questions might point a way to keep the mines open while addressing big problems such as the despoiling of these hills that have been passed down to us as our birthright, as the beauty of nature that, rich or poor, we see every day."

A few days later, with only five days to go before election, the *Berea Daily News* published a poll conducted in Letcher Count, that showed Birl Poling with a 53 to 43 percent lead over the incumbent commissioner, who was quoted as saying, "As far as I'm concerned, that man appeals to the worst in people. He just goes around riling people up."

The same paper announced that a complete bombing halt in Vietnam, ordered by President Lyndon Johnson on Friday, November 1, had brought Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic Party candidate, a bounce in the national polls, bringing him up to one point behind his rival, Richard Nixon. Statistically, they were in a dead heat.

Buoyed by that, the local MVs, consisting of Matt, Mary, Dennis, and

the two new volunteers, Janet Harlan and Karen Holm, pushed on with their voter registration drive and planned a big election night party in Kelly's apartment on election night to watch the returns on Kelly's TV.

111. MVs gather for election returns as rumors spread about Poling

On Monday, November 4, 1968, the evening before the election, Matt and Mary Brandt and their three MV colleagues, Dennis Kelly, Karen Holm, and Janet Harlan, met in Holm and Harlan's apartment in the little town of Hassox to discuss their plans for the next day to transport people to the polling stations. They had all just sat down for a spaghetti supper when a news bulletin on a local television station brought their conversation to a halt. The bulletin was announced as an attempt to look into rumors that "local candidate, Birl Poling, has a troublesome past that no one has questioned in this campaign, a past that his opponent says ought to disqualify Poling for public office."

"What it comes down to," the opponent was shown saying, "is this man, years ago, deserted his wife and child. Never gave them any kind of financial or moral support, at all. What does that say about the man? I think it says the voters ought to reject him."

Another image followed on the screen after that, an image of a young woman, about 30 years of age, who claimed to be Poling's daughter and who bore an unmistakable resemblance.

"Are you rooting for your father in this election?" an announcer asked.

"I don't know him," the young woman replied. "I haven't had a word with him in 28 years. If he's as good a candidate for this position, whatever it is, as he has been as a father, he wouldn't get my vote, that's all I can tell you."

Poling himself was shown responding to a reporter soon after. The former union steward looked haggard, with the deep wells under his eyes sharply marked by shadows.

"The girl is right she hasn't heard from me," he said softly. "I didn't know where she was. I've tried to find her, I've wanted to find her, for many years. I'm sorry now that she has come forward in these circumstances, but I'm glad to know where she is."

"Did you pay child support all these years?" the announcer asked.

"I would of if I had known where she was," Poling replied.

Matthew and Mary Brandt and Dennis Kelly, traveling together in Kelly's jeep, stopped off in Edinburg, on their way from Janet Harlan's apartment, to talk to Birl Poling.

Going around the side of the row houses, past the little bridge and creek and the cokes stoves, which were dark on this particular evening, the Brandt's and Kelly found Poling's apartment dark, also. The blue and white 1965 Ford pickup that Poling had bought for getting around to his campaign speeches was nowhere in sight.

A neighbor out for a walk along the railroad tracks informed them

that he had seen Poling leaving about an hour before nightfall.

"Said he didn't care about the election anymore," the neighbor told them. "Said all he could think about was his daughter coming forward like that, after so many years. Said he could remember walking around the room with her, rocking her in his arms to get her to sleep."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No," the neighbor replied.

A truck came into view and passed, but it was not the old man.

"You ask me, it's the mother who should be called to account, for poisoning the girl against him," the neighbor called as the MVs walked back to Kelly's jeep.

Next night, after a long day of transporting people to the polling stations, the five MVs gathered again, this time in Kelly's apartment in Kensington, to listen together to the national election returns.

The election coverage began with a report on two events of the past week regarded as affecting the disposition of the volatile electorate with respect to the presidential candidates. The first event was the November 1 complete bombing halt that the MVs already knew had given Hubert Humphrey a last-minute boost in the polls. The second event was one that none of them had paid much attention to, however.

The gist of it was, on the day after the bombing halt, the South Vietnamese president, Nguyen Van Thieu, apparently anticipating additional pressure to cooperate in expanded peace talks including his own government and the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Viet Cong, had delivered a defiant speech to a joint session of the National Assembly. In that speech, "interrupted by applause and cheers 15 times," Nguyen had said that South Vietnam would not enter the peace talks in Paris until the North Vietnamese had agreed to negotiate without the NLF, as it was commonly called.

"Those who have followed the progress of the efforts for peace seem to have taken this to prove that the Democratic peace initiative is mired down in South Vietnamese politics and cannot succeed," the announcer said. "And spot polls indicate that that perception has played into Republican hands. Hubert Humphrey has lost his surge, it appears. Richard Nixon has regained a two- to three-point advantage. George Wallace has gained with increased support from those who would like to see our armed forces set free to fight an all-out war for an all-out victory in Vietnam."

In a detailed analysis based on the final polls, Nixon was reported as being ahead in 30 states with a total of 299 electoral votes. That was 29 votes more than the 270 vote majority required for victory. Humphrey was ahead in eight states and the District of Columbia for a total of 99 votes. Wallace was ahead in the five states of the Deep South, which in

total had 45 votes. Seven states were too close to call.

"Well, that's just wonderful," Kelly remarked, shaking his head. "So it looks bad again for the big triple H."

"He could still win!" Mary Brandt threw in.

On this election night, as on so many similar occasions, Mary was her unique blend of determined, serious, and cheerful, sitting alertly on the floor with her legs crossed, her straight, dark eyebrows lowered in her patent frown as she listened carefully for each new detail of the election news as it was brought forth on the screen.

She was dressed in blue jeans and a shapeless purple sweater, and had paid no attention at all to her appearance, but her natural shape and dark-featured beauty were obvious nonetheless, earning her a special gentleness from Dennis Kelly, who treated her always with unfailing admiration.

The two other women, plain by comparison, and neither of them politically inclined, wound up in the kitchen after a while, talking about their common activities as volunteers. Karen Holm, looking like a plump, self-conscious farm girl, talked in a rapid manner with many gestures and exclamations, laughing at her own self-disparagements. Lean-faced Janet Harlan listened attentively with a serious, strained expression, often shaking her head in response but seldom laughing.

Janet Harlan was the one who first disclosed that maybe the tide had turned slightly against Birl Poling. She said that several women that she had transported to the polling stations had talked about Poling's daughter, saying it was unlikely that Poling could have been unaware for so many years of where his daughter had ended up.

"They said he's always been known for tipping the bottle," she said. "They said it was probably him who left his family, not the other way around."

"Well, I don't believe that," Matthew answered. "I don't think he would have done that. I don't think he could have done that. And, if he had done that, Fletcher Bourne would have known about it. I heard his whole story from Fletcher back when I was with Poling in jail."

"Maybe Fletcher had it wrong," Harlan replied.

"Fletcher doesn't get his facts wrong."

"Still it's statistically significant," Dennis Kelly said. "It's like a poll sample, isn't it? If three women were saying that, you know there were more thinking the same thing."

Concerns about Birl Poling faded to the background when extensive returns started coming in from the Eastern states. Humphrey was faring better than expected, with blacks in urban areas turning out in large numbers and voting five to one in his favor. Third-party candidate George Wallace was receiving only about ten percent of the votes in

Northern, white, blue-collar neighborhoods where he had been expected to get ten percent or more among workers put off by "government dole" programs.

"That share of those traditionally Democratic voters apparently stayed with Humphrey," the announcer said.

The Democratic candidate soon had gathered sizable leads in Northeastern states including Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Delaware. New Jersey was close. Nixon was ahead in New Hampshire, Vermont, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. Georgia, as predicted, was leaning toward Wallace.

New York was the first state to be declared. It was projected for Humphrey about an hour after the polls closed. In Pennsylvania, which had been expected to go for Nixon, Humphrey had a surprising lead, with heavy voting reported in the Democratic strongholds of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

The MVs by this time, even including Harlan and Holm, were in an energized, hopeful mood, cheering as each tidbit of good news came in for Humphrey. There was ample reason for head shaking, also, as Nixon's numbers grew in the states just west of the Atlantic seaboard, including Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Tennessee, and their own adopted state of Kentucky.

By two hours after midnight, the national election map presented by the television networks had taken clear shape. Most of the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwestern states were colored blue, indicating they had been projected for Humphrey. Most of the western states and central states south of Missouri, colored dark red, had gone for Nixon. The five states of the Deep South, colored green, had gone for Wallace.

Based on these projections, Humphrey had 182 electoral votes of the 270 needed for election. Nixon had 162. Wallace had 45. 149 were too close to call. The uncalled vote-rich states of Ohio, Illinois, and California would decide the election, the announcer said.

"And get this," Kelly announced. "It could be that nobody will get the 270 needed."

"What would happen then?" asked Mary sleepily.

"The House of Representatives would have to decide it!"

Kelly, still sitting on the couch, directly in front of the TV, was the only one in the group awake enough to take delight in this tidbit of history in the making. Mary was on the floor in her sleeping bag beside Matthew, who was already asleep. Harlan and Holm were asleep in their sleeping bags in another corner of the room.

The only news that had come in regarding Birl Poling was from a local station that had conducted exit polls in key areas throughout the

day. Based on their analysis, the old man had been severely hurt by the news story about his daughter. He was running slightly behind his opponent, the one who had broke the news.

The MVs woke up late the next day to learn that the election was still too close to call, but with the key states of Illinois, Ohio, and California leaning toward Nixon. By early evening that tendency had been confirmed. Nixon had won the election, the *New York Times* had announced, with 287 electoral votes. His popular vote total was 29,726,409 votes to Humphrey's 29,677,152. The margin of 49,257 was closer than Kennedy's margin of 112,803 in 1960.

News had also come out that Birl Poling had been defeated by 176 votes out of 8,323 cast. The Brandt's stopped at his place on their way home from Kelly's on the next day, Thursday. The situation there looked unchanged from two nights before, with the blue and white pickup still gone. A neighbor said Poling had not been seen.

Driving away from there, the young couple talked about what had happened. For months they had gone along on the shared personal dream that they would end their volunteer days in Appalachia with definite successes. Birl Poling would be elected to office. The strip mine committee would be operating at full strength. A Democratic president would be established in Washington to maintain the antiwar programs. They had warned one another that maybe some of that would not turn out quite as they hoped. But they had not expected such a general defeat.

They had to remind one another that they had been successful in their other projects, the gardens and cookbook.

"But you know what the weird thing is, Matt," Mary remarked softly. "The things we were successful in are the things that... that won't really make for any lasting change. Tell me I'm wrong... I'm just in a down mood at the moment."

Matthew had no immediate response.

Miles later, he said: "We did our best, Mary. Fletcher told me once that it's a struggle that has gone for years. We just saw a little piece of it."

"He said the same thing to me, at the last demonstration," Mary answered. "Are you sorry we're going so soon?"

"No," he said simply. "We stayed as long as we said we would. Now it's time to go."

That was exactly how he felt about it, all of a sudden, eager to move on. His mind had settled on Bourne, from whom he was still estranged. He realized that he had said some good things about Bourne lately, and that Bourne deserved to have them said. Bourne had proven right in his assessments and cautions, just as had Fr. Dan. The older men, experienced in the Appalachian scene, had both warned how hard it

would be to bring about change in Appalachia.

Brandt thought to himself that he had learned a lesson in that. He had believed them to an extent, and to an extent had held back, waiting to see what would happen. But he had never expected that the opposition to change would be so hidden and mean as to bring about the tactics he had seen employed.

[Chapter 111 notes]

112. Morris and Pitt react to the election in Takhli, Thailand

Capt. Jim Morris, in Takhli, Thailand, first learned of the final election results on the base radio. He went across from his own hooch to that of his friend, Maj. Tom Pitt, to see if his fellow flyer had heard the results, also.

Pitt hadn't heard.

"Well, Nixon or Humphrey, it's the same to me," the major said as he jumped up from his bunk. Throwing on his khaki shirt, he strode across toward the door. The assumption was, unsaid, that they were bound for the stag bar on their mutual day off.

"You didn't actually think Wallace would win, did you?" Morris replied.

"Never had a hope of it."

"Neither did I."

They had not talked about politics a great deal, but the topic of the presidential candidates had come up one evening in the officers' mess, and they had both revealed then, to common friends, that they planned to vote for the third-party candidate. An exchange of opinions around the table had revealed several others to be for Wallace, also.

That informal survey had piqued Morris's interest enough to tune him in on other conversations here and there, establishing what he had suspected, that Wallace's support in the military community had been considerably stronger than among the general populace.

He knew why that was. The answer was simple. George Wallace and his Air Force general running mate, Curtis LeMay, had been the only ones of the three slates who had offered any possibility of American forces' actually trying to win the war.

After 24 missions, seeing the enemy forces firsthand, Capt. Morris had come to the conclusion that, given a will to win it, the war could, in fact, be won. To accomplish that would require unleashing the Air Force to do its job (as it would know how to do it if given a chance, he thought), plus some kind of full-scale land invasion of the North, maybe an Inchon- style invasion north of Haiphong combined with a pincer movement from the south. He had heard others expressing similar opinions.

Morris's own view of the war had become increasingly a view through the filter of Laos. From that perspective, the war had by no means cooled down. Although the prospect of expanded peace talks in Paris had resulted, in Vietnam itself, in an expectation of fewer combat engagements, it had resulted, in Laos, in more combat engagements on the part of the Air Force and its support structure of CIA-commanded road watch teams, forward air controllers, and intelligence-gathering guerrilla teams (called Prairie Fire units).

Just in the past week, preceding the presidential election, there had been a dramatic upswing in Air Force activity throughout Laos. In the first five days of November, Morris had heard, a total of 405 sorties had been flown, compared with a total of 181 in that same period the previous year. According to intelligence briefings, the number of sorties per day over the Laotian panhandle was expected to rise to 250 per day, from the previous year level of 100 per day. Air activity in that area was expected to remain at that level throughout the dry season, which had just begun. The number of sorties in the northern "Barrel Roll" area (east of the Plain of Jars) was expected to rise to, and remain at, 100 per day, compared to the previous year average of 30.

The official reasons given for the increase in air activity were as complex as the war itself had become. The obvious reason was the start of the new dry season. Since 1962, when their military actions had begun, the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies had used the dry season to expand their area of control. They were expected to use the current dry season in the same way, although not with such a dramatic effort as to endanger the peace talks in Paris and their ultimate goal of American withdrawal from Vietnam.

In addition, there was another new complication that the expanded talks had brought, the probable withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam to probable positions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The North Vietnamese units were withdrawing, Morris had heard, to give legitimacy to the claim, believed by no one, that the new participants in the talks, the Viet Cong (represented by the National Liberation Front, their political arm), were in actual control in Communist-held areas in South Vietnam. Nonetheless, their new positions along the trail were expected to result in fiercer defense of truck convoys.

On the American side, there was talk of increased activity on the part of the Prairie Fire units to uncover truck parking areas, road by- passes, and truck portering locations hidden below the jungle canopy in places that could not be spotted by the Air America FACs. That kind of "real-time" information, as an intelligence officer had called it, would result in a new type of interdiction: against areas where targets were less clearly visible from the air than had been the case thus far in attacks along roads.

Along with this prospect, Morris and his fellow pilots had been subjected to increased official warnings about the importance of avoiding collateral damage (as damage to civilian areas was called). The increased activity in Laos had not been noticed much by the press back home, the airmen had been told, because of the distraction of the election. Notice was expected to increase now that the election was over. In fact, a report had recently come out, an intelligence officer said, citing the "tripling" of bombing operations in Laos.

"Believe it or not, gentlemen," the officer said, "this war in Laos still does not officially exist. Laos remains, officially, a neutral, non- aligned nation, an essential buffer between Vietnam and Thailand. Our officers, throughout the service, have been directed not to confirm the continuance or increase of the war in Laos. You as officers are expected to follow along that same line by keeping your missions low profile, within the realm of the possible, of course."

Pitt got off on that subject as he and Morris sat in the stag bar at a corner table next to a group from the 537th in their blue flight suits. The immediate reason for the discussion was a mission to which Pitt and Morris had been assigned for the next day. The mission would take them to an area near the Ban Karai Pass, where the Prairie Fire units had found a truck parking lot in the jungle. It was an area of scattered villages, and as a result the briefing had included the familiar cautions.

"Did it ever occur to you, Jimbo," Pitt remarked as he stirred his third martini, "this is an absurd situation. We've got a real war, and we can't fight to win it, and we've got this so-called secret war, and we go in hamstringed... to the extent of being hardly able to fire the Gatlin gun, for fear of hitting some gook disguised as a civilian."

"They're worried about the political fallout, Tom, you know that," Morris answered softly.

"Fallout! Hell, Jimbo! A good number of those villages are bases of operation, you can't deny that."

Morris had been through the exact same conversation before and he was in no mood to go through it again. He turned the subject to a more interesting turn of events for them both, an unlikely romantic interest that the 35-year-old bachelor officer had stumbled upon somehow, an 18-year-old, modern-leaning Thai maiden named Souphana Vayaphong from a completely traditional family just outside of Takhli village. Pitt had stopped there to ask for a drink of water on an exercise tour on his bicycle, and enough had happened then to encourage him to go back.

The balding, socially awkward pilot, who had long since lost the look of youth, had assumed the mannerisms, at least, in several displays of clumsy interest that had made Morris embarrassed to watch. The major apparently failed to see through the veneer of romance to the reality at the heart of the encounter, an obvious desire on the part of the girl to escape her village life and on the part of her parents to help her along that path and maybe enrich themselves in the process, compared to their present level as small-time merchants.

Pitt had little to say about that, on this particular evening, just that he planned to go into Takhli village after supper for a visit. Later Morris saw him heading off in a taxi with a bouquet of white flowers of a local variety that grew around the base.

Morris was content to go back to his own hooch. Finding himself alone, he again tuned into the base radio station and happened upon a replay of comments delivered by the president-elect from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City.

"Mr. Nixon is understandably in a buoyant mood this morning," the announcer said. "His supporters are nothing less than ecstatic. It is fair to say he is in a generous mood, also. Just a short while ago, he praised the 'gallant and courageous fight,' as he called it, of his opponent, Humphrey."

Nixon's voice came on after that, sounding manufactured and forced into a lower octave at it often did.

"I saw many signs in this campaign," he said. "Some of them were not friendly and some of them were friendly. But the one that touched me the most was one that I saw in Deshler, Ohio, at the end of a long day of whistle-stopping, a little town, I suppose five times the population was there in the dusk, almost impossible to see, but a teenager held up a sign, 'Bring Us Together.'

"And that will be the great objective of this administration at the outset, to bring the American people together. This will be an open administration, open to new ideas, open to men and women of both parties, open to the critics as well as those who support us.

"We want to bridge the generation gap. We want to bridge the gap between the races. We want to bring America together."

Analysts following after that were not so certain, however, that Nixon would be able to achieve the national reconciliation that he had presented as the initial goal of his administration.

In particular, the sought for peace between the older and younger generations would be hard to obtain, one analyst said. Young people were regarded as being too far gone, since Chicago, to be brought back into the fold.

"There will be increased disaffection, increased direction of youth energy into demonstrations and confrontations," the analyst said, "along with, for the more disenchanted, increased diversion of energy away from everything 'Establishment' in any way."

It was the same message, more or less, as Morris's ex-teammate Matt Brandt had heard in West Virginia at the home of Fr. Dan Riley. Morris was less receptive to it. For these continuing disturbances he had nothing but contempt. He was glad when the facilitator turned to an analyst identified as an Army retired senior officer. The name given was not familiar to Morris from his own experience.

The discussion turned then to what the new president would mean for the war in Vietnam. There the retired senior officer soon showed that the expected increase in war activities in Laos, while the war cooled down in

Vietnam, was more generally known of than the intelligence corps seemed to be aware of themselves. The officer mentioned the “secret war,” and then added, as an interjection, “well, not so secret anymore.”

What especially drew Morris’s interest were the officer’s comments in reference to what the war would mean to those involved in it, because there the attention turned to downed pilots.

“Pilots who go down in Vietnam wind up somewhere where we can track them,” the retired officer said. “Pilots who go down in Laos go off into a kind of limbo from which there are no reports. In many cases, we don’t even know if they are dead or alive. We don’t know sometimes for years after they disappear.”

Two of Morris’s hooch mates arrived home at that point, in a half drunk state, joking back and forth. Morris sat up on his bed and joined in the joking, glad that he had not gone into town drinking, with his next mission set to go the next afternoon.

Later, with the lights out, and one of his hooch-mates snoring in the background, Morris lay awake thinking what a mess the whole situation was, with the war he was fighting in being secret and then not so secret, like the family secret that everyone really knew about while keeping up the pretense of not knowing.

Morris found himself thinking, also, about what the retired officer had said about the limbo-like fate of pilots downed in Laos. He had heard similar comments from others, but on this particular evening the thought of being captured somehow struck a deeper cord. If shot down, he thought, he would do his utmost to avoid capture. If captured, he would do his utmost to escape. Resolved on that, he fell asleep.

[Chapter 112 notes]

113. Morris inadvertently fires on a village killing women and children

The issue of collateral damage came up again the next day, brought up by the very man, Maj. Tom Pitt, who had been so contemptuous of it the night before. Capt. Jim Morris was not surprised by that. He had learned over time that Pitt was his own disciplinarian, and often called himself to task before anyone else had a chance to. He assumed that the major had decided that the comments had been out of line and had resolved to make amends.

"Listen up, Eagle Flight," Pitt, as flight leader, radioed to his three men. "If not under fire ourselves, we will cease fire at any sight of human habitation. Villages, individual huts, whatever. If need arises, we'll go in twice."

Morris took that in consideration as he plotted the current flight position on the topographical map of Laos that he always brought with him on his missions. They were at a cruising altitude of about 30,000 feet, providing a panoramic view of vast reaches of lush green jungle dotted with mud-brown karsts and cliffs.

He no longer felt anxious about being captured, as on the night before. What struck him at the moment, in the expanse below him, was the lack of any infrastructure such as might have been observed in developed countries. He could see only a single road, a thin brown line curving from west to east between scattered, rugged hilltops. That was Highway 31, he gathered from the map, the main road linking Thailand with the Laotian town of Lotoe.

Morris was impressed, also, with the lack of visible political boundaries in the scene below him. The political boundaries were in the minds of people, he thought. Yet here he was, agent of a government ten thousands miles away, carrying three tons of bombs to enforce a particular arrangement of political boundaries.

A glint of sun on water, evoking a brief remembrance of the sun on the water in Puerto Penasco, where he had vacationed with Ellen, when she had still been Ellen Kass, drew Morris's thoughts next to his new wife. She was on his mind lately in a more problematic manner since he had detected in her last several letters a growing dissatisfaction with her life alone in Las Vegas. So far as he could tell, the dissatisfaction did not extend to him. Without a doubt, she was still in love with him, judging by her girlish confessions of admiration and desire.

The crux of Ellen's problems, so far as he could detect from her indirect comments, was that she felt contained by her job and by her self-imposed limitation to Air Force friends, mainly spouses and girlfriends of other pilots. She seemed to be hinting for his blessing to go outside of that area of containment.

She had mentioned in one of her letters that waitress jobs paying twice as much were available if she was willing to wear a “costume.” He imagined she meant by that a skimpy costume, and that bothered him more than he cared to admit in a return letter.

Instead he had written back saying that, in his opinion, she should do whatever she had to do to make her own life, in the present, as happy and full as it could be.

“Ellen, honey, I don’t want you to feel contained,” he had written. “I want you to explore and grow as you need to. You always said you never promised not to have fun. I want you to have fun, Ellen. I know you need that.”

Pitt’s familiar voice on the radio drew Morris’s attention back to the task at hand.

“Eagle Flight, this is Eagle Leader,” said Pitt. “We’re about 150 miles from target. I’m going to start the descent. We’ll be checking in with Cricket in about four minutes.”

Morris, in the plane three, lead element, position, watched as Pitt’s plane, about a hundred yards ahead, nosed slightly down, followed by the number two plane, which was about fifty yards back from that and farther to the left in their relaxed flight pattern. He pushed his own stick slightly forward to follow behind them.

Their frag order called for them to make radio contact first with the “Cricket” ground-based controller, operating out of LIMA Site 36, the only TACAN site of the original four that had not yet fallen into enemy hands. Under that controller’s guidance, they would rendezvous with an Air America forward air controller. The FAC would smoke-mark the area of the strike and would then hand them over to a Prairie Fire unit located on a hilltop above the truck park.

The truck park was in a narrow valley about three miles long, the pilots had learned in flight planning, with about 300 trucks parked there in three’s and four’s in the very center of the valley for a stretch of about a quarter mile. The plan was a rolling dive into one end of the valley followed by a shallow delivery in single file. Each plane was equipped with six 500-pound bombs with instantaneous fuses.

They were flying at about 8000 feet through cloudless air when Maj. Tom Pitt called for the flight to switch to Channel 79 for the Cricket controller.

“Eagle Flight, you are five minutes from target,” Cricket called. “Take up heading one-six-two. Your FAC will be at 5,000, at two o’clock. Bird Dog. Call sign, Raven 9.”

“Roger, copy,” Pitt answered. “Eagle flight, green them up.”

Armament panel armed, trigger pin out, gun sight on and set, radar warning on, oxygen 100 percent, cabin pressure to RAM air... all systems

ready, Morris determined. He pulled down his visor and drew his mental focus inward to prepare his mind. Already he could see, in the distance, the FAC's two-wing prop, cruising at level about a thousand feet below with a trail of white smoke behind it.

"Cricket, this is Eagle Leader," Pitt said. "We've got a tallyho. O1-A Bird Dog. Three miles distant at two o'clock."

"Roger, Eagle, affirmative," Cricket replied. "That is Raven 9. Cleared to contact on strike frequency. Cricket out."

The FAC's voice came in on the strike frequency. "Eagle, this is Raven 9. Got you for a tally ho. Four Thuds."

"Roger, Raven. We read you five by," Pitt replied.

"You're straight on target, Eagle. Two miles ahead, between the two hills. Prairie Fire is already on."

"Roger, Raven," came a third voice. "This is Prairie Fire. How do you read me?"

"Prairie Fire," said Pitt, "we've got you five by."

"Eagle, this is Raven. Swing back around when you're done. Saw a column of trucks just up the road here."

"Copy, Raven. Will comply."

"Good luck, Eagle. Raven, out."

The four planes were barreling ahead at 400 knots airspeed with the two densely-wooded hilltops clearly in view and the oval-shaped valley between them, also densely covered with jungle canopy.

"Eagle, this is Prairie Fire," came in the ground unit. "We've got a tally-ho. You're right on course. Watch for a red flare now. Where the flare drops, that is the first truck."

A red flare shot up then from the densely-wooded hillside, trailing in a graceful arc to a point about a quarter mile beyond the near end of the valley.

"Eagle Flight, take five seconds spacing. Drop your bombs in order beyond mine. Eagle Leader is in now," Pitt said.

Morris watched as Pitt's plane dipped into a sharp dive followed by his wingman on his left wing after the five second interval prescribed. It was his turn next. He pushed the control stick forward and followed behind the second plane.

Pitt's bombs were already exploding as the lead plane ascended in a leftward spiral on the far end of the valley. There was no sign of enemy gunfire. The truck park had been caught by surprise.

Morris, right thumb on the "pickle" button to drop his own bombs, charged through the explosion plumes of the two planes before him. Just beyond the last plume, he let loose his own bombs.

Banking up from his drop, Morris observed that the trail of bombs had been successful. The valley below him was a morass of shattered

trees and burning, shattered trucks, strung out for a distance of about a quarter mile. There were no huts or other signs of human habitation. It had been a clean kill.

"How's it look, Prairie?" Pitt called.

"What can I say, Eagle? You got them all."

"We should get together again sometime."

"Let's do that, Eagle. Prairie Fire out."

In a wide, rightward spiral the four planes ascended as they closed up in flight formation again behind the lead plane. Three miles out they located the FAC Bird Dog again and made contact. The two-wing prop was flying at about 1000 feet altitude above a mud-brown terrain marked by broken trees, bomb craters, and crisscrossed tire ruts.

"Eagle, half mile up the road from my smoke is where you will find them. About 30 trucks in a line," the FAC said. "Just a minute ago, they looked unaware, but they may have seen me."

By the time the four planes descended in a swift, turning dive, the trucks were fanning from out the road toward the cover of the cliffs and trees on each side. The line of trucks extended for about a quarter mile up the valley to a leftward turn of the road. The lead trucks were apparently further ahead.

"Eagle flight, fan out. Lead and two, go left. Three and four, go right," Pitt called as they zoomed in on their target.

Morris, with his Gatlin gun blaring, swung to the right along the line of trucks that were fanning out to that side. His wingman followed close behind, just off to his left side. They were shooting well, with explosions going up from punctured gas tanks.

Coming around the turn of the road, Morris saw too late, there was a village of huts, just beyond the lead cluster of trucks. He was already firing in that direction, and stopped as soon as he saw the huts, but a secondary explosion in that area suddenly sent out a wall of flames. It was from a hidden gas store, apparently. He had hit it head on.

A group of villagers, women and children, running from the village, were caught by the wall of fire just as Morris sped by. He caught just a glimpse of their panicked faces as he pulled out into a steep ascent to join up with his flight overhead.

Pitt had also seen the explosion from the village, though not from close range.

"Eagle Three, that was inadvertent," he called on the radio as they joined in formation to rendezvous with a tanker before heading back in. "Case in point, as far as I'm concerned. They use their own people as a shield to hide their gasoline. How about avoiding collateral damage on their side? They don't care."

"Looks like that, sir," Morris replied. "I was sorry to see it. I was

caught unaware."

Back at the base, the routine operations report, compiled by an intelligence officer, noted that collateral damage had occurred in a situation where gasoline had been concealed among civilian huts. No further action was expected.

114. Morris wards off troubled thoughts as Pitt fetes Souphana Xayaphong

What Jim Morris retained most strongly from his 25th mission was an almost subliminal image of women and children running from their huts as they were engulfed in flame. One woman and a child, a panicked young boy, looked in his direction.

Morris continued with his duties, otherwise unaffected, but every night the image returned to his mind, to disturb his composure before he fell asleep. Other troubling, nonsensical memories perplexed his mind, also, such as the pig he had seen butchered in Mexico on his visit with Ellen. In particular, he remembered the pig's blood streaming out and being caught in a pail.

Morris remembered, also, at this time in his life, that his mother, Jane, had told him once of comments his father had made about having to bomb German cities in the last year of the war. As Morris recalled his mother's account, his father had said something about that in a letter written in the summer of 1944, several months before his death.

Morris had read a number of his father's letters, of course,—at his mother invitation,—but he couldn't remember having coming upon such comments himself on that summer evening, more than a year before, when his mother had presented him with the cigar box containing his father's letters.

Morris made no mention of this whole business to any of his fellow pilots, not even to Tom Pitt, his closest friend. But, when the troubling memories persisted, he wrote to his mother asking her about his father's comments.

"Now that I'm insider to combat, so to speak, I no longer wonder like I used to, how I would conduct myself in face of the possibility of dying," he wrote. "But I never expected for there to be such a big other side of combat having to do with what you do to someone else, what you must do in order to do your job correctly. I've wondered what Dad's slant was on that, whether he thought about it."

Tom Pitt, meanwhile, had proceeded with his own life on another level. He announced that he had asked his Thai girlfriend to marry him and that she had accepted. In cooperation with the young lady's father (but assuming the total bill himself), he had arranged a celebration dinner to be held in one of the establishments in Takhli village, with all of the pilots in the squadron invited.

To have such a dinner before the wedding, instead of after, seemed out of whack socially, but everyone took it in stride knowing that Pitt had a poor sense of how to proceed properly. With no one on hand to guide him in etiquette, he had apparently come upon the idea of dinner as a way for his Air Force colleagues to meet his girlfriend, then the whole

thing had apparently gone out of control and had become a bigger deal than he had wanted it to be at the outset.

Morris considered the rolling ball of string that Pitt had started and decided that he owed it to his friend to try to persuade him to think through where the situation was leading. He invited him over to the stag bar and tried to play the role of advisor.

"Tom, you really think you can bring this girl back to the States, ten thousand miles away from her family, and everything will just be all right?" he ventured.

"Jimbo," replied the battle-hardened major, "didn't you ever hear the saying, 'Where there is love, all things are possible'?"

Morris concluded from that that his friend was beyond hope, in terms of bringing him back to reality, and, anyway, he began to discover that Pitt had, in fact, considered many practical contingencies such as what to do about Souphana's family, left behind in Thailand, if they decided to ask him for money or tried to come to America themselves. The major told Morris that, if need be, he could accommodate them all back home somewhere.

"It won't be a grand life, by American standards," Pitt declared. "But by their standards, of what they've been used to here, it will be a grand life even in some little house in Albuquerque."

Albuquerque was the major's hometown.

Pitt's celebration dinner, on Saturday, November 23, demonstrated the extent to which the socially inept major was appreciated by his fellow pilots. The event was attended by the entire squadron, with all routine military action having been postponed for that day by the squadron commander, Col. Jack Knowlan, who also attended.

Pitt's betrothed, Souphana Xayaphong (whom he called "Vanna"), was there as the centerpiece, dressed in a white sarong with a white lily tied in her black hair. She was about five foot three in height, slight but shapely in build, with shy, dark eyes, and a few basic English phrases such as "Up to you," which was her usual response when he asked her what to do about any complication among the guests.

Vanna's parents, dressed for the occasion in Western clothes, spent the evening bowing and smiling and reciting a few practiced phrases, also: "Please to know you." – "We so honor."—"You have good time."—"Tank you very much."

Along with them, there were a whole slew of other Thai types, from peasant to merchant to hip young, showing various kinds of adjustments to the pervasive influence of the air base with its 10,000 men looking for amusement and spending Yankee dollars freely.

Pitt had arranged for a local rock band to perform, a group with three young Thai men with Beatle-cut black hair and a svelte young Thai

woman singer dressed in a mini-skirt with her black hair in a Jackie Kennedy bouffant. Amidst the dancing, good timing, and drinking, there was not much drunkenness, though, as all of the American pilots had been forewarned of the importance of avoiding an intercultural disaster by staying on best behavior in honor of the girl and her family.

Morris ignored the looks of interest of several pretty, dark-haired Thai guests, and, at the major's request, sat at the lead table with the girl's family, exchanging smiles and briefly worded toasts with the girl's father, who bowed too often and made gestures with his hands. The bar was too noisy for much else to transpire.

The looks of interest merely turned Morris back in his own mind to his dear Ellen, for whom he still retained the affection of new love. She had written back to him, following his last letter, saying she had taken the new job that required the mysterious "costume" that she had still not described.

"Jimmy, I've been so grateful for your advice," she had written in her letter. "I was floundering, kind of, until I heard from you. Now I feel like a whole new world of opportunities is opening for me. I'll make more money, for one thing, and I'll save it all for you and me! For when you get back home!"

Morris smiled and shook his head, thinking of that. He had told her to do what he hadn't wanted to tell her to do, really, just in order to prove he was big enough to say it, and now he had given her "advice."

After what seemed like a dozen toasts, with food being forced on him constantly, Morris excused himself for a moment and wandered outside for a breath of fresh air. There he found the usual Saturday evening activity on the three block main street of the village. American officers and enlisted men strolled back and forth in small groups laughing and shouting at one another, while here or there young Thai women, in much smaller numbers, smiled and made gestures or offers, commercial or romantic.

Morris lit a cigarette and looked at the familiar scene, unaware of the people around him until a Thai woman carrying a young boy passed and glanced warily in his direction. In those dark eyes he saw the look again that had been troubling him in his private thoughts. It was not a panicked look, but the eyes were similar enough to bring up the image again of the women and children that he had inadvertently killed.

Going back into the party, he scanned the smoky room for the bald head of Maj. Pitt. He found Pitt standing with a drink amidst several other pilots, with Souphana Xayaphong beside him.

"Tom," he said. "I've had a little too much to drink, I'm afraid. Would you forgive me if I head back in?"

"Party's winding down, Jimbo," the major replied. "I appreciate what

you did, entertaining Vanna's folks."

The major apparently was sure enough of his fiancée's lack of English not to be more careful in references to her family.

"Souphana, I hope you won't mind," Morris said, turning his attention to her with an outreached hand.

She took his hand and smiled with shy, innocent eyes. "Up to you, Zhim," she said. "Tank you very much."

"The major has got himself a good lady."

"You good, too, Zhim," she answered.

Outside Morris caught a cab and sat watching out the open window as the cluster of lights in the village center gave way to the bumpy darkness of the Thai countryside. Here and there along the road were huts lit from within with the flickering light of cooking fires. From somewhere in the darkness came the bellowing sound of a water buffalo or cow.

His thoughts returned to Ellen again and how she had used to sit beside him, with her shoulder pressed against him, on outings together from which they had returned alone in the dark.

Back at the base, Morris paid the fare, handing the driver a generous tip, and made his way carefully along the path, watching for the snakes that were sometimes present. Muffled music, with a thumping base, came from a two-floor dormitory where enlisted men lived.

Morris found himself thinking once more of Ellen, of his first evening with her at the Red Garter bar above the boat club, when he had first met her on the veranda while the band played inside that Bill O'Rourke had arranged.

His hooch was quiet and dark, with all the occupants, being fellow squadron members, still in town at Pitt's party. On his bed he found a mail package that someone had apparently brought over for him from the base center.

The package was from his mother, he determined at once. Inside he found a letter in a separate envelope and the usual newspapers, several weeks of them.

The newspapers had been sent late, his mother explained, because she had once again been in the hospital. She didn't say much about that, just that she had "been feeling sick again at times, enough to need attention," and had had some tests that "the doctor said are quote, 'inconclusive'."

In response to his questions about his father, she went into more detail.

"Your father did say in one letter that he was bothered by what he had to do," she wrote. "He said, and these are his exact words, 'I don't think there's any way to justify it on a personal basis. The only way to justify it, if at all, is on a larger, societal basis. I don't mean to play philosopher, Jane. I just want to say to someone, and I just want you to know,

especially, that I do what I do, I inflict damage, praying the whole while for the people being damaged.'

"That's all he had to say about it, Jim. That's all he ever had to say about it, as far as I know."

The newspapers were an interesting bunch, taking Morris back to the eve of the election and the final result with Nixon eking out a victory in the final hours.

In the midst of all that news, Morris noticed, the war in which he was so immersed himself was an almost unnoticed backdrop to the drama of the national election and imminent change of guard. Battles here and there were reported as so many enemy killed versus so many Americans and South Vietnamese, as if the battles were baseball games in which men were counted instead of runs.

In the election coverage, Morris found one tidbit about a candidate in Kentucky. He looked closer, remembering that his friends and new in-laws Matthew and Mary Brandt were living in Kentucky and (as he had learned from Ellen) were involved in some kind of election effort themselves.

The headline for the article said, "Rebel Candidate Dies in Head-On Collision After Losing Election." A sub-heading said, "Had Gone to Find Daughter Who Spoke Against Him."

"Whether Mr. Poling actually found his daughter and talked to her, wasn't clear," the article said. "The daughter refused to comment. There was also a drinking problem in the picture, according to the sheriff who examined the scene. 'The man was driving with an empty whisky bottle on the front seat beside him,' the sheriff said. 'I don't think he cared if he was breaking the law. He was pushing it to the limit for his own reasons.'"

[Chapter 114 notes]

115. Steward visits everyone a final time and leaves Dulatown unseen

Early December, 1968, found Thomas Steward still in North Carolina, preparing his departure from the little community of Dulatown where he had worked for 14 months.

With the water cooperative idea having been firmly put to rest, and with no other grand idea having come forward to capture his imagination, Steward had spent the previous two months doing physical chores at the community center and helping the Dulatown children with homework after school.

He no longer lived in his unimproved cabin on the hilltop a mile up the road from Dulatown. He had moved several weeks before to Ma Florence's house in the Dulatown hollow. The old woman had insisted that he move into her little house after hearing his cabin was without heat. He slept in the single bedroom, while she, by her own preference, slept in the living room next to the main source of heat, a black iron stove.

Ma Florence would accept no rent, but she let it be known that she appreciated being brought into town to shop and pay her bills. Also, she mentioned that she only wished she had more money for food, to be able to cook better meals. Taking that hint, Steward began buying the groceries, going with her list into town and getting more of everything than she asked for.

As soon as she got those first bags of groceries, Ma Florence started cooking. She often had six or more dishes cooking on the kitchen stove at the same time. Greens, biscuits, fried ham, custard, gravy, sweet potatoes, yams, cookies, and pies were there, awaiting the children who kept dropping in, all of whom called her "Gramma" or "Ma." She gave the food away until it was gone, then started cooking again.

Every night Steward lay in Ma Florence's soft bed, piled high with covers, listening to the rats below the house as they gnawed and pounded like construction workers. In the early morning, when he got up to dress for his morning run, he would find the rats on the kitchen table. Later, when he ate breakfast, the rats would watch from their hole in the wall between the refrigerator and the stove.

Ma Florence had no more fear of rats that someone else might have had of squirrels in the back yard. She kept her prepared food in rat-proof metal containers and let the rats help themselves to scraps on the floor, when she didn't have time to clean them up. She was careful, though, to remind Steward that the rats had started nibbling on her toes one night when she had let her foot stick out of the covers.

"Mind what I say, child," she said. "Keep them toes in."

She kept Steward's bedroom excessively tidy, much tidier than the

rest of the house. She was proud to tell her neighbors that the young volunteer was staying in her house.

She also decided that it was partly her obligation to assure that Steward had a proper sendoff when he left. She began to ask him exactly when he was leaving.

"You know these peoples gonna wanna do something for you, Mr. Tom!" she exclaimed. "These chilluns love you to death! Ain't never seen nobody they gonna miss like you!"

Steward, in his diffident manner, doubted that he was appreciated as much as that. But he got the gist of the inquiry, that she was planning some kind of formal gathering, most likely in conjunction with the neighborhood aides who had been asking similar questions.

Steward had his own ideas about that. He made up his mind right away that he wouldn't allow himself to be the object of attention at any kind of community farewell. Instead he would go around through Dulatown, as he done on behalf of the water coop, visiting people individually. He would visit without any mention of his imminent departure. Then he would depart without notice, leaving a note on the community center door to say goodbye to the kids.

In the second week of December, Steward began at this plan. First, he made a reservation for the flight home to Minnesota, for December 22. Then he called his VISTA friend, Doug Thomasek, who had offered to take him to the airport, and arranged for Thomasek to come by in his pickup early that same day. Last, with ten days remaining before that date of departure, he began going around to visit people in Dulatown, starting down in the hollow at Ma Florence's house.

About the same time, Steward received a letter from his local draft board, offering him a chance to present himself for an interview with the board members. Subsequent to that interview, the letter said, his appeal for conscientious objector status would be decided. He called the board clerk and set up an interview for the second day after his scheduled return to Minnesota.

He also called the American Friends counselor who had encouraged him to file his application in the first place.

"Even if your appeal gets turned down, that won't, or shouldn't, be the end of it," the counselor remarked when he learned what the draft board had done.

"And why is that?' Steward inquired.

"Because the local board is almost sure to turn you down. They don't really have the authority to go outside the guidelines. So the logical next step is an appeal to the state board."

"How long would that take?" Steward asked.

"Maybe three to six months," the counselor replied. "But, think of it

in terms of the contribution you're making to the whole dialogue about the war. It's not easy to wait, but by doing so you witness to your ideas before others. That's the real purpose of the whole thing. You have an influence on what other people are thinking and deciding."

Steward considered that as he went around on his visits. He didn't like the idea of dragging things out. The slow speed of the proceedings up to that point had begun to eat on him at times when he tried to come up with some kind of plans for the future. Eventually, though, he accepted the logic of having to play the process out. At the same time, he promised himself he would avoid the trap of passiveness that he fallen into on previous occasions waiting for the local board to finally act.

In his home visits in Dulatown, Steward no longer found it necessary to ask where anyone lived. He knew who lived in each house. He knew when they were usually home. If there were children in the house, he knew their names, their nicknames, and their ages. He knew how they got along with other kids and how they did in school.

If people were home when he knocked, they came to the door at once and greeted him gladly. He felt gratified by that. If there were children at home, they came in the room where he was, said a cheerful hello, and sat listening as he talked to their parents. He felt gratified by that, also. He could tell that he was truly liked.

Many people were not even aware that Steward was leaving, but, of those who were, quite a few had compliments to give him. Several of the mothers said they appreciated how he had been such a gentleman with girls and young women, never looking at them in the wrong way or making lewd comments.

"You been a 'zample to these chere boys, Brother Tom," said one woman. "They gonna remember that."

Internally, as he evaluated his time of service, Steward submitted compliments like that to his ever-active process of self-examination. He realized that much that had passed as "good conduct" had been a result of his shyness and lack of experience. Still, there had been some subtle and not so subtle offers that he had turned down. In that he had kept true to a resolution that he had made at the outset not to abuse his role in the community. So he felt that in part he deserved such compliments, and he was glad for that.

What struck him most of all about his time in Dulatown, however, was that it had given him an opportunity to take an ideal of service that he had dreamed about in college and apply it in everyday life. He had had an opportunity to be a "true servant of the people," as he had always wanted to be.

He thought about that on his last day in the community, as he stood by himself on the community center back steps, looking out to the rutted,

grassless clay playground where he had played so many pickup basketball games with the kids.

After such a start, what could follow, he wondered. Would he ever find another situation such as he saw before him, a little community of maybe 50 or 75 families that he could walk among daily and get to know so well firsthand? The situation had been perfectly suited to his own quiet personality. With less chance of daily interaction, he thought, he would have been less successful.

Early the next morning, Steward had his bag packed. When Thomasek's pickup pulled up outside, quietly, without a honk of the horn, as Steward had asked, he placed a note to Ma Florence on the kitchen table and left quietly without waking her.

The note said: "Ma Florence, you've been like a mother to me while I was here. Thanks for all you've done."

Douglas Thomasek, dressed in his black cowboy hat, with a toothpick between this teeth, was in a typical expansive mood. He grinned as Steward came out with his bag, and gestured for him to toss it in the bed of the truck behind him.

"Great morning!" he said in his cheerful voice.

The sky in the east, above the pine trees on the other side of the hollow, had just begun to show the first light of dawn. Together they rode up the road through Dulatown for a last look: past the gray-shingled house where Frank Dula, the barber, had often sat on the porch, talking with the other young men; past the modern, ranch-style house where Delores Harper, the neighborhood aide, lived; past the other familiar houses (all of which, in keeping with his plan, Steward had visited in the past ten days for a last time); around the corner past the Church of God, where Steward had spent many Sunday mornings, and had had his long talks with the intense preacher, Rev. Vannoy Jackson; then down the rutted road again to the community center.

There, on the door, Steward left a second note.

"Kids of Dulatown," said the note. "Thanks for all the good times. You're a great bunch of kids. Best to you in the future."

Thomasek was also in the course of leaving, he told Steward as they left Dulatown and headed toward the airport, 80 miles south in Charlotte, with the sun just rising above the snow-covered ridges of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He had bought a horse trailer, he said, and planned to go out West somewhere, looking for construction work and taking with him his horses and his girlfriend and her daughter.

"It's all ahead of us, Stewie!" he said. "Who knows, maybe some day we'll meet out West somewhere, out in the Rockies or something!"

While with Thomasek, Steward was caught up in the excitement of the unknown future, also. But, after his fellow volunteer drove away, his

thoughts turned to his upcoming interview with his local board and the prospect of spending two or three years in prison while Thomasek was exploring out West.

116. Steward attends his draft board interview determined to be honest

Two days later, on a blustery, gray-clouded day, with temperatures well below zero, Thomas Steward drove his father's black Ford Thunderbird to downtown St. Paul for his interview with his local board.

Near the public library, he parked the car not far from where he had parked on his previous visit to the draft board more than a year and a half before. Crossing the square to the Landmark Building, where the draft board was located, his mind went back to that visit and what the draft official, Harold Langerquist, had told him regarding the escalating requirements of the war.

Steward recalled the newspaper graph that Langerquist had brought in that time showing the increasing numbers of troops in Vietnam over a five-year period. As he recalled, the top number shown had been 400,000 at the end of 1966. Now, at the end of 1968, that number had grown to more than 550,000, he had heard recently on the evening news.

Langerquist had persisted in Steward's memory as an example of how many seemingly good people supported the war effort. As he remembered, Langerquist had presented his numbers almost apologetically. There had been no rancor there, no hostility toward him personally, though he imagined there well might be in other boards toward people like himself who resisted the draft.

In the board office Steward encountered Patricia Block, the pretty brunette who had answered his questions on his previous visit. She smiled at him as at an old friend from college and directed him to sit down in a chair in the same room as her desk. The door to the larger room with the long table was closed.

"Well, it's been more than a year, hasn't it?" she said.

"Yes, it has. Actually, coming on two years."

"How have you been?"

"I've been fine."

"I've heard you've been a VISTA."

"Yes, I have."

"Good for you, Thomas. That's an important service."

"Thank you."

"Well, Thomas, if you'll excuse me a moment, I'll tell the board officers that you're here."

Steward then found himself alone, with a brief moment to gather his thoughts. Various people, including his father, had counseled him on how to convince the board to provide some kind of situation where he would not be required to refuse induction and go to prison. He had paid no heed at all to such practical advice, determining in his own mind that he would "just tell the truth," as he had told himself many times in his

self- admonitions.

On the other side of the door, men's voices could be heard and the sound of chairs being slid into place.

"You can come in now," said Ms. Block.

Steward then went through the door to find four men seated at the table. At the head of the table was Harold Langerquist, dressed in a navy blue suit, white shirt, and narrow green tie. He looked leaner and older than Steward remembered him.

"Gentlemen, this is Mr. Thomas Steward," Ms. Block announced.

Steward, dressed in slacks and a dark blue sweater, with his brown hair clipped short and neatly combed, entered the room to the one chair available for him to sit in, on the near end of the table. As he entered, the men at the table rose, though they had just sat down.

"How have you been, young man?" Langerquist inquired, stepping out from his place to extend his hand across the table.

"I've been fine," Steward answered softly.

"Well, that's good to hear."

On that friendly and respectful note the interaction began, and it continued in that same tone as Langerquist introduced the other officers, who were all dressed in suits, also. Each, when introduced, extended his hand formally and nodded his head.

Steward felt too anxious to pay attention to their names. He noted merely that all three appeared to be men of his father's generation. The first man introduced had white hair and wore glasses. The second was bald with kind eyes. The third had the look of a stern professor. Each had a notepad and pen and a stack of copied material.

"Please sit down, gentlemen," Langerquist said. He sat down himself and waited until the others were seated. "Thomas, the way we do this, we start with a review of your background leading up to this time, then we will go on to your claim and what you said, followed by questions from the board, which will give us all a chance to arrive at a clear understanding of your position."

"Yes," Steward replied. "Thank you. I'll try to be clear."

"Now," Langerquist went on, "to begin the background, your records indicate you participated in an Air Force ROTC program in summer of 1967, is that true?"

"Yes, sir, that's true," Steward replied.

"And you removed yourself from that program... You had the option to discontinue, and you did so?"

"Yes."

"Why was that, Mr. Steward, could you tell us briefly?"

"Because I learned that the Air Force," Steward replied softly, "as a whole, is an organization like a team, and you shouldn't be involved on

that team if you don't believe in it wholeheartedly. I didn't want to be there pretending to be part of the team and not really believing in what the Air Force ultimately was doing."

"And by that you mean the war?"

"Yes, sir. I didn't feel right being part of the team and not wanting the team to win. I wanted to be wholehearted about what I was doing."

"Well, that's a commendable sympathy, in my opinion."

"Thank you."

There was a brief lull at this point, followed by a new round of questions. The kind-eyed, bald-headed officer, seated immediately on Steward's left side, was the questioner.

"Mr. Steward, after returning from the Air Force camp, you enrolled in the VISTA program, is that right?" the bald man asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you worked in what you describe as a 'rural black community?', right?"

"Yes, that's true."

"And you served for how long?"

"14 months."

"How did that compare to your Air Force experience?"

"Well, sir, along the lines of what I just said about wanting to be wholehearted, it was exactly that, it was that completely, whereas, as I said, the Air Force was not."

"You believed in what you were doing."

"Yes, that's correct."

"And you don't want to just do things, as I take it, you want to believe in what you're doing."

"Yes."

"Would you continue along those lines if you were classified as a conscientious objector and required to do alternative service?"

"Yes, sir, I would. I would look for the most challenging, the most demanding, situation I could find."

For the first time, based on the line of questioning, Steward began forming a hope that his request to be considered a conscientious objector would be approved. Soon, however, the questioning took a more confrontive direction with Langerquist asking for Steward to confirm that his stance was based on objection to the Vietnam War only.

"As a corollary to that claim, Thomas, with respect to this one war only, you admit there are other wars you could see yourself taking part in, is that true?"

"Yes, sir, specifically, World War II, which I mention."

"Why World War II?"

"Well, it's the only other war I know anything about, really, in any

detail... but my reason, because the evil was so clear there, of Nazism."

"Are you aware there were pacifists, conscientious objectors, who refused to participate in World War II?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"And you would not have considered yourself as philosophical kindred to those people?"

"Not to the extent to join them."

"Are you aware that some of the aspects of World War II we know of today were unknown at the time?" the white-haired officer threw in. "The concentration camps, for example?"

"Yes, I did know that. I think the occupation of countries like Poland would be enough."

"To justify a military action, on our part?"

"Yes."

"Such that you would have agreed to take part in yourself?"

"Yes."

"As a combatant?"

"Yes."

There was again a lull of silence during which one officer, the one who looked like a professor, wrote down notes. The three others appeared to be mulling over their thoughts.

"Mr. Steward," Langerquist began again. "Consider for a moment our predicament as officers of this board. We're a board established by law, directed by law to perform certain duties in a prescribed manner. As part of our duties, as the main part, really, we draft young men into our armed forces. These young men, some of them, go off into situations where they may lose their lives..."

"Yes, I understand," said Steward. "You have to be fair."

"Precisely, and, with respect to the exclusion of certain men from being drafted on religious grounds, the law is very clear, these young men must formally declare, through the CO form, that they object to participation in war 'in any form.'"

"Yes, I understand."

"There is no stipulation or mechanism, or whatever, through which a person can object to a particular war only."

"Yes, I know."

"What would you do then if you sat here where we sit today contemplating your own claim, as you have submitted it?"

"Well, I think the answer is clear that you must refuse it," answered Steward without hesitation. "That is your obligation just as my own obligation is to state what I truly believe and follow through with the consequence."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, to refuse induction, if necessary, and go to prison."

"And our obligation, if you were us, you think our obligation is to refuse your claim?"

"I don't see how you could do anything else, really."

"What if we would do it," said the bald-headed officer, "just out of a recognition that it makes more sense for you to be out doing something more worthwhile than to be sitting in jail?"

"I don't think you have that latitude under the law."

Langerquist smiled and shook his head. "Well, Steward, I'll give it to you for logical consistency. You realize, though, we have to decide for ourselves what our latitude should be, what the spirit of the law is as opposed to the letter."

"Yes, sir. Of course."

"Is there anything else you would like to say to the members of the board at this time?"

"I just want you all to know I respect you and won't resent you for doing as you see fit, however it affects me."

"Thank you very much for your attendance here today."

"Thank you, Mr. Langerquist. And thank you all."

With that, Steward left the room and draft board office and headed down the elevator alone. He felt satisfied that he had told the truth as he had resolved; but the thought occurred to him, also, that he had been, in effect, an advocate against his own position, with the likely result that his request to be considered a conscientious objector would be rejected.

117. Steward stops at the boat club and happens on Brandt

After leaving his draft board interview, Tom Steward drove across the Mississippi River toward the Minnesota Boat Club to take another look at the setting that had been so important to him in college. As he came under the bridge, he noticed a battered red pickup parked behind the club where the crew usually parked. It looked like the old truck that Matt Brandt had occasionally driven to practice.

Steward pulled up beside the red truck and, finding the back door of the club open, went inside to the unadorned locker room. Matt Brandt, dressed in a gray sweat suit, was sprawled out there on a bench press bench beneath a barbell stacked with weights.

"God damn!" Brandt exclaimed. "Thought we shipped you out!"

"I came back," Steward said.

"Yea, I can see that," Brandt answered dryly. He grasped the bar firmly with both hands, stared at it fiercely, and expelled his breath loudly three times. "How about a spot?"

Steward continued into the locker room, not phased by this attitude which he was used to from his months beside Brandt in a shell. He took up position at the head of the bench and watched his former doubles partner pump off six reps, bouncing the bar off his chest.

The seventh rep slammed down, bounced up a few inches, and hovered there a moment. Seeing that, Steward applied one finger to the bar, and settled into an old role. "C'mon, big Matt, you can do it! Push it up! C'mon!"

Brandt inched the bar up with jaw clenching and scowls, and jerked himself on the bench to a sitting position. From there, he turned toward Steward with a maniacal grin. "Goddam Stewball! How y' been?"

"I've been good," Steward answered in his steady-tempered manner. "How about you?"

"Hey, what's it look like, man? I'm groovin'."

Steward didn't know what to make of that. As was often the case, he wasn't sure if Brandt was kidding or serious. He did notice, though, that his plain-speaking friend had taken on some hip jargon.

The two were a contrast in style. Brandt had gotten more rebellious in appearance, with his dark hair longer, his dark eyes more brooding, and his dark goatee trailing in unkempt wisps amidst the black stubble on his neck and cheeks. Steward, trimmed and shaved for his interview with the draft board, could have passed as a new recruit in the Army.

Brandt noticed that at once. "You look like a plucked chicken," he said. "We gotta get you some hair."

Steward nodded and smiled. He was aware that long hair and certain kinds of clothes and speech had become the uniform of the "Movement," and he regarded himself as part of that, to some extent; but, after thinking

this through, he had determined not to give himself over to anything that dictated appearance or speech in any way.

"Well, big deal today, you know," he said softly. "Interview with my draft board, regarding my CO application."

He knew that the Brandt's had seen his statement, having received a letter from Mary Brandt about it in which she had complimented him for his integrity and thoroughness of thought. She handled all correspondence for both herself and her husband. Matthew never wrote letters anymore, now that he was free of the task of writing letters to her.

Matthew took up position over another barbell for a set of curls. He lifted the bar and inhaled and exhaled loudly three times. "They like your thesis?" he asked through gritted teeth.

Steward laughed. "I don't know."

"You teach them anything?"

"I don't know."

That would be the extent of the discussion on that, Steward thought as he watched Brandt pump out six reps. He knew from his past experience that Brandt used such humor to deflect from serious talk when he wasn't in the mood for it.

Brandt, after being led by his pretty wife through the experiment of trying to read intellectual books and express his thoughts, had come back from Kentucky not sure what to make of the whole business. He was aware of the contrast between people like Bruce Harris, his ex-MVs leader, who used ideas as self-promotion, and people like Dennis Kelly, Fletcher Bourne, and Fr. Dan Riley, who were willing to put their own lives on the line for their ideas. Even so, although he had come to accept that ideas such as such people expressed were valid and important, he had begun to wonder anew about whether his own mind, inclined to visual expression, could ever be disciplined to the intellectual detail that such ideas required. In photography he saw a more possible direction.

Brandt had thought a great deal about his Appalachian experience, just completed. Without saying so to anyone, even Mary, he had come to the conclusion that the MV efforts that he had been part of had failed. None of the original goals had been met. People had been led to expectations that had not been fulfilled. Birl Poling had died. The emotions that remained from the whole endeavor, for Brandt, were regret and self-blame for having let people down and then left.

Brandt suspected that he would never go back to live in Appalachia again. Despite having felt at times like he had belonged in Kentucky, he had arrived at the feeling, eventually, that he did not, that he could never be a true Appalachian. He wanted to go somewhere where it was his own life, his own people, where he wasn't just visiting someone else's culture. At home, on the farm, at the boat club, he had felt in his own milieu. But

he knew that he couldn't return to the past, either. He was determined to strike out on his own, looking. Washington, D.C., his and Mary's next destination, seemed a step on the way toward that.

"Somebody left some sweats over there in one of those lockers, if you want to join in," he said to Steward.

"Great!" Steward replied.

Soon they were working out together and exchanging information in short, factual bursts, without elaboration or emotional content, as they had been accustomed to do as doubles partners.

In this way Brandt conveyed the main facts about his own situation. He and Mary would be in town until the day after New Year. They would then drive to D.C. to look for an apartment. They both were enrolled in graduate programs beginning the week after that. Mary would be attending a nutrition program at Georgetown. Matt would be attending an "alternative" off-campus program intended to train specialists in the development and use of audio-visual aids in educational settings.

Brandt mentioned the audio-visual program without explanation, not wanting to betray an artistic interest.

Steward conveyed some facts about his own situation, also. On the advice of a draft counselor, he had been looking for alternative service assignments so as to not be caught without options if the draft board surprised him by accepting his claim.

Steward had found one possibility that was of particular interest, he said, a job driving relief trucks in a war-torn area of Africa called Biafra where there was a widespread famine throughout the area of conflict. He would be going to Philadelphia, to the American Friends central office there, to apply for that position.

That news drew a puzzled glance from Brandt as he stood wiping his hands on a piece of chalk.

"You ever think that you could shortcut the whole process by just telling them you're crazy?" he remarked. "Last time I heard, they don't want any crazy people in the Army."

"I'm serious about it," Steward answered.

"Point made," said Brandt. "Hey, let me tell you something, Stewie, there's going to be some people shooting at them trucks."

"Yea, and that's the reason I want to do it, Matthew. To be in a war for a good reason, to do my part without being a soldier."

"You need help, Stewball. You goddam really need help. You need to talk to somebody or something. Or maybe we ought to set you up with some hot babe so you can get your rocks off."

"I wouldn't mind that."

"If you didn't bore her to death with your theories."

In this way they went on mixing exercise and banter with occasional

weighted remarks, as they had done for four years in college, though both were well aware of new dimensions in their lives that gave the weighty remarks more importance.

After completing their workout and showering, they threw open the tall double doors at the far end of the oblong locker room and stood for a few minutes on the concrete embankment, looking down to the floating deck from which they had launched their shells for so many practices and races in their years on the crew.

Ice and snow were piled up there against and over the planks, but beyond that the main channel of the river was still open. The water was dark gray in color and looked viscous, as though made thick by the cold. Steam rose from the water amidst chunks of ice and driftwood borne by the swift current. Upriver, below the High Bridge, the water had a golden sheen. Gray clouds there, above the western bluffs so dear to Jim Morris, broke off in a straight line, leaving a wide bar of gold sky parallel to the houses on the bluff and appearing about twice as high from where Brandt and Steward stood.

Both of them in their private thoughts had a similar sense of being in a place that was visibly the same as in the past but that had changed in meaning. Both had a sense of being on the threshold of a new time, a sense of something opening up. But neither expressed this sentiment in words to the other.

"Mary's been talking about getting together a little party over the Holidays sometime," Brandt ventured as he and Steward walked out later to their cars. "She may be giving you a call if she gets around to it."

"Sounds great," said Steward. "I hope she does."

"We were even thinking of renting out the Red Garter."

"Wow, that would be great."

"O'Rourke is in town, too, I heard," Brandt went on. "And Ellie, Mary's kid sister."

"Jimbo, too?"

"Naw, last I heard he's about half done."

"Well, let me know about the party."

"Oh, yea, for sure, man. We'll give you a call."

The two former team-mates departed soon after in their cars, each glancing back to the familiar setting of the river front before heading off in their separate directions.

118. Steward balances wanderlust with a desire to connect with tradition

Tom Steward called Bill O'Rourke that same evening and immediately got invited to accompany O'Rourke on a trip to California. O'Rourke said he was going out there to work as a volunteer for a couple of months with a migrant services group before reporting for the Army (for which he had already enlisted) in mid-April. All his arrangements for the trip out West were already made, including a "drive-away car" that he would pick up in Chicago and deliver to Las Vegas.

"This is a pretty good deal," O'Rourke explained. "I've done it before. The way it works, you drive the car where they want. So you get free use of the car, but you pay for the gas."

The car would be available on January 14 and had to be delivered in Las Vegas on January 20, O'Rourke continued, so he had scheduled his trip around those dates.

"Who knows, maybe they will give us a day extra," O'Rourke said, "for looking around. Then there's California. You ever been there?"

"California? No, I never have."

"Well, hey, man, then come on!"

Steward didn't need any convincing on the trip part of it. His mind moved ahead to the prospect of whether he could get some kind of volunteer work out in California, too, through whatever connections his friend had established. That would give him something productive to do while waiting for his draft situation to be resolved.

O'Rourke was optimistic about that, also, in his ebullient manner. "Hey, man, I got the perfect thing for you!" he said. "See, I've got this friend out there, this guy I knew in Georgia, who just took over as the head of this program, the California Migrant Ministry. He told me he's working with the UFW, the grape pickers union, and they have all kinds of need for volunteers. That's what I'm thinking of doing myself, some kind of med work with them. We can work in the same town, or whatever."

The friend O'Rourke was referring to was Rev. Mark Chambers, the raw-featured minister that O'Rourke had run into after the July 4 fireworks in Macon, Georgia, the one who had just returned from the Poor People's Campaign with his idealism deflated. Chamber's father had died, freeing him of that tie to his hometown and propelling him into a change in job and location in an attempt to restore his failing spirits.

Steward felt relieved after talking to O'Rourke. Though he had only been at home for a couple of days, he had already begun to feel anxious about the prospect of hanging around for months, waiting to hear from his draft board, with nothing to do. Now he had the prospect of continuing the kind of work he had been doing in VISTA. Beyond that,

there was prospect of spending time with O'Rourke. He had come to like the former coxswain a great deal as a result of their fireside talks on their trip together the previous summer.

Steward went into the living room and sat beside the Christmas tree, looking out the window. Before him was a wintry scene of snow thrown up in swirls above the frozen plain of the lake, but his imagination was focused on a different scene of deserts, mountains, orange trees, and sandy beaches, such as he had heard existed in California.

He felt a great desire to explore and see new things. He had long been interested in the history of California, having read about the early period of the missions and in *Grapes of Wrath* about the migrants who had worked in the orchards.

Joseph Steward, the father, came in after a while and sat looking out to the lake, also. Mrs. Steward and the younger children, a college- age daughter and 10-year-old son, were already in bed.

The elder Steward, neatly dressed and combed despite the late hour, was an opposite to the pajamaed, ruffled man of the previous summer. With the Christmas season approaching, he was near a high point in his chronic mood cycles. He had been down in his office, typing with two fingers on his typewriter there. As part of his flurry of activity in his current "up" mood, he was writing a monthly, volunteer column in a neighborhood newspaper.

"I was thinking about how your grandfather used to come over every Christmas morning," he said. "Do you remember that?"

"Yes."

"How old were you when he died?"

"I think I was nine."

"I remember, when you were about six years out, he bought you that blue bike. He waited out in the kitchen to watch you when you came out, to see how you would react to it, but you just kind of looked at it and went on to the other presents."

"He thought I would be more surprised?"

"Oh, yea... It was a big deal for him because he didn't have that much money. But you kids didn't know that. He never let on that he didn't have much money."

"Well, I did ride that bike all summer."

"He noticed that, too."

"You were working on your column?"

"Yes."

"What's it about?"

"It's about that old, high wall that runs along Wells Street there, above the railroad tracks."

"By Payne Avenue there?"

"Yea, by the old junior high."

"That wall is quite a monster."

"Oh, ya."

"When was it built?"

"1885."

"What was the story with that?"

"Well, it was quite an undertaking, back in them days. The original hill went all the way over past where the tracks are now, to down by the brewery there, where I used to work... That's where the hill sloped down. They had to chop off the hill, and take away all that dirt, and bring in all them blocks. That wall is 60 feet high."

"Where did those blocks come from?"

"Nyberg Quarry, up in St. Cloud."

The father was glad to have this knowledge, and the son was glad to receive it. They settled back into silence again as the snow continued to swirl in blizzard-like gusts on the lake below the house.

Young Steward's mind, in this interval, returned to the plans just made with O'Rourke. He saw an opportunity in his father's mood and at once broached the subject. His object was not to gain permission as neither he nor his father thought that necessary any longer. His object was merely to arrive at an understanding that would make it possible to leave home again without inflicting the distress of his departure of the previous summer. What had stayed with him, especially, from that occasion, was a memory of how his father had left him and O'Rourke off at the highway ramp and had then circled back to wave goodbye. The look of loss in his father's face had returned to his mind at times in the months since then.

On this particular night, however, there was no anguish in response to his news. Joe Steward sat listening, scrunched into the couch as he had a habit of doing, in a way that made him look smaller and less virile and alert than his son wanted him to be.

"I can see how you would want to do that," Joseph said. "You're young and you want to see things, you want to explore. I don't blame you for that. Things have changed a lot since I was your age. I never really went anywhere, you know. I don't think I ever even got out of Minnesota and Wisconsin until I started going on trips through insurance, when I was more than 40 years old. It was a lot smaller world."

Young Steward had no immediate response to this comment. He had observed, along the same lines, that his father's world, from boyhood on, had not gone much beyond the old neighborhood on the East Side of St. Paul and the family's new surroundings by Lake Camden. But even Lake Canden had been part of the East Side scene. His father had told him once that the streetcar from the East Side had used to run out to it. Lake

Canden, in those days, had been a resort area for working people where you could get out of the city and have a picnic or rent a boat.

His father's whole world in youth had been circumscribed by a circle with a radius of no more than 50 miles or so, was the impression the son had gotten. It had been a world held to its center, to the old neighborhood, to an extent inconceivable in the modern era of television imagery and cars.

"Of course, people my age, young guys, went off to the war," Joe Steward continued. "That was a great waking up for people my age. I always wondered what would have happened to me if I had gone myself, or why I didn't go, whether I was really sick or just scared or just didn't want to leave Mom alone with your brother. He was just a baby then. I suppose I was really sick... I don't think I could have gotten it all together, as you young people say."

"What was the deal with your sickness anyhow?" the son asked. "I always heard people say you had a 'nervous breakdown'."

"Well, I guess that says it," the elder Steward replied. "I was so nervous about everything."

"About what, though?"

"About my work, whether I could do the work, whether I could keep the job. About your mother and my mother. They didn't get along. I was always kind of in the middle of it, you know, and I didn't know what to do. About taking care of your brother, and then your mother got pregnant with you, and I was worried about leaving her in that condition. And we didn't have our own house, you know, we were living with Gramma... and, like I said, your mom and Gramma didn't get along."

"So you were just worried all the time?"

"Oh, worse than that," Joe Steward continued. "I just couldn't get going. I would get up in the morning and I couldn't get going. I couldn't face the day. And the more I didn't face it, didn't go out or called in sick, or whatever, the worse it got, you know. I was losing confidence, I guess. I suppose I was weak. Maybe I was just scared, like I said, but I don't know for sure that I was or if I could have gotten over it somehow." He suddenly laughed and looked at his son. "I was a real wreck, I guess. I don't think they would have wanted me, anyhow."

"Well, you showed courage in your own way," said the son.

"And how is that?"

"In even getting through all of that and coming back so strong. You could have stayed down and you wouldn't let yourself stay down. You fought your way back up. Look what a success you've been. You're the president of everything."

Young Steward was referring to his father's success in the insurance business, where his father had for many years been one of the top

salesmen, and his success in organizations like the Lions and the Kiwanis where his father invariably rose to the leadership positions because of his ability to relate easily to other people.

"Well, ya," the elder Steward replied, looking touched by his son's praise. "I always liked getting in organizations, and next thing I knew, they were handing me the gavel."

Such an intimate conversation on the family secret of his father's sickness young Steward had never had before. He was left deeply affected by it in mood with a feeling of having taken from it a complexity of meaning for future sorting out.

He had sensed in the interaction, also, that his father had entered momentarily down into a dark mood, as if being pulled into it, a trigger he had observed in the past as being a first step toward a downturn in his father's familiar mood cycles.

His noticing of that gave him a feeling of apprehension and personal blame, though he noticed, also, that his father seemed recovered from the dark mood before he got up, tapped him twice lightly on the shoulder, and left the living room to go to bed.

Young Steward's own thoughts were troubled after that as he returned to the expectation of his planned departure.

119. A different Ellen attends a subdued Red Garter crew party

"Tom, you remember my sister, Ellie, don't you?"

"Sure, how are you, Ellen?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'm fine, too. Thank you."

The young woman who stood before Tom Steward in the Red Garter bar on the evening of December 27, 1968, was every bit as lovely as the girl that Steward had first met in that same bar more than a year and a half before. She displayed some subtle changes, however, showing a greater maturity in both body and mind.

Her body had settled somewhat, as if drawn into itself. It seemed to have swelled with voluptuous fullness. The face was fuller, too, though in no way too plump. It was perfectly full, the creamy skin taut and rich in tone, the green eyes dazzling below the moist, tumbling ringlets of chestnut hair.

The eyes spoke of the mind behind the face, also, as she stood in a finely-tailored, charcoal-gray suit with an embroidered white blouse and lace cuffs and lapels, displaying a sophistication in dress and manner seldom seen in the circle of "dressed down" people around her. The eyes were alive with a sexual knowledge that had not been there before.

The eyes said that she was aware of the pleasure her body could give to a "real man" such as James Morris, that she was aware of the pleasure it could have, in hands such as his. The eyes said that she knew men would look at her and desire her, but that her body was reserved for one man, him. There was an element of teasing in the eyes, also, because of that, with an occasional tension due to a conscious attempt to rid herself of any such tendency to smugness.

Ellen Kass Morris, now a married woman of six months, although she had lived as such with her soldier husband less than two months over all, had matured in other respects, also, in her worldly knowledge. Since mid- November, after obtaining his permission, she had worked as a waitress in a Las Vegas nightclub, dressed in a blue velvet outfit that left her long legs and lovely shoulders and the tops of her breasts naked and in full view as she pressed close through a crowd of hundreds of men and bent over tables to have paper money stuffed in her brassiere,—enough money, she hoped, to convince Morris of the advantage of her new job when he got around to asking details.

And such men she had seen! Of every conceivable type! Suave, deep-voiced men who spoke authoritatively and spent money freely. Lecherous men who patted her behind or leered at her breasts as she passed. Young, well- built men, athletes with keen eyes, who moved surely with quick, flexible movements. And in her own eyes, none of

these men compared to her darling Jim. He was the only one who received her sexual energy, even in her secret thoughts.

She found herself often thinking or talking about him, or defending his world view, as she imagined it, before anyone who would put it down. Such was the case on this particular evening, also, when Tom Steward, whom she regarded as a boy, not a man like her pilot, answered her questions about himself with a dutifully truthful account of his recent interview with his local board.

"Well, you're fortunate to live in a country where you can even have a stand like that," she said softly. "I know you're sincere, Tom. But, in a lot of countries, the government would never let it happen."

"Would never let what happen?" asked Mary, who was still standing beside them.

In contrast to her younger sister, the ever-earnest Mary was dressed simply in a sweater and jeans, though she was a pretty sight, also, with her dark hair pulled back from her thoughtful brow and thick, straight eyebrows, and arranged in a French braid.

"Some people left home with their opinions and other people sent off to maybe die."

"Well, don't you think he has to do what he believes in?" Mary persisted in her relentless, serious way.

"Yes, I just said so, Mary!" Ellen returned, her voice getting icy. "And you missed the point. The point is, he won't die for it, will he? And, if people like Jimmy weren't willing to die, he wouldn't be able to have his opinions, would he?"

She felt victorious at how well she had said that, seeing that her articulate sister had been left momentarily without a response. "That's the simple fact of it!" she said to drive the victory in.

"Even so," said Mary, regaining her tongue, "a democracy lives from an exchange of ideas and beliefs, and it just makes sense that... that that works best when everyone does it with conviction."

"Oh, yes, that's true, too," Ellen answered softly with a glint of amusement, swishing her drink. "Here's to all the convicted!" she said, raising her glass.

She took advantage of the laughs from that to make a graceful exit from Steward's tedious discourse, and drifted off across the room with a light, fluent step.

There was not so much to drift to, in this crew party, compared to those in the past. There were only nine people present, including Ellie herself, Steward, the Brandt's, Bill O'Rourke, and two other couples, friends of Mary from college.

To those two couples, as she passed them where they sat at a table, Ellen offered a gracious smile. But her thoughts by that time had focused

on a reunion with Jim Morris planned for New Year's eve.

She would meet him in Bangkok, Thailand, where he would have a leave of five days! She was excited about seeing him again and excited about the prospect of travel. She had never been outside of the United States except for her one trip with Morris to Mexico before they were married.

Going a few steps further, she settled into the easy company of Bill O'Rourke. The former coxswain, dressed in a firehouse-red sweater, with his red hair and beard curled in large locks around his blue eyes, was apparently in a thoughtful mood at the moment. He was standing by himself by his stereo set, which he had lugged in for the occasion, as seemed to be his ongoing responsibility from previous events.

"Hey, Ellie, how ya doing?" he said pleasantly, pulling himself at once from his self-absorption. "Heard you're going over to see Jim."

Soon the two of them had headed off smoothly in that direction of conversation. O'Rourke had been reading up on Southeast Asia, expecting that his slow progress toward the Army would wind him up there after basic training, as he and Barbara Carpenter had discussed.

"That won't be until July or so this summer," O'Rourke remarked. "Jimbo will be home by that time."

"Well, I certainly hope so," Ellie replied, her green eyes clouding over with concern.

"Ya hear from him often?"

"Oh, quite a bit."

"Has he been seeing action?"

"Oh, yes, all the time."

She had been able to keep up with the war,—in her own undetailed way,—based on letters he had written. He wrote about twice a week, much as his father had written to his mother, and in much the same affectionate tone and unadorned, unpretentious style, picking from his life things he thought would be of interest to her, such as their mutual friend Tom Pitt's budding romance and what could be bought in local shops.

Her sense of the war, obtained in this way, was a hodgepodge of fragments not drawn together in her mind. There were peace talks going on, she knew, but they were stalled somehow; she didn't understand why. The war was expected to continue for an indefinite period, as she understood, for years maybe, while the U.S slowly withdrew its forces,—for some reason which she didn't understand, that's what they were trying to do instead of just giving up and leaving. Meanwhile, the fighting had actually increased, so far as her Jim was concerned, along the "trail" he wrote about (in her imagination, it was a trail going through the woods like an Indian trail, not a road as it actually was).

"I tell you one thing," she said with a charming flick of her hair, "he doesn't want to get captured... He said he would rather die! He said people get captured and nobody knows what happened to them. They just disappear!"

"Yes, I've heard that," O'Rourke responded, sitting down on a chair beside her. "They have these groups there that control vast areas of jungle... The Pathet Lao, the Khmer Rouge... They're not even the people we're fighting against, they're allies somehow. They're all Communists, I guess. And then they have governments but the governments aren't really in control..."

Ellen's eyes glazed over at that.

"Well, it just sounds like a big mess, as far as I'm concerned," she said. "I don't know why we ever got mixed up in it."

She stopped at that, thinking it was a comment somehow opposed to her husband's views. She was glad when O'Rourke got called out to the veranda, where Brandt and Steward were standing looking off toward the lights of downtown St. Paul on the other side of the river.

"God damn it, O'Rourke, get your ass over here!" Brandt was yelling. "Look at what a mess this river is in! I thought you had this thing under control!"

"What's wrong with it" O'Rourke answered, going through the double doors.

"There's fuckin' ice in it, man. Big blocks of ice coming down!"

"Well, what is Stewmeat doing standing here, doing nothing as usual?"

"I've been informing him, Rorkie."

"Steward, God damn it! Get down there with an oar and get that mess cleaned up!"

Ellen, watching from the table where O'Rourke had left her, saw that the party was taking a boyish, raucous turn. She went across to her sister who was sitting with her friends from college.

"I'm going to turn in," she said.

"Ah, come on, Ellen. Things are just starting."

"I can see that. I'll see you at home."

"We'll stop out there tomorrow."

"Okay, see you then."

From the boat club, Ellen Morris headed out into the Red Pinto that her husband had left behind when he went overseas. The engine turned over at once and she turned on the heat at once, also, not understanding that the engine was still too cold to have any heat to spare.

Her route took her across the one-lane bridge between the boat club island and the river front, below the concrete foundation of the bridge. From there she drove up and around the bridge and over it toward the St.

Paul downtown.

She didn't look below the bridge for another glimpse of the snow-covered roof of the boat club and the channel of dark water passing silently beside it.

In the downtown area, the sidewalks were deserted, except for at one bus stop where a shabbily dressed man in a stocking cap was hopping up and down and slapping his mittened hands together to keep warm.

Snow had begun to fall,—a delicate, sparkling snow beneath the street lights in the streets she remembered from her girlhood. But there was an emptiness in them, without him. Her mind was far away, sent ahead to the mysterious land where she would meet him again. Her insides churned at the thought of it, burning with the expectation of his physical entry inside her.

What was life without him? It was not life at all anymore. She could not go back to her former self, to the carefree girl who had flitted away from so many men unaffected. Why not admit to herself what she secretly knew? Her whole being yearned for him and would never rest anymore in anyone else.

120. Morris meets Ellen in Bangkok for a week of R&R

A windowless flight for a hundred miles in a KC-135 tanker gave Jim Morris an hour or so to collect his thoughts as he traveled to his reunion with Ellen. His thoughts for much of that time settled on her, but he gave some deliberation, also, to the recent loss, in combat, of another friend, "Bang" Bork, his fellow trainee at Nellis.

Of the foursome that had hung out together, –- composed of Morris, Bork, Marty Sardo, and Harvey Growe,—only Morris and Growe remained. Growe was stationed at Khorat.

Bork had gotten married just before he came over, in an unexpected development similar to Morris's own. He had left behind a widow 19 years old and six months pregnant.

Morris gave some passing thought to that situation, also. The child was bound to a future such as he had experienced himself, never seeing or knowing his biological father. He assumed that he and Ellen would have a child someday, but he didn't want to get her pregnant until he was home from his tour of duty.

Sunlight burst into the dark interior of the plane when the door swung open at the Royal Thai Air Force Base northeast of Bangkok. Beneath a blue sky, the hazy air hummed with the distant sound of jet engines.

That sound came from another, larger airfield beyond a chain-link fence, Morris observed as he emerged from the tanker, suitcase in hand. That was the international airfield where Ellie's plane would be arriving within an hour. Several planes there, painted in the red and white colors of a commercial line, waited at the takeoff runway. Beyond them, a plane with a blue fuselage and white wings rose above the waves of heat that radiated from the vast expanse of asphalt.

Morris felt strange dressed in civilian clothes. He was wearing tan pants and a blue polo shirt that Ellen had told him he looked good in. Even without the uniform, however, his neatly-clipped blond hair and something in the coolness of the blue eyes and firm set of the chin revealed him as the battle-tried soldier that he had become.

At the edge of the tarmac, he found a Thai cabdriver with a wide smile and a baseball hat on backwards in the American style.

"Airport there," Morris said, pointing.

In response the cabdriver grinned and sped off toward the arching, modern terminal about a mile away. There Thai flags and other national flags, including American, were flapping in a courtyard adorned with shrubs and flowers.

"You come back, go to town, hotel?" the driver asked.

"Yes," said Morris, taking out his wallet.

"I wait, you pay later," the driver replied.

Inside the terminal Morris found a scene far removed from the scene

he had gotten used to at Takhli. Men in business suits, and tourists in leisure outfits, moved about in an arching, sunlit space amidst flowers and plants. In passing he recognized a scattering of different languages—Thai, German, French, and Chinese, then English spoken with a British accent. There were no people in uniform. There were no political slogans, just an immense picture of the Thai royal couple, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, dressed in ceremonial clothes.

Here in this place where this ally country Thailand met the world, the war was far away, Morris thought. This government had no interest in depicting Thailand as a country at war.

He was among a group of others when Ellen's plane pulled up at the terminal and the passengers filed off. He picked her out immediately from the others when a head with chestnut hair, visible behind two businessmen in blue suits, appeared for a moment, bobbing up and down. When she tilted her head sideways to look between the blue suits, he saw her pretty face, flushed with excitement. She smiled and waved, and then, with a bounding, quickening step, threaded her way between the other passengers and into his arms.

She was dressed in a cheerful, flowered white skirt with a white, sleeveless blouse. She looked up at him joyously. Her green eyes were moist with emotion.

"Twenty-four hours later!" she said. "I hope I look okay!"

"You're the most beautiful sight I've seen since last July," he answered. And she was. She was the very picture of feminine beauty and grace, just as she had remained in his mind.

Outside the terminal, they found the same cab driver, waiting with a smile. He had obviously detected from the first that they would provide a long fare. He looked delighted to see the lovely passenger that he had gained, thinking that his other passenger would be in a good mood in her company and would give a good tip.

"Erawan Hotel," Morris said.

It was a hotel in the midst of the embassy area of the center city, where Morris knew there would be the security of an American and European presence. He had made the arrangements in advance, going over the details with fellow pilots who had been to Bangkok themselves. He had tried to avoid a situation that he thought might seem too alien to Ellen.

The area that he had chosen had modern, Western shops, he had been told, frequented by the moneyed class of Bangkok and western visitors who dressed in style. There were sleek, modern buildings amidst ornate temples called "wats" and quaint canals where boats men propelled long boats with poles as in the canals in Venice.

"Well, captain," Ellen said brightly, settling down beside him. "Now

you really are a captain!"

"Yes, I am."

"How have you been?"

"I've been well, very well" he replied in his strong, steady voice, "waiting for you."

It was their private joke, their proven means of reaffirming their bond, to hark back to that first evening together at the boat club when she had called him "captain." Even in the briefness of the exchange and respective tones of voice, it reestablished their manner of interacting with one another,—she emotional and prying, he the master of the situation, as she trusted him to be.

The two-lane road from the airport soon widened into a thoroughfare lined by teak trees with sprawling branches burdened with leaves. Luxury cars competed with trucks, buses, bicycles, motor scooters, and buffalo-drawn carts for the disorganized surface of the road, where apparently there were no such thing as "lanes."

Signs in English identified the road as "Wiphewit Rangeitt," Morris noticed. Just to the right of them, running in a parallel course, was a passenger train, apparently moving people back from the airport. Beyond that, visible between Oriental and western buildings, was a straight, narrow body of water on which Morris saw a flat-bottomed boat being propelled by a standing steersman with a long pole.

"Klong Phem Prachikorn," the driver said, seeing Morris looking in that direction. "Cah-nell."

"Ah, canal," acknowledged Morris with an absent nod.

He took some interest in that since he had planned a trip along the canal as a possible activity to do with Ellen, but his mind for the moment was focused on her. He found himself with a bewildering loss for words, though she seemed content to sit beside him, holding his hand.

The hands, soft and white in appearance, were carefully manicured; the nails painted a purple color like plums. The downy hair on her tanned forearms looked blonde in the sunlight. Her body, nestled against him, emitted a faint perfume.

"So you had a long time of it, coming over," he said.

"Oh, yes. I thought I would never get here!"

"What do you make of it?"

"Bangkok?"

"Yes."

"I feel like I'm in a movie. I never could have imagined... I never thought I would be in a place like this!"

He laughed. "Neither did I... with you."

They were approaching the center of the city, where the street was bordered with wrought-iron, ornamental lamps. Signs in English showed

the pervasive influence of the American presence. White stucco mansions with tile roofs in a European style stood alongside stone and marble temples with flame-shaped arches and spires.

Ellen, sensing that her husband was searching for something to say, took up the conversation herself, venturing into the area of his military duties, which she always found somewhat puzzling.

"Are you still going out every day?" she said to begin.

"Yes," he answered. "The same routine."

"Do you think it's doing any good?"

"Yes. In increments. It's the total effect of slowing them down."

"Along the trail."

"Yes."

That was the most she could think of to ask about it, with his brief responses opening up no new areas for discussion.

"And how are all your friends?" she continued.

"Oh, they're all just fine," he said. "They all ask about you."

"They do?"

"Oh, yes. Especially Tom Pitt. He thinks the world of you."

That led off in the direction he expected, to talk of the major's upcoming marriage, which he knew would be of more interest to her than the war. Bork's death, which she was not yet aware of, so far as he knew, had entered his mind for an instant as a possible item of news to pass on to her, but he had stopped short at that, not wanting to throw a pall of sadness on the first few hours of their reunion.

The Erawan Hotel turned out to be an elegant, four-story building with an ornamental façade. Across the street from it was a parklike area with a flower-line courtyard leading up to a Buddhist shrine. All along the street were hotels and ambassadorial mansions. Luxury cars lined the street on both sides.

At the desk inside, in the black marble lobby, Morris made careful arrangements, as he always did when Ellen was with him, selecting a room with a window that looked out to the shrine.

He checked out the view at once when entering the room, and turned around to find Ellen standing prettily beside the sumptuous bed, waiting to embrace him.

"What a wonderful place to spend New Year's eve!" she said. "It will be a wonderful year for both of us, Jim, I know!" She leaned closer and whispered in his ear. "And what a great way to start it. I've wanted you so much!"

The vast metropolis of Bangkok, with its odd clash of Eastern and Western cultures, faded into the distance then in Morris's mind. The room, with its prints of temple dancers and its drawn purple curtains, was a complete world in itself for the fulfillment of passion. It would have

been so, it would have been perfect, in any city for Morris and Ellen at this time.

Only later, with Ellen asleep inside, did the city beyond the hotel rise into Morris's consciousness again, as he stood on the balcony outside the room, watching smiling, laughing couples, dressed in elegant Western clothes, passing by on the street below. Beyond the stream of traffic, a monk in an orange robe, with hands cupped in prayer, placed a bouquet of flowers on the Buddhist shrine.

How strange that life should just go on, with such gaiety and self-absorption, Morris thought, when, not more than a few hundred miles away, soldiers like Bork were locked in life-and-death conflict! If the war was lost or won, would it matter here?

"The war means nothing here," Morris answered in his mind.

He had never entertained such a thought before, that the outcome of the war would be, in the end, inconsequential. He didn't like the feeling it gave him of being questioning and disloyal.

Shaking off that thought, he returned to the insulated room. Soon he fell asleep with Ellen nestled in his arms, her lips pressed against his cheek.

[Chapter 120-122 notes]

121. Morris and Ellen find romance in Bangkok, and "allies," also

The next day began for Jim and Ellen Morris as the previous evening had ended, in a whirl of passion. After making love, they remained in bed, hugging and talking.

The captain had an opportunity then to ask his pretty wife about the new job that she had mentioned in her recent letters. What he really wanted to know was just what this "costume" was that she was parading in before a roomful of people, most of whom, he assumed, were men.

He began with some general questions. Where was the job exactly? What kind of place was it exactly? What kind of entertainment did they have?

She replied with mostly one-sentence answers. It was downtown, on the Strip. It was a "very nice place." The entertainers were "big name acts" like Wayne Newton and Frank Sinatra.

"That's what I like about it," she said. "Hearing music, seeing people. There's so much more going on... Not to mention the money, Jim. I've been putting it away for when you get home." She understood, though, where his questions were leading. "But what you're really wondering is what I wear, aren't you?" she ended.

"What makes you think that?" he replied.

"Because I know you're private in your thoughts, private in your life. You want our life to be private... Isn't that true?"

"Yes."

He made no further comment as he had become aware, in the past few weeks, of having conflicted thoughts about this topic. He had made up his mind to be careful about what he said.

"And you do have reservations, I can tell," she ventured after she had gathered from his steady blue eyes that he would have nothing further to say on the subject unless prompted. "Well, I do have a picture... Do you want to see it?"

"Yes."

She reached down for her purse, beside the bed, and extracted a color photograph, which she held for him to see. The photo showed her in her costume, standing with a fellow worker. The costume was as he had expected, a playboy type thing with her lovely thighs exposed above red hose, a red choker on her elegant neck, and her shoulders and upper breasts naked.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I think you look beautiful."

"So you think it's all right?"

"It comes down to sense of decency," he answered, choosing his words carefully. "People have different senses of it. You and I have

different senses of it, apparently."

"Jim, if you want me to quit. I'll quit the first evening when I get back."

"What I want you to do, Ellen, is what you think is right."

He had thought in advance of that answer. He had determined that, in the end, it was the only thing he would be able to ask of her.

"What I want is to please you, Jim," she said, drawing closer to him. "I don't want to displease you in any way."

"I don't want to control you, Ellen. If it makes me feel jealous, that's something I'll work out myself."

"Well, I have to admit, I'm glad it makes you jealous, Jimmy," she answered softly, "but yours are the only eyes that will ever really see me, and I'm saving up the money for me and you, for when you get back."

That led to another round of lovemaking, with the conclusion being, as Morris understood, that there would be no change in her situation, that it had been all worked out. He was left wondering, though, as he and she headed out later, about the odd mix of independence and eagerness to please him that had characterized the whole interaction.

He encountered more of that as they walked the wide boulevards that led from the hotel to a destination about a half-mile away where they had been directed to go to arrange a boat trip on the Khlong San Sap, one of the city's picturesque canals.

Their route took them for several blocks along the teak-lined Thanon (Avenue) Ploenchit, where the blue and white flag of Finland, and the yellow and green flag of Brazil, fluttered in a gentle breeze before mansion-like embassies bordered by flowers, then to the left along Thanon Witthayu, past the British embassy, with its familiar Union Jack, and the Norwegian embassy, with its red and white flag, like that of Finland, a cross on a solid field.

Ellen, lovely as a flower herself in the shadowed morning light, told Morris then that she had been placed in an unfamiliar situation, back home alone, being no longer a single person, and yet not really part of a couple, either, since he wasn't there. Sometimes she felt ill at ease going out with young single women (of the kind that had been her friends before marriage), since often the attention turned to single men. With couples, she was the "odd man out." She didn't feel quite right.

"It's just a matter of adjusting, I suppose," she commented with a smile, "and, by the time I get adjusted, you'll be back home."

He made no response to that. He merely nodded as he took it in. He was impressed that, being now his wife, she no longer tried to put up an image of not needing him around.

"I guess I'm not quite the fun-fun girl I pretended to be," she said. "I mean, I like fun, all right, but you're the one I want to have fun with. I

miss you, Jim."

"I miss you, too, Ellen. You're always on my mind."

"Am I really?"

"Yes, all the time."

Beyond the embassies and hotels, they found the area they had been directed to, called River Khwar Village on an English language sign. With its huts made of bamboo and thatched straw, it was an odd contrast to the modern, Western-oriented scene through which they had just come. Tourists speaking a scattering of languages were lined up there, along a canal bank buttressed with logs, waiting to be led into one of several long boats that looked like the gondolas of Venice.

Near where Morris stood was a red "spirit house," a little temple on legs, such as he had seen in Takhli, also. A worker had paused there, hands folded in a face-high "wai," to offer a quiet prayer.

Elsewhere in the scene was little else of tranquility as tourists milled around talking and joking amidst handicraft stalls and outdoor restaurants with tables set up under canvas awnings.

At one such restaurant, where signs in English announced imported beers, the Morris's paused for a lunch of tea and "tom yom kum," a lemon-flavored shrimp soup, watching the interaction of shoppers and hawkers as money and goods changed hands.

Their boat ride, which began an hour later, after a half hour of waiting in line, took them into a world removed further still from the Western influences within the ancient city. Banyan trees, overhung with jasmine vines, provided a green canopy and tunnel of shade in which the modern buildings of the city were removed from view. Along the banks of the canal, nestled in trees, were thatch huts with bamboo enclosures for chickens and pigs. Barefoot children, some dressed in colorful T-shirts with American logos and designs, played in grassless yards, waving at tourists as they passed.

Even here, however, Capt. Morris found that consciousness of the war had filtered in. Two men seated in front of him, though speaking in German the whole time, pronounced terms he recognized: Pathet Lao, NLF, Chieu Hoi (the last was a name bandied around just in the past month for an Allied operation in South Vietnam aimed at convincing the Viet Cong soldiers to defect to the Western side). A Thai boy waving from one of the yards carried a toy gun.

Further up the canal, in a quiet area where rays of sunlight shone down through the leaves overhead, the boat paused at a floating market where vendors presented an array of peppers, melons, and oranges.

The air was hot and humid by this time, but Ellen looked cool and fresh in her white sleeveless blouse, with her chestnut hair falling in large curls around her moist, pretty face and bright green eyes.

She bought and peeled an orange and offered a slice of it to one of the Germans, who took it with a smile.

"Zank you, ma'am," said the German. "Vat bring you Bangkok?"

"Vacation," she replied in her pleasant voice. "My husband, Jim here, is a pilot, soldier."

With age her voice had gained a rich timber like that of her sister Mary's voice. It had a slightly different quality, though, a seductive huskiness that she herself was unaware of, and that her sister's voice lacked. This full-throated sound, arising sweetly from a female body that looked as ripe as a perfect gourd on a vine, had a visible effect on the German, who leaned closer, smiling.

"Ah, pilot!" he said, turning with a look of new interest to Capt. Morris. "American?"

"Yes."

"Air Force?"

"Yes."

"Ver station?"

"Takhli."

The exchange of nods all around brought in the second German, who, like the first, was thick throughout, in chest, stomach, legs, and arms. He had a jowled face and small, squinting eyes.

"Ve allies den," said the second German. "Ve sell to Thai army. Allies, yes?"

"Yes, Allies," Morris answered with an obliging smile, not asking the obvious question of what was being sold. He assumed guns. He was glad when the boat starting moving again, drawing attention back to the boat and canal. The German turned around at that point to face the direction in which the boat was traveling.

Further up the canal, there was a second stop, at another village-like cluster of thatch huts similar to the "River Kwar Village" from which they had started and the others like it that they had seen along their route. This "village," complete with stick fences, animals, and children, was located in an incongruous spot, about a hundred yards below the gleaming blue glass façade of a modern commercial building.

Here the tourists were let out of the boat to stretch their legs in close proximity to more handicraft stalls set up one side. Motor vehicles on a street just on the other side of the commercial building produced a background noise of motors and honking horns.

The Morris's strolled past the stalls looking at the T-shirts, post cards, pottery, portraits of the Thai king and queen, and other odd items being offered in the makeshift array of goods.

Near a stall at the outer edge of the market, Ellen's attention was drawn to a pretty, dark-haired girl, about 4 years of age, who was helping

her mother prepare corsages of lilies and blue bells. Ellen bent over the girl, smiling, and said, in English, “very nice” several times.

Morris, standing beside her, observed a maternal side of Ellen that he had never seen before. She was obviously a natural at relating to small children. The girl’s face lit up as Ellen talked to her.

The girl took a flower and handed it to Ellen, saying words in Thai that brought a quizzical expression to Ellen’s face. She opened her purse and said, “How much?”

“She no want money,” the girl’s mother said. “She say, gif’ for pretty lady. Gif’.”

“Oh!” replied Ellen. “Tell her, please, she’s pretty, too!”

The mother smiled at that and said some words in Thai that brought a bright smile to the girl’s face.

“How do you say, ‘Thank you very much’?” asked Ellen.

“Kob-kuhn mark.”

“Kob-kuhn mark,” said Ellen. “Kob-kuhn mark!”

Before leaving the village, Capt. Morris bought a corsage for Ellen to wear and said “sowahdee” to the mother, also. Returning in the boat, he admired the effect of the corsage on his lovely wife as she sat beside him in a thoughtful pose. He kept thinking about the maternal expression he had seen on Ellen’s face.

[Chapter 120-122 notes]

122. Morris spends an evening with intelligence officer Orin Brown

As Jim and Ellen Morris approached their hotel on the last evening of their vacation together (Saturday, January 4, 1969), they saw a young man of medium height, with a GI haircut, compactly built like a wrestler, coming toward them with an expectant gaze. He had the casual dress and free and easy manner of an American soldier on R&R.

"I've seen you pass by a few times," the young man said as he drew near. "Kept thinking I knew you from somewhere... Finally I figured it out."

"Yea, some kind of connection," Morris answered, looking at the young man more closely. "What is it anyhow?"

"Well, does the name 'Tom Steward" ring a bell?"

Ellen laughed at that. "Yes, it does, for both of us!"

"Well, your friend here --"

"My husband, I'm proud to say."

"Your husband whipped my roomie Tom Steward in a three mile race in Spokane."

"At Fairchild?" said Morris.

"Yes."

The three of them laughed together.

"Just barely beat him," said Morris.

"It was a good race, all right. I'll grant you that."

"And you were there on the field helping him," said the captain. "I remember now... Are you still in the Air Force?"

"Oh, yes. Let me introduce myself. My name is Orin Brown, in case you forgot it..."

A conversation ensued after that establishing that Orin Brown, now a first lieutenant assigned to the 467th Intelligence Group of the Seventh Air Force, was in Bangkok not on R&R but as his permanent assignment. He worked just a few blocks away in the American Embassy where he served as a liaison between the Air Force and a U.S. Army unit called Detachment K, a component of the Army's 500th Military Intelligence Group.

"Seems I remember a Morris who shot down a MiG a few months ago... was that you?" Brown ventured when the conversation lagged.

"Yes, I've been lucky," Morris replied.

"Well, that's impressive, Captain. I have to shake your hand on that."

They shook hands.

"Pretty damn impressive."

"Thank you very much."

Looks like you've done pretty well for yourself in the feminine domain, also."

"Been lucky there, too."

"Oh, don't believe him," Ellen threw in. "I'm the lucky one. I hunted him down!"

The banter ended in an offer by Brown to take the Morris's out for dinner or a drink.

Ellen politely refused, but encouraged her husband to go. She was glad for the prospect of having some time by herself to rest and pretty up for her final night with her husband.

"Well, I'll join you for a drink or two," the pilot said.

"You drink, I'll eat. I'm a Mormon, you know."

"Oh, yea? Can't resort to the bottle, huh?"

"Can't resort to much else, either."

The two men discussed where to go and decided on an area called Pat Pong, which was notorious as a red light area for American servicemen but also reputed to have excellent restaurants and cheap bars. Morris had avoided the area with Ellen, but he had heard about it back at the base and was curious to see it.

Brown said he went down to the Pat Pong about once a week to a restaurant there that had good American food. "Hamburgers, French fries, the good ol' greasy stuff," he said with a ready grin. "After a few months in Bangkok, the allure of fried grasshoppers begins to wane a little, if you know what I mean."

"I can imagine," said Morris. "I've heard about those."

"Haven't tried 'em, huh?"

"No, I draw the line at bugs."

About a block up the wide boulevard from where they had parted with Ellen, Morris and Brown found a taxi waiting in front of an international hotel. Soon they were speeding down the Thanon Ratchadamri toward the Pat Pong area, which was only about a mile away.

"I used to take the tuk-tuks when I first got here," said Brown, referring to the bicycle-pulled, two-passenger cabs common in Bangkok. "But that went the way of the grasshoppers, I guess."

"The American love affair with the automobile."

"Exactly, yes."

Their route through dense traffic took them past the well-groomed grounds of the Royal Bangkok Sports Club, with its mile-long horse-racing track and the immense stadium beyond, from which blue and yellow flags fluttered in the breeze.

Morris leaned back in the cab and looked off toward the scene with interest. Beyond the stadium was the ornate arch of a temple of some kind with palm trees swaying in the wind. He was glad to be away briefly from the intensity of his reunion with Ellen, though already he was

looking forward to getting back to her for their last round of making love, which he expected to be nothing less than spectacular, considering her ingenuity in adding spice to the common fare. He told himself he would look around in Pat Pong for a going-away present to surprise her with when he returned.

He was forgetting his host, though, he reminded himself, turning to his companion. “Well, Brown, what exactly is it you do anyhow?” he asked. “Intelligence is outside my sphere.”

“What do I do?” Brown answered with a barely audible laugh. “What I do is reports... I read reports. I write reports... Now and then I ask questions,—I ‘debrief’ them, if you will,—for my reports... Reports, reports... I do reports.”

“The object being?”

“The object being? The object being... Well, the first object is to monitor the Communist Party in Thailand. Thailand is a neutral country, on the face of it, but the party is very active, with many cadres who’ve been trained in China. These people represent a danger to our facilities, our bases, to people like you at Takhli.”

Morris took this in, without comment, as he looked out the window. They were passing the green expanse of Lumphini Park with its manicured lakes and corner statue of King Monkhutklao, Rama VI. The situation was so complex, Morris was thinking, there were so many diverse groups contending,—at a cost of life and death,—for control.

“China is a player here, that’s for sure,” Morris said. “I’ve heard that from others, too.”

“Oh, yes, a player, and a hard player to scrutinize,” Brown agreed heartily, nodding. He had the manner of a lover of history absorbed in an interesting discussion in an honors seminar in college. “That’s another part of my business,—another object, to use your term,—to figure out what’s going on in China. That’s the debriefing part I mentioned. We are talking to people continually, people who’ve been to China, people who are going to China and will tell us anything about it. Since the Cultural Revolution, there’ve been so many changes, power changing hands.”

“I haven’t followed it,” said Morris.

“Well, and that’s exactly the point!” Brown laughed. “What’s there to follow, with everything so veiled in secrecy! But some of these cadres coming back may have their second thoughts... about the revolution, that is, if the price is good enough.”

“They’re not too formidable, in other words,” Morris answered dryly. “What good to anyone are people like that?”

“Well, agreed, some of these people aren’t any good and are easy to buy. But, then, you’ve got your true believers,—people like you, for our side.—These true believers, on their side, are ready and willing to put

themselves on the line. Their principles are not for sale. These are the people that are biding their time, in my opinion, while we argue about table shapes in Paris."

"Table shapes, how's that?" Morris asked as the cab left the park behind and headed into an area bordered by a dense mish-mash of western and oriental buildings, some with blinking signs.

"You haven't followed that, either, I take it," Brown returned with another laugh. "Well, sir, in the past two weeks or so, that's the main thrust of the peace talks in Paris, believe it or not, what the shape of the table will be... Will it be round,—or 'four-sided,'—as the North Vietnamese want, with them and the Viet Cong seated as two separate entities at the table? Or will the table be divided in two somehow,—'two-sided,' as we want,—with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong seated on the same half of it? The implication being, they're part of the same political entity... which, of course, they are. All these groups are working together..."

"Yes, I know."

The taxi pulled up at a corner where a narrow street led off from the wide street on which they had been traveling. Looking up the street, Morris saw neon signs of restaurants and bars advertising in English above sidewalks crowded with American GIs, some of whom spilled out onto the roadway, mixing with traffic, as in a midway at a state fair.

Several dark-haired, dark-eyed prostitutes in satiny, mini-skirted outfits waited outside the cab as the two soldiers paid their fare and swung out to the sidewalk.

"How you like ass?" one of them said.

"No subtlety there," Morris observed.

"Not much allurement, either, from my perspective," Brown replied. "My religion won't allow it, and I'm scared to hell of disease."

The two men continued up the street, rubbing elbows with fellow Americans, to the restaurant that Brown had mentioned. Inside there were hamburgers and French fries, as Brown had said, but also young women, marked with numbers, who danced to American music in a smoke-filled bar on one side. They were dark-haired and pretty like the young women on the sidewalk, and danced as in a hypnotic trace. Some of them appeared to be barely in their teens. Several stood next to American GIs caressing them or sat on their laps like life-size dolls.

The numbers were for selection, to pick one of them out and take her to a private room, Morris observed. Just as he and Brown sat down, a GI at an adjacent table picked number 9, by raising his hand with gestures of five plus four. With a grin at his buddies seated with the same table, the GI went off with her to an area out of view where presumably there were private rooms. The girl looked like a young teen. She showed just the

first sign of puberty in her breasts and hips.

A second girl about the same age stood at another table close to Morris, licking the side of a GI's face and moving her lips open-mouthed down around his cheeks and neck. The GI talked with his buddies as if unaware of her presence. The girl looked dull-eyed as if under the influence of liquor or drugs.

"Getting back to our conversation of earlier, in the cab, whether these cadre types, these true believers, are anything to worry about... I have one main thought about that," Brown said as he ate his hamburger and fries. "I've read news articles lately, just saw one a couple of days ago in the *New York Times*, saying the Viet Cong are demoralized since the Tet, they don't engage in guerilla warfare anymore, they don't have the support in the villages, and so on... Well, personally, I don't think that's true. I don't think it's true in Vietnam or here."

"What do you think then?"

"I think these bastards, Viets or Laos or Thais, or whatever, are as busy as bees, as we say in Utah, and increasing their activity, while we Americans are decreasing ours, trying to find a way out... They are just biding their time, waiting for us to leave."

"And what then?"

"They complete the revolution. Or, at least, they try to."

"That's a dismal thought."

"You're goddam right, captain," Brown returned with the same note of intellectual interest as in a debate. "But that's where people like you come in, bombing the hell out of them in the corridor and Plain of Jars. If you can keep the cadres in a weak enough state, maybe the South Viets can pull it off, if they can conscript themselves a big enough army, maybe they can take over where we left off, maybe they can keep on piling on, keep on attacking en masse, as Abrams' been doing."

Morris tried to graciously accept these comments on the importance of what he was doing, but the comments fell flat somehow. He didn't like Brown's "history buff" interest in the war. He didn't like how Brown sat by eating hamburgers and fries while dull-eyed, barely teenaged girls licked the faces of battle-hardened men. It occurred to him that Brown had somehow gotten himself into a situation with respect to the war similar to his situation with respect to the sex trade, close enough to look, close enough to get the feel of the action, while not putting himself in jeopardy.

When another officer, a friend of Brown's, stopped by at the table and accepted Brown's invitation to sit down, Morris rose as he shook the officer's hand. "Sorry I'm going to have to miss out on your company this time around," he said. "Got my wife here in town with me. Got to back at her."

"Well, next time, then," said the officer.

"And thanks for the drinks, Orin."

"Thanks for your company."

As Morris turned to go, he saw that the GI who had selected the young girl earlier was just getting back to his table.

"How was it?" he heard another GI at the same table ask.

"Dee mak, man," the GI who had come back answered. "Dee fuckin' mak!"

Morris recognized those words, "dee mak," from Takhli. They meant "very good" and were often used to describe good food.

Outside the bar, Morris walked toward a waiting cab and passed a few bars where barkers out front competed for his attention. Glancing into one of them, he saw a central, stage-like area, bathed in red light, where a group of people, adults and children, were engaged in sexual acts with one another.

The place didn't lack for business, he noticed. A half dozen or so soldiers entered the door as his cab passed by. Several others emerged from the door, laughing. Close behind them, Morris saw the two Germans that had declared themselves as "allies" on the boat ride several days before.

[Chapter 120-122 notes]

123. Morris re-states his concern about leaving behind a fatherless child

As Capt. James Morris rode back to his hotel, looking out the cab window, his thoughts returned to his wife Ellen. He expected a pleasant evening of romance with her, but also he had concerns that he wanted to address before she left for home.

His first concern was to explain to her why he had mentioned, on their second day of vacation, that they had ought to be careful not to get her pregnant. Her response to that had been a serious look, as if to say she understood the importance of it. He assumed she understood, also, from past conversations, that the reason for his caution was because he didn't want to leave a kid behind without a father as he had been himself. But he wanted to reassure her that he hoped to have a child with her as soon as he returned, that he thought she would be an excellent mother. He hadn't talked to her at all about his friend "Bang" Bork's recent death and the pregnant widow Bork had left behind.

His second concern was to help her get back to the state of easy happiness that she had seemed to have before his departure for overseas. He didn't want her to languish, even if only for six months until he returned. He wanted her to thrive, with or without him.

He brought up the second concern first, back at the hotel, sitting with Ellen at a table set with candles, appetizers, and wine that she had prepared for the evening. On the table, also, was a miniature model of the Wat Sekat, a high, spired temple that he and she had climbed together the day before to get a final view of Bangkok. He had bought the model in the lobby of the hotel as a going-away present, having forgotten to buy a present in Pat Pong as he had resolved.

"Ellen, you know, you've always been such a happy girl," he said. "I want you to be happy. I just want you to know that. I want you to be happy when you get back home."

She laughed when he said that, her green eyes sparkling with cheer. For their last night together, she had worn a negligee that she had saved as a surprise. The negligee was of a see-through red material embroidered with white hearts. Her lovely, long legs and shoulders were bare. She had arranged her hair in an Empress style, with braids pulled back above her ears and tied with a red bow behind her head.

"I am happy," she replied, "because of you."

"Well, I just want you to know I'm glad for your job," he went on. I'm glad when you get around and spend time with other people."

"Thank you, sweetheart," she answered softly. "And I'm doing fine, really... I didn't mean to worry you... and I'll keep on doing fine until you get home."

He took a sip of wine, thinking he had taken care of that item, to the

extent he could at the present time.

"I was watching you on the boat ride, how gentle and sweet you were with that little girl," he continued. "I was thinking what a wonderful mother you'll make. I want you to know I'm looking forward to that when I get back home."

"I know you are, Jimmy. And so am I... I think you will be an excellent dad."

"The reason I'm hesitant now... oh, you know the reason..."

"Yes, because of what happened with you and your own dad. You don't want to repeat that... I know."

She was wondering, though, about something else; a fleeting thought had passed her through her mind. Had she taken her birth control pill the day before, as she always did? She knew she had taken a pill a few hours before, but the previous day had been a fog owing to the confusing change in time of day as she traveled half way around the world. Her inclination was to go at once to the bathroom to check the card of pills from which she extracted a pill each morning; but, with an inward sigh, she realized that even checking the card would not establish the case without doubt.

Morris, sensing something was amiss, watched the subtle changes in her face, not discerning the cause. He got up for a moment from the table to look out the window at the park across the street.

"I've been meaning to tell you," he said, coming back into the room. "You remember 'Bang' Bork?"

"Of course."

Ellen had recovered herself by that point, figuring it was no good to worry about her own state for the moment.

"He's dead. He went down."

"Oh, no! How sad!"

Jim Morris had not been sure, all through his and Ellen's vacation together, whether to bring up this news. Now he felt, instinctively, that he ought to,—in particular, the fact that Bork had left behind a pregnant widow,—to provide a further insight into his own hesitation about getting Ellen pregnant while he was still in combat.

Ellen was visibly affected when she heard about Bork's widow. She knew who the girl was, she said. She had talked to her a few times on the base, and had run into her once at a grocery store in town.

"I noticed that she was pregnant and asked her about it. She didn't hide it at all. She was wearing maternity clothes before she even needed to. She was proud of being pregnant."

"Bang was proud, too."

He told her more about the details of Bork's death, as he had heard of them. The pilot flying ahead of Bork had seen a flash in his rear view

mirror, and then Bork's plane had been gone. The assumption was the plane had been hit by a SAM. Bork had not even had time to send out a mayflower notice. There had been no rescue effort.

"Well, you be careful yourself," Ellen said with a kiss. "I want you back alive."

Their lovemaking that night was the most intense that each had ever experienced, despite their history of moments heightened by intermittent good-byes and long periods of separation. In the morning, the lovemaking resumed again, until the time came to get ready for the cab trip out to the airport.

Two hours later, at the airport, there was another farewell.

"I'm going to remember what you said," Ellen whispered, kissing him on each eye. "I'm going to be as happy as I can be, for you. And I'm going count the days until you get back home. Then we'll have such a fine life together! I just know we well, Jimmy."

He watched her as she walked to the ramp and turned around to blow him a kiss,—a lovely, graceful sight in a simple yellow dress with her hair slightly in disarray from pressing her head against his on the way to the airport. That was his final sight of her, as she stood at the door to the ramp with people passing by. She looked smaller than he remembered her, more vulnerable. Her face was plaintive and sad, though she was smiling.

He realized, looking at her, how much she loved him, how it hurt her to say goodbye despite her best effort to put a happy face on it, as he had asked her. There was a different quality to their farewells now that they were married, an expectation and longing so much greater and more intense than when they had been just lovers.

"Love you," he saw her lips say before she turned and disappeared from view.

Back at Takhli, his mind kept returning to Ellen as he stopped at the base exchange and picked up his mail. His usual package of newspapers from his mother, plus an empty hooch, when he returned to it, offered a respite for a while from his feelings of sadness at having parted from Ellen again. There was a letter from her, also, apparently sent before she left for Bangkok.

Orin Brown had been right in his depiction of the peace talks as being stalled over the issue of table shapes, Morris noted as he skimmed over the headlines of the previous two weeks in the *New York Times*. A headline for Monday, December 30, 1968 (the last date for which his mother had sent a paper), said: "Hanoi's Rejection of U.S. Proposals on Table Is Hinted."

The article described the face-off that Brown had referred to regarding whether the table shape would be "four-sided," as North

Vietnam wanted, implying that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were separate political entities, or "two-sided," as the allies wanted, implying that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were part of the same organization.

"If the United States sincerely desires to solve the Vietnamese problem in a peaceful way, we are ready to talk," Le was quoted as saying. "If, on the other hand, they want to go on with their aggression, the 30 million Vietnamese from the North to the South are determined to fight until total victory."

Morris also came upon the article that Orin Brown had referred to, describing the Viet Cong as being in a state of degraded ability due to heavy losses incurred in the Tet Offensive.

"The Viet Cong in the past offered advancement and self-respect to humble peasants with native intelligence and drive," the article said. "The willingness to promote by merit was a factor in the movement's excellent leadership. The leaders, in turn, inculcated impressive motivation and dedication."

As a result of Tet, the article continued, many of those dedicated leaders were gone. An American official who had lived through the attack on the U.S. Embassy was quoted as saying, "The 19 men who attacked the embassy never showed any indication of wanting to surrender. They were brave men. But they are dead now and you don't replace that kind of man easily."

The article continued in this vein, describing examples of the "poor planning, poor execution, and poor tactical leadership" that had followed from Tet.

There were also quotes of allied officials who claimed that popular support for the revolution had fallen to "as low as 15 percent" as the rebels had resorted increasingly to "harsh and 'unselective' terror and recruitment methods."

Morris wondered, though, to what extent Brown had been right in claiming that there were still many "true believer" cadres,—not just in Vietnam but throughout Indochina,—dedicated as those who had given their lives at Tet, and just biding their time until American forces left. He saw evidence of that in another article stating that North Vietnamese planners "were stressing post-war development." According to that article, the Hanoi correspondent of *L'Humanite* had reported that budgetary and economic planning "increasingly concentrates on the period after the victory, which will demand boldness and enterprise in all fields of industry and agriculture."

"After the victory!" Morris said to himself. "If that's how they're thinking, no doubt a bunch of them are digging in, waiting."

"True believers versus true believers," Morris observed, thinking

Brown had been right in calling him a “true believer” himself. ‘All the pilots are true believers,” he thought, “if you’re inclined to use that term.” Tom Pitt, for example, doing a second tour of duty. Who could be more of a true believer than that? What irked Morris, though, looking back, was that Brown had implied that true believers were, in effect, “saps,” willing to give up their lives when others were not.

Picking up his wife’s letter, with its graceful handwriting and perfume-scented paper, Morris found a welcome repose.

“Tomorrow I’ll fly half way around the world to see you, dear Jim,” Ellen Morris had written. “The reason is because you’re the whole world to me. You’re my husband. You’re my hero. You’re my darling pilot. You will always lead the way for me. I can’t wait to see you! I can’t wait for my hero to take me in his arms!”

On that note, the captain settled back on his bed while an image of his pretty wife arose in his mind before a backdrop of memories and images from his stay with her in Bangkok. There had been moments, Morris thought, when he and she had seemed so alone, so joined as one, in the midst of that sprawling city with its temples going back in time and its GIs on leave bringing to mind the present war in which he found himself a soldier. He wanted so much to be the hero Ellen took him for.

His thoughts returned to the hotel room, to the puzzling change that had occurred in her face when he had brought up the subject of not wanting to get her pregnant until he got home.

He would not let her down, Morris resolved in his mind. He would will himself through his remaining missions somehow, to make it back to her in one piece and give her the life they both wanted.

[Chapter 123 notes]

124. Matt and Mary start their new life in Washington D.C.

On Saturday, January 4, 1969, the day when Ellen Morris was flying back from Bangkok to Las Vegas, her sister, Mary Brandt, was standing on a sidewalk on R Street in Washington D.C., looking across the street at a red brick row house.

It was a Queen Anne style row house, of a type common in that city at that time, a narrow, four story building with one apartment on each floor, stacked on top of one another. The bottom apartment was about a third in height below street level, and it was not as wide as the other apartments because the exterior door of the building, led up to by three steps, was on the right side. The upper three apartments each had a double window on the left side, where there was a tower capped with a witch hat turret. Each double window had a cross-shaped sash. On the right side of the building, above the exterior door, were three single windows, one per apartment. On either side of the building were other row houses, not of the same style but plainer, though each appeared to be based on the same basic design of one apartment per floor. There was no walkway between the buildings. They were smack dab against one another.

"Well, what do you think?" Mary asked, looking at her husband.

"I think you could pack all of Lecher County in about four blocks."

"Be serious, Matthew! This is important."

"I like the big window."

"So do I."

They considered that in silence for a moment, peering down the street in both directions. The traffic on Connecticut Avenue could be seen about two blocks away in one direction. In the other, the street appeared to end about two blocks away at a stand of leafless trees. Other leafless trees,—tall, arching elms and lintels,—bordered the street on both sides. Here and there, snow could be seen, in the cracks in the sidewalk and in crannies of buildings that had missed the sweep of the shovel.

"I like that Connecticut Avenue is so close," Mary remarked. "It's such a cheerful street. It's got all kinds of shops. I was noticing when we driving up from downtown."

"And restaurants," said Matthew.

"Yes, that, too."

"Should we give it a look?"

"Yes, let's do."

After securing a key from the supervisor on the second floor, they went up to look at the available apartment. It was on the top floor. The stairs were in the middle of the building on the right side, down a long hall from the front door.

Matthew was the first up the steps with Mary several steps behind.

Following Matthew through the open door, she stopped to look around at the area revealed. Immediately inside the door was a large room with hardwood floors fronted by the double windows visible from the street. To the right of that was an appealing kitchen, partly divided from the first room by a waist-high counter, and well-illumined with natural light from the single window seen from the street. The kitchen had a refrigerator, stove, and sink, but was too small for a table.

"What do you think?" Matt inquired.

"Well, we would need a table by the big window."

"I kind of like that, looking out."

"So do I."

They went closer to the bay windows and stood looking out, arm in arm. On the other side of the street below was a Tudor style blue house with white trim and awnings. A single branch of a tall elm, broken out into several limbs, arched across the scene.

"I like the tree outside the window," said Mary.

"So do I."

"One more very important item."

"The bedroom."

"Let's go look."

A short hall led from the main room to the back of the apartment, giving the apartment a squared-off "C" shape (with the stairwell in the center of the "C").

First along the hall was a bathroom. It was small, but clean and cheerful, with yellow curtains and wallpaper with a green and blue floral pattern. The sink and shower faucets, when tested, emitted strong streams of water and showed no evidence of leaking.

At the end of the hall was the bedroom, which also had a hardwood floor. It had windows facing the side and back of the building. The side window looked out toward Connecticut Avenue, where people could be seen crossing the intersection. The back window looked out to a small parking lot, bordered by a brick wall, with pine branches hanging over from the yard beyond.

There was a boon for Mary, also, in the bedroom. A tiny, quaint study opened off the bedroom. It had a built-in desk and bookshelves, and a swing-out lamp with an embroidered shade. A half window looked out to a snowed over, terraced garden located behind the building, against the brick wall.

"That's yours, Mary. You don't need to ask," Matt offered.

"You can use it, too."

"It's yours, Mary. I know you need your little office."

Mary sighed. "Well, this place is just perfect, as far as I'm concerned!"

"You think it's a go, huh?"

"Yes, a definite go.

"Okay, I'll go tell the manager."

Matthew went downstairs immediately to the supervisor's apartment. He came back in a few minutes, saying that he had made the arrangements. They could move it at once.

"Well, isn't this something!" Mary said, giving her husband a hug. "Here we are living in D.C.!"

"Hey, and guess what, Mary?"

"What?"

"The sup said there's some furniture in the basement. Apparently, nobody lives down there. It's just kind of a warehouse of stuff that was left behind."

They went down to the basement and found—voila!—a table. It was a solid table, just the right side, made of blond varnished pinewood, and with four matching chairs.

They also found "director chairs" to set around in the living room and a coffee table with a blond varnish similar to the table; maybe they had all been part of a set.

"We can get padded chairs later," said Mary, "if we want to."

"I like these kind of chairs. You can move them around."

"Simplicity."

"Yea."

Within a half hour, they had the basic furniture set in place. They would sleep in their sleeping bags for the first few nights, they decided, laying some blankets under them that they had brought from Minnesota. Matt would, in the meanwhile, find materials to make a bed using cement blocks, plywood, and a piece of foam.

Next came the suitcases and cardboard boxes. The first box carried in to the new home contained the coffee maker. It was put to work at once. Next box contained Mary's dishes and silverware, her wedding present from her parents. Mary then busied herself putting up her kitchen wall hangings while Matthew trudged up and down the steps getting the remaining boxes and leftover items.

Another hour later, with the boxes all set in the appropriate rooms, they sat down for coffee together at their new table.

"We'll be done with all this by supper," Mary said.

"Want to go out to eat on Connecticut somewhere?"

"Yea, let's. I think I saw Chinese."

They had arrived in D.C. just three days before, staying in a motel out near the new beltway freeway. They had driven from Minnesota in their new vehicle, a blue 1964 Chevy wagon, a present from Matt's parents. They had already been around the city, taking in the big sights like the

White House and the monuments, they had driven past their new schools, but the neighborhood they had just settled in remained an unknown.

A light snow was falling when they headed out for supper. Along Connecticut, they found headlights and lights of shops and restaurants glowing against a cloudy twilight sky. It was a busy scene, with people passing back and forth along the snow-dusted sidewalks. They were of a wide range of types: some dressed in professional clothes, topcoats and suits; others, like themselves, dressed in the casual jeans and khakis of the counterculture. Others in foreign dress walked along conversing in foreign languages.

Three blocks down Connecticut, the Brandt's located the restaurant Mary had mentioned, which, they discovered, was called the Golden Dragon. Inside, with a candle flickering between them, they sat a table, looking out the window at the steady stream of traffic and people.

"You know, Matthew," said Mary, "I have to confess, when I first came to live with you in Kentucky, it seemed so remote. I missed scenes like this. I missed the city lights. Then I started getting used to the isolation and the darkness, you know, and I got to really love it. Now here we are, back in the city again. It's going to be different for while."

"Yes, it certain will," Matthew replied simply.

"It's going to take some adjustment the other way."

"Yes, it will."

"It's going to be a whole different world for us financially, also."

"$235 a month, though," Matt reflected. "That's not bad."

He was referring, she knew, to the rate they had agreed on for their new apartment.

"Not as bad as I thought," she replied. "When you consider the rooms are so big!"

"And then we have the little office."

They were rather well situated, actually, considering they had just come from a low-paying volunteer situation. Matt had received the standard termination allowance from VISTA: $300 for each month of service, $3600 in total. Tuition and partial living expenses, for him, would be paid for with three percent student loans. The loans would not have to be paid until he had completed his degree. Mary had received a full scholarship for her graduate work in nutrition, owing in part to her academic record in college, and in part to the Mountain Women cooperative that she had started with Hattie Beecher in Kentucky,.

By the time they left the restaurant to walk up Connecticut Avenue, night had descended, the snow was falling harder with big, airy flakes that melted on their faces. At Dupont Circle, they paused to marvel at the fountain, then they hiked up Massachusetts Avenue hand in hand, looking at the 19th century mansions, many of which had been converted

into embassies and other official buildings. The sidewalk by the mansions was covered with a thin cover of new snow, marked with just a few footprints from the street into the houses.

Reaching their new street, R Street, they turned to the left, away from their apartment, wanting to prolong the moment. To their surprise, they found themselves, within a few blocks, looking off a bridge toward a city park they hadn't known about, Rock Creek.

"This park is huge!" Matt said, looking at a roadside map. "It goes along this creek through the whole city, all the way from the Potomac!"

"It's beautiful!" Mary replied.

Though it was January, when everything would have been frozen back in Minnesota, the water was free of ice, bubbling in a dark torrent over jagged rocks as it rushed under the bridge below them.

"Matthew, remember how I used to always ask you what you were thinking?" said Mary.

"Yes, I do. Very well."

"I'd like to ask you that now, because I think I know."

"If you know, tell me then."

"You are thinking about a bridge."

"Yes, that's true."

"Another bridge in snow."

"Yes, that's true."

"Only this other bridge is much higher above the water."

"Yes, that's true."

"And the water is much wider."

"Yes."

"Almost exactly a year ago."

"Is that when it was?"

"Well, think about it, it was right after New Year."

"Yes, it was."

They both knew by then, for sure, that Mary was referring to the bridge at the University of Minnesota, between the west and east banks of the campus, where they had talked about whether to get married and had decided to go ahead.

"You ever feel sorry we did it?" Mary asked.

"Got married? No... How about you?"

"No," she said. "I'm glad."

They started walking back to their apartment, hand in hand. Mary, with a black scarf around her dark hair and her face pink with cold, looked like a pretty peasant girl out for a walk in the woods.

"I worry, though, at times," she said softly, "how we'll fare here, each going off to different worlds. Oh, not different worlds, exactly, but different spheres of activity. You're so inclined to keep things in, and I

know you get weary sometimes of all my theories and speculation."

"I like you for what you are," he responded, throwing his arm around her. "I like how you think."

"Thank you," she replied.

"And I just think this is going to be an exciting time."

"So do I."

They walked a little ways again, along the snowy sidewalk where the only tracks were theirs.

"You know, I was thinking, we can go for walks down in that part sometimes, maybe have breakfast down there, build a fire."

"I'd like that."

"Little bit of Kentucky."

"Yes."

125. Brandt discovers history and "strangeness" in his new urban world

Two days later, on Monday, January 6, 1969, Matthew Brandt left for his first day at Whitney Pratt School, feeling that he was at a transition point in his life.

There were two main aspects of this transition, as he conceived it in his own mind. The first aspect was changing over from his former study area of political science, which he thought of as tied up in words, to his new area of audio visual studies, which he thought of as being more "hands on," and which he thought of, also, as being a door through which he would advance in the study and application of photography. The second aspect was switching from his rural experience as a Mountain Volunteer in Appalachia to a new experience that was, by design, an encounter with urban life and problems.

He was aware of the transition in just this way because his devoted wife Mary had drawn out the sense and scope of it in long conversations on the road during their trips back to Minnesota for the holidays and then to their new home in Washington D.C.

Brandt was also aware, at this transition, of the extent to which he had evolved, since his college days, toward a deliberate acceptance of counterculture attitudes and dress, having at this time jagged, long hair and a bushy goatee, both dark brown in color, and wearing always clothes of a type that signaled his loyalties (on this particular day, jeans and an Army jacket). At the same time, he was aware of having retained a strain of suspicion with regard to the high-flung language that the counterculture often spawned. That had been a conscious factor in his choosing practical learning over a return to academic subjects.

Wanting to make the most of the day as an introduction to his new city, Brandt decided to walk the three or so miles to his new school. His walk took him across R Street to New Hampshire Avenue, up New Hampshire to U Street, and across U Street through a neighborhood he had heard referred to as "U Street Shaw." Whitney Pratt was located just beyond that, in the vicinity of Howard University.

Brandt had driven through the U Street Shaw neighborhood with Mary, to get a sense of where his new school was, just after arriving in D.C. a few days before. It was an inner city black neighborhood such as he had heard about in VISTA training, but had never directly experienced. It was also a neighborhood that he had heard compared to Harlem, both in the range of problems found and in the sense of being a cultural center for American blacks.

An article he had received from Whitney Pratt had touched briefly on that, listing some of the famous blacks who had lived in the area, including writer Langston Hughes, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood

Marshall, and a host of famous jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughn, and Pearl Bailey.

The same article had noted that the neighborhood had been the scene of race riots in summer 1967 and just eight months before, in April 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King.

This background information was on Brandt's mind as he walked up U Street, but none of the extremes he had read about were apparent, either on the cultural side or on the side of social problems. What he saw instead were black working people bundled up in jackets and coats against the early morning chill. They waited at bus stops or walked along sidewalks still shaded by the long shadows of buildings. Many wore uniforms of service workers: maids, waitresses, bus drivers, janitors, or store clerks. Some women wore office style clothing, with short skirts revealing long, shapely legs. Men dressed in blue jeans or tan or blue work pants carried lunch pails and thermos bottles.

Posters and announcements of various kinds, on telephone poles and buildings, provided a glimpse of a world of concerns beyond those of the workplace, however. How to apply for welfare payments was the subject of one poster on a boarded up storefront defaced by graffiti, including the scrawled words, "Black power." Another poster invited inquiry into Malcolm X and his Islamic "Black Nation." "Islam has words of wisdom for modern times," the poster said.

Most of these items, Brandt vaguely registered in passing, without giving them further thought, but one poster, in particular, commanded his attention. It was a large, commercially printed poster featuring Muhammad Ali, the black heavyweight champion whose boxing title had been stripped from him because of his refusal to be inducted into the Army. The poster showed the famous photograph of Ali with both arms raised after defeating Floyd Patterson, the previous champion, in the first round. "The Vietnam War According to Ali:" the poster said. "White Men Sending Black Men to Kill Yellow Men." Below the picture, in smaller letters, was a message: "Ali said 'No.' You can say 'No' too."

Brandt was aware that Muhammad Ali (whom he still thought of in his own mind by his pre-Islamic name, Cassius Clay) had refused induction and had incurred complications because of it. He had never been aware, though, of the extent to which resistance to the war had been associated with more general black issues. He glanced in the barber shop, expecting to see some radical types with afros and African clothing. But the barber on duty was a middle-aged, neatly appearing man with gray hair. He was in the midst of telling a joke, pointing an index finger at another man with a similar conservative appearance.

Reaching the so-called "14th Street Corridor," the main drag where the riots of recent years had taken place (according to the article sent out

by Whitney Pratt), Brandt saw evidence of damage lingering still in boarded up storefronts defaced with graffiti. Here the scrawled letters were more hostile in character: “Power to the people!” “Kill the Pigs!” “Revolution Now!”

Two blocks further, with a bright sun suddenly appearing above the intersection at 12th Street, Brandt turned an interested gaze on the YMCA hotel, which he had heard had served as a residence and community center for many black notables and community leaders. In his mind, he framed the sight as in a photograph, wondering how Walker Evans would have framed it to provide an objective view.

As if in direct response to the advent of sunlight, the energy and social interaction of the street intensified, Brandt noticed, displaying a wider variety of types. He watched as three men, wearing black berets such as he associated with the militant Black Panther Party, emerged from an apartment building and crossed the street in front of him, conversing loudly in street slang. One of them met his eyes with a sullen look of assessment.

Just a few blocks beyond that, the scene changed drastically again as Brandt found himself in the periphery of the Howard University campus, with the brick edifice of the university hospital coming into view as he left U. St., at its convergence with Florida Avenue, and continued south along Florida to 7th St. Here black men and women in the white coats of medical professionals waited at a stoplight to cross toward the hospital, while others in collegiate dress passed by talking or laughing or with an absent gaze of intellectual preoccupation.

Leaving that scene behind, Brandt continued for another four blocks down 7th Street to the Whitney Pratt School, which was headquartered near the corner of 7th and P. St. in an immense, Romanesque-style house with massive, white limestone facades and round arches. The house was a former Masonic Lodge, Brandt had heard. Adjoining it was a rectangular, red brick building that had belonged to the same lodge. It provided a meeting hall large enough for the school’s 326 students and several basement rooms used for classes.

Brandt ascended the castle-like steps to the stone-pillared front room of the house, stopping there at a receptionist desk just long enough to be directed out again and through an alley to the “assembly hall,” as it was called, which was located directly behind the house. The alley led between the house and a brick office building.

Coming out at the back end of the alley, Brandt got a first glimpse of a scene that would become quite familiar. The alley opened to a paved parking lot filled with cars. Beyond the parking lot was a street on which traffic streamed steadily past. Across the street, there was a red brick church, of which only part could be seen, including the front door and a

bell tower hung with a three-striped banner in the colors, green, white, and brown (generally accepted as representing African heritage, Brandt knew). Several buildings up from the church, there was a storefront community center of some kind, with painted messages and posters on the windows and kids hanging around outside the door. There were kids at the far side of the parking lot, also, playing basketball on an outdoor court next to a large billboard sign with a "Marlboro man" cigarette ad. The kids were mostly black, but there were a few white faces among them.

Closer to Brandt, about 30 feet out from the alley, the corner of the Whitney Pratt assembly hall jutted out onto the black top. A door was open there and students could be seen within, milling around amidst rows of folding chairs.

A bearded man, dressed in collegiate tweeds and propped up on one crutch, greeted Brandt as he entered the door. He was obviously in some official capacity, although he appeared to be about the same age as the others in the hall.

"New student, I take it," he said.

"Yes," Brandt replied.

"What's your name, sir?"

"Matthew Brandt."

"Well, I am delighted, indeed, to meet you, Matthew Brandt. My name is Darren Houghten. I'm the director of seminars here at this school,—or so I am fondly called,—and a few other unofficial duties."

"Glad to meet you, also."

"Where precisely do you hail from, Matthew?"

"Minnesota, by way of Kentucky."

"Is that right? And how is that, if I might inquire?"

"Year and a half with the Mountain Volunteers."

"Is that right? Well, I have heard of them, most certainly. That must have been through the VISTA program."

"Yes, it was."

"Well, allow me to introduce you to another ex-VISTA right there," said the bearded man, pointing to a neatly dressed, dark-haired, youth with dark-framed glasses standing about ten feet away. "Mark Holmgren!"

"Yes."

"Meet a man of like sympathies, a fellow volunteer, Matthew Brandt!"

So it went, with Brandt thus speedily placed in with a group of his peers. As it turned out, not only Mark Holmgren but three others standing with him had been VISTAs, having served together in New York City, in the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

There was enough there in common to ease along the conversation for the few minutes that intervened before the students began filing into the folding chairs for the presentation of the morning.

Several people, in turn, then addressed the students from the open area in front of the chairs. One of them was Darren Houghten, the bearded man on crutches who had welcomed Brandt at the door. He stood on the stage, with his jagged shoulder-length hair and jagged hair, of a like brown color, looking like a Shakespearean character, a Hamlet or Prince Hal, delivering a soliloquy.

"You will all be seeing more of me, I expect," he said, "and I hope it is with good expectations, always as I bring you various seminars. I'm also a second-year student in political science. But I'm afraid I'm not so good at studying as I am at curiosity.

"What are these seminars, you may be wondering. Well, think of it this way, they are an attempt to introduce this community—meaning you, meaning me, meaning many of our faculty members, also,—to the many aspects of this great technical and cultural revolution in which we find ourselves living. To give you an example, last year we had a seminar on Timothy Leary and his experiments with LSD,—not with the object of converting anyone to drugs, mind you, but with the object, as in all our seminars, of understanding one facet of our culture on its own terms."

Other speakers described other details of student life, including payment of fees, parking privileges in the parking lot next to the hall, and location of classes. About half of the classes were held in the old Masonic lodge and assembly hall; the rest were held in various locations throughout the city, in keeping with the school's professed mission of providing a real-world learning environment.

Last person to speak was a thin, refined-looking, middle-aged man with a big voice, introduced as Dr. Tyler Moy, the school president. He delivered the expected welcoming remarks, displaying a capacity for witty asides and an active, emotional imagination. He then went into some detail regarding the unique opportunities that attending school in the nation's capitol provided.

"You've probably already seen the monuments of this great city," he remarked, "monuments to Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, our great founding fathers and national leaders. And you've seen neighborhoods like this one, splendid in their political and cultural history, while, at the same time, beset with the real problems of our modern era: most basically, poverty and racism; and then, arising from that deplorable foundation: inadequate housing, prostitution, and crime; drug trafficking, drug addiction, and gang warfare; the list goes on, ending in the familiar result of broken people and broken families.

"You would see something further, however, if you could see through

the walls of the official buildings all around you. You would see the machinations of a great nation involved in our treasured heritage of self-government. You would see, as well, the byzantine arrangements that, unfortunately, go with this process.

"Just this past week, in the United States Senate, for example, as some of you are doubtless aware, a struggle ensued for the whip position in the Democratic party, the current majority party that will provide the 'loyal opposition' to the soon-to-be-inaugurated new president, Richard Nixon. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Russell Long of Louisiana, as many of you know, were the two senators involved in this struggle. Long, the standing whip, was defeated. Think about that for a moment: Long, a conservative as Democrats go, successor of the Dixiecrat line, apologist for the Vietnam War; Kennedy, a liberal, surviving brother of two of our most famous liberal leaders, successor, you could argue, of a tradition going back to William Lloyd Garrison and the Liberator press, critic of the war; and these two men engaged in a struggle, mind you, not for Mike Mansfield's majority leader position, but for a second place position, a position of more subtle influence. What conservative bills, or maybe just conservative items within bills, will be impeded by Kennedy's exercise of power, to the extent the position gives it? What liberal bills or items will thereby move forward? On this miniscule level, the tiny grains of policy coalesce into our granite laws.

"Consider, also, I wish I could convey this to you,—perhaps, it is best for me simply to render it in terms of my own experience,—what a wonder it is to live in this nation, in this city, at this instant in history. The experience I had of this myself was when I first arrived here for my present position, about a year and a half ago, and was coming into town in a cab from Dulles. It was late on a summer evening with the red and orange light of sunset falling on the buildings and monuments, falling as I once saw it falling, remembered it falling, out West somewhere, on one of those landscapes you run across out there, of monumental rock, and, seeing that, I had a sense—I wish I could describe it better!—of having arrived from outer space into a classical city like ancient Rome or like some Mayan or Aztec city. I saw it for that moment as what it is, the capitol city of a great civilization, the greatest ever on the face of the earth, but as if frozen in time. It was an astounding sight, truly, to see this city in that mode of perception,—or conception, if you will. I felt like a 'stranger in a strange land,' as Heinlein says.

"That's the mode of mentality I would like to leave you with today, for trying on, the mode of strangeness, the mode of waking up and seeing these wonders around you with uninitiated eyes."

This thought was on Brandt's mind, hours later, as he sat on a bus going home. The bus led downtown, only a few blocks from the White

House, with the national mall and monuments coming in and out of view between the more mundane shapes of regular buildings. The scene was, by chance, just then, bathed in red and orange light such as Dr. Moy had talked about, with street lights and lights of passing traffic glowing amidst the frenetic movement of the rush hour.

Sirens wailed then as a formation of motorcycles with blinking red lights appeared a few blocks up the street. The stream of traffic came to a halt. People on the sidewalks stopped to watch. The motorcade rushed past, revealing a black limousine amidst the phalanx of motorcycles. The limousine was carrying an important person, apparently, a leader of the people, akin to an ancient chief, in a city that seemed for a moment ancient in its strangeness.

[Chapter 125 notes]

126. Mary begins her graduate program in nutrition and community health

Mary Brandt soon began her graduate study, also, two days later, at Georgetown University.

The program she was enrolled in was called the "Graduate Program in Nutrition and Community Health." It was a two-year M.S. program involving studies in chemistry, biology, anatomy, human behavior, community health, and public policy. The program also included seminars comparing different political models for delivering health services and food, with a prospect there of delving into some hotly contested issues of the day, such as the proper role of government in underwriting access to health care and food. The program was administered by the Graduate School of the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Georgetown was about two and a half miles southeast of the Brandt's new apartment on R Street. As a commute, it was an easy shot, down Florida Avenue and 23rd Street to M Street, then due west across M Street to the campus area bordering the Potomac River, just north of the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Mary found a parking place in that area, near 36th and Prospect, on her first day of school. With registration materials in hand, she walked two blocks north to O Street, and followed O Street one block west to the campus mall. From there, she could see the Healy Building, with its tall, medieval-looking clock tower. Beyond that, visible above the tiled roof of the Healing Building, was the red brick bell tower of the Dahlgren Chapel. It was a scene that reminded her at once that she had entered an academic world similar to what she had left behind at the Catholic college where she had obtained her baccalaureate degree.

"Well, here I am, a student again!" she thought to herself as she crossed the snow-covered mall, searching on her campus map for the Ryan Administration Building, her first destination.

It did seem odd, she continued in her mind. So much had intervened since her previous college experience. Marriage. Knowledge of the passions and inner workings of a man. Then the whole experience in Kentucky. Life among people so different from what she had known before. Hattie Beecher. Fletcher Bourne. People not educated, formally, but without a doubt smart, and wise. She had met no people like that in the tiny academic world of her college in St. Paul.

This new world of Georgetown was a far cry from her former academic world, however, Mary observed. There was a wider range of types,—people of every color, some speaking foreign languages, people of different ages,—and most of them were men.

Of more than 8000 students, in fact, only about 900 were women, Mary had heard. All of them were in graduate school or in special

schools like Nursing. Georgetown College, the liberal arts undergraduate school, was still composed of all men, though there were plans, she had heard, for women to be admitted the coming fall.

Mary noticed, also, that the campus was politicized compared to the campus she had attended in college. Men with long hair and facial hair, the accepted sign of the counterculture, were everywhere to be seen, in faculty offices as well as on the sidewalk. Posters on bulletin boards called for action against the war.

One display, occupying an entire side of a hexagonal kiosk used for posting student news, bore the title: 1968, A Year of Confrontation. The display was a collage of newspaper clipping from the previous year showing student demonstrations at various campuses. A poster on another side of the same kiosk encouraged students to "insist on a student government that truly represents the current student population. The Yard once represented Georgetown in its totality, but in this day of conflict, we need a student government that is willing to confront the status quo. That government is the East Campus Student Union."

Mary had educated herself enough in Georgetown history to know that "the Yard" was the traditional student organization. By a convention going back to 1879, it was composed of one representative from each major team and student organization. She also knew that the East Campus, located just north of the national mall, and site of many programs in government and political science, was a hotbed of radical activity.

In the Ryan Building, Mary lined up to pay some fees and noticed another poster inviting new women students to the women's center on the fourth floor. Finding herself with an hour free before her first activity, an orientation session in another building, she climbed eight flights of stairs to have a look at it.

The center was a large room adjoining a smaller room that appeared to be used for counseling. A southeastward-facing window afforded a view of the Key Bridge.

No one else was present at the moment. Seeing a bulletin board with information posted on it, Mary went over to look. There were notices of various meetings of different groups of women. There was also a list of women writers including Betty Friedan and Simone De Beauvoir.

"Well, how you are faring in this man's world?" said a voice from behind her.

Mary turned around and saw a neatly attired, professional-looking woman standing at the door to the office. Apparently, she had been inside. She was about 35 years of age with shoulder length blonde hair.

"All right, so far," Mary replied in her pleasant voice.

"You're a new student?"

"Yes, a new grad student. In Nutrition."

"What's your name?"

"Mary Brandt."

"Well, I'm pleased to meet you. My name is Joy Kasberg. I'm the administrator of this program."

"Pleased to meet you, also."

"Welcome to Georgetown."

"Thank you."

A brief silence intervened as no further topic arose.

"It's a beautiful view of the bridge," said Mary.

"Yes, it is. I enjoy it myself often."

"Well, as you can see," said Joy Kasberg, "we have support groups that we organize. Some are social, some are to study feminist ideas."

"Yes, I did see that. I was looking at the list of writers."

"Are you familiar with them?"

"Just on the surface."

"Well, if you ever want to go deeper into it, or if you'd like to join up with a group, we'd love to have you. Or just come up and relax. Enjoy the view."

"Well, thank you so much. I may take you up on that, sometime."

"Nice to meet you, Mary."

"Nice to meet you, also."

Mary continued on to her orientation, where for the first time she saw a full assembly of her fellow students in Nutrition. They were all women. Most of them appeared to be in their 20's and 30's. They had the well-groomed appearance of hospital workers. Many were dressed in jeans, as Mary was herself. Some were quite dressed up, Mary observed, in trim slacks or dresses.

The presentation of several speakers included welcoming remarks and information that Mary was already aware of concerning the objectives and content of the curriculum, sites of classes, and so on. There were also details on the "clerkships," as they were called, which brought students out into neighborhoods for study experiences at schools, hospitals, day care centers, and other sites outside of campus.

"A limited number of two-month fellowships are also available," one presenter said, "some in the United States, some overseas. This year we had a fellowship on an Athabaskan reservation in Alaska, set up through the Indian Health Service. We had fellowships in Sweden, China, and Cuba, studying the health and food delivery systems in those countries. These fellowships are competitive, by the way. They are generally funded by extra-campus organizations such as Women for Peace."

Mary drove back up M Street late that afternoon content that she had started an exciting new time in her life. She liked the campus. She liked

her schedule and prospective course of study. She was glad for the emphasis placed on the hard learning of the sciences (biology, chemistry, and so on). The clerkships and fellowships were especially intriguing. She wanted to advance quickly from her present initiate status to a status of understanding the world in real terms.

Arriving home, at the red brick row house on R Street, she looked in the mail box, not expecting to find anything there. She had given her new address only to her parents, by telephone on Saturday evening, three days before. To her surprise, the mailbox contained a letter addressed in the unmistakable elegant handwriting of her sister, Ellen.

Mary carried the letter upstairs without opening it. She swung open the door to see the table at the big windows set with a display of brown oak leaves, rust-colored cattails, and orange berries from a mountain ash, that she and Matthew had gathered the day before at Rock Creek. With the letter on the counter beside her, she cooked a pot of chamomile tea in her newly decorated kitchen. Then she sat down with a cup of tea by the big windows to read the letter.

"Dearest big sister," the letter began, "I called home Sunday and heard about your new apartment. What a lovely place it sounds like! Are you reading this there? I got your address from Mom, so decided to write right away.

"Well, as you know, Mary, I just got back from Bangkok, and what a wonderful time we had, my Jim and I, we're so in love, and, since getting married, have had so little time together, as you know."

Details followed about Ellen's four days in Bangkok: the hotel on the square, the temples, the canals, the sweet little boy who had sold her flowers. They were happy details, for the most part, but the letter ended on a troubled note.

"One more little thing happened, Mary, I just have to tell someone. Of all things, after having a long discussion with Jim about waiting for a child until he returns, I think, in all the excitement, you know, I went and made love without taking the pill. I wasn't sure at first but now I'm almost sure, I'm about 99 percent sure, I forgot. And it's only 48 hours since then, really, but I can just <u>feel</u> that something is different. Maybe it's just my imagination. Maybe part of me wants it. But if it did happen, a pregnancy, what would I do?

"It's not that he wouldn't accept it, if I tell him. Of course, he would accept it. Maybe he would even be happy about it. It's just that if, Gods forbid, something would happen to him, then his child would be left behind without a father, as he was himself, and he has told me so many times he doesn't want that to happen.

"Mary, I'm just glad I've got you there at a distance to tell my thoughts to. That's the weird thing about me, I've got so many friends,

supposedly, but the only one I can really bare my heart to is you.

"Write me soon, Mary, just to say hello. Yours ever, your little sister, El."

On finishing the letter, Mary rose with moist eyes from the table, feeling as though in deep thought but no words came to her mind. She made herself another cup of tea and went over to the table again to read the letter a second time.

Outside the big windows, the striated clouds in the sky beyond the leafless elm had taken on sunset colors, she noticed. The lights were on in the roughhouses on the other side of the street, throwing a soft yellow glow on the snow-covered boulevard.

Already she was starting to compose a letter in her mind. It began with the words, "Dearest Ellen, I can understand why you're troubled. I just think, I just feel so sure, that everything will work out okay, with or without a pregnancy."

Somewhere later in the letter, she thought, the words would appear, "You say you need a friend, you consider me a friend as well as a sister. Well, I am that friend, Ellen. I always will be, I hope. We have gone on different paths, yet we are both young, newly married women, we have so much in common, so much to share."

With the outdoor light waning, she returned to the kitchen, turned on the light, and walked down the short hall to the bedroom. For a moment, she stood watching the traffic pass on Connecticut Avenue a block away, then she went over to her office niche, turned on the lamp with the embroidered shade, and sat down at her desk.

She had already arranged her books and notebooks there, in shelves above the desk, with her mail from various people sorted neatly by person and time. In addition to her parents and Ellen, she kept in contact with about a dozen people, including Hattie Beecher, Fletcher Bourne, Bumper Bourne, Dennis Kelly, and the other former MVs from Kentucky, and Tom Steward, Bill O'Rourke, and Barbara Carpenter from Minnesota. Her letters to Barbara Carpenter and Bumper Bourne now went to Vietnam. She had sent them both cookies for Christmas.

So much was changing, she thought with a sigh, and how harsh life was in separating good friends from one another!

She completed the letter to Ellen before Matthew arrived home and walked with him to Connecticut Avenue to mail it at once.

127. Steward and O'Rourke with backpacks hit the road for Chicago

On Friday, January 11, 1969, six days after Jim Morris said goodbye to Ellen in Bangkok, six days after Matt and Mary Brandt started their new life in Washington D.C., another event took place, in St. Paul, Minnesota, bringing transitions of a different kind to two other members of the old Minnesota gang. Early that day, just after sunrise, Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke, with packs on their backs, headed out to the highway for their second trip to Chicago. From there, they would go on to California, for both of them, the first time.

Morning headlines on the same day told of the joint session of the U.S. Congress held to honor the Apollo 8 astronauts who had just completed the first manned flight around the moon. Steward, bundled up against the cold in a blue hooded sweatshirt and olive drab Army jacket, read those headlines enroute, at a newspaper box in Madison, Wisconsin.

A photo on the front page there of the *Madison State Journal* showed Col. Frank Borman of the Air Force with his left hand raised as he and his colleagues, Capt. James Lovell Jr. of the Navy, and Lieut. Col. William Anders of the Air Force, acknowledged a standing ovation. Behind them, clapping, were Speaker of the House John McCormack and President of the Senate Hubert Humphrey (soon to be replaced in that office by the Vice President Elect, Spiro Agnew).

Next to the photo, in a box by itself, was a quote attributed to the outgoing president, Lyndon Baines Johnson: "If there is an ultimate truth to be learned from this historic event, it may be this: there are few social, scientific, or political problems which cannot be solved by men if they truly want to solve them together."

Steward thought of that quote as the day's journey continued down the wide, new corridors of the I-94 interstate highway, which was still under construction at that time. Cars and trucks streaming past in both directions provided a different scene than the two-lane highways, lined with billboards and signs, that Steward remembered traveling on as a boy with his parents. That era of limited travel was fading fast, he thought to himself, giving way to a new technology that seemed to have its own inner drive for completion.

In Beloit, Wisconsin, at a spired-hip-style rest stop, with a timber and stone veneer,—as sparkling fresh in appearance as the new highway,—Steward found a discarded newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, with another report on the Apollo 8 commander's remarks to Congress. "In a few years, I believe, we will have an international community of exploration and research on the moon," Col. Borman was quoted as saying, "much the way we have now in Antarctica. I'm convinced that it is no longer whether we'll do these things, it's how long it will take and how much

we'll spend."

The paper also contained excerpts of Borman's responses in a press conference held at the State Department. Among other topics, he had been asked how such "heavy funding" for the moon program could be justified "when such unfortunate situations exist on earth."

"There's no question in anyone's mind that we have serious problems on the earth and in this country," the colonel had replied. "I'm not sure you'll solve them all by neglecting the quest for knowledge that we're undertaking, and I'm not the one that makes the decisions as to how many funds or how much monies will be spent and where. I hope that the next Administration will carefully consider not only the technical and the scientific value of this program but also the value that it has to the spirit of the community."

The phrase "spirit of the community" led Steward off for a moment to his own unsuccessful effort at "community development" in his adopted community of Dulatown during his Vista service. The notion that the entire country was a "community" was an interesting twist. He had noted that the astronauts had been impressed with the "oneness" of the earth from their vantage point of the moon. They had thought of making that the theme of their televised remarks from lunar orbit, as the Apollo commander had remarked, but they had settled on the first ten verses of Genesis as being, in Borman's words, "so appropriate and so simple."

The only part of all this that Steward conveyed to his traveling partner, O'Rourke, was that one of the astronauts had commented on how far off the "cold, black and white" moon seemed from its romantic conception in poetry and song. That brought a subtle change to the former coxswain's blue eyes as he recalled a moonlit walk with Barbara Carpenter along the riverbank just upriver from the boat club—his last meeting with her, two days after their chance meeting in Chicago.

He had managed to see Carpenter in person just once to exchange Christmas presents with her. After completing the nurses' program in early December, she had passed the state board and had received her R.N. license. Close upon that, she had been commissioned as a second lieutenant and for orientation in the Army Nurse Corps had reported to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. In his backpack, O'Rourke had a packet of her letters of the past half year, held together with a rubber band. The last letter told of her arrival in Texas.

"Well, in just a few weeks, I will find out where I've been deployed," she wrote. "Then it will be the real thing. For the first time in my life, I feel useful, I feel needed. I feel like I'm where I belong. If you do wind up coming over here, Bill, if we wind up seeing one another (I hope we do!), I'll tell you more. I can't possibly write it all down."

Never once did she mention the complication of what would be the

difference in rank between her and him. She had apparently gotten some information about that, but none that she mentioned to him.

O'Rourke was surer than ever by this time that his long-anticipated entry into the Army medical corps would actually happen. In his backpack, also, he had his first official information concerning his basic training, due to start in four months, on Monday, April 14. After spending more than two years deciding what to do about the draft and then making his decision and then waiting for it to take effect, he was glad to be locked into a definite schedule.

He had followed the progress of the peace talks and war activities enough to know that the peace talks were proceeding slowly and that the war activity was down. Nevertheless, he had read that 123 Americans had been killed the previous week. "Lowest count since 1965," the article had noted, but that was still a large number, in his estimation. He almost wished that some aspect of the war would continue legitimately until he got over there and had a chance to be of service. All accounts he had read suggested that, even assuming progress in the peace talks, the war would continue for at least another year or two as American troops were gradually withdrawn.

Like Steward, O'Rourke had come to the journey prepared for a day of standing in a raw winter wind. But, over the course of the day, with "lady fuck," as he called it, bringing one ride after another with hardly any exposure to the cold, he had shed the clothes in pieces, packing away first his wool and leather choppers, then his red stocking cap, then his wool sweater of the same color.

By late afternoon, with the sun high in its southern arc and reflected from the snow with the brilliance of spring, he had rolled up his flannel sleeves with a sense of disappointment at not being dealt a harsher test.

The test, if any, came in Chicago, where the two travelers arrived after a last ride dropped them directly in Rogers Park south of the Loyola campus where Patrick lived. By then it was early evening with a strong wind blowing down the Granville street shops they remembered from their previous visit. This time, as they marched grimly past the storefronts, there were no gazes of approval. At a bus stop on one corner, a student with a scarf over his nose and mouth jumped up and down, clapping his mittens together to keep warm.

"Billy Boy, you made it fast!" Patrick exclaimed when he let them in with a firm handshake for Steward and a hug for his brother. "Didn't get to sleep outside at ten below!"

"Might get that yet," the younger brother replied.

The older O'Rourke had changed in appearance. He no longer had his 50s-style "duckback" haircut. He had let his reddish-brown locks grow out into a frizzy mass of curls that reached below his shoulders and

fanned out from his face on both sides. His facial hair had evolved from the neatly trimmed beard of the previous summer to a tangled full growth.

"When I got hit on the head in that demonstration, it did something to me," Pat O'Rourke explained as they entered the familiar main room of the apartment with its huge stereo speakers, counterculture posters, and large pillows on the floor around a coffee table piled with books.

"It made your hair grow?"

"No, it made my mind grow."

In conversation, the older O'Rourke displayed a similar turn toward a more extreme position on culture and politics. He said he had become involved in a group pressing for changes in the local Catholic Church.

"There's a big issue going on now," he said, standing in the living room as his younger brother, without taking off his coat, continued into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator.

"Oh, beer!" the younger brother exclaimed.

"Help yourself. Lunchmeat and bread, if you want it."

"Got any chips?"

"In the cupboard, Billy. Has it been that long?"

"So what's the big issue?" the younger brother said, coming back with chips and a beer.

Steward, invited to help himself, came in behind him with a beer and hastily assembled sandwich. He sat down on the floor, his face in a reflective pose.

The "big issue," Patrick explained, had to with a poor parish, St. Dorothy's, in an all-black neighborhood in South Chicago. The white pastor had died, leaving behind as heir apparent a black assistant pastor. But that priest, known for his militant activities citywide, had been passed over. Instead of him, the head of the diocese, John Cardinal Cody, had appointed another black priest with moderate views.

"It doesn't matter what institution it is," Patrick said. "You have an entrenched power structure that, instinctively almost, will try to push back change. The only way to get it is by pushing back... from the bottom, from the rank and file."

Bill O'Rourke, the former coxswain, himself still new to this kind of talk, had observed with interest over the months as his brother, once a defensive linebacker on a high school football team, then a "greaser" kid in college, had undergone this transformation to become a "politico" who discussed philosophy and smoked pot.

"And that's what you're doing?" the younger brother said.

"Yes, standing there with the others, in front of the church, if that's what it comes down to."

That led into another long spiel about the Catholic Church and its

“racist policies” in various dioceses such as in Newark, New Jersey. In Newark, the ex-greaser said, 20 priests calling themselves the “Inner City Priests United” had sent a letter to the other priests in the diocese, accusing the archbishop of ignoring urgent requests for church programs and changes in leadership in poor neighborhoods.

The younger brother’s eyes glossed over as the details came forth. “Well, one thing to say for you,” he remarked when his sibling looked at him for a response, “you sure are goddam informed.”

Patrick O’Rourke, by this time, was getting tired of his own expounding, also. He reached into a Mexican type straw basket in the center of the coffee table and pulled out a plastic bag.

“God some grass, too,” he said.

“Roll one up, Patricko.”

“You see the super bowl yesterday?”

“Oh, yes.”

“The Giants were fantastic. Namath was fantastic. Playing with that bloodied face.”

“He’s one tough guy.”

“You got that right, Billy.”

Steward, tired also, had not participated in the conversation thus far, and he excused himself from the rest of it when the brothers settled into their boyhood pattern of talking sports.

Steward continued into the back storage room where he had slept on his previous visit to the apartment. Without bothering to turn on the light, with enough light coming in from the city lights outside, he knelt down there on one knee to untie his sleeping bag from the top of his backpack.

The darkness and kneeling position evoked a passing memory of his boyhood days at the Catholic parish where he had gone to grade school. On many weekday mornings, he had served at the six o’clock mass, kneeling in a dark church lit only by candle light at a service attended usually by only the handful of people who came every day. He had been a pious boy then who took religion seriously and he continued to do so.

Though not offering any comments himself, he had listened to the details regarding the black priest. He was not surprised that the cardinal in Chicago and the archbishop in Newark (both, he had heard, old men) had acted to defend the status quo. Fourteen years in Catholic schools had not inspired him with admiration for the commanding officers of his boyhood church. Only in areas where the church met face to face the humblest of its practitioners had he observed charity and zeal such as he had been told to expect in men of God.

Rising from his sleeping bag, he looked outside and saw the moon, just an irregular piece of it behind a ragged cloud.

That was the same moon the astronauts had circled,—for the first

time in the history of mankind, he reminded himself,—but the moon, from this urban perspective, looked contained and weighted down, insignificant almost, amidst the myriad, human-made lights of buildings, traffic, and neon signs.

[Chapter 127 notes]

128. Steward and O'Rourke depart from Chicago headed for Las Vegas

Chicago and the moon, in its old and new conceptions, were far from the minds of Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke as they embarked on the second part of their trip, from Chicago to California, on Tuesday, January 14, 1969. Their minds were on a vision they could not quite see, and on a quest for knowledge they could not quite obtain, and that was all the excitement.

The vision they could not quite see was of themselves in the future as more fulfilled noble men. The knowledge they could not quite obtain was the substance and secret of their vast country, America, that seemed so torn by conflicts and contradictions.

The sun, not the moon, greeted them on that day, joyous behind the concrete pillars of a bridge as they stood in a parking lot surrounded by a chain-link fence. It shone with a light such as early mornings sometimes have, clean and uncontained. There was an open road ahead of them leading to places they had never seen.

A human face greeted them, also, in that same lot, the first of the hundreds of faces they would encounter on their trip. It was a grim face, leathery and old, and intent on the business of pushing cars.

"You put in the gas. You get it to Vegas by next Monday. Six days. That is your part of the bargain. Our part is pure and simple, this car, period. Good for you. Good for us. You got any questions?"

"Any chance we could get seven days?" O'Rourke asked. "We sure would appreciate another day to look around."

"Six days."

"Is everything in good order?"

"Mister, if the car is not in good order, the car does not go out of the lot."

"Well, we'll take good care of it."

"You don't, you pay."

There was just one more detail: "Jack and spare in the trunk. Keep on the good roads, and you won't have to use them." O'Rourke looked at the rear tires on hearing that, and noticed that one of them was worn. But his mind was leading where he and Steward soon went: out of the lot, down two blocks to an onramp, then speeding down the sleek, new freeway that led toward their first major milestone, St. Louis, Missouri.

By noon they were already there, crossing the Mississippi River on the concrete-span I-40 bridge, completed the previous year, as they looked off to the south to a vestige of a different era, the immense MacArthur Bridge with its three spans of wrought iron, each a half mile long, and its upper deck 14 stories above the river.

Cars and trucks streamed across there, through the long shadows of

the trusses. On the lower deck, used for railway transport, four diesels in tandem pulled a line of boxcars extending the full width of the river. Far below, a tugboat, with water churning from its rear starboard side, labored between the massive stone piers as it pushed its eight barges toward a southwest bend of the river shimmering with light.

The two bridges, a half-century apart in construction and design, yet both so astounding in their dominance of materials of great weight and size, presented just the first of the many juxtapositions that Steward and O'Rourke would see. Another greeted them on the other side of the freeway, to the north, where the 630-foot-tall, stainless steel Gateway Arch, bold and modern in appearance, and completed just four years before, in 1965, rose up before a backdrop of downtown buildings, some of old-fashioned brick and stone, others sporting the polished metal and glass panels that had come into vogue in that decade.

Steward wanted to stop on the river front to take a closer look at the arch, but O'Rourke insisted on keeping on.

"What I'd like to do, Stewie, is just blast on through," he said in his persuasive voice. "If we blast it today, we can have a day or two out west. There's not going to be a hell of a lot of time, if you think about it. Fucker wouldn't give us an extra day!"

Steward had heard that persuasive voice many times from his number five position in a racing shell. It was O'Rourke's coxswain voice, filed away for the most part, but brought back into service whenever O'Rourke wanted to achieve a desired end with his old rowing friends.

Soon they found their progress slowed, however, when the freeway ended abruptly on the other side of the river. Signs led them down to a boulevard along the river, then along an urban route through wooded neighborhoods with neatly-tended houses and corner stores where the freeway corridor had not been completed.

There they saw another juxtaposition, this one familiar, of people their own age confronting a bastion of the older generation. In a snow-covered lot with several idle bulldozers parked nearby, a small group of 20 or 30 young people stood with picket signs, their breath vaporizing in the cold air. Their signs called for community action to stop the freeway corridor from being cleared.

"Question Authority!" one sign said.

The freeway continued again after about ten miles of city streets, and then, throughout the rest of the day, stretches of freeway (the new I-44) alternated with other "under construction" areas where signs directed traffic back to the old two-lane roadway of U.S. Route 66 that was being relegated to the past.

Along the stretches of new freeway, the two former team-mates found sparkling gas stations with four or more islands, each with two or

three pumps. Truck stops with vast parking lots provided resting places for the thousands of truckers moving cargo down the smooth concrete roads. Along the stretches of old Route 66, they found nostalgia-laden scenes: brick and wood-frame houses (each subtle in its uniqueness); stores and other places of business; courthouses, churches, and schools; playgrounds and parks; and, in the midst of them all, human actions: the child in mittens and scarf running from the school step to the car where his smiling mother held open the door; the old man unsteady on his cane, his wife holding his arm, as they approached an icy sidewalk; the teenage girls in their pretty coats with fur collars, walking so dignified; the boys on the edge of the garage rooftop, getting up their courage to jump down; the people walking or standing alone with absent, lonely eyes.

Early the next morning, with O'Rourke still "blasting" west, they reached what he declared to be their first sight of it, as they rounded a bend past a stand of leafless cottonwood trees with long, jagged shadows projected over snow and rocks.

They were just entering the northeast corner of Oklahoma at that time, about 25 miles southwest of Joplin, Missouri. The view there, from the higher elevation of the Ozark Plateau, was of the wide, green valley of the Arkansas River, extending southwest toward Tulsa, with the inlets and bays of the Lake of the Cherokees just below them to the south. Beyond that, to the southeast, were the pine-covered ridges and limestone bluffs of the Ozark Mountains. On the south and west, far in the distance, were the low purple hills beyond the Arkansas river. The converging lines of the new interstate extended in that direction, toward the distant point where the interstate bent out of sight. For the first time on their trip, they saw a spring-like landscape without snow. A moist wind carrying a scent of soil and vegetation wafted through the open windows of the car. Little towns,—clusters of buildings, each with a water tower, sharply edged by the long shadows of early morning,—floated in the mist amid stands of leafless trees and rolling, harrowed fields. From one such town, miles ahead, a single plume of gray smoke rose straight up from a single smoke stack and then bent in a parallel course along the horizon, a long, narrow cloud in an otherwise cloudless blue sky. It was a sunlit scene resplendent with promise, a scene where every direction led somewhere unknown.

"Now this is country that at one time belonged completely to the Indians," said O'Rourke. "I read that back there in that little town we stopped in. Exclusively to the Indians. They routed them here from God damn everywhere, from places like Georgia, even."

Steward had nothing to say in response to that, immediately. He had been repeating a phrase in his head, "The West was opening up again, as he had seen it once before." He didn't know where he had heard that,

whether in a book or song, or poem, but it seemed to express what he felt at the moment, a feeling of opening up to a landscape of grand design.

The saga of the Indians came back again the next day, however, when Steward and O'Rourke stopped at a wayside store dubbed the "Indian Trading Post" in Moriarity, New Mexico. There, amidst tables piled with moccasins, cowboy hats and boots, turquoise jewelry, pottery, woven rugs, and various curios of the Old West, was a display with a photo of the Apache leader, Geronimo. Tacked on the wall next to the photo was a typed article that the young travelers found of interest. It was entitled, "Geronimo's Surrender—Skeleton Canyon, 1886," by James W. Hurst.

"On May 17, 1885," the article began, "Mangus (son of Mangus Colorado), Chihuahua, Nachite, old Nana, the shaman Geronimo, and their followers fled the San Carlos reservation in Arizona in an attempt to regain the freedom they had known before the reservation system was instituted by the United States government. The restrictions of reservation life were difficult for these semi-nomads, and they longed for the openness of the land the Spaniards had called Apacheria. Although the Chiracahuas could not have foreseen it, this was to be their last attempt to recapture the old ways that many of their cousins had already forsaken."

"The 'renegades,' or 'hostiles,' as they were called, consisted of 35 men, eight boys, and 101 women and children," the article continued. "They would occupy the attention of 5000 troops, 500 Indian auxiliaries, and an unknown number of civilians. In an area roughly the size of Illinois and comprising some of the roughest desert and mountain terrain in North America, they maintained themselves for 16 months. In that time they killed 75 citizens of the United States, 12 White Mountain Apaches, two commissioned officers, eight soldiers of the regular Army, and an unknown number of Mexicans. The Apaches lost six men, two boys, two women, and one child."

Water, said the article, was what eventually brought the Apaches to defeat. With soldiers stationed and waiting at all the water holes in the dry region, the Apaches had been unable to obtain the basic requirement of life. Constantly pursued in both the United States and Mexico, they had given up hope of ever regaining their former freedom.

Next to the first article about Geronimo's surrender was another about the shaman's life after surrender. Along with others in his band, he had been sent to a prison in Florida, and had become enough of a celebrity there that the local townsfolk had refused to allow him to be sent to a more secure island prison, considering him a tourist draw too valuable to be lost. A photo showed Geronimo riding on a horse in Teddy Roosevelt's Inaugural Parade in 1912.

In those displays regarding the last Indian to defy the arrival of the

settlers, Steward and O'Rourke saw another odd juxtaposition of their culture: Geronimo, the defiant warrior, side by side with Geronimo, the co-opted; Geronimo, who had promised never to allow his people to be assimilated, side by side with the Geronimo of the Inaugural Parade, Geronimo the tourist attraction.

The next day brought a similar mix. All along the highway were tourist attractions. Not only Geronimo, but also the Spanish Missions, the Santa Fe Trail, the trek of the Okies to California during the Depression era "Dust Bowl," and even the creatures of the region, like coyotes and reptiles, all were present as the subject matter of sideshows along the highway. Meanwhile, beyond the blacktop surface of the road, scenes of the real West extended many miles into the distance: cowboys herding cattle through open ranges of mesquite and sage, Indians in traditional dress, Indian adobe villages, Mexican neighborhoods where dark-haired children ran along dusty streets beside the dual railroad tracks that extended westward with the highway.

Oddest place of all was the town of Gallup, New Mexico, which the two former teammates reached near sunset, in a steady rain, on Friday, the fourth day of their trip. There the old highway, railroad tracks, and new interstate (at that time just a flat clearing about a hundred yards wide on the other side of the tracks) all ran side by side through the center of town amidst rubble-like piles of brown and red rock. Similar items were on display as had been on display in the "Indian Trading Post" of the day before, but in a bleaker setting of drab brick store fronts lined up along one side of the highway, which was also the main street of town. Indians, dressed like cowboys in cowboy hats, cowboy boots, embroidered shirts, and jeans, huddled in doorways or alleys, passing bottles of liquor back and forth in brown paper bags. Among them, here and there, were Indians lying in doorways and alleys as if knocked out from over-indulgence. They were Navajos, apparently, judging by the numerous signs advertising Navajo jewelry, leatherwork, and rugs. Bar-windowed pawn shops and Indian families crammed into pickup trucks completed the scene.

Outside of town, Steward and O'Rourke encountered one such family when they stopped to take a pee behind a rock and noticed a pickup truck stuck in the mud about a quarter mile away. They drove over the railroad tracks to help, and discovered that these were Indians indeed, who spoke to one another in an Indian language.

"We help push, we help push," O'Rourke called out, making a pushing motion with his hands, when the language barrier was discovered.

Steward and O'Rourke threw themselves against the back gate of the truck with the man and boy who were already there pushing in the

flailing mud. A woman in the cab, with a little girl standing on the seat beside her, revved up the motor whenever the man shouted.

A half dozen or so good pushes wrested the truck free.

The man, without smiling, raised his right hand. He said a few strange-sounding, heavily aspirated words to his son.

The son, who was about 10 or 11, looked at them and said, “My father says, thank you.”

Without further ado, the Indians were gone.

No sooner had the Indians left, however, when Steward and O’Rourke confronted a problem of their own. Returning to their car, they found the rear tire flat. The spare tire in the trunk was also flat.

They were rolling the tire into town, about two miles away, when the Indians pulled up in their truck. “My father says, we take you to town,” said the boy from the passenger window.

Steward and O’Rourke rode with the tire in the back of the truck to a service station in town where the Indians insisted on waiting until the tire was fixed. An hour or so later, Steward and O’Rourke, with the Indian father and son still with them, lowered the drive-away car from the jack and observed that the repaired tire looked fine.

“Please tell your father, we say thank you” said O’Rourke.

With that communicated, the Indian father raised his hand again and said “Good luck.” For the first time in their encounter, he smiled, but ever so slightly with closed lips.

By nightfall Steward and O’Rourke were on the road again, speeding across the broad mesa toward the next town, Flagstaff, where they planned to spend the night. Due to their fast progress, they would have a day at the Grand Canyon before delivering the car to Las Vegas.

They turned on the car radio then, and soon radio waves transmitted through the dark expanses all around them brought back the other world of America,—the world of the war, ten thousand miles away, the world of confrontations at home between representatives of the government and people of their own generation.

The two young men were left each to his own thoughts, with the country they had hoped to understand seeming ever more complex and elusive of understanding.

They were thinking of the Indian father, too, the nobility of a man who took and gave help as needed, and who held himself in reserve, first just raising his hand, then, on further contact, smiling slightly. There was a lesson in that to be pieced into their growing vision of their own future selves.

“You know something about that Indian,” said O’Rourke, summing it up, “when he smiled, he meant it.”

129. Steward and O'Rourke hear competing views as they enter California

Three days later, Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke, with their packs on their backs, headed out from Las Vegas, Nevada, bound for Pasadena, California. Per their original plan, worked out months before, they would meet up in Pasadena with the Rev. Mark Chambers, O'Rourke's friend from Georgia, and would stay with him a few days while the young minister arranged their volunteer jobs with migrant workers.

For O'Rourke the volunteer stint had no more importance than being, in his estimation, a good use of his time. In his mind a clock was ticking down to his scheduled entry date into the U.S. Army—April 14, less than three months away. For Steward there was an added importance related t his expectation that he would be working as a union "organizer," not just as a volunteer. Along with his decision to appeal his CO claim to the state draft board, he saw this organizer role as representing a more "radical" commitment to social change. He wanted to be pulled from such a role, not just waiting passively, if forced, by rejection of his appeal, to refuse induction and go to prison.

Steward and O'Rourke's planned route for the day would take them 120 miles southwest along the new interstate highway I-15 to join up with another new interstate, I-40, in Barstow, California. From Barstow, they would have another 165 miles to hitch into Pasadena.

Arriving at the onramp to I-15, just outside of Las Vegas, the two travelers got a sense of what the day would bring. Ahead of them, to the south, was a brown and red valley rimmed with jagged hills and extending toward a curved horizon where dreamlike shapes of mountains floated in a dim haze.

Behind them, a couple of miles in the distance, were the downtown buildings of Las Vegas. The neon signs of the Strip were still lit there, relieved against a dawn sky. The sun was just rising, but only an oblong, glowing red part of it could be seen between a bank of gray clouds and a darker gray silhouette of mountains.

Steward and O'Rourke had spent an uncomfortable night lying outside in their sleeping bags on rocky ground. They had gotten up early to bring the night to an end. They had thought of staying in a cheap motel, but had foregone that to save money. Between them, they only had about $250.

They had considered calling up Ellen Morris, whom they assumed was living in Las Vegas somewhere. But, in the phone book, they had found no "James" or "Jim" Morris, no "Ellen" or "Ellie," only several names with the first initial E. They had given up at that, not wanting to use their spare change guessing at the right number.

A flight of four fighter jets, leaving long, white trails in the pink sky,

reminded them of Jim Morris just as they arrived at the onramp. Neither of them had seen or heard from him for more than a year.

"When I'm in Vietnam, if I go there," said O'Rourke, "I'm going to try to look Morris up. I don't know what the situation will be, you know, but I'm sure as hell gonna try."

That was all they said about their old friend as each lapsed into private thought. O'Rourke thought about Vietnam, how it really would be. Steward thought about his CO statement and whether he had done right to submit it. He thought also about what he would do if imprisoned or in the unlikely situation of having his CO appeal approved by his state board. His biggest hope was to be accepted by the American Friends for the war-zone truck driving job in Biafra that he had applied for in Philadelphia with the American Friends. He told himself again that, if he got accepted to that, it would prove he had hadn't applied as a conscientious objector out of fear of being in a war zone.

Within a half hour, he and O'Rourke had secured their first ride of the day with a balding, amiable man of about 55 who described himself as a real estate salesman.

"You boys look out there, and you think 'desert,' maybe," he said, pointing to the flat country around them as they sped down the clean, new freeway. "I look out there, you know what I think?"

"No, what?" O'Rourke returned with a look of genuine interest.

Out of his sense of hitchhiker ethic, the former coxswain engaged almost every driver in this manner. There was not much effort in it, for his curious, young mind.

"Real estate! That's what I think," the salesman replied, warming up to the interest. "'Cuz there's only thing that makes that stuff in town real estate, compared to this, and that's good ol' H_2O! You pipe some water in there, you got real estate, son. That's a fact."

"And there's water to be had?" asked O'Rourke.

"Right over there behind Hoover Dam! Enough water there to make a lot of desert into real estate, let me tell you... You know how tall that damn is."

"No, I don't."

"726 feet!"

"That's pretty tall."

"Base of that damn is 300 yards thick, of concrete."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Lake behind it is 115 miles long, 500 feet deep, couple miles wide. Hell of a lot of water, son."

"God damn, yes."

The energetic talk continued in this way, through mile upon mile of the vast open county, with O'Rourke saying he'd hate to see the desert go

away and the salesman replying, with a hearty laugh, not to worry about that, there was enough desert left to last a thousand years.

"Tell you what I really think," the salesman continued with a more thoughtful expression. "I think, if you look at it, the whole history of mankind,—of us,—is this spectacular history of applying organization to the material world. To me, that's the genius of creation, that the stuff of the earth can be worked up like that, like clay, and molded! That's what we people do, we organize the earth."

He said that he expected that one day, far in the future, the whole world would be organized.

"Every single square inch," he declared, "and the world will be better off on account of it! People will learn in the process till they get everything right."

Turning on the radio later, the travelers learned what none of them had been aware of—it was Inauguration Day in Washington D.C. Richard Milhous Nixon had just become the 43rd president of the United States.

Excerpts of Nixon's speech, carried over the air waves, sounded a similar note to that sounded by the Apollo 8 astronauts in the comments Steward had happened upon in Madison, Wisconsin, on the first day of his and O'Rourke's trip.

"As the Apollo astronauts flew over the moon's gray surface on Christmas Eve," Nixon was heard saying, "they spoke to us of the beauty of earth, and in that voice so clear across the lunar distance, we heard them invoke God's blessing on its goodness... In that moment of surpassing technological triumph, men turned their thoughts toward home and humanity, seeing in that far perspective that man's destiny on earth is not divisible; telling us that however far we reach into the cosmos, our destiny lies not in the stars but on Earth itself."

"See, ain't that what I was just saying?" the amiable salesman remarked, looking sincerely moved.

An announcer, following the excerpts, noted that the new president had spoken only in general terms about the domestic problems facing the nation. How the war in Vietnam would be ended had also only been hinted at, the announcer said.

As an example of that, the announcer played another excerpt:

"The peace we seek to win," Nixon was heard saying, "is not victory over any other people, but the peace that comes 'with healing in its wings,' with compassion for those who have suffered, with understanding for those who have opposed us, with the opportunity for all the peoples of this earth to choose their own destiny."

Regarding the new administration, the salesman was optimistic, also. He said that he thought there was hope now for "some kind of harmony

between people like you and people like me."

For the first time then, the young men realized that the salesman regarded them as representatives of the "youth generation" and was aware that their generation had opposed his own.

In the midst of all this, Steward and O'Rourke crossed the California border at California border at Primm, Nevada, not even calling attention to it out loud. But the two young men were each aware in their private thoughts of this entry into a place they had heard about and read about and were seeing for the first time.

In Barstow, they watched as their second ride of the day slowed down and pulled off to the side of the road. The vehicle that had stopped was a battered, old Volkswagen bus painted in psychedelic colors and peace signs. Inside was a young couple about their own age, both with long hair. The young man had a long beard braided in front and tied with a blue ribbon.

"Where in L.A. you going?" the man asked, pointing to their sign.

"Pasadena."

"Going right by there."

"Alright!"

There was no need to search for commonality as soon as Steward and O'Rourke informed their hosts that they were on their way to work with the United Farm Workers. The young couple had been involved with the United Farm Workers, also, in organizing a boycott of Safeway stores in the Bay Area, they said, before moving to Los Angeles.

"They're not just going against the farm owners anymore, they're taking it to the people who sell the grapes," the young man said.

"Yes, I heard about that," Steward answered.

He and O'Rourke had not paid much attention, however, to this less exciting sphere of the farm worker effort. They imagined working in green fields with the California mountains in the distance.

Near Bakersfield, the travelers rounded a bend and saw a development site with bulldozers shaping hills into streets and lots. That turned the talk to the discussion O'Rourke had had with the real estate salesman who had been so enthusiastic about organizing the earth.

"He said people will learn in the process till they get everything right," said O'Rourke.

"Well, you know what I think of that, man," said the young man with the long hair, "I think what it means is this consciousness we got going is spreading out. So even people like this salesman guy, they're getting high on it, they're getting stoned. It's like this massive vibration, man, if you know what I mean. But where can it go if the end is the buck?"

"I don't know what you mean," said O'Rourke softly.

"Well, okay," said the young woman just as softly, "I'll try to hip you

to that. What he means is, you've got to be vigilant, you've got to be on guard, because you've got these types, these commercial types, they can talk all planetary, you know, they can talk like a Bodhisattva, saying' organize the earth,' and words like that... But what's their object? Well, your salesman friend is an example."

"Right on," said the young man. "Their object... their object, man, is to put it up for sale... You see it out here in California. Bulldozers like the ones we just saw. There's no vision to it. The only vision is the buck."

"That's the truth," said the woman. "And the only thing we can do is, talk like we're doing right here,—and organize more like you guys are going to be doing,—so we get this big vibration going even stronger, like Dana was saying."

"And you've got to be a witness," said Dana (as the young man was apparently called), "like, the way I heard it put, like you're one of the cameras for the akashic record. That's what Stephen Gaskin, up in San Francisco, calls it. I don't know if you ever heard of him."

"No, I never have," said O'Rourke.

"They have these Monday night meetings and the whole idea of it is everybody's gets high just on being together and thinking together."

He paused as if waiting for either of his riders to ask a question about that, but Steward and O'Rourke were both silent.

"This deal of witnessing," said the young woman, "it's like you're recording the history of mankind here on this planet, as it's seen through your eyes. It happens in your head, but it gets into everyone else's heads, too, because of the vibration."

"Yes," said the young man, "and if you let things come down that aren't true, if somebody says something around you that's a lie, and you know it is, this is what Steve Gaskin says, and you don't say anything about it, then it's your lie, too."

"And you've cheated the vibration, kind of."

"You've corrupted it."

"Yes."

There were a few minutes of silence as they reached the top of the Sierra mountains, outside of San Bernardino, and headed down the other side in a steady rain. The group of young people remained in a posture of communication, however, with the long-haired driver and his girlfriend inclined sideways toward their guests and the guests leaning forward toward them.

"You're going to do some witnessing yourself, I imagine," said the young man, "when you see what comes down with those big stores."

"Yea," said the young woman. "They've got the power to ignore the little people, and that's what they're doing."

The freeway had widened to three lanes in each direction. Below them, in the rainy mist, sprawled the great metropolis of Los Angeles, extending from north to south as far as they could see.

[Chapter 129 notes]

130. Steward and O'Rourke visit Mark Chambers in his Pasadena apartment

In Pasadena, with the rain pouring down, Steward and O'Rourke said goodbye and good luck to their hippie friends, and dragged their backpacks out of the van, being careful not to set them down in the stream of water racing down the gutter.

"Sure you'll be okay?" called out the driver.

"Yea, we got ponchos. Came prepared!"

"Keep up the good fight!"

"We intend to. Thanks!"

The psychedelic-colored van, with a double toot of the horn, raced up the freeway onramp just across the street, leaving Steward and O'Rourke in the pouring rain with their Army-issue, olive drab ponchos draped over their bodies and backpacks.

Side by side, the two travelers swung off gamely toward O'Rourke's friend Mark Chambers' apartment, which O'Rourke had determined was about two miles away. With their poncho hoods covering their heads like cowls, they could have passed as medieval monks. The red-bearded O'Rourke looked older despite his younger age. Steward, clean-shaven as always (he had shaved in a filling station in Las Vegas), had the boyish, earnest appearance of the proselytes who go door to door seeking converts for various religions.

"What did you make of all that?" Steward asked.

"The whole deal about the salesman?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. I thought the salesman was all right."

"So did I."

"It gets all confused with the jargon," said Steward. "First time I ever heard that kind of hippie talk."

"Me, too. To that extent."

"You think there's a massive vibration?"

"I don't know, man, 'Bhodo-vista,' or whatever, I was getting a little bit lost."

They were passing through a neighborhood of large houses, one of which had an orange tree in the yard with actual oranges. That, plus the Hispanic architecture and omnipresent flowers and exotic, semi-tropical plants with immense, flat leaves or jungle-like appearance, reinforced their initial impression, that this was California, all right, just as they had imagined it would be.

Far from decreasing in intensity, the rain was coming down with an added ferocity. At some intersections the water was several inches deep. There was no use anymore in trying to step carefully through it to keep their feet dry.

"You know, though, I do think the whole thing's growing, for whatever reason," Steward continued after they had walked in silence for several minutes. "It's like you were saying that night in Indiana, on the rooftop. People see all these things on TV. Then there's people like us, walking around..."

"Word of mouth."

"Precisely."

Within an hour, Steward and O'Rourke were approaching Madison Street, where the address was that they had been given for Chambers' apartment. The weather had broken, with a low sun revealed above palm trees on the western horizon. The rain had stopped, leaving the plants and flowers sparkling in the late day sunlight beneath the gray clouds that still covered the rest of the sky.

Chambers' apartment, they soon discovered, was in a large house converted for multiple dwellings just across the street from the Fuller Theological Seminary, where he was a part-time student (in addition to his full-time work as director of the California Migrant Ministry, the job that had brought him to California). The neatly landscaped campus mall, with its brick classroom buildings and adobe-style, two-story dorms, continued along the street for several city blocks.

The young minister, seated at his desk by his second floor window, had noticed the two obvious travelers, with their packs and ponchos, while still some distance away. He greeted them at the door with an expression of pleasure in seeing his old friend, O'Rourke. He looked less haggard and more rested than he had looked the last time O'Rourke had seen him in Georgia. His brown hair, still jaggedly cut, was longer; it extended beyond his collar.

"You made it all right, Billy!" he exclaimed. "Welcome to California."

"We're glad to be here!"

"Looks like you got wet!"

"No need for a shower."

"And this must be Tom Steward."

"Yes, Tom, this is Mark."

"Welcome to California!"

"Thanks for taking us in."

Upstairs there were more introductions. Chambers had two room-mates. The first to be introduced, Phillip Nordell, was a large, ruddy young man, 6-4 in height, with a clean shaven, pleasant face and long blond hair. He was a graduate student, he said, in Fuller's School of Psychology, and was working in the school's new Child Development Clinic. The second room-mate, Alan Bonnard, an intense, compact young man with neatly-clipped short hair and glasses, was a doctoral student in

the School of the World Mission.

Chambers' apartment, though half a continent distant, might well have been the apartment Steward and O'Rourke had just left, of O'Rourke's brother, Patrick, in Chicago. There was a kitchen with political posters on the wall, as in Patrick's apartment. The refrigerator, as in Patrick's apartment, served as a bulletin board for local political announcements and newspaper clippings, though here there were also notices regarding seminars and classes. In the large living room were the usual central coffee table and large pillows and stereo systems with record albums stacked against it on the floor.

There was distinct flavor, also, owing to Chambers' work with the migrant ministry. A large poster on the living room wall showed a young Hispanic couple looking up from a field of lettuce with their dark-haired children beside them. The poster said, "Venceremos," which Steward and O'Rourke both knew meant "we will win" in Spanish. In smaller letters below the statement was the inscription, "Just Employment Conditions for All Americans." The poster also displayed the black eagle and UFW acronym of the United Farm Workers, the union that Steward and O'Rourke intended to work with.

Next to that was a poster of Muhammed Ali. It was the same poster, in fact, that Matt Brandt had seen on the barbershop window in Washington D.C. The poster showed the famous photograph of Ali with both arms raised after defeating Floyd Patterson. This poster was titled, "The Vietnam War According to Ali: White Men Sending Black Men to Kill Yellow Men." Below the picture were the words, "Ali said 'No.' You can say 'No' too."

"You ever wonder about your arrangements?" asked Chambers, when he saw O'Rourke looking at that.

There was no need to go through the formalities of introduction to the subject of the war, no need to be careful regarding possible offense. The conversation took off at this point with everything else assumed.

"Not at all, Mark. I'm glad for my arrangements."

"Well, I'm with you on that, Bill. They need people like you over there. No matter what decision you make, there's always going to be something wrong in it, something people can criticize."

An hour later, Steward and O'Rourke were seated in the living room with Chambers and his two room-mates. Here, too, as in Chicago, there was a welcoming supper of spaghetti and wine; but, in contrast to Chicago, there was no bowl of marihuana on the coffee table, in the midst of these serious students of God. They gave an impression of clean-living in their speech and appearance, though all had long hair.

Playing softly in the background was the Bob Dylan album, *Bringin' It All Back Home*, from which the poet's plaintive words came out as the

sky outside darkened and the mood inside the room grew more familiar:

I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.
No, I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.
Well, I wake in the morning,
Fold my hands and pray for rain.
I got a head full of ideas
That are drivin' me insane.
It's a shame the way she makes me scrub the floor.
I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.

The conversation soon turned to the student confrontations occurring throughout California. There had been an eruption of incidents, Chambers said, with strikes now in progress at eight universities. At San Francisco State University, S.K. Hayakawa, the president, had asked for assistance from the National Guard. In response, Ronald Reagan, the governor, had sent in troops to evict students from occupied buildings.

"Reagan also asked the legislature to help him rid the campuses of 'anarchists,' as he called them, in his state of the state address just a few days ago," Chambers noted.

"Who is he calling anarchists?" O'Rourke asked.

"Anyone with long hair," Phillip Nordell, the large, clean-shaven student with long blond hair, answered.

"I think maybe that's an exaggeration," said Alan Bonnard, the one with the neatly clipped short hair.

"How's that?"

"Well, I think you would agree, there are, in fact, students who have no intention to study, whose only purpose on the campus is to foment trouble. And with no particular agenda in mind. That seems pretty close to anarchy to me."

"I agree there are those, but I don't think Reagan is discerning enough to find them."

"With that I agree."

"See, at this campus," Chambers said, turning to his guests. "We have dissent, but of a quiet kind. There's a feeling of fellowship here that extends to the faculty. I mean, there's not so much of a feeling of confrontation."

"Though we have been pushing for changes," threw in Nordell.

"A lot of the recent outreach programs, such as the child center that Phillip is involved in, are the result of that," Bonnard added.

The slight hint of a rift that had briefly clouded the discussion was in this manner quickly cleared, with all soon returning to a tone of mutual accommodation.

This was no group to sit up talking into the late hours, either, with classes scheduled for the next day. Chambers' room-mates soon excused

themselves to go to their rooms to study.

Chambers lingered after the rest, however, to inform Steward and O'Rourke in a sober voice that he had been unable to find work for them in the fields, as organizers, as he had hoped to do.

"There's a feeling that you, not being Hispanic, would not be the real thing," he said softly. "There's a look to it of outsiders, and what the union's been doing, especially lately, is to try to build an indigent movement. It's the same as everywhere, as you know."

Steward was, indeed, aware of this, because of the similar dynamic in Dulatown that had prevented him, he thought, from being an effective organizer among blacks. He took in the news silently, disappointed and yet feeling that somehow all of this was meant to be. That was an attitude he subscribed to increasingly as his life had become less planned and more dependent on the vagaries of external situations that he came into blind. He had begun to like the excitement of not knowing exactly what he was going to do next.

"I'm sorry if I've disappointed you," Chambers added.

"Fuck, you didn't disappoint us," O'Rourke answered. "We'll find something useful to do. Hell, we've got nothing but time."

"Well, I did arrange something," Chambers continued. "To put it briefly, an urban experience. Let it go at that for the night. It's not a lightweight job. It's a demanding job, really. We'll talk more about it tomorrow."

The room was silent after that, with palm trees waving outside an open window and a breeze like that of summer bringing in the damp earth and plant smells left by the afternoon rain.

Steward, in his sleeping bag, scanned the books on a shelf next to him. Among the authors were many he recognized from his self-study when preparing for his claim of conscientious objector. Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonheoffer, and Reinhold Niebuhr were among them.

He was on familiar ground, with people of a like spirit, he thought to himself as he turned aside to sleep.

131. Steward and O'Rourke begin as UFW organizers in East L.A.

Next morning, over coffee, Mark Chambers described in more detail the situation he had arranged for Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke. It was in East Los Angeles, in one of the "urban centers" established by the United Farm Workers (UFW) union to promote support among the general populace for the strikes in the fields.

"The way this is set up," said Chambers, "they have a house, just a regular house, in East L.A., in a Chicano neighborhood there. You might as well say it's a neighborhood in Mexico. Everybody speaks Spanish. And, in this house, there's a couple, farm worker couple, worked in the fields all their lives, and were recruited to do this job. And there's a Jesuit seminarian living there, named Dan Kampf, I think. Nice guy. I've talked to him a couple times. And three Filipino farm workers, middle-aged men, that they call the "brothers," live next door, I think, but they all eat together. And their main business has been, well, two things, setting up pickets of Safeway stores,—you've heard about that,—and going out into the community, all over L.A., colleges, neighborhood groups, and so on, to speak to people and work up support."

There was silence for a moment as O'Rourke, scratching his red beard with one hand, and Steward, ruddy from his morning run, which he had just completed, considered this proposition, with their cups of coffee on the table in front of them. The young minister waited, sitting erect, his keen eyes alert and thoughtful. With his full beard and lean, long features, he had the look of a latter-day Abraham Lincoln.

"So what do you think?" he said, when his long exposition brought no immediate response.

"I like it," Steward answered. "I like the idea of living in a Mexican neighborhood. I like the idea of being in a big city."

"How about you, Bill?"

"Well, tell me one thing, am I going to have to be a room-mate with this idiot here, Stewardus Maximus?"

"I think that may be the case, Bill, garage mate, that is."

"Garage mate?"

"When I was over there, talking to Jose,—Jose Terda, guy of the couple I mentioned,—that's what he showed me, garage below the house, half-filled with boxes."

"Boxed up with Steward in a garage."

"I'll be real quiet," said Steward.

"That's what I'm afraid of."

The following day, the three of them rode together to East L.A. in Chambers' car, Steward and O'Rourke's first foray into the heart of the vast metropolis. Steward and O'Rourke brought their backpacks with

them, intending to move in at once after the perfunctory initial interview was completed.

Exiting the Golden Gate Freeway about three miles east of the L.A. downtown area, they headed north along South Atlantic Boulevard, a busy commercial street lined with signs in both Spanish and English. Through the open windows of the car, Spanish-language could be heard, coming from the storefronts. Some of it was in the unpolished Mexican tradition, some in the rock and roll rhythm of the current American fare. Dark-haired, dark-eyed people passed back and forth, speaking in a Spanish dialect laced with English expressions.

At Eagle Street, they turned right for two blocks, to a cemetery with Hispanic names on the tombstones, then right again onto a tributary called Amalia Street, not much wider than an alley. Along here, there were modest, rambler-style houses, many with wood-plank or adobe barriers around tiny back yards, in the Mexican style. At one of these houses, a small, yellow house set up above a waist-high cement block wall, with a screened-in back porch and grassless back yard, they pulled to the side behind an old car with a bumper sticker saying "La Raza—Unida."

"Well, this is it," said Chambers. "Like I said, it's just an ordinary house."

"This Jose guy have a family?" asked O'Rourke.

"Two teenage daughters."

"Where do they all live?"

"Kampf has a separate room in the front. Terda and his family live in back. As you can imagine, it's pretty compact."

Steward and O'Rourke, leaving their backpacks in the car, followed Chambers around the corner of the cement block wall, looking with interest into the open door of the garage. Inside they could see boxes piled on one side. Some mattresses were stacked on their narrow ends in the open area where there were no boxes. Several steps led up into the bare back yard where there was a picnic table and a scrawny tree with yellow leaves in a wooden pot.

At the house, Chambers knocked on the back door. Without waiting for an answer, he continued inside. Jose Terda, the former farm worker that Chambers had described, was standing at a desk in the front room before a L.A. wall map marked with colored tacks and an immense calendar used to keep track of upcoming events. He was a young-looking, handsome man, about 40 years old, slender and athletic in build, with a pleasant, expressive face. With his svelte dress and slickly combed black hair, he could have passed as a singer in a nightclub.

"Ola! Mark! Com' estas?" he called cheerfully from the phone. "Be with you in a minute, man! Come on in!"

Daniel Kampf, the seminarian that Chambers had mentioned, was in the room, also, seated next to his dapper boss. He was a skinny Ichabod Crane, quite a contrast in style, with a bald head, glasses, and a bright, unassuming smile. He was dressed in plain, baggy slacks and a white shirt open at the collar.

"Bien venido, amigo!" said Jose Terda, coming across the room after quickly completing his phone call in Spanish. He extended his hand for a handshake with the young minister. "How the hell are you, man? Nice to see you! So, estes son los volunteros nuevos! Nice to meet you, guys! Where are you from?"

"Minnesota," answered Steward and O'Rourke together.

They stood awkwardly in the small open area between the desks and back windows, extending their hands for a handshake. The tall seminarian, smiling all the while, had joined the group without an introduction.

"And I'm Dan Kampf," he said simply. "Nice to meet you."

"Si, este es mi hombre mas estimado, mas estimado!" Terda said enthusiastically. "Without Senor Dan here, I don't know what I do."

That slight grammatical slip was the first indication of anything short of absolute fluency in the rapid Spanish-English mix of the former farm worker.

A short time later, Steward, O'Rourke, Chambers, Terda, and Kampf sat together at the table in the kitchen, discussing arrangements for the upcoming stint.

"Amigos, I tell you what I think is best arrangement all around," Terda said, "one week at a time... You come here and try it this week. A week from now, no se gustan, fine with me, fellows, no hard feelings. Hasta la vista. That's all."

"We can use your help for any amount of time, is what Jose means," Kampf explained, "assuming a good faith effort, and I'm sure, talking to you, that's exactly what you'll give."

Terda then went on to present some other basic details of the arrangement. For as long as they stayed, Steward and O'Rourke would go out with the Filipino brothers every morning to help in coordinating the ongoing picketing at Safeway stores. In the remaining time, during the normal workday, they would help with stuffing envelopes and other humble chores. In addition, under Kampf the seminarian's direction, they would meet with groups throughout the city to explain the farm workers' cause. Their wage would consist of room and board, plus a cash stipend of five dollars a day.

"The community meetings are where you'll really be helpful," the seminarian remarked with an earnest look. "We've been going out to the colleges, trying to talk to young people,—hippie, radical types,—kind of

like you. I've done my best myself, but you know...."

Kampf broke off with a gesture toward himself with both hands that evoked a laugh from his boss. There was no need to elaborate. His plain face and unstylish clothes made the point in themselves.

"Daniel, Daniel, amigo mio," Terda said softly, placing a hand on the seminarian's shoulder, "We like you berry, berry much, just like you are. Is true, Marco? Es muy simpatico, no?"

"Muy simpatico," Chambers replied.

Steward and O'Rourke spent the remainder of the afternoon arranging their living quarters in the garage. They set down their mattresses side by side and placed boxes next to the bed to use as tables and chairs. A wall poster with a large black UFW eagle and a second-hand standing lamp brought out from the house by Kampf added a final touch.

That night at supper Steward and O'Rourke met the other members of the extended family including Terda' wife, Guadalupe, a shy, peasant-like woman with Indian features and long, dark hair pulled artlessly back from her forehead. She was notable for her complete lack of the flare and stylishness of her husband. The Filipino brothers were there, also. They introduced themselves as Ernesto, Julio, and Romerico. Ernesto was a tall, bespectacled man who spoke fluent English and displayed a dry wit. Julio and Romerico were small, compact men with reserved manners who depended on Julio for communicating with the rest of the group. They spoke with Julio in their native dialect, which Julio said was Taklig. Julio spoke fluent Spanish, also. He was the only one other than Jose to talk at any length with Mrs. Terda, which he did in Spanish. She spoke only a scattering of English phrases and seemed uninterested in learning more.

The Terda daughters, Rita and Juanita, aged 18 and 16, showed their pretty faces briefly at the kitchen door, enough to say hello with a very American, teenage inflection, then withdrew to the back rooms reserved for the family. They preferred to eat by themselves, Jose said.

Next day, after a communal breakfast, Steward and O'Rourke went out with the Filipino brothers to a Safeway store in a shopping mall about a mile away. Signs saying "Boycott Safeway" and "Support the Farm Workers" were already made.

"What do you do if people talk to you?" Steward asked.

"Talk back, hermano," Ernesto replied.

"What do you do if you don't know the details?"

"Say "No se," hermano. Send them over to me."

It was a cut and dry, soon boring affair, walking back and forth with the signs. There was no need to say anything, after all. People walked by without even glancing in their direction, as if the lonely picketers were invisible men.

After an hour or so, however, O'Rourke did manage to make contact with one old gentleman with a shock of gray hair who declared a sympathy based on his own experiences with the longshoremen's union. In answer to the man's questions, O'Rourke recited some of what he had just learned as to why the boycott was needed, then he called on Ernesto to fill in the details.

"Well, we got to all pull together," the man replied simply after listening intently. He went back to his car and drove out of the parking lot without going into the store.

"We appreciate your support!" O'Rourke yelled as the man passed by with his hand raised in a fist.

A young woman with dark eyes and dark hair of the Hispanic type smiled at Steward as she walked by on the sidewalk with a child in her arms. "Que camine bien la huelga!" she called out softly.

"That means let the fight keep going good," Ernesto informed. Steward thought of that that evening as he rested on his bed in the garage with O'Rourke sleeping on the bed beside him. He hadn't needn't for Ernesto to translate the Spanish words; he had studied Spanish in college and had spent a summer in Mexico. His own translation of "huelga" would have been more on the order of "struggle." The word "struggle" had more significance for him, he said to himself. It implied an ongoing, less dramatic effort.

"La huelga," as it appeared to him at the moment, involved more than just the farm workers' struggle. It involved the whole effort that he and so many others his own age had somehow fallen into against the war and for social change. Patrick O'Rourke's demonstrations in Chicago, on behalf of racial equality in the Catholic Church, were part as of it, Steward thought. So were the demonstrations in St. Louis against the clearing away of old neighborhoods for freeway access. His own efforts as a volunteer in North Carolina were part of it, surely, and the stance he had taken on the draft. Probably even the dignity of the Indian father who had helped him and O'Rourke change their tire, a dignity maintained against the chicanery of the highway and the booze culture of the little nearby town of Gallup, was part of the same struggle, Steward supposed.

"Que camine bien la huelga," he repeated to himself, thinking again of the pretty, dark-eyed woman who had smiled at him.

From that, his thoughts drifted to the "massive vibration" that the hippies had talked about, the ones who had given him and O'Rourke a ride from Needles to Pasadena. There was a relationship there somehow, he thought, but he was too tired to figure it out.

Steward did observe to himself, though, that whatever it was, that was going on, was getting bigger, and involving more and more people, and getting more and more complex. Despite the tedium of the past day, he

felt eager to continue in his new work, especially the part of it that would get him out into the city to explore this phenomenon as he promoted his newly found cause.

132. Brandt attends a presentation about the counterculture and the war

Matthew Brandt, in Washington D.C., had also experienced a widening sense of the counterculture, not as a "huelga" or "massive vibration" such as Steward had been "hipped to" in California, but simply as the new range of types of people and interests that he had been exposed to in his new life at Whitney Pratt.

That the range was countercultural, there could be little doubt, as evidenced by the easily recognizable signs of hippie-like (or Peace-Corps-like) informal dress, long hair on both men and women, and softly spoken, carefully drawn out exchanges of opinion. Denim pants and jackets, often embroidered with flowers, doves, or peace symbols; quasi-military clothes such as Army jackets or Navy Peabody coats; flannel shirts, hiking boots, and other outdoorsy dress; all contributed to the standard look, creating a feeling of commonality. In addition, there was the common bond, among many, of having completed a volunteer experience such as Brandt had done in Kentucky, and the further common bond, often, of having done so under pressure of the draft.

There was, also, because of this common experience of avoiding the draft, a conscious centering on opposition to the war more present than in Brandt's previous experience. In Kentucky, though most of the male MVs would not have had been there had it not been for the draft, the war had nevertheless not been talked about much. The war had been a background event. Opposition to the war had been assumed. At Whitney Pratt, with the sight of public buildings reminding everyone of the political battles taking place within them, with demonstrations of one kind or another taking place against the war almost monthly, and talked about on television and in the daily paper, the war and what to do about it were daily topics of conversation.

The war,—or, more specifically, "the countercultural result of opposition to the war,"—was also the lead-off topic in the series of lectures arranged by Darren Houghten, the bearded, articulate, young man with the crutch who had spoken to Brandt on the first day of school. The lecture was described as "an effort to examine how opposition to the war has opened the way for social and intellectual exploration."

Brandt, with his natural suspicion of academic language, would not have been inclined to attend this seminar, had he not encountered Houghten by chance one day, in a stairway in the former-Masonic-lodge main building of the school, and received from him a personal invitation. Houghten first demonstrated how quickly and efficiently he had absorbed Brandt's name and home state, Kentucky connection, and other information, then he threw out the invitation, almost as an afterthought, as he hopped down the stairs, crutch in hand, his braced leg clunking on

each step.

"It's more than just a seminar," he called back. "It's a gathering of the student body in a family-like setting. It's one of the ways we get to know one another! So as to support one another!"

"I'll do my best to make it," Brandt replied.

"Hope to see you there!"

Brandt, appearing later that day in the meeting hall behind the lodge (same hall as used for the orientation on the first day of school), found assembled there people with familiar faces, but with names for the most part still unknown to him. The gathering had the slightly carnival, yet serious atmosphere he had grown used to from taking part, in the past couple of years, in meetings and demonstrations organized by people his own age.

The presenter had already begun. He was a man of medium height, in his mid-forties, judging by appearance. He was dressed in blue jeans and a corduroy sport coat, with neatly trimmed long hair and a bushy mustache that seemed an accommodation to the hirsute style of those of a similar mind but younger age.

"The central idea I'm going to talk about today is, I think, pretty much accepted by everyone here," the presenter was saying when Brandt sat down. "The idea is, this 'movement' we've gotten into the habit of calling the 'counterculture' would never have developed to the extent it has had it not been for the war, or, more importantly, the draft. I'd like to go into the details of this idea by looking at events in a timeline kind of way, general culture vs. counterculture, using comparative numbers such as the number of American soldiers in Vietnam."

The presenter said that to examine the counterculture he was going to proceed through three chronological phases in its growth: "first, its roots; second, its burgeoning; and, third, to coin a phrase, its 'cross-cultural effect'." He said that the three phases "correspond roughly to the years 1952 to 1962 (roots), 1963 to 1967 (burgeoning), and 1968 to present (cross-cultural effect)."

"But, before we go on, let me ask this," he continued, "what is the advantage for us in considering this development? It is simply this, the development we speak of is still in process. It will be in process throughout your time here at this school. It has grown to this point. Where will it grow from here?"

Going then to the first phase he had listed, "roots," the presenter declared that the years 1952 to 1962 had to be understood in terms of the uniformity of purpose that had followed World War II.

"In the mid-50's," he asked, "what did we have in American cultural life? We had a society that accepted a singular view resulting from our victory in World War II. We had young men who had returned from life

in a military structure to install a similar structure on their new world of business, with their units of production organized into corporations and divisions, just as their military units had been divided into armies and divisions.

"We had young men willing to accept the single set of cultural and behavioral norms that presumably had prevailed against the fascist norms of our conquered enemies. We had young women eager and willing to dedicate themselves to being wives of the men they had pined for, and mothers of the children they had longed for, throughout the war.

"The result was a society in concert, but also the 'Organization Man' of William Whyte, the 'Woman Question' of Eleanor Flexnor. The first, a book published in 1956, and known to many of you, I'm sure, lamented the disappearance of the individual within corporate organization. The second, a feminist class taught by Flexnor in the mid-1950's, at Jefferson School of Social Science in New York, looked at why women, who had served so well as our work force in World War II, remained second-class citizens after the war. Developments like these composed another, albeit small, element in our 'root phase,' an element of protest struggling to break free from what Herbert Marcuse would later call 'the paralysis of criticism, a society without opposition.'

"I refer to this 'element of opposition' in the singular case, as if the voices of opposition were united somehow; but, the truth is, in the 50's, it was more accurate to speak of 'elements' in the plural: multiple elements, separate from one another, with no lines drawn between them, in the collective consciousness. And, if we look harder into the postwar era, we discover that there were many such elements. Among them: the emergence (or continuing emergence) of the Negro voice such as in *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison, published in 1952; literature relating to the strangeness of modern existence, as in the European works of Samuel Beckett and Rolf Holchut; the rising voice of the sexually different, as in the plays of Jean Genet; the rising voice of political protest, as in the writings of Dorothy Day and Michael Harrington; the rising discontent of the effectively disenfranchised poor; and, of course, last but not least, the familiar voice of the Beatniks.

"Now, interestingly enough, I myself am a contemporary of the beat generation. I was born in 1928, Allen Ginsberg in 1926, and, in fact, he and I attended Columbia for a couple of years at the same time, though I never met Mr. Ginsberg then (or ever, personally, for that matter), and I didn't ever get kicked out of school for being 'crazy' or for 'writing on skulls,' whatever that means, as Ginsberg says regarding himself and his friend in his poem, 'Howl.' I did become aware of Ginsberg, however, in summer of 1958, when I bought a copy of that poem after hearing about the obscenity charges filed against it in San Francisco, in connection with

its sale there at City Lights.

"I will always remember reading that striking first line: 'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked.' I knew right there, this was not ordinary stuff; this was someone breaking out, though of what I didn't know. That one sentence, aggregating in my mind with the images of the poem, started a background process that continued for years, throughout the late '50's and early '60's, as evidence compiled regarding what had to be broken out of. Eventually, I found a pattern in it, however, as, I think, did many others, also.

"And that brings us to our second phase, the 'burgeoning' that, few would deny, occurred in the years, approximately, of '63 to '68, the years that brought us the idealism of John F. Kennedy, the 'great society' dream of Lyndon B. Johnson, and also, as you are all aware, the Vietnam War, the draft, and the efforts of young people to avoid it.

"Here some statistics will help, using the number of our troops in Vietnam vs. the number of people in our various volunteer organizations as a means of comparing the war buildup vs. the spill-off into these various organizations. In 1961, when most of you were in high school, America had less than a hundred troops in Vietnam, called them 'military advisors;' the Peace Corp, just begun, had 532 volunteers. By 1963, tracking the same sets of numbers, there were 11,000 troops in Vietnam; the Peace Corps had grown to 5,937. By 1964, when most of you were in college, the number of troops in Vietnam had doubled to 22,000; the Peace Corps had also nearly doubled to about 10,000. In 1965, the trend continues: 52,000 troops in Vietnam; 14,452 volunteers in the Peace Corps. That year we also see two other significant developments: first, for the first time, the number of returned Peace Corps volunteers (14,573) exceeds the number in the field; second, VISTA, our domestic Peace Corps, begins, absorbing another 1,375 people avoiding the draft. The Teacher Corps, another deferment-giving organization, absorbs hundreds more (I don't have the exact numbers). And so it goes on, up until the present day. In the last three years, dramatic troop level increases: to 250,000 in 1966; to 450,000 in 1967; to 535,000 last year, while thousands of young people continued to seek refuge in the volunteer organizations we've been tracking (by 1968, 5032 are working in VISTA; the Peace Corps had peaked at about 15,000 and had begun to decline to a level of about 10,000). Also, as you're all aware, by the time of 1967 and 1968, this was far from the whole story. By then, thousands of others, maybe tens of thousands, had avoided the draft through a variety of other actions: as conscientious objectors, doing alternative service, similar in nature to the Peace Corps and VISTA; as teachers in urban or rural ghettos, thereby obtaining deferments; as expatriates in

Canada or other countries; as those pursuing the more extreme action of refusing induction, winding up, in most cases, in prison, in a similar 'out of culture' experience. Then, there are those,—many thousands,—who have dropped out to become officially 'non-existent;' and those, like some of you, who have obtained deferments by staying in school when you might otherwise have not been so inclined."

Here there was laughter from the audience, as dozens acknowledged that this was the case for them.

"But you, too, I would hazard to say," the presenter went on, "have had an experience far different than what you would have had, had it not been for the war,—an experience here in D.C. with the black subculture, for example. And that brings us to our last phase, 'the cross-cultural effect' that I referred to. For you, being representative of so many of your peers, find yourself now in classes with many people who have been outside of the culture they grew up in and now have come back to it, half way, at least. They have brought back knowledge of various cultures and subcultures that they now share with you. They have brought back, also, an attitude toward society learned by opposition to the war, a sense that authority, in the form of our established institutions, cannot be simply accepted.

"We have seen, also, a further result, in the drawing together of the lines between the cultural elements that were left unconnected in the 1950's. Experience with the irrationality of this war has led to openness regarding the irrationality of other aspects of our society, such as the abuse of technology, as described by Marcuse. Experience with the under-classes,—the poor, racial minorities, the sexually different,—has led us to be inclined to side with them politically, to insist that their voices be heard, as never would have happened had we not been thrown into the same camp with them, as many have. Life outside of society, the lot of those who have dropped out, and who tell us their stories, has opened our imaginations to 'lifestyles' that we never would have considered otherwise (to use that new term): lifestyles as artisans, craftsmen, organic farmers living off the land. And this leaves out another facet, psychological and spiritual exploration, often intensified with drugs.

"But that brings us to our final consideration. With the lines now drawn together, where will this process lead? I would say, it will lead to greater experimentation, a greater breaking apart, as the counterculture fulfills its inherent power. We have seen that, certainly, in the numbers of people involved in confrontations or in extreme politics of one kind or another, groups like La Raza, the Black Panthers, the Socialist Workers' Party. In the '50's and mid-60's, they would have remained fringe groups. Now, in the late '60's, they have gained a wide listening

audience and many converts from among your own, the white middle class. Others among you have formed new political groups of their own, most notably, Students for a Democratic Society. Along with this, the stridency and extent of campus unrest has increased, as you all know. Last year, for example, more than 40,000 students, on nearly a hundred campuses, demonstrated against the war and other social problems.

"Will student foment increase? Odds seem that it will. Will numbers in extreme politics increase? The odds are in favor of that, also, in my opinion. More protest, more conflict, await us, and, maybe, for the first time, growing divisions within the Movement as its extremes begin to tug against one another. A great experiment, no doubt, but a tinderbox, also, such as existed in pre-Nazi Germany in the early 1930's."

After the lecture had ended, Brandt walked alone out to the parking lot, where he encountered Darren Houghten.

"Well, what did you get out of it?" Houghten asked.

"Cross-cultural effect," Brandt replied.

"Yes, you can see that in your own life, with people like you coming back from places like Kentucky, and both giving and receiving the widened awareness he talks about."

The conversation went from there to whether Brandt had brought back anything from his experience in Kentucky. He said he had brought back some blue grass music, but had nowhere to play it, having left his old stereo set behind with another volunteer (Dennis Kelly).

"Well, today is your day, then," Houghten exclaimed. "I just bought a new set. You're welcome to my old one. You can have it free."

The offshoot was Brandt, who had walked to school, wound up leaving with Houghten in Houghten's Volkswagen bus. Together, the two men went to pick up the stereo set in Houghten's apartment, then they brought it over to Brandt's.

In the course of this, Brandt learned a little about this arranger of lectures. As it turned out, Houghten was not of the elite, as suggested by his refined manners.

He appeared to be rather poor. His apartment was in the alley. His stereo set, with the large dual speakers serving as end tables on either side of a tattered sofa, was the only new furniture he had. The rest of his furniture was shabby. It was obvious, though, that Houghten had money for record albums and books. There were hundreds of both, stacked on shelves made of wood planks and cement blocks.

Brandt also noticed that Houghten had Zig-Zag cigarette paper, and other objects associated with drugs, sitting in plain view on the cluttered coffee table in the center of the room.

That brought Brandt back to the comments he had heard earlier that day, in the seminar, about "psychological and spiritual exploration, often

intensified with drugs." That was a whole "facet" of the counterculture, he thought, to use a new word of the day, that remained outside his own experience.

[Chapter 132 notes]

133. Brandt finds a refuge in photography, seeks a documentary directness

Although Matthew Brandt took in earnest the intellectual pursuits of his new life in graduate school, he sometimes felt a sensation that he had often felt in his days as an under-graduate, a sensation of weariness with words, of wanting to be away from them completely. When such was the case, he had a sure refuge, his studies in photography.

In photography, too, Brandt encountered an intellectual component, of course, especially in the documentary tradition he aspired to be part of. But there, beginning with the unadorned speech of his friend and mentor, Fr. Daniel Riley, who had introduced him to the tradition, Brandt found a lack of the rhetoric and verbal posturing that he instinctively despised.

The West Virginia priest was one of the few people Brandt actually wrote to. His other communications, for the most part, were left to his articulate wife, Mary. She corresponded with common friends on behalf of them both.

Brandt's letters to Fr. Riley were brief, often only two or three sentences. The photographs sent with the letters were the more important content. The letters always began with the salutation, "Dear Plain Dan," continuing the inside joke started at the MVs' convention in Covington, Kentucky, the previous spring, when the priest had asked to be called "just plain Dan."

With one letter in early February, 1969, Brandt enclosed a copy of a photo by Alfred Stieglitz entitled "The Hand of Man," dated 1902. The photo showed a locomotive leaving a Long Island City freight yard with a cloud of black smoke shooting up into billowing gray clouds laced with white swirls. Despite the title, there was no human in sight, just the laboring engine between silhouettes of telegraph poles and buildings, and the steel tracks (four pairs) crossing in a complex switching pattern as they curved from the train toward the point of view of the photo. "They say he was a pioneer," was Brandt's comment. "Maybe so. For me it's too moody." That was the entire content of the letter.

The priest's response came back promptly as always, about a week later. "My understanding about Stieglitz is he started out wanting to make photos that would be taken as seriously as painting as an art form. So he used moody settings to give the effect of painting. You can see some of that in the effect you mention, the attempt at mood. Also, on a technical level, as I understand, he wanted to demonstrate he could work with light in difficult settings. I imagine that's something you're learning about now, in your present studies. But, as I also understand, Stieglitz wound up defending the photo as valuable on its own, a completely new form of expression. In his later years, when he was living in New York, he did some shots of the skyline, as seen from his apartment window. In

those photos, he arrived at a more objective view. You could say he ended up where the FSA took off."

There was no need for the priest to explain that the acronym "FSA" stood for the Farm Security Administration of the FDR era. Brandt and Fr. Dan had had many discussions about the FSA "photographic project." Brandt was familiar with the main photographers: Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, John Vachon, Arthur Rothstein, Gordon Parks, and Walker Evans. He had seen many of the FSA photos of rural and urban poor: slum dwellers, tenant farmers, miners, migrant workers.

There was no need, either, for Brandt and the priest to restate the basic principles of documentary photography that sustained their sense of being kindred spirits. The priest had defined them and Brandt, being then on the lookout for such principles, had accepted them wholeheartedly with the unreservedness of youth. The principle they had talked about most was for the photographer to be as absent as possible from the subject matter of the photo. Following from that were other principles they had touched on: objectivity, directness of view, and eschewal of "cleverness" and "artiness."

Fr. Dan had given Brandt what Brandt considered a great compliment once. He had said he thought Brandt's photos for his garden project (which Brandt had made copies of, and given to the families involved) were of more value than the gardens themselves. "The gardens just give the people food. These photos give them a record of their resourcefulness, to shore up their self-esteem." There was no phoniness in them, Fr. Dan had said. "You see in them, Matt, how much you hate bullshit."

Brandt thought of that one morning, soon after receiving the letter about Stieglitz, as he rode to school on the city bus. The memory of that last comment brought him amusement inwardly, though no look of amusement came to his face. He felt a great pride in what the priest had said about his lack of phoniness. He was determined to build on that foundation.

It was a crisp, sunny day. The bus route past the capitol mall then north through the inner city presented many settings and situations that he regarded as worthy of photos. His blue-gray eyes were alert, above the dark strands of his new goatee, as these scenes appeared amidst the rush hour bustle of people and traffic.

At a corner newsstand, he noticed a black man in a turban surveying the street keenly, as if in expectation. The face had a look of defiance that reminded Brandt of a photo he had seen by Walker Evans, part of a series done in 1936 called "New York City Block."

Evans' work, in particular, among the FSA photographers, had gained Brandt's notice. He had studied as many of Evan's photographs and

comments about them as he could find, including Evans' series on migrant farmers in Alabama, coal mining towns in Pennsylvania, and city scenes in Havana, Cuba (in addition to the New York series just mentioned).

Brandt had observed that Evans, though striving for objectivity, had not been adverse to trying to be artistic. That seemed at odds with the lack of artiness that Fr. Dan had recommended. Brandt had come to his own private conclusion about this, however, thus far shared with no one, that an attempt at art was okay if the art was good in itself and didn't detract from the documentary truth of the photo.

One Evans piece that Brandt had especially noticed, in this regard, was a photo of a contractor's building with a corrugated tin exterior and a pile of dirt in front of it. The photo, taken in 1936, was an example of Evan's use of the large format camera (8x10 inch, as opposed to 35 mm) to obtain a wide shot with foreground and background equally detailed. The perspective, at eye level, from directly in front of the building, had resulted in the desired objective view. Evan's comments, however, which Brandt had read, revealed other considerations: "cross light on silvery, corrugated tin... the barren look of the false front... how the pile of dirt added to it." Evans had tried to capture more than simply the structure.

This consideration came to Brandt's thoughts as he exited the bus, seeing there a chance constellation of people and objects such as urban life provides: a dark-haired young man in a finely tailored suit, reading a newspaper at the bus stop; two teen-aged boys with baseball caps on backwards, next to him but in no way interacting; a mother and little boy outside a drug store, the boy looking up at an icicle that was glinting with sunlight. That accidental arrangement of people was the documentary component of the scene, thought Brandt, the counterpart of the building, recorded in its structural completeness, in Evan's photo. The glint of sunlight and the boy's expression of interest in it were the counterpart of the cross light on tin, the barren front, and how the pile of dirt added to it.

An hour later, Brandt was absorbed in the more pedestrian details of dark room technique, his class for the morning. He was one of eight students seated in a room on the northeast corner of the upper floor of the former-lodge, main school building. The students, all young men about his same age, were an agreeable bunch, although Brandt had just begun to get acquainted with them.

Gregory Lorentz, the teacher, was a man of about 35, a former Peace Corps volunteer (one of the first groups sent out, in fact). For the past several years, subsequent to the Peace Corps, he had worked as an audio visual consultant to a Teacher Corp program in Corpus Christi, Texas. He had been accomplished in photography before going into the Peace Corps, where he had worked in a similar urban teaching program in

Kuala Lampur, Indonesia. He was also a photographer with similar interests as Brandt himself and Brandt's mentor, Fr. Dan.

"You can't bring out of the darkroom what you don't bring in," Lorentz was saying on this particular day, "but you can work within a range of possibilities, and all of them come down to gradations of light. Light is represented, in our black and white photographs, by gradations along the scale from black to white, by gradations of gray, in other words. Someone said once, if you don't like gray, if you can't do gray, you better not be a painter. The same thing applies to photography. Gray is the world in which the photograph lives."

Another hour later, Brandt was in the darkroom, making an effort at that, gradations of gray. He had with him a series of photos that he had taken at his first community assignment, working as an audiovisual aide at Jostens School, an elementary school about a mile from Whitney Pratt. Taking one strip of a half dozen photos at a time (he had sectioned the film into pieces of this size), he watched the marvel of the reaction of silver nitrate with the film, bringing out the images from the substrate of the film until it was just right, and then, in an instant, overexposed. Picking the right instant was the problem, the instant that would best represent reality. The images that came into view were of the documentary type Brandt was trying to create: a straight-on, plain shot of the audio visual room in the school, with items stacked exactly as he had found them; several shots of children in the playground, again from directly in front of them. They were black children, exhibiting a range of expressions in their natural postures, from buoyant to plaintive and worried.

After development came printing and then the process of cropping to a selected frame of reference. Here, too, Brandt's new teacher, Lorentz, had provided a maxim: "All art involves selection of frame."

"The frame is the container into which life is put with an object to achieve a certain point of view," Lorentz had said. "But life itself offers frames,—naturally, accidentally.

"We look through the bus window, for example. The bus window is a frame. We look through the windshield of a car. The windshield is a frame. And, much as we try to pick frames, we sometimes discover that the frames that just happen, the accidental frames, are at least as interesting as anything we can deliberately choose. 'Accidental is perfect,' as someone said. That is why I would suggest to you the best way to learn is to go back and forth between accidental frames and frames of your own choosing. The way to find the accidental frames is simply to be alert, to keep looking at the frames that present themselves as you go through your normal day."

A dormer window in the photo workroom, located in the attic of the

lodge, just up a narrow stairway from the photography classroom, provided such a frame, Brandt had observed. The window was set at a 45-degree angle from the corner of the roof. Brandt often looked through it from the same place, behind the workbench used for cropping and mounting photos. Viewed from that perspective, the frame enclosed an urban landscape including the parking lot behind the school, the busy street beyond, and the red brick A.M.E. church and storefront community center that Brandt had noticed on his first day of school.

Within this frame, as he worked, often by himself, sometimes at day and sometimes at night, Brandt had seen many changes of content during his one month as a student at Whitney Pratt. They were subtle changes but they still caused the ambiance of the scene to change.

The quantity and spatial arrangement of vehicles in the parking lot were always changing, for example, and the light on those vehicles changed with sun position, cloud cover, and so on. Sometimes the parking lot was empty, the flat expanse of it not a single color, but reflecting, as in a dull mirror, the light commotion of the street and overlapping shadows of buildings. People passed along the sidewalks or met in impromptu groups. Youths often played basketball in the basketball court at the far corner of the parking lot. Across the street, at the community center, other youths gathered, moving about with respect to one another in changing arrangements.

Accidental arrangements, accidental frames,—and all of them were interesting, all of them were perfect, in their own way, Brandt had come to agree. There was no end to the transformations that could occur within the frame of the window. Brandt had hardly ever seen a frame content that he hadn't regarded as worthy of a photo, if captured in its true form and depth of significance. To bring that content into the camera was easier said than done, however, he had learned. Just matching the camera frame with the window frame left something out.

Working late, on that day of the priest's letter about Stieglitz, Brandt watched as the orange light of the setting sun fell upon a narrow border of brown weeds on the far side of the empty parking lot, below the Marlboro man billboard. There was a tiny red flag there, a construction marker of some kind, flickering in the wind. For just an instant, the red and orange-brown colors there, in a golden shaft of sunlight, glowed with surreal intensity, then, in the next instant, the effect was gone. Brandt observed that without forming an opinion about it in his mind.

Night brought another effect, as Brandt turned off the light in the workroom and donned his coat for the bus ride home. Darkness covered the parking lot. A wet snow had glazed the street with a sheen that reflected the lights of traffic passing along the street in front of the church. An angular shape of white light projected outward from an open

door in the front center of the church, where two women stood talking. Further down the street, by the community center, traffic lights clicked through their color series, from green to amber to red, leaving long reflections of colored light on the wet street and sidewalk.

Again, Brandt watched the scene with no words forming about it in his mind, except isolated words not arranged into longer syntax. “Cross light on silvery tin,” were the only words he said to himself.

Downstairs, in the mostly deserted student and office areas of the school, he found a different scene taking place on a couch and chairs in the corner of the student lounge. Darren Houghten was there, his crutch beside him, involved in an animated discussion with some other people Brandt didn’t know.

“But isn’t that precisely what he’s talking about,” Houghten was saying as he gestured with both hands, “the ‘historical continuum that links pre-technological and technological reason’?”

Brandt, hearing that, tried to pass by quietly without being seen. But Houghten looked up with pleasure.

“Join in with us, Matthew!” he called.

“Not tonight, Darren,” Brandt replied. “Going out for supper with Mary.”

“Some other time?”

“Sure.”

Within minutes Brandt was on the bus, glad to be on the way home to see Mary, and glad to be away from the words he had heard in the student lounge.

[Chapter 133 notes]

134. Mary pursues her intellectual journey through her journal and correspondence

Mary Brandt, though never waning in her admiration of her husband, had experienced no weariness with words such as he had experienced. To the contrary, she felt herself to be in a kind of intellectual explosion, and she was throwing herself into it with her typical seriousness and earnest idealism. Her manner of learning was, in fact, based on words. She used words, neatly printed in her journal, to take hold of the impressions of her daily life.

She maintained her journal as diligently as she had maintained it in college, using just an ordinary three-ring spiral notebook, as she had always done. To her written thoughts she added pen sketches, some of which she colored with pencils. She also pasted or taped in newspaper clippings and cut-out pieces of items that she regarded as significant, such as school announcements, posters, photocopied pieces of letters from others, Christmas cards, and so on.

In addition to the readings required in her studies, which mostly had to do with government, health, and nutrition, Mary had begun reading a number of feminist books including *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and the more radical *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. She had been introduced to these books by Joy Kasberg, the women's center administrator whom she had met on her first day of school. Through her, Mary had joined up with a women's group, composed of both students and faculty, that met once a week to discuss feminist ideas.

Much of this Mary had encountered superficially before, in college or in Kentucky. She was familiar with the basic themes: women defined as pleasers and servers of men; women defined as something not of their own choosing (as, by default, what was left over after control and authority had been relinquished to men). Her general impression of feminist ideas was that they did not especially apply to her present life. She did not regard herself as being constricted with Matthew, in so far as her own ambitions were concerned. Even so, she was willing to consider and talk about such ideas, if for no other reason than to form deeper friendships with other women at school.

Through her discussion group, Mary had been introduced to a diverse range of women writers and notables of various kinds. Some were familiar to her, some not so familiar. Emily Dickinson, Katherine Mansfield, Willa Cather, Eleanor Roosevelt, Marie Curie, Sarah Grimke, Alice Paul, Susan Anthony, "Mother" Jones, Margaret Sanger, Germaine Greer, Anais Nin, Anne Sexton, Joyce Carol Oates, Joan Didion, Sylvia Plath, and Susan Sontag were among the names she had heard. The women behind these names would be studied not just for their ideas, Mary understood, but for how they had fashioned their lives.

Mary had already started looking more closely into the writings of one woman mentioned at the meetings who had piqued her interest at once, the French reformer-mystic, Simone Weil. “There are many qualities in Simone that I find appealing,” she wrote in her journal in her neatly- printed block letters, “her absolute independence, her refusal to be associated with any ‘ism,’ her sympathy with working people, to the point of actually living with them and sharing her teacher’s salary with them, her insistence that intellectuals should apply intelligence to real-life problems. Then her crazy contempt of caring how she looked, her self- starvation...”

Most of all, though, what Mary identified with, she knew, was Weil’s fluent writing and self-examination, which were so much like her own. She yearned to articulate and direct her own concerns with the same degree of self-discipline and purity of intention.

Besides writing in her journals and to the extent required in her classes, Mary maintained a steady correspondence with a number of people. These people included Fletcher Bourne, his son, Bumper, who wrote from Vietnam, and Hattie Beecher, who wrote through Fletcher. They also included Mary’s friends from the “dog cadre,”—as the MVs in eastern Kentucky still called themselves,—Janet Harlan, Karen Holm, and Dennis Kelly. Kelly wrote to both Matt and Mary at the same time, but Mary always responded for both herself and her husband. Mary also kept in touch, through letters, with her parents, her sister, Ellen Morris, and with friends from college. Occasionally, also, though not often, Jim Morris, Tom Steward, or Bill O’Rourke, and lately, Barbara Carpenter, sent a letter to both Brandt’s together. These she answered, too, for both herself and Matthew.

Through this correspondence, Mary had retained a wide view of “what was going on,” as Matthew put it when he asked for information that he was curious about himself. Apart from her parents, her view revealed one group of people, known through Jim Morris, Bumper Bourne, and Barbara Carpenter, who were involved in the war, and another group, known through associates and friends, who were “against the war,” and involved in “social change.” Between these two groups, there was an almost palpable tension. It was an interesting view. She welcomed each addition as letters came in from her correspondents.

On the war side: Bumper Bourne, by this time a truck mechanic with the U.S. Army 199th Mechanics Division in Dhang Nhu, in South Vietnam, had just written a scrawled note to thank Mary for the Christmas cookies she had sent. Barbara Carpenter, an Army nurse stationed at the U.S. Army 3rd Surgical Hospital at Dong Tam, also in South Vietnam, lived in a room just big enough to stand up in, with a wall of sand bags outside her door. She worked often, she wrote, for 12

hours a day, “seeing such horrible things, Mary, I never dreamed of seeing. Like last night, this poor boy, just 18, with both his eyes blown out.” Capt. Jim Morris had completed his 58th mission at Takhli. He never mentioned combat. He wrote about the look of the camp and nearby town or about his fellow pilots, where they were from, what they said and did.

On the social change side: The letters brought continuing news of the situation Matt and Mary had left behind in Kentucky. Fletcher Bourne was still publishing the *Miner-Mountaineer* (though, according to Dennis Kelly, Bourne had lost a fair piece of his advertising revenue due to his defense of Birl Poling). Janet Harlan and Karen Holm, already approaching the end of their promised year with the MVs, were thinking of going back to college, Harlan in teaching, Holm in social work,—of course, with the stated end in mind of continuing the work of social change they had been introduced to in Kentucky. Dennis Kelly, ever the true believer, still published his *Dog Daze* newsletter, filled with news of a new strip mine committee, this one with some middle class participants to shield the other members. He was no longer an MV. He had gone ahead with his ambition of freeing himself from dependence on the government. He was working in a shoe factory in his adopted town of Kensington, Kentucky.

“It’s the same factory I was trying to organize last year, the one you can see from my window,” Kelly wrote in his diffident manner. “I was honored just recently to get elected as shop steward. Continuing in the Birl Poling tradition, I hope. I like doing plain old honest work for my livelihood. I like not getting paid for what I do on the side to work for better working conditions.”

There was always a note of loneliness in Kelly’s letters, also. He wrote of missing the MV meetings. He wrote that he missed his “regular go arounds with Matthew.” His every letter contained an invitation, somewhere or another, for the Brandt’s to visit him in his apartment in downtown Kensington.

“Come on out whenever you get in this direction,” he wrote. “You don’t need to arrange it formally. I’m the only one here. Just drop on in. You can stay as long as you want. I’m serious. Spend your vacation out here, if you want to.”

Proudest development of all, for Mary, was represented through her correspondence with Hattie Beecher. The old woman had not only remained a friend, she had also continued working with the group of women that she and Mary had founded.

The women, by this time about a dozen in number, called themselves the “Mountain Women’s Cooperative.” They had published the cookbook of traditional recipes that Hattie and Mary had started. In

addition, they had begun making and selling mountain specialties such as jelly, jam, and apple cider. The cookbook and food products were being sold in student cooperative stores in Knoxville, Kentucky, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, both contacts arranged by Mary.

Mary was currently working to get a third contact established, at a cooperative store in Georgetown. One of the women in her feminist group worked at the store. Mary was also designing decorative labels for the various products.

In her journal, Mary had pasted some mementos of milestones along the way, including her cover design for the first issue of the cook book, a pen drawing of Hattie's old iron stove with a pot sitting on the heater and onions hanging above it.

The cookbook had gone into a second issue, with the production method converted from the original copy machine to offset press. Mary's journal also contained a cutout copy of an article about the coop that had appeared in the Minnesota Daily, the student newspaper at the University of Minnesota.

In this, as in all her activities on behalf of the mountain women's coop, Mary had kept herself in the background. The article quoted Hattie Beecher, "We started this recipe business years ago, when times was hard, when we saw there was young wives didn't know how to grow food and feed their families."

The article also included a photo (supplied by Mary) of the old woman looking up from her newly planted garden with her plum and apple trees in bloom in the sunlight behind her.

Hattie's letters, as transcribed by Fletcher Bourne, retained the quaint mountain expressions, though with colloquialisms like "wadn't" converted into standard words. Hattie's letters were a mixture of food production facts, showing a shrewd business sense, plus affectionate remarks often begun with the words, "Young Mary."

"Young Mary, you watch out for yourself now, in the midst of all them strangers," went a typical comment. "Don't go too far astray without Matthew. There's men, you know, watch for young girls like coyotes for sheep. I learned that myself when I was young like you."

To these remarks, Mary responded with her own affection, which she felt intensely and gave out freely. "I was thinking of that evening we sat together in your living room talking, thinking you must think about your son sometimes and wish he was there," went a typical remark inviting a deep level of response.

Mary's greatest emotion within correspondence went to her sister Ellen. Letters from Ellen had arrived about twice a month since Jim Morris had gone overseas. Each letter brought Mary to a state of keen alertness as she tried to discern the underlying meaning of the often-

superficial news. She knew that Ellen used humor and activity to put a happy face on dire moments.

Mary was keen, also, to find out whether Ellen's recent suspicions about being pregnant would turn out to be true. That seemed to be the case since Ellen's letter received in late February 1969 brought the news that Ellen had missed her period.

"It's not happy news as it could be if Jim was home," Ellen wrote. "I'm so conflicted about what to do. What I mean, Mary, is I've been thinking of getting an abortion. I know it's illegal and it sounds drastic, but I talked to someone here, a woman I met on the base, and she said she knows of a place where it could be done safely. It's not complicated, especially at this point. It's mostly a matter of the emotional side of it. And, I suppose, the moral, too. I've thought a lot about it. The main thing that keeps coming into my mind is Jim and I have only really lived together a few months. I want things to be more solid before we have kids."

That was the extent of what Ellen had to say about it, but Mary knew, for her sister, there were other issues involved, including plain and simple vanity (wanting to look her best when Jim arrived home), and the other issue that Ellen had described in a previous letter, of Jim's expressed desire not to have a child while there was still a danger he would die in combat.

All in all, it was a complicated matter. Mary suspected that the emotional and moral sides that Ellen referred to almost in passing would turn out to be more considerable in the aftermath, if the abortion actually happened.

Was there any advice she could give, Mary wondered. She had lately been hearing comments from various women in her group that the world was too screwed up, with the war and all, to bring more children into it. She didn't know herself whether she would ever want to have children, despite being aware that all through her relationship with Matthew she had been attracted to him partly because of her assessment of him as a potential good father. Lately, under the influence of her new friends, her view of parenthood has become increasingly bleak, leaving her now in a state, she knew, where she could not promote it.

No, she could not, she would not, interfere in her sister's private decision, she decided. But she could assist in legal and health issues, if that were the direction her sister went, by talking to women in her group. She decided to do that at once.

"Ellen, I can just feel how tormented you must be," she wound up writing. "I just want you to know I love you very much. I'll be there for you, little sister, whatever you decide."

[Chapter 134 notes]

135. Steward and O'Rourke immerse themselves in meetings and picket lines

By mid-February of 1969, after having been with the Farmworkers for two full weeks, Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke had settled into their daily schedule of morning picketing followed by afternoon and evening meetings. They were each, by this time, working independently in arranging meetings, which they kept track of using the big calendar and L.A. wall map in the living room office.

The four people doing meetings (Steward, O'Rourke, Jose Terda, and Dan Kampf) each used different colored tacks on the wall map and pen ink color on the calendar. Steward used blue, O'Rourke red, Kampf green, and Terda black.

Without being told, and as a result of inclination rather than of any agreed upon plan, O'Rourke had gravitated toward meetings with college age people, usually through presentations before campus organizations such as the Newman club or Young Democrats, while Steward, desiring a change from his youth work in North Carolina, had gravitated toward union locals and neighborhood organizations. Both young men had found that almost every meeting resulted in suggestions for further contacts, which then led to phone calls to those contacts, followed by arrangements with them for further meetings, and then by the meeting themselves.

On a typical day, Steward and O'Rourke had at least one afternoon meeting and one evening meeting. On busy days, there were three or more meetings.

In the course of being oriented to the Farmworkers' organization, Steward and O'Rourke had also learned that the immediate objective of the organization was to focus on city-wide, nation-wide events designed to mobilize support and capture the public imaginations. These events were around the clock picketing "camp in's" at selected stores. The idea was that hundreds of people would show up to picket all day at each selected store, then they would remain on the store parking lot for an all night campfire vigil involving music, speeches, and prayers. The expected local news coverage would be used to inform the public about the strike and boycott, and to elicit support for the Farmworkers' cause.

Two such events were scheduled for the near future. The first would take place on Easter weekend, starting on the morning of Holy Saturday (in that year, April 5), and ending Easter morning with an outdoor ecumenical prayer service on Easter morning. The second event would take place on "Cinco de Mayo" (which landed that year on Monday, May 5). The reason for the Easter date selection, Steward and O'Rourke had learned, was because the union had obtained its first contract on Easter Day, 1966, after having been on strike since September of the previous

year. Cesar Chavez, the union leader, had announced that victory in Sacramento upon completing a 340 mile march, with 10,000 union members and supporters, from Delano, where the strike was taking place. The reason for having the second event on Cinco de Mayo was obvious since most of the farmworkers were Mexican by ethnic origin and Cinco de Mayo was a Mexican holiday. But the extent of conscious alignment with the Mexican revolution and with revolutionary figures such as Emiliano Zapata was of interest here, Steward thought, just as the conscious alignment with the Christian (mainly Catholic) tradition was of interest in the Easter date selection.

Mark Chambers, O'Rourke's preacher friend from Georgia, offered his own view of the religious and ethnic roots of the Farmworkers union at about this same time, on a weekday evening when he visited the office in his official capacity as Director of the California Migrant Ministry and wound up staying for a visit in Steward and O'Rourke's new, cabin-like garage home.

"I came out here, officially, as a religious man," said the lanky, raw-boned minister with the hippie hair. "I was expecting to 'minister to migrants,' as my title implies. Once I got here, though, I found there was more religion inside this movement than I could bring to it from outside. The religion comes from the Mexican, the Chicano, culture, which is so religious to the core. The revolution in Mexico was in part against the Roman Catholic Church, which was almost a de facto state church. But the revolution was religious in its mentality, in my opinion."

"We're gonna get our damn fair share of that on Easter, I betcha," O'Rourke replied.

"Yes, I reckon you will, Billy Boy," Chambers remarked, peering at his friend with his large, sad eyes, which looked older than the rest of his face. He wasn't bothered by O'Rourke's irreverence. He found it a pleasant relief from the often over earnest tone of the people he met in his work. "I think you're going to get to hold a candle, like I guess you must have learned in your Catholic school."

"Yea, man, I'm afraid of that, too," the red-haired, red-bearded former coxswain replied.

Chambers smiled at that and went on without responding to another topic. "Now here's something else you might not know yet," he said. "How come you think we got the Filipino brothers involved in this operation? There's some history to it I bet you don't know."

"Well, I assume it's because they work in the fields," said Tom Steward. "They just joined the union like everybody else."

"Well, yea, to some extent," said Chambers, assuming the manner of a teacher. "But there's more to it than that. See, the Filipinos were the first ones out with a union, which was called the Agricultural Workers

Association, the AWA. Delores Huerta was involved in it, too, back then, but, for the most part, they were Filipinos. Under Larry Itliong. This was back—what is it now?-- almost ten years ago. Or, actually, exactly ten years, counting from this year. It was in ‘59. And four years or so ago, in spring of ‘65, the AWA began staging strikes and had some success at it, not contracts, exactly, but in a couple of instances the growers, up in Coachella Valley, agreed to up the pay to a buck and a quarter an hour. This led up to another strike, up in Delano, in September that same year, where again the union was trying to get a buck twenty five. Most of the strikers were Filipinos, and Itliong went to Cesar Chavez and asked him to join in with his mostly Chicano union, which was still at that time untested. Chavez agreed. It was a big deal, you know, the Chicanos and Filipinos banning together, and they’ve been together ever since.”

“Thus the Filipino brothers here,” said O’Rourke.

“Precisely.”

“Then there was a goofy little side scene in all that. Believe it or not, after the Easter ceremony, Chavez’s march, and all, the Teamsters came in and offered to the grower, Schenley, that they could organize a more conservative union than the Farmworkers and a cheaper rate.”

Chambers’ Lincolnesque features became more animated and boyish as he delivered this information in his Southern good ol’ boy manner to his two friends. With his hands clasped behind his head, he leaned back against the wall behind the cardboard boxes he was sitting on, his face set in a toothy, unaffected grin.

“And that’s the truth of it,” he said. “So help me, God.”

“Guess that’s what they call union corruption,” threw in O’Rourke from his bed where he was sitting as on a couch with his back against the tool bench behind his bed, which consisted of two mattresses stacked on top of one another on the floor.

“So what came out of that?” Steward asked.

“Big election, eventually, government supervised, and the workers chose UFW, you guys, us.”

“Hurray for us.”

“Yes, you’re in the right camp.”

O’Rourke listened to all of his politely, feeling some interest in it, an interest that grew in the successive weeks as he traveled to L.A. campuses arranging and attending his meetings. But his mind had begun to move ahead to another event scheduled to occur in April, his long-awaited induction to the Army. His mind also frequently settled on his continuing relationship, through correspondence, with Barbara Carpenter. She still wrote one or twice a week from Vietnam.

Steward had a deeper interest in the social and political details of his new situation. In just two weeks, he had come into contact with a wide

range of different types of organizations, from political groups to union locals. His meetings had brought him into many areas of the city including black neighborhoods such as Watts where riots had occurred in the past few years.

Most of the groups that Steward had spoken to had been friendly and willing to support the Farmworkers' effort with donations of supplies or money by providing volunteers for pickets at Safeway stores. Some groups, particularly in black areas, had been dismissive of the basic objectives of the union for not seeking fundamental change.

"This bullshit you're proposing, man," one man, dressed neatly in a suit and tie, had proclaimed, "this is 1966. This is James Meredith trying to get in the honkie school. Things are moving along, man. Where you been? Keeping the darkies in the honkie fields, getting them a little piece more, that ain't nobody's notion of a fundamental change." \

"What is fundamental change then?" Steward had asked.

"Fundamental change is, take the fields, throw the honkies out."

Steward had no ready response for such remarks. He assumed that the man in the suit was a member of an extremist, separatist group such as the Black Nation. He was aware that there had calls for drastic action from such groups, as well as from some radical political groups whose members were mostly white college students or ex-students like himself. But he himself still believed in the American way. He still believed the overall objective should be to bring anyone into the American way that had been unfairly excluded from it.

At a union local meeting in Wilshire, a mostly white, middle-class neighborhood near the L.A. Farmers Market, Tom Steward encountered another component of the so-called "Movement" on the evening after Rev. Chambers had lingered in the garage for a late night talk. There, in Wilshire, the members of Printers Union Local 235, assembled into a open hall on Fairfax Avenue, above a commercial street, with framed black and white photos of printers and printing presses on the walls around them, turned out to be representatives of the old labor ideal of intellectual tradesmen.

The local president, whose name was Seymour Frankel, talked about a strike in Chicago in 1905. He himself was a classic type. With his glasses and goatee, he resembled pictures Steward had seen of Leon Trotsky. The rest of him, as it came out, was what you might have expected from someone with such an appearance. He was a big fellow, about six foot two. He had a deep, strong voice. In his speech, he displayed the vocabulary of a college professor, though in words delivered with the hard consonants and cadence of a construction worker.

"This was a strike that started out with a couple hundred garment workers," Frankel said. "Three, four months later, it involved over

35,000 teamsters. This was first in a boycott of Monkey Wards, then affecting the entire city, when the mayor and cops got involved. And the teamsters had nothing to gain. They were just supporting the garment workers."

The prospect of unions all over the country joining in support of the Farmworkers' strike conjured up some grandiose conjectures as Steward, accepting an invitation, walked with Seymour Frankel, after the meeting, to his home just down the street from the union hall. There Frankel gave Steward a book on labor history that he recommended.

"This will help to put it all in perspective for you, young man," he said. "I just want you to realize that what you're doing is important. In this game, let me tell you, ground is lost or gained in increments, and this union, this strike they're waging, is one such increment."

The spacious apartment, with its bookshelves and artistic prints, could have been the home of a college professor.

"Hey, and don't think the increments aren't important in thought," the union president added, placing a book in Steward's hand. "That's why I'm giving you this."

Glancing down, Steward saw that Frankel's name on the cover below a title that reflected the thought just presented: 'Incremental Change: A Study of Labor History in the U.S.'"

"You may recognize the author."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I don't pretend to be a great author. But this is an idea, not really my idea, just an idea, that's been important to me for a long time, in my work in the unions."

"Well, thanks very much."

"The idea I'm talking about is, many little efforts add up, in our American two party system. Maybe, in a different system, we'd have a own political party, like the Social Democrats or something in Europe, but we don't have that, realistically. What we have is this system where we have to get out little inputs put in, to push the whole thing a notch this way or that."

"Well, I intend to read the book," said Steward.

"Good for you. All of us together doing and thinking are going to get the thing on the right track."

"Okay."

Steward drove back to the Farmworkers' house that evening on the familiar Hollywood freeway, thinking over what Seymour Frankel had said. From his perspective, it was heady stuff. He was glad to have entered the ranks of people that he regarded as true intellectuals. He was glad to be taken seriously enough to be talked to. He knew part of that was that he, of late, took ideas more seriously himself, having made his

commitment to accept prison, if necessary, to hold to his position on the war and draft. He had still not heard from his state board about the disposition of his appeal. Meanwhile, planning for the far shot of his appeal being accepted, he had been looking in the mail every day for a letter from the American Friends. He was still hoping for the volunteer job that he had applied for, driving supply trucks in the Biafran war.

That was heady stuff, too, but the lull of the tires on the freeway and a pretty face in a passing car brought Steward back to the more down- to-earth theme of his ongoing loneliness. He had lately noticed young women looking at him with interest, as he appeared at his meetings or talked to people afterwards.

[Chapter 135 notes]

136. Steward hitches up the coast and meets a young woman

Tom Steward's restiveness with regard to women was much in the mix in his mind at about this same time, in February 1969, when he decided to hitch up to Santa Barbara to visit his doctor brother, Art.

It would be an easy solo trip, just 150 miles, and a beautiful one, as Steward planned it, up the coastal highway through Malibu and Orono and other places where he'd heard there were white beaches and orange groves. The mere thought of it filled him with the wanderlust that he had been feeling often, also, in his new life. Compared to his previous life in the little community of Dulatown in North Carolina, his new life was so unconfined, so full of promise of freedom and unexpected events.

The idea for the trip actually originated from Jose Terda, the Farm Workers boss, who suggested it at once when he learned that his new worker had a brother so close at hand.

"Tomas, amigo, you go on, and have a good time! You been workin' berry hard! Es un worker duro, no?" the ebullient Chicano said. He gave Steward an extra week's pay for the trip. "Hey, you need anything else, hagame saber!"

Bill O'Rourke, Steward's garage-mate, and always the good buddy in ready support, took him part of the way, to get him off to a good start, driving him in one of the United Farm Workers cars as far as the Santa Monica beach.

At the drop-off point in Santa Monica, O'Rourke got out of the car for a few minutes, to sniff in the ocean air, with his red hair and beard blowing in the wind. He stood with his hands on his hips, looking up the coast, as if assessing the situation.

It was a pose familiar to Steward from college regattas, where O'Rourke had often assumed a similar pose when assessing the water before a race.

"Well, Stewmeat, looks like you got a good day for it," the former coxswain said.

"Yes, it does."

"Maybe once, before I leave for the service, we'll do another one together."

"I'd like that, Bill."

"Up to goddam Big Sur or something!"

"I'd like that."

"You got everything now?"

"Yes, I do. Just my pack."

"Don't even need a map! Straight up the highway!"

"Yes, that's true."

A hardy handshake followed and O'Rourke was gone, bringing a moment of sadness at separation from a friend. Soon, however, the

loneliness and yearning came back that Steward had been feeling for the past few weeks, combined with a feeling of excitement at the vista before him. He felt eager for experience, eager to strike out into the world and take it somehow in hand.

It was, indeed, an astounding vista. Green hills rose steeply from one side of the highway. On the other, a white beach with rolling waves extended far into the distance beside the gleaming expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Out on the swelling water, the line was indistinct between water and sky. Long, thin clouds, just above the horizon, divided the sky and water into indeterminate shapes of blue and green. Seagulls swirled above the wet sand. Pelicans in single file followed along the trough of a cresting wave.

Steward, with his pack slung over one shoulder, set out along the highway. He would walk for an hour or so, he thought to himself, before sticking out his thumb for a ride.

He walked with long, vigorous strides, showing in his whole bearing and movement the effect of his experiences of the previous two years plus his native tendencies to one-mindedness and self-discipline. Since leaving North Carolina, he had intensified his daily workouts, often doing sprints and calisthenics in addition to his long runs. He ate only one meal a day, fasting not for any religious reason, but out of a vague desire for self-renunciation. He was dressed with an almost studious plainness, in jeans, a gray T-shirt, and his customary white tennis shoes. His face was firmly set, below the tousled brown hair. His hazel eyes were thoughtful and keen, reflecting the self-respect and sense of integrity gained from holding to his uncompromised position against the war and the draft. He had an appearance of directness and honesty.

All along the highway, as he walked, he saw people interacting with the vast scene, vignettes of people's lives that arose into his view and then were gone.

At one place, a narrow strip of beach beside an outgrowth of rock, he watched as a young, pretty woman exited from a car, with banging door, and opened another door to let out two little girls, the biggest one a head taller than the other. The woman and girls all had long, straight blonde hair in the waist-long style of the day. They all had their hair tied behind their head in the exact same way and secured with a ribbon, though each had a ribbon of a different color. The woman's ribbon was red, the older girl's was purple, and the younger girl's was green. They started toward the beach hand in hand, then the girls dashed ahead, laughing, sending the sand pipers scurrying to both sides.

Further up the beach, teenage boys and young men with surfboards paddled out into the surf toward the breaking line of the waves. A few watched from shore, standing in the wet sand. Others, further out, rode

the crest in, their bodies dark against a glittering sheen of sunlight. They were involved in their individual struggles with the surf, yet they were in contact with one another, shouting hurrahs and comments or just watching one another perform.

Further up the beach from the surfers were sunbathers, arranged into couples and small groups, many of them talking back and forth or lightly touching one another, applying lotion or holding hands.

One couple, in particular, he noticed, a young man and young woman dressed in hiking clothes and boots as if they had gone out together for a walk and just happened on the beach. What struck him about them was their looks of attentiveness toward one another. They were over to the side of the sunbathers, below a rock cliff. They leaned together, looking at a book in the young woman's hand.

People whose lives were all so interconnected, Steward thought. His fleeting looks into their lives brought him back repeatedly to the inner yearning and loneliness that he felt so often.

He found himself wondering how it was that he, at 24 years of age, had come into such an odd situation, with respect to women, compared to so many other young men his own age. His thoughts about this subject occupied him for several miles, with the waves crashing in from the swelling water beside him.

His high school days came first to mind. How had it come about that he had never dated once in that entire period? Being in a boy's military school hadn't helped, certainly, he said to himself, but many in that situation had managed to have normal social development. In his case, it had been a combination of pride and of somehow getting a reputation of being a "rolling stone that gathers no moss." He had been too proud to admit that he wanted to break out of the confinement of that partially self-imposed image.

Then, in college, another year in all male, rural Minnesota school, with occasional, secret eye contact with the farm girl who served the meals composing the totality of his romantic aspirations. A summer project in Mexico had provided a modicum of relief from that,—through two Mexican girls, Guadalupe and Gloria. Guadalupe had been prettier, Gloria had been more interested, but a chaperoned evening party at Guadalupe's house had been the only approach to romance.

Then three more years at other colleges, other awkward attempts at breaking out of the "confirmed bachelor" role, and the final roller coast ride with Barbara Carpenter, starting with her bold self-introductions and come-ons, and ending with her abrupt break-off and departure from school, just at a time when she had achieved his devotion.

That last episode, with Carpenter, was the one that remained most strongly in his mind. He recalled their first evening together when she

had lingered behind, after their YMCA activity together, to ask him to walk her home, her pretty face so girlish and mischievous beneath her straight bangs, then the evening a few days later when she had plopped down on his lap on the couch after kneeling next to him as if to look out the window. Events had led so fast from that initial promise of romance to her decision, following her pregnancy and miscarriage, to break off all her contact with "boys."

One memory came vividly to mind as he walked, the afternoon when she had called to tell him that her counseling colleague,—not even really her boyfriend, the one who had gotten her pregnant,—had tried to kill himself by injecting his veins with ether. The odd details of that had seemed too strange to believe, so he had walked up two blocks from his apartment to the alley behind the YMCA where her counselor friend lived, and there sat the ambulance she had described, with red lights blinking quietly off and on as the counselor was carried on a litter down the exterior steps at the back of the building.

That had been almost exactly two years before, Steward thought, and now Barbara Carpenter,—no longer a girl, now a nurse in Vietnam!—was sending letters to Bill O'Rourke instead of him,—letters signed with O's and X's for hugs and kisses, Steward had noticed.

"Two years ago," he said to himself.

His first and only ride, going all the way to Santa Barbara, returned him soon later to the world of contention and organization that he had left briefly behind. The driver was a sociology professor at the University of California in Goleta (just north of Santa Barbara, the professor explained). He was brimming with opinions about the student demonstrations that were disrupting campuses throughout the state, taking a middle position regarding them,(a safe position, Steward thought), not really against them and not really for them, either.

"You know what it's coming down to," the professor, a man of about 35 with a hip-looking beard and stylish long hair, proclaimed, "you kids are assaulting these institutions like some kind of fortresses, and let me clue you in a little, these fortresses are not gonna just fall. You got guys like Reagan..."

Steward knew who the professor was talking about—Ronald Reagan, the current, popular governor, whose popularity was said to be due, in part, to his staunch opposition to student demands,—but he couldn't bring himself to talk about that at the moment. They were passing through orange groves, the first he had seen, with sea pinks and acacia trees blooming beside the road and waves rolling in in the distance.

"It's goddam quixotic, is what I'm trying to tell you," the hip professor exclaimed. "That's why you got so many kids dropping out, hanging around. Maybe that's the best thing you can do."

Steward understood that the professor was referring to him, which impressed him as being off base, but he didn't feel inclined to set him straight. He was glad when the ride ended at an off-ramp in Santa Barbara, giving him a chance to return to his own thoughts.

Coming around a wide curve of the road there, at a municipal beach bordered with grass and palm trees, Steward found some instances of what the professor had referred to.

Vans and cars of the rattletrap kind young people without much money can afford were parked beside a pedestrian walk. Long-haired, bearded young men, and young women with hair reaching down to their waists, lounged on the beach, or played volleyball at the several courts on the sand. Other youths, some of them appearing to be no more than teens, passed by in a constant stream, walking, or on bicycles or skateboards. The smell of marijuana wafted through the air. Loud music blared from the speakers of cars.

Here Steward saw a dimension of the counterculture scene that he had been aware of to some extent but had never seen so closely before. These young people before him were not the activist types he was used to from his involvement with social action and opposition to the draft. They were not the desperate wino types, disguised as long hairs, that he had seen in the area around O'Rourke's brother's apartment in Chicago. They were somewhere in between, in opposition to the mass culture, obviously, but with a look of aimless celebration and self-indulgence.

For Steward, the effect of this was puzzlement at just where he fit in. He was part of this, in a way, due to the common thread of opposition, he thought, but he didn't feel inclined to such self-indulgence. His sense of the counterculture, thus far, had been mainly that it was a serious movement aimed at social and political change. Even so, there was much here that he did feel part of, the energy of youth, the dismissal of the staid world of "life as usual," life without meaning. And, throughout it all, there was the excitement of the free intermingling of men and women, the lithe movement everywhere of female forms, bringing him back again to his desire to break out of his lonely past.

One young woman struck him especially as he walked by with his pack slung over his shoulder. She was in the process of reprimanding a boy of about 13 or 14 in a gentle but firm manner. The gist of it Steward got in a moment was that the boy had played hookie from school. She was obviously not the boy's girlfriend or mother. She appeared to be an older sister, based on the family resemblance and how the boy appeared to grant her authority while at the same time resisting her directions. She had wavy blonde hair, about half way down her back, and a statuesque figure. The boy also had long blond hair, straighter and dirtier-looking than hers. He was holding a skateboard. She was not dressed for the

beach; she was dressed as for a business meeting, in red pumps, nylon hose, a neatly pressed, knee-length gray skirt, and a red business jacket.

Just as Steward approached on a sidewalk a few feet away, she spun in his direction to point with one finger to a car that she apparently wanted the boy to get in. Seeing Steward looking at her, she smiled. She had a pretty face with blue eyes and dimples. She looked about 19 years old.

"You got to give 'em the riot act!" she said. "It's the only way they listen!"

Steward, caught by surprise, replied, "Well, good luck with it," in the most pleasant voice he could muster.

"Thanks!" she said. "I'll need it!"

With that, she smiled again and Steward continued on past, but he kept thinking about her, replaying the whole scene in his mind from his first sight of her to her smile and spoken words.

137. Steward tours mission with Art as draft status is resolved

Tom Steward found his brother's apartment on a shaded side street, just off State Street, about two miles from the beach. Opening a wooden gate there, under an adobe arch overhung with ivy, he found an interior courtyard with a swimming pool. Seeing that, he recalled how Art had described the set-up for the interns as "like a motel."

His brother's wife, Nancy, was sitting reading a book at a table by the pool, waiting. He had called ahead a few minutes before to announce that he had arrived.

"So there's the stranger!" Nancy Steward said.

She was a prim, pretty young woman with a tiny waist, girlish hips, and neatly clipped blonde hair. In her appearance, there was no suggestion of the pensive bearing that Tom Steward had grown used to in the few women he had met in his experience in college and VISTA. She was a woman of a different type. She didn't like ponderous talk.

"Art just called," she reported brightly. "He's coming right home. We've got a special place to take you!"

"Oh, yea? Where's that?"

"Oh, you'll see! You'll like it!"

He followed as she showed him around. The entire, little motel was occupied by medical interns, she explained, all of them working at the county hospital. All the interns were men. Most of them were gone all day while the wives did various activities together. Some of the wives worked at various jobs, she said, but she had decided not to.

"One of us has to stay sane!" she laughed as she bustled about the apartment, waiting for Arthur to arrive.

An exterior stairway led to a second floor balcony where the third door along the line opened to a cheerful interior with a living room and kitchenette and a table set with flowers.

The younger brother considered all this, comparing it against his own situation. Here was his brother, only two years older than he, with a career that really mattered and a devoted wife, subordinating her own interests to be available when needed. "There's no going back," he thought to himself. A life such as Art had was not an option any more. He could not even imagine himself having a job such as Art had that would provide enough to accommodate two people in such a comfortable apartment.

Dr. Arthur Steward came in soon later, coming across at once for a grin and handshake. Standing together, the two brothers looked much alike with their common Nordic features and close-set eyes, though everything about the older brother, from features to movement, seemed more prosaic and sturdy.

"You came up hitching?" Arthur said.

"Nothing to it," Thomas replied. "Just stick out your thumb."

"Made it in three rides."

"No concern about safety?"

"What's to be concerned with?"

"California weird," Nancy threw in.

Soon they were settled down with beers, listening to music as the sunlight beamed in through the windows.

"Hey, Tom, on your way back down to L.A., you can take the bus," the doctor ventured. "Really, I'm serious. It's on us."

"I'd just as soon hitch."

"Just indulge me, okay?"

Thereby was resumed the dynamic, familiar to both of them, of older brother offering advice and younger brother dismissing that advice with a note of irritation. Along with that came the dynamic of practical versus idealistic notions, and the mutual, generous attempts to reconcile after tension resulted.

An hour or so later, with the sun low in the sky, the two brothers and the new wife headed up a winding highway through the coastal mountains to the place Nancy had mentioned. It was a tavern called Cold Springs, nestled in the pine woods just on the other side of the highest ridge of the dry slopes dotted with chaparral and oak.

The tavern had been a stage coach stop in the 1800's, Art informed as they wound up the highway. The tavern still had trappings of the stage coach era, he said, hitching posts, wagon wheels, and the spring itself, set in a limestone cliff behind the main log building.

"They say the stage coach followed this same route exactly," Nancy added, "going from Santa Barbara to Santa Inez."

Far to the west, the sun was setting over the ocean. Every turn of the highway brought a more dramatic view of the city and coastline as the breadth of the scene widened from increasing height.

The conversation remained on safe topics throughout the meal in the log-paneled dining room of the tavern. On the trip back down the winding road, however, with the bulk of the evening assured as enjoyable for all, the conversation strayed onto the more conflicted topic of what exactly the younger brother was doing in his volunteer work in Los Angeles.

Art attempted an attitude of patience and sympathy as he listened to the details of the secondary boycott against the Safeway stores. Soon, though, he was unable to contain himself.

"Well, look, Tom," he interjected, "I know you've got the best of intentions, but just let me play the devil's advocate on that."

"Okay, go ahead," the younger brother answered.

"These Safeway stores are simply buyers of merchandise. They don't employ the farm workers, do they?"

"No."

"Well, see, logically, they should be allowed to do what they do, fulfilling their proper role, which is, what? To buy food as cheap as they can to sell it."

"Yea, but, Art, it's not quite as simple as that," Tom answered. "What the UFW is saying is that just can't be. The stores have to have a conscience in what they buy. We as buyers have to have a conscience in what we buy."

"Well, think about that, Tom, every time you go to the store, you can't sit there and figure out where everything came from."

"Well, in this case, you know. That's the whole purpose of having pickets outside."

Art Steward shook his head in exasperation.

"Just think if everyone did that," Nancy threw in. "There'd be picket lines all over. You wouldn't feel comfortable shopping anywhere."

"Precisely. And the reason you feel uncomfortable is because it's not really a matter of conscience," said the doctor. "It's a matter of intimidation."

The younger brother let that comment drop as they reached the first tile-roofed house of the city, but the older brother returned to the topic again in a few minutes.

"Just one more thing," he said. "This business of 'what if everyone did it,' everyone says you can't apply that, but it seems legitimate to me when you got things such as you have a knack for which if everyone did, the whole society would crumble."

"Like what, for instance?" the younger brother replied, his voice rising.

"Your stance on the draft, for instance."

"Art, you don't know anything about it."

"I know what you told me."

"You know just the surface, Art, because that's all the deeper you want to go. On anything, really."

"Tell me more then."

"Some time you can read my statement."

"I'd like to do that."

"Oh, you guys!" said Nancy, laughing. "I don't think you're going to solve it all tonight."

Two days later, the brothers visited the Santa Barbara Mission and went on a hike together up a canyon just behind the mission to the top of the coastal mountains.

Traveling in Art's Volkswagen bug, they arrived in mid-morning and

stood for a moment in the parking lot looking at the 150-year-old church. It was a simple, functional-looking church with an immense central door, a pink sandstone façade, and twin, square bell towers with brass cupolas. Extending out from the church, on one side, was an one-story, tile-roofed building with an arcade of Romanesque arches. Nearer by was an immense fountain with a long, narrow stone extension (apparently an aqueduct of some kind) and a wooden cross with a historical plaque.

They went first to the historical plaque. The cross stood at the site of the original mission cross, the plaque said, set in place in 1786. The fountain and stone extension, identified as the "lavadero," were part of the mission water works, which had brought water to the fountain from a dam in Mission Canyon.

"Mission Canyon," Arthur noted with satisfaction. During the past week, he had tried hard to find events his brother enjoyed, and history was usually a winner. "That's where we'll be hiking."

Continuing on to the church, the brothers stood in a setting of a type familiar to them both from their Catholic childhood. Tom Steward lingered in the church in a reflective mood, recalling his boyhood ambition to be a priest. Art moved around like a tourist, examining various items that had been put on display.

"Hey, look at this," Art said when his brother caught up to him in the adjacent building. "This place, in 1809, was like a huge ranch. 5,200 head of cattle. 11,121 head of sheep. And who was in charge of the whole thing? Five priests. With hundreds of Indians working for them."

The younger brother, drawing closer, looked at a photo there (from a later period, circa 1875) of four priests, in brown Franciscan habits, seated in the living room of the rectory. Three of them, seated together in lounging postures, looked well-fed and comfortable. The fourth priest, younger and leaner, and seated at a distance from the others, in a more upright posture, had a look of austerity.

"Not a bad life, if you can give up sex," Art added with a smile. "Assuming they did."

The trail up Mission Canyon followed along a narrow creek through terraced groves of citrus and olive trees to an undomesticated landscape of chaparral, cactus, buckthorn, and sage.

At the earthen dam built by the Chumash Indians almost two centuries before, under supervision of the padres, the brothers paused in fulfillment of the historical note Arthur had planned.

"You know, Tom, something you don't know," Arthur said as they sat together beside the rock foundation of the old walls, "I've been meaning to tell you, I'm not exactly free of the draft myself."

"How's that?"

"Well, they have what they call the 'doctor draft,' which is, they let

you finish med school and internship, then they invite you. I'm not sure that will happen, but the word around is it will."

"What do you mean 'invite' you?" Thomas asked.

"Well, see, I guess that's their idea of subtlety. They invite you but you damn better accept."

"What if you don't?" the younger brother asked.

"Well, as I've heard, that's when things can get nasty."

"When you think this will happen?"

"As early as this summer... And I've thought about this a great deal, Tom," the doctor brother continued, choosing his words carefully. "You think I don't but I do. What I've decided is, if they draft me, I'll go in. I mean, I respect your thought process, Tom. Really, I do. But, for me, I don't know, I just figure, there have always been wars, our country is at war... I don't want to draw the line on it, I guess..."

"Well, maybe for you, that is the right thing," the younger brother replied, choosing his words carefully, also. "You see, the way I look at it, Art, everybody has a set of responsibilities determined by their own situation, and your situation is you're a doctor. That's how you've planned your life. You're just following through."

"How did you plan yours then?" the doctor asked.

Tom laughed. "Well, I didn't plan it. That's the problem."

"No, you didn't, did you? You're quite a puzzle."

"Yea, I guess I am."

They set off hiking again, up the zigzag path toward the top, with the conversation continuing as they took in the view. It was a clear day, with a long line of sand and surf visible to the south, stretching across from west to east (in the direction of the coast there), before the vast expanse of the ocean and the dim forms of the Channel Islands.

"See, what I've done, Art," the younger brother said, struggling to explain, in practical terms that he felt his brother could relate to, what he didn't quite understand himself, the progress of his own life. "I just set off on a course, trying to take the next step as honestly as I could, and that led me from college into the Air Force camp and from there into VISTA, and then this whole thing happened with the draft."

"You could have just accepted it, you could do that still," Art replied. "You could position yourself within the service, volunteer and set yourself up as a translator or something. You studied Russian, didn't you? In college."

"Yes."

"Well, see, there's an opportunity there," the doctor insisted. "Art, the way I see it, that's wrong, people assuming convenient roles. Somebody has to take a pure position."

"Why. Tom? Think about it. Why?"

"It just falls to certain people."

"You didn't see any pure positions back at the mission, did you?" Arthur remarked. "That kind of stuff only exists in movies."

At the apartment later, Nancy Steward greeted them with news that Bill O'Rourke had called from L.A., saying that a letter had arrived for him from the Minnesota Board of Appeals.

"Also, a second letter from the 'American friends," Nancy said, wrinkling up her nose, "whatever that is."

"That's the Quakers."

"Oh."

Steward called and happened to find O'Rourke in the Farmworkers office with the letters in the mail slot beside him.

"Open them up, please," he said.

"Which one first?"

"The draft board."

The news that emerged from the two letters was not what Tom Steward had expected. His plea to be considered a conscientious objector, based on his ethical opposition to the Vietnam war only, had been accepted. His application to the American Friends, to drive a war zone relief truck, had been turned down. The Friends had offered to accept him for a community development program in Guatemala.

Young Steward was in a daze as he and Art and Nancy walked to the ice cream store for their daily ice cream cone.

"What a great day!" Arthur said. "You've got to be relieved!"

"I don't know," Thomas answered. "I'm still sorting it out."

"What's to sort out?"

"I don't know. I was hoping for something more definite."

"How could it be more definite? You're out of the fire."

"I don't want to be out of the fire, Art. I want to be in the fire, doing what I believe in. Prison or a war zone. Not sitting down in some village eating beans. I want to be definite about where I stand."

"See, that's where you're going wrong," the doctor brother replied. "It's that purity thing again. You take this huge hunk of history and you make it about you."

"We all take part in history, Art."

"Tom, look around you! Relax a minute. Look around you! Sunshine! Flowers! You just got out of one hell of a nightmare. Relax!"

Tom Steward saw some truth in that but his mind was already focused on deciding what to do in his new situation. He thought to himself that he would have a long ride the next day to think it over, as he had agreed to take the bus home at his brother's expense.

[Chapter 137 notes]

138. Steward meets the woman again; her name is Kristine DeSolt

During his week in Santa Barbara, Tom Steward had thought now and then about the young woman he had seen on the beach and the brief exchange of looks that had occurred between him and her. He had exchanged looks with other women at times, of course, but this exchange had remained in his mind more strongly than any he had experienced before.

Arriving at the bus depot on the morning after his hike with his brother, Steward was surprised to see this same woman standing in one of the lines of people waiting to board buses. She noticed him at once and looked right at him, ending up with a smile. It was not a come on smile, but more a smile of amusement as if to say, “Fancy meeting you again.” That was the interpretation he gave it at first, but then he began to wonder if she had really recognized him.

He bought a ticket and turned to locate the door number he had been given. It was the door number for the line she was waiting in herself. He joined the line about a dozen people behind her and glanced at her again. She didn’t return the glance, however. She had, by that time, turned to the front of the line, but at a slight angle toward him.

Several minutes of waiting ensued, giving Steward time to look her over. She was smaller than he recalled, about 5-4, with a shapely figure. Her most striking feature was her long, wavy blonde hair. It looked clean and healthy, and was almost as wide as her shoulders. She had pretty features and slender legs.

She was dressed differently than she had been at the beach, Steward also noticed. At the beach, in her trim red jacket and gray skirt, she had looked like a young business person. On this day, she looked more like a hippie. She was wearing bell-bottom slacks and a “peasant” blouse. Even so, the clothes were not the usual hippie type, defiantly handmade or ragged. Her clothes looked tailored and new. If there was a statement to them, it was an ambiguous one. She felt herself a kindred spirit, maybe, but not to the point of giving up nice clothes.

When she talked to the bus driver, who was standing nearby her at the front of the line, she gestured dramatically with both hands. Then, when the line started moving to board the bus, she leaned over to pick up a backpack, flipped the backpack over one shoulder, and went forward holding a book that had been sitting on top of the backpack.

She was a college student probably, Steward thought. If so, she was at most a year or two out of high school. She looked too young to be any further along then that. If she was a sophomore, say, that would make her about 20 years old. He reminded himself that he had just turned 25. That was a big difference in age.

What should he do now, when he boarded the bus, if he walked down the aisle and found her sitting alone with an empty seat beside her? He knew already what he should do. Just smile at her. Say "Okay if I sit here?" or something like that.

"She smiled at me twice," he said in his mind. "I'm an idiot if I let this go by."

If the seat next to her was available, he would sit next to her, he told himself again. He would try to talk. He would risk the embarrassment. If the seat beside her was already taken, then what he would do? He would try to talk to her at the other end of the trip, in L.A. That would be harder still, but he would force himself to do it.

As he came up the steps into the bus, he glanced down the aisle for the unmistakable blonde hair. She was in a seat by herself about ten rows back. He steeled himself and continued ahead.

Coming closer, he saw that she had placed her book next to her to make the seat look taken. When he was a few feet away, she picked up the book and looked directly at him.

"Okay if I sit here?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," she replied with a smile. "It's a long way to L.A."

He settled down into the seat as the realization sunk in that she saved the seat for him. He found that hard to believe, but there could be no doubt that she had. She had even done it in what seemed a deliberately obvious way.

"I did run into you twice so I thought we might as well talk," she explained when he glanced in her direction.

He knew then for sure that she remembered him from their meeting on the beach more than a week before.

At close range, she was stunning. With her luscious blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes, she could have passed as a Hollywood star. Her face was girlish, yet she had a look of mature self-confidence. She was about 19 or 20, he thought, as he had guessed from a distance.

He suspected that he had also guessed right that she was a college student. He had gotten a glimpse of her book before she tucked it in her purse. It was an academic book of some kind.

"You came past with your pack looking so determined!" she began pleasantly. "Where were you on your way to?"

"To see my brother. My brother lives up here."

"Where do you live?"

"Right now, in L.A."

"Well, glad to meet you, neighbor! That's where I live, too."

"Glad to meet you, too."

"For the time being, at least."

"Guess we've got a lot of neighbors."

"Yes, we do."

She was easy to talk to, Steward thought, as the bus pulled out of the depot. Judging by her looks and tone of voice, she wanted to keep on talking. He found that hard to believe, too. What was the nature of her interest, anyhow? Could it really be romantic?

They headed up an onramp bordered with palm trees and flowers. The ocean, gleaming with sunlight, could be seen in the distance.

"Do you work in L.A. too?" she asked when the bus had started down the freeway.

"Kind of," he answered. "I'm a volunteer."

"Volunteer at what?"

He briefly described his situation with the United Farmworkers, not expecting her to show much interest in it. But she clasped unto that as if it was the most interesting thing in the world.

"Oh, the UFW!" she replied. "I know all about them!"

She had worked with the UFW herself, she said, "indirectly," as a volunteer with the Robert F. Kennedy presidential campaign the previous year. "The UFW was one of the groups we dealt with," she said. "They were big supporters."

"Yes, I can imagine they would be."

"So, from that, I learned about the strikes and the boycott! Is that what you're working in?"

"Yes, organizing pickets in L.A."

"Well, good for you!"

With that, the conversation lapsed off into silence for a moment, but without any strain. Various impressions, in the meanwhile, were mixing around in Steward's head. She had a sophisticated air, he thought, but it didn't seem like a put on. Her speech was completely unaffected. She was very plain, actually, in her choice of words. She didn't throw around any hip expressions.

"You said you worked with the Farmworkers," he said, "who were you working with exactly?"

"Some of the people in Delano, at the main office there."

"Well, for instance."

She didn't seem eager to throw around names, either, but when asked the names she mentioned were of people that Steward recognized as some of the highest office holders in the union, just below the leader, Cesar Chavez.

"Those are some pretty important people," he remarked. "How did you wind up working with them?"

She answered that she had started out in the campaign doing "a kind of cheerleader job," but had soon wound up doing "what they call advance work." As part of that, she said, she had been sent up to Delano,

to set up events with migrant workers all over the state.

"Setting up the choreography, kind of?" Steward said.

"Yes, precisely. That's just the right word!"

Other information followed along the same line, not put forward in a braggart way,—in fact, put forward almost humbly,—but nonetheless establishing the impression that this young woman beside Tom Steward was much more formidable than he had expected at the onset. While only a year or two out of high school, judging by appearance, she had moved quickly to a position within the inner circle of the campaign. Maybe looks had had something to do with that, Steward thought, but she didn't seem like the type to have advanced herself in that way. She was too proud of what her work had accomplished. She had even at the end met with the senator himself on a frequent basis.

"It seemed like a big deal at first," she said, "then I realized he was just another person. A very intense person, you know, but still just another person."

By the halfway point of the trip, at Ventura, they had gone on to Kennedy's assassination. She had been in the Palace Hotel on the night of the shooting, she said, in a dining room right next to the kitchen where he had been shot. The next day she and her coworkers had waited together in a hotel room until hearing he had died from his wounds.

"Our whole world changed," she said. "We'd been talking about maybe going to Oregon, to the next primary up there, and then, all of a sudden, there was nothing to work for anymore. Nobody else could take his place, in our minds, at least."

All of these points she illustrated with charming gestures of her hands. Her face was as lovely in sadness as it was when she smiled. She had gone home, she said, with no idea what to do next, then someone had come up with the idea to have a memorial concert and she had been asked to get it together.

"It was a natural for me," she said. "I just love music, so I said okay. And next thing I know, I'm in the midst of like this whirlwind, you know, getting the concert together."

"And it all worked out?"

"Oh, yes! Extremely well! Better than I could've ever imagined! It wound up being an unbelievable concert! In Hollywood, if you can believe it! At the Hollywood Bowl! That was about the only part of it I really had to arrange. Everything else just fell into place. People were calling me, once they heard of it. All the big names! I was overwhelmed!"

She listed a few of the groups—Santana, the Young Rascals, the Who. They were groups that Steward recognized as major groups of the day, though he had little knowledge of their music.

"Then just when we got done with that, people started talking right away about doing the same thing out East," she continued. "And everybody thought I had done so well, you know, they asked me."

This second concert had been held in Yankee Stadium, she said, and all the same groups as in the first one were easily signed on. Again, it had turned out to be a success, she said. She had lived in New York, in Manhattan, with expenses paid, while arranging the concert.

"I was just a girl when I went out there," she said. "But I had to fend for myself. I had to grow up and I did."

Steward had been listening intently, but with an increasing sense of hopelessness and strain. This was a young woman who related easily to many people, he was thinking, who related easily to men. She had dealt with famous people and notables of one kind or another. How could he possibly fit into such a world? For her, this whole conversation of the past hour was probably next to nothing, a mere diversion during a bus ride, whereas for him it meant so much. There were obvious further questions, he knew, but he could not bring himself to ask them.

For a moment, he allowed himself to rest from the conversation as he looked out to the waves pounding in on a beach they were passing. What a fool he had been to think she had been attracted to him! He just wanted the conversation to be over. At the other end of the trip, he could say something nice and walk away.

He looked back to her, expecting to see that she had looked away from him, also. But she was looking directly at him. She smiled.

"Well, now, how about you?" she ventured. "I'd like to hear about you! You said you've been in California since January, right? Where were you before that?"

It was an awkward attempt to rescue the situation, and she made no attempt to hide her intent. The gesture was as obvious as when she had set her book on the seat.

He found that hard to believe, too. She was really something else. She was completely uncoy. Whatever was her interest, there was nothing phony or superficial about it. She seemed to be trying really hard to establish a basis that would continue beyond the bus ride.

"Well," he said, "I was in Minnesota for just a little while before coming out here, back at my folk's place there, and, before that, for a year and a half, I was in North Carolina."

"North Carolina!"

"Yes."

"Doing what?"

"Working as a VISTA volunteer."

"VISTA Volunteer! Wow! You've been all around!

So the conversation went on, with her prompting responses in a like

energetic manner. From Steward's VISTA service in North Carolina, it went to his home state of Minnesota and his years in college, which brought a particular interest on her part.

"So you completed college then?" she said, "and got a degree?"

"Yes. B.A. in English."

Well, that is really an accomplishment!" she pronounced. "In my opinion!"

He thought at first that maybe there was some sarcasm in that. But, looking at her face, he saw no sarcasm at all. Surely, also, by this time, she realized how old he was, he thought, but she showed no sign of being scared off by the difference in age.

"You never went yourself?" he asked.

"Well, yes, I did, kind of," she said. "I'm ashamed to say, for only one quarter."

"Why was that?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I couldn't keep it up."

"I noticed your book," he said. "It didn't look easy."

"The book on the seat?" she answered, laughing. "I cannot tell a lie! I have never read a word of it! Someone gave it to me, someone from the campaign. We were having a big discussion, you know. I wish I could say I read it! I'm not much of a scholar!"

For the first time, Steward saw a hint of insecurity in her eyes, but, before he had a chance to contemplate that, he noticed the bus was heading off the freeway.

"This is Pasadena," she said softly. "This is where I get off. I live in Sunland. It's right over there.

He had expected he and she would both get off the bus at the same location in downtown L.A. If he wanted to arrange something with her, he realized, he would have to act at once. But before he could speak, she spoke herself.

"You know, I was thinking how hard it was for me in New York, how I was wishing for a friend to show me around. I was thinking I could be that for you, here in L.A., if you'd like me to. Take you on a little tour, you know. I don't mean to come on. I'm just trying to be a friend."

"I'd like that very much," he replied.

"I never even told you my name!" she said, reaching out her small hand. "My name is Kristine DeSolt. Everybody calls me just 'Kris,' K-R-I- S, not C-H. And I don't think I ever got your name, either."

"Tom. Thomas Steward," he answered, taking her hand.

The bus was pulling up to the stop.

She wrote her name and number on a piece of paper. "Give me a call, really!" she said, handing him the piece of paper as she rose to go. "I can get the people's car I stay with. We'll have a nice time!"

139. Steward gets stood up his first date with Kristine DeSolt

Tom Steward began the next week with his attention divided between Kristine DeSolt and the organization effort begun that week to mobilize for the state-wide demonstration scheduled for Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, about five weeks away (on April 5 and 6).

The strategy to be employed, Jose Terda explained, was for each of the UFW organizers (Kampf, Steward, O'Rourke, and Terda himself) to enlist the help of each of the organizations they were working with to line up their own participants for the demonstration. The effort was being started five weeks early to allow time for the organizations to do the necessary set-up within their own groups.

Steward and Bill O'Rourke were busy making phone calls. In addition to arranging meetings with organization they were already in touch with, they were trying to set up meetings with new groups suggested by people they had talked to. The effort spanned 100 miles, across the entire metro, touching campuses, churches, neighborhood groups, and unions.

As Steward made his phone calls, his mind was continually on the phone call he would make to Kristine DeSolt. He had decided he would not call her until mid-week (specifically, Wednesday evening) so as not to seem overeager.

Steward did discuss her, though, with O'Rourke, as they lounged in their garage home.

"You know what really bothers me?" Steward said. "Just that one sentence, 'I don't mean to come on.'"

"You would like her to come on, in other words," O'Rourke remarked with a smile as he sat on his bed, shining his boots.

The red-haired, red-bearded former coxswain had only two pairs of shoes, these boots and his running shoes. All of his possessions fit into his backpack. He was as careful with his possessions as a soldier with his battle gear, especially now that his entry to the Army, awaited so long, was only three weeks away.

"Sometimes people say the exact opposite of what they're feeling, has been my experience, Stew," O'Rourke continued. "Maybe in secret she's really hot for you, is what I'm trying to say."

"Hot I could take," Steward said. "It's kindness I worry about."

That brought a laugh from O'Rourke. "So what the fuck is wrong with kindness, man?" he asked.

"I'd rather not be the object of an act of mercy."

"You don't think it's romantic?"

"I don't know."

"Look, Stewie, when she said she wants to be your friend, that's just an entry, man! All them other things, how she put her book on the seat,

and everything, they don't say that at all."

Steward let the matter drop at that point. Whether her interest was romantic or not, he was determined to push ahead. He felt anxious for the matter to be resolved. He had a constant feeling of butterflies like he had felt in high school track before running the mile.

On Wednesday evening at 10 P.M., late enough to ensure that Daniel Kamph, the Jesuit seminarian, would be retired to his room and the Terda family retired to their back quarters, Steward crossed the patio between the garage and the house to make his phone call to Kris DeSolt from the Farmworkers' office.

A man who sounded middle aged answered the phone. "Krissy? Sure, one minute," he said into the phone, then aside to someone else, "Phone call for Kris. I think it's Prince Charming."

Steward wasn't sure what to make of that. Did she really regard him as a Prince Charming or was he merely the object of humor? Or had he been mistaken for someone else?

His doubts were dispelled when she answered the phone.

"So you did call," she said at once, with no attempt to disguise her delight. "I suppose you're going to claim your free tour!"

"That's what I was hoping," Steward said.

"Well, I arranged to use one of the cars! So the tour is on!"

"I was thinking maybe Sunday. I have the whole day off."

"That sounds possible. Just wait one second."

Parts of a conversation could be heard, apparently taking place in an adjoining room. The words "Sunday," "car," and "ballet" came through. The woman being spoken to had an accent that sounded British.

"Sunday sounds fine," DeSolt said, returning.

Details followed, ending with an agreement that she would pick up Steward at the Farm Workers office at 1 P.M.

"I'm just glad we can get the car," she remarked. "It's been such a circus around here. Lynn and Sandy are both in ballet, in separate groups, and they both have recitals coming up next week."

"One of those is the friend you mentioned on the bus?" Steward asked, glad for the opening to continue the conversation briefly.

"Yes, Lynn is my best friend I mentioned. We were best friends in high school. And Sandy is her little sister. She's so precious! You'll love her! She's always so happy. She's a very loved child!"

"Are they British or something? I thought I heard an accent."

"Oh, Audrey? She's from New Zealand. She and Don met when he was in the war, in World War Two. You'll love them, too! They're just such very nice people. And Don is so creative! He's an artist,—a painter,—and this year, he wrote a screenplay and won an award. A very prestigious award, in France."

"Your own family lives in Santa Barbara, you said?" Steward asked.

He sensed that it was all right to continue, that she was glad for the show of interest.

"Yes. My mother and three of my brothers."

"The boy I saw you with on the beach, that was your brother?"

"Yes, my youngest brother. Randy. He's been skipping school, and I fill in as a mother, kind of, a lot of the time."

"But didn't you say your mother is there?"

"Yes, she is, but... well, it's a long story. She's kind of zoned out. She's been drinking too much." She paused. "I guess the awful truth is, she's an alcoholic. That's why I come down here a lot, to get away from it. I can only take so much. But, then again, my brothers need me sometimes, and I don't want to let them down either."

"All your brothers are younger than you?"

"No, actually, I have four brothers. The three in Santa Barbara are younger and the older one is in Vietnam."

"He's is in the Army?"

"Yes, he got drafted. But you know what they have him doing?"

"No, what?"

"He's in a rock band! Going around to entertain the troops."

"How did that happen?"

"Well, he's a drummer. He was a drummer before he went in, and he started a band over there, in his time off, and someone heard them, and one thing led to another."

"Where's your dad?"

"Another long story. My parents are divorced, and my dad is an archaeologist, and just this last winter, he got accepted for a government project. So that's where he is."

"Where's that?"

"Would you believe on a little teeny island off of Alaska? In the Bering Straight, I think... I'm not very good at geography! I'm sure you never heard of it, though. It's called Amchitka."

"Amchitka?"

"Yes. Because the United States, our wonderful country, is going to explode a nuclear bomb there! In an underground test. And, before they do that, they're required—by law—to do an archeological study, to see if anything would get blown up, you know. It's a very big project, the biggest my father ever had."

"Well, good for him."

"There's a romance mixed into it, too, I think," she said. "Between my father and someone on his crew. Little looks, you know. I'll tell you more when we're together. It's quite a soap opera I live in!"

That was as far as the conversation went, but it left Steward with a lot

to think about. He felt encouraged by how she had kept saying she wanted to tell him more about various parts of her life. She seemed truly eager to see him. He was intrigued by the world she described. Painting, dancing, archaeology,—these were things he had always been interested in but had never experienced directly. There was more there of interest than just the possibility of romance.

Even so, there was no doubt in his mind that romance was the main attraction, the possibility of a level of intimacy that he had not experienced for a long time.

For the next few days, he thought about her constantly, recalling in his mind how she had welcomed him so pleasantly on the bus and how she had made such a point of starting up the conversation again when it had become stalled. He went running each morning, preparing himself in his determined, deliberate way for what he felt could be the start of a new chapter in his life.

Sunday morning found him waiting in the narrow street beside the Farmworkers house, sitting on the wall there beside the parked cars. He was dressed in freshly laundered blue jeans and his best shirt, a blue polo shirt. He had gotten up early to go on a long run so as to feel physically keen. He looked tan and lean.

The promised time of her arrival came and went, however, with only one car entering the street during the entire half hour on either side of that time. It was a white car such as she had described, but without the blonde hair he was watching for.

Feeling increasingly anxious, he walked up to the corner where the alley-like street intersected with a four-lane thoroughfare. He stood on the corner looking up the street at the traffic coming from the direction of the freeway. Many types of faces approached and passed as he watched, but not the face he was looking for.

“Man!” he said to himself. “Where can she be?”

Just as abruptly as he had turned from the wall where he had waited first to go to the street, he turned back again, walking quickly as the terrible thought began to sink in that maybe somehow he had read the whole situation wrong and she was not going to show up. He continued across the tiny back yard of the Farmworkers house and through the back door into the kitchen front room office. There he found Daniel Kampf, the seminarian, seated at the kitchen table reading the Sunday paper.

“Any calls for me?” Steward asked.

“Not since I’ve been here,” Kampf replied. “And that’s about a half hour.”

Steward looked at the clock on the wall. It was now almost an hour beyond the time DeSolt had said she would arrive. He crossed the patio and sat on his bed in the garage. O’Rourke was away for the day. Soon

O'Rourke would depart for the Army, Steward thought. With O'Rourke gone, he would lose the connection, through him, to their mutual past. That prospect seemed dismal in his present state of mind.

Another half hour passed. There was no reason to go on waiting, Steward thought. He ventured out to the street again and, with a sigh, headed back up to the corner.

He felt anxious beyond what seemed reasonable. He had forgotten how immature he was with women, how overwrought he became. He had not felt so troubled since the days when he had been in the midst of breaking up with Barb Carpenter.

There was one possible remedy, he told himself. He could call her to find out why she hadn't shown. That would, at least, dispel the anguish of the unknown. But to resort to that seemed like a defeat. What could follow from betraying how much he cared? He could try to act casual about it, but he had never been able to act. He would betray how much he cared, and that would just scare her off.

Even so, knowing his own past, he knew it was only a matter of time before he gave in. He walked around with no destination, walking as if in a hurry, but with no object in mind. Finally, happening on a phone booth on a busy street where loud Spanish music carried over the sidewalk, he stopped to make the inevitable call.

The phone rang and someone answered. It was the woman with the New Zealand accent, who informed him that Kris DeSolt was not there. "Was she supposed to meet you?"

"Yes."

"Is this Tom Steward?"

"Yes."

"Oh, dear! She must have forgotten! She did say something about it a few days ago. I know she was looking forward to it so much."

"She's not around?"

"Well, no, see, that's the unfortunate complication. She went up to Santa Barbara with her grandparents. They carried her off last evening. I don't know for what reason. I think there was some kind of problem in her family. Not a big problem. Just something they had to take care of. And there's no phone up there, where they're staying."

"Do you know when she'll be back?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. She comes and goes. Sometimes it's days, sometimes it's weeks. I'm so very sorry, Tom! I'm sure she didn't mean to give you a disappointment. Can I have her call when she gets back?"

"Yes, please do."

"I will, for certain. I'm so very sorry again!"

The conversation ended at that point. Steward trudged up the street with an entire day ahead of him and nothing in sight that could dispel his

disappointment.

He had placed himself in the worst kind of situation, he thought to himself, so far as his feelings were concerned. It was a passive situation with no graceful way out except to wait for her call. He felt emotionally drained, but he still wanted to hear from her. Despite what he had said to O'Rourke about thinking she maybe didn't have a true romantic interest, he didn't really believe that.

140. Amidst ambiguous war, Morris reassures Pitt that Vanna wants love

Capt. James Morris received several letters from his wife Ellen in the month after Mary Brandt had received her letter from Ellen telling of the missed period. The captain's letters contained no such news. There was no mention of the anguish Ellen had described to Mary regarding whether to get an abortion. Morris's letters described Ellen's happy memories of her vacation with him in Bangkok. There were expressions of fondness and of eagerness for time to pass quickly to bring him home.

Each letter to arrive was scented with perfume. Morris always kept his wife's most recent letter in his khaki jacket. Her previous letters were neatly stacked from side to side on the top shelf of his clothes locker in his hooch.

Morris had just completed his 60th mission. Much was abuzz lately in his life on the base, with Maj. Tom Pitt's wedding scheduled for less than a week away, on Saturday, March 15, 1969.

Morris came upon the bald, lately-often-cheerful groom-to-be as he and the major emerged together, coincidentally, one evening at this time, from their respective quarters.

After conferring for a moment, they decided on taking a cab to town together for a quiet supper away from the base. They had a two-day break, with their next flight scheduled for the morning after next.

Enroute to town, watching the jungle scene of huts and carts with water buffalos passing on the road, Morris's attention went to the recent events of the war, both personally experienced and read about.

The Viet Cong had in the past week launched an attack against 50 or so targets in South Vietnam. They had hit military bases and provincial towns, without much gain militarily, but for the first time they had launched mortar attacks in the capitol city, Saigon. Some of the bombs had fallen within a few blocks of the U.S. Embassy.

Morris was aware that there had been an "understanding" between the U.S. and the Communist forces (both North Vietnam regulars and Viet Cong) that the bombing halt in the North would continue as long as the Communists withheld themselves from large-scale military action in the South. This activity had violated that understanding and the U.S. had reacted with threats for retaliation.

After the two soldiers had traveled quietly for several miles, Morris asked Maj. Pitt what he made of the whole situation.

"Hate to admit it, Jimbo. I haven't been following lately."

"Well, you got better things to think about."

"You're right on that... What kind of shit is coming down now?"

"Well, based on the action in the South..."

"Yea, I heard about that..."

"Possible resumption of bombing."
"Back to the dog house?"
"Yes, in North Vietnam."
"Well, I'd welcome that."
"Would you believe for two or three days?"
"Two or three days?"
"Yes, two or three days."
"You're goddam kidding!"
"No, that's the threat, really."
They both shook their heads.
"Teach them a lesson, you know."
"Yea, nice lesson."
"Don't imagine they'd be naughty again after that."
"You wouldn't think so."
Pitt settled back in the cab seat and sighed. "Where's this goddam war going anyhow?"
"I don't know, Tom. I don't know," Morris replied.
"You got to think, though," Pitt continued after reflection, "they say two or three days, it could wind up as two or three months."
"Yea, that's an option, too."
"What do we know, we're dumb fuckers."
"Just tell us what to blow up."
"What do we care if we win."
"Perish the thought of that."
They were silent again, as a cab passed in a reverse direction, bearing pilots they recognized from the 23rd Squadron.
"You know what gets my attention more," said Pitt, "all this business with the Apollo spacecraft."
He was referring to an event reported in the news frequently in the past few days. They and the other pilots had followed this event with great interest. The Apollo 9 mission, orbiting in space around the earth, had succeeded in separating for a distance of 110 miles from its manned lunar landing module and then docking up with it again.
"Well, they say they proved we have the ability to land the module on the moon and then get out of there," Morris remarked thoughtfully. "I always remember back to that speech Moynihan gave about landing on the moon, that speech he gave at Nellis."
"That seemed pretty far away at the time."
"Yes, it did."
"And here it is on us."
"Astounding, if you ask me."
"Yes, it is."
In town, they had no trouble choosing a restaurant. They went to their

old favorite, the Vue En Rue, which by this time had become as familiar as the bars back in Las Vegas.

Two martinis brought the major to a contemplative mood as he gazed out the window toward the busy main street of the little town, with its odd mix of Thai and American establishments.

"You know, Jim, all along, you got to understand this is a little hard to admit, I've had this idea Vanna didn't really truly love me like an American girl would love a guy," Pitt remarked, sweeping his precious strands of long hair back along his bald palate. "You know, there's an element of deference, of devotion, almost, I guess you would call it... It's a different relation of the sexes."

"Yes," Morris replied, "I know what you mean precisely."

"And there's an age difference, you know."

"Yes, I know."

They both sat in comfortable silence for a while as they had done on so many evening together in this same restaurant, with its appealing familiar décor of lantern-like lights, bamboo-frame booths and chairs, and red padded seats, table cloths, and curtains. Outside, some GIs were negotiating with a Thai prostitute in a glossy mini-skirt.

"Why, you having second thoughts?" Morris said.

"Second thoughts? Oh, no... What I was leading up to, lately, I don't know, there's been a real glint in her eyes."

"A glint of real love, you mean?"

"Yea. What an old fool I am! I want so much to believe that!"

"Tom, how old are you anyhow."

"42."

"42 is not an old man, Tom, in a lot of people's eyes, and there's a lot to love in you."

"Geez, now I got you going sappy."

"How old is she?"

"19, I think, or 20."

"That's a woman in this culture."

"Yes, I know that."

"You're getting the best of both worlds... You watch, when you get back to the States, she'll turn into a real American, eating burgers and fries."

"You think so?"

"Yea."

"Well, I'd like that, to a certain extent. But, you know, I guess I have to admit it, I like the deference, the devotion, too. It makes you feel like you could be devoted, too."

"You got that in you, Tom, 42 or not. You deserve to have it returned."

"Sometimes it just seems like this unbelievable, crazy dream. I hope I'm not a disappointment in bed."

"You're going to be spectacular, Tom, just like you are as a pilot."

"Jim, I appreciate your kind words so much. I really do."

"Like I say, the best of both worlds."

Later, at Pitt's urging, Morris tagged along for the quarter mile walk to Vanna's parents' house, which was just on the outskirts of town. Her father had a little store there, selling pop, candy, liquor, and Thai souvenirs and gifts suitable for sending home to wives and sweethearts.

"Zhim, how are zhew?" the bride-to-be chimed with a pleasant smile, reaching both her small hands out to her future husband's friend.

In her American-style blue jeans and cotton sweater, with her Asian black eyes and hair, her petite, shapely figure, and her almost reverent manner, she did, indeed, seem like the best of both worlds, American and Asian, Morris thought to himself—for a man such as Pitt. Pitt had the innocence, despite his age, to take it in in good faith; he would try to be a husband worthy of her reverence.

Back in the small yard behind the house, where the two airmen in their crisp tan uniforms were soon led by the lovely young lady in jeans, there were other members of the Thai family dressed in more traditional clothes. One woman in a white sarong, introduced as a sister, greeted the guests with shy dark eyes. She was as beautiful as Vanna and had a dark-haired little boy hanging on her leg, peering out at Morris.

"Takla!" said the boy. He was about three years old with bright, inquisitive eyes.

Morris didn't know what that meant. He said, "How you doing, slugger? Takla to you, too!"

That brought a laugh from everyone, and the boy beamed all the more, venturing out from his mother's leg to run behind a nearby table, where he peered out again.

Going back into town alone a short time later, Morris stopped again in the Vue en Rue for a nightcap. He wound up having two. Lately he had been hitting the bottle a little too much alone, he had been warning himself, especially when he felt lonely.

Sitting in a booth by the window, he looked up the street at the by then quiet scene, recalling how he had made such a point of asking Ellen not to get pregnant.

He was sorry he had done that, he said to himself.

[Chapter 140 notes]

141. Pitt gets hit, returns to base in a crippled plane

At the squadron headquarters the next afternoon, Jim Morris and Tom Pitt attended the frag briefing for their scheduled flight. They would be one of two flights taking off at daybreak the next day, Thursday. A lull was then anticipated because a major operation, organized in conjunction with the U.S. Army and C.I.A., was just being completed.

"Dewey Canyon," as the operation had been called, had brought U.S. ground forces for the first time officially into neutral Laos. The stated objective had been to protect the flanks of Marine elements maneuvering nearby along South Vietnam's northwestern border where the Ho Chi Minh Trail entered from Laos.

A report Morris had read in the *New York Times* had minimized the Laotian part of the operation, saying "100 United States marines seized several hilltops just inside Laos." That was not exactly true, Morris knew firsthand; more than 300 troops had entered Laos. The report also talked about other "accidental incursions" (in the words of an officer quoted in the report); they had not been accidental, Morris knew.

As for the air component of Dewey Canyon, Morris had noticed with interest that the *Times* report referred to it without revealing the extent of Air Force involvement. Bombing raids were described as occurring on a regular basis, "referred to, euphemistically, as reconnaissance flights by Air Force command." The report said nothing, however, about the extent to which the Air Force had been involved in tactical support of the ground missions. During the six-week course of the operation, Morris had flown in more than a dozen missions in which strikes had been controlled from the ground by the American marines.

Morris and Pitt also soon learned that the anticipated lull would not be forthcoming.

"Dewey Canyon's done," said the frag officer, "but we're hotting up in another direction."

"Where's that?"

"Would you believe, Cambodia?"

"Cambodia?"

"Yes."

"What's the deal there?"

"Tanks... Five tanks yesterday. NVA tanks," said the frag officer. (NVA was the acronym for the North Vietnam Army; the Communist regulars, in other words.) "Ten tanks this morning. In Military Region II, around Camp Benhet... And that, gentlemen, is about 24 miles northwest of Kontum."

He pulled down a wall map of the Indochinese Peninsula and pointed to the area. It was just inside of Cambodia, about five miles southwest of the point where Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam meet, which was

about 50 miles due west of the South Vietnamese coastal city of Quinhon.

"Haven't heard of tanks for a while," Morris remarked.

"No, not since Langvel, Camp Langvel, last year, in February," the frag officer said.

"And this is much further south," someone else said.

"What makes you think we'll go in?" Pitt ventured.

"Because that's what I've been hearing, major, the only thing I've been hearing, upstairs. We can't just look the other way, with the Khmer Rouge, by all accounts, getting bolder."

The Khmer Rouge, as everyone knew, was the equivalent, in Cambodia, of the Pathet Lao in Laos. Both were guerilla organizations corresponding more or less with the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Increasingly, there was a tendency for these organizations (as was the case with the Viet Cong, also) to join up with NVA units in such large-scale battles. There were more than 100,000 North Vietnamese troops in Southeast Asia outside of Vietnam, Morris had heard on another occasion.

"Goes without saying, this will be more of the classified," the frag officer added.

"You know what I think," Pitt remarked as he and Morris walked away from the briefing, "we're going to play out our tour of duty in this unofficial bullshit."

"You were hoping for a replay of your previous tour?"

"Maybe I was, Jimbo. Those days are goddam gone."

"What were the odds of surviving? Maybe one in two."

"Well, that's true, too."

There was no need to go further into a comparison of the air war of two years before to that of their present experience. The related dual psychology, so commonplace to all, was hardly worth a mention over a shot of brandy. One side of it was relief at the lesser risk of death. The other side was collective nostalgia for the glory of the "dog house days," known to some like Pitt through personal involvement and to others like Morris through stories passed down in the 355th wing.

The statistics Morris had heard, just recently, were two 355th wing pilots killed in action, and nine missing in action, for a total of 11, in the year just completed, 1968, compared to 27 killed and 8 missing, for a total of 32, in the previous year, 1967. The new year of 1969 had thus far brought one death, to the 354th squadron, a major felled on a direct hit from ground fire on February 11. Morris's squadron, the 357th, had been without casualties in the new year.

The next morning brought the familiar routine of walking in silence to the equipment room, suiting up, and riding out in the crew bus to the

flight line. The eastern horizon, beside the long, low rim of Radio Hill, in the direction of Laos and Vietnam, bore the first light of the new day. That was a familiar sight, also, though each takeoff brought its subtle variation of dawn coloration and clouds. On this particular morning, the uniqueness was in a parallel pattern of stringy gray clouds edged with pink and blue light.

Next came the familiar greeting of the crew chief, the checking of ordinance, the ascent up the ladder into the cockpit, the attachment of shoulder strap and seat belt, the pre-flight checklist, then the call to start the engines from the flight leader, Pitt: "Roger, Eagle flight, let's turn them on! Start carts, ready now!"

Morris, contained within the small world of his cockpit, with his instruments, throttle, and control stick spatially ordered in his mind, performed his own personal routine, also. First came his customary words to his father, "Here we go, dad, number 61!" (words addressed as to someone sitting beside him, though he didn't really believe that his father was there, in any respect, or could hear what he said). Then, after the final countdown and take-off, and take-up of formation in air, came fragments of memories and images of past battles and of near escapes (and, always, too, of people injured inadvertently, like the villagers he had fired on and, he assumed, killed by mistake). Last of all came memories and images of his wife, Ellen, and with them his usual wordless determination to be keen in battle so as to avoid damage and return to her the same man she had married.

The details of the battle action were familiar, too, as the four planes reached the Laotian border, passing above the same landmarks of rivers and hills over which they had flown on squadron flights for the past several months.

Sighting the group of 20 or so trucks that were the objective of their mission, they went in under orders from a hilltop spotter.

"Tuck it in tight, Eagle," radioed Pitt as they dove into a narrow valley, laying in their 250-pound bombs.

It was a direct, easy attack at first, with no gunfire returned and the truck drivers running from their trucks for the cover of the jungle, a familiar action once more, dispatched with habitual wariness and split-second timing. Near the end of the line of trucks, however, Morris saw a detail he had not seen the likes of in some time. Three flatbed trucks at the edge of the jungle canopy bore the unmistakable shapes of 85mm guns, with the muzzles pointed in his direction. An instant of suspense led to another unmistakable development: light flashing from the muzzles as the soldiers manning the guns began to fire.

In a confused response, Pitt, in the lead plane, banked to the left and up, catching a direct hit to the rear of his fuselage, while Morris, in the

number two plane, banked to the right above the trees.

The erratic motion of Pitt's plane, as it pitched from being hit, alerted Morris that something was wrong.

"Tom, are you okay?" he said, breaking from the normal protocol of the radio exchange.

"I've got alarm lights," Pitt returned. "I've got something on the windshield, oil or something. It's all smeared up. I can't see anyone. How are three and four?"

"We're all okay. I've got them in view."

"Nav systems are screwed up. God damn!"

"I'm coming close for a look."

"What do you see?"

"Fire from the tail."

"I think I can get her back in."

Within minutes, Eagle Flight had regrouped in air, with the second flight assigned, from ground control, to attack the 85mm guns. There was nothing to do then except ride out the 500 miles back to Takhli hoping Pitt's plane would hold together.

Eighty miles out from the base, they established contact with the Takhli tower.

"Roger, Eagle One, we have you cleared for a straight on landing," the tower returned, when informed of the situation. "Ground crews are standing by."

Pitt headed in for his landing, straining to see through the oil on the windshield, with fire still trailing from the rear of his fuselage. He had his wings tilted slightly to the left side, in a calculated attempt to counter the expected rough impact of a flat right tire (which he had been told of by Morris, flying on his wing). The plane hit hard, bounced twice, and skidded down the runway, the right wheel on bare metal and throwing sparks, while the ground crew, with red lights flashing, raced in that direction.

With the spilled oil, sparks, and fire, the plane was in danger of exploding, Morris thought to himself as he circled above, watching. But the ground crew was on the plane within seconds, dousing the fire from the truck while several crew members, with the speed and coordination of a raceway pit crew, detached three unexploded bombs and carried them to the safety of a nearby area of grass.

What might have been a disaster was over in 20 or 30 seconds. As he rounded for his own landing, Morris saw Pitt waving from his open cockpit as a truck towed his plane off the field.

That night in the stag bar, Pitt pronounced his take of the whole situation.

"Well, we had the glory and the danger before," he said. "Maybe,

with the NVA grouping in Laos, we'll have the danger again, at least. Guess without the glory."

"Kind of a raw deal," said someone else.

That was the consensus of the evening. But a point had sunk in, in the private thoughts of many in the room. The specter of death that had retreated somewhat was still there, and it would be there more, as more NVA troops took up position in the so-called secret war.

[Chapter 141 notes]

142. Morris is best man as Pitt and Vanna get married

"Zhim, Zhim, Khun Zhim! Ju look very good! Very, very good! Look very good, jes? Good sol'der!"

Souphana Xayaphong, soon to be Souphana Pitt, said these words to the best man, Capt. James Morris, as he entered her parents' house in his dress uniform on Saturday, March 15, 1969, the long-awaited day of Maj. Thomas Pitt's wedding. She was on her way to a back room, with women and children on all sides, to be decked out in her wedding outfit. Her pretty face was flushed with excitement, the dark eyes sparkling below her carefully coiffed black hair.

In keeping with the American tradition, she would be kept from the sight of the groom after being dressed in her gown. She and the major had been together in the morning, however, for a Thai traditional blessing by a Buddhist monk.

Pitt, standing in the next room that Morris entered, was a bundle of nerves, pacing back and forth like a schoolboy. He was dressed in his dress uniform, also, with his precious strands of long hair arranged for maximum coverage of his bald palate and plastered into place with some kind of oily cream.

"Jimbo, buddy, glad you're here!" Pitt exclaimed.

The two airmen had gotten to be close friends under the influence of being in a strange place together, in addition to being shoulder to shoulder, so to speak, in combat, but "buddy" was new.

"How ya doing, young man?" said Morris.

"Young man, don't I wish!"

"Come on, Tom. You look like a dashing young soldier."

"Dashing, sure! Just don't let me dash out that door!"

A quality had come out in the battle-worn major, under the strain of the event, that really did make him seem younger. He could have been a high school kid in jeans and T-shirt, at a drive-in with his friends on a hot summer night back in the States. Even his voice had acquired a more youthful, more animated inflection and cadence as he blurted out comments, shaking his head in self-deprecation when he paused by a large mirror in the corner of the room.

"What a joke, these goddam strands of hair!" he said at one point. "Who's kidding who?"

"Tom, you look great. Just relax."

Morris had been previously informed of what the day, with its odd mix of American and Thai traditions, would bring. First would come a Thai wedding ceremony, called the "rod-nam-sang," then Pitt and Vanna would get married a second time, American style, before a chaplain from the base, a Baptist minister. These two ceremonies, in the family house, would be for the immediate family and selected guests only. In the

evening, there would a gala dinner and party in the Raan Vue en Rue, the bar in town that Pitt and Morris liked.

The entire 355th wing and assorted crew chiefs and other support personnel were invited to the dinner and party.

No flights had been scheduled the next day, an indication of the general affection extended to the stumble-speeched, often-stressed major, who was known all around for his youthful idealism and old-fashioned, "straight arrow" morals (as the common description of that type went in the base jargon).

Despite all of the buildup evident in Pitt's behavior, the wedding ceremonies, beginning with the Thai ceremony, then followed at once by the American, were quite simple. Only about two dozen people were present, all of them immediate family. Aside from Pitt and the Baptist minister, Morris was the only American in the room.

The ceremony began when Souphana entered the room, escorted by her parents. She was dressed in a gold, off-the-shoulder, sarong with a floral pattern white and gold scarf. Her black hair was gathered above her head into a bun held in place by a garland of white flowers.

In the first ceremony, the "rod-nam-sang," the major and his bride sat together on a small platform in the back yard. Their hands, connected with a chain of flowers, were cupped in the "wai" devout style in front of their lips. The maid-of-honor and Morris sat next to them on either side. The maid-of-honor was the sister Morris had met on his previous visit to the house, the one with the young son.

Corresponding to Thai tradition, the ceremony was conducted by the oldest member of the family, Souphana's granduncle, Vitoon Xayaphong. He was a lean, serious man of about 70 with a gray beard and gray hair.

As he proceeded through the ceremony, Souphana's brother, Praphat, seated next to him, described in halting English, with an elaborate show of courtesy, what was taking place.

A pretty girl of about 12, Souphana's niece, Raina, dressed in blue silk dress with a white shoulder ruffles and a gold belt, brought forward a towering floral arrangement in a golden pot. It was made of banana leaves formed into a dome, with purple amaranths wound into spires. Yellow flowers ringed the bottom of the dome.

"This 'bai sri' tree. Mean 'hoh-lee t'read' tree," Praphat said, showing a loose thread from his garment and then pointing to a coil of white thread setting on the platform. "Hoh-lee t'read," he repeated, gesturing with folded hands and downcast eyes.

Six children, in three boy-girl pairs of different ages, brought forward other objects. The first two, about eight years old, carried a white alms bowl filled with water. Four younger children brought bowls containing

betel nuts and flowers.

"Now we do 'rod nam,' said Praphat, as the grand-uncle picked up the alms bowl filled with water. "'Mean 'pour water,'" he explained, making a pouring motion with his hand.

The old man, with a slight smile at Morris, poured water from the bowl over the out-stretched hands of the wedding couple, just enough to wet the palms. He then handed the bowl to Morris, and made a gesture for Morris to do the same thing. Morris complied, and was followed by the entire wedding party, who all came forward to pour water on the hands of the wedding couple. Each pouring of water brought smiles and spoken expressions in Thai.

"Now we do hoh-lee t'read," the brother said.

The grand-uncle, Vitoon, wound a continuous length of white thread around Souphana's wrist, then around the major's.

"Now one," Praphat said to Morris, putting his hands together. Then he added, with gusto, "Now maybe no like! Pull apart!"

Pitt and his new bride each tugged on the thread until it broke at last, sending the longer end springing back to the bride.

"See, already fight!" said the brother.

"Souphana long," threw in the maid-of-honor, smiling, pointing to her sister's longer end of the thread. "Mean her love more!"

"Dat true," Souphana said softly, kissing Pitt's cheek.

Morris could see from Pitt's face that the major was deeply touched by this gesture. There was no doubting the genuine meaning in Souphana's voice and eyes.

Next to come was the American ceremony with the major and his bride standing before the Baptist minister on the same platform where they had knelt a moment before for the bai sri ceremony. The ceremony was a brief, wholly traditional exchange of vows, with each couple accepting the vow with the customary "I do."

Morris's sole role in the event, other than handing the ring to his fellow pilot, consisted of reading a passage from the Bible selected by the Baptist minister. It was from the Song of Songs (8:6-7):

Set me as a seal on your heart, As a seal on your arm;

For love is as strong as death, Relentless as Sheol in its devotion; Its flames are a burning fire.

Deep waters cannot quench love, Nor floods sweep it away;

Were one to offer all he owns to buy it, He would be roundly mocked.

Morris remained on hand throughout the rest of the afternoon and evening, amusing himself in free moments by talking and playing around with Vichol, the boy he had met on his previous visit to the household. When Morris walked down to the restaurant later for the evening event,

Vichol tagged along on his bike, jumping up over any object he could find. Morris had always enjoyed the company of young people of all ages. In high school, he had worked as a volunteer youth worker in his parish family center after having been asked to do so by his mother.

By mid-evening the bar was filled with people, with guests spilling out into the area between the Raan Vue en Rue and the bar next door, which was also doing good business. Among the guests were members of the Takhli flight crews, maintenance personnel, headquarters staff, nurses from the base hospital, and Thai friends including a good representation of young Thai women.

Also present was the emergency crew that had put out the fire in Pitt's plane after his emergency landing. They were given a thunderous round of applause for saving the groom.

Long tables on one side of the bar were filled with American and Thai food prepared by the Xayaphong family. "Aroy maak!" the guests were saying,—and even the Americans knew that meant "very delicious,"—bringing smiles to the faces of Souphana's mother and sister.

The Thai rock band hired for the evening was mixing in songs like the Beatles' "I want to Hold Your Hand" with Thai traditional songs and dances. In mid-evening, during a break in the rock music, local Thai girls, dressed in bright green costumes, danced a Thai temple dance called "Fawn Marn Mong Kol." The dance was marked by exuberant circling movements and elegant hand gestures.

"Mean "happy dance,'" Phraphat explained.

By 10 P.M. Morris, urged on all evening, was so tanked up with food and booze he felt he needed fresh air. Outside in the parking lot, he found the boy, Vichol, still hanging around with his bike. He was doing jumps over a ramp made of flat board leaning on a cement block.

"Takla!" the boy shouted each time he flew off the ramp, to the amusement of GIs passing by on the sidewalk between the bars.

Whatever that meant, it was the boy's saying, thought Morris. He shouted "Takla!" himself, and for that won a smile from the boy as he positioned his bike for another rush at the ramp.

Morris thought of that beaming face later as he rode in a cab back to the base. He thought of the quote he had read at the wedding about love being "as strong as death." He thought about the women and children he had seen at the party and the look on Pitt's face when Souphana had whispered, "Dat true."

He thought again of Ellen in Bangkok, also, as he had done the week before, and he recalled again how he made such a big deal, on their last evening together, about her not getting pregnant.

"What a goddam ass I was!" he said to himself. Back at the base, he

wrote a letter.

"I've learned from people like Pitt how life should proceed in the midst of war," he wrote. "There should be no fear of death, no fear of not living fully. You and I have such a strong love, Ellen. I'm sure it will overcome all the vagaries of distance and time. A pregnancy would have, too, if one had happened. I'm sorry I made so much of it. But we have plenty of time left. We've just begun."

Morris placed that letter next to his bed, intending to mail it the next day. But when morning came, he read what he had written and it seemed too sappy. He tore up the letter and went for a walk alone, thinking he would tell Ellen the same sentiments in person next time he saw her.

[Chapter 142 notes]

143. Steward's first date with Kristine winds up hot and heavy

Tom Steward had just about given up hope of ever hearing again from Kristine DeSolt when Bill O'Rourke informed him one evening that she had called and left a message. This was on Monday, March 9, ten days after her no show on her date with Steward.

"Kampf took the message," said O'Rourke. "It's over in the office."

Steward was at this moment on his way to take a shower in the house bathroom. He proceeded at once from the tiny back yard, where he had run into O'Rourke, into the living room office. There he found Daniel Kampf's scrawled note by the phone.

"Tonight if possible," the note said. "Even if late."

Steward recognized the phone number given as the one he had called before, the number for the Andrews' house. He sat down immediately to dial the number.

A woman answered on the sixth ring. It was Audrey, the woman with the New Zealand accent.

"Tom Steward," she said pleasantly, "and how are you? Didn't mean to keep you waiting. We were out back by the pool."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied.

"Kris is here... staying here again. But she went out for ice cream with the girls."

"Oh," said Steward.

"I could have her call you."

"I'm not sure exactly where I'll be. Could I just call back?"

"Well, certainly. Yes. Why don't you call about 9:30? We have our little custom of tea at that time."

"Okay, I will," Steward said.

He was determined to not allow himself to get in another situation where he would have to wait for her phone call.

He continued into the shower with a look of intense preoccupation. As he showered, he tried to figure out what was going on. The whole thing didn't make sense. It didn't look good. Obviously, this was just a casual matter for her. If it had meant more to her, she would have called sooner. She wouldn't have allowed him to suffer through two weeks of wondering if she would call. Had she had some doubts about him that had been resolved somehow? Or could it really be that she had had family complications of some kind, as Audrey Andrews had said?

In any case, he thought, the whole situation, in the meanwhile, had become more complicated. He had, just the day before, mailed a letter to the American Friends Service Committee, accepting the alternative service assignment, working in Nicaragua, that they had offered. He had mailed a letter to his draft board at the same time informing them of his

plans. The program in Nicaragua started on July 7, less than three months away.

That placed a definite timeframe on anything that could happen between him and Kris DeSolt.

He completed his shower and went back to the living room. He sat down in the office to call the number again, and listened anxiously as the phone rang several time.

"Hello, Andrews' house," came a voice. It was her.

"Kris," he said. "It's Tom."

"Tom! I'm very glad to hear your voice!"

"Are you really?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad to talk to you, too."

There was a moment of silence.

"I suppose you wondered what ever happened to me," she said.

"Yes, I did," he said. "I was hoping to hear from you."

He decided at once, upon hearing her voice, that he would be honest with her, wherever it led.

"Were you really?"

"Yes."

"You're not angry?"

"No."

"Well, I did mean to call you," she said.

Again, there was a pause. Steward, finding himself tongue-tied, was determined to persist doggedly until the conversation was over.

"You see... well, how can I make this short? My father, you know, the archeologist, and his whole team just moved into this old hacienda, and there is really no phone there, hooked up yet..."

She went into quite of bit of detail about that, the point being that she had intended to call but that the right time with privacy and mood had never happened.

Other details about the "hacienda," as she had called it, also came through. The picture Steward got from her description was of a mission-type place with an escalade and courtyard. There were rooms all along the escalade, some assigned to individuals on her father's team, others used for common purposes such as meals.

The whole thing seemed a little far-fetched. Steward couldn't help suspecting that maybe her description of it was exaggerated in some way, and he wondered to what extent, in general, everything she talked about was exaggerated for effect.

"What is your dad doing there?" asked Steward. "How come he's got this hacienda?"

"Because see, remember I told you they were up doing a dig, on that

island I told you about, where they're going to blow off the bomb?"

"Yes."

"Well, they're done with the dig, and now they've got all kind of things they dug up, artifacts, that they need to clean up and catalog and take pictures of. It's very important, because that was the whole purpose of it, and they did make a lot of finds."

"What kind of finds?"

"Well, to you and me, maybe, not so important finds. But they say they're important. Dishes, tools, weapons, things like that."

"Proving people went across the land bridge."

"Exactly! You know your history, or whatever, science! That's the exact right word."

He was pleased that he had made a favorable impression. "And why are you there?" he said.

She said her three little brothers had moved up there to be with their dad and had started going to school there but had wound up playing hookey to go down to the ocean. Her job was to make them toe the line.

That seemed plausible enough. The whole thing was certainly not run of the mill, but it did kind of make sense.

"My mother is there, too," she added. "But she's not up to doing much. That's why my dad asked me. Just for a while, you know, until things get settled down."

Now it was getting crazy again, thought Steward.

"I thought your parents were divorced," he said, trying to piece it all together.

"They are. But she's not really staying with my father. She's got a trailer. She just pulled up in the yard. The yard is really big. Like a park, almost, you know."

"Your dad doesn't mind that?"

"He kind of minds. But he worries about her, too. So I think he's glad to have her there, to make sure she's okay."

There was again a pause, with Steward relegating all of this to the California lifestyle he had heard about. He didn't really have an opinion of it as good or bad. He just recognized that it was more free-formed and chaotic than the Midwest life he had grown up in.

"I'd still like to give you your tour," she said. "You're going to be around now for a while, down here?"

"Yes, everything's in order now up there. I've got business down here, with that concert I told you about."

They made arrangements for just two days away, on Thursday, since Steward had no meetings scheduled for that evening.

Steward went back out to the garage where he found O'Rourke on his bed with a beer in his hand. Steward didn't usually drink beer but on this

occasion he took one himself.

"So how did it go? asked O'Rourke.

"It went okay," said Steward.

"You going to see her?"

"Yes, Thursday night."

"All right!" said O'Rourke

Steward settled back on his bed, which consisted of just mattresses stacked on the floor. He leaned against the stack of cardboard boxes that abutted the top side of the bed like a headboard. His mind went back again to the commitment he had just made the day before to enter the Nicaragua program on July 1.

"So everything's okay?" O'Rourke said.

"Yes, I guess so," Steward answered.

"You don't seem especially happy."

"Just concerned about the timeframe," he said.

O'Rourke knew exactly what he meant. The former coxswain, always the ready confidante, had ridden along with Steward through his whole thought process and decision.

"Hey, Stewie, three months is a long time," he said.

Steward let the matter drop. He was aware of how fast he got pulled in. He knew he was going too fast and yet he felt powerless to resist. He just hoped he wouldn't be embarrassed by another no show.

There was no need for that, when Wednesday evening arrived. He had just finished his shower when he saw her at the kitchen patio door. She announced herself by knocking on the glass while she peered through with her hand on her forehead to shield her eyes from the sun. She was 15 minutes early.

He was struck, on seeing her again, with how different she looked from the usual fare of women who visited the Farmworkers office. She had the prepared, tailored look of a fashion model. Her striking blonde hair was set in large curls. She was dressed in loose-fitting black silk pants and a pink blouse.

On her face was a pleasant but serious expression. The expression changed to a tentative smile when Jose Terda opened the door and with a gracious gesture waved her in.

Terda had learned earlier that Steward had a date, and he seemed as pleased as a proud father to see the pretty young lady his young charge had matched himself up with.

"Bien venido, welcome, welcome," he exclaimed in his charming manner, looking the dapper Latin himself as he nodded toward Steward. "I think the young man you're looking for is right over there."

The tentative smile widened then to show the white teeth. She was a lovely sight, trim and athletic-looking, her blonde hair luxuriant around

her pretty features and bright blue eyes.

"Well, this time I'm on time," she said.

"Better than on time. You're early!" said Terda. "And you are very pretty lady. Tomas has good eyes!"

"Tomas. I like that," said DeSolt.

"That's not quite official," said Steward. "You can just call me 'Tom.'"

With such light banter, assisted by Jose Serda, the occasion got off to a portentous start. Serda was never without a rejoinder, sensible or not. His accent and charm were enough to win a smile no matter what he said.

At DeSolt's suggestion, she and Steward went first to Chinatown, where they parked the car and walked for several blocks along the main street between the restaurants and shops. They stopped for a dinner at a restaurant called The Red Dragon and lingered over the meal, talking. Despite her polished appearance, as on the bus where she and Steward had first met, DeSolt proved to be down to earth and easy to talk to, and as interested in Steward as she was in her own situation.

"I'm glad you weren't angry with me for not showing up the first time. I really did want to get together with you."

"Why was that?" Steward asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I just thought we could be friends. Real friends are hard to come by, you know."

"Yes, I know."

She talked more about her family situation, going again into weird details about the situation on Goleta where her father had moved into the hacienda. The crew employed by her father was all young people, she said. They played hide and seek in the dark inside the hacienda, going from room to room, crawling on the floor.

"It sounds crazy," she said, "but it's a lot of fun."

There were so many odd details like this, that Steward began to think everything she said was legitimate. She was just in an unusual situation. She didn't present as if she was trying to be zany to portray a certain kind of image.

After the meal, about 8 P.M., they returned to the car and went for the promised "tour," proceeding first down the freeway to downtown then to West L.A., passing the Farmers Market without going in, then through Hollywood, and winding up in Griffith Park.

There they stopped on the hill by the observatory, looking off to the smog-covered expanse of L.A., dotted with lights as dusk came on. The sun had left a burnt orange glow in the western sky. The ocean could be seen there, stretching out toward the horizon like a low gray cloud with sparkling dabs of red and orange.

"I grew up here. This has been my city. I'm such a California girl,

you know," she said. "But I always feel like it's bigger than I can really understand. I like to come here to this park, to this hill. It gives me a sense of where I belong, or what I belong to, you know. It gives me a sense of myself."

She touched his hand then with hers and he took hold of it and for a long time they stood together, pressed together but not arm in arm as the glow of the sun faded and the lights of the city grew brighter in the urban expanse that stretched southward as far as they could see.

Later, when they arrived at the Farmworkers house, she parked the car, shut off the motor, and looked across to him expectantly. He kissed her in response to that and soon found himself in a passionate encounter such as he had never experienced before. His hand found his way under her pink blouse and up to her breasts then down into her loose-fitting silk pants and between the underpants and the skin.

She didn't push his hand away, as he had been used to expect from girls he had gone out with in the Midwest. For the first time, he felt the area soft with hair and was surprised to find how wet it was down in that area and how easily his fingers pushed inside.

She stopped him at that point, with what seemed a great effort.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I really should go."

"Yes," he answered.

She stared at him for a moment, looking puzzled herself, with her blonde hair in disarray. She pulled her pants up over her hips, put her breasts back in her bra, and smoothed out her blouse.

"I would like to see you again," she said. "I'd like to see you, too."

"Just give me a call."

"I will."

He exited the car soon after that and watched her drive away up the dark, narrow street, the blonde hair visible above the seat through the rear window of the car.

He felt overwhelmed. He hardly knew what to make of it. But he was planning already when to make the next phone call.

144. Steward calls Kristine and gets invited to a pool party

Coming into his garage home a few minutes later, Tom Steward found Bill O'Rourke still awake, drinking beer. Apparently, O'Rourke was unaware that Steward and Kristine DeSolt had been parked just outside, fogging up the windows of her car.

"So here's the lover boy," O'Rourke intoned good-naturedly as his former rowing teammate came into the room.

The red-haired, red-bearded former coxswain was reclining on his bed with his backpack on the floor at his feet and his stack of letters from Barbara Carpenter beside him on the mattress.

"Yea, for better or worse, here I am," Steward replied.

"Well, how did it go?"

"Fine," Steward answered.

He went over to the corner of the room and took a beer himself from the small refrigerator that Jose Terda had recently provided.

"You like her?"

"Yes."

Steward had been glad to be with DeSolt, but he felt relieved to be back in the male domain of the garage. Yellow light from the arc lamp in the alley, falling on the bare wood walls and cement floor, gave the place a welcoming glow. Adding to the virile effect was the poster of Emiliano Zapata, with gun and bandoleer, on the back wall.

"So that's all I'm going to hear, I guess," O'Rourke said. "No, Rorkie. Tell you the truth, there's much on my mind."

"And what exactly is that?"

"Well, Billy, you know," Steward said as he sipped his beer, "we've talked a lot over the years, you and I, but, something I never told you, I'm a guy who has somehow come into adult life having just about zero sexual experience. Nada."

"You fucked her."

"No, no, I didn't fuck her. I just got closer than I've ever been. Got my paws in there, you know. And, I have to say, Rorkie, that is one extraordinary region."

O'Rourke threw back his head, laughing. "Well, on that we agree."

There was silence for a moment in the intimate surroundings of the garage. The two, old rowing buddies might just as well as been in a cabin in the north woods of Minnesota or on the Indiana rooftop where they had sat by a fire talking on their first trip together.

"Just what was so extraordinary?" O'Rourke asked.

"Ah, well. I don't mean to be crude. But I had no idea it would be so wet. It was extremely wet in there."

Again, O'Rourke threw his head back in a hearty laugh. "Well, you know that means to me, Stewie?"

"What?"

"She was extremely turned on."

Steward considered that a moment as some kind of souped up car with a bad muffler went past in the alley, creating a motor roar that rose and fell with an accompaniment of Mexican music.

"Well, who ever thought this would happen to me," Steward said.

"Like they say, man, go with the flow."

"I intend to."

"Sounds like now's the time."

"You think she just sees it as sex?"

"Well, let me ask you, you stopped, obviously, since, as you say, you did not fuck. Why did you stop?"

"She stopped it."

"How?"

"I don't know. She just drew back, all of a sudden, and shook her head. Like all of a sudden she thought it was going too far."

The former coxswain considered that for a moment as he twisted the red curls around his mouth like a Celtic poet with soft, thoughtful eyes. "Well, why would she stop," he said, "if that's all she wanted? She wants more, obviously. She doesn't want to mess it up."

"By going too fast."

"Precisely," O'Rourke declared, "See, my humble analysis is this. She's a lady who's already had sex, so that first time barrier is gone. And now she's coming into something else, you know. She grooves right toward the sex, because she knows what it is, she likes it. Then she catches herself. 'Whoa! This is a new guy!'"

"Because she wants to start fresh."

"Precisely."

Tom Steward thought about that the next day as he took part in a morning picket line and went to his afternoon meetings. He could live with her having had sex before, he thought to himself, so long as she was capable of loyalty within a relationship, if it came to that, and he thought she would be, from everything she had said.

He kept wondering what her objective was in seeing him, if she had an objective. Did she really just want a friendship, as it seemed she had implied on the bus? That didn't seem to be the case anymore. Was she looking for a romance? Obviously, to a certain extent, at least. But where could that lead within the three month span that remained before he would have to leave for his alternative service assignment? And what would the draft board do if he tried to change his alternative service assignment? Surely, he thought, there must have been previous instances of that among the thousands of people who had been conscientious objectors.

Even if all that was resolved, though, he asked himself, how could he fit into her world, as she had described it? Her world was musicians, artists, famous people. DeSolt must think that he fitted in somehow. He would soon reveal that he did not. Yet, he knew he would try to see her again. He would go with the flow, as O'Rourke had advised.

He determined a set time to call her, as he had done before, to not reveal his eagerness. His set time was Friday evening. But, on Thursday evening, finding the Farmworkers office empty, he called her on the spur of the moment.

She answered the phone herself.

From her tone of voice, it was obvious at once that she was glad to hear from him. "Tom," she said, "I've been hoping you'd call. Sandy, you know, the little girl I told you about, Don and Audrey's daughter, is having a birthday, and we're having a party. I thought maybe you would want to come. You could meet the Andrews."

"When's the party?"

"Well, it's kind of short notice. Tomorrow evening."

Steward paused. He understood, without thinking it out, that if he said yes he would be diving right into the world that he had been thinking he wouldn't fit in. Then again, if he said no, where would things go? He would, in effect, be stopping the relationship before it had a chance to get going. No, it would be better to plunge ahead.

"I have a meeting, but I think I can arrange it," he said.

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes."

"You don't feel put upon?"

"No."

"You think we're seeing each other too much?"

"No."

Next action required was for Steward to ask at the staff meeting the next morning if he could take the evening off and cancel his meeting or get someone to take it.

"I'll take the meeting," Dan Kampf offered.

"You don't mind?" said Steward.

"Hijo mio, the meeting is important, but the birthday is very important," said Jose Terda with a smile.

That brought more nods of agreement all around the room including from Carmen, who in her typical manner was present at the meeting handing out coffee and bakery without participating in any other way.

"The revolution can wait, hermano," Ernesto added.

Steward headed out that evening, dressed in his best T-shirt and blue jeans, his construction boots newly polished.

As he had expected, his amiable boss Terda had readily approved his

use of one of the Farmworkers cars. His ruddy face was determined, his body abuzz with a sensual memory of his passionate encounter of five days before.

His route took him northwest up I-5, the Golden State Freeway, past Burbank and Glendale to the San Fernando Valley, then off an exit into a suburb called Sun Valley. There he found a typical California scene with malls and parking lots and motorized youths in cars and on scooters and motorcycles roaring past in the never-failing sunlight amidst palm trees and flowers. Occasional empty lots and undeveloped, desert-like hills marked the temporary edge of the L.A. sprawl.

The Andrews' house was about three miles from the freeway, Steward discovered, as he followed DeSolt's directions from Sun Valley to another suburb called Sunland. It was at the end of a curving street, on the edge of land set aside as the Angeles Forest, though the low hills that rose up there, to the east of the house, were arid and treeless, and covered with straw-colored grass, chaparral, and shrubs.

It was a large, but quaint, cottage-like, rambler-style house with a stone foundation, a gray plank exterior, and white shutters. The front yard, surrounded by a gray plank fence, contained low trees with thick leaves surrounded by an untended ground cover of ivy.

Steward, feeling reassured by the homey, unpretentious look of the place, walked across a stone walk through the ivy undergrowth to the front door and rang the bell.

The door opened to reveal a smiling Kristine DeSolt, her pretty face glowing with health and her blonde hair in pigtails tied with red ribbons. She was a lovely, wholesome sight in her red shorts and a blue blouse, with bare legs and white tennis shoes without socks.

"Hi, Tom! You made it!" she chimed.

"Yes, I did."

"And you're early even!"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, come on, let me introduce you. No one else is here yet, just the family."

The door opened to a large open room, painted white, with an entire wall of ceiling-height windows looking out to a large pool surrounded by palm trees, ivy, and flowers. The other walls were covered with paintings and other objects including seashells, pieces of polished driftwood, and a ship inside a bottle.

"What a beautiful place," said Steward.

"Oh, yes. It's very nice. Don is an artist, as I think I told you."

"Are those his paintings?"

"Some of them, yes. That one over there, the ship at the dock."

"I like it."

"Oh, yes. He's very good."

Waiting in the next room, at the kitchen table, were a red-haired, attractive lady of about 40 years of age and a girl who appeared to be about 12 or 13. They smiled at once when Steward came through the door.

"So this must be Tom," said the lady. "We're so pleased to meet you. Kris has given you quite good recommendations."

Those words were delivered in the British-like New Zealand accent that Steward remembered from his phone conversations. The girl, though, was a completely American pre-teen in appearance and speech, with long straight hair reaching past her waist.

Don Andrews, the father of the family, came in soon after that with a cigar in hand that was never lit up. He was a man of medium height with an amiable face and easy smile. He asked Steward about the Farmworkers and what he had done before that, where he had gone to college, and so on.

"I'm from the Midwest myself," he said. "I grew up there and went to college there before I got drafted."

"That was for World War Two, right?"

"South Pacific. Marines."

"That's where you did the drawing on the boxes?" Steward said, referring to the story Kris had already told him.

"Yes, just started doing 'em one day, couldn't find any paper."

More details followed, delivered in the same unpretentious manner. A journalist had discovered his drawings and they had wound up getting printed and recognized back home. Then came an invitation to art school and one thing had followed another, leading eventually to a life as an artist in Taos, New Mexico.

"That's where the three girls had grew up. We had a great life out there. No pressure," Don Andrews said. "We should have never come to L.A. I make more money here, but our life isn't as good, I mean, just on a simple, human level."

Later came a party out by the pool with about 20 or 30 people attending eventually. They were a varied group including the girl's friends, the two older sisters, who both had long straight hair, also, a receptionist from the New Zealand consulate in L.A. All in all, they were pleasant people, not difficult to get along with at all, as Steward had feared they might be. He stood with a beer, talking with Don Andrews and the others, feeling himself not out of place and in fact well liked. So, in that respect the evening was a success. As for Kristine DeSolt, she was always at his side, and seemed pleased with how he looked and acted.

About 9 P.M. Steward left with DeSolt going with him to the door. He thought then that there would maybe be a passionate interaction such

as had happened five days before. But, after kissing him softly on the lips, she pushed him gently back.

"You know, Tom," she said. "I thought about what happened Sunday, between us, and I just came to the conclusion I let things go too fast. I don't mean to put myself off as innocent, because I'm not. But I want things with you to be right. It's just you're so decent and unassuming and you really have a genuine interest in me. I can tell it. I need that so much. So I went for it big time. I went for it in the wrong way."

He took that in quietly.

"You must have a lot of people interested in you," he said.

"You know what my fate is, though?" she answered. "I meet guys like I met in the campaign or in the concerts. They seem nice at first but then you figure out it's just an appearance. There's no niceness under it. It's all just bullshit, I guess you could say. You're not that way. When you say something, you mean it. And I love how you think before you speak, how you're so careful with your words. I don't know what I'm saying. I'm just going on."

"I would like to see you again."

"Oh, definitely. Yes."

She kissed him again, open mouthed, with her tongue working away inside of his.

"See, I am attracted to you!" she said. "Don't get the wrong idea!"

"I couldn't misinterpret that," he answered.

"You didn't think I would just let you get away, did you?"

"No, I guess not. I hope not."

"Have you ever been to Tijunga Canyon?"

"No."

"We can drive up there, maybe. I'll show you where I lived when I was growing up."

"I'd like that."

There was not a third kiss. She pressed his hand firmly and smiled, and then the pretty face and bright blue eyes, with a final swish of the blonde pigtails, disappeared behind the white door.

145. Steward learns about Kristine's family past as the relationship deepens

Tom Steward arrived back at the garage to find Bill O'Rourke still awake and waiting to talk to him about what had happened that evening with Kris DeSolt.

"Well, I finally figured out she sees in me," Steward said.

"And what is that?" the former coxswain asked.

"That I'm less bullshitty, is what it comes down to. More direct, more truthful. When I say something, I mean it."

"Well, she is an astute judge of character then, Stewball, because that is you to the core."

"You really mean that?"

"Yes."

"And she does see it as a romance, not as a friendship. Because, when she talks about that, she always puts it in that context."

"There you go."

With that, the former coxswain turned on his side and fell asleep, leaving Steward to mull over the situation in more detail. The big piece of the puzzle he couldn't figure out was what Kristine had in mind for the long run. Was she just looking for a fling, or did she think of him as a marriage prospect? Either way he could accept it, he thought. He knew he would go for it either way. But he should be prepared for an eventual break off. Also, he warned himself, he could not just turn all his attention to her and forget about his responsibilities in the Farmworkers organization.

He went carefully over his meeting schedule the next morning and determined to himself that he would do his utmost to attend all of them and be prepared for his presentations. He would continue to look for new contacts and set up new meetings. He would read the book that Seymour Frankel had given him on labor history and not allow himself to be broken off from the intellectual pursuits that he had maintained throughout his VISTA service and interactions with the draft board.

As a result of this determination, he did not call DeSolt for several days, but on Saturday morning, she called him to say she had the car and, if he was available, could pick him up for a ride out to Tujunga Canyon, as she had promised.

He was glad to hear from her as he had been holding himself back from calling her out of a concern that she would start feeling pressured if he called her too soon.

Kristine arrived in the early evening, a pretty sight in a well- tailored, navy blue skirt and jacket with a white blouse and ribbon-like blue tie. Her blonde hair was just gorgeous.

It was a brilliant, sunny evening, perfect for such an event, with a

cloudless blue sky and balmy weather.

"Turns out, we're going to have another concert," she explained. "That's why I'm all dressed up. I stopped in Hollywood on the way down to talk to some agents."

"Agents for who?"

"For different groups. See, a lot of times they're on tour and they don't even know their own schedules."

"When will the concert be?"

"Looks like sometime in June."

"Another memorial?"

"Not exactly, but all the same people are involved. This one is to just to make money. For the various causes.

"Kennedy type causes?"

"Yes. One of them is the Farmworkers, in fact."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

Steward glanced across at DeSolt from time to time, amazed that a woman as lovely as she, dressed as she was, would be sitting next to him, talking to him so naturally and acting like he was a desirable man. From a distance, he had always been intrigued by women who dressed in this way, never imagining that anyone of such a type could find him of interest.

Now and then, by some girlish expression or gesture, she reminded him, inadvertently, that she was only 19. At those moments, she switched quickly from girl to woman again in a way that made the woman part of it seem like an act. She seemed to be trying it on in the same way she was trying on the different styles of clothes.

The trip provided an opportunity for DeSolt to fill in some details about why she had left her own home about two years before and had gone to live with the Andrews family.

"My parents have never really gotten along," she said, "but things got especially bad at that time because my dad was without a job and my mom started drinking every day. To the point where, really, she was pretty unreasonable, you know, but I think my dad was unreasonable, too."

Steward wasn't sure what to say in response to all this. For the most part, he merely listened.

Her brothers had gone to live with her mother's parents, she said. Money was not an issue because they were rich. Her grandfather, only child of a farmer, had gotten rich investing in California real estate, starting out with money he had gotten by selling the family farm back in Indiana after his parents died.

"All of this land around here was rural, farm country, really," she

explained, “until about ten years ago. Then the whole thing exploded. Land values went sky high.”

Steward could see the pattern of that, when he looked for it, in a way he hadn’t noticed on his previous visit. The grid of developed areas, with its geometrical shapes and imported, lushly watered plants, extended here and there to an interface with the irregular shapes of the original landscape of dry grass, chaparral, and rolling hills.

“Then, another shrewd move he made,” DeSolt continued, “when my mom was little, you know, just a little girl, five or six years old, he saw an add for an audition in Hollywood for some movie, for a girl actress, and he took her over there and, lo and behold, she got the part.” “So you’re mother was in the movies then?”

“Yes, for many years, all the time she was growing up, really. She even went to a special school.”

More details followed from that, the gist of them being that Patti DeSolt, Kristine’s mother, having been never a normal child, had grown up into a never normal adult. After first trying to continue in acting, she had worked as a stunt actress, mostly doing horse stunts. In the midst of this, she had met Kristine’s father, then an aspiring anthropologist who spent much of his time in the field, camping and living a rough life.

Out of that had come the unusual circumstances of the DeSolt family life, Kris explained with pretty gestures of her hands, looking at times disconcerted by it and at times proud.

“My mom had some money saved from her childhood days, you know, but they spent it when my dad was in school, paying for him to get his degree. He’s got a doctorate in archeology. It took him seven years to get it, you know, and meanwhile, they were having babies like crazy. One thing you have to say for them, they never lacked for passion, for each other or life.”

They had reached the upper end of the valley where the road to the canyon wound into the San Gabriel Mountains following the crooked course of the Tujunga Creek. The landscape there became more extreme, with the canyon walls becoming steeper and more wooded as they continued through it. Here and there were rustic houses that, by their location and décor, looked to be the homes of people who wanted to escape the grid-based existence of the developments in the valley.

“Some of these houses along here are on private land, before the federal land starts. The Angeles forest starts here somewhere. Oh, there’s the sign! The other houses, beyond here, were grandfathered in. The house where we lived is one of those. It’s right up here another couple of miles.”

They reached the house a little while later. It was a large house but with a cabin-like exterior, located behind an outgrowth of rocks and trees

at the end of a long driveway.

Seeing no cars in the driveway, DeSolt pulled up and stopped, looking up the hill at the house.

"This house was not cheap, as you can imagine. My mother spent a good part of her money on it. But, I think for them, it was so important, you know, kind of symbolically."

"And why was that?"

"Because it was off the beaten track, physically off of it, and they wanted their life to be that way. They didn't want to be pulled down into humdrum. My mom used to always say that. She still says it."

"Something like, you're never going to see Patti DeSolt living a humdrum life."

Hearing that, Steward had an insight to how Kristine DeSolt saw her relationship with him. She had grown up in offbeat situations with parents who placed a high value on not getting pulled down into a routine, banal life. That's why she was less concerned about a traditional situation and less troubled about unpredictable changes in direction. She even to some extent seemed to delight in that kind of uncertainty. She seemed to have contempt for people who settled too easily into a conventional life.

"My mom has always been bold, you have to say that for her," DeSolt said later as she and Steward sat in a restaurant in Sunland. "She was that when she was a little girl, to stand up and sing and dance in front of everyone, and she's been that, as an adult, being a stunt person. She told me everyone was telling her not to do it. Some of the things are pretty dangerous."

"She still does that?"

"No. What she does now, mostly, is drink."

"When did that start?"

"Well, it just happened gradually, kind of."

She said that in a way the stress that led to it had just come with the marriage because her dad had always been a wild, party type, which her mother liked when she was the object of the fun herself, but soon her dad had started getting into "little escapades," as she called them, leaving her mother embarrassed or left out.

"My folks have always liked to drink," she said. "They've never hid that from us kids. But, it always seemed like just part of having fun, you know, from my standpoint, until my mother started drinking by herself."

"How old were you then?"

"Oh, I don't know. One time I do distinctly remember was when I was 12, because I had just turned 12 on July 1, three days before, and for Fourth of July we were supposed to go see her folks, my grandparents, but my dad got sidetracked somewhere and didn't show up. My mom

took us to her folks and it was the usual stuffy day full of all kinds of criticism, you know. That is the one thing about my gramp, he told my mom not to marry my dad and she went ahead and he never forgave her for that, he kept driving it in. I don't remember the exact way that came down, but, that night, after we got home, I came downstairs and my mother was drinking by herself. She was absolutely falling down drunk. I had to help her to bed, and she puked all over the floor. I had to clean it up... That was the first time, you know."

"First time of what?"

"First time I was taking care of her instead of her taking care of me."

"There's been more of that since then?"

"Oh, yes."

She said that's why she had gone to Santa Barbara recently, to help in taking care of her little brothers, "just doing the little things, you know, that my mom doesn't attend to. Her heart is there, you know, she doesn't lack in love, she just lacks in... Well, I guess you could say, she lacks in sobriety, that's the main thing."

"I don't want to make it sound like it was all bad, though," she said. "We had a lot of fun in this canyon, my brothers and me, and my folks had a lot of fun and were really fun to be with when they were getting along, in between the fights. Sometimes I think they needed the jealousy, they wanted the jealousy, to keep intense about one another. They acted like lovers, you know. They never acted like a married couple. They didn't want to get bogged down."

Later, after eating supper together at a restaurant in Burbank, they headed back to the Farmworkers house, with a mutual feeling of having established a deeper bond. He was already contemplating when and how he could see her again. She seemed to anticipate his thoughts.

"There's something you need to know about me, Tom, my situation is really unpredictable," she said. "I don't even know where I'll be living a couple of weeks from now."

"Yes, I know," he said. "Mine is, too."

That brought them both to silence for a while, as the car sped along in the never-ending stream of traffic on the Santa Ana freeway.

"We can still be good friends," she said.

"Yes, I know. I hope so," he answered.

He wondered, though, just what she meant by that. She seemed to be implying that she didn't want him to get too serious about her.

At the Farmworkers house, as they parked in the dark street, there was the usual heated goodbye, though ending before things got as far along as they had the first time.

She finished with a long, passionate kiss. "See I am attracted to you!" she said. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea!"

“How could I have the wrong idea?” he said. “I would like to see you again.”

“So would I.”

“A lot or a little?”

“A lot. All the time.”

“Let’s just agree, we want to see each other. Then it won’t be so hard both ways.”

“Kind of like going steady.”

She laughed. “Exactly, yes.”

She kissed her fingertips and touched his lips. “See you next time, boyfriend.”

“Okay, girlfriend. See you soon.”

146. Steward divides his attention between Cinco de Mayo and Kristine

During the next two weeks, Tom Steward saw Kris DeSolt more often and more easily with a growing sense of a bond between them. At the same time, as the Farmworkers ramped up their organizational activities for the upcoming Easter Weekend demonstration, Steward was aware of tension, in his mind, between that and Kristine.

Kristine, aware of this, sought to include herself somewhat in the Farmworkers, also. She showed up to help make signs for the picket lines one evening and told Steward that evening that she planned to attend the demonstration herself if she could work it out. Though she was never sure, she said, when she might be required to go up to Santa Barbara again, if there was any problem with her three younger brothers, especially the youngest one, Dory.

Steward's dates with DeSolt took him to festive places in L.A. that he hadn't yet seen: Sunset Boulevard, the UCLA campus in Westwood, the zoo and nature trails in Griffith Park, shops and restaurants in Santa Monica and San Fernando Valley. He also had occasion to spend more time with her adopted second family, the Andrews. Audrey, the mother, looking pleasingly domestic with her trim figure and neatly curled red hair, welcomed him as if he was a member of the family, too.

The Andrews, in fact, had begun to provide an interesting dimension in Steward's relationship with Kristine, despite his previous misgivings about not being able to fit into her world. The dimension was in the form of intellectual and artistic discussions, often mostly with the artist father, Don, but with Audrey and the two daughter who still lived at home, Lynda and Sandra, often taking part, also.

Don was an appealing person, Steward thought, a true intellectual and always looking for intellectual contact. He had taken to Steward right off as someone he could talk to, not to pick an argument or for display, but in a mutual effort to understand something of common interest. He was often close by when Steward was in the room, with his never lit cigar in his hand. Usually, he was dressed in his jockey underpants and a white T- shirt, since he hated the discomfort of clothes. "Well, you ever think of this one?" was his favorite expression.

Audrey was an appealing person, also, a ready, intelligent listener who seemed to have no agenda or ego at all. The daughters were nymph-like girls with Botticellian features and long hair. They were ballet dancers, lovely to look at, and not spoiled. Sandra, the youngest, was typical of the whole family. She was a happy girl with dimples in the middle of her cheeks. She listened intently when others were speaking. She never interrupted. She was never rude.

Steward, driving away from this setting with Kristine at his side, as at

this time he often did, couldn't help but notice differences between her and her adopted relatives. Obviously, she admired their artistic and intellectual refinement and aspired to have the same qualities. In her conversation, however, she revealed a lack of knowledge and depth in such areas. Her own knowledge was practical. It was an amalgamation of facts and impressions picked up from her contact with the Andrews and from her experiences in political campaigns and in arranging concerts. Even in body she showed that difference, compared to the Andrews girls. She didn't have their understated, classy lines; she was strongly drawn with big hips and breasts and she dressed in a way to show it.

Kristine was good at acting happy like the Andrews girls, Steward also noticed, but she didn't seem to be as truly happy as they seemed to be. In reality, she was a needy, troubled person. Despite her good looks, she often seemed dissatisfied with her appearance and unconvinced that her appearance had his full approval. She worried about money and not having a job. She confessed she had never been really paid for her volunteer work; she had just got expenses and per diem. She worried about her mother's drinking problem, and about whether her parents would get back together. Also, in addition to worrying about her younger brothers, she worried about her older brother in Vietnam.

"He says the real war is between the enlisted men and the regular guys," she told Steward. "I mean it. Somebody even tried to shoot one of the sergeants!"

She had a dramatic flare when she pronounced such things, gesturing quaintly with both hands. She seemed not really to comprehend what the war was, or where it was, other than to know that her brother was involved in it, and that in various ways he was being treated wrongly.

There was much there to wonder about for Steward, in the convincing veneer of classiness and apparent neediness beneath it, but he found the neediness attractive. He was impressed by the struggle he saw in her and by the good heart revealed in her concern for her family. She thought of him as an intelligent, honest person, a teacher, almost. He wanted to be worthy of her trust.

Her growing trust had brought another endearing dynamic, also. She seemed determined to reveal every bad thing about herself to make sure he didn't have a false conception.

One evening, she told him her whole sexual history, which included having had intercourse before (as O'Rourke had suspected), even in high school (though, as she described it, "just one time"). She had never had sex with anyone in the political campaigns, she said, but she had had sex with a lead singer in one of the rock groups she had organized for her first concert. She had even gotten pregnant from that ("after just one night together, and that's the honest truth," she declared, "and that was

the end of it"). A miscarriage ("not self-induced!") had terminated that, but she claimed it had happened after she had fainted on a dock, falling into cold water, somewhere out East on the ocean, before being rescued. That seemed rather strange.

"I don't know really if I would have gone on to have a child," she explained softly. "I don't know if I could have. I was sorry to lose the baby, but, then, too, I was so relieved. You must think I throw myself around. But I don't. I haven't done that. And don't think I don't respect marriage," she added, "because I do."

"I wear false eyelashes, by the way," she told him next when they were parked together, staring into one another's faces.

"I didn't notice," he said sincerely.

"That's why my eyelashes are so long and curly."

"Oh, well, you have beautiful eyes."

"Does it bother you I wear them?"

"Not at all."

She told him, too, that her hair wasn't truly blonde.

"My hair is actually a boring, dishwater blonde," she said. "You would absolutely hate it! I hate it myself!"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, trying to imagine her without the Marilyn Monroe look he had grown accustomed to. "In a way, you know, you'd look like the girl next door."

"The plain one, you mean?"

"No, the pretty one everyone's got a crush on."

She began to warn more earnestly that she might have to leave for Santa Barbara. She never knew when, she declared. It all depended on her little brother. Recently her mother had written, she said, and told her something disturbing, that he might be trying drugs.

"I've used drugs myself, if you wonder," she informed. "But, a twelve-year-out, that is out of line!"

There was more in that, also, for Steward to consider, both in her possible leaving and in the experiment with drugs. He was aware that drugs were "part of the scene," as some people put it, that he had been part of himself, but he had never tried them or had much interest in trying.

Meanwhile, events had moved along quickly in his other sphere of life, the Farmworkers. Through all these developments with DeSolt, he had been just as involved in that, speaking at two, sometimes three meetings in one evening, often with Bill O'Rourke beside him, then helping Daniel Kampf, the Jesuit seminarian, as he prepared materials for the final organizational meeting on Wednesday of Holy Week.

The late night talks with O'Rourke had continued, also, with the red-bearded former coxswain alternatively laughing and glossing over in

thought as Steward described the latest development. O'Rourke's attention was every day more focused on his upcoming departure for the Army, which he had set for a few days after the demonstration. He also had paid more attention lately to his most recent letters from Barbara Carpenter. He spent more time in apparent anguish as he tried to write back.

Soon that final organizational meeting for the demonstration was at hand, with an odd range of types gathered into the tiny Farmworkers house backyard. Middle-class suburban women, union rank and file, politicos with long hair and hippie clothes, community organizers from Chicano and black areas, and religious activists, among them two nuns in traditional habits, had found common cause in the event. Mark Chambers, O'Rourke's preacher friend from Georgia, attended, also, in his capacity as director of the California Migrant Ministry, and the Trotsky look-alike Seymour Frankel, in his capacity as secretary-treasurer of Printers Local 375.

"I just want to emphasize our goal is to witness for what we stand for, being totally respectful for what other people stand for," Dan Kampf remarked as he stood, dressed as usual as plainly as possible in tan work pants and white, open-collar shirt. "We want to win this battle through the power of conviction, as we've been taught by Gandhi and King, and, if I could throw in a pitch for my boss, by Jesus, too."

Jose Terda stepped forward to say a few words after Kampf ended his own with a final serious smile. "Hey, people, compadres, amigos, we got to remember, too, this is Easter, big holiday, huh? We gonna have a good time! We gonna sing some Mexican songs. Que cantamos, no?"

"And we're going to win our revolution, too," threw in the goateed union officer, Seymour Frankel.

"Hey, alright, let's go for it then," Terda obliged.

"Keep ours eyes on the prize!" added a black preacher from Watts. "Que camine bien la lucha!" shouted someone else.

The actual demonstration three days later, on Holy Saturday, was, by contrast, anti-climatic. By noon, only 45 people had showed up at the store in the Wilshire district where Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke were assigned to be in charge. Mark Chambers, the raw-boned, lanky preacher with the hippie hair, was on hand as he had promised. With him were his two roommates from Pasadena, Phillip Nordell and Allan Bonnard. Seymour Frankel was there, with his son, Solomon, a sociable, dark-haired young man about the same age as Steward and O'Rourke. With Frankel, also, were about 20 members of the printers union. The two nuns who had been at the meeting and five others in brown habits had brought their own signs saying "Jesus Would Not Shop Here." Then there was a group of lay people from the same Catholic parish, a group of

students from a community college, and six field workers who had come down from Delano, bringing with them sleeping bags and guitars.

Chambers, Nordell, Bonnard, and Sol Frankel, being in general of the same age and disposition as Steward and O'Rourke, stood with them in the parking lot, surveying the scene, as young Frankel, new to them all, explained that he was a printer like his father.

"There are professional families that hand down a profession," he remarked. "We are a trade family that hands down a trade. My grandfather was a printer, too."

"Well, there's sense in that," Phillip Nordell replied. "You work doing honest work, real work, and you get to keep your personality for yourself. Now, me, I've been studying psychology, and one thing I found out, you come home tired like everybody else, only the part that's tired is the part everybody else uses to relax, the social part."

"You start out solving problems and you end up a problem yourself," Sol Frankel remarked, laughing.

"Sad but true, man! Sad but true!"

They stood together, hands in pockets, bantering like this, as they might have at a football rally just a few years before, at their various colleges, only this was quite a different gathering, with the farmworkers, side by side with the students and printers, marching back and forth with their picket signs, while a loudspeaker blared a Mexican song, "Vayamos unidos, vayamos trabajadores."

"We've done our share of this kind of stuff, too," Frankel said. "Picket lines, demonstrations."

"And what's your opinion of this one?" asked Steward. "Well, you can't help but notice the futility."

"How's that?"

"We're over here, in this corner of this humongous lot, and people have ceded it to us, so to speak, but the store is still open, people are still going in."

"Well, we may affect some," Chambers said.

"That I don't doubt. But the attitude you get into, if you do this enough, is you got to have some kind of leverage. Working on the level of conversion..."

"Yes, that's my territory."

"Precisely. We're not winning souls."

Steward gave that some thought as he took his turn with a picket sign. The young Frankel's observation was true. The whole exercise had an air not only of futility but of absurdity almost. The circle of picketers had merely displaced the stream of shoppers, as Frankel had said. Instead of going into the main door, they were going into a side door on the other side of the building. Meanwhile, in the distance, traffic streamed past

with the usual, ceaseless frenzy on the elevated freeway bordering the shopping center.

Jose Terda and Daniel Kampf, riding together like old buddies in one of the battered Farmworkers cars, arrived in early evening, soon after this, saying they had been around to most of the other demonstrations and everything was going well. They brought with them candles, firewood, food, and coolers with pop and beer. In the two locations in East L.A., said Joe, people were singing and dancing.

"Hey, people, this is Easter! The little baby Jesus, rose from the dead!" Terda exclaimed. "We're gonna drink to that, all right?"

Everyone got busy then, making cooking fires, handing out the food and beer, and settling into a big circle like campers at a jamboree. Two of the farmworkers went to the bus and brought back guitars. They started playing some traditional Mexican songs, with others singing and clapping hands. Terda, seated with a beer in his hand, sang along, mariachi style. Kampf, beside him, looking out of character with a beer in his hand, sang along in the same open-throated manner.

For the first time, the event gathered some interest from shoppers going into the store. Several parents with young children ventured over to listen to the music.

With the sun sinking in the western sky, Steward kept an eye on the entry points to the shopping center, watching for Kristine to arrive. At last, he saw a car approaching that looked like the Andrews' car that she had been driving the last time he had seen her. There were just two people in the car, he noticed as the car pulled to a stop about a hundred yards away. Two figures, silhouetted by the sun, came across the lot toward the demonstration. By graceful motion and long hair, they could be identified at once as the Andrews sisters, Lynda and Sandy.

"No Kris," said Lyn at once when she drew closer. She smiled at that, with extended arms, and shook her head, as if amused at how life could be so complicated.

"She did say she is so very, very sorry," added the younger sister brightly. "And she sent you a note, Thomas! We brought it for you!"

Steward took the note and read: "Dear Tom, Well, it happened. More stories, and my grandparents came by to drive up there for Easter, so I decided to go. Maybe I'll be there for a while, maybe even for a couple of months. Please don't think it's to get away from you! I want to see you! We'll work it out somehow. Love and kisses, your good friend, Kristine (and devotedly too)."

Steward lay awake after that, with O'Rourke beside him, thinking that he had ought to just follow Kristine somehow to be where she was, though he wondered what he would be getting into with all her talk of drugs and family problems.

147. Brandt balks at the rhetoric of revolution—peaceful or violent

Matthew Brandt, at about this same time, in April 1969, also, like Tom Steward, came in contact with the drug part of the counterculture for the first time, though this occurred within the context of a much broader introduction to various other aspects of the counterculture that he had just begun to think about.

The occasioner of Brandt's first contact was a "special issue" of the *Rolling Stone* magazine with the title AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1969 that he came upon on the Monday after Easter, April 7, in the living-room-like student lounge in the former-lodge main building of the Whitney-Pratt school. The cover showed a policeman in a visored helmet bent over a protester who had been pushed flat onto his back on the ground. On the first page inside, the same title was repeated. Under the title was a page-wide photo of two men and three women standing in a demonstration with a Viet Cong flag visible in a crowd behind them. Below that were smaller words, in quotes: "The Sound of Marching, Charging Feet".

Rolling Stone magazine was, at this time, only in its third year of publication, but it had become accepted by Brandt's generation as the last word on rock music. Brandt lately had perused the magazine in keeping with an increasing interest in music encouraged by his new friend, Darren Houghten, the director of seminars at the school.

Brandt's first impression of the "Revolution" headline was that it was another case of the overstatement that he often encountered among his peers at school. The word "revolution" implied for him an out-and-out war against your own country. He had seen nothing to indicate that current conditions in America could be described as that, or warranted such an extreme action. Changes were being made, certainly; changes had to be made; but not "revolution," in his opinion.

The headline did attract his attention, though, enough to set him down in a padded chair in the corner of the empty room. School was out for Easter break. His wife Mary had gone with members of her women's group to an all-night session at a cabin owned by one of them on Chesapeake Bay. Brandt was glad to have found something to do.

He looked first to the italicized text on the first page of the magazine, below the photo of the five youths and the subtitle about the "marching, charging feet."

The text (ascribed to the *Rolling Stone* publisher, Jann Wenner) read as follows:

"Like it or not, we have reached a point in the social, cultural, intellectual and artistic history of the United States where we are all going to be affected by politics. We can no longer ignore it. It threatens

our daily lives and our daily happinesses. The new political movements we feel all around us can no longer be left at the periphery of the artistic consciousness.

"Our black population and our student population have finally declared themselves sick and tired of desolation row and finished with the old folks home at the college. The blacks and the students are our brothers and they are doing something which we must take awareness of. And we must participate in it because they are fighting a fight against our enemies, even if our participation is just by the fact of awareness itself.

"These new politics are about to become a part of our daily lives, and, willingly or not, we are in it... Thus *Rolling Stone* has a special issue about something hopefully titled 'The American Revolution--1969.'"

Brandt, due to his natural suspicion of rhetoric, was adverse to such language, of course. To him, the stream of high-sounding words seemed overwrought. But he was in an unusual mood, with the entire evening ahead of him and nowhere to go. He skimmed through the magazine to determine where the grand claims would lead.

The whole issue was about confrontation, obviously, judging by the photos printed with the text throughout. Most of them were photos of crowd situations. On Page 3, a black youth, with both hands upraised, stood in front of a cheering crowd. A smaller photo on the same page showed fists raised in defiance in front of a familiar scene, a mass demonstration of some kind. Other photos showed youths running through plumes of tear gas or confronting helmeted police. In another photo, a group of at most a dozen youths with defiant faces and holding a flag stood in the midst of an assembly of several hundred students seated in an orderly manner in chairs. "Their red flag aloft, militants move to control a student conference," the caption said.

Amidst all these photos of confrontations, there was, in addition, a basic theme running through the whole magazine that the confrontations were not just occurring but getting more intense on both sides. It was somewhat the same theme as presented in the seminar Brandt had attended at school the month before, the one in which the counterculture had been explained as a response to the war. Only in this article, Brandt noted, the pitch had been turned a notch higher.

The lead article, by Michael Rossman, a self-described "campus traveler in the education reform movement," referred to the growth in intensity as "ideological hardening."

"The hard edge of the student movement has gotten even harder," wrote Rossman. "Since its founding in 1962 (as an offshoot of the League for Industrial Democracy), the Students for a Democratic Society has grown to be the most important young white political group with over 300 local chapters and some 200,000 active sympathizers.

"At first, SDS rhetoric and concerns centered around 'participatory democracy.' Then it became preoccupied by the Vietnam War. Now, largely in response to hard-line pressure form the Progressive Labor Party (with their acrid insistence on the importance of a worker/student alliance *a la France*), SDS has gone over to a stance based on an updated version of Marxism: direct attack on the total institution of American Imperialism.

"On the campuses, the ideological hardening is expressed in sit-ins against Marine recruitment (at Oberlin in Ohio), against involvement in chemical and biological warfare research and other university roles in the Vietnam War Games (at Pennsylvania State University), and against the university's nature as a racist institution (at Brandeis in Waltham, Massachusetts)."

Brandt had been aware of events like this, on some level, at least, having gathered parts of them from tidbits of news passed around lately at school and before that between himself and his fellow MVs during his year and a half in Kentucky. The connection to radical political groups was new to him, though. He wasn't sure what to make of it.

Beyond that, the article ascribed to students and young people in general a unity and underclass status that to Brandt's sense of the situation was a new twist. "America's 2700 colleges form a great youth ghetto with 7,000,000 inhabitants. Higher education itself is only one of a cluster of campuses now coming alive with violence and change."

The same dynamic had spread to non-college communities of youths, Rossman claimed. "After the media discovered the Haight-Ashbury in 1966, sister communities appeared in every major American city. The gift of the Haight's media martyrdom was that a second great youth ghetto—a voluntary one—became visible. At first, its talk was all of flowers and grass and music. But lately the rhetoric and action have gone hard in the hippy ghetto."

Brandt read that holding it at a distance in his mind. He was aware that a process of self-segregation had occurred among young people like himself,—people who were, generally speaking, "against the war."—He was aware that colonies of young people such as "the Haight" had sprung up in many places, especially near campuses. The "West Bank" and "Dinkytown," near the University of Minnesota, in his home state of Minnesota, were examples of that. He was aware that lately the mood in such colonies had gotten less "flower child" and more somber as people persisted sometimes in a hand-to-mouth existence and as clashes related to drugs had increased. But to call such places "ghettos," akin to big city black ghettos like Harlem and Watts, seemed far-fetched. To call a student campus a ghetto was even more of a stretch, in his estimation.

Still, Brandt thought to himself that he understood the reasoning

behind the comment to some extent. The comment was true, he thought, to the extent that young people were bunched up in places like campuses where they felt that actions required from them and decisions made about them were contrary to their ideals.

Brandt also took note of the extent to which rock music and drugs were regarded as integral parts of the "revolution," at least in this same lead article by Michael Rossman. Again, it was a point similar to comments Brandt recalled from the seminar the previous month about "psychological and spiritual searching." The author drew out this point in detail, defining the connection between the revolution, repression of the revolution, and the quest for self-knowledge and change as represented by experiences in drugs and music.

"According to official government estimates long outdated," Rossman claimed, "at least 10,000,000 white youth smoke grass for pleasure and to change their lives. Some 2,000,000 young people have dropped acid and undergone psychotic breaks to learn that there are other ways of knowing than those taught in school... And in less than a decade," he continued, "we have generated and lovingly consumed—and been shaped by—a great flowering of music whose sheer bulk, variety, and quality compare favorably with the whole output of the Renaissance."

The drugs and music were helping to create "a deep unity," Rossman said. "The children of a total System that denies human needs are moving for power and freedom to build what they want... Students, and youth in general, are becoming aware of themselves as a class."

At the same time, the youth unity was evoking repression, Rossman asserted, and much of it focused on drugs. "At its present pace, 1969 will see some 250,000 arrests for grass... The use of selective enforcement as a tool of local community disapproval is increasing. Cops have planted dope on SDS and Yippee organizers, editors of high school underground papers, ed reform travelers, to make arrests in the course of political persecution."

Confrontation met with repression, repression met with fiercer confrontation, that again met with fiercer repression, in an ever more passionate cycle, was what the author suggested. Confrontation and repression had grown hand and hand.

From that cycle had come the potential violence of the revolution, Rossman proclaimed. "Violence spills over at the intersection of black and white, at the technological interface where men's jobs vanish from their hands (haven't you noticed union action is violent again?), where the freaky young try to inhabit the streets they grew up in, at the leading edge of theater, and all along the open surface of young radical politics."

There was also no doubt, either, that the word "violence," in this

article, meant just that, not some symbolical equivalent. Michael Rossman was talking about guns.

"During pleasant nights in communes in San Francisco and Colorado, I watch friends oiling guns and learning how to load magazines; they offer to teach me to shoot. People are swiping dynamite. Industrial sabotage mounts, unreported in the press...."

Another article in the magazine described "the repression" in terms of specific measures undertaken in California by the new governor, Ronald Reagan, and the California legislature in response to the student unrest at Berkeley and San Francisco State College.

"More than 70 bills," claimed an article by Conrad Williams, "have been passed this year to put down students. State Senator George Danielson cried the new bills would rid the state campuses of the 'Typhoid Marys' of student rebellion."

Among the measures listed were: to make it a demeanor to remain on campus after ordered out by police, or to commit any act disrupting normal campus activities; to prohibit release on bail for anyone committing more than one such misdemeanor until the first is resolved; to enforce a five- year minimum term for anyone assaulting a cop with a deadly weapon; to dismiss all teachers who strike; to make incitement to riot punishable by one to three years in prison; to make a student guilty of criminal trespass upon reentry of state property from which the student has been expelled; to make it illegal to bring a loudspeaker or voice amplifier onto a campus without first getting official permission, and so on.

Going on to an article titled "PANTHER'S FIGHT TO THE DEATH AGAINST RACISM," Brandt found a grimmer line. The article was by George Mason Murray, "Minister of Education, Black Panther Party."

"To say you're Black and you're proud and still go to Vietnam to fight our Vietnamese brothers or to go and entertain soldiers who are exterminating the Vietnamese people is a crime against all of us descendants of slaves in the U.S.," the article said. "It is reactionary and insane, or counter-revolutionary, to teach or practice Cultural Nationalism. When one speaks of nationalism in terms of culture only, he is admitting that the entire group he comes from is too weak, timid, and sissified to challenge the slave master, and put him up against the wall, take all of 'his' money, and redistribute it to the poor...

"All of these racists must be robbed completely. We want all our communities to be rich. We want all the wealth redistributed, all the medicine redistributed. All of the mansions given to the poor. We must fight to make the last first, and the first last; in short, we must make the revolution force the ultimate change...

"Once one realizes his human worth, his intrinsic value, then he

knows that he must not tolerate slavery, oppression, exploitation any longer. It is at this point that the slave picks up his tools of liberation, sharpens his razor, steals a gun, shoots a police, robs a bank, seizes control of a school, assaults a job foreman, runs a racist landlord off, burns up a cotton field, or grape fields, shoots down a helicopter."

This man was advocating "revolution," too, Brandt thought, but the action tied to it was more extreme. The action prescribed was "revolution" as the person in the street would describe it.

It was a heady mix, Brandt concluded as he set the magazine aside: rock music, drugs, demonstrations that he knew by his own experience to be put forward as "non-violent," and calls to arms, actual arms, presented together as if there were no tension between them owing to their common opposition to the "System."

[Chapter 147 notes]

148. Brandt gets stoned his first time in Houghten's alley apartment

By the time Matthew Brandt left school, a few minutes later, he had already set aside in his mind most of what he had just read except for the claims about drugs,—especially, the claims that young people were using drugs to "change their lives" and "to learn that there are other ways of knowing than those taught in school." He had never experimented with drugs of any kind, but lately he'd been thinking that he had ought to sometime, at least, marihuana, commonly called "grass."

The main obstacle that had held him back so far was his wife Mary's disapproval. With her gone for the night ahead, the notion occurred to him that the evening at hand would be the ideal time.

Brandt also knew where he could find grass. Just before the start of Easter break, Darren Houghten had invited him over for "some dynamite stuff," as Houghten had put it. Brandt had turned the offer down, but Houghten had called behind him that he had meant it as a "standing offer" and would be in town over the break if Brandt, alone or with Mary, would happen in his direction.

Using his student key, Brandt returned to the student lounge and called Houghten from a pay phone.

"Well, as luck would have it, my good friend," Houghten said, when informed of Brandt's desire to stop by. "I'm just now whipping up a batch of spaghetti, and I've got a case of beer in the hall, in addition to the other stuff I mentioned last week."

"I was thinking of the other stuff," Brandt replied.

"Well, come on over, my man! I'll leave the alley door open. Just come on right in."

A half hour later, Brandt ascended the steps from the alley door to Houghten's apartment door. Finding this second door ajar, he continued in and found the director of seminars in his kitchen, dressed professorially in gray slacks and a blue cordovan sweater. Seeing a crutch propped on a chair, Brandt proceeded to Houghten's side to save him the inconvenience of coming over to greet him.

With his long, refined face, pale cheeks, and wispy beard, framed by jagged, shoulder-length brown hair, Houghten would have fit well in a Shakespearean play, as a Hamlet or Prince Hal. He offered his hand for a handshake with a look of delight.

"So you made it finally!" he chimed. "At last, we will have our evening of imbibement and talk!"

Soon Brandt was settled in on the couch in the living room with a beer in his hand. He was in great spirits for the evening ahead and full of curiosity for what would transpire.

The apartment appeared, on a surface look, to consist of three rooms,

including the kitchen, which had yellow walls and white trim, the living room (in which Brandt sat), which had blue walls with red trim, and a bedroom, too dark to colorify, where an unmade bed and a bedside table (actually a wooden crate) were visible through a half-open door.

Houghten lit several candles and set them on the coffee table and shelves. Within five minutes, Brandt had tossed down two beers and he was starting to feel the effect. With the lights in the living room not lit, the candles flickering, and an arc lamp in the alley swinging in the wind (outside the side-by-side, large windows facing in that direction), the place had acquired the atmosphere of a corner bar.

Brandt, with a third beer in hand, looked around at the clutter of books, record albums, and miscellaneous objects that crowded Houghten's private world. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the mess except maybe to cram into one place as wide a range as possible of every mode of thought and being as could be represented in such a manner. There were books on politics, literature, psychology, religion, the occult. Many had titles Brandt recognized as being in vogue among people his own age. The range of political subjects went from a study of Abraham Lincoln to the little red book of Mao Tse Tung. The range of record albums went from classical music (a whole shelf of it) to rock and roll and folk music.

Three books on the coffee table, right in front of Brandt, drew his immediate interest. They were *The Short Stories of Frier Kafka*, *The Return of the King* by J.R.Tolkien, and *A Yaqui Way of Knowledge: The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Castenada. Brandt skimmed through the books, noting the cast of strange characters, from a man who had changed into an insect, in one of Kafka's stories, to the "Lord of the Nazgul," in Tolkien: "A great black shape against the fires beyond he loomed up, grown to a vast menace of despair."

Brandt's attention was also drawn to a large print hanging on the back wall of the room above a bookshelf. The print showed a young woman in a white dress hanging clothes on a city rooftop.

"Ash Can School," Houghten informed when he peeked into the room and saw Brandt standing with his beer looking at the print.

"I like it," Brandt replied in his simple manner.

"New-York-City-mostly group of painters, around the turn of the century," Houghten said. "Wanted to look at common places. Common places where common people live. Did a lot of stuff of city alleys. Ergo, 'Ash Can'."

"I like it," Brandt said again.

He also liked the philosophy Houghten had described, of wanting to focus on common things. He noted the connection between Houghten's alley view and the view in the print.

"Now, tell me, Houghten," he asked a while later, "where does a guy like you come from anyhow?"

"Haw!" said Houghten, peering into the room from the kitchen, where he had returned. "Where does a guy like me come from?"

He hobbled back into the living room, crutch in hand, to answer this question. "A guy like me comes from New England," he said. "New Hampshire, to be exact! I grew up in Concord."

The conversation continued along this vein as Brandt and Houghten ate supper together. Houghten said that he had been one of two children in a family with no father at home. His parents had separated when he was three. In the midst of that, his father had left town. Since then, his father had faded out of contact.

"My father's still alive, I know," Houghten remarked. "I don't know where he's living."

The moment that Brandt was anticipating came a little while later when Houghten went out to the kitchen again and came back with a plastic bag filled with marijuana.

Brandt had never seen marijuana at close range. It did not look like strands of grass, as he expected. It consisted of dry, nutlike buds with brown, crisp leaves.

Houghten broke apart a dozen or so of these buds, using the upside down cover of a shoebox as a tray. He used a little rake to separate the seeds from the leaves. Then he rubbed the clumps between his fingers to produce a little pile of a tobacco-like mixture that he lined out onto cigarette rolling paper and rolled up to form three joints.

Next came the first light—not ceremonious in any way, yet Brandt had a sense of embarking on a new direction in his life.

"Draw it in deep, then kind of push it down in your lungs," said Houghten, speaking with his lips pressed together, his bearded face drawn with the pressure exerted downward into his lungs as he described. "You just want to hold it there for a while, if you know what I mean, to let the smoke soak in."

"Got ya," Brandt replied.

The joint went back and forth between them for a half dozen or so drags with Brandt feeling no effect at all.

"Now what exactly is going to happen here?" Brandt asked. "Am I all of a sudden going to go wild?"

"What's going to happen?" Houghten replied, "What's going to happen is this, 'Ah! Sweet mystery of life!'"

"So that's how it is, huh?"

"Yes, indeed," Houghten remarked. "You don't need to worry, my good friend. You won't dissociate."

Brandt found this last statement of particular interest. "You won't

dissociate," he thought to himself. It seemed as if the words resonated for a long time in his mind. He drew his vision inward, oblivious to his physical surroundings.

"You know," he said, focusing on his companion again, "I think I'm starting to feel an effect."

"Hey, all right!" said Houghten. "Me, too."

Brandt became aware then of a subtle change in perception that was difficult at first to comprehend. He noticed that the sound of the traffic outside the window, with its rising and falling component noises of motors and horns, had become more distinct, and yet seemed more distant, as if separated by a great chasm of space. Looking toward the window, Brandt noticed the arc lamp in the alley, framed, with a leafless branch of the tree beside it, within a rectangular section of the window sash. He thought to himself that he had never seen anything so beautiful. "Accidental is perfect," he said to himself.

It was more than beautiful even, it was astounding. The bulb of the lamp moved in the wind in an erratic pattern, its range of motion limited by the metal arc that it hung from on the pole. It appeared to be dancing as if possessed with its own life or to be a creature deep below the sea buffeted by unseen currents. Light radiated from the lamp in successive, concentric aureoles. It looked like light seen under water or etched on thick air.

Light was both particles and waves, both mass and waves, Brandt thought. He had heard that somewhere, in some class in college. Names came into his mind—Einstein, Max Planck—but he was unable to draw out the relation between the names and the fragments of ideas passing through his mind. The lamp was not a true source of the light, as he recalled. The light of the lamp was energy from the sun, captured in the earth, and that had happened centuries before... in places like Kentucky where vegetation buried under tons of rock had been turned by pressure into coal, the coal on being mined had been turned into heat, and the heat turned into steam to rotate turbines, and the motion of the turbines converted somehow, magnetically, to electricity... to electrons, and the electrons passed through the wire to the arc lamp...

"Well, how about a little music, my friend," said Houghten when Brandt was absorbed in these thoughts.

Brandt looked up and saw Houghten standing by the turntable on the side of the room. How Houghten had gotten there, he didn't know. It seemed as if a long time had gone by. His thoughts about the arc lamp in the alley seemed far behind.

"Music? Fine," Brandt replied.

Brandt had a sense in replying of being removed from his own manner enough to observe it objectively. He noticed the hardness of his

voice and words, the brevity of his characteristic way of speaking. Houghten, on the other side of the room, had acquired strangeness, also. Houghten looked like an animal, Brandt thought, with his furlike hair and beard, and his white teeth revealed by the thin lips drawn back in the odd gesture of a smile. The crutch in Houghten's left arm seemed odd, also. Houghten was a cripple, really, Brandt thought. In an animal world, he would have been quickly killed. When Houghten smiled, the eyes remained serious. The skin at the corners of the eyes drew taut with strain.

Soon the music Houghten had chosen filled the room. Brandt looked at the record album and saw it was *Tenderness Junction* by a group called the Fug. The component sounds of the music, like the component sounds of distant traffic (which Brandt was still aware of), seemed far apart. The drums, the guitars, were surreal, but human voices rose in front of them: "Nor servitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; and we are here as on, as on a darkling plane, where ignorant armies clash by night."

For a long time (he knew not how long), Brandt was absorbed in this music. Then, in a sudden switch, his focus trained on a book on the coffee table in front of him, the book by Castenada, *Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, that he had noticed before. On the cover was a picture of a bluish-black bird, a crow or raven, Brandt supposed, with its shadow projected onto a rutted field beside a purple mountain.

He opened the book at random and read:

"The creek, which a minute before had been less than a foot wide, expanded until it was an enormous lake. Light that seemed to come from above it touched the surface as though shining through thick foliage. From time to time the water would glitter for a second,—gold and black. Then it would remain dark, lightless, almost out of sight, and yet it was strangely present. I don't recall how I long I stayed there, just watching, squatting on the shore of the black lake."

Then, soon, Darren Houghten was seated nearby, talking about his college days and how he had been involved in campus politics, as he passed another joint.

"I started in the whole thing thinking it was a matter of politics, acting like it was a matter of politics, if you know what I mean," the bearded director of seminars said, "and I came to the realization it is not a matter of politics."

"What is it a matter of then?" asked Brandt.

"It is a matter of consciousness."

Brandt recognized this as a lead-in to the kind of philosophizing that he normally didn't like. But, under the influence of the grass, he felt more receptive.

"You were reading Castenada, right?" said Houghten.

"Yea, if you can call it reading."

"Well, that book is about consciousness."

The lamp in the alley was still moving in the wind, Brandt noticed as he took another drag of the grass, pushing it into his lungs. The room was beautiful, with its flickering candles and its interesting objects all around. There was a continuity, a theme of some kind, running through the place that he hadn't noticed before.

"You see, once the consciousness is there, it's like Thomas Wolfe, you can't go home again," Houghten continued.

"You can't go home again how?"

"You cannot go back to your original head, man. You cannot go back to your original innocence, as far as life in America, as far as being on course to a middle class life."

In the distance, a wail of a siren rose in the air, above the sound of traffic, like something drawn on top of it. The siren had a shape like that, Brandt thought, without being that actually.

Houghten took another long drag of the joint himself. "To quote Bob Dylan," he remarked through pressed lips, "'Strike another match, go start anew. And it's all over now, baby blue.'"

Brandt picked up the *Don Juan* book again and skimmed through it. In one incident, the teller described how, after chewing peyote, he had felt his field of vision contracting to a circle directly in front of him, and how he had then found himself in a tunnel made of a material like tinfoil that had collapsed upon him, forcing him to crawl out of it looking for air. In another incident, the narrator claimed, he had listened to the sounds in the desert and had heard "holes between the sounds."

"Well, tell me just one thing," Brandt said, "speaking of this guy, Castenada, do you think it's real?"

"Do I think what he's describing is real?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me ask you this, Matthew? What is 'real'? 'Real" is inside of your head, what your mind is perceiving, and do I believe what Castenada writes about is what he perceived? Yes, I do."

"But apparently the senses under the influence are not perceiving what's really there."

"What's really there, Matthew, is always beyond perception. What's really there must be filtered through perception."

Brandt fell asleep thinking about that and woke at dawn to see Houghten's feet, shoes still on, dangling from the bed in the adjacent room. He went to make sure that Houghten was okay, and saw that he was sleeping like a child with a pillow hugged in one arm.

"Hey, Darren! Darren! I think I'm heading back," he yelled.

"Oh, ya, hey, sure, man," Houghten replied.

"Hey, thanks for the great evening."

Brandt left, walking hurriedly, although still in a daze, as he traversed the two miles to his own apartment.

[Chapter 148 notes]

149. Matt and Mary argue after Mary discovers he got stoned

The next morning found Matthew and Mary Brandt in clashing states of mind, with Matthew still feeling the effects of a night of being stoned and Mary as alert and verbal as ever after a night of intense discussions about feminist and political topics.

Mary was in a somber mood owing to a letter received the day before from her sister; nonetheless, she took note of her husband's status. She observed the change in him as soon as she spoke to him in their living room by the big windows overlooking the street.

Her curiosity heightened when she learned that Matthew had spent the previous evening at Darren Houghten's.

"That's quite a development," she said. "Seemed like you thought he was too poshy."

For once she lacked the right word, but he got the meaning.

"Nah, Houghten's okay," Matthew replied.

"What did you do?"

"Drank beer. Listened to music."

"What kind of music?"

"All kinds of music. Houghten has a stack of records about ten feet long. The guy has every record I ever heard of."

"Is that so?"

She didn't ask him the further question that was in her mind. She knew that Houghten not only had beer and records; he also had marihuana, Matt had said on a previous occasion. On that occasion, just a few days before, she and Matt had had a brief discussion on marijuana. She had asserted her strong view that it was something that was best avoided. Usually, when she felt strongly about anything, he paid heed. She was proud of her influence over him in that regard.

Mary noticed something else, also, that drew her suspicion. Matthew had just taken a shower, judging by his fresh, moist appearance, and he had shaved his cheeks clean along the edges of his goatee. She had known him to do that on previous occasions after nights when he and Dennis Kelly had had too much to drink. It was his not too subtle way of hiding the effects of over-indulgence.

Matthew stood at a distance from her, on the other side of the kitchen, trying to act as normal as possible so as to avoid having to make an accounting regarding the grass.

Far from feeling perturbed with her, he felt desirous. When she turned away from him for a moment to watch some people passing noisily below the window, he looked her up and down in a way he hadn't done for months. She looked beautiful, he thought. Her black hair was pulled back simply from her intelligent brow. She was wearing blue jeans and a Navy blue sweater, a characteristic understated outfit that made her

shapely figure seem all the more alluring.

"What time did you get home?" she said, trying to pitch that as a pleasant question and not a nagging wife inquiry.

"I stayed all night, as it turned out," he said.

"You stayed all night? How come?"

"Just fell asleep."

"Drank yourself to sleep, huh?"

"Naw, Mary. It wasn't that. There just wasn't any point, you know, with my pretty wife gone."

"Ha!"

Later she noticed he seemed to be lingering in the area of the bedroom as if waiting for her to come in. Normally, she would have been inclined to make herself available, but she didn't like the added intensity that his interest seemed to have.

He swung his long arm around her as she walked by with a handful of books on the way to her corner study. In a single motion he swept her off her feet and flat onto his stomach with the quickness of a wrestler. The books went sprawling on the bed.

"Forget the books," he said.

The forcefulness of it was more than she was used to from him. She raised up on her knees, trying to get some distance, whereupon his right hand slammed into her crotch, lifting her entire lower body off the bed, while his teeth sank into the nape of her neck.

"Matthew, stop it!" she demanded.

He relented at once, realizing that he had blown it by coming on too strong. He fell back onto the pillow with a sigh, wondering if there was any way to recover the lost ground. If so, it would take a lot of talking. He wasn't in the mood for that.

"I'm not a toy, you know," she said.

"Yes, I know, Mary," he replied. He didn't like the trend at all. "I'm sorry, really. I just got carried away."

"And you know why?"

"Why's that?"

"Because you're stoned. Aren't you?"

"No, I am not stoned," he said.

He sat up on the side of the bed and re-tied his shoes.

"Oh, yes, you are," she persisted, tapping her finger on his forearm.

He tried to remain serious but his lips curled up into a smile. "Okay, Mary, if you want the whole truth ..."

"I do."

"I am not stoned. I was stoned."

"You got stoned with Darren?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, you must have gotten very stoned, Matthew, because you're still stoned, in my opinion."

"You don't approve of it, I gather."

"I didn't say that."

"Ah, Mary, I'd say it's fairly obvious."

"I just want to know what's happening. I don't like to be left out and surprised."

"Okay, next time you'll know."

He got up and went to the window to watch the traffic passing by on Connecticut Avenue two blocks away.

She let this settle for a while, lying on her side on the bed with her books beside her, which she had retrieved and stacked up neatly.

"Well, I just want to say, I hope there are not a lot of 'next time's,'" she said.

"See, you do disapprove," he said.

"And you knew that last week, when we talked about it."

"Yes, I did."

She sighed. "Well, I don't mean to control you. It just concerns me, that's all."

"Concerns you how?"

"Concerns me that you will turn into some kind of space head dope addict."

He came back and sat on the bed.

"Mary, let's put it into perspective. I didn't mainline heroin. I smoked a few joints."

She relented when she heard that. "Okay, Matthew, I'm sorry," she said, "really. Everyone's talking about being independent, all my friends. Independence for women. But you need your independence, too."

He listened in silence.

"I don't mean to be the controlling bitch," she said. "I don't think that, Mary."

"Okay, let's be friends."

She kissed him softly then and looked at him with her big eyes in such a way that he thought he would maybe get the opportunity yet that had escaped him before. But she rose abruptly from the bed and looked out the window in the direction he had been looking.

"Matthew, good buddy," she said. "Let's go for a walk by the creek. I really need the creek."

"Okay, you got a deal."

They headed out soon later into the lovely sunlight of the Sunday-quiet sidewalks along embassy row. Reaching the bridge above Rock Creek Park, they headed down their usual path to the creek and along the creek toward the north alongside the tumbling water. The intimacy of

being alone on the path, with no other people in sight, was enough to reestablish their normal good feelings toward one another.

"Well, I'm dying to know," said Mary, in a deliberate effort to smooth over any remaining bad feelings, "what was it like being stoned? Did you enjoy it?"

"Well, Houghten had a good description."

"What was that?"

"Ah, sweet mystery of life."

"That's how it was, really?"

"Yes, very much."

"How could it be that?"

"It's hard to describe. It's makes everything more intense. It makes you look at things, really look. And everything is kind of in a dream, and yet it's not in a dream."

She made no reply, though the straight, dark eyebrows lowered in the patent Mary Kass frown that he remembered from his first walks with her in Minnesota.

"You ought to try it sometime," he said.

"Oh, no! I don't think so," she replied softly. "How come, Mary?"

"Because I like to be alert, Matthew. I like for my mind to be keen."

"See, you don't know what you're talking about, Mary, because it does not make you unalert. It does not make you unkeen."

"Well, that I don't believe."

Matthew laughed, seeing it was an impossible battle.

"You know what else, Mary?" he added in a more intimate tone. "They say when you're stoned, sex is out of this world."

"Well, Matthew," she said, "I'll have you know, I don't need drugs to enjoy sex with you."

She meant that as a compliment, and he knew it, but it struck him as tame and prudish, also. No, that wasn't really true, he thought, but the notion lodged in his mind with the self-absorbing intensity of the previous evening.

There was a heaviness all around, he noticed, weighing things down and making the air seem heavy. The colors of objects around him seemed slightly out of hue. It was an aftermath of being stoned, or maybe of drinking too much, he supposed. He had an odd feeling between his eyes, just above his nose, as of a pressure there clamping down on things he thought about.

He tried to shake the feeling off and return to the original spirit of the walk, as she had put it forth, as a way to be out in the fresh air together to dispel the bad sentiments of their minor altercation in the bedroom.

"Well, what did you and your friends find to talk about?" he asked as they walked single file along the path with her a step ahead.

He asked this question to provide an opening for what he knew she wanted to talk about, though without any real interest in the stream of words that he expected would follow. She had already given him a brief report, earlier in the apartment.

"What did we find to talk about?" she replied from in front of him as the head of black hair bobbed up and down. "The books everyone's been reading, trips people have been on, relationships, projects, classes, jobs. There's just so much!"

He didn't need to see her face to know that it was animated with her typical earnestness as she pursed her lips choosing the precise words to convey her meaning.

"What exactly are they reading?" he asked.

Again, he didn't really want to hear. But he did his best to listen as she brought out her long answer. Several of the women had been reading a book called *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, by a new author named Joyce Carol Oates, she told him. She said he would maybe find it of interest because it was about people at the bottom of society who were nonetheless good people, people such as they had known in Kentucky.

"Well, I might look at it sometime," he said, not really believing that he ever would or would care to.

Next topic to appear was a class-required book that she was reading about the Cuban system of education and food supply. Again, Matthew tried to listen as the feeling of heaviness continued.

"It's even in their constitution," she said. "Every person has an equal right to education, medicine, and food."

He listened patiently for a while, but the drift of it annoyed him. His mind went back to the Rolling Stone articles he had read the previous evening, with their high-flown rhetoric and claims of being part of a "revolution."

"Mary," he said at last. "Isn't Cuba a communist country?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, doesn't that give you just a mite of pause?"

"'Communism,' 'socialism,' etcetera, these are just words, Matthew. These are words people put on anything that opposes capitalist enterprise. As if to say, capitalism and freedom are one and the same, but often they are not. Aren't we seeing that in Vietnam where socialism is the movement of the common people against people of privilege?"

He had no response to that. He just wondered when the preaching would end.

"I don't take it lightly," she added.

"That I don't doubt, Mary," he said. "Don't you ever think of anything light or happy?"

"You know I do, Matthew. All the time."

"So talk about that for a while. Give me a break!"

It took her a moment to take that in before the nostrils flared. "Okay, I will," she replied. "You can have your break for the whole afternoon."

With that, she spun around and headed back the way they had come, but soon she veered off on a path into the woods.

Matthew watched her brisk figure, with her black hair bobbing up and down, as it disappeared into the trees. He waited for a moment to see if she would come back and then went looking for her. She was not on the path for as far as he could see, for about a hundred yards, to where the path bent into the trees. He hurried to the bend, expecting to find her within sight somewhere. But she was not within sight. There were several alternatives as to where she could have gone. The trail ended there at a parking lot with several trail heads and a path going back up a hill to the street.

He took the path to the street, thinking that the most likely, but she was not in view on the street, either. After watching up and down the trail for a half hour or so, he headed back to the apartment. She had not returned home. He didn't see her until six hours later when she showed up back at the apartment. He had spent the afternoon alone, wandering around as he experienced a rapid succession of moods, from anger to self-blame and sorrow.

Before going to bed, Matt and Mary Brandt made up. Lovemaking that night was especially intense. But, later, as they nestled in one another's arms, their thoughts went in different directions. Matthew thought about how the arc lamp had looked when he had been stoned. He doubted he could explain to Mary how astonishing it had been. Mary thought about the letter from her sister. The letter had brought the news that Ellen had gone ahead with an abortion. Mary had meant to tell Matthew about that on their walk. Now she wondered if she would ever tell him.

[Chapter 149 notes]

150. O'Rourke and then Steward leave their L.A. garage home behind

On the following Saturday, April 12, four days after Matt and Mary Brandt's quarrel in Washington D.C., Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke rose at daybreak, in their garage home in East Los Angeles, to begin their last morning together in California. After almost two years of building up to it, and wondering whether it would ever actually happen, O'Rourke was bound for Fort Benning, Georgia, to begin his term of service with the United States Army.

There was not much to get ready. O'Rourke had packed his bag neatly and shined his hiking boots the night before. He had already been over to the Farmworkers' house to take a shower and shampoo his curly red hair and beard. He sat on his bed, looking around at the bare stud interior of the garage, which hadn't changed much in his and Steward's three months stay. Boxes of donated food for the striking farmworkers were still piled along one wall exactly where the two friends had found them. Emiliano Zapata still looked out from the wall, under the words, "VIVA LA HUELGA."

"You know the weird fuckin' thing?" O'Rourke said when Steward looked in his direction. "I'm going to miss this goddam place."

"Yea, who would have ever thought it?"

"Goddam garage."

"Might be better than you're going to be having."

"You got that right."

"No bullets flying."

"Yea, only bull."

O'Rourke folded his hands meditatively as he felt the strands of his red beard. He had intended to shave off his beard before leaving, but he had been unable to get himself to do it. He was a compact sight, 5-10 and well-muscled, with not an ounce of fat on him, and everything about him, his whole life, right there on the bed with him in his backpack, including his treasured letters from Barbie Carpenter, who lately had informed him that she was already in Vietnam in a place called Can Tho.

Soon the former college friends who had wound up as hitchhiking buddies and then as fellow volunteers in California, were on the road for one more time, in a rattletrap Farmworkers cars, heading for the airport. To both of them, O'Rourke's departure was a significant event, a turn in the road with the next stretch of the road not yet in sight.

With Steward handling the driving, O'Rourke took a last look at the L.A. landscape, with its odd combination of natural beauty, urban sprawl, windblown litter, and smog. He had come to think of L.A. as a land of endless islands of low tan and white buildings surrounded by rivers of six-lane traffic. The traffic never stopped, and it seldom slowed down.

The islands, on closer look, had busy streets and shops and longhaired pretty girls in shorts and halters. Then the constant sun, the bright blue sky, the balmy evenings with palm trees waving, the interactions of people on the sidewalks, and the awareness of everyone that, only a few miles away, the surf was rolling in on beaches that stretched from Oregon to Mexico; that was L.A., too.

The former coxswain's restless mind settled on that, for a moment: the surf rolling in. Midwestern from birth, O'Rourke had seen that for the first time in the past few months. He thought of Joe Terda, Dan Kampf, the Filipino brothers, the whole L.A. team, all of the meetings he had gone to, people he had talked to, young ladies he had met,—ladies with pretty eyes that had regarded him as important and intelligent.

O'Rourke left off at that as those pretty eyes reminded him of some others. The eyes he was thinking of were walnut brown. He imagined those eyes looking at him as he had last seen them, just after Christmas before Barbara Carpenter had left for the Army.

O'Rourke's red-bearded face acquired an dreamy, absent quality as he thought of meeting up somewhere with Carpenter once he got to Vietnam, where he assumed he'd be sent right after completing his medic training. Looking over, he saw a similar dreamy, absent-minded look on the face of his friend, Tom Steward. Seeing that, he remembered that he and Steward would soon be parting.

He pulled himself back to the moment at hand. "So, tell me, Stewmeat, which way is the weathervane pointing this morning?" he asked with a smile.

Steward responded with a similar click back to reality on his own part. There was no need to ask O'Rourke to explain the question. Steward and his old teammate had been talking lately a great deal about the idea that Steward had brought back with him from the demonstration, that he ought to just close up shop with the Farmworkers union and head up the coast to be in Santa Barbara with Kristine DeSolt. He and O'Rourke had discussed the logistics of what the move would involve, arriving at the conclusion that finding work and a place to stay would be easy to do.

"Well, I'm still thinking on it hard," Steward answered.

"What's to think about?"

"Main thing I been wondering about, is what we touched on before. She specifically said she wasn't trying to get away from me. But maybe inside she wants that. She needs a break from me."

O'Rourke threw back his head in a laugh.

"Well, goddam, Stewie, I know a fuckin' good way to find out."

"Yea, that's the truth, ain't it?"

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

They rode on for a few more miles until the first signs relating to the airport came into sight. O'Rourke all the while had been lost in thought again, but with a more whimsical expression.

"You know what I've been thinking?" he said. "Who'da thunk it, me and you out here in California, livin' in a garage together. And now me goin' off to be a fuckin' soldier and you maybe goin' up there—you better goddam do it, Stewball! Our entire goddam lives have been thrown into the mix, and it all started with the war, trying to position on account of it."

"That's the truth."

"I just think, coming out of the gate like that, in such a mixed up fashion, it has made all of us more inclined to accept the twist of fate, as Dylan calls it. Who's to know what will happen?"

That turned out to be O'Rourke's final pronouncement as they headed off the off ramp to the airport and tried to figure out which lane to go in. At the terminal door, O'Rourke jumped out of the front seat with his backpack. With his red hair and beard flying in the wind and his lean, ruddy face and strong shoulders and arms, he did indeed look like a soldier, a Celtic soldier in old Ireland or Scotland.

"It's been great," he said.

"Yes, it has," Steward replied.

"Goddam adventure!"

"That it has."

"You been a good friend, man."

"Thank you, Bill. You, too."

"Hey, I got a little present for you, by the way."

"Really, what's that?"

O'Rourke reached into his backpack and from the top pocket took something Steward recognized. It was the laminated folding sky map that O'Rourke always had carried with him on his hitchhiking trips to look at the stars at night.

"Well, thank you, Bill," said Steward, sincerely touched.

"Study it a little bit, goddam it. Try to knock something into that empty head."

A smile and a hardy wave followed that. Bill O'Rourke, with his pack slung over his shoulder, took a few steps toward the terminal and turned around with a grin.

"Think about what I told you," he said.

"Yes, I will."

"Give her a big kiss for me."

"I'll do that."

"Hey! Alright!"

The matter was as much as settled, Steward thought as he drove back

to the Farmworkers office. He knew already what he would do.

"Joe," he said to his boss the next morning, "I've got to leave. My mind is elsewhere."

"I know that, rapaz. I been watching you, with your lovely girlfriend. I was once a young man, too."

"Do I need to give a notice or something?"

"No, hermano, you can leave right now if you want to."

"I may just do that. I mean, really right now."

"I know that, rapaz."

Terda, in his affable manner, drove Steward out to the Santa Monica freeway, treating the occasion like an exciting event. He said he had once hit the highway himself to walk and hitchhike from Lubbock to Juarez.

"I was 14, just a kid, you know, but I was already working like a man. I was going to see Carmen."

"How old was she?"

"She was 14, too."

At the onramp to the freeway, Terda pulled out some money. "Por tu viaje," he said, holding out some bills.

"No, I can't take that," Steward said.

"Eso no es mio, Tomas," Terda insisted. "Eso es Farmworker money. I can spend it, you know. It's up to me. You take it, Tomas. I gonna feel real bad if you say no."

"Thank you, Joe."

"You are welcome, very welcome, Tomas."

"Thank you."

"And good luck to you, my friend."

"You're a great person to work for, Joe."

"Thank you very, very much."

Within a half hour, Steward had secured a ride, taking him all the way to the UCLA campus in Westwood. A second ride took him along Sunset Boulevard through the luscious green woods of Brentwood Park. Soon after that, from the passenger seat in his last ride, he saw the ocean in the distance, beyond it a striated expanse of clouds and sky.

At the bottom of the hill, at the intersection of Sunset Strip and the coastal highway, Steward stopped in the same parking lot where he had stopped with Bill O'Rourke. He stood where O'Rourke had stood looking out to the surf as the realization sunk in more that his old buddy was gone from the scene and would be gone for a long time.

His mood changed quickly, though, when he swung his pack onto his back and headed up the coastal highway, having decided to hike a while for exercise before sticking out his thumb. It was a bright, sunny day. The beach beside him extended alongside the highway in front of him as far as he could see. All along it, the long, crooked line of the surf rolled

in, white with foam in the gleaming water. The cliffs beside them were marked with dark, jagged shadows.

Steward thought to himself that he no longer had any commitment to the Farmworkers. He no longer had to worry about the draft. He had no idea what the future would bring. He felt free. He felt ready for adventure and the twist of fate O'Rourke had talked about.

"I'm doing it, Bill!" he shouted.

An hour of hiking brought him into Malibu, where he found a store and gas station beside the highway. A young man with long, stringy blond hair and a full blond beard came out of the store and hopped into an old, beat-up red pickup truck as Steward walked by. The pickup truck was piled high with long slabs of wood.

"Which way you headed?" the man asked.

"Up the coast. Santa Barbara," Steward replied.

"I'm going as far as Oxnard, if you'd like a ride."

"Yes, I would," said Steward. "Much obliged."

Steward hopped into the front seat of the truck with his backpack on his lap. He watched ahead as the truck bumped out of the lot and zoomed out toward the continuing vista of surf and cliffs. On his right, pine-covered hills rose up steeply out of sight. On his left, the beach curved out into a treeless point with sand dunes.

"What's in Santa Barbara?" the driver asked. "This woman I want to see," Steward replied. "That sounds important."

"I guess it is."

"She your girlfriend?"

"I guess so. Yes."

"Going up for a day or two?"

"No, indefinitely. She had to move up there, so I'm going to move up there. I'm just going to get some kind of job."

"Far out, man! Following your heart!"

"What do you do?" Steward asked.

"What do I do?" the man laughed. "For the time being, what I do is I drive this nice little truck up in the hills, and me and him, we find trees up there. Of a particular type. We buy the trees. We cut 'em down. We bring 'em down here. We sell 'em."

"What kind of 'particular type'?"

"Oak, my man. Good, old-fashioned oak. People use it for specialty things. Cabinets, furniture, things like that."

"Sounds like a nice life."

"Yes, it is. Everybody's got their little story, you know, and my little story is, I was on my way to being a physics professor, you know, hiding out in school because of the draft, but I wound up getting drafted anyhow,—long story I won't bore you with, missed a couple quarters

way back,—and, lo and behold, I go for the physical and they say they don't want me,—because I got bunions, of all things,—so all of a sudden I'm scott free, and I get to thinking of all the things I was telling myself I wasn't doing because of having to be in school. One of them was this. I'm outdoors all day, man, working hard, smoking reefers. My spurs are jingling, if you know what I mean."

The man told Steward he had lived in Santa Barbara himself for a while, actually during the quarters he had missed, picking up jobs at a labor pool.

"Where was that exactly?" asked Steward.

"You know where State Street is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Lower State Street, right by the bus depot there."

"Okay, thank you. I'm going to try it."

"Hey, and if you're looking for a good, cheap place to stay, I can help you with that, too. El Capitan Motel, right on the beach as you come into town. Eight bucks a night, last time I was there. Rooms are pretty nice, inside."

After several more rides, Steward arrived on the outskirts of Santa Barbara at the beachside road that the lumberman had told him about. From a distance, he could see that the orange "VACANCY" sign was lit.

Soon he was established in a room on the ocean side of the motel. His windows looked out to a beach scene with palm trees and sand dunes. Beyond that was an offshore oil rig and out further still the shadowy shapes of the channel islands.

Near sunset, Steward bought some crackers in a vending machine and walked across the road with the sky map O'Rourke had left him. He sat eating his crackers, watching the swelling water offshore as it curled up into white-capped waves and came roaring in.

"Tomorrow I'll try that labor pool," he said to himself.

Should he call his brother Art? No, he decided, he should not. His brother would invite him to stay at his place and would be trying to give him money. He didn't want to be in that kind of situation. He wanted to work out things on his own. Should he call Kristine DeSolt? No, he decided, he should not call her, either, until he got his own affairs in order. He would try to find a job that would continue for weeks, at least. As soon as he got a job, he would look for an apartment. Once he got all that arranged, he would call her and tell her that he had moved up to Santa Barbara because he wanted to see her.

Having decided all that, Steward sat with the star map O'Rourke had left with him, looking up at the star-studded sky that opened up to the West above the vast openness of the ocean.

[Chapter 150 notes]

151. Steward establishes himself in Santa Barbara and calls his brother

Early the next day, Tom Steward walked from the motel to the labor pool his lumberman driver had told him about the day before. There, in a storefront office less than a mile from the beach, he found an assortment of men of various ages intent on finding work.

Steward identified himself to the clerk, filled out an assortment of papers, and sat down on a folding chair in the smoky haze of the room. An hour later, he heard his name called and went forward to the counter.

"Steward, this one is at a shipping and receiving desk at a printer company," the clerk informed, "Way out on State Street, top of the hill. Pays three bucks an hour."

"How long is it for?"

"Full day today, maybe tomorrow. Regular guy called in sick."

"Sure, I'll take it."

Following directions provided by the clerk, Steward caught a local bus on State Street, just up the block from the office. His thoughts, as he looked out the bus window at adobe-style houses and palm trees, shifted to Kris DeSolt. He was aware that the instructions she had given him to the "hacienda" where she was living called for going on State Street along the very route where the bus was going. Thinking of this, he affirmed his determination to quickly achieve the objectives he had laid down for himself as prerequisites to seeing her.

"Trucks come in and go out four times a day," the supervisor told Steward when he reported in. "For each shipment out, there's an address for which you prepare a label. Items coming in are supplies for the plant. The plant has six areas, as you will soon figure out."

Steward applied himself diligently to the work, asking questions at the parts desk whenever he needed directions. But, towards the end of the day, the supervisor came to tell him that the person who had been sick would be back the next day.

"You did a fine job," the supervisor remarked. "If I had another position, I'd hire you."

Steward was glad to hear that, but he felt discouraged at having to start all over again at his objectives the next day. Fortunately, he had signed up for a second night at the $6 motel. But how long could he last out at this rate? he thought. He had only $11 besides that, plus the $30 or so dollars after taxes he had just earned.

"Going downtown, if you need a ride," the parts man said as Steward walked out.

"Actually, I would," Steward replied.

"Say, I meant to tell you earlier today," said the man as they rode along. "My son told me a friend of his just got hired down at the zoo.

Said his friend told him they were looking for someone else."

"What zoo is that?"

"Child's Zoo, they call it, down by the beach, on a hill, kind of, in some trees."

Steward was at the zoo at 7 A.M.. Coming up to a gate that led to a park-like square with a children's railroad, he saw a man of about 30 looking at him from an open door.

"I heard from someone you're hiring," Steward said.

"Well, you heard right," the man replied.

"What kind of job is it?"

"Grounds man. Four bucks an hour, to start with."

"How long is it for?"

"Let's just say, it is a four-day job that may turn into a kind of permanent job, permanent meaning 'till this other guy gets back from the Guard, in about two months. After that, who knows."

"I'd like to apply," said Steward.

"Well, come on in."

A half hour later, Steward was dressed in blue coveralls, listening as the man, who gave his name as Tom Barnes, explained the job.

"There are two things you do here," said Barnes. "One, you keep the place clean. Two, you feed the animals. That's the whole sha-moh. Doesn't sound too complicated, does it?"

"No, it doesn't."

"You get a certain section to do. I don't have to keep looking if you're working. You know why?"

"No."

"Cuz all's I gotta do is look if it's clean. All's I gotta do is look if the animals got their food."

"Yes, I understand."

"Outside of that, I don't give a flying fuck if you're up in a tree somewhere stroking your chicken. You get what I mean?"

"Yes, I do."

Next thing to learn was how to feed the anteater named Why Not, who lived in a two-part concrete cage surrounded by grass.

"First part of this is you go get a hotdog," Barnes said going over to the concession stand to place the order.

"One hot dog for Why Not," Barnes said to the woman who worked there, with the result that a hot dog, complete with catsup and mustard, was placed in his hand without even a smile.

"Needless to say, Why Not likes ants," Barnes remarked, turning toward Steward. "But hot dogs are his favorite. He will kill for a hot dog. Please keep that in mind."

Together they went over to one side of the cage, smaller than the

other side, from which the anteater was watching them approach.

"Okay, now kindly observe, Mr. Steward. Why Not has some goddam big forearms. The reason he's got these big forearms is he rips tree stumps out of the ground to get at the ants."

"Yea, I think I've seen that, actually," Steward answered.

"What I'm trying to impress on you, Steward, if this animal ever gets a hold of you, he will rip you apart."

"Yes, I understand."

Barnes then demonstrated the rest of the daily procedure of feeding the anteater and cleaning its cage. He placed the hot dog on the far end of the small side of the cage inside a little cardboard box so the animal had to get it out of the box to eat it, then he ran around through a door on the other side of the cage and released a rope pulley allowing a concrete door between the two parts of the cage to slam down.

Steward then cleaned out the first part of the cage while the anteater pried under the door with its long black claws, trying to lift it up, which it could do just enough to look angrily through.

"See, he likes this part of the cage 'cuz it's bigger," Barnes observed. "That's why he's so pissed."

"I can see that."

"Poor ol' Why Not... You can fool him every time, and every time he gets pissed."

Steward tore into his tasks with a purpose. He realized, from the first explanation of the hiring possibilities that Barnes had explained, that this was exactly the kind of job he had been trying to find. It could be permanent enough to provide a month or two of pay, while, at the same time, unclaiming enough to let him leave when he wanted to without feeling like he had misled anyone. He liked being outdoors, and he liked his boss despite the gruff demeanor. He noticed that Barnes often took time from his chores to answer questions from kids.

Talking to a fellow worker that day, Steward also made progress in finding a place to live. The fellow worker told him about a lady who lived in a large house not far from the mission and who was looking for a renter for a basement room. Steward walked to the house after work and wound up moving in that evening. The room rented for 20 dollars a week. It had a private door that opened to the side yard.

Next morning Steward was at the zoo ten minutes early, at 6:45, after having gotten up at dawn to run up the mission hill. He raked his areas and fed the animals in half the time, then went to ask Barnes if there was anything else he could do. Barnes directed him to a pile of wood chips which Steward put around the trees and plants.

On Friday, Steward was raking out an low area by a pond when he saw Barnes approaching.

"Them little feathers will get you, man," Barnes said.

"I know what you mean," Steward replied.

"And they get all gucked up with the damn bird shit."

"Precisely."

"You do a good job, though."

"Thank you."

"You still want this gig?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, you can start on Monday then."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Thank you."

Steward left the zoo soon later, determining already what his next step would be. He would call his brother Art as soon as he got into town, to reestablish contact with him. Then, on the next morning, Saturday, he would call Kristine DeSolt and try to arrange with her to see her during the weekend.

He called Art from a phone booth across from the beach.

"Art, hi. It's Tom," he said.

"Tom? What a surprise! What's up?"

"Guess where I'm calling from."

"Where?"

"Down by the beach. About two miles away."

"You're in town here?"

"Yes."

"Doing what?"

"I just got out of work. I live here."

"You live here?"

"Yes."

"You're kidding."

"No."

"You live here?"

"Yes."

The conversation went on like this for a few minutes conveying the details of Tom Steward's new situation while Art Steward accepted it all in an amused, incredulous tone.

"You could have stayed with us, you know," he said.

"I know, Art. I just wanted to get established on my own."

"Well, damn it, Tom, you better not say you can't make it over here for supper."

"Sure, I can, Art. I'll be there in about a half hour."

Art met his brother at the top of the exterior stairs leading up to the motel-like balcony outside his apartment. He grinned all the while as Tom came up the steps.

"What happened to the Farmworkers?" he said.

"I quit."

"I thought it was such a big deal."

"It was a big deal."

"Tom, you're something else."

Inside the apartment, Nancy Steward greeted her brother-in-law with the same amused, incredulous tone. "So you live up here now?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, welcome, Tom."

"Thanks very much."

Art went to the refrigerator and came back with a couple of beers. He handed one to his brother.

"So, let me see now, not to press the point," he said, "you quit in L.A., you moved up here, and now you are working in a zoo."

"Don't put it down, Art. It's a fantastic job."

"I could see where it would be," said Nancy. "I've heard about that zoo. It's right on the ocean."

"Yes, it is."

"Oh, well," said Art. "Why do I keep thinking, there's some piece of this missing?"

Tom Steward took a sip of the beer. "There is a piece missing," he said.

"And what is that?"

"Woman lives up here I met in L.A."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nancy. "Now the plot thickens!"

"You moved up here because of a woman?" Art asked.

"Yes."

"And who exactly is this mystery lady?"

"Oh, she's not so mysterious. She lives in Goleta, out by the university somewhere."

"She's a student?" Nancy asked.

"No, actually, she isn't," said Tom. "She's been working, organizing a concert."

"What kind of concert?"

"Rock concert."

"Is that so?"

"Hippie type," said Art.

"Kind of, a little."

"I've heard about that type," Art remarked with a grin.

"Free love, he means," Nancy threw in.

"How old is she?" said Art.

"19."

"Oh! Robbing the cradle!" Nancy laughed.

Later, after a pleasant supper and conversation about family news,

Art sprung some news of his own as the three Steward's walked to the ice cream parlor where they had gone on Tom's previous visit. "To make a long story short, I've been offered a commission in the United States Army," he said.

"Fort Knox, Kentucky. July 15," Nancy added.

"What do you mean a commission?" the younger brother asked with a puzzled frown.

"Well, see, the way they do it with doctors, they don't draft you," Art explained. "They offer you a commission."

"What if you say you don't want it?"

"They don't like that," Nancy remarked.

"Naw, as I understand," said Art, "you can take the commission and go in as a captain, or you can refuse the commission and go in as a buck private."

"Doing what?"

"I'm afraid to imagine."

"So you're going in?"

"As Nancy said, Ft. Knox."

"Wow," said Tom. "You must be doing some pondering on that."

"I'm not exactly clicking my heels with delight."

"You've got no other options?"

"Your kind of options, I guess. But I think I'm going to leave the rebelling to you."

"We do seem to watch the news a little more," said Nancy, "the so-called peace conference in Paris."

"Yea," said Art. "No wonder they're at war! They can't even agree where to sit down!"

Back at the apartment, Art went to the back room and returned with a yellow ten-speed bike. "I want you to have this," he announced to his brother.

"What's the point of that?"

"You need it and I don't use it."

"You really don't use it?"

"No, I don't."

Tom Steward stood looking at the bike without speaking.

"I want you to have it," Art repeated. "You can take it with you right now."

"Now I got transportation!" Tom Steward rejoiced as he drove away later.

He rode down to the beach and along the boulevard, thinking of the strange twist of events, that now he was off the hook for the war and his brother was on it. But his mind soon went on to Kris DeSolt and his hope to see her the next day.

152. Steward calls Kristine and bikes ten miles to see her

The next morning, which was Saturday, Tom Steward called the number that Kristine DeSolt had provided. The person who answered the phone said that Kristine had gone down to Goleta, shopping with her mother, and would be back "about 5."

"I'll call back then," said Steward, disappointed.

With a whole day of waiting ahead of him, he hopped on his yellow bike and rode from the pay phone where he had made his phone call down to the Santa Barbara beach.

Well, for better or worse, the matter would soon be resolved, to a certain extent, at least, Steward said to himself. If she was glad to have him around, he would know by the tone in her voice as soon as he talked to her. But what if she seemed unsure? Then he would have to decide whether to press ahead.

"Either way, I'm better off here than wasting away in L.A.," he pronounced aloud as he sped along on the bike, his brown hair flying behind him in the breeze.

It was a bright, sunny day, with people of all ages passing along the blacktop paths by the beach or sitting on the grass lawn beneath the tall palm trees. Far from being worried, he felt excited by the openness and unpredictability of his new life.

Throughout the day his mind involuntarily reviewed the odd odyssey he had been on since college: that first letter from the draft board, Air Force camp in Spokane, VISTA in North Carolina, the second letter from his draft board, his decision to file as a conscientious objector, submission of his claim, his interview with the local board, rejection of his claim, the appeal to the state board, riding out West with O'Rourke, the United Farmworkers, the garage home in L.A., the news that his state appeal had been accepted,—and now here he was on the Santa Barbara beach, just down the road from the zoo where he was working as a groundskeeper.

"Who'da ever thunk it," he remarked out loud, quoting what O'Rourke had said on their last ride together out to the airport.

Throughout all of this, also, there had been the persistent problem of loneliness, Steward thought as he rode along the beachside walking path past the outdoor volleyball courts near the freeway onramps. Mixed games were in progress there, as they had been months before on the day when he had first seen DeSolt. So many relationships, such as the one with Barbara Carpenter, had gone awry. Now, for the first time in his life, he had a chance to really love and be loved by someone; and not just by someone, she was a beautiful girl.

"Who'da ever thunk it," he said again.

As the time to call Kristine drew near, he started feeling nervous. He

raced home on the bike and took a shower, though he hoped to jump back on the bike right after he talked to DeSolt, to go out and see her.

At 5 P.M. sharp, he called. The moment of truth had arrived.

She was the one who answered the phone. She recognized him at once by his voice.

"Tom!" she chimed. "They said someone called me this morning! I was hoping it was you!"

He knew right there everything was alright. There was no mistaking that tone. She was glad to hear from him.

"Well, I was hoping to see you," he said.

"I'd like to see you, too."

"How about right now?"

"You're kidding! You're up here!"

"Yes. In Santa Barbara."

"At your brother's place?"

"No. It's a long story. I'll tell you when we meet."

"I don't have access to a car, though, for the time being. My dad is out of town."

"I've got a bike."

"You're kidding!"

"No, I'll explain. Just tell me how to get there."

Five minutes later, Tom Steward was on his bike, pumping hard as he headed up Laguna Street past the twin bronze domes of the mission church. By the time he got to Los Olivos Street, just beyond the church, he had worked himself into a frenzy of physical exertion. He bent down over the handlebars, pedaling hard for the four blocks to State Street, where he turned toward Goleta and charged up the long hill in the bike's highest gear. At the top of the hill, he barreled under the highway 101 overpass and shot onto the flat stretch of the Hollister Avenue, zooming past the printer company where he had worked the previous week. Sweaty and panting for breath, he looked for the street called Puenta Drive, where DeSolt had told him to turn off.

At Puenta Drive, as instructed by DeSolt, he spun off to his left, to the south, toward the ocean. As he rode, the surroundings changed quickly from commercial to almost backwoods rural. The narrow, unmarked road wound around through the woods and coastal hills. Coming through a stand of bay trees, he could see the ocean spreading out toward the shadowy forms of the channel islands. On his right, the sun was low in a cloudless sky above a point of land where the coast bent north and out of sight.

A second turnoff, Via Huerta, materialized after about two miles. Steward turned there to his left, and wound around through the low-hanging branches of the bay trees, looking for a sign saying "Rancho

Roblada" that he had been told to look for. He located the sign about a mile further down the road. From there, a gravel road led up a steep hill. Looking ahead, he could see what he assumed was the "hacienda," a Spanish-style adobe building with a red tile roof. The facing side had a sheltered walkway lined with doors and facing some kind of statue or sculpted fountain.

His impression of it from this distance was of a hillside, ocean- view mansion of wealthy people, but, at the top of the hill, he rounded a final bend, with his view obscured by a thick stand of oak trees, to find before him a setting quite different than he had imagined. The courtyard- like yard, which the square-C-shaped main building faced on three sides, was overgrown with weeds. The fountain was dry. Someone had thrown some orange peels into the dry basin.

He continued into the courtyard scanning doors on three sides of him to determine which way to go to ask for Kristine. He didn't need to look for long. As he swung his right leg off the bike and hopped to a stop, a door opened in the center building. Kristine DeSolt emerged from the door with a smile and a wave and came across toward him.

She was dressed simply but prettily, in white pedal pushers and a pink cotton blouse, with a her blonde hair combed into bangs in front and pulled back into a pigtail held in place with a pink ribbon. She looked healthy, like a well-trained athlete, and she was smaller and more buxom than he remembered her to be.

"Well, you made it all right!" she said brightly.

"Yes, I did."

"Nice bike! I like the yellow!"

"Thank you. So do I."

She kept staring at him with a quizzical expression. "Well, you just have to tell me," she said. "How is it you're up here with a bike? I know you didn't ride all the way up from L.A."

He smiled. "I live here."

"You live here?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since last Sunday."

He had already thought about how he would explain his situation to her. He explained straightforwardly that he had moved because he wanted to be where she was. He said he that he hadn't called her until then because he had wanted to get established first with a place to live and job.

"I figured, if I got up here and you didn't want to keep seeing me, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I was tired of the Farmworkers anyhow, to tell you the truth."

"I do want to keep seeing you," she replied. "And, guess what, Tom? You can give me a hug if you want to."

He did, and for the first time that day he felt calm. He had done the right thing, he thought. Everything was alright.

"Well, this is the hacienda!" she said, taking his hand.

"Quite a place! What a view!"

"Oh, yes. We've been enjoying it. We don't live like this all the time, I better warn you."

"Your father's whole team is here?"

"Yes, behind all the doors!"

"How long is this for?"

"For a few months, until they get done with the artifacts." "Your mother is here, too?"

"Oh, yes, and my brothers, too! It's quite a circus!"

It did seem like quite a circus, Steward thought, with the mother and father separated but still living in the same place while the father pursued a new affair. The mother, as Steward recalled, lived in a trailer by herself. There was a trailer parked behind the buildings, he noticed, up against a hill under some trees.

"Well, can I show you around?" she said. "Sure, I'd love it." Steward replied.

The mother turned out to the first person Steward met as DeSolt led him across the courtyard through an open door into a white-walled kitchen with a high ceiling supported by timber beams. Mrs. DeSolt, introduced as "Patti," was standing at a counter there, chopping tomatoes with a knife. She had blonde hair like her daughter, but shorter, and of a more diluted color without the daughter's healthy sheen. She was trim like the daughter, also, but she looked as if she had carried it too far.

"So this is the guy I've been hearing about!" she said.

"Yes, I guess I am," Steward replied.

"Heard you spent two years in the Peace Corps!"

"In VISTA, in North Carolina."

"Following your dream, huh!"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Far out!"

A brief, further interaction occurred after this, marked by mutual strain. Despite having made up his mind in advance to get along as well as possible with Kristine's family, Steward couldn't prevent himself from the impression that there was something odd about Patti DeSolt. She was only about 45 years old (as he recalled being told), but she had a weathered look. In her speech and dress, which were hippie-like, she seemed to be trying too hard to look and act young. She was drinking wine, which on the face of it wasn't odd, but Steward recalled what the

daughter had told him about her mother having a drinking problem. She was smoking a cigarette, also, which she held in the same hand as the wine glass.

"I'm sorry you have to see my mother drinking," DeSolt remarked when she and Steward left the kitchen soon later. "It's been so hard for her, with my dad flying so high, with his new romance and all. I think she still loves him very much. And she acts so breezy, you know. It's just an act. She was an actress, you know."

"Oh, yes, I remember," he said.

"Well, see the thing is, she's still acting."

The next people met were two of DeSolt's brother, the two youngest, Randy and Dory, ages 13 and 9. They were crossing the courtyard, carrying skateboards, when Steward and DeSolt came outside. They looked like twins, except that the older boy was a head taller than the other. They were both barefoot and bare-chested, dressed in jeans without belts, with straight, shoulder-length brownish-blonde hair and good-looking, almost girlish, faces, though there was nothing feminine about how they moved or acted.

They stood in place dutifully as Steward was introduced.

"Pleased to meet you," said the older boy, Randy, followed a few seconds later by the younger brother who said the exact same words with the exact same inflection.

"Well, that was pretty good, for them," DeSolt remarked. "They got a lot to deal with right now."

She seemed concerned to present the situation in a good light. She took Steward next to see her room, which was on the end of the building, with a window that looked out to an ocean view of a cliff with windswept trees. Photos on the wall showed her in her various roles in the Robert Kennedy campaign.

After that came the several rooms where artifacts brought back from Amchitka were laid out on a table. Her father wasn't around, she said; he had gone to a seminar somewhere to present his findings. The artifacts were humble looking—pieces of dishes, utensils, and so on, with no sculpted pieces or jewelry or anything that looked striking.

"It might not look much to you, but to my father, this is a big, big deal," DeSolt remarked. "You see, these things prove people crossed over the Bering islands from Siberia to Alaska, and up to now that has just been a theory."

Finally came supper with a five members of her father's team. They were intellectual, longhair types who spoke in soft voices as they drank wine. Patti DeSolt sat with the group at the table, trying to take part in the conversation, but her comments were less refined. When someone made a joke, she laughed loudly, bringing a raised eyebrow reaction from

one of the workers, a gentile-looking woman of about 25 with long dark hair who had sat quietly the whole time with a contemplative expression.

"The dark one is my father's girlfriend," DeSolt said when she and Steward left. "She's the kind that has to think she's superior."

"Oh," said Steward. "Is she superior?"

"Yes, in many ways. She can be nice, also. But there are always the sparks flying around, you know. She doesn't want my mother to be here, and my mother just hates her, I think, in her heart."

Later, Steward and Kristine walked out a ridge beyond the compound to look at the ocean. It was just after sunset. There was an awkwardness between them with night coming on and no understanding about whether Steward would stay for the night, under whatever circumstances.

"Tom, I wish I could offer for you to stay," she said. "But, you know, it's like a little town here. Everyone would talk. Not to mention my parents. They're kind of hippies, you know, but they're still parents."

"Yea, I know, Kris," he said. "I don't mind riding back."

"Do you have a light on your bike?"

"No, I don't."

"I've got an old bike with a light. I can give you mine."

"No, you don't need to do that."

"I want to, Tom. I want you to be safe."

They found the bike and some tools, and transferred the light from one bike to another. Next they transferred the rear reflector. Then they walked to where the road left the compound.

"Tom, you really moved all the way up here just to be around me?" she said softly as they walked.

"Yes. You're the only reason for it, really."

"Wow, that's hard to believe!"

"You don't think I should have?"

"No, I like it."

"Good."

She brought him to a halt by pulling back on his hand. She reached up to give him a kiss that lingered. "It's the sweetest thing anyone ever did for me," she said.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

On hearing that, Tom Steward thought at first that the day had been a success without complication, then he saw she was frowning with pursed lips as if forming her thoughts to tell him something else.

"Tom, I hope this doesn't give you a heart attack," she said, "but one of the people here is going down to L.A. tomorrow and I was planning to go with and stay with the Andrews for a couple of days. I have to make some arrangements for the concert."

“Oh,” he said, his face clouding with concern.

“I’ll call you as soon as I get back,” she whispered as she pressed against with a final kiss. “And I will be coming back. I promise.”

153. Steward negotiates the unpredictable turns of his romance with Kristine

Tom Steward went for an early run the next morning, Sunday, all the while thinking about Kris DeSolt. His route took him up the mission canyon road, then along a path that provided a view of the ocean beach stretching west to Port Hueneme.

It struck him as an odd twist of circumstances that he had moved to Santa Barbara to be where Kris was, just as she was on the verge of going back to L.A., where he had just come from. But that was only temporary, he reassured himself. Certainly, he couldn't expect her to turn her own plans around when he had given her no advance warning at all that he would show up on the scene.

He kept thinking about how she had called his moving up there "the sweetest thing anyone ever did for me." He remembered how she had brought him to a stop with a gentle tug of her hand to make sure he heard those words. There was no doubting the meaning of that. She was glad he had moved and wanted to see more of him. Even so, a lingering doubt remained along the lines of what he had thought about before, that maybe, without fully being aware of it, she was throwing up obstacles to ward him off. Was the trip down to L.A. so important that it had to be done right when he arrived, that she couldn't have put it off? Was she going ahead with the trip on a matter of principle, to show that she had her own life and shouldn't be expected to conform to his?

If that was the case, Steward thought to himself, he was sorry he had given the impression (if he had) that he expected her to conform. He resolved to make it clear to her, next time he saw her, that he regarded her arrangements as important as his own.

Kristine DeSolt was in the process of making arrangements, that was for sure, Steward continued in his mind. She had a lot to work out, with her parents separated and her brothers in need of supervision and support. She had no education beyond high school, no job skills except as acquired in her volunteer jobs (for which, as she had pointed out, she had not been paid). She had no money or car. She was scrambling, in other words, to get her life in order, just as he had scrambled to get his own life in order in response to the draft.

Maybe that unsettledness in her life accounted for why she had been so disposed to accept his own unsettledness, Steward thought. The least he could do in return, if he really cared about her, was to support her in every possible way so she could make sense of her life just as he was trying to make sense of his own.

Steward paused at the highest point of the path, on a point of land that commanded a panoramic view. Below him, amidst a lush growth of leafy trees and palms, pastel-colored buildings and red-tiled roofs extended for

several miles to the ocean. The water on the beach side of the crest was bright blue in color and sparkling with sunlight. Further out, under the shadow of distant clouds, the water was dark blue. A ship there, with a silhouetted, derrick-like super-structure, rode the swelling waves. He didn't feel discouraged about Kristine DeSolt. He felt determined to work things out. He was eager to see her again so he could start. He felt enthused with a promise of the future and excited with how it was unfolding in unpredictable ways.

"I'm not a person meant to fit into a pattern," he said to himself, "and neither is she."

Monday, Tuesday, and then Wednesday came,—pleasant, sunlit days for Tom Steward as he worked at the zoo,—but, as hour after hour went by with no word from Kristine DeSolt, his equanimity gave way to a feeling of anxiety that grew steadily larger. Finally, on Wednesday morning, he decided to call the hacienda phone number on his noon break to find out if what he had started to fear was true, that she had already returned from L.A. and had simply not taken the time to call.

He was just in the midst of this determination when his boss, Tom Barnes, came up to him.

"Somebody's here looking for you," he said.

"Where's that?" asked Steward.

"Up by the elephants."

Steward looked toward the elephant pen, which was on a raised area, from where he stood, and saw there an unmistakable head of blonde hair in the bright sunlight. It was Kristine DeSolt, dressed prettily in a red and white skirt and sleeveless blue top. She smiled and waved when she saw him looking in her direction.

He felt extremely relieved to see her. "Okay if I go talk to her?" he asked.

"Sure, why the hell not?"

"Okay, thanks."

"We're just now on our way back," she informed him right away when he came near. "I can't stay long. I'm still with the people I got a ride from. I just didn't want you to worry."

With those words from her, his anxiety dropped away. He realized that the relationship was still on track.

"Well, I guess I was starting to wonder," he said. "I was going to try to call you today."

"I've been so hard on you, Tom. I'm sorry."

"You don't need to feel sorry. You haven't done me any harm. It's my own fault. I want things to be more sure."

"Well, everyone does, Tom."

They stood facing one another, about a foot apart, staring into one

another's faces. Both felt sure of one another; yet, on both sides, there was a strain of bashfulness.

"Well, you've got the zoo looking very nice," she said. He smiled. "Thank you, Kris. It's not just me."

"Which part is yours?"

"Well, actually, I did this."

"See, I could tell."

That was cause for a laugh and direct exchanges of glances as Tom Steward stood with rake in hand.

"Well, I can't stay now, but guess what?"

"What?"

"I called ahead to my dad and he said I can use the car this evening. So I was thinking, how about if I pick you up after work?"

"I'd like that."

"Alright!"

The blonde head of hair was there again, in obvious view, as Steward came down the path from the work, rolling his bike beside him. Kristine DeSolt was standing beside her father's car, on the far side of the parking lot, dressed in a green, mid-thigh, sleeveless dress.

In the late afternoon sunlight, standing before a backdrop of palm trees and flowers, with the ocean expanding out into the distance behind her, she looked as "California girl" as could be imagined, as if sunlight, tropical trees and flowers, and pounding surf had been distilled into a bright face and lithe body.

"Where should we go?" she said. "Would you like to stop at your place first to wash up or something?"

"Actually, yes."

"Good! I'd love to see where you live!"

In a moment, they were cruising down the curved road to the beach. People of all ages, alone or in couples or groups, walked, biked, or skated along the paved paths under the tall palms. An underpass under the freeway led from the beach to city streets dappled with shade. The large house that Steward lived in, with its Midwestern-type yard with Lombard's lining one side, was about two miles up the gradual incline from the ocean.

Together they went in the basement side door to look at Steward's room, which was just inside. It was the single finished room in a basement that was otherwise clean and modern but unfinished. It was separated from the rest of the basement like an indoor cabin, with its own door. Outside the room were laundry tubs and appliances, a clothes line, and a workshop that appeared unused.

"Well, you have privacy," remarked DeSolt as they came in. "Do the people upstairs come down very often?"

"No, there's only a lady upstairs. She just does her laundry. She says her son used to have this room."

"Does she have a husband?"

"I think he's dead."

Steward opened the door to his room. It was a humble place, about ten feet square, with plain walls, painted tan, and a single window, high up on one wall, facing out to the side yard. There was a bed, a dresser, a desk with a lamp, and that was all, except for a plaster bust of Albert Einstein that Steward had noticed out in a storage area in the basement and asked to have in his room.

"Well, this is really nice," Kris said, bouncing on the bed. "It's clean and it's nice and quiet and you have a desk where you can sit and read. I bet you like to read and study, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, when I'm in a calm mood."

"Well, you can be a little calmer now you know where I am."

"You've got that right."

"I know!"

From the apartment, they drove toward Goleta, through the wooded, coastal hill area where Kristine lived, and beyond that, down a winding road to a rocky beach. She had brought a picnic supper of fried chicken, bread, salad, cheese, and wine.

"My dad showed me this beach," she said. "He used to come here when he was going to school in Goleta."

It was a secluded beach in an alcove of cliffs. They gathered drift wood and made a fire by a bridge of rock that extended way out into the crashing waves. The sun was completely visible but muted behind a bank of thin, foglike clouds. Nearer the bluish-green water on the horizon, the clouds were etched with a pattern of almost parallel dark lines.

Any lingering questions that Steward might have had, at this point, regarding the trend of the relationship, were quickly resolved as Kristine explained what had been going on her own mind during her several days in Los Angeles.

"Thomas, I want you to know I was trying to arrange everything down there so you and I can have as much time together as possible. I know you want that, and you're so honest about it, it's really refreshing, and I want it, too. I'll have a lot to do down there end of next month, early June, I may have to go back down there then, live down there at Don and Audrey's, but, you know, we can work it out, if things are going good between us."

From this he understood what extent she had gone to alter her own plans for him, how important he had become to her. He also understood how important it was to her to do well in arranging the concert. He remembered his resolution to make it clear to her that he regarded her

arrangements as important as his own.

"Well, Kris, I want you to do what you need to do," he replied. "I trust you and I understand that you need to be down there sometimes to make arrangements for the concert. Whenever that's the case, you just go right ahead. I want to see you succeed at this."

"Thank you, Tom," she said softly. "I know I can trust you, too. I know you mean that."

After eating their picnic supper by the fire, they walked out on the rocks to look at the fish and hermit crabs contained within the little worlds of the tide pools. They hiked up the beach, sending the sand pipers scurrying in front of them on the wet sand.

The sun drew nearer to the horizon, still shrouded behind the misty clouds in the western sky. The clouds ended in a straight line just above the horizon. The sun was moving slowly toward the point where it would break out of the clouds before setting below the horizon.

Kristine DeSolt was in a talkative mood. She said that she had had a good talk with her younger brother, Dorian, the one she had feared had been doing drugs. She had learned from him that it had just happened one time, she said. He had promised he would not try it again, at least for a while. So she felt she had been successful in warding off that danger. Her older brother, John, the soldier in Vietnam, was doing a final tour to various bases with his service-sponsored rock band. He would be coming home in June, she said, after having completed his 12-month tour overseas. He had ambitions to start another rock band when he got home. Three of his fellow band members in Vietnam had expressed an interest. Another potential band member, an old high school friend of her brother, lived in Burbank. She expected a lot of activity and excitement in the summer related to his return and the formation of the band.

"I think I may be able to help them get some gigs," she remarked. "I've got some good contacts."

He got a sense from this, also, of how important music was to her, how essential it was to her identity. She saw herself as being part of a world of music that centered in California, in the recording industry in Hollywood and Burbank that she had dealt with extensively in her work with the concerts. He felt a lack in that area, when she asked him about his own musical tastes. He said he had no knowledge at all of what groups existed and what they sounded like.

"Well, for example, what was the last album you bought?" she persisted.

"I don't think I ever bought one," he replied.

"You never bought an album?"

"No, I don't think so."

"In your whole life?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, we'll have to educate you a little!"

"Yes, I know. I'd like to learn."

Soon the sun descended below the bank of clouds it had been behind before. A flood of light was projected then up along the line of the beach over the wet sand, marked with their footprints, while the rest of the sky remained dark and hazy. Within a half hour, the globe of the sun, hovering above the water, had changed in color from gold to red and then to orange, bringing the same change of colors in the clouds. Red and gray areas of cloud and sky extended from the horizon back over their heads as they sat watching a group of seagulls following in the wake of a boat far out on the water.

Later they drove back into Santa Barbara, stopping for ice cream at the same store where Steward had gone with his brother Art and sister-in law Nancy.

"Well, are you going to invite me in?" Kristine asked when they got back to his apartment.

"Yes, of course."

Inside they sat on the bed together and began to kiss.

"I forgot to tell you. I brought you a present," she said.

"What's that?"

"Me."

154. Morris and Pitt hear about the "great irony of Laos"

For Capt. James Morris of the United States Air Force, April 1969 had brought continuing air combat, not in the official war against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong but in the unofficial "secret war" being fought in Cambodia and Laos.

The war was actually not so "secret" anymore, he had heard, since Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Laotian premier, had in recent weeks announced to the Western press that American forces were operating in Laos with the full approval of the Laotian government. Even so, Morris, in his newspaper readings, had observed that the Laotian theater of war was largely ignored and still treated as an insignificant matter compared to the theater of war in Vietnam.

U. S. Air Force fighter bomber pilots operating out of the Khorat and Takhli bases in Thailand, as in the prior six months (since the end of the Rolling Thunder campaign on October 31, 1968), were divided between two campaigns, the Steel Tiger campaign of interdiction along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the Barrel Roll campaign in support of the Hmong and Royal Laotian forces in the Plain of Jars. In April, the previous month, the pilots had flown about 13,000 Steel Tiger sorties and about 1000 Barrel Roll sorties.

Col. Estes Collard, the blond, articulate officer who had appeared at Takhli on several occasions in Morris's time there, noted in a briefing on a rainy morning (on Thursday, April 24), that he expected Steel Tiger to decline by as much as 1000 sorties a month, with those resources being shifted to Barrel Roll. The reason, he said, was because the military situation in the Plain of Jars had become more tenuous.

"As you are all aware, we have this see-saw thing going in Jars," the colonel said. "It has been going a long time, and the Pathet Lao have been the big winners. They are now in control of the entire plain and our friend, Gen. Vang Pao, the Hmong leader, is, as you can imagine, feeling a little nervous, with the plain no longer serving as a buffer between the Communist forces and his headquarters in Long Thieng, on the southwest perimeter of the plain. As you're also aware, the Communist forces we're referring to here include North Vietnamese regular army units. We estimate the North Viets have about three full divisions—that is, about 60,000 troops,—either on the plain or nearby in the northeastern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, which the Communists regained control of after routing Vang Pao in 1963."

Morris and his friend, Maj. Tom Pitt, after having encountered one another at squadron headquarters, attended this session together, sitting side by side. Pitt had walked over from his new apartment, just off base, where he had moved with his bride, Souphana, an arrangement readily okayed by the squadron commander since Pitt was doing his second tour

of combat duty in Thailand.

"Another situation you're probably all aware of, to some extent, at least," the colonel continued, "as fighting men intent on victory, is what we might call the great irony of Laos. The great irony, if I can put it in a nutshell, is this. On the one hand, all of the major powers involved in this picture, including Russia, China, North Vietnam, and we, the United States, have (for different reasons, of course) a shared strategic goal, which is for Laos to remain neutral with no American forces on the ground. On the other hand, despite this mutual interest in maintaining the status quo, the ground war continues and continues to get fiercer. That is the great irony, that no one wants any change, everyone wants the status quo, and yet the civil war goes on.

"So what is the cause of this irony? The cause, if I can attempt another nutshell, is this. You have people there, on both sides, who have never accepted the status quo concept of the major powers. On the western side, you have the old loyalist, rightist factions that supported the right wing government of Prince Buon Oum, the die-hards of the so-called FRG, the "Forces Armee Royale," and, of course, you have the Lao Soung, the Hmong, a society of warriors. They don't intend to relinquish their freedom, or their poppy trade, either. On the Communist side, you have the zealots who compose the Pathet Lao, the successors of the freedom fighters who beat the French at Dien Bien Phu. These people on both sides have one thing in common: they want to win.

"So that's the great irony of Laos in a nutshell, or two nutshells, gentlemen, a war the major powers are determined to not allow to be won, fought by people on both sides who want to win, and who keep trying to win. These people 'mean' this war, and they are going to still be meaning it a long time after the likes of us are gone.

"And, speaking of people like us, where do we figure in? We figure in, in keeping the war from being won, by keeping the die-hard types at bay. And why? Because this war in Laos, that seems so big when we're out there, is just a small part of a bigger war, a war for the world, where we do want to win, and where we must win, which is why we can't win here. Or, put it this way, we win here by keeping Laos neutral which it must be in order for American policy in the whole region to prevail."

There was enough of befuddling policy and military logic in these remarks to cause many of the officers to sigh inwardly in exasperation, still the colonel went on to lay out the details of what not winning in the short run in order to win in the long run would require.

It would first require, as he explained it, a continuing increase in the number of sorties over the Plain of Jars.

"We expect that Gen. Vang Pao will try to break out of his box with a thrust into the plain, maybe toward Louangphrabang and Phou Khoun.

When and if he tries to do that, he will need air support, more so than in the past because this would be necessarily a large-scale operation involving regular troops on the ground as opposed to guerilla tactics. Even if he remains where he is, he will need extensive support to prevent the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces from advancing further. To put this in perspective, we expect the Plain of Jars to be allocated one and a half times the number of sorties allocated to all of Vietnam."

With no objections or even questions coming forth from the pilots, the ascetic-looking colonel turned his attention to another matter that he knew was on the minds of many in the room. This other matter was the loss of a Thud pilot from Khorat, Maj. Keith Lindberg, shot down over the plain the week before and officially designated as Missing In Action (MIA).

"Word has it, an attempt was made at the peace talks to go through the North Vietnamese delegation," the colonel remarked," to determine if Maj. Lindberg is dead or in enemy hands. Nothing could be confirmed either way. It's a continuation of the same old pattern, as you are all aware. These soldiers lost in Laos drop off into nowhere, unlike those who go down over Nam."

This comment, too, was met with silence. A half dozen or so of the men in the room had trained with Lindberg, a 45-year-old man with a wife and three children back in the States.

The story that had come back about Lindberg's downing was that he had been seen ejecting from his damaged plane and parachuting down into a narrow gorge between limestone karsts. The karsts had protected him from ground fire as he was going down, but the area was under control of the Pathet Lao and was known to be the current home of two battalions of the North Vietnamese regular army. A search and rescue team had arrived on the scene within minutes, as the major on the ground reported that he was under fire. His last words to the crew had been: "Put it all around me. I'm hit." For that reason, he was regarded as possibly mortally wounded, but the crew had been unable to find him on the ground when they arrived. Thus, lacking confirmation, the case had been closed as MIA.

"I would just like to point out," the colonel went on, "our return rate for downed pilots is almost two-thirds. The choppers are there within minutes, usually. But there are going to be some failures. It's the nature of the game, unfortunately."

"There's been no word from the Pathet Lao?" someone asked.

"Well, there have been some statements, as some of you know," the colonel answered, "mainly from Soth Petrasky, the Pathet Lao spokesman in Vientiane. He said in December he had been in touch with his headquarters people up in the northeast, and that quote 'the prisoners

are there, and they will take care of them,' or approximately that."

"You think this guy is a reliable source?" asked someone else.

The colonel paused before responding.

"Well, Soth Petrasky, in my opinion, illustrates the complexity of the situation," he continued. "This is a sophisticated, westernized guy, educated at an American college, and chosen for his position because of his command of English. He lives in Vientiane, which is as French as many cities in France. Does he really have contact with the Pathet Lao up in their jungle camps? He himself, likely under official pressure, said just recently (and here I can quote from my notes): 'News of the missing Americans is our own affair. It is up to the high command of the Pathet Lao to say what has happened to them. I know nothing about them.'

"I guess that's pretty clear. He doesn't know, but the chances of his rumors being true are a hell of a lot better than ours."

The colonel ended on a grim note, fielding questions regarding the treatment of prisoners in Laos. There was no doubt, he said, that torture was used, "often not really to gain any information of value, but simply to break the morale of the prisoner to provide information beyond the name, rank, and serial number proscription of the Geneva Convention."

"How do you know that?" someone asked.

"From interviews with people who have escaped. There have been some escapes, as you know. That is the bright spot in this picture."

"What do you hear about caves?" came another question.

"What I hear about them is probably the same as you," Col. Collard answered, "that they are used as prisons, especially in Sam Neua, in the karsts there. It's torture through sensual deprivation, really. There's no way to portray it as any less than frightful. It would be a test, surely, of inner resources. I don't know who could hold up under it. I would not hazard to make any claims for myself."

Morris and Pitt walked out from the somber meeting to find that the rain clouds of the morning had broken. Droplets of water sparkled on the green leaves beside the wood plank sidewalk. Thumping rock music of some kind came from an enlisted men's dorm across the way.

The middle-aged, combat-worn Maj. Pitt had acquired a new look, in the previous weeks, seemingly as a direct result of his marriage. He no longer seemed harried. He looked younger and seemed happy and confident. He was quick to engage in conversation and smile.

"Well, Jimbo," he said pleasantly, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder, "I've been meaning to get together with you for one of our old suppers at the Vue en Rue."

Apparently, judging by Pitt's facial expression and tone of voice, the down mood of the presentation had not carried through into the balmy sunlight of the afternoon.

"Vanna doesn't mind?" Morris said.

"No, in fact, Vanna has made it clear she doesn't want me to lose your friendship. She likes you very much."

"Well, to tell you the truth, " said Morris, "I could use dinner and a couple of strong ones, alright, after listening for a couple of hours to our blond messenger friend."

"These women, you know, they're all so cognizant of relationships and people."

"You sound like a man of experience," Morris remarked.

"You would think, Laotian women would be different," Pitt went on, "in that respect. But Vanna would fit into any American coffee clutch, I can assure you of that."

"Bending your ear, huh?"

"Yes, a little bit."

They secured a taxi at the base gate and rode into town along the familiar route of jungle and huts.

"Speaking of ear bending," Pitt said when they were situated in their usual seat by the window, within the familiar ambiance of red seats and table clothes and bamboo supports. "I don't mind it at all. I'm glad for it."

"Well, you went a long time alone, my friend."

"Yes, I did."

"And Vanna, her whole attitude is, she doesn't want my life to get smaller, she wants it to get bigger."

"She must be getting along in her English."

"Oh, yea. She manages to convey some fairly complicated concepts, you know. The way she put this one, she drew a circle and said that was my life at the air base, and then a bigger circle, that was my life with her. She pointed at the first circle and said, 'You no forget friends. Me no want that.'"

"Seems like she's been thinking it through."

"That is no simple peasant girl, let me tell you."

"Yes, I can see that."

"That mind is going all the time."

"It doesn't surprise me at all."

Odd, Morris thought, looking out at the familiar scene of Thai and American signs, that he would be here like this on a spring evening with a good buddy, as on a street back home, feeling that this place and this man were like a part of his home, also.

"You know what else, Jim?" Pitt said after a while as he mixed his drink with a contemplative gaze.

"No. What?"

"Well, as close I can get this, with the Thai to English problem and

all, is Vanna missed her period."

"Missed her period? She may be pregnant, you mean?"

"Well, judging by the gleam in her eye when she told me, she thought it was a very significant fact."

"God damn Pitt! How long you been married?"

"Three months. Give or take a few days."

"And you knocked her up already."

"She wants to be knocked up, Jim. She's made that clear."

"There must be something to that bald virile story after all." "Maybe. I'm just glad my bullets aren't blanks."

"Well, goddam, Tom. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Jimbo. I'm keeping my fingers crossed, you know. Knock on wood or whatever."

"We got to drink to that one."

"I'm in for that."

The drinks were soon at the table, brought by a smiling dark-haired waitress who was let in on the good news.

"American Thai!" she exclaimed. "Who know, him have dark hair maybe or maybe him bald!"

Morris and Pitt had a good laugh at that.

[Chapter 154 notes]

155. Morris and Pitt fly on their ill-fated last mission together

Four days later, on Monday, April 28, 1969, Capt. James Morris began his day's work with his customary words: "Here we go, Dad," followed by the mission number. That number, on this particular day, was 78. Only 22 missions remained until the magic number 100 would accrue. His tour of duty would then be over, and Morris would be free to return to the United States to rejoin the pretty wife he had lived with for only about a month in their one-year marriage (though they had lived together as singles for about three months before that).

The mission, following from the briefing of the previous Thursday, was to be over the Plain of Jars. The frag order called for flying to an area just southwest of Xieng Khouang, to be then placed under control of local spotters. Missions had been going out with similar parameters for several weeks. The object was to soften up enemy positions so as to make the enemy less capable of moving against the Hmong stronghold in Long Thieng. The organized thrust out of Long Thieng that the colonel had referred to as possibly occurring had not occurred. There was no sign that such a major offensive would occur in the near future.

The flight left at dawn, with Maj. Tom Pitt in the lead position and Morris as his wingman. Capt. Frank "Funk" Fangle from Kansas City led the element in position three. Capt. Trent Lange, a new addition to the squadron, from Cody, Wyoming, held the number four position in his first flight out. To welcome him, the flight was named "Buffalo."

The customary ride in the crew bus, from equipment room to tarmac, started the familiar events of the morning. The airfield was shrouded in fog, an aftermath of the rain of the previous night. The sun, shining from a jagged hole in the gray clouds on the east horizon, gave the scene a golden glow.

That golden mist, with sometimes a rainbow in the distance, above Radio Hill, was familiar, also, as were the cartridge starting of the big engines, the unpinning of the armaments, the pins flags fluttering in the wind, in the hands of the crew chief, and the final call down of "pins, canopy, lanyard,"—all so familiar, but Morris, after his 73 flights, still felt the same excitement he had felt on his first flight out of Tackle.

"Buffalo flight, bring them up," Pitt said.

Morris switched on the brake antiskid system and shoved forward the throttle to the full power position. The immense Whitney-Pratt engine came to life then, with a roar of air rushing into the inlet valves on either side of the cockpit. Morris pressed down hard on the brakes as he eased the plane forward to the takeoff position.

"Buffalo Flight, you are cleared for takeoff," came the final call from the tower. "Your mission control is button three."

"Roger, tower, and have a good morning. Buffalo One is rolling," Pitt

replied.

Morris watched as Pitt's plane shot down the runway with its blue-white exhaust flame streaming behind it. At the prescribed time, five seconds later, he lifted his feet off the brake, shoved the throttle outward, and heard something else familiar: the bang of the afterburner as it ignited, propelling the plane forward toward the dark treetops at the far end of the runway.

"Buffalo Two is rolling," Morris said.

Morris switched on the water ejection system and observed, at the 2000 foot marker, that his air speed of 125 knots was okay. He pulled back on the stick and felt the plane lift off. He retracted the landing gear and pointed down the nose to gain air speed. Easing the stick to the left, he closed in on the exhaust plume of the lead plane as it arced to the left, relieved against a bank of gray clouds.

"Buffalo Flight, this is Buffalo Leader," said Pitt when the flight had formed up around him. "Current time, 617 hours. Time on target, 723. We'll be meeting up with a local spotter at about 715. Gentlemen, check your systems. Enjoy the ride."

The tone and cadence of Tom Pitt's voice were, as always, good to hear. Pitt could be counted on to add the personal touches,—the "enjoy your ride," "have a good morning," and so on. Pitt had never been one for the macho stuff. He was the same bungling, friendly guy in the air as he was on the ground. Everyone knew and expected that, just as they knew and expected his courage in combat and his readiness to put himself at risk for any other member of the flight when required. In fact, Funk Fangle, the pilot from Kansas City, had been a recipient of that generosity, after going down on a previous mission. Pitt, ignoring a barrage of flack, had rushed in, with Gatlin gun firing, to keep the area secure until the search and rescue team arrived.

Morris, after completing his checklist, had a few minutes to look at the Thai surface features, 30,000 feet below, that he had seen on several previous missions. In front of him, beyond the curved nose of the plane, he could see a long, dark line leading almost directly north, through a vast, flat expanse of green jungle, toward a cluster of buildings. That dark line was Thai highway 2, Morris knew. The cluster of buildings was Udon Thani, where there was a huge B-52 air base, not yet in view.

His thoughts drifted to his wife, Ellen, as they often did when he was on his way into combat. Lately, he had detected a different mood in her letters. She seldom referred, as in the past, to fun or interesting things she did on her own. She never complained or wrote of sad things, either, but in little ways she betrayed that her daily life was more troubled. She mentioned being lonely. She had written, in her most recent letter, that she could hardly wait for him to return so that he and she could begin a

normal married life together.

Morris had thought about that, also, in light of his friend Pitt's new situation with Pitt's new wife Souphanna already pregnant. Ellen had never told him about her own pregnancy, which she had terminated in early March, as her sister Mary has suspected. Ellen had not told her parents, either, or anyone else except Mary.

Udon Thani and the spoke like runways of the air field had passed by as Morris mulled over these thoughts. Returning to the task at hand, he looked to his north again, beyond the nose of the plane, where the dark line of highway 2 crossed a curving, east-west extending, thicker line, in color, muddy blue. That was the Mekong River. Another town, not as big as Udon Thani, was coming into sight—Nong Khai, the border town between Thailand and Laos. Further in the distance, shimmering in the morning heat, was an indistinct island of brown and white forms amidst the green sea of jungle foliage. That was Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, located just south of the Plain of Jars.

The flight would not be going there, as Morris knew. They would be curving to the right of Vientiane toward the disputed area of the Plain of Jars, where the spotter, expected to be an Air America pilot in a T-28, would guide them into the target, whatever it turned out to be. Targets were chosen on the spur of the moment based on the movement and vulnerability of the Communist forces on the ground.

The T-28 pilot (call sign, Big Trouble) came into contact a while later after being identified by local radio control.

"I see you, Buffalo," he said. "Four Thuds."

"Roger, Big Trouble, This is Buffalo leader. We see you," Pitt replied. "T-28, drifting west."

"How you read me, Buffalo?"

"We got you five-by."

"Buffalo leader, it's not lookin' so good," the spotter said. "The column split three ways about 15 minutes ago. One columns went into Xieng Khouang. One essentially dispersed. The third is up the road a way. Just a fragment, maybe ten, 12 vehicles, in trees."

"Can you get us to those?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"Let's go for it, Big Trouble."

"Buffalo leader, let me go on ahead. Look for smoke about two miles north. On the right side of the road there, you'll see another road going off into the trees. Go down this second road about three miles. Last I looked, the column was just sitting there."

"Roger, Big Trouble, we'll follow you in."

After sighting from the smoke as directed, the flight went in with Pitt in the lead, Morris on Pitt's right wing, and Fangle directly behind Pitt in

the number three position. The fourth man, Lange, was on Fangle's left wing.

The trucks were there, just sitting on the road, per the spotter's expectation. There were ten of them in a single file. They were painted in tan and green camouflage colors. They looked like dump trucks that had been converted to military use as troop transports. No soldiers were in sight, however. The back doors of the trucks were hanging open. The cargo areas were empty except for bags and rifles propped against the sides.

With the four F-105's travelling at an air speed of 385 knots, the target trucks came into sight in less than a minute. Pitt rolled in, with Morris keying from Pitt's wing in close combat order.

"Buffalo flight, fire at will," Pitt said.

The planes were tucked in tight in the best defensive position but the attack drew no fire at all from the trees on either side of the road. The bombs falling from the planes in a neat row left a row of explosions just as neat. Three of the trucks, on being hit, exploded into fireballs. The others were reduced to charred, smoking junk heaps.

"Buffalo Flight, I think that does it," said Pitt, as his plane ascended in an arc from the billowing smoke.

"A little too easy," Morris answered.

"That it was," said Pitt. "Buffalo three and four, everything okay?"

"Buffalo three, okay," "Buffalo four, okay," came the replies.

"Big Trouble," said Pitt. "Are you still with us?"

"Yes, I am, sir," the Air America pilot replied. "I just passed over the road. Good job."

"You got anything else?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"We're going to head back then," Pitt informed.

"Buffalo leader, you may want to follow along the main road for a while," the spotter said. "There's some kind of construction going on about ten miles down, some kind of fortification maybe. I just caught a glimpse of it earlier this morning."

"Okay, will do. Thank you, Big Trouble."

"Thank you, sir. Have a good trip back."

Maj. Pitt, not expecting much to come out of this last information, directed the flight to follow him along the road southward as the spotter advised. Ten miles down the fortification came into view, a series of dug out trenches beside the road, apparently for use, eventually, as for anti-aircraft artillery, though hardly worth the munitions to blow them up in their present state.

Something else came into view, though, a way further down. It was a bulldozer painted in military brown, sitting on the side of the road like it

was waiting to get blown up.

Pitt, with Morris close on his wing, didn't even bother a radio call about it. He looked toward Morris's cockpit, a distance from him of only about 50 feet, and pointed at the bulldozer with a jaunty smile. Morris nodded in agreement that the bulldozer was too good to resist, to which Pitt responded with a thumbs up sign and another smile.

Morris observed to himself, seeing that, that his newly married, newly self-confident friend had a new, dashing quality about him that became him well.

"Buffalo Flight, Morris and I are going in to say hello and goodbye to that fat and saucy little bulldozer down there," Pitt said in a casual tone. "Buffalo three and four, just hang around for the time being."

Pitt dove into the target, Gatlin gun blazing, as Morris followed on his wing. There were flashes of fire from that and then an unexpected series of flashes from the right side.

Morris noticed that and in the next instant saw Pitt's plane veer to the left with upraised wing. The bulldozer had gone up in flames, the dive was over, but Pitt's plane didn't ascend. Instead, it descended as for a landing, smacked flat onto the ground in the middle of the rutted road, and blew up in a fireball.

Morris, swerving from the explosion, realized at once that Pitt had been killed. There had been no time for an ejection. He appeared to have been hit in the cockpit before he went down.

"Oh, my God," Morris said into the radio.

"You see him come out?" asked one of the other pilots. In the confusion of the moment, the normal protocol of the radio exchanges had been lost.

"No chance," said Morris. There was silence all around.

"Should I call the S & R?"

Morris understood then that, with the automatic battle instinct of soldiers, the command had gone to him.

"There's nothing they could do," he replied.

"Sir, with your permission," said Fangle, "we'll go in for those guns."

"Well, they're on the move, I think,' said Morris. "We can give it a try."

"Roger, sir, we're going in."

Morris didn't watch the two planes as they dove in. Instead, he flew low in a semi-circle to survey the spot where Pitt had gone down. There was nothing left of the plane, nothing left of Pitt. Seeing the planes coming back, he asked how the attack had gone.

"Hard to say," said Fangle. "We didn't see them."

"Looks like there's nothing else to do here," said Trent Lange. "Buffalo Leader, we should call the S & R and let them look over the

site," said Fangle.

"Yes, Three, let's do that. Can you get the coordinates?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

They were gone soon after having completed that task. Morris was in a state of shock. The crash had happened so fast as to be almost below the registration threshold of his memory, but he remembered well the look Pitt had given him before going into the target. That last expression on Pitt's face, so dashing and full of life, kept repeating in Morris's mind as he flew back to Takhli.

156. Morris, reeling from Pitt's death, writes a letter to Steward

Jim Morris tried to shake off Tom Pitt's death in the same way as he had shaken off so many other disquieting events in his experience as a soldier. His thoughts kept coming back, however, to that last, jaunty look on Pitt's face, the look that had repeated in Morris's mind on the way back to Takhli from his ill-fated 78th mission. Expanding from that, in his mind, were other disturbing memories and thoughts, complicated by the immediate responsibility (as he saw it) of trying to do something to alleviate the sorrow of Pitt's widow, Souphana.

"Zhim, tank you very much," were the only words Souphana could find when Morris visited with her on the evening of Pitt's death to express his sympathy. His visit had been preceded, less than two hours before, by the official bearer of bad news from the squadron.

"Souphana, if you need help, any help," Morris said, picking words that he thought she would know, "I want to help you. I can help you with the Air Force, with getting money. I know you're pregnant." He gestured with his hand over his lower stomach, thinking she would not understand that word. "Money for child, for baby," he said.

"Me don't care money," she said, shaking her head. "Me got no Tom. Very sad."

She broke up at that and placed her head on Morris's shoulder while he kept saying, "I know. I know. I'm so sorry, Vanna."

Morris took part in the Thai funeral and events leading up to it as a member of the family, continuing the position granted as a result of his gracious participation in Pitt's wedding. He also wrote a letter to Pitt's parents, to tell them how good a man their son had been.

In total, those events, from death to funeral (including the letter to Pitt's parents), took five days. Morris's tasks related to his friend's death were then, in his estimation, done. But the feelings of loneliness and emptiness that followed were as hard to deal with as the death itself. The attendant thoughts were such, being of an intimate nature, that Morris would previously have told to Pitt. With him gone, there was no one who could fulfill that role.

Capt. Morris had his first taste of that, four days after the Thai funeral, when he went to town with some others to attend a birthday party at the Vue en Rue, the bar that he and Pitt had often gone to together. He remained by himself after the others had left, declining an offer to go down the street to another bar.

The waitress came over to take his order with a look of concern on her pretty face. It was the same Thai waitress who had joked about Pitt's baby maybe inheriting his baldness.

"So sorry for your friend," she said.

"Thank you," Morris answered simply.

Morris ordered a double martini and sat looking out the window as he had done so many times with Tom Pitt, telling himself that he had to toughen up and accept the loss. But a taxi trolling the street for GIs brought a memory of the many taxi rides, back and forth from the base, that he had shared with his old friend.

Morris's mind went back to the recent intelligence briefing by Col. Estes Collard, the briefing in which the arrogant, central command officer had referred, in an almost bemused tone, to the necessity of "not winning in the short run in order to win in the long run" (as the colonel had put it), despite the refusal to accept the status quo of those who "really meant" the war. What a waste, what an absurdity, Morris thought, that a man the caliber of Tom Pitt, with a beautiful new wife and a child not yet born, should be ripped apart from that to satisfy the policy goals of men who never saw the war firsthand.

Morris's thoughts went back, too, to his chance meeting in Bangkok with Orin Brown, the self-serving intelligence officer with the history buff interest in the war. He recalled how Brown had managed to experience the fleshpot of Pat Pong, keeping his distance from venereal disease, in the same way as he had managed to experience the war, keeping his distance from the battlefield. "True believers" was what Brown had called people on both sides who took the war seriously enough to put their own lives on the line, as Morris recalled.

These considerations were not new to Morris. He had thought about them before Pitt's death. But, on this evening, with Pitt's death to drive his thoughts, and with a second and then a third drink affecting his mood, he mulled them over more.

True believers versus those who took a safe path, Morris thought to himself, what was new about that? In college, maybe, before going into the service himself, he had been naïve enough to suppose that all of those who volunteered for the service in a time of war were true believers. But he had soon learned, once in the service, that many of his fellow servicemen looked down on "gung ho" types while seeking the safe jobs for themselves. These people were no different, really, from the many students who had sought refuge in the National Guard or from those who had stayed in school to maintain deferments. There were true believers outside of the service, maybe, but, ironically, they were the ones who had opposed the war, rather than the ones who had supported it.

Tom Steward came to mind. Steward, despite all of his bungling good intent, had at least taken a stand, Morris thought. You could almost say that people like Steward were a cut above people like Orin Brown. People like Brown would seek the safest path whether in the social camp opposed to the war or in the camp supporting it.

Morris, an hour into his drinks, and feeling the dull, depressing effect, looked out the window at a group of young men in uniform laughing and horsing around as they moved together like college kids between bars on the Americanized main street of the town.

Had he really come to a point, he asked himself, where he doubted the objectives of the war, the mission of his command? “No, I do still believe in it,” he answered, not quite out loud but mouthing the words. “It is just not easy to see a man like Tom Pitt go down.”

Morris expected he was through with the disturbing train of thought then, but the thoughts continued as he rode back to the base in his cab. A light there, thrown from a car light on one of the humble houses along the road, revealed an animal within a picket fence enclosure,—something like a pig, Morris thought, though he didn’t know what the local version of a pig would be.

Seeing that, Morris remembered the pig he had seen butchered in Mexico on his trip there with Ellen, the scene he had chanced upon as he descended the steps from the church rooftop in Puerto Penasco. He recalled how the butcher, with a deft movement, had sliced the pig’s neck, catching its blood in a pail.

Morris allowed this memory to form in his mind, knowing that it was not new, like the other thoughts and memories that had come to mind in the course of the evening. From that memory came two other familiar memories. The first memory was of the soldier he had seen on TV (while on the same trip to Mexico with Ellen, at the time of the Tet Offensive), the wounded soldier in the arms of his comrades, with blood streaming down his face and neck. The second memory was of the instantaneous sight, on his 15th mission, of women and children caught by his inadvertent strike on the village near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Morris was aware that these memories had come into his mind owing to their loose association with Pitt’s death. He was aware that he had not consciously called them forth. He felt that, at any moment, he could shut them off. But he felt too weary and demoralized to shut them off. He let them run their course.

Arriving back at the base, Morris found the buildings shrouded in mist from a quickly passing, torrential rain. Something about the scene, with yellow light from the windows of barracks filtering through the mist, and muffled music coming from somewhere, reminded Morris of the small town in Oregon where he had gone as a boy to visit his mother’s relatives. In that town, too, not far from the ocean, lights of houses had often been shrouded in mist, and he had heard such muffled music once when walking with his mother. Morris felt nostalgic, remembering that. A deep feeling of separation and loneliness came over him, adding to his sorrow about Pitt’s death.

Mindful of the snakes that sometimes lurked in the darkness, Morris picked his way along the boardwalk between the buildings. Turning toward the officers' hooches, he lost his balance and stepped backward to regain his balance.

"Drunk as a goddam skunk," he said to himself, "and I don't give a damn, either."

Inside the hooch, finding his mates sleeping, Morris stopped at his bunk to pick up a stack of recent mail, then he went at once to the cubbyhole "living room" in the far corner. The tiny room had a couch, a desk, and an unpadded chair. A lamp there, located behind a blanket hung from the ceiling, could be turned on without disturbing the others while sleeping.

The "living room" also featured an assortment of bottles of booze and a refrigerator stocked with various soft drinks. Morris reached for a bottle of brandy immediately upon sitting down at the desk with his stack of letters before him. He took a water glass from a shelf above the desk and filled it half full with brandy. He sipped it warm without bothering for a mixer or ice.

Opening his wife's most recent letter, he reread a paragraph that had intrigued him.

"Jim, when we're together," the paragraph went, "everything goes so well. But when I'm alone, without your strength to support me, sometimes I think I do stupid things or make wrong decisions. They're certainly not on the level of what you have to deal with, facing the dangers you do. But, for little me, they're important. I'm not talking about flirting or infidelity. Please don't think that. I'm just talking about things relating to our married life, relating to wanting you to be here with me so we can begin a normal life. I can't explain it. I just want you to know that whatever I do is for love of you, whatever I do comes out of hope and trust for our future life."

As Morris reread this paragraph, he shook his head, thinking that he had no idea what his pretty wife could have to worry about or make bad decisions about,—if she wasn't talking about other men, and he trusted her entirely in that respect. Maybe she was talking about something simple like eating the wrong food. He knew how intense she was about keeping in shape and keeping to a healthy diet. Maybe she was talking about her behavior at work. She still worked on the strip, wearing the "costume" that he had never asked about in detail, not wanting to seem like he wanted control.

He took out a pen and paper from those that were kept in the desk, available for everyone in the hooch. For a long time, he stared at the blank paper, unable to even begin, then he started in.

"Dearest Ellen," he wrote, "you say you worry and admire me. Well,

I have to tell you, sometimes I worry, too. Sometimes I don't feel worthy of your admiration."

He stopped at that point and stared at the scrawled sentences for a long time. Then he tore the letter into half and into half again and at last into tiny pieces not wanting his hooch mates to discover a single word of what he had written.

Taking out his mother's letter, he merely looked at the envelope. He knew what was inside, more bad news about her bout with cancer, more time in the hospitable getting treatments with the outcome unsure.

He felt so lonely, he thought to himself. He felt as if he didn't have a friend he could really talk to.

His mind returned then to his earlier thoughts about Tom Steward with a longing for the good old days of college comradery before the war had come into his life. He took up the pen and began to write.

157. Steward reads Morris's letter and reacquaints himself with the war

Tom Steward received Jim Morris's letter, forwarded from Minnesota, on Thursday, May 15, 1969. He read the letter immediately, sitting on his bed in his basement room.

The letter went as follows: "Dear Tom,

"I am sitting here this late evening thinking what buddies I have in the world and, to tell you the truth, I don't have a lot, so I decided to write to an old rowing buddy like you.

"You maybe are surprised to hear from me, and don't think of me as a buddy at all, but I hope for old time's sake you will pretend to be one in reading this letter.

"I'm in a bad state, buddy Stew, and drunk as a skunk accounting for the fluency of this letter. The reason I'm in a bad state is a true, good buddy of mine, also named Tom, by the way, Tom Pitt, died a few days ago. He was my good friend here in Takhli, Thailand, where I am stationed, a pilot like me, and I can imagine what you may think about that, since I know you wound up as a conscientious objector to this war in which I am just a captive partner, but a willing partner, having desired and begged to get here where I now am.

"Tom, sitting here with this booze, I was thinking back to that evening—what was it, about two years ago and some few months—when I invited you to go out for a few beers with me and you refused. Afterward, I was pissed as hell, thinking of you as a fuddy duddy, which I suppose, to a certain extent, you are. But maybe you were the better man, having the character to say no, which I don't do very often.

"Then, as I remember, I did you a bad turn by taking Ellie Kass out of your scope when you brought her to the boat club that night. You'll have to forgive me for that, buddy Stew. I just fell in love.

"But, really, you know, aside from those two things, Tom, I think we always acted like friends, and I've thought of you as a decent type, in your own way. You were a devoted athlete, well disciplined, as I knew you, and you had the courage to take a stand against the war.

"Stewie, that is the whole point of this letter, your being someone I can tell what I can't say to Ellen or my mother or anyone here. Stewie, something is eating inside me about this war, seeing several of my friends die, and now my friend Tom Pitt. I don't know what to do anymore. I can feel something inside me dying and I'm fighting against it.

"That's all I got to say, buddy Stew. Keep me in mind. Write me sometime. Tell me how the world looks from that side of the war.

"Best regards, Jim Morris"

On completing the letter, Steward put it in his pocket and went out of

his apartment, wheeling his bike with him through the basement door to the side yard of the large house that had become his new California home. Outside he found the usual sunlit scene of palm trees and flowers. In the street, he stood for a moment, looking up the shade-dappled street toward the old mission, two blocks away.

He hopped on his bike and headed in that direction. He had no plans for the evening as Kristine DeSolt was out of town. She had gone up to San Luis Obispo with her father to help him in setting up a display there, at the state college, of artifacts brought back from her father's excavation in the Aleutian Islands.

Steward and DeSolt were still seeing one another, almost every day. He had been out to the hacienda several times, and she often stopped unannounced at the zoo to have lunch with him or to pack his bike in her car after work for a ride together along the beach.

At the mission, Steward looked off toward the familiar sandstone façade of the 150-year-old church, with its twin bell towers capped with bronze domes. His thoughts went back to his visit to the mission with his brother Art two months before. He thought to himself that he had been so preoccupied then with his draft status and therefore indirectly concerned with the progress of the war. Since then, with his draft status resolved, and with his relationship with DeSolt having eclipsed all those previous matters, he had hardly paid any attention to the war. Meanwhile, Morris had been in the midst of the war, still risking his life for it, and confronted daily with its ambiguities.

Turning from the mission, Steward pedaled along under the palms of Los Olivos Avenue, turning again onto State Street by the ice cream store where he often went with Art and Nancy. Three blocks down State Street, by a corner store, he came upon a newspaper box with the *New York Times*.

He hopped off the bike and leaned over to look through the glass. A three-column headline said: "NIXON ASKS TROOP PULLOUT IN A YEAR AND WOULD JOIN VIETNAM POLITICAL TALKS." Below that headline was a photograph of the president, with a determined expression, standing behind the Presidential Seal. "SPEAKS TO THE NATION," said a one-column headline next to that, "Hints Partial Cutback of U.S. Forces Will Come in Any Case."

Despite this being so-called "news," Steward's first take on it was hadn't he heard it before? Hadn't Nixon talked of a pullout months before, in fact, on first taking office in January? The effect of reading this news was to make you want to turn away. And why not, with the beach and the ocean so close at hand? Evening was settling in with great swirls of clouds in the west promising a splendid sunset.

But the war was still there, Steward reminded himself, even if he was

having trouble, anymore, keeping the elements of the whole situation from becoming a boggled mess in his mind.

He peered more closely through the glass of the newspaper box to read the text under the banner headline.

The article went as follows:

"President Nixon proposed tonight a phased, mutual withdrawal of the major portions of the United States, allied and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam over a 12-month period.

"Then, according to Mr. Nixon's proposal, the remaining non-South Vietnamese forces would withdraw to enclaves, abide by a cease-fire and complete their withdrawals.

"The President made the proposal in a nationwide television address in which he gave his first full-length report to the country on the war in Vietnam.

"Although the President indicated that such full-scale withdrawals would probably require lengthy negotiations, he hinted strongly that 'the time is approaching' when some partial reductions of combat troops could be accomplished regardless of what happens in Paris."

Steward paused for a moment, calculating his expenses. Then he took two quarters from his pocket and dropped them into the coin slot in the newspaper box. He pulled the front cover of the box forward and took a newspaper from inside.

Turning the newspaper over, he noticed a two-column headline below the picture of the president. "2 Vietcong Aides in Paris Call Their Plan 'a Whole'," the headline said.

Hadn't the Vietcong presented such a plan before, in fact, a series of them, Steward asked himself as he sat down on a stone wall next to the store to read the paper.

He read the text below the headline:

"Two leaders of the National Liberation Front at the Vietnam peace talks here declared today that the Front's 10-point program 'forms a whole.' Tran Buu Kiem, head of the delegation, and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, his deputy, added that negotiations could and should take place on the basis of the principles and content of the program."

Seeing, just below that paragraph, an italicized note indicating that "excerpts from the interview with Mrs. Binh" could be found on page 17, Steward turned to that page, where his attention was drawn instead to the facing page, page 16, which was taken up entirely by a transcript of Nixon's speech and summaries of the NLF and U.S. positions, including the "10-point program" of the NLF.

In the midst of this text was a three-column-wide photo of the U.S. Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, arriving for allied talks in South Vietnam. He was shown leaving his plane at Tansonnhut Airport,

accompanied by the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Tran Chanh Thanh, as well as by several MPs with their rifles at ready arms.

The first point listed in the summary of the 10-point program was: "Vietnamese independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity are to be respected, as provided by the 1954 Geneva agreements." The second point was: "The United States must unconditionally withdraw all of its forces and liquidate its bases in Vietnam." Other points called for: the right of the Vietnamese themselves to "resolve the question of military forces in South Vietnam;" the right of the Vietnamese to settle their affairs "without foreign interference" through "free and democratic elections;" the determination of Vietnam (North and South together) to be a neutral nation "without any military alliances" and hosting no foreign bases or troops. The points also called for mutual release of prisoners of war and international supervision of military withdrawal.

When asked (in the interview on the facing page) whether point 2, withdrawal of American troops, was required to be completed before point 3, resolution of the question of Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam (meaning, presumably, Northern as well as Southern forces), Nguyen Thi Binh replied: "The United States, who are the aggressors in Vietnam, must withdraw all their forces without making any conditions. The question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam will be resolved by the Vietnamese parties among themselves."

President Nixon, in the transcript of his speech, remarked:

"The United States has suffered over a million casualties in four wars in this century. Whatever faults we may have as a nation, we have asked nothing for ourselves in return for those sacrifices. We've helped our former foes as well as our friends in the task of reconstruction. We are proud of this record and we bring the same attitude in our search for a settlement in Vietnam.

"In this spirit, let me be explicit about several points:

"We seek no bases in Vietnam. "We seek no military ties.

"We are willing to agree to neutrality for South Vietnam if that is what the South Vietnamese people choose freely."

The contrast was obvious, Steward noted, between Nixon's references to "South Vietnamese" and Nguyen's references to "Vietnamese" (without the distinction between North and South).

"Remarks from Hanoi indicate that the enemy has given up hope for a military victory in South Vietnam," Nixon was quoted as saying in another part of the transcript, "but is counting on a collapse of American will in the United States. There could be greater error in judgment... Let me be quite blunt. Our fighting men are not going to be worn down. Our mediators are not going to be talked down. And our allies are not going to be let down."

Inside the newspaper on other pages, Steward found some interesting facts. There were presently 542,000 American troops serving in Vietnam, he read. Eleven of them had died in the previous week—eight from the Army, three from the Marines. Also, despite talk of a peace agreement, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong had not pulled back on their activities. In the previous week, they had staged 159 rocket attacks throughout South Vietnam, a campaign not on the scale of Tet but nonetheless involving seven provincial capitals and 21 district towns.

In Paris, site of the peace talks, "the renewal of large-scale enemy attacks in South Vietnam was regarded... as motivated, at least in part, by a desire to show that the Vietcong's 10-point peace plan was not a sign of military exhaustion," another article noted. "Information from Communist sources connected with the peace talks indicated that neither the North Vietnamese nor the Front believes that the revival of offensive operations will affect the American Administration's attitude on withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam.

"The assumption, repeated often, is that the American public is sick of the war and insistent on withdrawal. The new offensive, these sources seem sure, will serve to confirm the belief that the war is hopeless and must be brought to an end."

On another page, Steward found a new development. President Nixon, the previous day, had called for Congress to bring an end to the current draft system and replace it with a "lottery system."

One feature of the new system, as Steward understood it, would be for men of draft age to only be exposed to the lottery for one year, after which, if not lottery-selected, they would be draft-ineligible for ever more, thus freeing them to proceed with their lives. Also, the youngest, rather than the oldest, would be first subject to the call.

"For almost two million young men who reach the age of military service each year, and for their families," Nixon was quoted as saying, "the draft is one of the most important facts of life. It is my conviction that the disruptive impact of the military draft should be minimized as much as possible, consistent with the national security."

Steward knew the draft had not only been "a source of disruption," but also a principal source of the counterculture—and, through that, of the revolution in values taking place among people his own age. Without the draft, would "flower children" and the "Movement" have ever occurred? He doubted that they would have. Could it be that this attempt to minimize the "disruptive impact of the military draft," as it was represented, in context of a war overseas, was also an attempt to stem the forces that had resulted in the ongoing culture war in the domestic United States? Could it be that Nixon and his political allies (along with their financial contributors) saw the culture war at home as just as important,

or maybe more important, than the geopolitical war being fought ten thousand miles away in Vietnam?

Remembering Morris's letter, Steward searched the paper for news of the air war that his "old buddy" was involved in. He recalled hearing from someone, maybe Mary Brandt, that many of Morris's flights were over Laos. He found no mention of the Air Force at all. The only reference he could find to pilots or flight was an article on the space program entitled "Astronauts Get Briefing on Reconnoitering Lunar Surface." A picture showed an air machine called Droop Snoot, "designed to provide uninterrupted communicating between Apollo 10 and earth radio..."

"It is T-minus-4 (the fourth day before lift-off)," the article said, "for the $24-billion Apollo project's dress rehearsal flight before men attempt the first landing on the moon this summer... At one point in the mission, Colonel Stafford and Commander Cernan will crawl into the lunar landing craft, detach it from the command ship and rocket to within 50,000 feet of the moon's surface.

"The main purpose of the mission is to test the lunar module in the moon's vicinity, check out its radar capabilities to control a descent and determine how to navigate the two ships in the moon's gravitational field... If Apollo 10 is successful, the plan is for Apollo 11 to be launched on July 16 for the lunar landing on July 20."

Moments later, Steward did encounter a mention of the air war in Laos. It was within an article entitled "HANOI HINTS SHIFT ON POLICY IN LAOS," buried on an inside page.

The article dealt, in the main, with North Vietnamese contacts with the Laotian premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma: "part of a larger peace offensive connected with the peace proposals of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front, or Vietcong, at the Paris talks on Vietnam... Laotian sources suggested that the North Vietnamese move reflected the disillusionment with the civil war in Laos and the increase in American bombing there...

"Since November, when the United States stopped bombing North Vietnam, the bombing of Laotian targets had reportedly increased four or fivefold, inflicting heavy casualties on North Vietnamese troops along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in other areas of Laos. The bombing is designed to reduce the flow of supplies to the Vietcong."

The level of detail struck Steward as an irony consistent with the whole situation, that the activity that had brought Morris to a state of having "something eating inside (him) about the war" was regarded as worthy of only two paragraphs in the *New York Times*.

[Chapter 157 notes]

158. Steward plots to maintain contact with Kris, winds up engaged

Tom Steward wrote a reply to Jim Morris that same evening, but his mind quickly returned to Kristine DeSolt. A whole month had sped by since his first night of sex with her. His relationship with her since then had become more intensely romantic, but more problematic, also, due to the time limits imposed by his and her respective obligations.

The obligation of concern to DeSolt was the benefit concert she had committed to organize, the sequel to her prior two concerts on behalf of the Robert Kennedy Memorial. She had already announced to Steward that she would have to return to L.A. on Monday, May 26 (Memorial Day that year), for a period of about two weeks, to attend a series of meetings. Steward's obligation was to the American Friends program in Guatemala that he had agreed to take part in. He had recently received a packet of information from the Friends setting a starting date of Monday, July 7. The program, designed specifically for conscientious objectors, would last for two years.

If all of that went as planned, Kristine would be in Santa Barbara for just another week and a half, then she would be gone for two weeks in L.A., then she would be back again in Santa Barbara for two final weeks before Steward departed for the Friends program. It was a dismal prospect, Steward thought, as he and she had only obliquely touched on the subject of what to do, if anything, in face of that rapidly approaching date of separation.

Steward had also noted with concern that the remote area around San Marcos, Guatemala, where he and his fellow volunteers would be working, would not lend itself easily to meetings between him and Kristine.

"This is a rugged area," the description said. "San Marcos itself has a population of about 6000, but volunteers will live and work in smaller, more isolated villages in the surrounding mountains. These villages are generally without electricity, running water, or access to telephones. The villagers are descendants of the Maya Indians. They speak various Mayan dialects. There is not much contact between villages, even between those that speak the same dialect."

San Marcos was also located high up in the mountains, Steward had observed, based on the black-and-white, photo-copied map included in the information packet. One nearby peak, Volcan Tajamulco, had an elevation of 13,845 feet. There was a major city, Quezaltenango, with a population of about 100,000, only 30 miles away, by a direct line on the map, but there were no roads shown between the two cities. The area between consisted of miles of peaks, all presumably of an elevation of more than 10,000 feet. Mazantenango, the nearest city accessible by

road, with a population of about 40,000, was situated about 50 miles to the south, on the coastal plain.

Steward brought the Friends' packet with him, in a small backpack, that evening when he drove his bike out to the hacienda to see Kristine. He showed the packet to her as he and she sat at the kitchen table, drinking wine.

She became animated in her typical emotional way. "Well, Tom, I have to say, I admire you, that they would even want you!" she exclaimed. "They have to really think they can trust you to take care of yourself in a situation like this!"

"Only thing I worry about is how to keep in contact with you."

"I've been on a plane, you know!"

"I don't think there are airports close."

"Tom, there are airports everywhere."

When Steward heard comments like that, said with such assurance, he was reminded of how young she was, how limited in experience despite her trips across the country setting up her concerts. He didn't have the heart to challenge her self-image of being a woman of the world. He decided in his own mind that he would have not be able to rely on her for strategy, or even to discuss the situation realistically. He would have to figure out what to do by himself.

"I've worked with Indians, too," she remarked later.

"Where was that?"

"In South Dakota. I arranged a concert out there, for the Kennedy foundation."

Why had she told him about that, he wondered later. Did she think she could come down on her own somehow to work with the Indians near where he was? She also threw out some more casual comments about her plans to return to L.A. for a while in early June. She talked of the couple of weeks involved as if they were nothing, while he was thinking the two weeks would be half of their last month together.

He called his draft board to ask what the policy was regarding conscientious objectors changing alternative service assignments. "The only requirement is to perform some approved service," he was told. "It is not our business to discriminate between agencies." From a local draft counselor, he obtained a booklet of all such agencies in the United States. There were more than 200 agencies listed.

What an irony, though, thought Steward. After months of trying to find a challenging situation, a situation hard enough to demonstrate his convictions, he had finally found such a situation, and now he was trying to figure if there was any way out. Because of a woman! Who would have ever thought! Just those same several months ago, he could hardly have contemplated the predicament he found himself in now.

The next two weeks sped by with romantic moments heightened by the tension of the mutually recognized timeframe. After a final dinner and a final night of making love, Steward said goodbye to DeSolt at the same bus depot in downtown Santa Barbara where he had boarded the bus four months before to find her saving a seat for him.

Steward went to work at the zoo on that same day, thinking his life in Santa Barbara had become pointless. He felt like packing up his stuff and following her as he had before. But how could he do that? It would seem foolish to do that, he told himself. He tried to call her on the phone, but he found it as hard to do as when their relationship had just begun. He twice rode down on his bike to State Street to try to call her on a pay phone where he had more privacy then in his landlady's hall. On both of these occasions, Kristine was not at home (at the Andrew's house).

After three days, he received a letter from her, in a yellow envelope with flower stickers beside her return address.

"Dear Tom, I hope you miss me as much as I missed you," the letter read. "Any chance you could come down this weekend? I can meet you at the depot to pick you up. I checked it out with Don and Audrey, you can stay in the guest house. (I won't sneak in, I promise!) Sandra has a ballet recital. We could go to that together. I know she'd be pleased."

This was just another occasion among so many before, he thought to himself, when he had suspected that she was easing out of the relationship only to find she was as enthused about it as before. Why did he doubt her? Why couldn't he accept, as she had said so many times, that he and she would find some way, whatever the circumstances, to see one another?

Steward arrived in Pasadena a few days later to see Kristine waving from her car as the bus slowed to enter the depot. She was dressed in a pink, mid-thigh dress. She looked like a wholesome schoolgirl with her blonde hair in pigtails tied with pink ribbons.

At the Andrews house, Steward found Don, Audrey, and the two long- limbed, smiling daughters on hand to greet him as if he were a member of the family. Sandy Andrews, the 13-year-old daughter, whose ballet recital Steward would be going to (it was by this time agreed), led him to the guest house to show him where he would be staying.

"Krissy has missed you very much!" she announced, peering at him with her round, double-dimpled face set in her characteristic pleasant expression. "Very, very much!"

"Well, I'm glad."

"And we've all missed you, too!"

The guest room was a cheerful place with a red rug and a flowered spread dappled with sunlight from the window that looked out to the pool. Another window on the back wall looked out to an ivy-covered

fence. The walls were hung with paintings, all of them done by her father, Sandy Andrews informed. They were paintings that didn't require a feigned interest. They were interesting in color and content.

"He has more than he knows what to do with," Sandy said.

"He should sell them."

"Oh, he does when he can."

A full day followed for Steward and DeSolt with a swim in the pool, then a hike in the hills above the house, then supper with the Andrews and an evening of pleasant conversation. Last came tea, Audrey's New Zealand tradition, as they all sat together watching the ten o'clock news. In the midst of all, each member of the family separately told Steward, in one form or another, how much he meant to Kristine and how good they thought he had been for her so far.

Out of respect for the family, there were no secret meetings in the guest house, and no overt displays of sexual interest, even. But the next day, there was time for that when Steward and DeSolt went for a picnic at a reservoir a few miles from the Andrews house.

"Well, one week, then two weeks," said Kris, referring to the time that remained before Steward left for the Friends' program.

"Does it bother you?" he asked.

"Yes, it does."

They sat for a while looking off toward Los Angeles. The scene was beautiful in a way, but a low haze of brown smog hung over the buildings in the distance, where traffic could be seen streaming past endlessly on an elevated freeway.

"Do you really think you can just drop by to see me, when I'm down there?" Steward asked.

They had again looked together the previous evening at the material Steward had received from the Friends. He had used the occasion to point out the remoteness of the location where he had been assigned.

"Well, I did kind of, but now I don't," she answered.

"Yes, it doesn't seem there will be much hope of it."

"Did you ever think, maybe if I was more official, it wouldn't be such a big problem?" she said.

He looked up at her, trying to ascertain just what she meant by that. Was there a less drastic meaning he wasn't thinking of?

"Do you mean by being engaged?" he asked.

She wasn't intimidated or daunted at all by the subject, as he thought she might have been.

"Or, better yet, married," she said.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Well, I would like that, really."

"Are you sure you would like it?"

"Yes."

She sat back and grinned at him with a mischievous expression. "Well, let me try to figure this out now. Did you just propose?"

"Yes, I guess did. I mean, I want to."

"Tom, little lesson in the laws of love: you have to ask a direct question."

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes."

There was much to be worked out after that, as the rest of the day completed in a daze amidst toasts of champagne back at the Andrews' house when the engagement was announced. DeSolt wanted to get married on July 1, her birthday, only three weeks away.

So Kristine had had a plan of her own making, Steward thought to himself. He had shorted her on that. She had apparently already thought about details of the wedding. It could be a peasant style wedding, she told him, outdoors with a fire in the Andrews' backyard by the pool. There would be little expense for anyone. Audrey Andrews and the three Andrews daughters would help making a peasant style wedding dress. Susan, the oldest, married daughter, who Steward had met just once, was an accomplished seamstress, Kris informed.

With matters proceeding quickly in the course of a few hours, there was even talk of who would preside at the ceremony. Mark Chambers of the California Migrant Ministry, O'Rourke's preacher friend, came to mind. Steward called him on the spur of the moment, and Chambers, without a moment of hesitation, agreed.

"Hey, and are you going to get our old friend O'Rourke involved in this?" Chambers asked in his Georgia drawl.

"Well, actually, I would like to," Steward replied. "I'd like him to be best man."

"He might could arrange a trip out on a transport. I have heard of people doing that," Chambers said.

Riding back to Santa Barbara on the bus, Steward was busy thinking of all the exigencies that had been brought into play. He would have to make arrangements and make them fast. But he felt happy about what had happened. In less than six weeks, he would be a married man! He could hardly believe it.

159. Brandt's react to Steward's engagement as their own lives diverge

Matt and Mary Brandt heard about Tom Steward's engagement by way of a letter from Steward received on Tuesday, June 3, 1969. The letter was in the mailbox, the last thing checked, as the Brandt's left their Washington D.C. apartment for their summer vacation. The vacation, as planned, would take them home to Minnesota for about six weeks and then for two weeks to Kentucky on the way back to D.C. Mary opened the letter in the van as Matt drove across the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge.

Mary paused first, however, with the letter out of the envelope but still unfolded in her hands, for a last look back at the adopted city that she and Matt were temporarily leaving behind. First in the wide scene to meet her eyes, upstream on the Potomac River, near the eastern base of the Keys Bridge, were the familiar multiple spires of the Healy Building on the Georgetown quadrangle, with its tall, central clock tower. She had just been there, in Georgetown, the day before, on the fourth floor of the Ryan Building, where the Women's Center had become her personal center of operations on campus. Next to meet her eyes was the island below the bridge, Theodore Roosevelt Island, with its hiking paths, which had also become familiar to her and her husband in recent months, since the coming of spring. Last of all, Mary looked back at the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool, and at the other monuments and official buildings visible beyond them. Those structures were always there, she thought, in her and Matt's new home, reminders of the mechanics of a powerful nation that were going on just miles away from the events of her and Matt's personal lives. Every day brought news of some event taking place in the capitol, often connected with the never-ending war.

Opening the letter, Mary read the greeting out loud, but her eyes, skipping ahead, picked out the words "special news" a few sentences down on the written page.

"Hey, Matt get this!" she announced. "Stewie is getting married!"

"Married? You got to be kidding," Matt replied, looking across with interest.

Mary read out loud from Steward's letter: "'Her name is Kristine DeSolt. She is 19 years old now, but she will be 20 exactly on the day we get married, July 1, since that is her birthday.'"

"July 1!" Matt remarked. "That's a month away."

"Just about."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, it goes to confirm, Stewball is crazy," Matthew pronounced.

"Crazy in love," Mary qualified with a tone of finality.

She continued reading out loud from Steward's letter: "'All of this

happened since the last time I wrote you. It started when Bill O'Rourke was still here, living with me in the garage in L.A. Rorkie met Kris and liked her. He encouraged me to keep trying to see her. I thought many times Kris was too young or fickle, that she would change her mind. But each time I thought that, I was proven wrong. She has stayed steady in her determination to see me and she was first to broach the subject of marriage. Once she did, I realized she was right. And so I went forward and now everything has to be adjusted. Like first my alternative service assignment with the American Friends (the program in Guatemala I told you about). I wrote them today asking if I could stay in the program as a married person with Kris coming along."

"Fat chance of that," Matthew remarked.

Listening to the letter, he had been reminded anew of how formal and stuffy Steward was in sorting out all his reasons. It was a quality Matt had never liked in Steward. The whole arrangement struck him as a potential mess.

"Yea, you wouldn't think so," Mary replied. "Too many things could go wrong."

"Precisely."

Other details followed as Mary read the rest of the long letter out loud. Steward had been writing to a number of other agencies, also, he wrote, trying to come up with an alternative if the Friends turned down his request to continue in their program as a married man. His wife-to-be was helping in typing letters and a resume.

Mary turned back to the letter and continued reading.

"'It's kind of like applying for a job, '" she read, "'which I've never done in this way. Only in this case there not much money to be made in it. All the jobs are like VISTA, or worse, in pay. I only have a couple hundred saved. Kris doesn't have anything, as far as I know. We're going to have to live cheaply.'"

"The guy is crazy, I tell you," Matt remarked again, sighing with exasperation. "How are they going to get by like that, living cheaply? He doesn't even have a car."

"Love conquers all?" Mary said with a smile.

"There's going to be some weekends going down pretty bad, without a couple of buck for beer."

"Yes, that could be."

Left to her own thoughts later, with the news about Tom Steward's impending marriage fading to the background, Mary had time to reflect on the status of her own marriage. She was aware of feeling envious of the togetherness that she imagined Steward and his bride-to-be were feeling. Just a year before, she thought, she and Matthew would have had such a sense of togetherness themselves. Lately, though, in the two or so

months that had passed since the altercation between her and Matthew at Rock Creek (on the day after he had gotten stoned), she had been conscious of the extent to which she and Matthew were drifting apart. They were no longer sharing ideas and thoughts as she once had hoped they would as a married couple.

Mary's mind went back two summers to the first road trip she and Matt had gone on as a married couple, from Minnesota to Kentucky, just after getting married. She thought to herself that he and she had been so together then, so one in mind and spirit, and so aware of their oneness. Now she was aware (and she sensed he was, too) of having reached a point of divergence. Had she really assumed that he and she would go forward into their shared life as adults so in tune with one another that there would never be a point of divergence?

The point of divergence had happened, she thought to herself. Of that, there could no longer be any doubt. It had happened, not as she once had feared, from her being unable to pry from Matthew the details of his thought. Rather, it had happened because he did not reciprocate; he did not pry in return. Her thoughts were the ones that remained unknown, to him. She had tried to share them with him, to the extent she could. But, though often he struggled to listen, he could not with true interest. She did not hold that against him. She did not want him to feign interest.

But she had recently come to accept that her mental makeup required a more intense interaction than he could provide. Increasingly, she relied on others to unburden herself of her verbal formulations.

Under the influence of her feminist group, her concept of marriage had evolved, also, through many convolutions. She had considered all of the various ideas presented to her, such as of marriage as an archaic, bourgeoisie institution, not entirely taking them in, but drawing from them an attitude of examination and analysis of her own marriage. As part of that, she had accepted the notion that any marriage of strong-minded, intellectually searching equals would result in growth on separate paths, in addition to their shared path. But what was her shared path with Matthew?

She thought to herself: "I still love him so much; I don't want to grow apart from him; I want to find and nourish the common bond;" and, in her verbal way, as a succession of small towns brought scenes of family life, she enunciated and repeated those words in her mind, "find and nourish the common bond."

She had done that, she thought, in encouraging their walks together in Rock Creek and on Theodore Roosevelt Island. She and Matt would do that on their vacation, also (she had carefully planned it with that objective in mind), beginning that same night with a two-night campout in Shenandoah Park (where neither of them had never been before), and

stopping to camp at other points along the way where, as she was well aware, the physical exercise and the mood of the outdoor fireside stood a good chance always of restoring the intimacy they had once had all the time.

Leaving the D.C. area, they headed northwest through Virginia, not along the new interstate freeway, I-66, which would have been faster, but along the old two-lane highway 29, which led through a rural scene similar to what Matt had known as a youth. He drove with enthusiasm, as he always did on a trip of any kind, watching as the Virginia countryside unfolded before him, revealing subtleties of the rural scene that he had left behind in his new urban life.

He looked with particular interest at the farms along the way, recalling similar scenes from his childhood. He was surprised to see that Virginia had dairy and crop farms, similar to his own native Midwest. The growing season was about a month earlier, he noted, with many of the fields already neatly rowed by the seed drills.

Everywhere he looked, there were details that he framed, as for a picture, with his newly-trained photographer's eye: barn swallows swooping over mown grass in a rural cemetery with narrow, sentinel-like trees; seed planters and disks in an implement yard, glinting in the sunlight; a stand of trees forming an island within the contoured lines of a newly planted hillside field.

Sometimes, also, Matthew tried to remember how the same scene would have looked when stoned. Since his evening, two months before, of getting stoned with Darren Houghten, he had not indulged a second time, mostly out of deference to his wife's wishes, still at times he yearned for the sense of "ah, sweet mystery of life" (as Houghten had described it) that he had experienced that one time in Houghten's alley-view apartment. On certain occasions, when he experienced a situation of particular significance to him, he wished he could have the same experience stoned.

Just outside of a small town called Amissville, in the foothills there, his attention settled on a blue farmhouse with white outbuildings in a setting that reminded him of his family's farmstead in Minnesota. A series of memories came into his mind then, many of them of physical tasks done with his father and brother. They were not memories drawn out into phrases, fixed into syntax, as his dark-haired, pretty wife would have experienced; they were visceral in nature, tensing his muscles as he recalled them.

Instinctively, he felt the pads of his fingers where he had used to always find his hard-earned calluses when he was a kid. Mary, with her keen sense of him, noticed the exploratory movement of his fingers and perceived at once where his thoughts were.

"Still got them?" she asked.

"No," he answered flatly, "the ol' calluses are just about gone."

"You kept them pretty well in Kentucky."

"Yes, I did."

"You miss them?"

"Yes."

"You ever think of going back to Minnesota, or something like that, to have a farm of your own, of our own?" she asked.

"Yes, at times."

"And where does that lead you? What do you think about that?"

"I think, how do you reconcile it with the modern world?"

Had he taken the wrong course in going into photography, he asked himself. Had he chosen too refined a life? No, he didn't think so, really. He was still excited with what he was learning. He was still excited about reflecting life in the honest, documentary style that his old friend, Fr. Dan Riley, had talked about. But he would have to make his life harder, more physical, somehow. He was determined to do that.

The Blue Ridge Mountains first came into view in late afternoon, in the distance, with dense woods and jagged outgrowths of rock such as Matt remembered from Kentucky. Soon after that, the Brandt's entered the park at the Thornton Gap entrance, and began their ascent to Skyline Drive at the top of the ridge, stopping at Hazel Mountain Overlook, at an elevation of 2770 feet, to view the Shenandoah River, winding through the green valley 1200 feet below.

At the Skyland station, at an elevation of 3680 feet, they parked the Volkswagen bus and got a map from a ranger. From there, with packs on their backs, they headed off along a trail toward the summit of Stony Man Mountain, about a mile from the highway. Within a few minutes, they were in the cool darkness of the woods, brushing through ivy dappled with the long rays of sunlight that filtered through the canopy of leaves overhead. Just to feel the uneven ground, with rocks and tree trunks jutting out, was a relief after months of city sidewalks and sitting in class.

That night, at a place called Jewell Hollow Overlook, they sat huddled together, watching their campfire. The scene below, extending over several ridges, was reminiscent of their favorite vantage point at their Kentucky cabin, the place where they had often gone together to build a fire and talk and to sometimes make love.

"Well, it's not quite like Kentucky, but we're on the way," said Matthew.

Mary laughed. "Yes, we are.

They sat watching the fire burn, talking intimately as they had not talked for months.

Matt described his plans for his masters thesis photo project, which he would be required to complete the following year, in his last semester.

"Maybe it sounds simple," he said, "but what I've been thinking, I'd like to capture the extremes of D.C. The ghettos, the monuments. The White House, the slums."

"That would be fantastic, Michael," Mary said, looking at him in the motherly way, to nurture his potential, that she had used to look at him when they were first going out, when she had encouraged him to say what he was thinking. "You would be just perfect for that. Because the way you would do it, it wouldn't be sentimental. It would just be a statement of facts. Without words."

"Yes, without words," he answered, smiling.

Mary described her plans for the coop of mountain women that she was still involved in, with a support auxiliary set up in D.C. of her fellow college women from her women's group.

"I would like to have a meeting sometime. Bring these women like Hattie down to D.C. to meet these women who are supporting them. It would be like a meeting of two different worlds."

"Yes, it would."

They lay back on the ground then, their bodies entwined, looking off to starry sky such as they had not seen since leaving their mountain cabin a half year before.

160. Brandt and his father decide to re-roof the damaged barn

The view of his family farm that Matt Brandt had been reminded of in Virginia, by a view of a similar farm near Amissville, materialized eight days later, on Thursday, June 12, 1969, in a view of the real thing, as he and his wife Mary drove over a crest of a Minnesota hill to see, in the distance, a square, white, two-story house and red outbuildings in a grove of maples and pines.

For Matt, with his ever-keener visual sense, owing to his studies in photography, the family farm was an interesting sight. He and Mary arrived in late evening. The sun was low in the western sky, shining out from a jagged hole in an otherwise cloudy sky. The horizontal light, with much of the sky dark gray, cast the scene in a striking contrast of light and dark. Long shadows extended from the tall trees in the farmyard. The western sides of the outbuildings gleamed with light. In the field beyond the barn, where a farmer in a red tractor mowed the first crop hay, the unmowed grass had the intense hue that green has in shade, but above the tractor, on the crest of the hill, the newly mowed grass lay in a long row in sunlight, bordered on one side by a long dark shadow that blended into that same shade-intense green hue again further up on the hill where the sunlight ended.

Matthew was glad to see that no unfamiliar buildings were in sight to jar with buildings remembered from boyhood. A few miles away, near the junction of the interstates 35 and 94, he had noticed several more of the huge, new cargo exchange warehouses that he had noticed on previous trips home. Other unfamiliar buildings had popped up in unexpected places in the area between the freeway and the house, enough to remind him that changes were coming. He had arrived in Minnesota in a curious state of mind, with respect to change, eager to determine the extent to which his old world had changed since his last visit. He had a sense that much was in flux all over the country, not only in infrastructural changes, such as the new freeways, but also in cultural changes brought about by the youth culture and opposition to the war. He felt, too, that he himself had changed a great deal, in his odyssey from Minnesota to the mountains of Kentucky and then to the urban intensity of Washington D.C. He wasn't sure whether change in any quarter had been good, even in himself. Much had been gained, he believed, but something had been lost, also. He hadn't worked it all out.

Brandt's father, Buster, and his mother, Caroline, saw Matthew and Mary coming up the long driveway and met them in the front yard. There the gathering soon included much that had not changed at all, including Matt's college-aged sister, the three family dogs, and the entire, 11-member cat family from the barn, among them five brand new kittens.

Below the house, in the barnyard, was another sight he remembered, several sheep, big ewes with the black legs and faces and white body wool of the Suffolk breed, baahed from the fence, as the sheep were inclined to do whenever anything unusual happened. Matt was familiar with their behavior, having raised and shown that particular breed as his 4-H project for several years in grade school. Further down in the barnyard, a group of lambs bounded through some chopped up logs.

"We've been watching that driveway all morning," the father said. "Welcome home, kids. We're happy to see you."

"We've got the bedroom all fixed up for you," the mother added.

"Well, we're glad to be here," said Matt.

"Very glad," said Mary.

"And we're glad to have you."

A late supper followed of the plain, hearty fare that Matthew also remembered from his boyhood: fried pork chops, baked potatoes, sauerkraut, boiled rutabagas, fresh sliced cucumbers in vinegar, and fresh-baked whole wheat bread, with milk for the main beverage with the meal and afterwards coffee with the cherry pie desert. From the kitchen window next to where he sat, Matt could see the familiar scene fading into darkness outside as the yard light on the meter pole threw a yellow light across the barnyard and down beyond the fence into the corn field below. The smell of mowed hay came in through the open window.

Next morning, Matthew Brandt awoke at the first light of dawn and, with Mary sleeping peacefully beside him, and lay for a moment looking at the familiar objects in his old basement room. His parents had freshened up the room as part of a separate, apartment-like area in the basement. The "apartment" had a separate exterior door leading out into the side yard and a separate bathroom, the same one that he and his brother had used when in high school and college. Caroline Brandt had prettied up the bathroom with new bright yellow and white curtains and a new matching shower curtain and set of wash clothes and towels. Scented soap and artificial flowers were set out on a shelf above the commode.

Heading up the familiar steps to the family room, he opened the upstairs door to smell the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. His mother was standing in the kitchen by the window where the soft light of dawn was pouring through on the clean counter.

"Well, good morning, stranger," she said cheerfully.

"Good morning," Matthew replied.

"Go for a cup of coffee."

"Yea, I sure would. Thanks a lot."

"Paper here, too."

"Thanks. Dad already up?"

"Yes, he is. He's outside somewhere. I saw him walking around down below the barn."

"Feeding the sheep?"

"No, I think he may be looking at the roof."

"What's the deal with that?"

"Some shingles came off in the wind."

"How many shingles?"

"Quite a few."

Matt sat down at the table to look through the paper, noting that the confrontive world he was used to reading about in the *Washington Post* had not projected its intensity as far as his hometown, judging from the current sampling of news. There was a front-page headline regarding the war but, aside from that, there was no news at all of either the war or protests against it. Local articles described a community initiative to improve a riverside park and a dispute regarding off-hour scheduling of transit buses.

Going out later, Matthew walked down the slope to the big red barn and around past the milk house to the barnyard. His father was standing there, in the midst of several curious sheep, looking up at the roof with his hand on his brow to shield his eyes from the sun.

"Well, the insurance will pay for the shingles," Buster Brandt told his son when asked the damaged roof. "Already got that resolved. But I got to talking about it with Ned down the road there, and he said he wouldn't just put shingles on if it was him. Said he would rip all the old shingles off and put plywood all across the roof and then put the shingles on, on top of that. Said it would firm up the roof."

"What do you think?"

"I think Ned's right."

"Would the insurance pay for the plywood?"

"Well, that's a minor problem, and then, that's just part of it, you know," the father replied. "Say you hire it done, that's quite a sum. Sets you back on your heels."

"Dad, you and I could do that ourselves," Matthew ventured.

"Oh, I don't know, Matt. That would be one heck of a job. I don't know if my knees could stand it, really, working on a slope like that."

"You could hand the stuff to me."

"We'd have to rent some kind of platform contraption, or, what you call it..."

"Scaffold."

"Yes."

"I'll be at home a whole month."

"Somehow I got the impression you're on vacation."

"What I need," said Matt, "is a vacation from thinking." He walked

down from where he had been standing and stood in the barnyard looking up at the roof. “What is the barn anyhow? About 80 by 50?”

“80 by 40.”

“Holds a lot of hay.”

“Oh, yea, I heard 10,000 bales.”

“Don’t suppose we’ll ever fill it up.”

“Oh, no. Not with our use.”

“80 by 40. That’s 3200 square feet. Then you got the incline on the roof. I suppose it would be about 5000.”

“Well, that’s right exactly. I already figured it out. Each side of the roof is 40 by 25. Each piece of plywood is 4 by 8, 32 square feet. So 5000 divided by 32. It comes to about 160.”

“That’s a fair number.”

“Yes, it is.”

“You could have eight across, three up.”

“Leaving one dang foot to fit in.”

“You’d have to cut out a one-foot strip.”

“Yea, that would be a troublesome detail.”

Matt hung around a little longer to help his father pour out pails of oats and ground corn into a long trough. The trough was in a fenced in area with an entry big enough to let in the lambs while keeping out the ewes. The barn cats could get in, though. They were sitting on top the fence watching the lambs contend for grain.

“You remember that one spring that one ewe had quadruplets, the one you kids called ‘Dollie’?” the father asked.

“Yea, she was a good one,” Matt replied. “Big ol’ ewe.”

“Yes, she was.”

“And then the barn cats ate the paws,” Buster Brandt said.

“Yes. I recall,” Matthew answered.

“That was a terrible thing. That bothered me a lot.”

“I remember you kicked the cats out of the barn and fenced off all the windows.”

“Shows you those cats are basically wild,” said Buster. “Yes, it sure does.”

“Saw them kill a pigeon one time,” the father continued. “Let me tell you, they took their time at that.”

“You couldn’t stop it?”

“No, they dragged the poor thing off somewhere under a plank, over in the lambing stalls.”

“You sure tried on those paws, though.”

The father had a bitter laugh, remembering that. “Yea, I gave it a good try. Those bones where the paws had been, they were just like bones on a plate, ate completely clean, right down to the bone. I wrapped

the bones all around with tape real tight, and they actually could stand on them, like they were artificial feet or something. I thought I had done quite a job at that."

"Died anyhow, though."

"Yea, only lasted a couple of days. I guess, I don't know, it must have been a shock to their system or something."

"Yea, I don't know."

"You don't hear of quads very often," said Buster, "not with Suffolk, at least."

"No, you don't."

"Thought I was going down in the record book."

"Yea, guess it wasn't meant to be."

That evening, at Mary's suggestion, Matt and Mary went out together to the West Bank of the University of Minnesota where they had often gone on dates before getting married. The scene had many cherished places for both of them, including the bridge above the Mississippi River where they had decided to get engaged—on that snowy evening in December, a year and a half before.

Here, Matt found changes that didn't need to be looked for, and he found the intensity of conflict he was used to everywhere from his life in D.C. There were protest signs all around. The whole scene had become more counter-cultural, with young people everywhere sporting the long hair and hippie-like clothes that on his visit a year before had been marginal. He saw signs referring to "revolution," bringing to mind the claims that he had felt to be overstated in the *Rolling Stone* article on revolution that he had read a couple of months before at Whitney-Pratt.

Matthew and Mary ate at a Chinese restaurant on Cedar Avenue, then took a walk together that led at one point past the theater where they had attended the play together where Matthew had walked out. They stopped to ask someone coming out of the stage door, a young black woman, about Mary's old friend, Samuel Lee.

"He moved out East," the young woman said. "I think he's living in Washington D.C."

"Washington D.C.? That's where we live!"

"Well, I hope you run into him. I don't have an address."

"What is he doing out there?" Mary asked.

"Some kind of community center. I don't know the details."

Matt and Mary went on from there, arm in arm, following the route that Mary had followed when looking for him after he had left the theater to avoid being drawn into a discussion. They stopped in the bar where they had run into Jim Morris, sat at the same table by the window, and noted that now the students seemed young and naïve, despite their long hair, compared to what they had become themselves. Finally, they

walked over to the bridge and enjoyed a long kiss in the exact spot where they had kissed on the bridge following the fight Matt had intervened in on behalf of Jim Morris.

"To think that Jimmy now is my brother in law, married to Ellen," Mary reflected softly.

"Yea, who would have ever thought."

It was a good evening all in all for Matthew Brandt and the former Mary Kass, an evening filled with rich, affectionate moments, but the contact with the long hair culture and seeing how it had become less of an outsider thing and more of the norm among the students gave them both food for thought. For Matt, especially, the added closeness, and overhearing various profound or self-conscious conversations, brought out the full gamut of feelings, from a feeling of loyalty to the scene to his old weariness with words.

Back home, Matt found his father in the kitchen when he went upstairs to look in the frig.

"You give any more thought to that roof?" he asked.

"I did, Matt, and I mentioned it to Mom, and she said I better not put you to work for your vacation at home."

"I want to go to work."

"I feel like I tricked you into it or something, talking about what Ned said and the cost of hiring it done," the father said.

"I know you wouldn't trick me," Matt replied.

"You mean more to me than that."

Matt took a glass of milk from the frig and stood looking down at the barn, which was partially visible in the yellow light from the meter pole.

"I want to do the damn roof, Dad," he said again.

The father laughed at that. "Well, it would be fun."

"Let's plan it out tomorrow."

"Okay. son, you got a deal."

161. Brandt encounters familiar issues at home and the boat club

From the moment Matt Brandt stood up on the barn roof, two mornings later, to begin throwing off the old shingles, he realized he had made the right decision in offering to do the job with his father. A bright day was just beginning, with the sun coming up in a cloudless sky above the woods about a quarter mile away. He felt healthy and strong, stretching his legs to move along the steep incline of the roof. He breathed a sigh of relief at the prospect of a whole month of fresh air and physical work with the mental convolutions of his student life left back in D.C.

"God damn shit comes off fast once you get the hang of it," Buster Brandt said as he watched his son moving along the roof with a flat barn shovel.

Matthew had gone for the shovel after a tedious start with the crow bar, prying off one shingle at a time. Once he had got the hang of the shovel, ramming it along under a whole row of shingles, he could work away in a fever, with a safety harness allowing him to move freely without having to worry about falling. The harness was like a tight vest. A rope attached to the back of it was strung over the other side of the barn and tied to a tree, with just enough rope to reach to the edge of the roof. He could not, therefore, fall over the edge. Starting at the peak of the roof and pushing downward, he had already cleared off a section of shingles about 20 feet wide.

At lunch, Matt and his father sat in the hay mow on bales of hay, enjoying the cool breeze coming through the open, 20-foot high barn door across to where they were and then out a nearby window, actually just a square opening in the side of the barn about four feet square. High above them, they could see the results of the labor, a full half of one side of the roof showed daylight coming through between the planks where the shingles had been removed.

"Well, things seem to get crazier and crazier, if you look at the TV," Buster Brandt said. "Soldiers keep dyin' in the war and then other people are marchin' around saying bring the boys home."

"What do you think of that?"

"I'm of that inclination myself."

They sat in silence, chewing slowly on the sandwiches brought down by Matt's mother. They were both tired from having worked a good five hours already. The father's non-roof part of the job was not exactly easy, either, since he had to go up and down on the frame to clear the shingles away on the bottom and throw them into a dump truck for hauling away when they got it full.

"Remember Denny Martin, went to grade school with your sister?"

the father said.

"Yes, I do. Sure."

"Word came back about him."

"He got killed?"

"Yes."

"What were the circumstances?"

"Now, that I don't know, for sure. I think he was in the Marines. It happened in combat, I think."

"Well, that's too bad."

"Yes, it is."

Again, they ate in silence.

Matthew rose to go stand by the window and look down across the corn field to the pasture about a quarter mile away. The Brandt farm was a nice laying farm, people said, with the pasture to the south and a ten-acre woods just to the east. A dry run ran from the woods through the pasture forming a little valley bordered on one side by a stand of pines. The dry run was a creek for about a month in the spring and whenever it rained hard for several days in a row. In the full sunlight, rays of heat rose from the damp soil. The lush green corn looked like it was bracing in the sunlight.

"Tell you, Dad," said Matthew, returning to the hay pile where his father was still sitting with his cap beside him, rimmed with sweat. "The whole business gets a little crazier still from the perspective of D.C. where me and Mary are living now."

"How's that?"

"Oh, I don't know. All kinds of claims. People throwing around big words."

"'Establishment.'"

"Yea, words like that. 'Revolution.'"

"Tell you the truth, Matt, I hear stuff like that. You know what I think? I don't mean to offend you." "No, what do you think?"

"I think it's kids playing."

"I'll grant you that. There's an element of that."

"But serious people, too?"

"Oh, yes. People talking about guns."

"Either for or against this so-called revolution."

"Yes."

The father thought about that for a moment. "Well, that seems preposterous."

"I agree. It does. I just hope it never comes down to it."

"God save us. So do I."

There was no tension or hard feeling in that exchange, which ended soon when father and son went back to work on the roof. But a bad

feeling lingered in Matthew's mind, of what the heck had he gotten into and where was it going. He was glad for the physical frenzy of jamming through the shingles to work it all out of himself as he had so often done with other concerns.

About 3 P.M., after clearing off half the roof, Matt and his father called it a day, but far from feeling tired, Matt felt energized for more physical exertion. Mary was scheduled for an evening out with her mother and the family women at a shower for one of her cousins. With nothing to do, he decided to drive down to the boat club and maybe arrange to go for a row by himself in a single shell.

Arriving at the boat house, he found one of the club officers just leaving and obtained quick approval to use a shell. He rowed up to the eight mile mark and then headed back in a contemplative mood. Coming up the ramp later, with the shell over his head, he smelled the unmistakable smell of marijuana. A person with long scraggly hair, faced away, was sitting just east of the boat club with a joint in one hand.

Hearing Brandt coming up the ramp, the person turned around. It was Dennis Nolan, the former stroke oar, the one who had rowed with Brandt on the St. Thomas college crew.

"Goddam, Nolan!" Brandt shouted. "What you doin' down here?"

"I'm sitting here, man."

"Yes, I can see that." "How the hell are you?" "I'm fine, Den. I'm fine."

Nolan got up at that and came over, looking more like a hippie than the crew cut kid Matt remembered, to follow Matt into the boat house. He no longer had a joint in his hand, Matt was sorry to notice, as the urge had come on strongly to try the grass again.

"Well, you're looking good, man," Nolan remarked, peering into Brandt's eyes. "Looks like you grew some long hair, too."

"Yes, I did. I guess it's the thing."

"I like the beard, man. You look like a goddam wildman."

"Thank you... I guess that's a compliment."

Conversation followed during which Brandt learned that Dennis Nolan had just returned from Vietnam. He said he had been home for just about a month, "trying to get my act together," as he put it. Nolan looked a lot more serious than Matt remembered him. He joked around as he talked but all the jokes seemed dry. He never smiled or laughed.

"How was the Army?" Matt asked.

"Tell you the truth, man, it was a fuckin' horrible experience," Nolan answered. "You see somebody get killed, somebody you know, and it brings it all home."

"Brings what home?"

"The fuckin' ridiculousness."

"Some of your buddies got killed?"

"One too many, man. One too many."

The two former teammates talked for a while longer in the locker room as Matt showered, but Nolan seemed restless and he became downright agitated when Brandt alluded briefly to his own life in graduate school. That seemed to strike a sore nerve somehow. Nolan jumped up at once from the bench where he was sitting. He took a few steps into the boat repair room next to the locker and peered out the window there which looked out to the parking lot.

"I got to go, man," he said bluntly after a moment.

"Nice seein' you again."

"Nice seein' you, too."

"Maybe sometime."

"Yea, who knows. Like I said, I got to get it together. There's a whole fuckin' lot of shit I got to get together right now."

"Well, good luck with it."

"Thank you."

The two former teammates shook hands with the thumbs up grip of the Movement. Nolan headed for the door, while Matt struggled with the notion of asking Nolan to buy a joint from him. The nearness to it, the smell of it, had increased his desire.

"Denny?" he called as Nolan passed. "Don't suppose you could sell me a joint. I smelled it outside."

That brought a little laugh from Nolan for the first time. "Matthew Brandt," he said, "you mean to say, my ol' buzz head teammate wound up as a dopie?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Just want it, huh?"

"Yes, I do."

Nolan, reached into his vest pocket. He opened a small lozenges can in which about a half-dozen joints were neatly packed side by side. He took out two of the joints and put them into Brandt's palm.

"For you, old buddy, I got two and they're free," he said. "Rolled 'em myself with my little machine."

"One is fine, Denny."

"No, I insist."

"You know how it is, I'm just in a mood."

"Don't I know, man. I'm in a mood like that about 24 hours a day since I got back from Nam."

"All right, Dennie. Thanks a lot."

"Viva the revolution, man."

"Yea, viva. Thanks again."

Twice in a day, Matthew thought, conversations at home and now at

the boat club, had brought up deaths in the Vietnam war of people that people near him had known. And twice in a day the conversation had brought up the notion of the “revolution,” seeming both serious and yet also playful, as his father had typed it.

Brandt stuffed his workout clothes in his pack and went out the door to see Dennis Nolan roaring out of the parking lot in a beat-up, old car. The former stroke oar smiled and waved, looking a little crazy, Matthew thought, with just the craziness that he and his dad had been talking about.

162. Brandt gets stoned in the barn to contemplate his heritage

Matthew Brandt headed home from the boat club acutely aware of the two joints in the front pocket of his shirt. What he wanted to do now, he told himself, was experience his boyhood home in a stoned state of mind. If he could get back before Mary returned from her outing, or, if she had already returned, if he could slip away from her somehow without arousing her suspicion, then he would be able to ensconce himself with the joints in a situation allowing full attention as the setting transfigured due to the effect of the grass.

"I'll bring some beers down to the barn," he said to himself. "She knows I like to do that. I'll sit in the wind, where the wind will take the smell away from the house and buildings."

The spot in the haymow where he and his dad had eaten lunch would be just right for that, he thought, if the wind was still going south as it had been then. He watched the shrubs beside the road to gauge the direction of the wind. It was going south.

Arriving at home, he assessed the situation. Mary had not returned. His father had gone to bed. His sister was out for the evening. His mother was settled in the family room, watching TV.

"I'm going down to the barn to have a few beers," he announced to his mother.

"You deserve it," she said. "We appreciate all you're doing."

With a graceful exit thus assured, he headed down the hill to the haymow with a six pack in hand. The wagon doors were still open. He crossed to the barn window, where he had predetermined he would sit in order to have the wind take the smoke out of the barn.

Finding the window closed, he slid the window board open and looked out to the corn field south of the barnyard. Leaning out the window, his eyes took in the familiar setting, which extended from the maple woods in the east, on his left, to the stand of pine trees above the pasture, in front of him, on the south, then around in an arc across fields planted in lush green corn, to the apple orchard on his right, a quarter mile to the west. The sun was low in the sky above the basswood trees on the edge of the orchard. The apple trees, in their neat rows, looked small and quiet. From the pond, charged with recent rains, came forth a constant chorus of frogs.

The sheep in the barnyard, seeing him in the window, had gathered around the dump truck, baahing for hay. He threw down a piece of hay and watched them yank it apart.

With the beer in hand, being careful not to lean over so much that the two joints would drop out of his pocket, he climbed up on the hay pile which was stepped up in layers and about six bales high at the highest.

He settled in a comfortable spot, five bales up, where he could see out the barn window to the corn field and pasture, with one edge of the woods also visible on the left side. Through an opening between the bales, he could see back to the house to watch for Mary, in case she came down to the barn, which he knew she likely would do as soon as she got home from her outing.

Setting the six pack of beer at his feet, he opened a bottle and took a good swig. Then he lit his first joint, took a long drag, and held the smoke inside, feeling that a moment of exploration and insight with regard to his boyhood home was about to begin.

He blew out the smoke and watched as it wafted up into the breeze and tumbled out the window.

"Perfect," he said.

The first effect he noticed was the effect he had noticed first in Houghten's alley apartment, a separation of sounds. One sound especially stood out, a sound that was low yet distinct as if cut into the vaulted interior of the barn. Looking up, he saw a shadow moving near the furthest reach of the roof, from where he sat, by the hay door at the apex of the east gable. He located the source of the sound, a pigeon in the dark recesses of the rafters. It was standing on the hay trolley that hung there from a track secured to the ridge beam.

The pigeon was strangely quiet, Matthew noticed, as if aware of his presence. An image came into his mind of the bluish-black bird that he had noticed on the cover of the book in Houghten's apartment, *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Castenada. He took another drag of the grass and leaned back against the hay, listening for the "holes in the sounds" that he had read about in Castenada. There were many sounds and holes between them, forming a structure around him. It was like a landscape of sound, he decided. He could sense the extent and makeup of it in his mind.

Most insistent of the sounds was the chorus of frogs resonating from the pond in the orchard. It was not a single, mono-pitch chorus, he noticed, but a medley of voices of different pitch. Sometimes the component voices sounded separately, sometimes one or more of them waited in silence, sometimes they all sounded together madly. The frog chorus was the base upon which all the other sounds were built up. Just above it was another sound that seemed everywhere. That was the wind, Brandt decided, sweeping through the grass in the barnyard and the leaves in the yard. A steady buzzing sound occupied a tier above that. That was electricity, he thought, passing through the wire to the meter pole. The wailing sound, far to one side, was a train passing by on the track by the Minnesota River.

These were sounds of his boyhood, he said to himself, and, yes, he

had heard them before, he had listened before intently, as a young boy in his bedroom listening from his bed as he lay in the dark.

Hearing the rustling sound of the pigeon again in the rafters above him, he opened his eyes, feeling like he had awakened from a dream. The pigeon was still standing there on the hay trolley, silently keeping vigil with him. He reached over to get himself another beer and pried off the cap with the church key.

"Here's to you, pigeon," he said, lifting up the bottle.

From the pigeon, his attention shifted to the roof above, where his work of the past few days was reflected in the open slits between the roof planks where shingles had been removed. A full half of the barn had these openings through which the brightness of the twilight sky could be seen. On the other half, the roof presented a continuous, dark surface. If the weather held, he thought, he would have the shingles removed from that half of the roof, also, by the end of the next day. Then he would get to lay down the new plywood. He was looking forward to that.

In his stoned state, the gambrel roof struck him as being a marvel of construction. It was an open structure, made up of simply the rafters, each rafter composed of four sections secured with a triangular collar at each junction to hold the sections at the correct angle with respect to one another. The truss, as a totality, was held in place, mainly, by its weight pressing down. A marvelous structure, Matthew thought,—though, of course, not on the scale of the monuments he had seen in his adopted new home of Washington D.C.,—but this was something put into place by people on ladders working with simple hand tools.

That reflection led him in another direction, with a chasm of time seeming to intervene again from his previous reflections. He thought of the framed photo that sat on a bookshelf in the living room, showing him as a boy of about age four, lugging a man-sized toolbox. That had been his first tool box, bought at a garage sale after he had begged for it. He recalled being lifted to the workbench by his father to pick a tool for his tool box from the tools hanging on the wall.

That had been quite a time, Matthew thought as he leaned forward on the hay pile to light his second joint. Another memory came to him as he drew on the joint, forcing the smoke into his lungs. He was a boy of four, that same summer with the big toolbox, going out of the house and across the yard to the crew hired that year to "straighten" the barn. The men had pretended to take seriously his offer to be of help. They had set him to work with a shovel, throwing concrete into the wooden forms built for footings about 50 feet out from the wagon doors of the barn.

Other details of that project came to his mind. It had been man's work, certainly, he thought, stretching the half-inch chains across from the eight-foot-deep footings to a ten-ton winch. From the winch, two

other chains had been routed, through drilled holes, to a 2 by 12 inch, 30-foot-long plank, positioned at floor level, on the outside of the barn, to catch both the girt and the stud plate on that side.

Spoken directions of the time came back to him, too. “Every now and then, maybe once or twice a day, you come out here and give the winch one full pull,” he recalled the straightener telling his father. “That will bring the whole thing across maybe one sixteenth. You wouldn’t think it would do that, you know, but that cellar wall is poured concrete, and poured concrete will bend.”

He recalled completing the last task in the project with his father and brother, installing washers and nuts, big enough for a tractor, to the one-inch-diameter, 50-foot-long rods extended between the cellar wall and the concrete footings to hold the barn plumb.

With his second joint completed, he jumped down from the hay pile, feeling like he had been thinking hard for a long time about the repair of the barn. He looked out the window toward the pine trees by the pasture. The twilight sky was purple with pink fissures in the clouds above the dry run where he knew at the moment a creek was rushing through that would be there for a few days only. The frog chorus at the pond had become more intense.

He felt that, on some level, he had understood something about his boyhood home he had never understood before. It had to do with the barn as the center of what his family was. It had to do with tools and simplicity of talk and, most of all, with connecting through physical work with the scene around him.

From the barn window, Brandt went across the strewn hay on the barn floor to the wagon doors. From there he could see the family house on top of the slope that led up from the barn. It was a two-story, “prairie box” house with enclosed porches on front and back and with a full attic with dormer windows. Night had come fully in. The back of the house and back yard were shrouded in darkness, amidst the overhanging leaves. The front of the house and a stretch of the gravel driveway were illumined by the yard light.

He stood with a bottle of beer in his hand to match what would have been his usual behavior on such an occasion (so as not to be suspected, if anyone was watching, of being stoned). He looked at the house as if trying to figure out some structural problem, but the house appeared to him like something dreamily familiar from a long time before, as from a past life, or like something seen for what it was in the present but viewed from the future as something past.

Again, he felt as if everything that had happened previously, since he had gotten stoned, had separated off, falling back a long time, out of his consciousness. He couldn’t remember anymore what had kept him

occupied for so long about the "landscape of sound" and the barn.

A pleasant voice soon awoke him from this thought, however. It was Mary's voice. Apparently, she had just gotten home. "Matthew!"

"Yes," he called back, confirming in his mind that he had tucked the remains of the joints and matches under a hay bale where she would not find them in case she got curious.

"Where are you?"

"Down in the barn."

He looked then, as his wife came into view, expecting to see his usual Mary bounding down the hill in her determined, plain style of blue jeans and some simple sweater. But it was quite a different apparition he saw in the yellow glow of the yard light. She was dressed in one of her sister's elegant dresses from home, an accommodation to the event, he supposed, since it had brought together all the women of her family. It was a beautiful blue dress, with tufted sleeves and a sleek, mid-thigh skirt, and she looked beautiful in it, with her dark hair falling in ringlets on either side of her pretty face.

"Hello, husband!" she chimed, joking a little at that word. "What are you doing?"

"Looking if the tie beams are rotted," he replied.

"How come?"

"Trying to make sure they're sound."

"How come you're doing that now?"

"I was just sitting drinking a beer and it occurred to me, you know. I'm all into this roof thing."

"How do they look?"

"They look okay."

"Can I have a beer with you?"

"I'd love you to."

"Would you really?"

"Yes."

"I'm not bugging you?"

"No. Kind of like a date, you know."

That was exactly what she wanted to hear, he knew. He was hoping it would have an amorous effect. Once again he found that, as on his previous experience, the grass had increased his sexual interest. This time he wouldn't blow it, he resolved to himself.

She settled in close, with her legs pressing against him.

"I was thinking about you all evening," she said.

"Thinking about me? How come?"

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I'm a little horny. I was looking at you when you were working today and you looked so handsome, so manly."

"Well, thank you."

"You're welcome."

There was a moment of embarrassment as both realized the mutual wish for sex. Matthew looked down and looked up again to see his wife's direct, intelligent eyes peering back at him from a few inches away.

"Matthew," she said.

"What?"

"You can kiss me if you want to."

She meant a little joke in that again, he knew, and yet at the same time it repeated the formula of her not initiating sex but inviting him to initiate it.

He kissed her, and for a long time, in his stoned state of mind, he was absorbed in a kiss such as he had never experienced before. He felt as if his whole being was in the kiss. When he pressed on her lips with his own lips, he felt her lips pressing forward and then yielding in the rhythm of sex.

The kiss went on so long and was so intense, he felt surely he had betrayed he was stoned. But when he surfaced from it, as if coming up from below water, she peered him at him with a flushed, excited face, the hazel eyes keen as always with her unrelenting intensity.

"You know what?" she said.

"No, what?"

"All my cousins have nice husbands, but you know what?"

"No, what?"

"I've got the best husband of all."

He began kissing her again, all around her face, and undressing her while she stood demurely like a girl, awaiting his touch. When he entered her, he could feel her body pressing forward and then yielding in the same rhythm as the kiss. The motion of his pelvis against her continued like a kiss, as if his being and hers were concentrated in the point of contact. She reached an orgasm, kicking out of control, while he came, also.

Again, Matthew felt like a chasm of time had intervened between the moment just completed and the present moment. As he lay in the dark, with his wife's lips pressing against him, the landscape of sound came up again around him. This time he had a sense that his whole life was constellated on it. At the center was the point of warmth of Mary's lips, seeming like a sound, too. Outside of that were the sounds of the farm he had noticed before. The house, as he had seen it, as a dream image, and the project of the barn, as recollected, floated on that, sounds, also. Beyond them, at the edge of the landscape of sound, were the river, as seen that evening, and Houghten's alley apartment in D.C., and the remembered world of Kentucky, the cabin on the hillside.

163. Steward moves back to L.A. as his wedding date approaches

On the day after Matthew Brandt got stoned in the barn, Tom Steward decided to quit his zoo job and head down to L.A. at once to be there with Kristine DeSolt. He had been trying to write back and forth to her to work out details of their wedding and where they would be going afterwards, but arrangements had become so complicated it made no sense to him anymore to remain in Santa Barbara alone.

Invitations had already gone out for the wedding, set for DeSolt's 20th birthday on Tuesday, July 1, 1969. Mark Chambers, Bill O'Rourke's preacher friend from Georgia, had agreed to present the vows. O'Rourke had written saying he thought he could arrange a three-day leave and a troop transport flight to L.A. from Fort Sam Houston in Texas where he was in Advanced Individual Training to become a medic.

Steward had no problem getting an okay to immediately quit his job at the zoo, as he wanted to. He broached the subject on first reporting for work at 7 A.M. The foreman, Tom Barnes, agreed at once.

"No problem. Leave right now if you want to," he said.

Steward stood with a rake in his hand, pondering whether Barnes was serious or was pissed off in some way. But Barnes didn't seem perturbed. He just kept messing around with the mowers.

"Hey, Steward, you're getting married, right?" he said.

"Yes, that's true." Steward answered. He hadn't told Barnes of his plans, but he had told some of the other workers.

"That pretty blonde that was here that day?"

"Yes, to her. Her name is Kristine."

"Well, good for you, Steward. More power to you."

"Thanks."

"You're a good worker, Steward."

"Thanks."

"So get the hell out of here. Leave an address and I'll mail your check on Friday."

Steward's landlady was just as obliging when he offered to pay an extra week on his apartment since he hadn't given a notice.

"You don't need to do that," she said. "You're going to ride that bike all the way to L.A.?"

"Yea, that's what I was thinking."

"So love sees no obstacles, huh?"

"No, I guess not."

"I was once of a similar school."

Less than an hour later, Steward had his belongings crammed into his orange backpack and the backpack securely tied onto his yellow bike. Hopping on to the bike, he headed out onto Laguna Avenue and down

the long hill through the dappled sunlight toward the ocean, the same route he had followed every morning to ride to his work at the zoo.

Just beyond the Milpas Street underpass below the freeway, Highway 101, he zoomed onto Cabrillo Boulevard, pumping hard, for a final ride past the ocean beach and the zoo then up ramp to the freeway, ignoring the "no pedestrians" warning.

Summerland, Toro Canyon, Carpenteria, Fana, and Dulah loomed in the distance and faded behind him as he drove hard through the first 15 miles, to San Buenaventura, and headed off from there on the less trafficked Coastal Highway 1.

Then came mile and miles of spectacular views of white beaches and oceanside cliffs, surf rushing in, sunlight glittering on lakelike regions of differing hues of water swelling out to the western horizon in a vast panorama of water and sky.

By noon, he had made it to the orange groves outside of Oxnard. By two, he was in the splendored world of Malibu with waves crashing against the oceanside cliffs and pillars of rock.

Then came Santa Monica. He paused to buy himself some orange juice in a store looking out to the parking lot where Bill O'Rourke had dropped him off three years before on his first hitch hiking trip up the coast to visit his brother Art.

By 5 o'clock he had reached the Wilshire district in L.A. with no idea where to go next. He was contemplating a motel across from him when he saw a familiar figure approaching. It was Seymour Frankel, the Trotsky look-alike printers' union president.

"You're back in L.A., I see!" he said with a friendly smile.

"Yes, for three weeks."

"Got the invitation to your wedding. We'll be honored to attend."

"Oh, will you? Good."

"Where are you off to now?"

"Well, actually, looking for a motel."

"Looking for a motel? We won't have that!"

Within a half hour, Steward was in the Frankel's house, being shown to a wood-paneled room with a bookcase stacked with books occupying an entire wall. Steward met Frankel's dark-haired wife, Penny, who came in to help with a roll-away bed brought out of the closet.

The Frankel son, Sol, the one who had been at the demonstration on Easter, was also on hand to joke with Steward about the speed of his four- month courtship.

"I'll need to be back and forth a lot," Steward said. "I'm going to try to find a job tomorrow."

"Thomas, you just do whatever you need to," Frankel replied. "We understand, believe me. Pen and I started on a shoestring ourselves."

Early the next morning, Steward was on his bike again, looking for a labor pool run by the same outfit he had worked for in Santa Barbara. The address was in Hollywood, a name that conjured up all kinds of intriguing possibilities for jobs, but he soon discovered that the part of Hollywood he was going to was on the other side of the freeway from the glitzy area known to tourists. It was a shabby area of dives and transient hotels. The sidewalks were stained with urine and littered with discarded bottles and other debris.

Steward located the office in a drab, beige-colored brick building with high, narrow windows. Following signs, he entered a back door into what appeared to be a former cafeteria, with a sign-up table on one end and about 20 men seated at cafeteria tables.

"You were doing the labor pool up in Santa Barbara?" the man asked after looking over Steward's form.

"Yes, for about two months."

"They treat you alright?"

"Yes, they did."

Steward crossed the dirty floor to an empty table, noticing that the man had picked up the phone, as if to check his information.

"Steward, your application says you're available for three weeks. Is that right?" the man asked across the room.

"Yes, it is."

"Well, I got one for you. I need someone who I can rely on to show up every day."

"You got my word," Steward replied. He got up and returned to the desk as the man waited.

"This is a part-washing job, Steward," the man informed. "Washing car parts. You know where the Lockheed plant is out in Burbank?"

"No, I don't."

"Come here and look at the map. I'll show you."

A perfect job, in terms of duration, at least, Steward thought as he headed out into the morning rush hour traffic. The bright sun had risen higher into a cloudless sky.

Within a few minutes, he left the shabby neighborhood behind. He continued up Highland Avenue through a cleaner, more modern area beside studios of the movie and record industries.

Three miles out, he saw the sprawling, fence-secured grounds of the Lockheed campus. Just off to the side of it was another sprawling complex, less technological in appearance, with acres of banged-up cars arranged in hill-like piles and a central plant with a huge vat under an overhead conveyor belt.

As Steward soon found out, the vat and the conveyor belt were two of the four main items in his workstation. The other two items were a timer

and a magnetic pincer that picked up parts.

"There's not a hell of a lot to explain about this," the supervisor told Steward. "You grab a part from over here. Move it across to the vat. Dump it in. Let it soak for 30 seconds, using the timer. Pull it out and move it across to the other pile."

There was not much to it at all, Steward agreed, and a counter on the timer, he noticed, would keep track of how many parts he completed.

"Wish I could tell you, every sixth part, you get to check out some broad's ass," the supervisor said.

"No, that's okay. I'm glad for the work."

The counter was on 67542 when Steward began. By noon he was up to 67726. At a nearby gas station, he bought juice and crackers and used a pay phone to call Kris DeSolt.

"Tom, I'm so glad you called," she chimed. "My brother John is back from Vietnam! We're having a little party for him, kind of. Tonight! By the pool! Should I try to get the car?"

"No, I'll bike out," Steward answered. "Only thing is, I don't have a change of clothes, unless I go all the way back to the Frankel's."

No problem, she insisted. The "boys" (as she called her brother and his friends) could loan him a swimming suit and clothes.

"See you tonight then!" she ended.

"Yea, for sure."

"I can hardly wait to see you!"

"I want to see you, too."

Steward hung up and called Seymour Frankel, using the work phone number Frankel had given him.

"No need to worry!" Frankel yelled with the sound of printing presses behind him. "We'll leave the key where I showed you."

At 5 P.M., Steward was off again on his yellow bike, leaning on the handlebars as he raced up Highland Avenue through Burbank under a blue sky and palm trees.

Kristine met him at the door, looking lovely, with her blonde hair arranged in pigtails. She pressed into him at once and pulled him aside in the hallway to give him a hug and kiss.

"I missed you," she said, "in case you didn't get the point!"

"I missed you, too," he answered.

"We've got a lot to talk over later!" she whispered in an urgent tone as she led him through the spacious, window-lined living room to the back pool. "All kinds of letters from the places we applied to!"

Outside at the pool, there was a group of about 20 people. All of them looked at once in his direction as Steward came through the door. Don and Audrey Andrews were the first to reach him with welcoming hellos and smiles. A young man in a Army swamp cap stood behind them,

waited to be introduced.

"Tom, this is my brother, John!" Kris said proudly.

"Pleased to meet you, man," the young man replied, extending his hand. "If Krissy loves you, you're fine with me."

The older brother had a confident bearing. He looked more like a hippie than like someone who had just come out of the Army. He had brown hair down to his shoulders and a Manchu style mustache with wispy hairs hanging down as over his chin line.

Kristine reminded Steward of what she had told him before, that her brother, a drummer, and a group of other soldier musicians, had formed a band in Vietnam, and had managed to get qualified as official entertainment.

"That's how I got away with this," the brother threw in, plucking his mustache. "They wanted us to look like the genuine article, so they looked the other way."

Steward then met a full contingent of his wife's friends from high school, complete with "valley girls" and male counterparts. They were all good-looking with tanned skin and long hair. They smiled and laughed as they talked about music and their shared social scene.

Three of the young men were members of the same rock band that John DeSolt had been in in Vietnam. They were introduced, with a lot of joking around, as Harlan, David, and Dana. They had all gone into the service and ended at the same time.

They had then come to L.A. together to keep the band going and to try to make it in the Hollywood recording world.

Harlan, identified as the band's lead guitarist, was a big guy with dark hair and a long, rugged face. He was part American Indian, Kristine informed. David, identified as the bass guitarist, was blond and intellectual- looking, with wire-rim glasses. The third veteran, Dana, was clean-shaven on his cheeks and around his mouth, with a full beard around his face that made him look like an Amish farmer. He was not a musician, he explained; he set up the stage effects, lights, and speakers. A fourth band member, Steve, soon introduced, played piano and keyboard. He was a boyhood friend of John's. He had not served in Vietnam. He had long hair like the others, with a clean-shaven, boyish face and a friendly, happy manner.

"Well, what do you think of all this?" Don Andrews asked Steward as they stood together, drinking beers.

"I don't know. I guess, I'm kind of wondering, how did my life ever came to this, the California scene and all," Steward responded. "I'm just a Midwestern boy at heart."

Andrews laughed. "Hey, cat, I know exactly what you mean 'cuz so am I. I been wonderin' the same damn thing for ten years."

"I'm part of it, in a way, I guess, but only because I wound up being against the war."

"The long hair does a lot," Andrews replied, his never-lit cigar in hand. "Back in the '50's, when Audrey and I were living in Taos, there was the same kind of culture out there, among the artists. But you didn't have the long hair. So there was less solidarity."

"Yea, I can imagine."

"Other side of it, though, there was easier coming and going. You had scientists, too, people working at the Taos labs. They could come into it, too, for the intellectual discussions, or whatever. It was better, in a way. It was less confining. The long hair is confining."

"Yes, I think you're right."

As the evening wound down, Steward and his fiancé retreated to the kitchen to look through the letters she had referred to earlier. In a few minutes, the situation ahead assumed a more definite shape. Two programs that Steward had hoped for most, in New Mexico and Texas, had responded with "no." Another program in West Virginia that he'd been less enthused about had replied with "yes." It involved organizing welfare recipients into "self-directed welfare rights organizations."

"I think we should take it," Kristine said. "It'll be an adventure, Tom. For me, at least! I think it'll be fun!"

Hearing that, Steward began at once to formulate in his mind what he needed to do. First thing would be a letter setting up a definite time to begin. The agency had suggested July 21. That seemed like it would work out fine. He and Kris would have two weeks to travel after getting married followed by a week in Minnesota with his parents so they could get to know her. Then they would head out to West Virginia. The program director, in her letter of acceptance, had offered to pay their air fare out. How would they get from California to Minnesota, though, Steward asked himself. The plan he had in mind was getting a drive-away car such as he and O'Rourke had driven from L.A. to Las Vegas six months before. He would start making phone calls the next day to see if he could arrange that.

Final big concern was money, Steward thought as he rode through the dark streets on his way back to the Frankel's. Thanks to not having to pay for a motel, he would be able to save, he figured, about 20 dollars a day. In three weeks, that would amount to about 300 dollars. Add to that 360 he had brought from Santa Barbara. 700 dollars by the day of his wedding, if he saved as he planned. He decided to make that his goal.

164. Steward and O'Rourke re-unite with friends from their activist past

On Monday, June 30, 1969, Bill O'Rourke arrived in California, as he had promised, to serve as best man at Tom Steward's wedding, scheduled for the next day. The former-coxswain-turned-soldier had arranged to get a free flight on an Army freight plane. He had boarded the plane at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, where he was stationed for his medic training. The plane landed at Fort Irwin, an Army training base 37 miles northeast of Barstow in the Mojave Desert.

Steward drove out by himself to pick up his old hitch hiking buddy, using the Andrews family's 1965 white Ford Fairlane four-door sedan. His fiancée, Kristine DeSolt, was busy with Audrey, Lyn, and Sandy Andrews, making o'er d'oeuvres for the next day. She and he had decided to keep away from one another right before the wedding.

From the Andrews' house in Sunland to Ft Irwin was a drive of about 120 miles. Steward left in early morning, first traveling southeast along the Golden Gate Freeway, then east along the San Bernardino Freeway to the Barstow cutoff. There he turned to the northeast into the three lanes of traffic ascending the 12-mile, curving incline from Ontario to the top of the ridge between the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains.

Near Cajon Junction, where the freeway tracked to the northwest for about eight miles, Steward looked back to metropolis extending below him as far as he could see, a patchwork pattern of human-built structures and trees from which windows of buildings glittered in a sun bright haze. His mind went back to his first sight of L.A. coming over the same mountains with O'Rourke and the hippies who had talked about "Bodhisattvas" and "being one of the cameras for the akashic record."

Thinking of that, Steward felt nostalgic for the time, only seven months before, but already seeming like the "old days," when he and Bill O'Rourke, traveling with their young hippie driver and his girlfriend in the psychedelic-colored VW bus, had ridden down the long hill in pouring rain to begin their California adventure together.

"Massive vibration"... "cheating the vibration by telling a lie," Steward said aloud, repeating some of the phrases he remembered from that day. He shook his head, thinking of all the fragments of words and ideas that had crammed into his head during his brief stay in California. He had, indeed, witnessed a "massive vibration," or something like it, at least, he acknowledged to himself, in the interaction of energy and ideas encountered in his work with the Farm Workers. It was interesting how the fragments, seemingly of their own accord, kept falling into place, in his mind, into a larger sense of the societal change happening around him. He wanted so much to gain that larger view. Soon his time in California would be over. Like O'Rourke, he would be off to a new

adventure. More fragments would be falling into place, he expected,—in West Virginia when he and Kristine got there.

From the top of the ridge, looking toward the east, Steward got his first glimpse of the sand-brown, round-shadowed Mojave Desert, wavering in heat waves. At Barstow, he left the freeway, following a two-lane highway through an arid basin dotted with bush scrub and ringed on north and east with jagged mountains. After about an half hour, he saw the fort in the distance, a conglomerate of long and low, chalk-pale, tan or white buildings, all about the same height, floating in the brown and pink landscape under a cloudless, sun-bleached sky.

A single taller building that looked like an airport control tower caught Steward's eye at once. Shapes that appeared to be airplanes could be seen there on a large flat area extending out to the edge of the base at the desert. He turned his mental focus in that direction, but he had no need to drive that far. As he drew within sight of the fort entry guard gate, a soldier in a tan uniform, who was standing there talking to the guard, grinned at him and waved.

It took a moment for Steward to recognize the clean-shaven, closely shorn soldier as his formerly curly-haired, red-bearded friend. O'Rourke was wearing a garrison cap, and only a reddish fuzz above his ears hinted at his former appearance.

As soon as Steward pulled up, O'Rourke came running across with duffel bad in one hand.

"You made it!" he cried.

"Yes, I did."

"Goddam Stewball!"

"How are you?"

"I'm fine, Stewie! I'm fine! Nice to see you!"

"Who'd' a thunk it?"

"Yea."

They spun out around from the guard point and headed back through the rolling arid landscape, talking and laughing.

O'Rourke said that he had left from the Texas base at daybreak with the plane arriving early on account of a tail wind. He had waited around the airfield for a while and then had decided to hike to the edge of the base to watch for the arrival of Steward's car.

"Well, they been treating you alright?" Steward inquired. "Oh, yea. You betcha. You'd love it, Stewie."

"How's that?"

"Up at 6 A.M. Exercises. Run four miles. Hike around in the hot sun all day."

"Wow, sounds great."

"Kind of like rowing."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Actually, not quite as intense."

"Oh, no?"

"Yea, actually, I was a mite disappointed, on that account. Wanted to really prove myself, you know."

"Well, that's what you get for being in shape."

"Yea, I guess so."

By the time they reached the freeway at Barstow, they had gone from the subject of the base camp to Steward's preparations for the wedding and the West Virginia program that Steward and his bride would be report to in less than three weeks, on July 21.

Heading back up the long hill on the eastern side, O'Rourke talked his just-begun second phase of training, at the medical training facility in Fort Sam Houston in Texas.

"And what exactly are you learning there?" Steward asked.

"Well, we've just been into it for a couple of weeks, you know," the former coxswain, growing serious, replied. "But, what they got lined up is just what you'd expect, I guess... in a combat situation. Gunshot wounds. Shock. Burns. Broken bones... you know, setting up splints...Shoulder dislocations. Even amputations, sutures. And using a stretcher, you know, setting up to get people out."

"In a helicopter?"

"Yes."

"They teach you to use weapons?"

"Oh, yea. That, too. In Vietnam, the medic is a soldier. The medic is issued a gun."

"Just a regular soldier."

"Yes."

"What kind of rifle is that anyhow, that you get?"

"Regular issue. M-16."

At the ridge of the hill, the friends stopped at a scenic overpass and looked below them toward the bottom of the hill where the freeway they were traveling on joined with another in a wide pattern of traffic. Far to the west, beyond the sprawl of buildings, the Pacific Ocean could be seen, a narrow blue-green band gleaming in sunlight below a skyline composed of successive strips of white clouds and blue sky.

"No rain today," said O'Rourke.

"No, not at all."

"Beautiful view, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"It's good to be back with you, Stewie."

"Yea, for me, too."

Their route from there followed the same street they had walked on

their first day in California. There was another twinge of nostalgia in that as they ended up, as then, at the Pasadena apartment of O'Rourke's Georgia preacher friend, Mark Chambers. O'Rourke had arranged to stay with Chambers for his planned two nights in L.A.

Chambers, with his full beard and long features, looking like a cross of a hippie and Abraham Lincoln, peered down from the open door of his apartment as Steward and O'Rourke climbed the long stairs.

"Billy, ol' boy," he pronounced in his Southern drawl. "Gol' darn! Look at what they did to you!"

O'Rourke grinned back at him. "Couldn't bear to shave off my beard so they did it for me!"

"And they took your red hair!"

"Buzzed me down to nothing."

"Ain't that the truth now!"

There was more conversation then, and later that evening the three young men were back in the apartment again as long shadows extended from the brick buildings of the theology school campus across the street. The occasion was a combined bachelor party for Steward and good luck party for O'Rourke that Mark Chambers had concocted on the spur of the moment. In attendance, besides Steward, O'Rourke, and Chambers, were the preacher's two apartment mates, the lanky, 6-4 psychology graduate student Phillip Nordel, and the square-bodied, intense, divinity doctoral student, Alan Bonnard, with his neatly-clipped short hair and frame glasses. Joining them, also, was the dark-haired Frankel son, Sol, who had driven with Steward from the Frankel house in West L.A.

It was a tame party, as might have been expected, with two divinity students present and a large, lighted cross visible just across the street at the entrance to one of the theology school buildings. The six young men sat together in the large living room around a central coffee table with music playing on a stereo system behind them. The music, from the recent, rave musical, "Hair," brought forth statements of solidarity among the young generation. The large poster on the wall (same poster as had been there seven months before when Steward and O'Rourke had first seen the apartment) showed a Chicano couple looking up from a field of lettuce with their children beside them. "VENCEREMOS," said the large banner letters, "Just Employment Conditions for All Americans." The black eagle and UFW acronym of the United Farm Workers, in the corner of the poster, brought to mind the UFW demonstration of the previous spring which the young men in the room had attended together,—and which, in fact, had been their only previous occasion together.

There was some joking around for a while as the young men recalled how Jose Terda and the Jesuit seminarian Pat Kemp had sung together

like mariachis at the campfire vigil. Later the conversation grew serious as O'Rourke described his expectations for his future duty as a medic.

"What it comes down to is this," O'Rourke said, "almost certainly we'll go to Vietnam. Say, a hundred percent on that. And almost certainly into combat operations. Say, 80 percent on that. They do have some guys in hospitals, when there's a shortage of personnel. But that's kind of a reward, or a rest, as I understand."

"Combat is actual fighting?" Sol Frankel asked.

"Actual looking for places where the VC are staked out. Lots of looking for that, as I understand, and only so much finding."

"But then again, when they find..."

"Yea, big time, yes."

There was a pause as everyone took this in.

"Then they've got guys in these other operations," O'Rourke went on, "clearing out buffer zones in the jungle."

"Clearing out buffers... How come?"

"Apparently, to make a safe zone. I don't quite understand."

"No shooting, though."

"No, there is. And mines."

"People trying to stop them?"

"Yea, as I understand." Another pause.

"One good thing I heard," O'Rourke continued, "everything is set up around helicopters, you know. You treat people just to stabilize them on the battlefield. Within minutes, usually, they're on a chopper out."

"No laying in the field waiting, like in the Civil War."

"No, none of that, usually, though sometimes, I heard, people get caught between the lines of fire... But, anyhow, one good thing, like I started to say, something like 98 percent of the wounded wind up being treated successfully."

"Meaning, the person doesn't die?" clarified Tom Steward.

"Yes."

"That is an achievement," the Georgia preacher threw in.

"Oh, yea. When you think of it, these guys are treated and on the chopper with a few minutes, like I said, then in maybe a minute or two more they're back at a field hospital getting emergency treatment, if they need it. Then, if the case is really severe, they take them back to one of the bigger hospitals. It's quite a setup."

"Sounds like it."

"Yea."

O'Rourke was left later to mull over what he had said. The prospect of being in combat, though no less scary than his original conception, had taken on a new connotation in training as he had listened to stories of medics performing heroic deeds. One medic he had heard about had gone

out three times into the no man's zone between opposing lines to treat and bring out wounded soldiers. The medic had then gone out a fourth time and had taken a round himself, receiving a mortal wound. After hearing such stories, O'Rourke had affirmed in his own mind that he wanted to prove himself capable of being brave under fire.

O'Rourke had occasion, also, in the midst of this party interaction, to reflect on Barbara Carpenter, with whom he had kept in touch through letters. In fact, coincidentally, she had been assigned to an Emergency Room (ER) Triage unit, meeting evacuation helicopters, just as he had been learning about such helicopters in his training. The odds were pretty small, though, O'Rourke had learned, of winding up in the same place as she,—that is, Can Tho,—because Vietnam was a big country, as he had realized looking at the maps all around him as he trained, and there were dozens of bases operated by the 44th Medical Brigade, the umbrella unit under which he and Carpenter would both work.

By midnight, the mood of the group had lightened once more under the influence of wine and beer. Steward and O'Rourke parted after making plans for the next morning. O'Rourke would pick up a reserved drive away car, it was agreed, and would drive the car to the Andrews' to be there for the newlyweds to drive off in after the wedding.

"Brave friend you got there," Solomon Frankel remarked as he and Steward rode back to the Frankel house.

"Yes, he is. He has become brave," Steward replied.

He was, indeed, impressed with how serious and resolute the former coxswain had become in his few months in the Army. His thoughts went back to the rooftop in Indiana, on his and O'Rourke's first hitch hiking trip together the previous summer, when a more tentative O'Rourke had talked about his plans to become an Army medic.

Lying on his bed that night, with a lamp lit beside him, Steward thought again of all that had transpired since his arrival in California. Memories of his and O'Rourke's garage home in East L.A. and the morning meetings with Jose Terda and the Filipino brothers passed through his mind. He thought of the tedious hours on the picket lines with traffic streaming past on the ever-present freeways. He thought of conversations he had had with other young people and with older people like Don Andrews and Seymour Frankel that he had never expected would be part of his life. Objects on the bookshelves and walls in the familiar room (which, he had learned, was the elder Frankel's study), reminded him of the breadth and variety of his experience. The names Darwin, Marx, Sartre, Camus, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Bonhoffer, Marcuse, and Dreiser, names he recognized from college or from his subsequent reading, were among those in view. Above the bookshelves were precisionist paintings of workers in industrial settings. Two men, a

driver and loader, stood at a loading dock in one picture. In another, three workers helped in loading a large dye on a sheet metal press.

Steward thought to himself that, from his experience in California, he had absorbed bits of knowledge all along the range displayed. He had interacted with workers such as shown in the pictures. He had learned how to get beyond his previous idealistic simplifications to the real world of the workplace. He had learned that men like Seymour Frankel carried the ideal of intellect into their daily work as energetically as many on a campus who made a living professing ideas.

[Chapter 164 notes]

165. Steward and Kristine exchange wedding vows over a pool-side fire

On Tuesday, July 1, 1969, the day of his wedding to Kris DeSolt, Tom Steward got up for the last time from the couch in the den bedroom so generously provided him by the Frankel family, then he rode for the last time on his yellow bike along the familiar route from West L.A. to the Andrew's house in Sunland.

It was a glorious morning, such as so many mornings had been in his California stay, but this was no ordinary morning, this was no ordinary day, Steward reminded himself. Before this day was over, he would be a married man.

Passing the car parts lot, where he had completed his last day of work just the day before, Steward took a last, long look at the hills of junk cars, feeling satisfied that he had met his goal of saving $700. He felt his right hip pocket to confirm that his wad of money was there. It consisted of 35 twenty dollar bills neatly folded in half. He had counted them again just before leaving the Frankel's.

Other parts of his general plan had also fallen into place, Steward noted as he charged through the underpass below the Golden State Freeway. A drive-away car had been arranged, though, unfortunately, it would have to be delivered in Tucson, Arizona, about 300 miles from L.A., on the very next day. A second car with an open timeframe would be waiting in Tucson, however. Bill O'Rourke would pick up the first car about noon and would have it at the Andrew's house for packing sometime in early afternoon. In all, the newlyweds would spend about two weeks traveling to Minnesota.

They would stay in Minnesota for another two weeks before flying to Morgantown, West Virginia, on July 29.

Along Sunland Avenue, Steward charged through the familiar scene of shopping strips, gas stations, and constant traffic under the ever-present sun. Bent over the handlebars of the bike, he swung from Sunland around the corner to the shaded cul-de-sac leading to the vine-covered yard of the Andrew's residence.

Without knocking, he went in. Hearing voices in the kitchen, he cut across the spacious, white-walled living room past the tall windows beside the pool to the kitchen on the far side of the house.

There, too, tall windows looked out to the palm trees and vinelike flowers around the pool. Audrey Andrews was sitting at the kitchen table, talking to her youngest daughter, Sandra, who was poised on one extended foot in a ballet position. Both smiled brightly when Steward entered the room. It was a cheerful scene with Audrey's statuettes from New Zealand set out on the counter and the sun dappled yellow curtains moving in the gentle breeze of an open window.

"Well, here he is!" said Audrey.

"You look really handsome!" said the girl.

"Well, today, for once, I really hope to be."

"You won't disappoint, Tom."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"Don is out by the pool, getting things ready. Why don't you go and ask him."

"Yea, I think I will."

"Take some coffee with you?"

"Sure, I'd like that."

"Fresh brew."

Steward went out in the sunny scene of gleaming water and freshly watered flowers. Don Andrews was back in the far corner of the yard, on the back side of the pool, where there was a pump house hidden in tall flowers and trees.

"Hey, here's the man of the hour!" said Don, extending his hand for a handshake.

In deference to the event, the congenial artist was relatively dressed up, for him, in Bermuda shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, with his usual unlit cigar in his mouth.

Steward took the extended hand, smiling.

"How you holding out, man?" Andrews said.

"Pretty good, I guess."

"Big day."

"Yes, it is."

"No second thoughts, huh?"

"No, none at all."

"I think you're getting a pretty good deal."

"Yea, I do, too."

Steward set about working beside the older man, whom he had come to like a great deal. Together they carried some chairs from in front of the pool, where standing room was needed for the brief ceremony planned by an outdoor fire, to the back of the pool, where there would be an outdoor reception and poolside buffet.

"And tonight you've be off for Arizona, huh?" Andrews said as they worked.

"Yes, that's the plan."

"I envy you, man. It sounds like a great time."

"Yes, I think it will be."

"Nothing like traveling."

"Yes, I know."

"I was thinking about when Audrey and me got married, you know. Of course, this was in New Zealand, in Auckland there, during the war.

We weren't sure where to go, so this one cat says, try the mountains, man, the mountains are a trip. Couldn't believe it, Tom, mountains as high as the Alps. In this little country, New Zealand."

Andrews talked like that now and then, using a "beat generation" slang that apparently he had picked up during his years in the artistic community in Taos.

"Is that right?" said Steward.

"Sea level to Alps level."

"Must be unbelievable."

"Beautiful, man. You wouldn't believe it."

"Audrey must have been a beautiful bride."

"Well, yea. Not to brag, you know. But she was really about the prettiest thing I had ever seen."

"I can imagine. She still is pretty."

"Yes, she is."

Soon after, Bill O'Rourke arrived with the drive-away car, looking still a little odd to Steward in his Army buzz cut without his red beard. He came across into the pool area, flushed and smiling, with the car keys jingling in his hand.

"You're going to love this car, Stewie!" he said.

Steward went with his old rowing buddy to check out the car in the Andrews' driveway. It was a brand new, blue Ford Mustang with star-spoked wheels. It had a radio and an air conditioning system.

At about an hour before sundown, the guests began arriving. First to arrive, together, were four of Kris's "valley girl" friends, members of a social club that she and Lyn had belonged to in high school. They set at once to helping Audrey and the Andrews' daughters preparing trays of hors d'oeuvres for the poolside tables.

In quick order after that, other guests arrived: friends of the Andrews' family, Kris's parents and brothers and their girlfriends, the boys in John DeSolt's band and their girlfriends, Seymour, Solomon, and Sara Frankel, Jose Terda of the UFW, his wife Carmen, and their two daughters, Rita and Lupe, the Jesuit seminarian Pat Kampf and the Filipino "brothers." Steward had also invited Tom Barnes, his former boss at the Santa Barbara Zoo, who surprisingly had agreed to attend.

Notably absent was Steward's doctor brother Arthur and his wife Nancy. They had already left Santa Barbara on a cross-country trip with plans to wind up at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where Art would begin his two-year stint in the Army.

Steward had also invited his parents, but they had responded with excuses about how they wouldn't be able to make a trip out "on the spur of the moment." There was, obviously, more to it than that, Steward thought; they didn't like how fast things had happened; they didn't like

that the wedding would not take place in a church. He had tried to write a letter to them explaining his actions, but he had not been able to put his reasons in writing.

Despite problems on all sides with coming up with ideas for what to say, Kristine had remained determined to avoid the formal, traditional wedding words and have people ad lib their parts. She didn't want the ceremony to be "stale."

O'Rourke first heard about this as he and Steward got talking about their trip together across country the previous winter. Remembering their experience in Gallup, New Mexico, they went out to the drive away car to make sure it had a good spare tire.

"Well, the ceremony's all arranged," said Steward. "You're going to have to say a few words."

"What kind of words?" O'Rourke replied with alarm.

"Whatever you want to say."

With everyone gathered beside the pool, just before sunset, the two former teammates stood side by side by the fire as the wedding procession emerged from the living room door of the Andrews' house.

First to come through the door was the 12-year-old Sandra Andrews, beaming with the trademark Andrews' family cheer. Next came Lyn, beaming, also,. The two sisters were dressed alike in pale blue gowns. Both were holding bouquets of violets.

Tom Steward then saw his wife's wedding dress for the first time as Kristine came forth on her father's arm. It was a white gingham dress with an empress waistline, tufted shoulders, and a round neckline embroidered with lace. Her blonde hair was pulled back behind her ears with bangs on one side. She carried a bouquet of daisies.

O'Rourke's friend from Pasadena, the bearded, long-haired Georgia preacher, Mark Chambers began the ceremony with a Southern style, good ol' boy smile,—held for about 20 seconds as he looked around at the assemblage, with bible in hand.

"Well, we are gathered here to witness the marriage of our friends in Christ, Thomas Steward and Kristine DeSolt. If anybody knows a reason we should not go ahead, say it now or forever hold your peace."

The rest of the ceremony continued in a similar vein, in words that were not really original but merely a paraphrase in common language of the traditional words. The exchange of vows fell back to the traditional form, however, even including "unto death do us part."

The time then came for key people to make little speeches, starting with O'Rourke. The normally feisty, irreverent former coxswain paled as he looked out across the faces of the guests.

"Thomas, you love Kristine. Kristine, you love Thomas," he said. "That's how it is."

Everyone waited for more to follow, but O'Rourke was done. Seymour Frankel then broke the awkward silence by describing the Jewish custom of breaking a wine glass after the ceremony was completed.

"I even brought a wine glass," he said, handing the glass to the bride to general laughter.

Last to speak was Lyn Andrews, who made a bright, pretty speech, as bright and pretty as she was herself.

"Well, I tried to say it right because you deserve it right, Kris and Tom," she ended. "We all love you very much."

She then gave her best friend a long hug, with the lovely dark hair and the sparkling blonde hair closing in an embrace. A stage designed wedding could not have finished on a more pleasing scene.

"So now is it time for the glass?" Lyn asked.

"Yes, I think it is!" Kristine answered, throwing the glass down on the rocks by the fire.

There was a roar of approval. The guests crowded around the couple to say their congratulations, then broke off to the coolers stocked with wine and beer and the tables piled high with hot dogs, lunch meat, bread, salad, cut fruit, and chips.

The guests milled then around with drinks and food in their hands, dividing into several groups including the Farmworkers in one group with the Frankel's and Mark Chambers, the DeSolt parents, grandparents, and relatives in another, the DeSolt brothers and musician friends in another with their beautiful girl friends. Tom Barnes from the Santa Barbara zoo, Bill O'Rourke, and Roger DeSolt, the bride's father, wound up in another group next to a cooler stocked with beer.

"So your Tom's boss from the zoo," said O'Rourke, turning to Tom Barnes.

"Yes, this whole thing is my fault, really."

"How is that?"

"I told him to go take a flying fuck and he took me serious."

Roger DeSolt let out a hardy laugh at that. He and Barnes remained side by side, exchanging stories and laughing.

O'Rourke, seeing Jose Terda and Patrick Kampf standing with the Filipino brothers, went over to talk to them.

"Here comes the Army man," Ernesto said with a grin.

"Soldado, si," Jose threw in.

"What did they do with all that red hair?"

"Sold it for a wig, I bet."

Kampf, the seminarian, stood by stiffly, smiling with closed lips, while Terda joked and laughed with expansive gestures of face and hands. Ernesto, the "lead brother" wore a knowing, amused expression.

The other brothers said nothing at all, but seemed to be enjoying their beers.

The fire used for the ceremony burned down, replaced by flickering candles all around the pool. Steward made the rounds from one group to another, visiting the DeSolt relatives, then his ex-boss Barnes and Roger DeSolt, who were still in great spirits, then Kris's soldier brother and the brother's rock musician friends.

Later, the guests remaining gathered in the drive-away to cheer as the young couple drove away.

"Well, we're really married!" Kristine said.

"Yes, we are."

"I've never been to Arizona!"

"Neither have I."

They headed down the highway with the city lights of L.A. extending on all sides of them as far as they could see. A half moon had risen in the east, visible behind the downtown skyline when they passed near. That scene brought to mind for Tom Steward the moon above the Chicago downtown that he had seen from Patrick O'Rourke's window on his last visit there with O'Rourke's brother Bill. Who would thought then that all that had happened would transpire?

166. Newlyweds cruise out of California and break down in Arizona

Early the next morning, Tom Steward emerged from a motel in Indio, California, and scanned the view ahead in the direction of Arizona. It was a scene of irrigated lushness, with fan palms and flowers, extending to an invisible border beyond which the landscape turned brown. An orange sun was rising above the jagged horizon just to the south of a long ridge of low mountains.

Those were the Little San Bernardino Mountains, Steward noted in a road map atlas given him as a wedding present. From Indio, it was about 90 to the next major town, Blythe. From Blythe to the border it was about ten miles more; and, from there to Tucson, another 200, approximately. He and his new wife Kristine had decided to aim for arrival in Tucson in mid- afternoon.

They would then continue out into the desert, about 90 miles east of Tucson, to a resort recommended by the Andrews. After two nights at the resort, they would drive up through New Mexico to their next planned stop, at Taos, where they would deliver some of Don Andrew's paintings to a gallery run by one of Don's old friends.

Steward scanned the terrain ahead, visually following the gray line of the freeway. The line extended for a mile or so toward the still-orange sphere of the sun, then it turned out of sight behind the southern end of the same north-to-south-ranging mountains.

Steward circled the car to check each tire. He opened the trunk and lifted the floor pad to check the spare. Going around to the front of the car, he opened the hood and pulled out the dipstick to check the oil. The car was in good order, he noted to himself. And why would it not be? It was a brand new car.

Steward took a moment, also, seated inside the car, out of view of the parking lot, to withdraw his neatly folded wad of money from his hip pocket. He counted the bills. Lodging and room service the previous night had taken three of his 20 dollar bills. He still had 32 twenties, plus a ten and five, 655 dollars in total. At 60 a night, the money wouldn't go far. He would have to conserve, he warned himself. He would have to be more conscious of money than he had been in the past while, at the same time, not betraying any worry to his new wife. He could not be as contemptuous of money as he had in the past. He would have to be deliberate and save.

Returning to the motel room, he looked at once for his pretty wife and was met at once with a cheerful smile. She was already dressed, in blue jeans and a blue, tunic-style blouse, tied at the waist. Next to her on the bed was a new suitcase, also a wedding present. The suitcase was open, with her clothes and special honeymoon lingerie neatly folded inside it.

Her full, blonde hair was arranged in pigtails secured by ribbons matching her blouse in color.

"Tomorrow at the resort I'll do my hair better," she said when she saw him looking her over.

"Your hair looks beautiful!" he replied.

"You'll have to put up with my rollers."

He had learned by this time that she didn't accept every compliment at face value, especially when the compliment concerned her appearance. She was never quite convinced that she was actually as pretty as other people told her she was.

"That's okay," he said. "I won't mind."

Later, when the newlyweds exited their room a final time and locked the door, Steward looked for the sun again and saw it had risen as high as the mountains, yellow-white above the gray line of the freeway. The day was heating up fast. They turned on the air conditioning and rode along talking cheerfully as the freeway continued through a landscape of Joshua trees and monolith rocks.

With the hubbub fading behind them of the marriage, they had an opportunity, at last, to talk in length about their immediate future. The letter received the previous day, from the program director, Janis Kulas, had provided details about the program that Thomas would be working in. (with Kristine working beside him as a volunteer).

From this letter, they had learned that, in addition to serving as director of the Family Services Agency, Janis Kulas also taught classes at the university. She wrote in an expansive, fluent style, as if the words came easily and quickly, and she wrote in a friendly, familiar tone, not like a boss.

The most interesting news in the letter was that the program served two counties, one fairly urban since it contained the city of Morgantown, which in turn contained the campus of the West Virginia University.

"The second county, Preston, is a mostly rural county," Kulas wrote. "That is where you two will work and I hope will live, too."

"She does say, 'you two.'" Kristine said.

This has been a continuing issue with her, Thomas knew. She still felt bad at not being accepted as a genuine employee herself, with her own position and pay.

"Yes, she does."

"And she says she hopes we'll live there."

"Yes, she does."

"What do you think it's like?"

"Well, woods and mountains, small towns. Kind of like what I saw in North Carolina. And, with that, of course, comes rural people. But I don't think these will be people like I knew down there, and I don't think these

will be hillbilly people like you read about."

"How come?"

"Well, the people I knew were Southern. The area we're going to in West Virginia in more northern, from what I've read. People have come from countries like Germany and Poland, rather than from Celtic countries, as would be the case in Kentucky, for example."

"Celtic is Irish?"

"Yes."

The Steward's had gotten into this mode, which Thomas was aware of, and concerned about, not being sure it was a good development, of teacher and student, almost, as he was more book-learned, and, in general, wider in knowledge than she, and more articulate about it.

"Where do you think the people live," she asked, "that we're going to be going around seeing?"

"Well, these are the poorest people, you know, people on welfare. Some of them maybe live in the towns, in the worst parts of the towns, but I think a lot of them prefer to live off by themselves."

"Why do you think that is?"

"Out of shame at being poor."

"Where do you think we'll live?"

"Maybe in a small town or out like that ourselves. Might be kind of lonely, you know. Are you concerned about that?"

"Why should I be lonely? I got you!"

Steward wondered, though, how she would fare without the excitement and friends she had gotten used to in her "Valley Girl" life. How would she fare without her beloved California sun? He knew from North Carolina that the mountains could be grim in cloudy weather. And would he be able to find a nice place for the both of them to live?

She seemed to have no doubt that he would work everything out, but he would be making the same salary as he had in VISTA, and she would get no salary at all. He would not be able to live in a cabin without hot water as he had in VISTA.

About 10 A.M., they reached Blythe, California. Four hours later, they were already in Tucson, driving through an industrial section of the city. The street was lined with warehouses, car dealerships, truck lots, and occasional lunch counters and bars. The only trees were cactuses and other low desert plants on boulevards of sand and rock.

The drive away agency turned out to be located in what appeared to be a former used car lot with an office smaller than a single garage and a randomly organized crowded lot where red and blue flags were still flying on a cord strung between light poles.

The man on duty—bald, frowning, and perspiring in the oppressive heat—looked at the papers Steward placed on the counter as if trying to

make out what they said.

"You supposed to pick up another car here?"

"Yes."

"Who told you that?"

"The guy at the other agency, in L.A."

The man made a few phone calls as the newlyweds waited patiently in the oppressive office. The office was all windows looking out to another car lot and a soda-bottling factory on the other side of the street.

"You talking about that white Olds?" the man said in the phone. "Is that the one they just brought back?"

"Follow me," he said when he got off the phone.

Steward followed while Kristine waited with the luggage outside the other car. From a hundred or so feet away, Steward saw the car sitting by itself and at once thought to himself that this was no brand new car like the first one. It was a huge, four-door sedan with some scratches on the side, near the left rear tire.

"Well, we'll have plenty of room," said Kristine when Steward drove up beside the car to transfer the luggage.

Under the hot sun, Steward repeated the ritual he had followed in Indio, checking the tires, the spare, the oil,—this time with less convincing results.

"Everything's fine," said the man. "You don't need to worry. We just gave it a thorough check ourselves."

"Why is this car being transferred?" Steward asked. "Big auction, some place in St. Paul."

This car was not being transferred because someone wanted to keep it, in other words, Steward thought to himself.

"They might have a thousand cars up there," the man said

"Wow. That's something."

"Good place to find a deal."

"Yea, I can imagine."

Within an hour, they were on the road again after transferring all the luggage and stopping at a store to restock the cooler. With the air conditioning at full blast, they headed out of town on a two-lane highway, leaving the drab neighborhood behind. A beautiful desert view loomed in the distance. They would make the resort just in time for supper, then they would go for an evening swim in the open-air pool the Andrews had told them about.

Kristine opened the cooler and made sandwiches as they sat happily talking. Her buoyant mood had persisted even through the small ordeal of waiting in the hot sun for the attendant to arrange the car.

Passing through a little town called Independence with a baseball field and water tower and not much more, they continued into the desert

beyond where a sign soon alerted them that the next service exit was 30 miles ahead.

About 15 miles ahead, Thomas noticed something that brought him to a state of alarm. The indictor needle on the engine heat meter was rising steadily toward the H (high temperature) side of the range. He slowed down a little and kept watching it, without even mentioning it to his wife. The meter did not respond to the lessened speed, however. After a few more miles, the indicator was well within the red (danger) bar at the top of the indicator and an "OVERHEAT" warning displayed.

"We've got a problem, Kris," he said.

"What's that."

He pointed to the meter.

"You think we can make it to the next exit?"

"I don't know. I'm going to slow down and try."

They turned off the air conditioner and slowed down to about 40 without any effect on the indicator. There was no traffic to be concerned with. They had seen only several cars in their entire time since leaving Tucson.

Suddenly the car bucked a few times and came to a stop. Steward tried restarting the engine but it turned over with firing.

"Wow, now we are in a jam,' Steward said.

They sat talking, seriously and calmly. They would lock the car and leave it where it was and try to hitch back into the little town they had passed through about 20 miles back. The service stop was closer, but they weren't sure what would be there. Maybe it would just be a gas station without any place to stay overnight if they had to. They would go through the luggage and take the most valuable, indispensable items with them. The rest they would leave locked in the trunk.

A truck coming going back toward Tucson was the first vehicle they saw about ten minutes later. The driver stopped and asked if they needed help.

"If you could please, we would just like a ride to the next town," Steward replied.

"Hard luck," said the driver, as they got under way.

"Yes, a little," Steward replied.

"There's a motel in the next town."

"Yea, I think I remember seeing it."

"Want me to leave you there?"

"Yea, please do."

At the motel, the young couple left the truck, shouting thanks, and stood for a moment looking across at the motel. It was a plain, one-story motel with a dozen numbered doors.

"Independence!" Kristine said cheerfully. "Maybe we can watch the

fireworks here tomorrow."

"You're not bummed out?"

"No, not at all."

With his wife secured in a motel room, Steward walked down the two block main street to the one filling station in town. Finding a tow truck there, he rode with the driver back out on the highway to the disabled car then back into town again to deposit the car at the filling station. He called collect to the car agency while the attendant looked under the hood, trying to figure out if the car could be repaired.

"This car is not going anywhere, on its own account," the attendant told the man from the car agency when he was put on the line. "Radiator is busted wide open."

"I'm arranging to have that car picked up," the man from the agency then told Steward. "I can get you another car but it won't be 'til Monday, with the 4th tomorrow," he said.

"Where would we pick it up?"

"Sorry to say, Phoenix. It's the best I can do."

"You got any ideas how we could get from here to Phoenix?"

"Greyhound bus stops there, I'm pretty sure."

Steward walked away, scheming. He and Kristine would be stranded in the little town for two more days. He asked at the café about the bus, and was directed to a schedule on the wall. A bus for Phoenix would stop on Monday morning at 8:12 A.M. The bus stop was right outside the café.

"They have fireworks here?" he asked the waitress in the café as he turned to door.

"You better believe it," the waitress answered. "Right across the street there, at the baseball field."

Steward was glad for that happy news to bring to his bride. Next evening, they were amid the crowd at the baseball field, watching as the fireworks burst overhead. On Sunday, they found some cardboard boxes and repacked the loose items for the bus trip.

Next morning, Steward was up early carrying the luggage from the motel to the cafe as Kristine waited in the parking lot to keep watch on what he had already carried. A bus trip along a two-way highway, jammed in with people speaking Spanish, with the paintings beside them in the aisle, brought them to Phoenix by noon. They used a grocery cart to port their luggage for one mile to the agency where the promised car was waiting.

"Well, I think we're going to have a life full of adventures, if this is any sign," Kristine said as they sped off in the new car, restored to the comfort of four days before.

Steward was in good spirits, too, though he was also aware that the

three days' unexpected stay in the little desert town and the subsequent bus ride had reduced his wad of money by another $150.

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PART III: CAUGHT AND TORN

167. Morris, in Takhli, Thailand, watches the Apollo 11 moon walk

An event of national interest on July 20, 1969, captured Capt. Jim Morris's attention: Cmdr. Neil Armstrong of America's Apollo 11 mission, looking like a sea diver in a space suit and shielded helmet, disembarked from the Apollo 11 landing module to become the first human being to set foot on the moon.

Morris witnessed the event live thanks to a special video feed set up in the base exchange. The landing occurred where he was,—in Takhli, Thailand,—at 9:56 A.M on July 21, twelve hours later on the Greenwich clock than the 9:56 P.M., CST, Houston time of the landing.

Morris listened with the others and gave a thumb's up gesture when Armstrong said the prescribed words: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." He sat up in his seat and nodded when Col. Edgar M. "Buzz" Aldrin Jr. planted an American flag on lunar soil.

An audience estimated at 720 million had watched the event life via a network of geosynchronous satellites positioned around the globe, Morris heard that same day. An announcer in the program that conveyed that fact compared television coverage of the moonwalk with radio coverage of the Battle of Britain in August 1940. That first-time-ever, blow-by-blow news reporting of a war had brought the nightly Nazi bombings of London into the living rooms of millions of Americans, the announcer said, preparing the American public for acceptance, a year and a half later, of the declaration of war on the Axis Powers on December 7, 1941.

"In this case, however," the announcer said, "the preparation is for something else. The preparation is for a new generation, a new sensibility, that looks to space as the next frontier."

Morris was proud to be a pilot, hearing that. He experienced an uplifting of morale such as he had not experienced since being plunged into despondency following the death of his friend, Maj. Tom Pitt, two months before.

In those two months since Pitt's death, Jim Morris had continued in his normal duties, even turning down the two weeks of time off offered by his squadron commander (though a lull had come anyhow due to recent heavy rains). He had completed his 97th mission, with only three missions left to the magic number 100, when he would be able, at last, to return home to his darling Ellen. He should have felt happy about that, he had told himself many times. But he didn't feel happy. He never felt happy anymore. He no longer went into town to the old haunts like the Vue en Rue where he had gone with Pitt. His only social outlet of any kind had been several visits to Pitt's widow, Souphana, trying to help her sort out her affairs. He had helped her arrange for benefits she had coming from the Air Force for herself and for her and Pitt's child. She

was in a worse state mentally, Morris had observed, than he was himself.

That night, about a half hour after midnight, with the moon landing still in his thoughts, Morris headed back to the base exchange, along a sunset-colored path pooled with the runoff of a downpour just ended, to listen in as the landing module took off from the moon surface to rendezvous with the orbiting mother space ship.

"TIG minus two," said a voice from the screen as Morris entered the room where a dozen or so other space enthusiasts, including both officers and enlisted men, were already gathered.

"Just in time, sir," someone said.

Morris maneuvered for a seat in the dark, watching the screen view of the long rows of computers at the control center in Houston. As he sat down, the screen view changed to a moonscape transmitted from the camera in the landing module.

"Roger," came back the voice of Aldrin, the lunar module pilot. "Guidance steering in the AGS," then, after a long pause, "Okay, master arm, on... DSKY blanks... Got that ascent card?"

Someone else said, "Yeah."

"9, 8, 7, 6, 5, Abort Stage, Engine Arm, Ascent, Proceed..."

There was a burst of static followed by some garbled words and then the audible words, "...shadow. Beautiful. 26, 36 feet per second up." Static again. "... for the pitch over... Pitch over... Very smooth. Balance couple, off... Very quiet ride... There's that one crater down there..."

"Eagle, Houston," the earth-based controller said. Eagle was the call name of the landing module. "Request manual start override."

"Roger."

"Eagle, Houston. One minute and you're looking good."

"Roger... A very quiet ride, just a little bit of slow wallowing back and forth. Not very much thruster activity."

So it went on, with many technical details, the familiar chatter of pilots back and forth that Morris was used to from his own experience. Now and then, there was a reference to a lunar landmark, as human beings, for the first time in history, took off from the moon.

"Now we've got Sabine off to our right," said Aldrin at one point, referring to the crater of that name.

"Roger."

"240 to go," Aldrin continued. "Okay. There's Ritter out there... There's Schmidt! Man, that's impressive looking, isn't it?"

"Eagle, Houston. You're looking good."

"155. Looking good. It's a pretty spectacular ride."

Observing later, on leaving the exchange, that the rain clouds had cleared, Morris scanned the dark sky, dotted with stars, looking for the moon. He found it at the height of its arc, in the middle of the sky. It was

just a sliver of a crescent, facing left and therefore waxing (as he recalled from his days in the boy scouts). In another week or so, it would be a full moon, providing an image such as the ancients had created myths about. How marvelous, Morris thought, that such an object, 6000 or so miles around, as he recalled, big enough to require four hours of travel for a spaceship to fly around it, was held there by gravity, poised in nothingness, in space.

What was the formula anyhow for the force of gravity, Morris asked himself. He struggled to remember it, his mind settling on an image of two objects counterbalanced somehow with one another. “Directly proportional to the product of their masses, indirectly proportional to the square of the distance between them.” That, as he remembered, was how the force was described. But there was another description for the same relationship, wasn’t there, from Albert Einstein? Something to do with how such objects, due to their masses, created a curvature of space and time. The objects were held together somehow within the folds of a mutually folded, shared fabric. In any case, the position of the moon with respect to earth was predictable to the extent that the moon could be counted on to be at a precise place at a given instant of time.

How marvelous, Morris thought, that human beings, specks of dust by the scale of the universe, were anchored there by that sliver of light in the sky, on the surface of the moon. After having traveled—what was it?—more than 200,000 miles. The least miscalculation could have sent them, with no hope for return, into the dark reaches of space.

His mind went back to his F-105 combat training at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, to the sendoff speech by Gen. Lawrence Moynihan that he and his fellow trainees had found so inspiring. He recalled the precision with which the general had described the Saturn rocket and the enthusiasm with which the general had talked of the adventure of being a pilot in the modern era of space exploration.

Some of Moynihan’s thoughts, meditated upon since the occasion of the speech, came back to Morris’s mind. He recalled how the general had himself talked about the force of gravity, saying that human beings had been held back from space by gravity but even more by an inability “to make the leap of faith into the sky.”

“This Saturn rocket is no Kitty Hawk,” the general had declared, as Morris recalled. He had compared the rocket to a Navy destroyer, saying it was as heavy as that. He had referred, in specific terms, to the amount of thrust. Seven and a half millions pounds, as Morris recalled. He had issued a challenge, “How would you like to ride on that?”

Love of adventure, attention to facts: those were the underpinnings of the “new sensibility” that the moon landing announcer had referred to, Morris thought. Surely, the astronauts had displayed those qualities in

their precise, technical jargon and unabashed enthusiasm for the lunar features visible on the return takeoff.

For a moment, as Morris returned along the boardwalk to his hooch, the veteran of almost a year of combat felt again the enthusiasm of those heady days of training when his then expected, not yet known for certain, tour of duty in Vietnam had loomed in the future as a test of his manhood and conviction. Soon, though, that feeling led to a memory of the evening, at Nellis AFB, when he had come upon Tom Pitt in the parking lot of the officers' club. He recalled how beleaguered Pitt had looked, how out of place he had seemed in the quiet stateside scene, as compared to the theater of war where he had seemed custom built for combat. He recalled how earnest and childlike almost the devoted pilot had seemed in giving his idealistic reasons for returning to war.

"That was the goddam weird, beautiful really, thing about Tom," Morris said to himself, "that big kid's heart inside the soldier's body, those clear, honest eyes."

He looked again up at the sky but his mind remained focused on his former friend.

"Trusting eyes, like a goddam big puppy or something," he remarked to himself, shaking his head and laughing. "It's no wonder a young woman like Vanna could fall for him."

Morris recalled the night in the Vue En Rue, just before Pitt and Souphana's marriage, when Pitt had so self-consciously,—so charmingly, really,—disclosed his hope that Vanna really loved him, that she didn't just see him as a ticket to a different kind of life. Then he recalled how Vanna had been taken aback by his own mentioning of benefits due her on account of Pitt's death. He recalled how she had blurted in her broken English, "Me don't care money. Me got no Tom."

Amazing, Morris thought, how so much of life came down to such a basic level of people loving one another and needing one another, while vast organizations, complex machines, engaged in a struggle that brought so much heartbreak on both sides of the conflict. No doubt the conflict was needed, in such an imperfect world. Still he felt so weary of it to the very bottom of his existence.

Back at the hooch, Morris pulled out his letters from Ellen, but, for some reason unknown to him, he could not bear to read them. Instead, he turned to a recent letter from Tom Steward. It was Steward's third letter since their recontact through letters six weeks before.

Morris had read one paragraph of the letter over several times. He read it over again as he sat in the little "study" by the back door, with a mixed drink in his hand.

"What unites us, Jim, is our love of democracy, our love of human dignity," the paragraph read, "of what we learned as kids that America

stands for. Those shared values are big enough to bridge the gap between us. I'm sorry if I sound like I'm standing on a soapbox. I don't mean to spout off. But I sense I can speak heart to heart to you because we both mean what we say with all our hearts. We both want with all our hearts to put our faith in America into play in our lives."

Each time Capt. Morris read these words, he did it feeling that the emotion behind them was a little too sappy and idealistic, as, from their experience together on the rowing team, years before, he knew Tom Steward would be inclined to be. Yet Morris was grateful, in his depressed state, for the expression of affection, and he also thought that, at the bottom, what Steward said was true, the one thing he and his rowing teammate shared most of all was a heartfelt love of America,—America for the best it could be, as they had both separately known it as boys, the safeguard of freedom and individual rights.

Morris poured himself another drink and drank it quickly, wanting to put himself in a stupor as soon as possible. He stared at the pile of his wife's letters, wanting to make contact with her, but feeling himself unworthy of it and unable to reach out to his remembered sense of her in his mind.

Rising from the desk, he steadied himself against his drunkenness as he drew in a deep breath. The hooch was empty at the moment. He was glad for that. Apparently, his hoochmates were still at the exchange or maybe they had gone to town.

"Well, Dad, what do you think of this pilot?" he said aloud. "Did you have any like this in the Second World War?"

Hearing the engine noise of planes on the tarmac, Morris realized that a flight scheduled tentatively the previous day had been given the "go ahead" due to the break in the weather. He went outside and stood just outside the hooch, watching the bluish white flares of the four planes as they rose from the airfield into a sky that was just starting to show the light of a new dawn.

The sliver of a moon he had looked at before had descended behind a bank of dark clouds on the western horizon, the tired captain noted. Seeing that, he turned back into the hooch, confused by the conflicting heights and depths that Apollo 11 had brought to his mind.

[Chapter 167 notes]

168. On his 98th mission, Morris goes down in northeastern Laos

Two days later, with the weather still good, Capt. James Morris was up at daybreak for his 98th flight. Per the frag order, it would take him into an area of Laos north of the Plain of Jars where Communist road crews were trying to link three existing, partially completed roads to provide an east-west highway across northern Laos. Once completed, the highway would presumably carry supplies to Communist forces engaged with American- allied Royal Lao and Hmong forces. The Communist forces were the Laotian Communist army, the Pathet Lao, and the North Vietnamese regular army, referred to often by the acronym NVA.

The roads being linked were the so-called "Chinese Road" and two Lao roads called "Route 19" and "Route 4." The Chinese Road, just completed the previous spring, led from Yunnan Province in China to the town of Muang Xay in the northwest corner of the Plain of Jars. Route 19, which passed through Dien Bien Phu, was the main NVA supply route for northern Laos. It currently ended at a depot on the Nam Ou River, 60 miles northeast of Muang Xay. Route 4 linked the NVA depot with Muang Xay, but it was a low quality road. Per intelligence reports, bridges and disconnected pieces of new road were in construction along the entire, tortuously winding course of Route 4 through the rugged, densely wooded mountains of the Phongsali and Oudumxai provinces of northern Laos.

As Morris and his fellow pilots were aware, the whole area was one that the U.S. Air Force had avoided because of reports that the new road was being heavily fortified. Air America spotters had observed batteries of 57mm anti-aircraft guns being built, along with hilltop strong points for ZPUs and 12.7mm heavy machine guns. The area had recently acquired strategic importance, however, due to being just north of the Plain of Jars, where, on July 1 (three weeks before), the Hmong general Vang Pao had finally begun his long-anticipated counter-attack against the NVA forces that had pinned him in at Muong Soui. As also anticipated, the Hmong troops, fighting with Royal Lao forces, had employed, for the first time, regular formations and conventional warfare tactics (as opposed to guerilla tactics). The attack, at the outset, had met success, with the enemy driven back, though the same rains that had halted the airwar had also halted the Hmong advance.

Jim Morris considered this as he sat, jammed in the cockpit of his F-105, waiting for his crew chief to give the sign that the arming pins on the fuselage and wings had been removed. The April briefing by Col. Estes Collard where Morris had first heard about the anticipated Hmong offensive had been the last formal Air Force function he had attended with Tom Pitt. The irony of that was not lost on Morris as he considered

the “secret war” that had taken Pitt’s life,—a war not meant to be won, as Collard had explained, a war meant to be a seesaw so as to preserve the balance of power between America, China, and the Soviet Union.

Morris’s crew chief was there in a moment, holding up the bundle of red streamers. In the distance, beyond the long, dark line of the runway, the dawn sky was red, also, above Radio Hill.

In front of Morris, the lead Thud for the flight was positioned for takeoff at the start of the mile long runway. The flight leader, Capt. Ken Walker, was just on his 18th mission. Morris had been offered the lead himself, but he had turned it down, as he had several others since Tom Pitt’s death.

“Comanche flight,” Morris heard the tower say. “You are clear for takeoff. Winds are 12 out of the east, altimeter two-one-four-seven, EPR two-seven-seven. Do you copy?”

“Roger, tower, Comanche copies,” went back the reply. “Leader has pins, canopy, lanyard.”

“Comanche Two, pins, canopy, lanyard,” Morris said.

Morris listened as the two other pilots returned the same clearance for the arming pins, the canopy, and the emergency parachute. Then came the leader’s call to bring up the engines and the thunderous response as the Pratt & Whitney engines on the planes powered up with a rush of air into the inlets on the rear aspects of the wings.

“Comanche is rolling,” he heard the flight leader say.

Five seconds later, Morris announced his own departure and pushed the throttle forward. With a bang of the afterburner, the plane shot up the dark runway between the rows of converging ground lights.

“Well, here we go, Dad,” Morris said aloud.

As always, he felt a jolt of excitement as the plane lifted off the runway and ascended into the morning sky toward the blue-white plume of the lead plane. Soon after, however, his heavy mood returned, replete with the irony of the war that made no sense and the lingering emptiness of his friend’s worthless death. How could such low feelings burden his thoughts just two days after the heights of the Apollo 11 moon landing, Morris asked himself.

At 20,000 feet, with the green landscape of Thailand below him in the long shadows of the rising sun, Morris went through his checklist. Feeling his attention had drifted, he went through it again.

Later, with the flight cruising toward its target, Morris went over the mission objective. The objective was to destroy a parking lot of dump trucks and bulldozers sighted by an Air America controller the previous day. The parking lot was located about 15 miles west of the Nam Ou River where a stretch of road was being built linking Route 4 with the end of Route 19 at the NVA depot.

Morris also took a moment to locate the target on his topographical map of the region. As he had done since his first mission, he always kept such a map in the breast pocket of his flight suit. The section of road under construction was in the Udomxai province, near a town called Muang Koua. He noted that the area was mountainous with valley floors of about 1600 foot elevation and peaks as high as 7000. The parking lot was located within a U-shaped indentation into what appeared, based on the contour lines, to be a sheer cliff.

Sam Neua, where the POW caves had been reported, was only about 50 miles to the east of the Nam Ou River, Morris noted. The whole area, extending west to east about 150 miles from Burma to North Vietnam, was a Pathet Lao stronghold (as it had been continuously since the post World War II years when the Communist forces under Prince Souphanouvong had coalesced there in the northeast provinces of Laos).

As he always did, also, Morris rehearsed mentally what he would do in face of enemy fire. SAMs and MIGs were was not likely, he knew, but he was concerned about the guns and hilltop batteries described at the pre- flight briefing. In face of those, he would "jink," he told himself, as taught in training. By that, he meant he would move the plane back and forth and up and down quickly to present an unpredictable target.

Last of all, with a half hour still remaining to target, Morris tried to seek refuge in his usual refuge, Ellen, but, as had often been the case lately, he found the connection difficult to make. In reaction to that, he thought to himself that he no longer felt himself to be such a hero or so noble in his pursuit of the war as he once had, and that that affected his ability to feel worthy of the admiration that he knew from her letters she still extended to him.

"She doesn't know the whole story," the pilot thought. "She never will. She wouldn't even be interested in knowing. All she wants is me. And I should be satisfied in being that, in being just me, whatever this war has become."

He had found himself lately talking to himself in this disparaging way, defending himself, and then not feeling really convinced by his self-defense. It was a confusing development. He knew it had to do with Pitt's death. Much in his present state of mind hinged on that, he knew. He had to come to terms with the death, he told himself again.

The local controller, Cricket, established contact with the flight about an hour from Takhli. "Comanche Flight, you are eight minutes from target. Take up a heading of two-four-two. The FAC will be at 3,000 at your one o'clock. T-39. Call sign, Raven 23. Copy?"

"Roger, copy. Comanche flight, green them up."

Armanent panel, trigger pins, gun sight, oxygen. "Comanche Two is ready," Morris reported when the final countdown was requested.

As was often the case, the attack took form and was underway in a matter of minutes. Morris swung in behind the lead plane, flown by Walker, as the four planes dove toward the parking lot of bulldozers and trucks designated as the target of the mission. As indicated on the map, the lot was located within a U-shaped indentation in a sheer cliff. The brown line of Route 4, visible from the vantage point of the cockpit, extended from the parking lot through a narrow valley, off to his right, that Morris had also noticed on the map. The trucks looked unattended at first, then some soldiers could be seen, off to one side, scurrying for the cover of the trees that lined the bottom of the cliff.

Morris followed in, laying down his 750 pound bombs while alert to the possibility of gunfire. He did not expect it, owing to the confusion of the soldiers running for cover. Then, suddenly, a muzzle flashed on his left side. He saw and sensed the blow at the same time—on the fuselage behind the left wing. He pulled back on the control stick to pull up out of danger, but the plane did not respond.

The hydraulic system had been hit, Morris assessed at once. He had no control. The plane would crash into the cliffs just ahead. There was no need to determine what to do; he had contemplated the exact circumstances many times.

“Comanche Two. Mayday. Bailing,” he said into the radio even as he pulled back the lever to eject.

In the next instant, he was flung high in the air in his pilot seat while the plane crashed in a ball of flame below him. He had cleared the cliff ahead of him, he saw. The parachute had opened. He looked below to see treetops coming up fast. His point of landing, he assessed, would be the top of the cliff. Twisting around, he saw that the cloud of smoke from his crash prevented a view of the parking lot. He could not see whether soldiers were scurrying to chase him.

Morris hardly had time to take cognizance of that before he felt his feet pushing through the topmost leaves of the dense canopy below him. It was too dense and inscrutable to see the ground. He braced to glance against a branch or hit some unknown object on the ground. Instead, he felt a jerking back.

He was dangling in mid-air, enclosed by thick-leaved branches. The chute was caught above him, he quickly assessed. Again, there was no need to analyze what to do. He cut it at once as he had decided in advance he would do in such a situation.

Released from the chute, he fell through more leaves, landing flat on his chest on a horizontal lower branch. From that, he bounced off in a half circle, struggling to get his feet below him for a hard landing. But there was no hard landing. To his surprise, he landed in water, plunging in over his head and emerging again before he had fully understood what

had happened.

He was in a slew of some kind, Morris concluded. He swam at once for the nearest dry land, just a stone's throw from where he had landed. Emerging from the water, he broke into a run through the trees. His radio and flares had likely been damaged in the landing, he thought. He flung a look back to see if his parachute was in view for someone passing on the ground. It appeared to be hidden by leaves.

First thing to do, Morris thought, was to get some distance between himself and his point of landing, in case anyone had seen him land. With that in mind, he kept running through the trees. Though on top of a ridge, he confronted a steady climb. Through a break in the trees, he saw that the ridge sloped up to a peak about a mile away. Pausing, he tried his radio. It had been damaged in his fall, as he had feared. His flares appeared to be too waterlogged for use.

For about a half minute, he listened for the sound of a chopper. He heard it, but the chopper was too far away to be hailed, considering his lack of flares. He heard human voices and gunfire, too, then he saw the chopper arcing away from him, as it rose above the trees.

Morris broke into a run again, as the chopper could be heard in the background, coming in a second time. More voices, more gunfire, the sound of the chopper arcing away again.

About a half mile up, he saw a clearing ahead of him. Reaching it, he paused, panting for air. He was at the point of a knife-shaped notch in the cliff, looking down a narrow gully that quickly grew deeper from where he stood, forming a kind of canyon in the cliff with trees on both sides. Far below, the canyon was hundreds of feet deep. It leveled off at the valley floor where a dirt road could be seen.

Morris decided at once to double-back into the canyon, though it would take him toward the location of his crash. His pursuers, if there were any, would not expect that. The high cliffs and trees would shield him from view.

Descending into the notch, he found the decline a relief after his uphill run. Within another half hour, he was at the valley floor where he determined that the road he had seen from the ridge was a narrow, rutted road apparently not often used.

Standing behind a bush by this road, Morris could see soldiers and military vehicles about a half mile away—he assumed at the parking lot. The soldiers, for no apparent reason, suddenly moved together out of view.

Taking advantage of that moment of being out of sight, he bolted across the road into the trees on the other side.

Soon later, Morris reached the top of the ridge, on the other side of the valley from the ridge where his parachute had landed. There he came

upon a table of rock about a hundred feet long and half as wide, with one side overlooking the valley floor. He crawled around the rock to that side to assess his location and discovered there a crevice in the rock forming a shallow cave. It would be a perfect place to hide, he decided. He could see the valley and points all around, including a corner of the parking lot where two damaged bulldozers were parked by the cliff.

The cave sloped downhill on one side into a fissure in the cliff, Morris observed. If it rained again, he would stay dry.

Settling back into the cave, Morris breathed in deeply. For the first time since his crash, he felt relaxed. His location commanded a vista extending from his left to his right over a distance of what looked like 15 or 20 miles, with peaks and ridges on all sides, and the valley below extending about ten miles directly in front of him. He could see the brown line of the road that he had noticed the day from the cockpit of his plane. The road ran alongside the parking lot for about a mile then bent to the right out of view behind an outgrowth of rock.

Extracting his water-soaked map from his pocket, Morris unfolded it with the utmost care and set it out on a rock inside the cave.

Late that night, it rained, a torrential rain that Morris thought would surely wash away footprints, if he had left any and if anyone was still looking for them.

[Chapter 168 notes]

169. Morris plans and executes an escape plan that goes awry

Jim Morris woke up the next morning at the first light of dawn and looked out of his hideout to see that the valley extending below his ridge was filled throughout with a cloud of fog, leveling off at about a hundred feet below his position. The fog gave the valley the appearance of a mist-covered mountain lake, with the higher elevations, within and around the fog, appearing like thickly wooded islands and outpoints of shore, edged with limestone cliffs.

The sun was still below the horizon, Morris noted, but a localized glow in the gray clouds on his left marked the spot where it would rise. That spot would be slightly south of due east, as he recalled, being, as he was, only about a hundred miles south of the Tropic of Cancer and only a month removed from the summer solstice, when the sun rose at exact due east at that latitude. Based on this, Morris adjusted his mental due-east marker about 15 degrees southward along the horizon, where he found a dent in the tree line to serve as a point of reference. Then, reaching for the map he had set out the night before to dry, he tried to pinpoint on the map the land features floating in the lake of fog.

The most prominent feature was a peak located about 30 degrees left of the dent in the tree line. Morris set an angle on that and set that off against the approximate course of Route 4, as remembered from the evening before. The peak had to be the one identified on the map as Phou Pha Tao, elevation 6240 feet, he concluded. If that was the case, there would be two other peaks, unnamed on the map, with elevations of 4285 and 5130, located to the south of the first peak. He found their silhouettes relieved against the dawn sky.

A quick check of his general location on the map confirmed what he had already known, though with less detail. The ridge he was on was about 15 miles west of the ARVN depot on the Nam Ou River at Ban Bak Pac. Looking in that direction, he could see the 5130-foot peak there, checkable by its steep southern slope, which was shown on the map as dropping from 5100 to 1630 feet in less than a half a mile. If that was the case, then the long valley he had noticed the evening before, the valley presently covered in fog, extended southwest, parallel to the river, to a town called Ban Poy Lo, about 40 miles south, where the river curved to the west. There the valley and river converged. Route 4, the road he and his flight-mates had bombed, followed the valley for about 20 miles. It then turned to the east and crossed the river at Ban Pin Mot. From there the road continued east toward Sam Neua.

Sam Neua, the Pathet Lao stronghold, site of the caves where POWs just dropped out of sight for years... If capture would come, better to be captured by the North Vietnamese, the ARVN, Morris thought. At least, with them, there was hope of some word of his status getting back home.

Even with the ARVN, though, there would be a chance of torture. Better not to think of capture at all. Better to keep focused on what he needed to do to avoid capture and get back to his own forces.

He knew already what his only possible evasion route could be. He would have to travel southwest through the valley—to get away from the depot—then across it to the river, which was about ten miles from the valley center. South was the only possible direction. North and west led to China. East led to North Vietnam. All of the territory between was in the hands of either the Pathet Lao or the ARVN.

Once to the river, he would merely float downstream. The current would be swift with the run-off of the many rains. There would be fallen trees to hang on. He would travel at night. The Nam Ou emptied into the Mekong, on the edge of the Plain of Jars. That area would likely still be in the hands of Vao Pang's army.

Much as he wanted to get going at once, Morris knew also that his best approach would be to wait for a day or two before starting. He had left no footprints. His chute was hidden in a tree. He was apparently assumed to be dead...

So his mind went on.

Later, with the fog completely cleared and the parking lot with the damaged bulldozers in view that he had noticed the previous night, Morris saw some of the trucks that had left the night before returning. Men in black pajama-like outfits piled out of them,—about half as many men as had been present the day before. Just behind was an open vehicle with a red flag and with two men in the back seat being driven by a third man in the front seat. The men in the back seat were saluted when they got out of the vehicle. They disappeared from sight for about an hour, then returned to their vehicle and were driven away.

Morris concluded that these two men had been officers of some rank. They had come to see the wreck of his plane and to evaluate the damage to the equipment and road. Less soldiers and workmen had returned because there was less equipment to work with. The small number of soldiers confirmed him in his judgment that he was indeed regarded as dead. There was no active search. Morris also felt more sure of the logic of his plan to hide two days and then move toward the river.

He spent the day planning an evasion route as he checked between the map and physical land features in view. His best route, he decided, would be to follow along the ridge that extended southeast above Route 4.

A main issue was where to cross the valley toward the river. The river was about ten miles east of Route 4. The best place to cross, he decided, was about 20 miles down Route 4 where the valley narrowed and where the map showed trees. He would need to take extreme care in crossing

the road. A peak shown on the map, Phou Pha Louong, elevation 3386 feet, could serve as a point of reference as he traveled toward the river. He would need to travel up and around that peak and along an eastward-ranging ridge to get his first view of the river, about five miles south of a village called Ban Bak Phoung.

Morris considered this, nodding, as he tracked his route visually using the land features in the distance. With the valley now clear of fog, he could see about ten miles southeast into the valley, where the brown line of Route 4 and the blue line of a creek threaded through patches of trees. Gray smoke rose in several locations that he assumed were villages located on Route 4.

A ridge to his right would be his first objective, Morris decided. There was a peak there of 3307 feet elevation with a distinctive outgrowth of rock that looked like a hammerhead stuck in the trees. To get there, he would need to descend about 1500 feet to the bottom of a narrow valley (offshoot of the larger valley) then climb up the steep slope on the other side. There was a village near the hammerhead rock and a road or trail marked by a dotted line of the map. He would need to move cautiously through that area.

The next morning was less foggy. At about the same time as on the previous day, the road crew returned—without the officers in the open car. There were only a few soldiers with them, with rifles in their hands. Apparently, the workers went each night to sleep in a nearby village and then returned in the morning.

With the workers gone each night, Morris noted, there was no one on hand in the late evening and early morning. He decided to leave his hiding place early the next morning at the first light of dawn. By the time the crew reported for work, he would be across the first narrow valley to the ridge that followed along Route 4.

Morris slept fitfully that night, waking often to look at the dark sky. Finally, hearing birds singing, he looked out to see a single, sunlit slash in a wall of gray clouds on the eastern horizon. Taking up his backpack quietly then, he emerged from his cavelike crevice in the cliff and headed into some trees on the steep slope below.

He felt relieved to be out of his cramped hiding place, springing along on the firm ground. He felt great hope that his plan would bring him success. Why should it not? The area was thick with trees. If he avoided marked trails, he could move along quickly without being seen. The total distance to the river was only about 30 miles. Surely, he could make that in one day, starting as he was at break of dawn.

Within an hour, Morris had descended from his starting point to the bottom of the first valley, crossing a narrow, rutted road, and a creek in a dense woods comprised of familiar deciduous trees like pines and oaks

and tropical trees like palms, teak, and bamboo. Along the ground were many ferns, some rising above his head.

Without pause, he continued up the other side of the valley to the hammerhead rock that he had selected as his first landmark. Reaching that, he turned to his southeast below the rock to avoid the village shown on the map on the southwest side.

Here Morris got his first full view, through fern leaves, of the long valley extending to the southwest. Below him was a village labeled on the map as Ban Lat Ko. Smoke rose from amidst tin-covered buildings and palm trees within a mish-mash pattern of irregular, bending roads. About five miles distant was the narrowing of the valley that he had chosen as his crossing point, a wedge of woods into which both the road and stream pointed. Above that, he could see Phou Pha Louong, the peak he would go around to get to the river.

He plunged ahead down into a second steep valley then up the slope again and along the ridge with the brown line of the road far below him. It was, by this time, about mid-afternoon, he gauged by the position of the sun. He had gone 20 miles already. Only ten remained to his final objective for the day, the ridge above the river.

Reaching the narrow part of the valley, where the road and creek disappeared from view below the dense canopy of trees, Morris headed down the steep slope toward the bottom. Only near the road did he run into any complication. Hearing voices, he retreated back up the hill behind some foliage and watched as party of women and children came by, laughing and gesturing back and forth. The women wore the traditional Laotian, ankle- length skirts with broad horizontal or vertical stripes. They wore pink scarves, tied under their chins, and plain, solid-color, blue or white blouses, left outside the skirts at their waists.

One woman carried a huge pile of wood, about four feet wide and three feet high, strapped to her shoulders. Another had a child on her back, supported by two scarves, one tied under the baby's bottom and around her waist, the other slung over her shoulders and tied in front of her neck like a long bow tie. The children were small. The biggest boy, who looked about six, carried a little girl on his shoulders.

In a moment, they had passed and the scene along the road was quiet again. Morris crossed the road then and continued into the safety of the woods on the other side, climbing up through a stand of trees toward the peak he had identified.

Coming around the back of the bluff, he got his first view of the Nam Ou River, far below him in a gorge between bluffs on either side. He noticed at once that the river was brown with the runoff of recent rains. Fallen trees rode the swift current as he had expected.

Coming upon a nook between rocks above the river, he planned his

next steps. He would stay where he was for the night, he decided. Early in the morning, he would go down to the river to find a branch or fallen tree to ride in. He would drag it to the water's edge then return to his hiding place until dusk when he would go down again to the tree.

Next morning Morris was up at daybreak. Descending to the river, he found a fallen tree of the type he had been imagining. It had a V-notch to hide his head and branches enough to guarantee a branch below water level to hang on to.

While dragging the tree across to the water's edge, he was startled by the appearance of tug boat pushing a single barge. It was a scene such as he could have seen back at home by the Minnesota Boat Club except a red flag flew above the cabin of the tug boat and soldiers manned guns at the bow and stern.

Before climbing back up the ridge, Morris considered the problem of food. He had eaten his last ration that morning. He decided to go without for the time being rather than to risk discovery as he tried to hunt or scrounge food.

On top the ridge, Morris managed to sleep a few hours until wakened by the sound of a second tug boat, again with a red flag and soldiers with guns. Later, he saw two flat-bottomed boats piled with vegetables moving in a southerly direction with the current.

At dusk, with a cloud of fog drifting in, he made his way down to his selected fallen tree and eased it into the dark water. He positioned his head between the branches, as he had planned, and, holding firmly on a branch just in front of him below water, he kicked silently for about 50 yards to maneuver the tree to the center of the river. There the current took hold carrying the tree along quickly between the dark forms of the high bluffs on either side.

Night had come fully in. The water had seemed cool at first but it grew more comfortable as he became more used to it. There were no boats on the river while there were other dark pieces of drift wood to make his own unremarkable. In a village with houses on stilts that he soon passed, only a few candles or lanterns burned in the silence.

He floated for many hours in a kind of half sleep, lulled by the good prospect of evading any potential captors. If he could just do the same as he presently doing, for three or four nights in a row, he would reach the Mekong River and the Plain of Jars.

Several times the river narrowed and the current became swifter. He needed to hold on more firmly then and once had to kick violently to avoid a logjam of fallen trees.

Upon seeing the first light of dawn in the sky above a high cliff on the east side of the river, Morris began to move his tree toward the shore and look for a place to hide for the coming day hours. Just as he was doing

this, however, a village came into view. He decided to drift past it before trying to land.

This village, like the previous, had tin-roofed, small houses set on stilts next to the water, but it also had sturdier houses on a rise above the water. Amidst those houses, Morris saw military trucks and an open vehicle with a small red flag.

With the sky getting lighter, Morris watched for a place to land. A bend ahead that would carry him out of view of the village, he noted. He decided to head to shore right after that. Just beyond the bend, though, the current grew swifter. Looking ahead, Morris saw a logjam that was impossible to avoid. His tree crashed into the jam while at the same time he felt himself being pulled under by the undertow of the swift water flowing under the logs.

With a spasm of exertion, Morris managed to pull himself up out of undertow and onto the logs, but, glancing to the river bank to gauge his new situation, he saw two dark-haired boys with sticks standing on the shore. They turned and ran away from the river into the woods.

Morris realized then he had two options, assuming the boys would make him known to the village. He could swim to the shore and make for the woods to hide, or he could try to find another log to set loose from the other side of the jam to drift with the current further away from the village. He decided to swim to shore and dove in.

He rose from the water to find men in uniforms approaching him with muzzles pointed in his direction. He thought then he would be shot on the spot, but someone, an officer of some kind, shouted orders from the road. The men stopped and waited.

Morris stood panting as the officer approached. The uniforms of the soldiers were of an irregular type, but the officer wore an emblem Morris had seen in training, the red lion of the Pathet Lao.

[Chapter 169 notes]

170. Newlywed Steward's happen upon the Brandt's at the boat club

Tom Steward was also standing beside a river on July 23, 1969, the day Jim Morris got captured beside the Nam Ou River in Laos. The river he was standing by was a less threatening one, familiar to him and Morris and all of his old friends from rowing. It was the Mississippi River, flowing below the Wabasha Street Bridge in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Steward had come down to the Minnesota Boat Club with his new wife, Kristine, on the evening before their planned departure for West Virginia, to show her the place that had been so much a part of his life in college. Standing on the point of the boat club island, he pointed toward the High Bridge about a mile upriver where the race course began. The traffic deck of the bridge could be seen there, above the boats in a nearby marina, but the water below the bridge could not be seen because the river curved there toward the tree-covered bluffs of the St. Paul West Side, Jim Morris's old neighborhood.

Kristine listened with a smile on her face, her hand resting on his arm. She was glad to hear any information Steward had to provide regarding his past life before he had met her.

It was a pleasant evening at the river with unusual lighting due to a bright but cloudy sky. The water was a brownish slate gray in color with reddish, rust-colored highlights where the muted light gleamed. The bluffs and buildings of downtown St. Paul, on the north side of the river, looked picturesque in the hazy light. On the veranda of the Red Garter Saloon, on the upper floor of the tan stucco boat club, people sat at tables talking and laughing. The voices brought back memories for Steward of boat club gatherings on that same veranda.

Soon a single skull came into view about a quarter mile away, just downstream from a floating marina building. Steward focused his attention on the oarsman, seeing something familiar in the ram-rod straight upswing of the upper body at the end of each stroke. He noted the long hair and angry set of the head.

"Hey, Kris, I know this guy!" he exclaimed. "This is Matt Brandt. You know, I told you about him."

"The doubles partner."

"Yes."

"The gruff one."

"Yes."

"Let's go say hello!"

"Yea, c'mon."

They headed back across the island through the ankle-deep grass to the concrete embankment above the boat dock, reaching the ramp just as the shell shot by.

Brandt glanced toward the boat club then, and saw Steward bouncing down the tottery ramp with Kristine a few steps behind him. He was aware, from Steward's letters, that Steward had gotten married, but, up to this point, he had had no idea what Steward's wife would look like. She struck him at once as not only pretty but pretty in a refined, stylish manner. With her blonde hair tossed in the wind and her shapely figure displayed in a red mini-skirt and blue halter, she looked like an actress or model. And, in some weird way, she looked like she belonged beside Steward. Her presence beside him brought out an All-American quality in his clean-cut good looks.

Brandt completed a final power ten and feathered off the oars as a mood of quiet amusement settled in his mind. What a crazy development, he was thinking. After an entire college career, almost, without ever having a date with anyone, Steward had returned now with this girl who could only be described as an absolute stunner.

He glanced again at the dock as he brought the boat around with one oar. Steward and Kristine were standing there together, both smiling in his direction.

"Goddam Stewball!" he called out as he brought the shell in toward the floating dock. "I thought I told you last time, we don't want you hanging around here breaking oars."

"Matthew! I didn't know you were home!" Steward replied in his typical flat-footed manner, unable to come up with a humorous reply.

"I tried to keep it secret."

"Well, now I know."

Brandt looked at once at Kristine when Steward caught hold of the gunnel.

"Who's the pretty lady?" he said.

"Matthew, this is my wife, Kristine."

The new Mrs. Steward had been standing in the background, her face set in an amiable expression, as her husband and Brandt exchanged their give-and-take. She came forward with a smile and extended hand to meet someone she was sure she would like, her husband's friend.

"Pleased to meet you!" she chimed.

"Pleased to meet you, too."

Brandt took a good look at Kristine then, for the first time, and he was at once impressed with the same contrast of girlish face and poised, womanly bearing that had impressed Steward in Steward's first talk with Kristine on the bus from Santa Barbara to L.A.

With Steward holding the shell steady, Brandt placed a foot on the dock and swung up from the shell, bringing it in a single motion to arms length overhead. Water from the shell bottom rained down on his head.

"Well, now you don't need to take a shower!" said Kristine.

"Except for all the toilets that got flushed in the river," Brandt replied.

"Matthew, please take a shower. We insist," she replied, placing her hand on his arm.

She said this in such a confident voice with such an air of a woman used to being a friend of men, that Brandt found it interesting. She was really very attractive, he thought. How had ol' Stewball wound up with someone like this?

"Well, hey, why don't you hang around a little bit," Brandt said. "We can go find Mary and have a few drinks at the Garter."

"Mary's down here, too?"

"Yea, she went up for a walk on Harriet Island."

"Hey, that sounds great," said Steward.

"What do you think, Kris?"

"I'd love to!"

"Okay," said Brandt. "Two minute shower and I'll be right with you. We can walk up and find Mary."

Soon they were underway, with Matt Brandt having changed into his customary baggy tan workpants, oversized T-shirt not tucked in his pants, and brown loafers with no socks. To Tom Steward, he looked like the old, tanned, "lean and mean" Matt, except for the long hair and goatee, which created an interesting tension between his old tough guy image and this new image which suggested an intellectual or artist.

"How long you been around?" Steward asked Brandt as they headed out from the boat club toward the one-lane bridge that connected the island to the mainland.

"Been here all summer," the former doubles partner replied, falling into a familiar pattern of interaction with this person from his past who he had spent so much time with as to know him almost like a member of his own family (while in a relationship never explicitly defined, from either side, as a friendship).

"Is that right?"

"Yes. Out at my folks' house."

"Wish I had known."

"Well, we'll make up for some of it tonight."

"Yea, I'd like that, too."

Kristine Steward walked between the two men with a light, feminine movement, following their conversation with her lovely blue eyes. Matthew was aware of her as a pleasant presence. She seemed to have no desire to put herself forward as an object of interest or to convey any information about herself. She maintained an upbeat expression, smiling or laughing when the banter took a humorous turn.

Their route took them over the little bridge, where the river water

eddied around a logjam complete with tires, plastic bottles, and some kind of black foam, to a road on the shore side of the bridge that fronted the river. Turning to the right, they continued along a sidewalk beside a chain link fence overgrown with grape vines.

Through the flickering leaves of the cottonwood trees on the bank below, they could see the water streaming down between the boats in the marina and a section of the riverfront just west of downtown. There was a barge dock there, with a barge moored in front of it. Railroad tracks, a junk yard, houses, brick apartment buildings, and other city structures, plus visible sections of city streets, with cars and trucks moving along them, rose on an incline toward the green dome of the Cathedral on a hilltop behind them.

Mary Brandt soon came into view, recognizable at once by her thick, black hair. She was dressed in blue jeans, a Navy blue T-shirt, and the brown leather, ankle-high boots that she always wore hiking. Even in her gait, from a distance, there was an air of no nonsense about her. Soon the face could be seen, the strong, intelligent face with the alert dark eyes below the Kass family trademark, the straight dark eyebrows.

Mary was lost in thought, apparently, and did not at first see her husband and the Steward's walking toward her. Seeing them a moment later, she waved and came toward them with a more buoyant stride.

She, too, as had her husband, made the connection at once that the woman with Steward was his new wife. The glamorous look was not as much of a surprise to her as it had been to Matthew. She had extrapolated an image similar to the person before her from the details of Steward's letters. Even so, she was impressed. The young woman before her was nothing less than gorgeous, and the face at first sight was so young, so fresh, so marked with good will.

Mary also noticed, as she drew closer, that Kristine's good looks were at least partly the result of a strong effort. The strong effort was evident in large curls obviously the result of curlers, in eyes carefully lined with mascara, and in the long eyelashes, not natural but carefully pasted on. Other women with beliefs such as Mary had come to have, by this time, might have seen this attention to looks in a critical light, but Mary saw in it similarities with her sister Ellen, and that at once disposed her well toward Kristine Steward.

For her part, Kristine was as unreservedly and innocently disposed toward liking Mary Brandt as she had been disposed toward liking Matthew, based solely on her husband's glowing reports about them. When introduced, she beamed with delight. "I'm so pleased to meet you, Mary!" she exclaimed with complete sincerity. "I've heard so much about you!"

"Well, I'm pleased to meet you, too," Mary replied good-naturedly.

"Did you drive across country?"

"Yes, we did! We had a wonderful time!"

Facts about the trip, as a comfortable first topic, followed as the couples returned to the boat club. Kristine did most of the talking, with a rapid "Valley girl" delivery. The others listened, amused as much by the California accent as by the information conveyed. There were details about the car breakdown in the desert, the three-day forced stay in the desert town (which Kristine presented as interesting and fun), and the stop at Taos to deliver Don Andrew's paintings.

There, in some allusions to the Andrew's, Kristine touched on the world of music, movies, dance, and art that she had been part of in L.A., but she didn't seem to do it in a way to impress.

"Well, I've heard so much about your activities," she said to Mary in what seemed a deliberate effort to keep the attention off of herself. "You were on the freedom walk in Mississippi, weren't you?"

"Yes," Mary replied, and the conversation turned in that direction and remained there for some time.

Within an hour or two, as the couples sat on the veranda of the Red Garter, overlooking the river, much had been established in their mode of dealing with one another. There was a mutual feeling that the two couples clicked with one another and enjoyed one another. Steward, as part of this interaction, was a more interesting person. The women got along well with one another, with Mary soon learning that Kristine knew little about the intellectual and feminist subjects she mentioned, but was eager to learn about them. Mary liked Kristine's intriguing mix of qualities. Kristine was glamorous, savvy, sexy, bold, proud of her good looks, while, at the same time, girlish, naïve almost, generous-hearted in her comments about other people, and humble, even self-conscious, in her occasional asides about her part in various events.

Most touchingly for Mary, though, Kristine seemed to be looking for an older sister, a confidante and friend, and she acted throughout their conversation as if Mary could be that person. Mary felt a true sympathy growing for the younger woman. She liked her very much.

"What would you all think of this?" Matthew said as they left the bar together after night-fall and stood for a final few exchanges in the boat club parking lot. "After you guys get settled in West Virginia, give us a call, come down for a little R&R in D.C."

"You'd really want us to?" said Tom Steward.

"Yes, we would. Very much," Mary threw in. "It would be a real treat for us." She nodded to Kristine. "We mean it. Come on down. Stay a whole week!"

"I'd love to!" returned Kristine.

"Looks like it's a deal then," said Matthew.

"All right," said Tom.

"No need to be formal. Just drop us a line or give us a call or whatever. Say 'we'll be there tomorrow.'"

"All right."

"Yes, the way our schedules are, we can adjust around them," Mary explained. "There's a lot we could do. Really, you will just love it, Krissy. There's so much to see."

They parted soon later, after exchanging addresses with a feeling all around that something had been started between them that they all wanted to continue.

171. Steward's land in West Virginia and meet the project personnel

The following morning, Thomas and Kristine Steward stood beside the driveway of the Steward family home, checking their luggage before leaving for the airport. Steward's mother, teenage sister, and 12-year-old brother came out for hugs, then the newlyweds were under way in the family station wagon, with the father, Joseph Steward, driving.

Throughout the week of family dinners and events with relatives to introduce the young wife to the relationship, the elder Steward had not displayed his anxious side. He had been optimistic and gregarious in his outward behavior. Now, having been a success in that, by all accounts, he displayed for the first time his underlying anxiety as he approached the airport with his son and daughter-in-law riding in the front seat beside him. He tapped on the dashboard and knocked his fist on it in a rapid motion.

"Well, Tom, you know we're proud of you," he said.

"Yes, I do, Dad. Thanks," the son replied.

"And, Kristine, you know we're proud of you, too."

"Thank you."

"Proud to have such a pretty girl in the family."

"Well, I don't know about that. But thank you very much."

That was the extent of it, but the look that accompanied the final handshake conveyed the rest. It was an exhausted look that said, "Well, I did my best. I know it wasn't good enough." It said another family event had dropped into time, not to be recovered. It was the look of loss of a son, seeming out of proportion and too intense, that young Steward had seen before on his several departures from Minnesota.

Later, the newlyweds, with their faces side by side, pressing on one another, watched out the plane window as it lifted off the runway and rose above the terminal buildings and then the backwater swamps of the Minnesota River. The Minneapolis downtown skyline could be seen behind them briefly, succeeded soon by the regular green fields and irregular blue shapes of the lake-covered Minnesota farmland.

With the plane droning on to the next phase of his new life as a married man, Tom Steward had a moment to collect his thoughts with respect to his new wife. In general, he felt that things were going well. He and she were getting along well. The mundane details they had been compelled to go through together had not lessened the intensity of their affection. Sex had gone well, as far as he knew. Even so, practical problems loomed ahead such as he had not encountered before. The first problem would be finding a place to stay. He would not be able to be as disregardful of his surroundings as he had been when single. There would be an immediate problem of money. His salary would only be 400

hundred dollars a month, with Kris receiving no salary or benefits at all, though she would work full time as a volunteer. Four hundred dollars was just a little more than he had earned as a VISTA, and he had had trouble, on that amount, just meeting his own expenses. Kris never expressed any concern about money, she insisted that she was not materialistic so she didn't care, but he knew that she was used to living in nice places and having her material needs met.

There was a moment, too, to talk with Kristine about their future housing situation, as they had learned of it from their most recent letter from Janis Kulas, their future boss. They would live temporarily with Kulas and the woman who shared a house with her, also named Janis, Janis Wolfe, a professor of social work at the university. The house they shared was a farmhouse about five miles outside of Morgantown. Kulas had suggested, in the same letter, that the young couple could maybe find an apartment in Morgantown for their first six weeks or so since many of the apartments were vacant there that students would return to in the fall.

The fall term began on Tuesday, September 2, just after the Labor Day weekend. The time period would correspond with the time that the Steward's would be broken in in Morgantown. In fall, they would move up to Preston County, which they had been told was mostly rural.

"I think it will be good to live in town for a while," Steward said to Kristine. "It will give us a chance to get adjusted. There ought to be some restaurants and places where we could go."

"Yes," Kristine replied thoughtfully. "You don't have to worry about me, though, Tom. I won't get lonely. I promise."

"All right."

After a two-hour flight, the Steward's landed at O'Hare Field in Chicago, where there was a transfer that took them to the other side of the immense terminal. Then came a three-hour flight to Pittsburgh, then a short ride from there to Morgantown through turbulent air that sent the bags flying out from the overhead compartments. A long, trying day, but they were still side by side with faces pressing together against the window when Morgantown came into view.

Their first sight of it, as the plane broke through the clouds, was of a collection of buildings occupying both sides of a winding river. The university campus, with its football stadium, was an obvious landmark, on the opposite side of the river from their point of view. Adjacent to that, on a bend of the river that projected back toward them, was what appeared to be a downtown area of about a dozen or so city blocks with buildings mostly of brick construction. A reddish-brown trestle bridge spanned the river toward a less densely built-up area where there were more brick buildings and roofs of houses amidst trees.

"Well, here at last!" Kris said, looking out of the window to see who

would be on hand from the project to pick them up.

At a simple building, about the size of a small school, with planes parked beside it, a group of people waited for the passengers to disembark from the plane. Among these people was a young black man who appeared to be dressed in a deliberately provocative feminine manner. He was wearing makeup, jewelry, and a lavender pants suit.

As the Steward's came down the steps to the tarmac, this man came toward them.

"Well, you were the only young couple on the plane, so I am laying my bets you are Tom and Kris," he said.

"Yes, we are."

"I said you would be darling and I was right."

"And who are you?" asked Kris, extending her hand.

"My name is Herbie, Herbie Franklin. One of the three workers here in Mongahalia County. Mong-ga-hale, we call it. We've all been invited out for a pot-luck supper to meet you. At her place, her farm. And it's a delightful farm, they tell me. I'm not much of a farmer myself."

For a moment, the young couple were left alone as they stood by their luggage while Franklin went for his car.

"Well, what do you make of him?" Kristine asked.

"Unexpected."

"Precisely, yes."

"Does it bother you?"

"No. I'm just glad it's not some staid old program."

Soon they were on their way and the scene quickly changed from the quaint city streets of Morgantown to a rural setting of farms nestled in wooded hills.

Meanwhile, Kristine talked pleasantly with Herbie, asking him about the project and how long he had worked on it. He said he had just started a couple of months before. He had been offered the job after Janis Kulas had seen him down at the welfare office arguing in behalf of his neighbor who had run into some problem getting her payments.

Much of the information he put forth the Steward's had already been informed of, but they listened intently, glad to hear it with the slightly different interpretation that Franklin gave it. Kulas liked people who would "stand up for their rights," Herbie said.

"Is she that way herself?" Kristine asked.

"Oh, as you will see, she is oh so polite, oh so quiet by nature," the young man replied. "So I don't think it just comes out. But she can make herself do it if she has to."

A rutted, dirt road about five miles out led around a stand of pine trees than down a hill to a white and green farmhouse that looked to be in a state of renovation or repair. There were building materials in the yard

and a sidewall was open with a piece of tarp hanging over it to keep out the rain.

There were about a half dozen or so cars parked in the yard and some people in the yard holding cups or bottles.

Janis Kulas came out of the front door of the house to greet her new workers as soon as the car appeared above the house on the hill. From a distance, she appeared to be a middle-aged person of average height and weight. She had short brown hair and was dressed in blue jeans, a plain purple sweater, and white sneakers.

She came forward at once when the car entered the yard and stood smiling toward the car.

"Welcome to West Virginia," she said in a pleasant voice as the

Stewards emerged from the car. "Welcome, welcome." "Thank you," the Steward's replied in unison.

"Well, Herbie said you were a good looking couple, and I see he has not exaggerated," she said. "Of course, as you can see, Herbie is the very model of understatement."

Here, when Kulas spoke, Franklin's description of her as quiet but "able to make herself do it" at once made sense. She spoke with a slight lisp and with what seemed an effort to minimize it in every syllable. She had made a joke that everyone had laughed at, but that seemed a product of effort, also. Her whole bearing was one of control and with it came a slight tension in her face and upper shoulders.

With Kulas leading the way, Tom and Kris Steward went around meeting the people they would work with in their new situation. First to be introduced was Dallie Thornton, a heavyset woman, about 40 years old, and quick to smile, despite having several missing teeth. She was the second worker in Monongahela County (the first being Herbie Franklin).

Then came the third, a petite but plump, sweet mannered, almost meek, coal miner's wife named "Pee Wee" Novotny. Her husband Tony was with her. He was an intense, dark-haired man, small and sallow in complexion, who said he had spent his life in the mines. John Sledger, the first worker from Preston County, was next to be introduced. He was a man of about 50 with short trimmed grayish blond hair, as meek as Mrs. Novotny, and almost completely lacking in facial expressions except for an occasional close- mouthed smile. With him was the second worker from Preston, Arlis Simpson, a pretty brunette of about 50 with a grand-daughter of about seven, who lived with her, she said, without explaining why. She seemed like she could have been a sassy waitress or bartender. She was quick to smile and wisecrack. Tom Steward would be the third official worker in Preston County.

Last to be introduced was a second Janis, Janis Wulfe, a professor in the graduate school of social work. She was large and almost virile in

appearance, stern in basic expression, but gracious and sensitive in her observations and conversation. She shared the farmhouse with Janis Kulas. They had bought the house together just three months before, moving out from a large house in Morgantown, of which there was a photograph on the refrigerator door.

"Well, I would have been right about the big house three months ago," Kristine noted.

"Yes, you would have," Tom replied.

Kris was active in her interactions with everyone, and in her assessments about them, also. She had immediately become the darling of the older women, especially Arlis Simpson, who took a liking to her at once. John Sledger seemed slightly ill at ease in talking to her, taken aback by her good looks. But Kris won him over too, before the evening was over, asking him about where he had grown up and what he had done before starting with the project. He had been a miner, he said, working in a "scab" mine, a low ceiling mine he had had to crawl in and out of and in which he had had to work on his knees.

She was proud not to have to ask him the meaning of "scab." "The union isn't so strong up there then?" she said.

"Oh no," Sledger replied, his face remaining immobile. "Preston County's a scab county. Always has been. Always will be."

That was his sole pronouncement of the evening, said with due solemnity in a mountain twang. He continued simply standing in place until Kristine was called away by Arlis to meet her grand-daughter.

"This here is my little treasure," said Arlis with a sideways smile at the girl. "Her name is Nadia. Or Nadie."

"And sometimes 'Nutty,'" said the girl.

"You said that now, not I," the grandma replied.

"Well, it's the flat truth, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is. I cannot deny."

"Pleased to meet you, Nutty."

"Pleased to meet you."

"You can call me Krissy."

"Okay, I will."

Later, as the conversation turned to Preston County and what the Steward's would do there, Tom Steward had an unpleasant surprise. He and Kris would be expected to buy a car. He had assumed there would be project-provided cars, as had been the case in his volunteer work in North Carolina.

"Everyone has personal cars," Kulas explained. "Of course, you will get mileage. We can show you how to do that. It's not as difficult as it sounds. And, of course, we can help you to find a loan, too, if you need one."

"I'd appreciate the help," he said.

"We can start on it next week."

"Okay. Thanks."

Her words on the surface were such that they could have been taken to indicate sympathy, Steward thought as Kulas spoke, but they seemed to suggest an underlying hardness, also, or an anticipation of a challenge to her authority. She seemed to be saying, this is the way it's going to be and if you don't like it you can leave.

172. Tom and Kris settle into a hillside apartment in Morgantown

The next day (which happened to be Friday and thus the last day of the work week), Tom and Kris Steward rode into Morgantown with their new boss, Janis Kulas, for their first official activity, a meeting of the combined staff and volunteers of the two counties, Monongalia and Preston, served by the project they would be working for. The purpose of the meeting, Kulas announced, was to organize for the United Fund drive, which was currently in process.

"This particular round we're preparing for now is just for the project you work in," she remarked in her soft voice, speaking slowing to carefully pronounce every "s" sound, though still some of them came out sounding like "th." "And it is a major concern. Because, you see, Family Services, our core agency, is a traditional, private agency and, as such, has fairly uncontested funding each year. But the WRO project, the project you'll be working on, is a public program, a 'War on Poverty' add-on, really, and it is more controversial for obvious reasons, teaching the poor to speak for themselves."

As she spoke, Janis Kulas also paused before and after certain key words to give them more emphasis. The words "private, "public," "poor," and "themselves" were emphasized in this way.

"How much of the project funds come from the United Fund?" Kristine asked.

"About a quarter."

"Where do the rest come from?"

"From the OEO, the Office of Economic Opportunity. Thomas is well acquainted with that, I imagine."

"Yes, I am," Steward replied with a look of assurance.

He was aware that his status in this project was quite different from the status he had had a year and a half before as a boyish volunteer beginning in Dulatown. There he had been expected to know nothing about the business of organizing the poor. Here he had been brought in as an "expert" based on the claims in his resume. For that reason, and partly also to make a good impression on his new wife, who now for the first time was seeing him at work, he had adopted a new, more confident persona.

"We received an original OEO grant for one year," Kulas continued, "and since then, we have gotten two six-month extensions. The last one has just started, you will be relieved to know. But I'm afraid we will be in the midst of proposals for that, too, within a few months."

"What would happen if the United Fund didn't come through?" Kristine asked.

"We could survive. In a bare-bones manner. But we wouldn't be able

to continue the current level of activity and staffing. Much is at stake here. It involves quite a degree of involvement from all of us."

"How is that?"

"Various people, committees, come around, this very week, in fact. And we are quite deliberate in how we present ourselves. We provide them with written material. Have them sit in on our meetings. Take them around to view our efforts. Put our best face on."

This last soft statement ended up in a quarter pivot of the stiff upper torso and a smile directed at Steward who was seated beside Kulas on the front seat. On the surface, the smile appeared to be a sincere, well-intended gesture, but it had the same forced quality as had Kulas's gestures and humor of the previous evening.

Steward noticed the strain of the smile and he noticed how detached Kulas was in presenting the news that the project could run out of funds within a few months, leaving him and Kris without an income.

He noticed, also, how his wife perked up to the talk of the need to raise funds, a reaction opposite to his own. She had indicated to him many times, directly and indirectly, how important it was for her to emerge in this setting as a capable person in her own right, especially as she was not receiving a separate salary. She regarded fund-raising as her special talent, he knew. Could it be that already she was imagining some kind of concert that she could organize as she had done for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial? He wondered how Kulas, with her stiff, cautious manner, would react to that.

In downtown Morgantown, the sun was shining brightly on the quaint streets with their brickfront buildings and flowers hung from light posts. The business day in the small city had just begun. Men in sports coats and women in casual slacks or skirts waited on street corners or moved along the sidewalks between the various places of business.

Turning onto High Street, where the agency offices were located in the heart of the downtown area, Janis Kulas pulled to a stop in front of an office supply store. A single door there, to one side of the store, had a smoked glass window on which was printed, in large black block letters, "Family Services Agency of Morgantown."

The young couple stood beside the car, looking around at the city where they would be living for at least the next six weeks, as Janis Kulas secured some items from the trunk of her car. It was a cheerful scene of clean buildings and clean sidewalks below a blue sky on a day of perfect weather. About a half mile to the north, the slight upward incline of High Street tracked abruptly up a steep hill to the campus buildings perched above the roofs of the downtown buildings.

"Well, now you will see our humble quarters," Kulas said, leading them in.

A long, straight stairway led up to a second single door, printed with the same sign. Inside, the quarters were indeed humble, consisting of just four rooms, including a reception area, a corner office, a second office occupied by a second social worker not involved with the project, and a large meeting room, about 20 by 40 feet in dimension, which Kulas identified as "the project room." The windows on the street side of the quarters looked out to the brick buildings on the other side of the street.

"Well, let me introduce you around," Kulas said. "As you will see at our meeting, we have our staff, who you've met, mostly, and we have our volunteers, who are almost like staff. It's a shame we can't hire all of them."

"What do the volunteers do?" asked Kristine.

"They advocate for other welfare recipients," Kulas replied in the formal, authoritarian tone of a professor, pausing before and after the word, "advocate." "Go with them down to the welfare office. Make sure they get a fair deal."

Jaylene Krupper, the receptionist, was first to be introduced. She was a tall, thin, pleasant college girl, about the same age as Kristine. Marlene Shotter, the second social worker at the agency, was next. She emerged from her office to shake hands and smile.

In the project room were two more people, a student intern named Dale Kuypers and a volunteer named Violeta Moss, introduced as president of the WRO group for Monongahela County.

"Well, I'm very pleased to meet you both," Violetta said on being introduced to the Steward's.

She extended her hand in a courteous greeting, but her expression was defiant, as if to convey a warning that she was a person not to be slighted. She was a large, dark black woman, a stolid, expansive form in a green dress that seemed too formal for the occasion. She had a glowering brow and sullen pinkish brown eyes that seemed ready to ignite with anger at any moment.

Dale Kuypers, the intern, seemed to have a good rapport with her, however. He was all gentleness in his manner and voice, not just with her, but with everyone.

"One thing is sure, with Violeta here, we are always sure to have a lively meeting," Kuypers remarked to Tom and Kris as the project members and volunteers began gathering in the project room for the first activity of the day, a meeting on the United Fund, as Kulas had warned.

"And why is that?" Violeta said, stirring in her chair.

"Because you always say what you think."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, and that is one reason, Violetta, why I am always glad to have you here."

"Well, thank you. If you ain't jivin'."

"I ain't jivin'," the director ended up in her formal manner, saying these words somehow as if they were within quotation marks.

Soon other staff members and volunteers arrived and made their way to the project room. First among them was Arlis Simpson, the sassy grandma who had introduced Kris to her granddaughter the previous evening. She was dressed in a burgundy sweater, arms crossed, smiling, and cracking jokes. Next came the taciturn, expressionless John Fletcher who nodded all around, sat down, and clasped his hands behind his head for a backward stretch completed with both hands raised overhead. He was dressed in a green work shirt and green slacks, short at the ankles, revealing white socks and brown, freshly-polished construction boots.

"Nadie says, when you comin' up to Kingwood?" Arlis said to Kristine.

"Within a week or so, I hope," Kristine replied brightly with a pretty smile.

"This week sometime, for sure," Kulas threw in.

Arriving soon were an assortment of staff and volunteers including the Monogahalia County workers, Herbie Franklin, Dallie Thornton, and Pee Wee Novotny. Herbie was dressed in tight yellow pants and a white linen shirt, open at the neck, with a gold chain and large medallion, different than the previous night. Dallie and Pee Wee, as on the previous evening, were dressed in house dresses and flat shoes. They could have passed as welfare recipients themselves. Pee Wee's sallow dark-haired husband Tony came in beside her, nodding hello in a dignified manner.

There were a also half dozen or so other volunteers, all of them welfare recipients who were learning to advocate for other. Three were three middle-aged women who came in together and who treated the whole event as a social occasion like a bingo game or church social.

Janis Kulas began the meeting with a preview of the agenda and from there the members went dutifully through her list of the events that would be staged for the benefit of the fund committee from the United Fund. Tony Novotny would read from his recent comments about the plight of the poor. Apparently, he had recently gained notice for this, after someone had discovered that he wrote down such comments, printing them neatly in a stiff hand with every noun capitalized.

"You will lead the meetings, of course, Violetta," Janis Kulas said. "I've written down some questions people are likely to bring up in these kind of committees and how you could answer."

"Janis, if you gonna tell me what to say, why don't you just lead the meeting yourself," Violetta flared.

"Well, I didn't mean to tell you what to say," Kulas answered.

"Seems like you want to, though."

"I was just trying to point out the pitfalls."

"Pitfalls. Shit falls. You was tryin' to tell us what to say."

"Violeta, I apologize if indeed that was what I was doing. I have every confidence in your ability to think and speak for yourself."

"Thank you."

"As you have just proven."

The last comment brought a laugh all around, with even Violeta breaking in a smile.

"Violeta," Herbie exclaimed. "You are one tough bitch and I, for one, admire you for it."

Laughter again.

"Thank you, brother, if that's sincere," Violeta said.

"It is."

"Well, there you've got it as only Herbie could tell it," Janis Kulas replied in her careful manner. "One tough bitch. And I would agree that we must all be one tough bitch or the male equivalent, but gently, gently, so as not to scare people away."

"Miss Kulas, I will be on my best behavior, I assure you. I may be a tough bitch, but I ain't a dumb bitch."

"That I know, too."

The meeting broke up after about two hours of discussion, and the Steward's were let go for the afternoon to look for a place to live. They head out with Dale Kuypers, the mild-manner intern.

Everything about Kuypers had a neat, moderate quality. He himself, with his closely trimmed brown hair and mustache, was neat and moderate in appearance. The mustache seemed to be an accommodation to the more hairy appearance of many of the people of his own age. In the fashion language of the time, it placed him in a middle area, neither conservative nor liberal, but a little of both. His car was a neat but humble light green Volkswagen bug without a trace of dirt or stickiness in the dark green dashboard and seats.

They headed out looking, as Kulas had suggested, for student apartments left vacant over the summer.

Thomas watched ahead as the car headed up through the Morgantown downtown and around the base of a hill toward a football stadium in the distance. His mind remained on the meeting just concluded. His first impression of the project was not as positive as he had hoped. The jokes about Kulas's control of the meeting seemed based in fact. She did seem to control the meeting with a strong hand, despite all her talk of poor people speaking for themselves. He had also noted that the people in the room regarded him with the same expectation of expertise as Kulas seemed to, and he had responded again with his new more manly, more confident persona. He was aware, though, that much of his success in

Dulatown, to the extent it had existed, had been due to the smallness of the community, which had allowed him to meet people naturally by just walking around, helping people with chores, and so on. No such community existed in this project. People were scattered all around, with the only "center" a downtown office. This project was not a perfect fit for his quiet personality as Dulatown had been.

On the first houses to come into view, near the stadium, FOR RENT signs were in view, but Kris, seeing a narrow, picturesque street slanting back and to the right up a hillside asked Kuypers to follow that. Near the top of it, another FOR RENT sign came into view.

"Let's ask here," she said.

Within an hour, the newlyweds had made arrangements for the next six weeks. The apartment was on the open side of a walkout basement of a two-story house. It had a private entry and windows that looked out toward the river, which was about a half mile in the distance, beyond the houses and railroad tracks at the base of the hill. The apartment was a single long room. A kitchen area with table, chairs, and appliances, occupied one end of the room, by the door. On the other end, was a "living room" area formed by a sofa, couch, coffee table, and lamps. In between was an open area with a box spring and mattress stacked against the wall. A corner bathroom and shower completed the accommodations.

That evening they went down the hill to the campus neighborhood across from the football stadium. There they found a pizza place where they had a pleasant meal talking about their new situation. After eating, they walked up the hill again together hand in hand.

Later, with his wife asleep and the prospect of a pleasant weekend ahead, Steward went outside to look at the scene below the hill. Despite his initial misgivings about the project, he felt hopeful for the future. The situation had shortcomings that he and Kris would have to overcome, but he felt confident that they could be of value to the project and have a good experience together.

173. Brandt's travel with Darren, Gail, and Jane to Woodstock concert

Two days after returning to Washington D.C., on Wednesday, August 14, 1969, Matthew Brandt ran into his friend, Darren Houghten, in the mansion-like main building of the Whitney Pratt School.

Houghten appeared to have become slightly thinner over the course of the summer. For once, there was some color in his long, refined face. The Prince Hal wispy beard and jagged hair were longer and more jagged, and the large eyes, set somehow permanently with lines that suggested sadness, glowed with genuine delight at the meeting.

"I've been looking for you to come back," Houghten exclaimed. "And I have a surprise. At least, I hope it will be a surprise."

"And what is that?"

"Two tickets, saved for you and Mary, to what will perhaps be the greatest concert of our generation."

"Oh yea? Where's that?"

"At Woodstock, man! It's been all over the news!"

Brandt had in fact seen the concert advertised the previous spring as "Three Days of Peace and Music" and a "weekend in the country." He knew it was to be held out on a farm somewhere with people camping overnight.

He had heard the farm was in the Catskills Mountains of New York in the area where musicians like Bob Dylan had taken up residence.

"Virtually everyone is going to be there," Houghten went on. "Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, Credence Clearwater, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, the Who, Crosby Stills Nash & Young, the Band, Santana. This list goes on. As I said before, it could well be the biggest concert in the history of America."

Brandt considered for a moment. The outing struck him as an opportunity for photos. If he could sell a couple to the *Washington Post*, that would go a considerable way to paying some of his expenses in starting the new year at school. In any case, he had not quite satisfied the feeling of wanderlust that his summer travels had created.

"Biggest get-together yet of the Counterculture. Of people like us! From all over America! Or from all over the East, at least."

"When is it exactly?" Brandt said.

"Well, that's a little complication. We're leaving tomorrow."

"Who's 'we'?"

Two of the women from the school, and I. I don't think you know them. Gail Martin and Jane Larue."

"Well, it's quite a temptation," Brandt remarked.

"Then, come on, my friend. Come on."

"There's the little lady, you know."

"Mary will be delighted to come, I can assure you... How about this, Matthew, we go together right now, in the van, present it to her together?"

"Sure, why not? You up for spaghetti?"

"Yes, I am. I always am. I'll spring for the wine."

They headed off together in Houghten's van.

"Just how did you get these tickets?" Brandt asked.

"Courtesy, for helping with the publicity. As director of seminars here at the school."

"You don't need to pay for ours."

"I don't intend to, my friend. I got them for free."

Mary knew something was up when she heard the two men coming up the long stairs to the apartment in an obvious good mood, cracking jokes and laughing.

She listened with a smile as they laid out their plans. They would all travel together in Houghten's van. Mary and Matthew would bring their camping gear including a couple of older, discarded, but decent sleeping bags that Gail and Jane could use.

Houghten called the two women from the apartment as he and the Brandt's sat together, listening to music, with the spaghetti and tomato sauce cooking on the stove. Plans for the trip were finalized. They would leave early the next morning, Thursday, so as to arrive at the concert in late afternoon to set up camp. The concert would not begin until 5 P.M. the next day.

Houghten was there at the appointed time. He beeped twice on the horn, and looked up to the double window on the top floor of the row house where the Brandt's lived. Mary was there, waving and pointing to the door.

Houghten opened the door to find Matthew at the top of the first flight of stairs, ready to roll down the four sleeping bags. By the time Houghten had placed the sleeping bags in the back of the van, Matt and Mary were emerging from the front door with their packs.

Introductions followed as Gail Martin and Jane Larue came around the van to shake hands with the Brandt's. Gail was a large, hearty women, not fat but sturdily built, with plain but animated features and bright, happy eyes. She was about five foot eight with shoulder-length brown hair and was dressed in blue jeans and a blue flannel shirt. Jane was small, about five foot two, with striking red hair, pretty features, and a shapely figure. She had a look of hesitance or shyness. She was dressed in a green hooded sweat shirt and cut-off blue jeans.

"Well, we're glad for the sleeping bags," Gail said. "I was about to steal some blankets from my kids."

"You have kids?" Mary asked.

"Oh, yes. Son and a daughter. And Jane has the same."

"Yes, I do," said Jane softly.

"Where are they now?"

"Staying with friends."

"Must get a little complicated."

"Oh, yes."

From DC, they head up the new interstate, I-95, following the map that Houghten had been provided by the same people who had given him the tickets. The interstate would take them 250 miles north, to just east of New York City. From there they would take another new interstate, I-87, 80 miles further north to a city called Harriman. At Harriman, they would head off on Highway 17, the historical main route from New York City to the storied western area of the Catskill Mountains. They would follow Highway 17 for 50 miles to Highway 17B which, per the map, led to the concert site about ten miles from the turnoff.

On I-87, they began noticing other young people, with long hair or otherwise identified as "alternative types," who appeared to be on their way to the festival. On Highway 17, as they wound up into the mountains through picturesque, old-fashioned-looking towns that seemed stalled in time, they saw many such young people here and there at service stations, stores, or restaurants. Occasional views ahead, as the road wound up and down the wooded mountains, revealed an unbroken procession of vehicles moving in the same direction, many markable also as belonging to young people who appeared to headed to the same destination.

"Looks like we won't lack for company, my man," Houghten remarked to Brandt, seated in the front seat next to him.

When they reached the turnoff to Highway 17B, they found traffic stalled about a mile ahead. Now it was obvious that all of the traffic was indeed connected with the festival. Youths were everywhere in sight and a group of long-haired young people was tossing a frisbee back and forth on the side of the road as they waited for the traffic to move ahead.

"Man, can you believe this?" Brandt said. "The concert is what, like 27 hours away!"

"How far away are we?" one of the women asked.

"According to the map, about nine miles."

Two hours later, after inching ahead for another seven miles, they saw people ahead of them abandoning their cars on the side of the road. The road ahead was impassable as cars were parked in the way. People were getting out with whatever gear they had and walking, a steady stream of people moving for a mile or so in the distance toward the water tower of the next little town, Bethel, which , per the map, was located about a mile from the site.

Everyone was in a happy mood, exchanging greetings in the sunshine and joking back and forth. Amid the people in view, not a single person looked older than 30 or at most 35. Many appeared to be in college, or even in high school. Children skipped along beside young parents or rode on their shoulders. Everyone was dressed in the informal, often colorful, often ragged, clothes of the counterculture. Many wore military issue khakis, Peabody coats, or similar pseudo-uniforms decorated with flags, peace signs, and white doves. Some wore T-shirts with bold-lettered sayings like “MOBILIZE NOW.”

Brandt had his camera in hand, bringing it up to his face now and then to take a picture of the people ahead as they proceeded through the logjam of parked vehicles and turned as in a single body to the right, up an intersecting road (identified by a sign as Herd Road), where someone was saying the main stage was located about a mile ahead.

Coming over a rise on the road, with Mary beside him, Matthew got his first view of the stage. It was at the bottom of a long slope, in a bowl formed by the terrain. Beyond it, on the other side of another road, was a pond and some buildings that appeared to be staff support buildings with trucks and utility vehicles parked beside them. The stage was a big platform about 50 yards wide with tall light and sound poles that looked like the masts of a ship. Workers were climbing up and down, installing wiring and equipment.

The entire slope above the stage, about a half mile by a quarter mile in dimension, was enclosed with a chain link fence. Within the fence, there were already a considerable crowd, maybe as many as 10,000 people. Some had set up tents at vantage points around the stage. There were three ticket booths near an opening in the fence on the Herd Road side, but no one appeared to be taking tickets.

“Looks like people are camping anywhere,” Matthew said.

“Oh, no. They’re not supposed to. There’s an area designated for camp sites.”

A young man hearing that, in the easy familiarity that prevailed, offered without being asked that the camp site was on the other side of Herd Road beyond a stand of trees in the distance.

“There’s a whole bunch of stuff over there,” the young man said. “Take the path down there at the bottom of the hill. Neat path with sawdust. You can’t miss it.”

The group from D.C., with Darren and Matthew in the lead, and the three women a few steps behind, continued down the hill and onto the sawdust path.

Here they found an assortment of booths and buildings set up as at a county fair. Vendor booths advertised pottery, candles, artwork, drug paraphernalia, posters, and clothes. A medical trailer, a “hippy theater,”

and a children's playground with a jungle gym made of 2x4's and a pile of hay to jump in, continued the scene. An area labeled "Movement City" on one side consisted of long tables set out with books under a banner that read "Revolutionary Literature –- Marx, Engles, Mao, Malcolm X." A large building with a sign "Food for Peace" had counters where workers were selling hot dogs and hamburgers.

Coming around from this area, the five from D.C. saw the designated camp area, a hillside with trees where hundreds of tents were already set up in a scene that looked like an encamped Civil War army. Finding an open site on the top of the hill, they set up the four-person tent that the Brandt's had brought, with the plan soon agreed upon that the men would sleep outside while the women slept inside.

With night coming in, they found standing dead wood in the woods to use for a campfire, and later sat together around the fire cooking a meal of macaroni made from dehydrated packs.

Talk of D.C. and their mutual interests there led to the topic of the children the two women had left behind for the weekend (each a son and daughter, as they had previously disclosed). Gail Martin said her son was two and her daughter was five. Jane said her son was six and her daughter was eight.

"Now how is it that a woman as young as you came to have an eight-year-old child?" Houghten asked.

"Well, I'm 25," she replied. "I got married at 17."

Her reply, as with almost everything she said, was delivered in a soft voice, at times in almost a whisper, and with always a suggestion of a lack of confidence or at least of any desire to affect an appearance of self-satisfaction.

"Seventeen! That is young!" Gail remarked.

"You wanted to get married?" asked Mary.

"Yes."

"Where is your husband now?"

"He died in Vietnam."

"Really? How was that?"

"He was a Marine. He died in Kesanh."

That brought the group to a momentary silence in the flickering light of the campfire.

"Well, you have some of your own reasons to be against the war then," Houghten said.

"Well, I don't know if I'm against the war," she replied in her gentle voice. "I never really thought it out."

Gail Martin had a different story. She said her husband had become ambitious to enter certain social circles related to business and as a result had left her behind.

"He just didn't think I was glamorous enough," she explained. "And I'm not."

"The guy needs eyes," said Mary.

"Well, I am what I am, and I like what I am," Gail answered with a laugh. "I don't need to be glamorous to be happy."

The laughter was as convincing as it always seemed to be with her. The lack of care seemed authentic. Throughout the day, she had proven to be unfailingly cheerful, not apparently as the result of a controlled mental attitude, but arising naturally. She seemed never to take herself too seriously or to get "heavy" about anything, as the current jargon described a tendency to brood on serious matters.

Houghten had his chance to talk, too, and when he did, he talked about his past few months of vacation.

"It was a wonderful summer, actually," he remarked.

"Did you get back home, up to, where is it, Concord?" Matthew asked.

"Yes, Concord. Concord, New Hampshire. I visited my mother there for about two weeks. Went to see the Shaker Village there. It was quite a nice trip. You would appreciate the construction, Matthew. I was thinking of you as I looked at it. Everything is so plainly and solidly done, as you would do it yourself."

"New Hampshire," said Matthew. "I've never been there."

"Oh, it's a beautiful place, a delightful place," Houghten replied.

"Much like your beloved Kentucky, I would imagine."

"Same woods and mountains," Mary threw in.

"Yes, and perhaps with a taste more of culture."

"Well, Houghten," said Matthew, "sometime you and me will find us some old truck and head on up there."

"Well, I've love that, truly. We don't need the old truck. We can use the van. Sometime in the autumn. The autumn is splendid."

"Okay, Darren, you got a deal."

"All of us could go, really. It would be a Woodstock reunion."

"Yes, that would be splendid," Gail Martin said.

All in all, it was an intimate time, with everyone feeling as if a new bond had been established between the two Brandt's, Houghten, and the two women who had happened to come along to the concert.

174. Woodstock brings a sense of community amidst rain and shortages

After the late talk around the campfire, and with nothing urgent to attend to, everyone slept late the next morning, on the first day of the Woodstock concert. Matthew Brandt, rising about 10, with his camera in hand, walked around to the stage and found at least twice as many people entrenched there as had been there the day before. People were streaming in along the road, breaking off toward the stage or campgrounds.

As he stood taking pictures of the crowd, he found himself within earshot of two long-haired young men, each wearing a red armband with a winged pig insignia. He had seen people with such armbands the previous day and had been told they were from a commune called the Hog Farm that had been recruited to keep order during the concert. They were a well- known group that had been followed in the national press as they migrated from their origin in the San Francisco Haight-Ashbury district to an actual hog farm in northern New Mexico.

“I heard there’s 200,000 here already,” one of the young men said to the other.

“There’s going to be problems,” the other man replied. “The food is already gone. The trucks can’t get through.”

“I heard, the musicians, either.”

“Yea, they’re stranded, too.”

Brandt understood from this that the situation was at the point of going out of control. He had observed that facilities of every kind were already overtaxed. If 200,000 were on hand already, with the concert not starting for another six hours, what would be the state of affairs once the event was in full swing?

Going back along the sawdust path, Brandt noticed long lines at the Food for Peace stand. Apparently, many people had come without supplies, expecting to buy food at the concert. The children’s playground that had looked so spruced up the day before was crowded with children shouting at one another, some in anger. The pile of hay provided for jumping was thoroughly trammeled.

Looking up toward the campsites on the hillside, he saw that more campers were moving in, filling every available spot. People were setting up tents outside the chain link fence that marked the perimeter of the designated camping area.

“This whole scene is getting claustrophobic,” he said to himself. He proceeded up the hill to his own campsite and saw that a group had sent up a tent about 20 feet away. The petite, pretty redhead, Jane Larue, was sitting outside the tent, reading a book. “Where is everyone?” he inquired.

“They went down to a play or something, at that hippie theater, down

the hill," she answered in her soft voice.

"Maybe we ought to go get them and head on over to the stage. The crowd is really piling up."

"Oh, it is?" she said.

At that, her eyes widened in what appeared to be alarm, but she was a difficult read, in that respect. Much that occurred seemed to evoke in her something like alarm, or maybe it was simply an uneasiness arising in her shyness.

Together they headed down the hill, taking some crackers and other food with them in a pack.

"We ought to head over," Brandt said to the group when he and Jane found them.

"Already? It's only 2:30."

"Place is filling up fast."

At the stage, they found a multitude of young people covering the entire slope above the stage and spilling over into the surrounding roads and fields, with some youths watching from trees by the campground. People were still approaching along Herd Road, threading between the clusters of people who were already there. There was hardly room for them to place themselves once they got down the slope without causing others to jam closer together.

Darren Houghten was busy talking to everyone who would engage him. He seemed eager to find out what everyone made of the event and what they were thinking in general. He was in an expansive mood. Now and then, he snuck a glance at Jane Larue, a lovely sight with her red hair and her cutoff jeans displaying her shapely legs. Matthew, meanwhile, occupied himself taking photos, while the three woman talked with several other women nearby.

The day was billed as a day of folk music, including such notables as folk singer Arlo Guthrie (son of the Depression-era folk singer, Woody Guthrie), the Indian guitarist Ravi Shankar, and the well-known contralto folk singer, Joan Baez. None of these performers appeared to be on hand, however.

As the 5 P.M. scheduled starting time approached, there was obvious confusion near the stage, with managers and stagehands hurrying back and forth and conferring with one another.

A Hog Farm representative, coming through the crowd, gave some new on that. "They're still back at the hotel, I heard. They're trying to get a helicopter to bring them out."

"Nobody is here at all?" someone asked.

"Oh, yea, some people are here."

"Who's here?"

"Well, for one, Richie Havens."

"All right!"

"Don't worry, folks. The show will go on!"

At 5:07 P.M., Richie Havens came forward to tumultuous applause. He had not been scheduled to be the first performer, someone else said, but he was the only one present and available to play. No one seemed greatly concerned as the smell of marihuana rose from the sea of people. Vendors passed boldly through the crowd, selling mescaline and acid. The local police were nowhere in sight. Apparently, they had given up on gaining ready access, also.

Three hours later, Havens was still playing when an Army helicopter arrived, as in a TV clip of a battle scene in Vietnam. To applause, the helicopter landed behind the stage and released its passengers, the missing performers, who came out waving.

The event then went into high gear with Guthrie, Shankar, Melanie, the Grateful Spoonful, and finally Joan Baez taking the stage as many in the crowd lit candles and sang along.

A change in weather near midnight brought distant claps of thunder with flashes of lightning striking out from an approaching thunderhead. The storm rolled in as Baez as was singing her last song of the evening, the Movement anthem, "We Shall Overcome." The storm brought lashing rain that sent some people scurrying back to tents or vehicles nearby. Those without shelter huddled under blankets or sleeping bags, waiting for the downpour to end.

The rain did not end, however. It continued with the same intensity with no sign of letting up. Soon torrents of water were tumbling down the hillsides and pools of water were accumulating in the low areas around the stage and buildings.

The D.C. group of five, too wet to make any further effort to keep dry, followed along the washed out sawdust path in a patient, still high-spirited crowd of fellow youths, proceeding a half dozen abreast from the stage to the campsites on the hill.

With the rain still pouring down, they took refuge together in the Brandt's four-person tent, sitting face to face in the dark with an Army issue wool blanket between them, covering everyone's legs.

"Well, this is unexpectedly intimate!" Houghten said.

He was squashed between Gail Martin and Jane Larue, with both of them pressing against him.

"You seem to have gotten the best of it," Mary remarked.

"Yes, I can't complain."

After a few minutes, Matthew lit a kerosene lamp, setting it by the door where the smoke could waft out of the tent. The top of the tent was a lightshow of lightning flashes. In the background, they could hear shouts of people and laughter. Matthew looked out and announced that

there was a group there in the dark, sliding down a hillside in the mud. Many people appeared to drunk or stoned.

Houghten thought of breaking out some grass, but no one suggested it so he deferred, thinking Mary would object. The conversation went ahead intensely without it, as if everyone was stoned anyhow, carried along by the ambiance of the flickering light from the lamp and the thunder and lightning outside.

The group of five, huddled together, laughing as much as talking, proceeded through a range of topics, from the music of the evening to the good fortune of being present at such a momentous event, to their common situation in D.C. and how they had each wound up there, in D.C., and had wound up where they were now, part of what was obviously such a growing, intense movement of young people seeking a new culture and a new way of acting with one another.

"For me, it has just been a matter of little steps," Jane Larue remarked in almost a whisper.

"Yes, little steps, little increments," Houghten said. "And often you're three steps ahead of where your mind is, not quite realizing yet how far you've gone."

"Yes, exactly," said Jane. "That's how it is with me."

Matthew, waking early the next morning, at once noticed that the noise of the storm had ceased. He crawled outside the tent and saw a band of clear sky in the west with the cloud cover breaking up above him.

Already they were setting up to begin the music again down on the stage, with the directions from the stage crew broadcasted by the huge speakers to everyone within the entire compound.

Grace Slick of the Jefferson Airplane was the first to speak for the first act.

"Good morning. It's a new day," she said.

With that, the roar of the crowd by the stage was projected, also, through the sound system. Apparently, many had spent the non-music night hours in the water and mud, having nowhere else to go.

Brandt walked down the hill to the fair-like row of buildings at the bottom. There, at the "hippy theater," where there was also a small pond, he came upon two young women standing together drinking coffee and talking as they looked out toward the water. They were apparently taking a break from working in the theater building, which looked as if it had been converted into a clinic. There was an ambulance and a fire emergency unit parked outside. Voices could be heard inside, some sounding panicked and desperate, others soft and consoling. One of the women, dark-haired, with a short, clipped hairdo, was dressed in a nurse's uniform. The other had long, straight blonde hair and was dressed

in blue jeans and a blue T- shirt with a Hog Farm armband on her arm.

Seeing them meet his eyes in the easy familiarity of the concert, Brandt nodded and stopped.

"What's going on here?" he queried.

"What you hear are people on bad trips," the blonde woman with Hog Farm armband responded.

Matthew saw at once that she was a serious, earnest one like his own Mary.

"What kind of bad trips?"

"Acid, mainly. Some of the stuff was bad."

"I heard people saying, watch out for the purple acid."

"Precisely."

"The whole building is filled with bad trips?"

"There's another group with cut feet, mostly, from walking barefoot over broken bottles, and some people with burnt eyes."

"Burnt eyes from what?"

"From staring at the sun."

"They were too zonked out to know it?"

"Or fascinated maybe. I don't know."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"No, not really. Thanks for asking."

Matthew had started walking away when the blonde woman by the pond called after him.

"They can use people up at the Hog Farm camp, if you'd like to help with that," she said.

"Help with what?"

"They're trying to make a big breakfast. Oatmeal or something. A lot of people are without food."

"Where is the Hog Farm camp?"

"Up in the woods there. In the thickest part, right next to the fence."

Matthew crossed into the woods and found a camp that looked like a boy scout camp with tents and makeshift buildings constructed of poles tied together with rope and roofs made of canvas tarps stretched between the poles. There was a banner strung across one of the buildings with the word SMOKE printed in large red letters between a peace symbol and another symbol that looked like a stick man or female gender symbol with an elongated circle head and a body drawn like a elongated cross.

There were people setting out grain from big bags, while others cooked the grain in large kettles above kerosene-powered stoves, mixing in molasses to form a brown cereal. One building had a counter where the cereal was being set out on paper plates. About 50 people were waiting in line for the food.

"Tell the word around for people to come to the Hog Farm," one of

the workers said.

Brandt was soon standing at one of the large kettles, mixing and stirring the cereal as instructed. When someone asked for a volunteer to convey plates of food to other parts of the camp, he volunteered and was directed to a big-wheeled cart. He pushed a cart of about 300 servings down through the woods and along the path toward the stage, wearing a red armband with the winged pig insignia. People lined up at once for the breakfasts as the unending music continued in the background.

In all, he made five trips. He heard later that the Hog Farm had handed out over 100,000 servings.

Later, when Matt brought Mary over to see the Hog Farm camp, he was asked to help with the security force for the evening performance. Mary asked to help, too, and wound up wearing an armband and working beside him, directing people to facilities when needed.

Houghten, meanwhile, managed to find an open spot in front of the stage. He, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue sat there on a blanket, smoking grass together and appearing to thoroughly enjoy the music.

The second evening brought forward the high-energy rock bands like Credence Clearwater, the Grateful Dead, Canned Heat, Santana, and Janis Joplin. In the growing darkness, the throbbing pulse of the music had a mesmeric effect on the crowd, bringing people to their feet dancing while others rocked back and forth under the influence of dope or booze. There was a shared feeling of having triumphed over the setbacks of rain and scarcity of food.

As the Brandt's stood together, they saw people on one side passing sandwiches along through the crowd, with each person taking a single bite before passing the sandwich along to the next person.

"It is quite impressive, you know," Mary noted to her husband. "In this whole thing, Matt, I haven't seen a single person act with malice or selfishness. We've shown that peace is possible in our own interactions. To me, that the greatest part of this."

That night after a performance that everyone said was the greatest they had ever witnessed, the D.C. five returned exhausted to the top of the hill to a welcome night of rest.

There was not much talking that night, though the group talked long enough to agree that they would stay through the next day and next night for the final acts on Monday morning.

[Chapter 174 notes]

175. The D.C. five decide to call themselves a "Woodstock family"

The group of five, including Matt and Mary Brandt, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue, headed back from Woodstock with a collective sense that something grand had happened, and was happening generally that they were all part of.

"It is a great flowering," Houghten said.

He seemed to have been profoundly taken by the experience. For four days, he had gone around talking and listening to people with a look of astonishment at the scale of the event and the fervor and complexity of the ideas being exchanged.

"Maybe you wax a little strongly, Darren," Brandt threw in in his flat voice.

"No, Matthew, it is!" Houghten insisted. "A great flowering of music and culture!"

The group had spent Sunday night at the camp, as they had decided. They had stayed to hear Jimi Hendrix, and had been on hand, with their gear all packed, when Hendrix had begun his inventive performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" at 10 A.M. By that time, more than half of the estimated 450,000 attendees had departed, but the remaining crowd had covered the entire, half-mile slope above the stage.

"Has any other generation ever had music like this?" Houghten asked when no one took up the theme.

"They did in their own perception, maybe," Mary replied. "They had the big bands. Our parents' generation. That was a kind of pop orchestra that never existed before, a pop orchestra that played dance music and jazz. It was new for them."

"Yes, it was," said Gail Martin in her cheerful voice.

"I suppose it was," Houghten replied. "And I don't mean to minimize that, their experience. And what they did for everyone, in World War II. But this is something different, you have to admit. This is a renaissance in music. A revolution in music such as no generation before us has had. This is a great synthesis. Starting with folk music, pure folk music like Joan Baez and Woody Guthrie. Then, with Dylan, thanks to Dylan, it becomes electric. Clearwater. The Grateful Dead. All this throbbing energy. Then bring in the blues and the old Gospel traditions. Bring in these foreign, exotic sounds such as Ravi Shankar has brought in. Hendrix has picked up on that. He took it a step further, brought it into the Western lexicon of music. What would have Beethoven or Mozart thought if they had heard music like that? Music like we heard these past days? Could it even be written out as western scales? It is beyond the scales."

They were winding down Highway 17, through little, hill-nestled

towns that had retained much of the quaintness of the days of Washington Irving. In the distance, beyond a pine-covered ridge, they could see the wooded summit of Slide Mountain.

"You know, I hate to pretend to hippie jargon," Houghten went on. "But I kept thinking about this as I was listening to the music and all I could come up with, in my head, was 'Like wow, man. Like wow.' I kept saying that, 'Like wow.'"

Everyone laughed.

"How about 'far freaking out'?" asked Gail.

"Hey, that, too. But, you know, in conventional terms, it's really what I said, a great flowering of music."

"And all of the ideas," Mary remarked. "This great interchange of ideas. I was thinking of that when I was standing by Movement City, where they had all the writings set out. I was listening to the conversations. These intense conversations. Who would thought, back in college, we would wind up like this, taking these ideas so seriously, ideas we were taught to beware of?

"Yes, I was thinking of that, too," Houghten responded. "Then, you add to that the shops, the artisans, a ferment in culture much like the ferment in music. People making things, people insisting on the right to be creative. Freeing themselves to be creative, overcoming the barriers. Many, many people each adding a little part to something that winds up very big. It is a renaissance in culture, too."

"And the fellowship," Jane Larue said softly. "This feeling that we are something, we are something! Something different than any generation that has come before us."

"Yes, that, too," Houghten answered. "Not necessarily better, but as a group, as a generation, we've been led to question more because of our experience with the war."

"And that has brought us into cohesion," Mary said.

"Yes, cohesion. Like a nation. The Woodstock nation, as someone at the concert said. That's a magnificent concept, in my opinion. We are not just people, we are families, we are tribes. We are united by everything we've gone through together. Suddenly, we see ourselves together, and we see what amazing power we have, or can have!"

"Power to make the changes we've talked about," said Mary.

"Yes, to truly make them!"

The group of five arrived soon at the junction with the freeway and headed down I-87, breaking off into smaller conversations or not speaking at all.

Gail Martin and Jane Larue, seated in the back seat, talked about their children. From their conversation, it was clear that they were both returning to a situation that required making immediate arrangements,

from the moment of picking their children up, at wherever they had stayed for the weekend, to getting them ready for school for the next day.

"Yours are both school age, aren't they?" Gail asked.

"Yes, they are, this year," Jane replied in her quiet voice, which was as gentle in cadence as tone.

"So you don't need to worry about daycare."

"They still go a little, after school."

"Do you get welfare?"

"Yes. I work part-time, though."

"Same for me."

Their lives were indeed complicated, Mary thought as she listened. In addition to taking care of their children and working part-time, they both attended classes part-time at Whitney Pratt. Tiring situations, Mary thought. But, in attitude toward their situations, the two women seemed worlds apart. Gail was upbeat about everything. She seemed optimistic for the future. Jane seemed pessimistic in her assessments. She talked as if the fun part of her life was over, to be succeeded only by the serious task of caring for her children. She seemed sad. She seemed to be still mourning the soldier husband she had talked about by the fire-side, the one who had died at Khesanh.

Later, as the van hummed down the freeway, past New York City and then through southern New Jersey, Mary paged through an atlas-sized, soft-covered book, called the *Whole Earth Catalog*, that she had picked up at the festival. The catalog struck her as an example of what the group in the van had just talked about, the cultural renaissance that was taking all of them in, and that seemed to offer so much hope for leading people away from the old, business-as-usual patterns that perpetuated injustice in the world.

The book was not a catalog in the usual sense of offering products for sale. Rather, it was presented, on the first page, as "an evaluation and access device" to determine "what is worth getting and where and how to do the getting." The categories of items that fell into that range of "what is worth getting" (listed on the same page) included "whole systems, shelter and land use, industry and craft, communications, community, nomadics, and learning."

Below the list was a statement of purpose: "We <u>are</u> as gods and might as well get good at it. So far, remotely done power and glory—as via government, big business, formal education, church—has succeeded to the point where gross defects obscure actual gains. In response to this dilemma and to these gains, a realm of intimate, personal power is developing—power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and

promoted by the Whole Earth Catalog."

That the counterculture,—or parts of it, at least,—would lead to this movement back to simple ways, instead of political action, struck Mary as an unexpected development. It struck her as something she had to think about and understand, in her continuing self-directed studies.

Matthew, who had not participated much in the conversation about the "great flowering" that Houghten had claimed, had drifted off to his own thoughts, also.

In his quiet manner, not explaining his thoughts to anyone, not even Mary, he had tied his experience of the past days into his ongoing reflections on photography.

His mind went over the photos he had taken at the event. He had taken them so carefully that he had a mental record of each one. He was eager to get back to the attic workshop at Whitney-Pratt to develop the photos. They were photos of a documentary nature, corresponding to his ideals worked out with the help of his friend Father Dan Riley of West Virginia. But, corresponding to his recent private interests, also, not yet shared with Father Dan, the pictures always had a component, also, of the "cross light on silvery tin" that he had read about in the notes of Walker Evans. The cross light, in this case, he thought, had been in the instants of charged communication. He had taken care to capture such instants in bodily postures and facial expressions.

Matthew had also been impressed by the four-day concert as an indication of the growing size and power of the Movement. He thought back to the seminar he had attended at school, the one in which the presenter had talked about the "burgeoning" of the counterculture and the notion of how big it could get as an amalgamation before starting to fall apart as a result of having pulled together so many components at odds with one another.

None of that has been overtly evident in the concert, he thought, though the range of types had suggested the amalgamation. Intellectuals and serious types like Mary had mixed with unformed kids and others who had long hair, suggesting a philosophical kinship, but who were there, apparently, for the music only, like college kids attending a beer bash. Also, despite the superficial cooperativeness that Mary had pointed out among those present at the concert, Matthew had also seen interactions between people, amidst the jostling, lack of food, and overindulgence in booze and drugs, that he had interpreted as showing annoyance and a carefully restrained anger. That was the kind of anger, he knew, that sometimes erupted into flashes of violence.

His mind went on to the photos he had developed on the day when Houghten had broached the idea of going to the concert. He felt satisfied in the way the pictures had turned out, as he recalled them in his mind.

They were scenes of his summer months just completed, beginning with the evening with Mary in Shenandoah Park. He thought of one photo that showed him and his father standing on the hill above the barn with the completed new barn roof. Other photos from the trip back to D.C. came into his mind, scenes of the American highway.

In just four months, he would begin on his masters thesis photo project. He had decided to go ahead with the idea he had described to Mary while camping in Shenandoah Park two months before. He would capture the extremes of Washington: poverty and wealth, urban ghettos and national monuments, extremes that people were so numb to they no longer saw them. Now it struck him that the juxtaposition of the youth culture and the holders of power should be part of this project, too.

The familiar scenes of D.C. drew into view in late afternoon. The group was in a good mood with good feelings toward one another. There was a mutual feeling that they had become more than just acquaintances.

"We're like a family ourselves, or could be," Houghten said. "Like the families of people we saw at Woodstock."

"A new kind of family," said Mary.

"Well, we could start with the New England trip, at least," Gail Martin said, "the one that Darren was talking about."

"Yes, should we really do that?" said Darren.

"I'd like to."

"Sometime this fall."

"Let's plan on it then!"

On that, they all agreed.

[Chapter 175 notes]

176. Steward tries to make sense of the Family Services WRO

Two days after the Woodstock festival, Tom and Kris Steward began their work day, as for the previous two weeks, with a pleasant walk from their hillside, basement-walkout apartment to the Family Services offices in downtown Morgantown. They were not even aware that the Woodstock event had taken place; they had been so engrossed in setting up their new life in West Virginia.

Their walk took them down the street to the football stadium at the base of the hill, and then around a triangular corner to Beechurst Avenue, a main campus thoroughfare, past the pizza joint where they sometimes ate supper or stopped for a soft drink to listen to music. They continued on Beechurst, with the Westover bridge on the Monongahela River in view, to the northwest corner of the downtown area, at Beechurst Avenue and Fayette Street. At that corner, there was a McDonald's restaurant, newly built, on a crest of a gently sloping hill overlooking the quaint, brick buildings of the Morgantown downtown. Three blocks beyond that, at the base of a steeper hill, leading down from the campus buildings at the top, they turned onto High Street for the remaining three blocks to the agency offices.

On this morning, as had usually been the case in the young couple's brief stay, the little city presented a cheerful face. There was a steady stream of traffic along the streets, without the tie-ups and honking that might have been had in a larger city. Business people and students passed along the sidewalks in the dappled shade of awnings and trees. The city, in general, as the Steward's had experienced it, displayed a harmonious blend of commercial and academic activity.

The Steward's had been in West Virginia, by this date, August 18, 1969, for three weeks and three days. Their new situation had brought many pleasant mornings such as this one, but Tom Steward had begun to have some misgivings about the project. He didn't like how closely Janis Kulas kept watch of his daily activities. He missed the autonomy he had enjoyed as a VISTA volunteer in North Carolina. He also didn't like how Kulas, and the staff in general, tried to control the meetings of the welfare recipients that the project was aimed at. Most of all, though, he missed the intimacy and physical centeredness his activities had had in North Carolina due to the smallness of the community there and the ability he had had there to interact with people informally.

"So you liked that car we looked at last night?" he said to her as they walked along.

They had not yet bought a car, and he had been thinking of that lately increasingly as a way to speed their transition to the other county and bring more autonomy for them both. The car he referred to was a 1959

Rambler Ambassador they had come across in a rural lot on Highway

7, the highway up to the other Preston County office in Kingwood. It was a green, four-door sedan with leather seats and chrome wheels.

"Yes, very nice."

"Kind of stylish, really."

"Yes."

"If we get it, maybe we can drive up to Pittsburgh sometime."

"I'd like to, very much."

"You ever been there?"

"No."

"Neither have I."

In the agency quarters, Jaylene Kruper, the receptionist, exchanged news with Kris, who was her same age. Janis Kulas, the project director, came out of her office to report how the day was shaping up.

"You may want to go with Dale Kuypers today," she remarked in her careful diction, pausing to pronounce each "s" sound carefully, sometimes producing a 'th' sound instead, "He's going out to Glendon. To pick up a client, Marla Dubcek, the one with the new baby. You may find it interesting."

That was the way she presented many activities that she laid before them, as "interesting" or "helpful," while her tone of voice implied that this was a job duty she expected them to perform.

"What's Glendon?" asked Tom Steward.

"Well, that's the interesting thing, or one at least. It's a little quasi-town that grew up around the glass factory there, as a place for the workers to live. It's out in the country, but it has a feel almost urban. Most of the people are Czech or Bohemian descent."

The conversation continued like this, seeming on the surface casual and undirected, yet in a meeting-like manner, covering all of the items of business that were of concern to Kulas with her new charges. She ended by reaching forth a brown manila envelope, not toward Tom but in a conscious manner toward his wife.

"These are some things, Kris and Tom, that I came across yesterday when I was cleaning out files," the director said. "Minutes of some of our past meetings. A history of the WRO, the national group. Some proposals for funding."

The subtlety of this exchange was not lost on Tom Steward. He understood that Kulas did this deliberate reversal of roles, giving the material first to his wife, to make the point that she believed in equality of the genders. A part of her action, too, he suspected, was aimed at needling him in an "angry feminist" kind of way.

The scene out in the direction of Glendon, northeast of Morgantown, was not as cheery as the downtown scene had been in Morgantown just hours before. The sky had clouded over. The two-lane highway brought a

succession of houses and places of business that looked in need of maintenance and care.

Glendon itself consisted of paint-worn, mostly two-story, box-frame houses situated at the intersection of two streets that looked like city streets almost, as Janis Kulas had noted, but in a general setting that was rural with wooded hills beyond. About two-thirds of the houses were arranged in a single row on one side of one street. The rest were randomly arranged on a hill above a boarded up building that appeared to be an old service station.

Dale Kuypers, the ever-nice student intern, attired neatly in a V-necked burgundy sweater with the collar of a white dress shirt visible at the neck, kept up a stream of bland remarks as they drove along the row of houses, searching for the address provided for Marla Dubcek. They found the address inscribed in black numerals on a white house with several exterior planks hanging down out of place on one side. With Kristine staying behind in the car, the two men ascended the concrete steps to the house which, like the other houses, directly abutted the street as if space was unavailable for a front yard.

A female voice acknowledged their knock then a wait ensued while Steward and the student intern stood like door canvassers, looking across the street where the shoulder of the road was built out over the top of a crumbling flagstone wall. Below that, in successive levels downward, were railroad tracks, a lot with old, battered cars, and, at the bottom of the hill, a brick factory about a quarter mile long. A red glow, as from fires flaring up, appeared sporadically in the two-story-high windows on the facing side.

Marla Dubcek, dark-haired and shapely, came out soon with her baby in her arms. She looked more like she was going for an evening out then to apply for welfare. She was dressed in a knee-length, tight skirt with the top two buttons of her white blouse left open.

She looked surprised to see a second person with Kuypers. “Marla, this is Tom Steward, a new worker,” Kuypers said. “Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Pleased to meet you, too.”

At the car there was another look of surprise, as Marla Dubcek saw Kristine in the back seat, then came another introduction and a strained interaction as they set out together for town.

“Well, Marla, some of the committee members will be on hand to help you,” Kuypers informed in first-name-intimate manner.

“I’ll be glad for their assistance.”

“If we can just get you there in my old car.”

“It’s a real nice car. I’m much obliged.”

Tom Steward rode along thinking the whole episode was out of

whack. Kuypers alone would have been a better arrangement. The situation called for a sensitive interaction, not an easy familiarity, like a double date. The young mother seemed ashamed.

Back at the downtown office, with no activities scheduled for the rest of the day, Tom Steward sat at the empty table in the project room, looking through the reading material provided by Kulas.

He looked first to the meeting minutes from the project's brief past (all of them from Monongalia County only). As the earliest minutes indicated, the project had been in existence only about a year and several months. The first meeting, held in June of 1968, had brought together many of the principals who still remained with the project, including Janis Kulas, two of the present outreach workers (Dallie Thornton and PeeWee Novotny), and some of the more prominent current members (among them, PeeWee's husband, Tony, and the current Monongahela County chairman, Violeta Moss).

Skimming through the minutes, Steward noted the frequent instances of the name "Mrs. Kulas." She was the predominant presence always, with many changes in direction occurring as a result of her intervention in the proceedings. The minutes, in written format, were formulaic, always going through the customary Old Business, New Business, etc., as if the group stuck rigidly to this agenda.

Proceeding to the history of the national organization included with the minutes, Steward verified a number of items he had been aware of before. The organization, he read, was not much older than the local group. It was only two years old, started in summer of 1967; he had heard that before. It had begun as a primarily urban organization in the biggest American cities (New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago), cities which also happened to have the largest concentration of blacks. The migration of the group from its urban setting to the rural setting of the West Virginia projects was thus an aberration and experiment, Steward noted, leading to the problems he had observed himself in spreading the word in less densely populated areas. His thoughts returned to the Glendon scene of that same day and his earlier reminiscences of the Dulatown community.

Steward had not known some of the details that he came upon in the organization's history, tidbits such as the names of the predecessor local groups, formed in the years 1962 to 1966, approximately: Mothers Anonymous in Los Angeles; the Committee of Needy Families on the Lower Eastside of Manhattan; the Welfare Recipients League in Brooklyn; the Welfare Rights Organization in Oakland (from which the name of the national group had been taken). He had not known, either, that the exact starting date of the national organization was August 25-27, 1967, when the founding convention of the National WRO had been

held in Washington D.C., bringing together 110 delegates from 67 local WROs and 22 states, and representing, in total, 4,000 members.

George Wiley, the black founder of the national organization, was an interesting character, Steward thought. Possessor of a Ph.D. in organic chemistry, former professor at UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Syracuse U, he had diverted his attention from an academic career to become an advocate of the mostly black welfare poor, thereby returning to the ethos of his parents, both activists in black organizations.

"Whereas many in the welfare rights movement have bogged themselves down in the details of this or that program," the article said, "George Wiley has simplified the focus to the one central demand of a 'guaranteed annual income.' He has claimed that work is irrelevant to the obligation of a 'Great Society' to assure that all citizens have the basic requirements of food, shelter, and clothing."

The amount set for the annual income, Steward read, was $5500 for a family of four. That amount exceeded his own annual income, he observed to himself, and his own income, he had been told, was more or less equivalent to that of a factory worker in Morgantown.

This demand, as stated,—for a "livable" income, "guaranteed" (by the government, presumably) "with or without work"—was new to Steward. He had never heard it expressed in Morgantown. How was it that Janis Kulas had not mentioned this demand as part of his orientation to the project? How was it that he had never come upon it himself? Did he believe in this demand, espouse it? He didn't know. The demand, when he thought about it, seemed to defy common sense. How could working people be told to accept the same pay for their labor as others got for doing nothing?

Steward got up from his reading, at the point of thinking this, and looked out to the window to the sidewalks of the street below. Two college girls were passing by, laughing and gesturing to one another.

"I should have been more careful about what I was getting into," he said to himself.

Back at the table, he came upon a document that stood out from the others in having an academic format. It was a photocopy of an article bearing the banner of the Journal of Social Work and dated May 1969 (just four months before). The title of the article was, "The Social Work of Social Change." The author, identified as Janis Morth Wulfe, Ph.D., ACSW, Steward recognized as "the other Janis" that shared the farmhouse with Janis Kulas.

The abstract of the article, appearing on the first page below the article title and byline, caught his attention: "Social work orientations are considered that promote institutional change in place of accommodation to the existing system. One possible model is the national Welfare Rights

Organization (WRO) of Dr. George Alvin Wiley. A chief feature of this model is a ‘crisis strategy’ using aggressive welfare roll sign-ups and militant advocacy of individual applications to force the current system into a financial crisis, the ultimate goal being to force a reevaluation of social policy. A second feature, the ‘cookie cutter’ spread of local organizations, based on the same crisis model, expands the effect nationwide.”

Inside the report, there was more: “Some promoters of the crisis strategy, it must be said, hold out the hope that the financial crisis of local governments, unable to meet the burden of their increased welfare rolls, will lead to political turmoil and ultimately to an adjustment of society in general and perhaps to a more radical (socialistic, if you will) approach to the plight of the American poor.”

Here Steward paused again to look out the window, this time for his wife who had gone up the street for a walk with the receptionist, Jaylene Kruper. He saw Kristine approaching from about a block away, her blonde hair catching the sunlight of the late afternoon.

The two Janis’s were intellectual partners in this enterprise, Tom Steward thought. Janis Wulfe, working in the academic community, presented the project as a radical experiment (“socialistic, if you will”), possibly threatening the very structure of society. Janis Kulas, working in the town with the fund-providing people of the United Fund, civic groups, and churches, presented the project as a kind of charity, training the poor to fend for themselves. In her remarks to such people, judging by examples Steward had heard, there was seldom a suggestion of the potentially confrontive nature of the project.

Tom Steward felt disturbed by the thought of this arrangement. Of course, to some extent, this was a necessary, understandable, excusable accommodation to the realpolitik of a college town. But there was an underlying subterfuge he didn’t like.

Kris, smiling brightly, came in with her friend and crossed the room at once to give him a kiss.

“Tonight is a pizza night!” she said.

“Is that so?”

“Yes!”

As Steward sat with Kris later at a candle-lit table, the concerns of the day faded off, though with a lingering feeling that he wanted to get as far away as possible from Janis Kulas.

[Chapter 176 notes}

177. Tom and Kris buy a car and ride up to Kingwood

The purchase of a car a few days later (after weeks of having to ask for rides from the ever obliging student intern, Dale Kuypers) brought a welcome change to Tom and Kris Steward's new life in West Virginia. They were able to move around freely for personal chores and recreation, and for project activities also, giving them more of the autonomy they had longed for.

The car they bought was the 1959 Rambler that Tom had mentioned to his social worker boss, Janis Kulas, the previous week. It was a green Ambassador 4-door sedan with chrome trim and tires,—a "good lookin' little car," everyone said.

"Now that you have your own car, you maybe would find helpful to drive up and have a little meeting with Arlis Simpson and John Sledger," Kulas remarked when informed of the purchase. She paused before carefully bringing forth the name "Arlis Simpson" with its double "s" sound. Even so, the second "s" came out like "th."

"Yes, we would like to do that," Steward replied.

"Maybe you would find it helpful to work out some kind of schedule, too," Kulas went on. "Spend three days a week up there, in Preston County, and two days or down here."

"Yes, I was thinking the same thing."

This advice was conveyed to Tom alone, as lately the stiff, formal director had timed the chance encounters in her office to happen when Kris was in another room. That made sense, as Tom was a paid employee and Kris was not, but Tom knew that his wife was aware of the slight change in her status and felt badly about it.

In general, the professor to student attitude of Kulas toward Kris had continued, Tom had noticed, and Kris had helped this process along at times, he had observed, by displaying her unsureness about her lack of a college education and college words. The professional woman image that Kris liked to convey was slowly being worn down, Tom could see, by the daily stage of meetings where often she seemed too dressed up and too consciously poised.

Kris, though, had persisted in holding to her image, Steward had also noted with interest. This aspect of his wife, her naïve, girlishness combined with her often convincing "woman of the world" image, the aspect that he had found so fascinating when he had first met her on the bus, had continued to fascinate him as he had learned more about her, living with her as her husband. She gave great care to her appearance, he had learned, washing and curling her luscious blonde hair every evening and carefully applying false eyelashes each morning, and he could see that she exerted this same care of her image in public. It was as if her public image was part of being attractive as a woman, and vain, in that

sense, though she did, obviously, have a true interest in the project and a true concern for the people served. But the interest was never intellectual as his own would have been.

At meetings, Kristine was a lively presence. She alertly followed the often boring items. She was quick to throw in comments or laugh when someone joked. When she spoke about something she had feelings about, she gestured dramatically with both hands. The educated, accomplished women, from the United Fund or university, who sometimes attended meetings, viewed her often with amused condescension, while the former welfare mothers who worked in the project regarded her with admiration. Men, of whatever rank or position, treated her with special attention.

Kris was the one who arranged the suggested Preston County meeting, immediately after hearing about the meeting from her husband, with a phone call to Arlis Simpson. The sassy grandmother had taken a liking to her, as had all of the other workers and volunteers.

"You can come up still today if you'd like," Arlis Simpson. "John is going to be by a little later and we got a welfare visit scheduled for this afternoon. You can come along if you'd like."

"We would like."

"You might find it interesting."

"Should we meet at the project office then?" Kris inquired. She was referring to the storefront office where the project had its weekly meetings. The Steward's had been there just once.

"No, come on to my house. Might as well be comfortable. I can make a pot of fresh coffee."

"Should we bring some rolls or something then?" Kris asked.

"No, sweetheart, you don't need to do that. I got food, you know. I might even surprise you and bake a little fresh."

"Are you sure now?"

"Sure I'm sure. All you kids gotta bring is yourselves."

The young couple set out in good spirits in their new car, from the Morgantown downtown office down Fayette Street past the Westover Bridge then left on Pleasant Street through the outlying areas of Morgantown to Route 7, the two-lane highway that led to Kingwood, the Preston county seat, where Arlis Simpson lived.

"I think, once that we're on our own, we'll establish our own way of interacting with people, we'll be more effective," Steward remarked to his wife as they left the outskirts of Morgantown behind.

"You mean, you didn't enjoy riding around with Dale?"

"Well, actually, I did, a lot of the time. It just put on a little strain or strangeness, having three people."

"He's been so nice to us."

"Yes, he has. But sometimes he seems too nice."

"Yes, he does. I know what you mean."

Outside of Morgantown, the highway led alongside a rocky creek and a railroad track through a narrow, wooded valley identified by a sign as "Cascade." Just beyond that began the long gradual climb to Kingwood, 1200 feet higher in altitude than Morgantown.

Signs beside gravel roads leading from the highway into the woods indicated the frequent presence of mines. The mines did not appear to be the strip mine type, with flattened out areas on hilltops, that Steward had heard about from his old rowing buddy Matt Brandt. Those in view of the road appeared to be a more primitive type with cave-like openings and rusted machinery.

Two little towns were located along the way. The first of the two was Masontown where the highway curved upward and around to the left beside a railroad track and a line of coke stoves, then straightened out for about a mile to become a main street amidst a cluster of houses. Within the cluster was a white church with a steeple, a cemetery, and a single-story brick school. The main street had two intersections, one of which had a service station and a hardware store across from one another. Reedsville, the second town, six miles further up the continuing climb, had a single intersection and a general store with an open walkway like a building in the Old West. Just beyond that, the highway ascended a long incline of several miles that commanded a view of the store and the few houses arranged in an "L" shape around it.

Reaching the top of the incline, the Steward's followed a few bends of the highway until the outskirts of the town of Kingwood came into view within a scene composed of tree-nestled houses and roofs, a water tower, two church steeples, and a capitol dome.

Arriving there, the Steward's turned down a shaded street past the corner storefront that served as the project office. It was an unimposing place with a sign that identified it simply as "WRO." There was nothing visible of a confrontive or controversial nature.

Arlis Simpson's house, just two blocks beyond that, was a story-and-a-half tan stucco bungalow with a closed in front porch and a tiny front yard with a single maple tree and a line of bushes that extended along the sidewalk.

The young couple pulled up to the shaded curve in their shiny new car and ascended the three steps of the closed front porch to the aroma of coffee and freshly baked rolls. Inside, through the open inner door of the house, they could see John Fletcher at a kitchen table in the back of the house beyond a second open door, expressionless as usual and dressed in his usual green work suit with his booted feet sprawled out revealing the usual white socks below his high water cuffs.

A knock on the door brought Arlis into view from the kitchen. She

was dressed in blue slacks and a white flower patterned blouse with her gray-streaked brown hair coiffed in a bouffant in the style. Just behind was her dark-eyed granddaughter Nadine.

"Well, you did bake rolls!" said Kristine as Arlis opened the door with a welcoming smile.

"Yes, I did, and this one here's been waiting," Arlis replied nodding at the girl.

"Mean to say, you still aren't back in school?" Kristine said.

"Still on vacation."

"Still on vacation! You startin' to get bored."

"Uh huh. Not yet."

"You're not anxious to go back."

"Don't care if I ever go back."

"Oh, don't believe her," Arlis threw in. "She likes school fine once she gets going."

"Got a lot of friends there, I bet," said Kristine.

"Uh huh."

"Got anything to show me? Any drawings or anything?"
"Yes, I do."

Steward settled in at the table with a cup of coffee while his wife went happily off with the beaming little girl into a back room. He could see that Kris was already converting the Simpson house in her mind into a kind of extension of the Andrews house in California, though in size and elegance it was no match.

"All ready to dig in, I hear," John Sledger remarked with an expressionless gaze.

"Yes, we are."

"Well, there's plenty of riding around, picking up, for all of us, I wager."

"Ain't that the truth," Arlis threw in. "And that what this job mostly is, up in this county, as you will soon find out."

Kris had meanwhile returned.

"How do you work that out, on a day to day basis," she asked. "How do you know where to go?"

"Well, I guess John and I are so used to it we're making it into a little simpler than it actually is. We do have a schedule kind of."

"Yes, around the meetings," said John.

The next portion of the meeting, the main portion, brought out the details of the activities around which the work week of Arlis Simpson and John Sledger was structured. These activities included the weekly "Monday meeting" for the county staff (up to this time just Simpson and Sledger), a two-county staff meeting (for Preston and Mongahalia counties combined) held every other Friday afternoon, "welfare office

days" every Tuesday and Thursday when the staff or WRO members accompanied people to the county welfare office, and the Preston County regular membership meeting, of the WRO, held every other Wednesday evening.

"Does it present a problem sometimes, people remembering when the meeting is, when it's every other week?" Kristine asked at the first Monday meeting that she and her husband attended.

"Can't forget 'cuz we remind 'em," Sledger remarked.

"Oh, yes, we do," Arlis threw in.

"Remind 'em so much they can't stand us," said Sledger.

"Ain't that the truth!"

Steward took an interest in that exchange as it seemed to indicate Sledger had a sense of humor below his expressionless features.

"John does most of the reminding, though," Arlis added. "What we do most the time is John goes out to pick up people and I'm the office lady. I open the place up and I just hang around in case any body comes in."

"Makes some good coffee," Sledger said. "As you have learned this morning."

"Why thank you, John! I must admit I do."

"Yes, it is delicious!" Kristine said.

Next portion of the meeting had to do with recruiting new members, which Arlis explained was a continual activity, "kind of like a zealous church, only we ain't a church."

"And ain't zealous either, truth be told," said Sledger.

"We've got three ways of finding new members," Arlis continued. "First is people just drop in."

"Four so far," Sledger remarked.

"Yes, that's about it. Sadly."

"Four more than zero," said Kristine.

"Yes, and ain't that true!" Arlis answered. "Oh, I'm gonna to be so glad to have an optimist around here! Not to mention any names."

"What are the other two ways?" Thomas asked.

"Oh, he means business, don't he?" Arlis continued with a smile and a nod at Steward. "Second way is our welfare office days. We get a couple people in here from the membership, you know, ready to help, and we get names of people, you know, who need help. We meet 'em at the center, usually, and walk over to the welfare office together."

"That's where the good coffee comes in," said Sledger.

"Oh, yes. We always have coffee and rolls. Plain ol' homestyle'll get 'em every time.

"And the third way," John Sledger prompted.

"And the third way, Tom, we go out. But, mostly, like I said, it's been

John. Go out and pick up people and kind of hang around hopin' to meet somebody's cousin or whatever."

"There's a lot of cousins," said John.

"Oh, yes. There are."

"Hang around so much they can't stand me," said John.

"That I can't vouch for, nice talkative man like John."

So it went on, leading up to the activity planned for the same day. It was Tuesday, welfare office day, so Arlis would be heading over the two blocks to the store front office, she informed. Sledger would not be part of that on this particular day as he had obtained permission to take the afternoon off for a private chore.

"Is anything in particular scheduled?" Kris asked as she, Tom, and Arlis walked over to the center together.

"No, honey, I'm afraid not," Arlis replied with a whimsical smile. "We may just spend the afternoon staring at walls. We do a fair amount of that, too, sorry to tell you."

178. Tom and Kris help with “welfare office day” in Kingwood

Two days later, Tom and Kris Steward drove off from their basement walkout apartment in their newly-acquired 1959 Rambler Ambassador 4-door sedan for their first official day as full-fledged, independent outreach workers in Preston County.

They began their day with a stop at the McDonald’s restaurant on the corner of Beechurst and Fayette streets in downtown Morgantown. From there, they carried out coffee in paper cups which they carefully placed in a cardboard cup holder on the front seat between them. Then, with the 6-cylinder V247 Austin engine seeming to hum with pride, they cruised down Fayette past the Westover Bridge, and turned left on Pleasant St. through the outlying areas of Morgantown, to Route 7, the two-lane highway that led to Kingwood, where the Preston county WRO office maintained by the project was located.

They were heading to work, but they felt as if they were heading to a day of fun and adventure, also. Kristine, neatly dressed in blue jeans and a blue, sleeveless blouse, with a blue ribbon in her freshly curled, voluminous blonde hair, looked pretty as a flower and smelled as sweet. Thomas, dressed in blue jeans, also, a tan Army shirt, rolled up to the elbows, and brown hiking boots, looked healthy and eager for a hard task to put his shoulder into. On his morning run, he had reviewed the entire situation, as he was inclined to do, and set out the objectives for the coming months.

“I think, now that we’re on our own, we’ll establish our own way of interacting with people, we’ll be more effective,” he remarked to his wife as they left the outskirts of Morgantown behind.

“You mean, you didn’t enjoy riding around with Dale?”

“Well, actually, I did, a lot of the time. It just put on a little strain or strangeness, having three people.”

“Yes, it did.”

They had with them jotted down instructions they had been given for picking up three members of the WRO group who were going up to spend the afternoon in the welfare office helping anyone out who needed assistance. The first of the three members was a woman named Rachel Locke who lived about halfway to Kingwood, just beyond the little town of Reedsville. The other two members were a married couple, Cyril and Virginia Boland, who lived a few miles before Kingwood.

The route was, in general, picturesque. About ten miles outside of Morgantown, it led alongside a rocky creek and a railroad track through a narrow valley identified by a sign as “Cascade.” Just beyond that, began the long gradual climb to Kingwood, which was 1200 feet higher in altitude than Morgantown.

Signs beside gravel roads leading from the highway into the woods indicated the frequent presence of mines. The mines did not appear to be the strip mine type, with cleared, flattened out areas on hilltops, that Steward had heard about from his old rowing buddy Matthew Brandt. Those in view of the road appeared to be more primitive type mines with cave-like openings and ancient, rusted machinery.

Coming into Masontown, the highway curved upward and around to the left beside a railroad track and a line of coke stoves, then it turned to the right and straightened out, almost, for about a mile to become a main street amidst a cluster of houses. Within the cluster was a white church with a steeple, a cemetery, and a single-story brick school with children swinging and climbing on a jungle gym in a playground beside it. The main street had two intersections, one of which had a service station and a hardware store across from one another. Two pickups were parked at the hardware store. A man stood at the back of one of them, pencil in hand, peering into a pocket notebook.

The town of Reedsville, six miles further up the continuing gradual climb, had a single intersection and a general store with an open walkway like a building in the Old West. Just beyond that, the highway ascended a steeper hill that commanded a view of the store and the few houses of the town left behind.

Just beyond the top of the long hill, Steward looked for a narrow paved road where he had been told to turn to find a dirt road that led to the house of the first person to be picked up, Rachel Shoats. He found the road in a stand of pines, and turned to see a woman walking toward him on the side of the road, about a hundred yards away. She was a middle-aged woman with graying dark hair, dressed in a knee-length blue cotton dress and an open tan cardigan sweater and carrying a shopping bag.

She was wearing tennis shoes, he saw as he drew closer. She walked with a determined gait, like someone used to walking, but also she walked up on her feet slightly as though they were sore.

"Well, you must be Mr. Tom," she said softly when he pulled up next to her. "They tol' me you was coming."

"Yes, I am, and you must be Rachel Shoats."

"Yes, I am."

"Pleased to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you, too."

Steward got out of the car to open the back door for her.

"And this is my wife, Kristine," he said as Mrs. Shoats swung in.

"How do you do, ma'am?"

"I'm fine. Pleased to meet you, Rachel."

"Pleased to meet you, too."

During this exchange, there was a brief meeting of the eyes between

Tom Steward and Rachel Shoats. She looked down at once as if out of shyness or embarrassment.

With Rachel in the back seat, Steward backed around and head back to the highway, then turned up the road toward Kingwood.

"How far back you live from where we picked you up?" Kris asked.

"Oh, just a little ways. Back in the woods, kind of. Back through them pine."

"How long you lived there?"

"Whole time my young uns been coming up."

"How many kids do you have?"

"Three boys."

"How old are they?"

"Tommie, the little one, is eight. Junior and Joey, I gotta think now, they're 16 and 14."

"The little one is named Tommie?"

"Yes."

"You hear that, Tom? You got a little namesake."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

Rachel smiled often in a self-conscious manner, looking down when she smiled. She said everything as if there was a little joke in it. She did not settle back into the seat; she sat forward, as if waiting for the next question to respond to. She seemed to be enjoying the ride in a car; she looked out with interest as the car continued up the highway past a two-story brick house with freshly painted white outbuildings and brown horses in a pasture behind a white fence.

Several miles further, the highway ascended a long hill again, like the one above Reedsville, only this hill had no town below it, just woods. Alongside the highway, near the top of the hill, were three shabby white houses, stacked one above another on roughly terraced lots. Here, per the instructions they had been given, the Steward's looked for their second pick-ups of the day, Cyril and Virginia Boland.

Parking the car at the second house, where there was a gravel turn-off, Thomas got out and walked up to the highest house on the hill, from which wafted the smell of freshly baked bread. Arriving at the open door there, he saw about a dozen loaves of bread lined up neatly on a table in a kitchen just big enough for a stove, refrigerator, and sink, plus the table and two chairs.

A knock brought to the door a short, fat woman in a waistless house dress with black hair flattened down to the head with hair gel. The woman had a plump, pretty face and small, squinting eyes. She nodded as she came forward, wiping her hands.

"You must be Tom Steward."

"Yes, I am."

"I'll round up Cyril."

She left the kitchen and went into the other room, returning with a tall, rough-hewn man who could have passed as a Welsh miner. He was about 6-2 in height, with dark, curly hair. He had large shoulders, ribcage, and hands, and a pot belly that hung over his belt. He was dressed in uniform type gray work pants and a matching gray shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

"This here is Cyril," Virginia Boland said.

Had Steward not known that the man's name was spelled as it was, he would have thought the name was "Sirl." Virginia Boland pronounced it like that with no hint of two syllables.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," the man said in a strong, deep voice, extending one of the large hands.

"Pleased to meet you."

As the drive continued toward Kingwood, Tom and Kris Steward tried to engage their passengers in conversation, but the three riders held to the mode of only speaking when directly questioned and then their answers were brief. Despite Kris' friendly chatter, Rachel Shoats persisted in her deferential attitude, smiling with downcast eyes.

In Kingwood, at the WRO storefront office, Arlis Simpson had coffee brewing. Seeing Rachel standing shyly at the side, she sat her down at a table with a cup of coffee in front of her.

"Now you look more at home," she said.

"Oh, I likes my coffee," Rachel replied, smiling.

She did look more comfortable as the group awaited the arrival of John Sledger, the remaining outreach worker. Sledger had gone to the furthest lying, most mountainous part of the county to pick up the woman that the committee on hand was going to assist in working out a problem with the welfare department. The woman had shown up at the last meeting and asked for assistance.

They came in soon later, Sledger dressed in his typical green work pants and green work shirt, the woman dressed in a full pleat skirt and flowered blouse. She was a tiny thing, only about 5 feet tall, with bangs cut off straight like a schoolgirl, and the face of a schoolgirl, too. She appeared to be just out of her teens, though Arlis had said she had three children. She was pretty in her own way, also, a pixie type with bright eyes and a bright smile.

"Well, you all, this here is Clara Mohs," Sledger said in a way that seemed to imply he didn't like introductions and this would be the extent of what he would offer.

"Pleased to meet you all," the young woman replied.

She spoke in a low voice hard to hear, but held her place without

shrinking while everyone looked her over.

"You didn't have no problem, John, finding Clara up in them hills?" Arlis threw in to lighten the mood a little.

That brought smiles all around but not to the motionless face of John Sledger. "It is a mite up there," he answered dryly.

"Well, folks, the matter before us today," Arlis explained when they got down to business, "is Clara here,—now you correct me, Clara, if this ain't right,—had her welfare cut off on account of a worker came up there, from the local office here, and found her ex-husband there, at the house,—ain't that true, Clara?"

"Yes, that's true. He was just there to visit the kids."

"So the worker assumed..."

"Yes, he just figured..."

"Well, they figure too much!" Cyril Boland asserted.

"Ain't that the truth," Arlis Simpson replied.

Without the perkiness of Arlis, Tom Steward thought as he listened, the group seated around him would have been a passive bunch. She imparted the group with spirit and direction.

From the WRO office, the group, not including Sledger, walked the three blocks to the welfare office together. There were seven people in all (the two Steward's, Arlis Simpson, Rachel Shoats, Clara Mohs, and the Boland's), enough of a number to attract glances from workers in an insurance agency that they passed enroute. The glances seemed to harden as the nature of the group was ascertained. At the welfare office, there were more looks, quickly assuming an appearance of stolidity.

"Don't worry now, Krissy," Arlis whispered. "They seen us before." That may well have been, thought Steward, but they had never before seen him and his wife. He was conscious of being examined and he noticed others looking at Kristine. The looks were not just curious; there was a glint in them of disapproval or dislike.

The plan was that only Arlis, Rachel, and Virginia would go forward to "advocate" for Clara when she presented her petition to begin receiving her welfare payments again after explaining that her ex-husband didn't live with her and didn't provide support.

"Now don't be cowered," Arlis Simpson said to the three other women as they drew together to go up to the counter.

"Oh, we won't be," Virginia Boland replied.

For all the bravado, though, the women were a meek-looking group as they went forward. Arlis was the only one who spoke. The others remained in the background.

The brief, hushed explanation that Arlis gave for why the group was present sounded recited. The woman behind the counter had heard it before, apparently, and had been told how to respond. With no contest,

the women proceeded past the counter to the hall behind, where they disappeared within an office.

Tom and Kris Steward sat with Cyril Boland who had nothing to say except when addressed.

"Well, we'll see what they can do," Kristine said. "Oh, they'll do, they'll do," Boland replied.

Soon the four women returned, jubilant with victory. Clara had had her welfare payment re-instated and she had been given a check on the spot for a check she had missed.

It then became clear why Rachel had brought her empty shopping bag. She left the group to go across the street to the town's one supermarket as did the Boland's.

As the sun lowered above the wooded hills on the western horizon, the Steward's dropped off the Boland's at their house on the side of the highway. They then brought Rachel to the place where they had picked her up, at the side of the highway.

Steward paused there with the car pointed to the paved road. "We'll be glad to drive you back," he said.

"Oh, no. I go by a shortcut," Rachel replied. "Just a little piece through the woods here and I'll be home."

She headed into the woods while they were still turning around to go back to the highway.

"There's something very appealing about that woman," Kristine said as she and her husband continued down the highway.

"She's so unassuming, so humble," Thomas replied.

"That's not the quality we're looking to encourage, though."

"No, it's not. But there's still a real purity to it."

"Yes, there is."

Back in Morgantown, they returned to their own home on the hillside above the cheerful lights of the campus, finding a letter in the mailbox with an unfamiliar name in the return address: Jane Morris.

Thomas opened it at once.

The letter began: "Dear Tom, I believe I've only met you once, but your letter to Jim came home to me among items sent to me from Thailand, so I decided to write..."

Thence followed the news that Steward had not yet heard, that his former rowing teammate and late correspondent had gone down in Laos and had been classified as missing in action.

"I've waited and prayed for some further word to come back on him," Mrs. Morris wrote, "but there's been nothing, absolutely nothing. It's been very disheartening."

179. Morris is moved, meets another POW, Ellwood Erland

After a month of being held in a cage made of bamboo, Jim Morris was relieved to be suddenly yanked out of it and escorted roughly toward the open back of a covered truck where two guards sat ready with guns. He understood he was being moved. To where he didn't know.

He was aware that the situation wherever he was going could be worse than that from which he was departing. But the long days of waiting, doing nothing, being unable to walk (though he had been able to stand), had brought him to a point of desperation. For the moment, he allowed himself to simply relax into the movement.

Movement, wonderful movement, how he had taken it for granted, he thought to himself.

The date was Tuesday, August 27, 1969. He knew that exactly, having taken care, as one of many self-imposed disciplines, to record the passing days by carving notches with a small rock in a bamboo support of his cage. Having lost that device, he considered how he would continue the practice in transit. He decided to make small scratches, using the same rock, in the leather of his boots, which thus far had not been taken away. If the boots were taken, he would think of something else.

For his month of captivity, Morris had been unable to get much of a sense of his surrounding owing to the location of the cage in a depression of land open to lower ground only on one side where there had been a pike fence too high to see over. Now, looking beyond the truck, he saw forested mountains, such as he had trekked through on the day before his capture, and a dirt road, rutted by rain, pointing ahead toward a stand of trees above which white smoke was rising.

Another village such as the several he had passed in his effort to escape, Morris observed to himself. Being without his map, he didn't know the town's name. But he knew the road was likely Route 4, the road he had followed as he had moved along the ridge to the Nam Ou River.

"Nong-ha!" a third guard, standing outside the truck, said to him as he passed, shoving a gun butt into him. "Nong-ha!"

He tried to climb into the back of the truck, which was the size of a small room, about 8 by ten, but he was pushed from behind as he placed weight on one foot to raise himself up. With his hands bound and tied to a rope around his waist, he could not prevent himself from flying headfirst into the back wall of the enclosure.

The other guards laughed at that and there were comments back and forth said in joking voices.

Soon, though, the guards tired of using him for amusement. He was glad to discover that he could see outside through a crack, about head

high, between two boards next to him.

The village he had seen before boarding the truck came into closer view. Through the crack in the board, he saw brightly painted houses among palm trees, then an immense building with a red roof surrounded by a dirt courtyard. The courtyard had stalls where merchants were setting out their wares for the day: green, yellow, and orange gourds that looked like cucumbers and squash; piles of dark green leafy vegetables that looked like spinach; other piles of red and yellow fruit. There were stalls with articles of clothing and, above them, solid-colored banners, red, yellow, green, white, and blue. There were many people, also, and many small children running and laughing.

Soon later, the captain felt the truck turning in a leftward arc, apparently at a "Y" in the road, for another road was visible branching off to the right as the truck passed. Assuming they had been going south, which he had determined by the position of the sun, then the leftward arc would take the truck eastward. Morris knew where that road would lead, to the Sam Neua Province where the notorious caves were located that he had heard about in intelligence briefings back at the airbase.

His suspicions were confirmed when the truck descended a hill to a view of bridge trusses and water. This would be the Nam Ou River, he told himself.

Upstream, by a limestone cliff, he could see a flag-bearing barge such as he had been startled by while looking for a fallen tree to ride down the river on. From this bridge to Sam Neua, as he recalled, was a distance of about 100 miles.

Just beyond the bridge, Morris heard a patter of rain on the canvas roof of the truck. Soon the rain became a downpour. A stream of water ran down a rut of the road left behind as the truck ascended from the low land beside the river.

For about an hour, the rain continued unabated until the truck began to mire down. With its wheels spinning out a brown spray of mud, the truck bumped and slid onward along a narrow, mountain road.

Prodded out, at one point, to help in pushing when the truck got stuck, Morris found himself in a fog-shrouded valley with densely wooded slopes rising up to a low gray sky.

Later, as conditions got worse, the truck stopped and Morris heard soldiers talking back and forth. The same words, apparently the name of a place, were repeated several times.

The truck started up again, lurching and sliding along the rutted, muddy road. Soon, though, with the sky darkening outside, the truck came to a stop again and Morris heard the cab doors open and slam.

Prodded out again, he saw immediately in front of him a cluster of a half dozen or so colorless, functional-looking buildings terraced into a

steep, forest-covered mountain slope. Within a few windows glowed the flickering light of lanterns, but the place looked mostly deserted. A red flag flew over the first building, which appeared to be an office.

Another push propelled him toward a muddy path. He followed it down between the buildings to a pen about 20 feet square surrounded by a wood post fence hung with barbed wire.

Within the pen was a man slumped over as if in distress or pain. The man looked up as Morris approached. He appeared to be a Westerner, perhaps an American. He was gaunt with a drawn, somber face and dull, feverish eyes.

"Well, I guess I should say, 'Welcome,'" the man said, "but I don't imagine you're too glad to be here."

"No, I'm not, but I'm glad to see you... Hell of a lot better than to be here alone."

The man said nothing to that at first. He closed his eyes as if to rest and then after an interval of silence opened them again.

"You're a soldier?" Morris asked.

"Yes, I am. Pilot," the man replied.

"American?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

"Out of where?"

"Takhli."

"I'm out of Khorat."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Again a lapse of silence occurred as the emaciated figure scrunched into himself, with his bony knees drawn up against his chest and his arms clenched around his legs to hold himself in that position. Either he had no interest in continuing the conversation or he lacked the will or the energy to go on.

"Could I ask you your name?" Morris asked.

"My name is Ellwood Erland."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Jim Morris."

"Pleased to meet you, Morris."

"I think I've heard your name, sir. You're a major, correct?"

"Yes, that's true."

"Went down this spring?"

"Yes, on March 16."

"So it's been five months."

"I can't help you on that. I've lost count."

Another silence ensued, broken only by the sound of soldiers talking in one of the buildings further up on the side of the hill in the darkness.

"Sir, could I ask you, how have you been treated?" Morris asked.

"Left alone, recently. In my book, that qualifies as good."

"That's not been the case all along?"

"They had a go at me for a while."

"Had a go at you how?"

"Later we can talk about it, Morris. Right now if you don't mind, I'd rather not."

"Sure, I'm sorry."

"Welcome to the hooch."

"Thank you."

"Make yourself at home."

"I will."

The major slumped down again and said nothing. He was obviously exhausted and sick.

"Sir. Is there anything I can do for you?" Morris asked. "No, not much, I'm afraid."

"You're not well, I can tell."

"Some kind of infection. General infection. It seems to be getting worse."

Later, the major got up and went to the darkest side of the pen. He had gone there to take a pee, apparently, but he ended up straining as if taking a shit in a stand up position.

"Sorry for the theatrics," the major said. "Next thing you know I won't be able to piss at all."

"I can see you're having a problem."

"It's a hell of a deal. You feel like you got to do it, then you can't get it out."

"It doesn't look pleasant."

"No, it is not."

The major sat down again and at once slumped into his knees as if to conserve energy.

"Could I ask you, sir," Morris ventured, "what brought you over to Nam and what you were doing when you got captured?"

"This is my second tour," the major answered. "I was up to number 87. Flying a Phantom."

"What happened to your partner?"

"He ejected, I think. I never saw him afterwards. I don't know what happened to him."

"What was his name?"

"Vendal Morrow."

"I think I heard he was verified as KIA."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that."

"Where were you before you came over... the second time."

"I was in Fairchild. Summer camp for ROTC."

"Fairchild in Spokane?"

"Yes."

"I was there one time, in summer of '67. Ran in a track meet."

"You came up from Nellis?"

"Yes."

"I saw part of that meet, actually. Some of my guys were involved. What did you compete in?"

"Ran the mile."

"Had one guy who ran the mile. Name of Tom Steward, as I recall.

"Well, it is a small world! Just so happens, I know him. Rowed with him in college. On a crew, you know?"

"The long boats."

"Yea."

"Couldn't stand the guy, to tell you the truth."

"Why was that?"

"Philosophical type. Crammed with bullshit from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."

"Ha! That's a little harsh!"

"Just my opinion. Sorry."

"You know, I met another guy from the base," Morris said after a moment of contemplation. "Friend of Steward's you must have known, too. Name of Orin Brown."

"Oh, yes, Brown. He was in my unit, too," the major replied.

"Where did you meet up with him?"

"Down in Bangkok, on R&R there," Morris answered. "He's in Intelligence or something. Something called Detachment K, joint op with the Army. Said they were questioning people to figure out what's going on in China."

"Yes, Detachment K. I've heard of that, I think."

Later, as Morris sat quietly by himself, with the major beside him obviously in physical distress but never uttering a complaint, a memory came back to him of an officer he had seen at the track meet that now in retrospect struck him as having been the major. The memory as it formed in his mind was of a much healthier, fleshier man, but with the same cast of the face, the same dismissive expression as just displayed in connection with Tom Steward.

From that memory, Jim Morris's mind went back to the river scene he had shared with Tom Steward and his other teammates on the crew. In fact, he recalled the exact same incident that Steward, in West Virginia, had recalled a few days before concerning him, the exchange between him and Steward on the boat club dock, the one that he had mentioned in his first letter to Steward. The associated scene, of the boat club dock

with the gray water of the river streaming past, seemed so far removed from his present situation that he wondered if the gulf of time and circumstance could ever be bridged again to bring him back to it.

180. Erland, before being killed, warns of the "collection apparatus"

Jim Morris awoke the next morning to see Ellwood Erland standing by the fence again, apparently in another effort to take a pee, but obviously in greater discomfort and distress.

"Well, this is the end of me, I expect," the major said. "Nothing is coming out. This can't last too long."

With that said, the emaciated major zipped up his tattered pants and walked a ways down the fence with his pelvis held back and his hands clenched. He made another attempt at the far corner of the pen and again was unsuccessful.

A steady drizzle was coming down, but the major hardly seemed to notice. All in all, it was a dismal scene. The hillside was a smear of mud from the occasional passing of guards. Nothing else was in view except the drab walls of functional buildings and, above them, a few pine branches against a gray sky.

Morris got up and stood by the major, not knowing what to do or say. "We ought to alert someone to get medical help, sir," he finally ventured.

"Medical help, shit," Erland replied. "That would require for them to regard us as human beings. So far, I've seen no inclination in that direction."

"You would think they have an obligation."

"Yes, they do, no doubt, based on various standards they've never heard of or care to be informed of."

"I should give it a try, sir. With your permission."

"Sure, go ahead."

Just as they were speaking, a soldier, one of those who had been in the truck with Morris, appeared on the side of the hill with a small pail and some other object that appeared to be a metal plate. He came down the hill carefully, holding to some posts there, to keep from slipping on the muddy path.

Without looking at them, the soldier set the pail and the plate at the base of the fence by the free-standing roof where there was a small opening and another similar plate belonging to the major. The pail contained some kind of gruel of cooked grain.

"Mister, mister, this man needs help, needs doctor, " Morris said, trying to get the soldier's eye. "Trouble here... Nothing comes out," he went on, making hand gestures to try to get his point across. "Needs doctor. Doctor. Sick."

The man replied with a curious, amused expression as if looking at an exhibit in a zoo.

Later, when the major went to attempt another pee, the same man was at the top of the hill by the same door that he had emerged from with the

gruel. He said something back into the open door, and two other soldiers came out to look.

When the major grunted and strained as if trying to take a shit in a standing position, one of the men said something that brought a laugh to the two others. A fourth soldier then came out to join in the joking and laughter.

"Well, I guess that answers the question about medical assistance," Erland said when he sank down again beside Morris.

"Sorry you're in such discomfort," Morris said.

"I've known worse," the major replied.

As they sat together, looking out to the grim scene, the drizzle began again, followed by a steady downpour that brought brown rivulets of muddy water streaming down the hillside.

Erland began to shiver and his teeth started chattering in a spasm that soon extended to his entire body. He folded his arms but could not stop himself from shaking.

"Sorry for the show," he said.

"Anything I can do, sir?"

"No, I don't think so."

The teeth chattering and shaking continued for several minutes and then subsided just as suddenly as they had begun, leaving the major in an exhausted, slumped posture. He pulled himself together and sat up against the fence.

"Morris, there's a couple things I need to tell you," he said.

"Yes, sir, please go ahead."

"First thing is this, there is a camp somewhere near here, maybe a hundred or so miles from here. To the east, I think. Looks like a temple, a 'wat,' as they call it, with walls, maybe it's an old monastery that the soldiers took over. You find yourself at that place, prepare your mind, because it has one purpose, torture."

"Torture for what purpose?"

"For no goddam purpose, as far as I could see, except some kind of sadistic purpose in tearing people down."

"You were there yourself?"

"Yes. Up until about two weeks ago."

"What are the methods?"

"Everything you've heard of, I imagine. Water, electrical shock, physical beatings."

The two men were silent as the rain continued to pour down and the brown water streamed down the hill beside them.

"Sorry to have to inform you," Erland said. "I just want to give you a chance to prepare."

"What can I say? I hope to be equal to it," Morris responded.

"One thing I can tell you," Erland said, "the pain can only get so bad. There's a separation to an extent that, you maybe won't fathom this, I don't know if I gave in."

Morris did not reply.

"The way I became aware of it, I heard someone screaming in another room, then I realized I was the one who was screaming. I had separated to that extent. And I would dream, these fitful dreams, and I would think in my dream I was giving in, then I'd wake up and realize, I hadn't really given in, I had dreamt it. That's why I say, I don't know if I gave in, because I don't know where the dream ended."

"What was there to give in about?" Morris asked.

"Well, that's the goddam thing. Nothing I know could have had any value for them, and yet they were trying to get me to answer questions. Just for the purpose of seeing me break."

"Well, sir, you're on your second tour here, as you told me. You've done,—what is it?—187 missions. That's a great service in this war. That's more than 90 percent of the people have done in our armed forces. That's a heroic service, in my opinion."

"Thank you, Jim."

"I'm the one who's thanking you."

The captive officers were silent again, looking off through the barbed wire to the sheet metal roof of a nearby building where the rain battered unceasingly.

"Oh, man, here goes again," Erland said. "Maybe this one will go alright."

He got up and went to the corner of the fence to try another pee, an effort that met no success. He came back, teeth chattering, and sank down beside Morris.

"Just have to put it out of my mind," he said to Morris.

"Don't know what else you can do, sir."

"Listen, Morris, call me 'Al,' if you don't mind."

"Thank you, Al, I will."

"Now, the second thing I need to tell you. Well, what it comes down to is I got a favor to ask of you, if you don't mind. It's quite a large favor, I'm afraid."

"Nothing is too large. Just tell me what you need."

"Listen, I don't think I'm going to make it," the major continued, "and I have a son, a 12-year old son. His mother and I are divorced, but I try to keep up with the kid."

"Of course. Of course."

"Hard goddam situation. You want to be close and you can't be. You want to be there for him and you can't be... He may even have a bad opinion of me by this time. His mother runs me down. He's got a new

father, as he calls it."

"That must be the hardest thing in the world."

"I just want him to know, this father, his real father, loved him. This father would have given his life for him in an instant. This father wanted to be there and he couldn't be there."

"Of course."

"Seek him out, Jim. Find him. Tell him that in person, is what I'm asking you to do. Tell him you knew me and I was a good officer, a good man. Tell him a goddam good lie."

"I won't have to lie, Al, and I will do that if I get back. I swear to Almighty God I will do that."

"Thank you very much."

For a while again, they sat in silence.

"You know, Morris, I guess I've been impolite," the major said after a pause of several minutes. "I never asked about you."

"There's nothing to tell."

"You married?"

"Yes, I am."

"For how long?"

"Just over a year."

"Still on your honeymoon, huh?"

"Yes, pretty close."

"Well, I hope it continues that way."

"Thank you."

"You got any kids?"

"No, I don't."

"Want to have kids?"

"Yes, actually, when I get back."

"Well, I hope to hell you get out of here."

"Thank you."

There was not much talking between them after that, though a silent bond of kinship grew as the day wore on with Erland getting worse. The soldier who brought down the evening meal,—more of the same in the same pail, not cleaned,—gave the major another curious look.

Next morning, Erland was in a worse state, crouched together, his teeth chattering. He could not stop shaking.

"Jim, I'd like to give you a better sense of your situation, while I'm able."

"How is that?"

"Something I've learned, Jim, is this whole system is set up like a large collection apparatus. A little camp like this is like a tributary, you know, to a river, or whatever. Some time or another, the tributaries are gathered in."

"To the larger camps."

"Precisely, yes. Including maybe the place I mentioned."

"I understand."

"The whole point is, you're okay, you'll be treated half decently in a camp like this, but once you get gathered in..."

"I understand."

"Sometimes, in my case, people get sent the other way, I don't know why. They get tired of looking at you, I guess. But, in your case, there's only one way. Don't sit back, is what I'm trying to impress on you. If you got a chance at all, it's to escape somehow here."

"I understand."

"I don't know how the hell you could do that. I'm too damn sick to look for ways out. But maybe there are some ways."

"Thank you, sir. I'll try."

"You're welcome, Jim."

As they spoke, a soldier, then two others, emerged from the door on the top of the hill. This time they were not carrying the pail with the gruel, they were carrying guns. At the pen, they unlocked a gate and motioned for the major to follow them out.

Erland raised his hand. "Best to you, Jim," he called back.

"Best to you, too," Morris replied.

The soldiers and Erland ascended the hill. When Erland slipped in the mud, one of the soldiers grabbed him by the shirt to pull him up and then shoved him ahead.

Morris had risen to bid his fellow captive farewell. Left alone, he sat down under the free-standing roof, immediately feeling the loneliness of being without the major's company. Later, he heard voices then a single shot followed by another.

Another downpour followed that as Morris sat under the roof, hardly moving. When darkness came hours later, he was still in the same spot and the rain was still coming down as if it would never end.

181. Medic Bill O'Rourke arrives in Vietnam for his tour of duty

The same weather front that brought Jim Morris a torrent of rain in Laos also brought rain to pound on the metal rooftop of a large hanger 800 miles southeast in South Vietnam, at the Tansonnhut Airport in Saigon (as the present Ho Chi Minh City was then called). A young soldier with buzz-cut red hair and a two days' growth of red stubble, on a ruddy face, was standing there, newly arrived with the rest of his company to begin his tour of duty.

"Bill O'Rourke," he heard the sergeant say who was handing out the duty assignments for his platoon.

"Yo, right here!" O'Rourke replied.

"Looks like you're bound for Chu Lai," the sergeant said.

"Chu Lai, what's there, Sergeant?"

"91st Evac. Up the coast."

"Just me?" O'Rourke asked.

"No, Moore and Burns, too," the sergeant answered.

"How we get there?"

"More of the same."

"Oh, wonderful," said O'Rourke.

"You don't like the Starlift?"

"No, I love it, Sarg. I love the windows."

"Tomorrow at noon. You'll find the details in the barracks," the sergeant said. "And I say the same to all of you, if you want the details on your transit, look on the bulletin board in the barracks. Van will be here to take us to the barracks in about 15 minutes, assuming they're on time."

"Fat chance of that," someone said.

"Make sure you're here and ready when the van arrives."

With time to spare, Bill O'Rourke walked alone down toward the far end of the hanger, where he could see there was an open door. The odds and ends of his new situation passed through his mind. He had heard about evac duty. As he understood, it involved meeting medivac helicopters as they arrived at the evac hospital with wounded soldiers airlifted from the battlefield. His sense of it was that it was intense and important duty, and also safe, as it all took place on the base. He was aware that, to some extent, he was relieved to know that he would be spared from combat (at least, for the time being), while, at the same time, he still wanted to prove himself in combat, and make that further demonstration of his conviction, as he had resolved to do as part of his original reason for joining the army.

Reaching the door, O'Rourke looked out to the wet tarmac, where the huge silver plane that had transported his company from the States was

still parked. Its official name was the CS-141 Starlifter, and it had no windows at all other than those in the cockpit. The seats in the body of the plane were along the walls, facing inward. As a result, O'Rourke had traveled half way around the world without seeing any of it except an airport on Guam where the plane had stopped for about an hour.

Beyond the sleek silver fuselage of the plane, gleaming with multi-colored, reflected light, converging lines of blue and white lights marked a runway that extended about a mile to a row of yellow street lights at the perimeter of the airport.

"Hey, fellows, what's this place remind you off?" O'Rourke said to two medics who came up behind him.

Owing to his well-liked, irreverent manner and natural leadership qualities, the former coxswain was seldom without company except when he insisted on it.

"I don't know, L.A.?" one of the others answered.

"Yea, exactly. Who would have thought, a place like this in Nam? This place is fuckin' huge."

Everything he had seen so far was huge, O'Rourke continued in his mind, and he was beginning to see that the Army and the entire military structure in Vietnam were just as huge and just as impossible to take in and deal with on a personal scale, starting with this assignment that he didn't much care for, and wouldn't know who to talk to about if he ever had a mind to.

"O'Rourke," he heard the sergeant call.

"Yo!"

"Van leaves in five minutes. Tell it around."

"Alright, I will."

O'Rourke set out at once to do as instructed. He had proven to be an excellent soldier, in the opinion of just about everyone, and recently had often been called upon for tasks like this, indicating a place above his peers, though he had, as yet, been given no commensurate rank. Due to his experience as a coxswain, he could give directions without being resented. He just seemed natural in the role, and his fellow recruits heard something in his tone of voice that led them to accept him as someone in charge.

Midway through his task, he stopped to look at some large wall maps that he came upon in an open office area of the hanger. One of the maps showed the location of the medical hospitals in Vietnam. Scanning the top of the map, about a hundred miles south of the Demilitarized Zone, he found Chu Lai, located on the coast of the South China Sea, about 25 miles southeast of Da Nang. From Saigon, where he was at the moment, it appeared to be at a distance of about 500 miles "up the coast" (north) as the sergeant had said. The words "122nd Evac" were crossed out by

the name “Chu Lai,” with the words “91st Evac” written in. Apparently the hospital had just recently undergone a change in command.

Scanning the map further south, O’Rourke looked for a second name, “3rd Surgical,” the unit where Barbara Carpenter was stationed in Can Tho. He found it about a hundred miles south of Saigon. So the distance from his new location to Carpenter would be about 600 miles, O’Rourke noted. That was the distance, approximately, from Minneapolis to St. Louis. Meeting up with her now and then would not only be difficult because of his and her difference in rank, with Carpenter, now a second lieutenant; it would also be difficult owing to the geographical distance between them and the limited time off that he expected he would have eventually,—he didn’t yet know the details of that,—if there was even some kind of safe transit all the way down through the country through multiple areas of conflict.

He had her recent letter with him, folded into the breast pocket of his shirt. In the letter, received three days before, she told of her excitement at his arrival. “She’ll be disappointed, too,” he said to himself.

Next day about noon, O’Rourke reported back to the hanger with the two others, Boyd Moore and Ed Burns, assigned to Chu Lai, expecting to see another immense CS-141 Starlifter parked there. Instead he found a dual-engine plane with a turbo prop on each wing. It was larger than a typical private prop, marked with the Army insignias.

“We got you guys riding along with Captain Ken Forland here,” the sergeant explained. “He’s going up there to deliver some meds.”

O’Rourke saw at once that this plane was no Gooney. It had two rows of two passenger seats in back of the two cockpit seats with windows on either side.

“Hope you don’t mind the change of plans,” the captain said.

“Oh, no, this is great,” O’Rourke replied, nodding at the plane. “What is this anyhow?”

“U-21 Ute, fondly called ‘Ute’.”

“Nice looking little guy.”

“Oh, yea, he is.”

After introductions, there was a brief discussion about seating, with Moore and Burns opting for seats in back. As a result, O’Rourke wound up in the cockpit, watching ahead on the runway as the plane gathered speed and nosed up into a clear blue sky. The rain clouds of the previous night were no longer in sight.

As the plane left the airport behind and rolled to the right, to his side, O’Rourke could see a lattice of tiled roofs, treetops, and narrow streets. He saw one street bordered with outdoor stands and crowded with a constantly moving hodgepodge of people, cars, trucks, scooters, bicycles, and oxen-borne carts.

"Looks like you're interested in the view," the pilot said.

"Yes, sir, I am," O'Rourke answered.

"I'll keep low for a while so you can see."

"Thank you very much."

"You guys are medics?" the pilot asked.

"Yes, sir, we are," O'Rourke answered.

"Bound for Chu Lai?"

"Yes, sir," said O'Rourke.

"Well, you'll find it's quite a place."

"How is that?"

"Big place, like a little town. 15,000 or more stationed there, last I heard," Capt. Forland explained.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"You get up there often, Captain?" O'Rourke asked.

"Yes, I do," Forland answered.

"What exactly you do, sir?"

"For lack of a better term, I'm a delivery boy, I guess you could call me. I ferry meds, urgently needed supplies, to the various hospitals all up and down the coast. And sometimes I take personnel, say, a certain kind of doctor is needed in a hurry or, you know, conferences of various kinds."

"Sound like a nice gig."

"I can't complain. I love to fly."

"Where do you fly out of. sir?"

"Place called Long Binh, 20 miles northwest of here," the pilot answered. "I fly with the 8th Aviation Detachment, which is directly under the 1st Aviation Group. We do all kinds of sundry little jobs."

"How long you been doing this, Captain?" O'Rourke said.

"This is my second tour."

"What was your first tour?"

"More of the same."

They had reached the outskirts of the city, with the lattice of houses and streets breaking off into a rural area of water-pooled green fields and occasional clusters of like-sized, simple-looking buildings, rimmed by forest-covered hills.

"Now, Bill," the pilot said, "your name is Bill, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell you what we're going to do, we're gonna head northwest to a place called Camh Ranh on the South China Sea. From there, we'll follow the coast about 300 miles up to Chu Lai. Little out of the way, because we could take an angle cross-country, but it's a nice ride."

"Sounds great to me, sir."

"This is a beautiful country, as you can see."

"Yes, it is."

They continued along, with the engines droning outside, following what appeared to a river valley below them. After about an hour, a body of water came into view stretching to the horizon.

"Now that there is the South China Sea," the captain said. "Other side of that, flying due east, you got the Philippine Islands. Fly northeast, you got Hong Kong."

At the coast, Forland rolled the plane leftward until the long line of the shore to the north came around ahead of them. All along it, far as the eye could see, white waves rolled in. Ships, some having the oblong gray shapes of battleships, moved up and down parallel to the coast leaving wakes behind.

"Looks like some good surfing spots," O'Rourke said.

"Oh, yes. For sure. Even got a beach there in Chu Lai where they do some," the pilot responded.

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Got just about everything you can imagine," the pilot said. "Big athletic fields. They've got some great contests now and then."

"I can imagine, sir."

Captain Forland and the former coxswain continued up the coastline, chatting back and forth amiably as they exchanged pieces of information. In the course of this, the subject of rowing came up and the captain disclosed that he had also been an oarsman.

"Where was that?" O'Rourke asked.

"Wayne State."

"Is that so! You know, sir, I think we rowed against you guys one time."

"When was that?" the pilot asked.

"1965."

"1965! I was there!"

"Which crew, sir?"

"Varsity heavy."

"Ain't that something, sir, we competed!" O'Rourke exclaimed.

"That is something."

"We beat you, as I recall," said O'Rourke with a grin.

"I'll forgive you for that, soldier."

"Maybe you might recall me because I was the coxswain."

"Oh, my God, red-haired guy, red cap, red sweatshirt, right?"

"Yes, sir, and don't ask me why. I thought it was my image."

"Well, as I recall, you were a little more than a coxie, O'Rourke. That crew had a tremendous amount of respect for you. You could tell by how

they listened and paid heed."

"Thank you, sir. Could I ask you a question, looking back at that?"

"Of course."

"There you were a guy in a boat. I suppose it was your last year."

"Yes."

"How was it you wound up here as an officer flying a plane?

Forland laughed. "Well, first part of it, I was already a pilot. I learned to fly in high school even, was really drawn to it, you know, and got my license, worked part-time to pay for my lessons. Afraid to say that was more important to me than my schoolwork."

"And the officer part?"

"Just plain old enlisted... Draft was coming so I enlisted, and then after the fact kind of thought of the pilot part and the recruiter said to me, 'Why don't you test out for OCS? You could maybe wind up as a pilot of some kind.' And long story short, I did."

Later Forland alerted O'Rourke that they were approaching Chu Lai. "You see that angle of land curving out, ahead there about five miles, looks like a little peninsula?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, the base is on that peninsula. Nice location, kind of. Right next to the water."

"There's something else just ahead of it."

"Yea, a sand bar, kind of, long low island nobody lives on. It serves a purpose, though, protects that narrow channel."

As they drew closer, O'Rourke could see the peninsula more clearly. The land was brown, almost desert like, but dotted with occasional trees that looked like palm trees. There were long rows of long, low buildings with roofs of corrugated tin amidst which, parallel to the coast, ran a two-lane road on which olive-colored military vehicles traveled back and forth. The road followed the line of the water where white waves rolled in below a low cliff. An A-frame chapel came into view, then an open area with what appeared to runways for planes.

"Here comes the airport," Forland said, picking up his radio mike. "Tower, this is 45 EM," he called in. "Looks quiet down there. I'd like to bring it straight in. Roger."

There was a burst of static then the tower came in. "45 EM, clear for landing, Kenny. Roger and out."

"They're used to me," Forland said with a smile. "Now, Bill, if you look right over there by the water, see that low building there with those two guys standing right outside?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the 91st Evac, the triage," the pilot informed.

"I see it, sir. What's the open area there, just beyond it?"

"That's the heliport."

"Where they bring them in from battle?"

"Yea. From battle. From hell. They don't have it so nice like the rest of us, let me tell you, though. Admittedly, you might find yourself under mortar fire there on occasion, not to speak of the drain of seeing people hurting and sometimes dying. I don't envy you for that."

O'Rourke acknowledged that with a remark that seemed spoken to himself, "Well, it's what I came for, to be of service."

A helicopter came into view as they spoke, people with stretchers rushed out, and O'Rourke's mind went again to his mixed feelings about having made it to a safe haven upon finally arriving in Vietnam.

182. O'Rourke starts as a triage medic at Chu Lai hospital

Upon landing at the Chu Lai airport, SPC Bill O'Rourke bid a hardy farewell to the friendly pilot, Ken Forland, and then turned to his two fellow medics, Boyd Moore and Ed Burns.

"Well, I guess we're not going to have a welcoming party," he said, throwing the strap of his duffel bag over his left shoulder.

"Thought I heard him saying it was right over there," Boyd Moore replied.

He was a string bean of a young man, about 6-3 and maybe weighing at most about 160 pounds. By contrast, Ed Burns was short and square with an ample pouch.

"Yea, he pointed it out. It's right down the road here."

"Might as well walk to it," said Burns.

"Sure, why not?"

They set out walking past the building that apparently served as an airport terminal of sorts. Like other buildings in sight, it was an "Army issue" structure, completely rectangular in shape, with sides and roof of corrugated tin, and with no architectural embellishments of any kind. In front was a oblong sign bolted onto two poles that were painted red and leaning toward another. The sign said, "71st HAC." The plain front door was locked.

Turning up the two-lane highway that fronted the airport, O'Rourke took in a full view of their new location. Just across the road, below a gradual incline, was a white sand beach with the rolling surf providing a sea view such as he remembered from his stay in California. Two soldiers were there, seated on a log, having a smoke together. But the functional sameness of the buildings, and the olive-drab-painted vehicles passing along the road, conveyed a different message: this was indeed a military setting, a station of war. He was actually in Vietnam, where he had seen himself for so long in his imagination.

The totem-like signs on the red leaning poles were standard issue, also, he noticed. He soon saw another such sign, "176th Aviation." Then, he and his two fellow medics came upon two sprawling buildings that were obviously dressed up in an effort to make them appear more cheerful. The first was identified as the "MAG 13th Officers' Club," the second as the base USO, the entertainment center for enlisted soldiers. It was a quiet- looking place at the moment with several soldiers playing pool in a corner section that looked like a sports bar.

Just up the road, on an treeless outridge of land jutting into the water, the three medics found the complex of medical buildings that they had been looking for. All of the buildings were the same standard issue, rectangular shaped, corrugated tin structures, only different in being of different sizes. One of them was labeled "91st Evac." They went up to it

and opened the door to find a desk by a window. A young woman in an Army uniform was seated there at a typewriter, facing outward toward them.

"We're here to report for duty," O'Rourke said.

"Moore, Burns, and O'Rourke?"

"Yes, that's us."

"We've been expecting you. Welcome," the young woman said.

"Thank you."

"Came up on a prop."

"Yes, we did."

"Have a nice trip?"

"Yes, we did."

"Well, the place you want to go now is back across the road there, at the company HQ. I think you'll find the sergeant there, Lloyd Kendall. He'll show you to your quarters. Then, tomorrow, you're due for some kind of orientation."

"Thank you."

"Oh, and here's some of these," the young woman said as they turned to go. She handed each of them a patch with the insignia of the 91st Evac. "Welcome to the unit."

The unit insignia, O'Rourke saw then, consisted of a cream-colored fleur-de-lys set on a vertical bar with black and white diagonal stripes. Below the fleur-de-lys was a banner saying "Aid to the Wounded."

That same afternoon, O'Rourke sewed the patch on his uniform using the needle and thread he still always kept in his pack, going back to his hitchhiking days with Tom Steward. He did this sitting in his new single room in one of the standard issue tin roof buildings.

Supper was in a mess hall similar to what he had experienced during his four months of training at Fort Bragg in Georgia. After a meal of meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and green beans, he went for a walk further up the same road that he and his two fellow arrivees had walked on earlier that same day from the airport.

With the sun setting over the hills that bordered the base on the landward side and long shadows extending seaward, toward the rolling water of the South China Sea, the base had a peaceful appearance. It was as large as Captain Ken Forland, the pilot, had said it would be.

There were buildings, most with the same standard design, for a mile or two in every direction. Each cluster was identified with a sign. 126th S&T. 588th Maint, Radar Divarty TP25, 123rd Aviation, were among the names he noticed. One sign saying "Hdqtr AMERICAL Div" had a blue shield like a knight's shield with four large white stars.

Three miles up the road, O'Rourke came upon the protected channel that Capt. Forland had pointed out from the air. There were several piers

there, jutting out into the water. There was an officers' club there where men in white Navy uniforms, several with women escorts, sat drinking highballs at tables overlooking the channel. It could have been a scene in Newport Beach, O'Rourke observed to himself.

Next day, early, O'Rourke and the two fellow medics he had arrived with, Boyd Moore and Ken Burns, reported to the hospital where they were given a tour and introduced all around to anyone they met in the process. The hospital had large, plain rooms with rows of black tripod stands that the nurse taking them around explained were used to support the stretchers that the wounded were carried in from the heliport. Medical supplies were arranged in open shelves on all sides of the room.

"Everything is in reach that you might need," she explained. She was a woman about their own age but with a captain's bars on her lapel. "Time if of the essence, as you can imagine. People are only with us until they stabilize,—at the most, for 48 or 72 hours. Anyone surviving beyond then is either released or sent to a larger hospital for a longer recuperation, if that's what they need."

"How often you get people in here, ma'am?" O'Rourke asked.

"A couple of times a week, usually," the nurse answered. "Sometimes every day."

The day continued with a brief presentation on the Army structures that 91st Evac belonged to. The presenter, the company adjutant, used one chart to show where the unit fit into the medical branch structure and a second to show where the unit fit into the Army combat structure.

"As you can see," he said, pointing to a tree diagram on the first chart, "91st Evac is part of the 67th Medical Group, which, in turn, is one of the main components of the 44th Medical Brigade. The 44th Medical Brigade reports directly to the central command here in Vietnam,—US Army, Vietnam, as it is called, or USARV.

"Going to the combat structure, our group, 67th Med, is assigned to support of the XXIV Corps, which is one of the four main combat components of the US Army in Vietnam, the others being the I and II Field Corps and XXII Corps. XXIV Corps has tactical control of the 1 Corps Tactical Zone, also known as Military Region I, which covers the five northern provinces of South Vietnam: Quang Tri, Thua Thien (where we are), Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. 67th Med is shown here, in the XXIV Corp structure, along with the main other components. I won't describe them all in detail, you can get a sense by the names—101st Airborne, AMERICAL, 3rd Marines,—these are some of the most storied units in the Army, going back to World War II. XXIV Corps consists of more than 100,000 personnel, so our supporting function is huge. Included in this picture, also, like us in 67th Med, are medical units assigned to combat operations. Each combat division, such as the 101st

Airborne, has its own medical battalion, consisting of about 200 to 300 people."

Later, O'Rourke learned he would be assigned to triage, replacing a soldier whose tour of duty would be up in several days. Moore and Burns were assigned to in-hospitable assistance,—in surgery or in dressing wounds.

O'Rourke soon met the young man he would be replacing. He was a young man of about the same age, 22, and he at once expressed his relief at finishing up the job.

His name was Dennis Norbert. He was a big, likeable fellow with a barrel chest and dark, curly hair.

"You're safe here yourself. There's no danger," he said. "But the decisions wear you down."

"What decisions?" O'Rourke asked.

"The decisions about who gets moved ahead," Norbert explained. "As you will soon find out, Bill, when people come in, we place them in one of four categories. First category is what we call 'expectant.' These are people, unfortunately, that we expect to die. You look at the poor guy and you see right away there's no way he's going to make it. His arm or his legs are blown off, half of his face is blown off, it can get pretty grim. Then you got guys we refer to as "immediate." These guys have got a fighting chance if they get treatment right away. They got a gushing wound, for example; they're losing blood fast. Next category are people that are, quote, 'delayed'. They've maybe got pain. We get to them as fast as we can, but not until the 'immediate's' are taken care of. Finally, we got 'minimal'. These are people that can just walk off."

O'Rourke considered this information in silence.

"Then there is a fifth category, also," Dennis Norbert went on. "Enemy combatants. Charlies. Sometimes we get some of them, too. Needless to say, they get treated last except if sometimes we can save a life while the delayed are waiting. Most of the time, though, they wait until all of our own guys are taken care of."

O'Rourke and his predecessor ended up in a corner room where there was a coffee percolator and some paper cups and a window looking out to the South China Sea.

"This is your little corner for sanity," Norbert said. "Have some coffee on me. I'll catch up with you a little later. Things are pretty quiet for the time being."

O'Rourke got himself a cup of coffee and sat down, looking out to the water. He was still trying to make up his mind about the assignment that he had wound up doing. He didn't like the idea of making decisions such as Norbert had described but he could see where making them was a medical necessity in order to save as many lives as possible.

About ten minutes later, Dennis Norbert stuck his head in the door and gestured with his finger. “Just got a call they’re on their way in. You can give a hand, if you’d like. Good a time to break in as ever, I suppose.”

O’Rourke didn’t need to inquire what were on their way in. He knew that Norbert meant medivac helicopters carrying wounded.

He followed Norbert outside to be met with staff members personnel from several directions. Two of them were Army nurses directing the others. Two were heliport personnel who guided in the medivacs.

They stood together looking out toward the southeast, above Pocket Rocket Ridge. Soon a helicopter appeared there, then a cluster of several more in quick succession.

The helicopters were UH-1H Huey’s, the squat-shaped aircrafts about 30 feet long that he had encountered in training, O’Rourke noticed as they came closer. Each had a pilot seat up front and a back area with an open door where airvac personnel could be seen kneeling over wounded soldiers.

“They said it’s pretty bad,” one of the nurses said.

In a matter of minutes, the first of the helicopters was hovering over the heliport, blowing up dust into their faces. Shielding his eyes, O’Rourke followed Norbert to the open door of the helicopter where he helped a nurse in removing the first stretcher.

The young man they were carrying—whose name, O’Rourke noticed, was J. Malloy—had his right arm blown off and his side opened up on that side. The two lowest ribs on that side and some of his inner organs were visible through a hole in his shirt. The shirt below the wound and his pants on that side were thoroughly drenched in blood.

“Lord, Lord,” the man said as he was being carried to an evaluation area on the tarmac.

Left alone with the man for a moment, O’Rourke tried to figure out what to do. He felt that he should bandage the wound somehow, but should he push the organs back in first? There was a section about six inches long of the intestine outside the man’s side.

The young man appeared to be only about 19 years old, younger than most kids in college, O’Rourke thought. He hardly looked old enough to have a beard. His teeth were clenched in pain.

For a moment he met O’Rourke’s eyes before O’Rourke raced back to unload another soldier from the helicopter. The second helicopters was landing. Two other nurses were rushing out from the building.

“Am I okay, doc?” the young man asked O’Rourke.

“Sure, you’re okay,” O’Rourke replied.

It was the first time he had been called “doc,” the affectionate term used by the common foot soldiers to address their medics.

"Am I going to live?" the wounded man persisted.

"Sure, you're doing fine."

"You going to stick with me?"

"Damn right, I will," O'Rourke replied. "You just hold on now, fellow. You're going to be alright."

Not knowing what to do about the wound, he ran back to the heliport where he again found himself behind Dennis Norbert.

"Can you help me with that guy over there?" he asked as he helped to unload another soldier on a stretcher.

"Nothing we can do for him," Norbert answered. "I noticed him when you were lifting him out."

"He seems like he's hanging on."

"He's not going to make it, Bill. I'm sorry," Norbert answered with a weary expression.

Disregarding what Norbert had said, O'Rourke turned to go back to his first evacuee as soon as he set down the second stretcher. There was no need to go further. A nurse was there, leaning over the man that O'Rourke had known only as J. Malloy. She said something to someone else and covered the man's face with a cloth.

[Chapter 182 notes]

183. Steward's seek a place to live, rent an isolated farmhouse

By the last week of August 1969, with less than a week remaining in their hillside apartment in Morgantown, Tom and Kris Steward had still not found a place to move to in Preston County. As a result, they obtained permission from the project director, Janis Kulas, to spend a whole day looking. The day agreed on was Thursday, August 28.

They paused together that day, arm in arm, to look out from their back yard to the stretch of the Monongahela River that could be seen below the hill, between roofs of houses and buildings and leaves flocked with the first yellow of autumn.

"I'm going to miss this place," Thomas Steward remarked. "I've really gotten to love it."

"I have, too," his blonde, pretty wife replied. "So far, though, every change has been for the better."

"You really think that?"

"Oh, yes. Since the day we met."

Throughout the idyllic summer in Morgantown, her cheer and optimism had not abated, though the project had proven more and more problematic, with talk lately that funds would be hard to obtain for the next fiscal period of the project, beginning in less then six months.

As usual, the Steward's trip out from Morgantown, in their cozy new Rambler, took them first to the McDonald's on Beechurst and Fayette. There they sat together at a table drinking coffee with a Preston County map in front of them. They decided to go first to look at the house they had seen an ad for in the county newspaper, the one in a little town called Dumbreck Creek.

They found Dumbreck Creek on the map. It was on a gravel road about five miles off of Highway 7, the main route from Morgantown into Preston County. They also located on the map several other places where they had heard rental housing might be available, drawing between these places a circular route. Their drawn route led from Dumbreck Creek southeast to the town of Springford, then north to Kingwood, and then back southwest to Masontown, which was on their way back to Morgantown.

They headed out of Morgantown just as a bright sun ascended over an eastern hill. The sky was cloudless and blue.

"Did I tell you Arlis told me she's got a couch we can have if we want it?" Kristine said as they rode along.

"No, you didn't. What kind is it?"

"The brown one on her front porch."

"Oh, really? That's a nice one!"

"Yes, it is."

Outside of this promised couch, they had no furniture at all. Their

complete belongings (other than their just purchased car) consisted still of the exact items they had brought out in suitcases from Minnesota.

In the long, narrow valley called "the Cascade," the young couple found the turnoff to the gravel road they had located on the map. The road led under an overpass of the railroad, then through some low woods, then toward a chopped off hill where Dumbreck Creek came into view.

It was not what they had expected. The entire town consisted of eight cottage-like houses lined up side by side on a narrow offshoot of the gravel road below the chopped off hill. A red water tower, about a third of the size of the usual small town water tower, was the only other building. Below the tower was the creek that apparently gave the town its name. It was a skinny, humble creek without any trees beside it. Chopped off dirt from the hill above had been strewn down the slope. There was rusted machinery on the flat part of the hill. A rusted tipple led down the hill to the road.

Tom Steward drove up to two women standing in front of one of the houses, rolled down the car window, and got a blank stare. The women were of a similar type, heavy-set, middle-aged, and stolid in demeanor, with short-cropped brown hair and small, inscrutable eyes.

"Have you heard of some house around here up for rent?" young Steward asked.

"Right over there, third from the end."

"Anyone around to show it?" Steward asked.

"Ain't locked. Go on in," the women replied.

"Who you make arrangements with?"

"Sign there with a phone number."

"Okay, then. Thank you."

There was no "you're welcome" in reply, only a look of indifferent, or maybe even hostile, regard.

Steward drove further and stopped at the house pointed out. It was a one story building without any basement and with an open front porch smack dab against the road.

"You want to go in?" Tom asked, looking at his wife.

"Sure," she said. "We drove all the way here."

They went in and stood in the empty big room. The room was exactly square with a back window directly in line with the front window and two doors on the left leading into two other rooms of the exact same size. . The big room had a floor of plain pine boards. The back window looked out to the creek and the muddy slope beyond it.

"Not very cheerful, is it?" Kristine said.

"No, it's pretty grim."

In the backmost side room, which was apparently the kitchen, there was a sink without a counter and a black cast iron stove. Steward turned

on the single faucet above the sink, placed his hand under the flow, and realized there was cold water only, originating from an above-the-ground pipe that ran behind all the houses. The water came from the little water tower at the entry to the road, he thought to himself. Thinking next of what other plumbing there might be, he realized the house had no bathroom. He looked out the back window at that and saw two outhouses beyond the last of the houses.

"Kris, let's just go on," he said.

"Yea, let's go."

They drove away, glad to leave the dismal town behind. The world seemed beautiful and hopeful again as soon as they turned onto the sunlit road leading back to the highway.

"Tom, when you were in the kitchen," said Kris. "I peeked in that little bedroom, you know, and there was a lady in the house next door looking at me from about ten feet away."

The exchange gave them both a laugh as they turned from the gravel road onto the paved highway to continue to their next stop, Springford, where a one-bedroom apartment was available for rent, according to an ad in the county newspaper.

Their first sight of Springford was from a hillside above it as they drove into a valley. It was a community of maybe twice the size of the previous one with a like functional look. The houses were clustered around a brick building that appeared to be a factory.

Seeing a young couple standing in front of one of the houses, Tom pulled to a stop. "We heard there might be an apartment here for rent," he said without an introduction. "You know of any?"

"Any what?" said the man.

"Any place for rent."

"Might be somethin' in the apartments down there," the man replied. "We don't go down there."

"Well, thank you," said Steward. "We'll go give a look."

Again, there was no "you're welcome" in reply.

The two apartment buildings were the last buildings on the side street that led to the factory. They were identical, two-story buildings with flat roofs. A FOR RENT sign outside said to address inquiries to apartment #1 in the rightmost building.

"We'd like to look at the apartment, if it's still available," Steward said to the man who came to the door.

The man went to a kitchen cupboard and came back with a key in his hand. "#7 upstairs," he said.

"How much is it?"

"450."

That was a hundred dollars a month more than the apartment in

Morgantown, thought Tom. He looked out the front door of the building to the car and gestured for Kris to come have a look.

Together the Steward's went up the stairs and down the hall to a door, painted dark green, with the number "7."

The apartment was similar in design to the one downstairs. It had a kitchen, a living room, and a small bedroom. The windows throughout looked out to the factory.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Kris.

"You don't want to know."

"I do want to know."

"I was just thinking, we came all this way to be in Appalachia, and this could be, you know..."

"Detroit."

"We need to think about it," said Tom when he returned the key to the man in apartment #1.

"Sure, you do that," the man replied and closed the door.

The Steward's drove out of the side street and away from the factory and little town, glad to be on the road again. The next stop on their drawn route on the map was an apartment in Kingwood.

"I was thinking," said Tom, "let's not even go Kingwood. Let's just go look at that farmhouse, and call it a day."

"Yea, let's just do that."

"Why don't we go out to eat somewhere this evening?"

"I'd love to."

From Springford to Masontown, where the farmhouse was located, it was direct shot about 15 miles. They arrived in late afternoon and headed out on a road from the center of town by the hardware store. The ad they had mentioned a yellow house by a white house with a red barn.

The road curved several times around the bases of hills before a yellow house came into view. It was directly below a tall oak tree with pine trees in the side yard and a paint worn shed in the back yard. The white house referred to in the ad was beyond the yellow house about a hundred yards, partly blocked off from it by pine trees.

"Looks promising," said Tom.

"Nice and private."

"Yes."

They drove slowly past the yellow house, looking it over. It was a box-frame large house with a full upstairs and an open back porch on which a metal cylinder of some kind hung on a rope.

At the white house, a man of about 45, stern in demeanor, met Tom Steward at the door.

"You're the one with the house for rent?" asked Tom.

"Yes," said the man. "Care to look?"

"Yes, I would."

"Drive on back down there. I'll meet you there."

At the farmhouse, Tom Steward introduced his pretty wife and watched as the man surveyed her with a curious expression and greeted her with a formal hello.

"Where are you people from?" he said.

"We've been living in Morgantown."

"How come you're moving up here?"

"Work out of Kingwood."

"What kind of work is that?"

"Social work, kind of."

"There's a lot of them could use a little of that, I imagine."

Steward made no answer.

"Deal with this house," said the man, "it needs improvements. Rent is only $250, the understandin' bein' you're gonna try to get things in order. To the tune of a hundred bucks or so a month."

Tom Steward had not expected this development but it struck him as okay.

"Yes, that's fine," he replied.

"You know how to fix things?"

"I think I can figure it out."

"Who was living here before?" Kristine asked pleasantly.

"This is my folks' house," the man answered. "My mother died about five years ago. Dad was living here hisself. Just died a few months ago. He kinda let things go."

"Sorry to hear about your dad," Kristine remarked.

The man went over to the back porch by the metal cylinder hanging on the rope. "This house has a well," he said. "You lower this drop down this tube here, about 20 feet or so. The drop fills with water and you pull it up. Get what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand," said Tom. "Give it a try," said the man.

Steward took the rope above the tube, which was about two feet long and about 6 inches in diameter. He placed the tube in the pipe and unwound the pulley to let the drop travel down until it settled at the bottom and took on more weight as it filled with water.

"That should be good now. Pull it up."

Steward wound the pulley to lift the drop up the pipe.

"You put the water in this pail here," the man said.

Steward pulled the drop out of the pipe and tipped it over to let the water pour out of the drop into the pail.

"Wow, that is really neat!" Kris exclaimed.

"Come on inside," said the man. "You can leave the water there."

The door pushed in with creaking hinges. Inside was a large kitchen

with a white table and chairs, an old free-standing cupboard, and a fairly modern-looking electric range. The plaster walls were crumbling in places and needed fresh paint, but there were curtains on the windows and some old-fashioned pictures on the wall giving the place a homey appearance. There was a black cast iron stove in the corner.

"Black stove is used for heating the house," the man went on. "With coal or wood. There's another stove in the front room. Electric stove is for cooking. Folks used to have some of them electric floor heaters, too, in the bedroom."

"It's really cozy," said Kristine.

"You can use the table and chairs if you want to," the man said. "Curtains and pictures, too, far as that goes. If you don't want to use 'em, just box 'em up and give 'em to me."

"I like them," Kristine replied.

"Folks would heat water on the stove," the man informed. "There's a little bathroom over there, wash room really."

Together they went to look at the washroom. There was a regular tub there, but without a faucet. The tub was set up on a platform about a foot and a half above the rest of the floor. The tub had a drain with a spigot at the bottom.

"Reason for this is to drain out the water," the man said, tapping on the spigot. "You got to carry it outside."

They went to look through the rest of the house and found in the front a living room on one side and a large bedroom on the other with a large brass bed.

"Mattress is yours to use, if you want to. My dad slept on it but he was pretty clean."

"Yes, we would want it," Kristine replied.

Upstairs there were two large rooms that the man said his parents had used for storage. The young couple went to look at them alone and took the opportunity to confer in private.

"This house is huge!" Kris said.

"Yes, it is."

"This is a real country place!

"Nobody looking in the window."

"Let's take it!"

"Alright!"

Next day they moved into the farmhouse and that night they slept in their new bed for the first time after drawing water from the well and heating it for baths.

184. Steward looks for someone to serve as WRO president

After settling into their rented farmhouse, Tom and Kris Steward turned their attention to their work as outreach workers with the Preston County Welfare Rights Project, beginning with the general meeting held on Thursday, September 4, 1969. A change announced at this meeting turned the group in a new direction that the Steward's became involved in.

The announced change was the requirement for selection of new group president brought about by the sudden departure of the current president, Myrtle Darr, who had moved to Pittsburgh, where her husband had gotten a job in the steel mills.

"Maybe tonight, with Myrtle not here, we can think about who else could take up the job," Arlis Simpson told the 14 WRO members gathered in the store-front project center in Kingwood.. "Maybe we can get some what you call it, nominations, of people. Then set a vote for I don't know... I don't think we should wait too long. Maybe next meeting. What do you think, Cyril?"

To this, the burly, dark-haired member, the one who looked like a Welsh miner, boomed: "That's what I say! Next meeting!"

Arlis had directed this question to Cyril, knowing he would assert agreement, in his strong voice, with anything she said, so long as she implied the correct answer. She knew also that any true question inviting a thoughtful reply would be met with puzzled silence, not just by Cyril but by the entire group.

As usual, the WRO group had assembled not as the result of any shared sense of needing or wanting to have a meeting, but as the result of the assiduous efforts of the workers, whose jobs depended on the group's existence. Those attending had been invited, coaxed, and reminded in the days leading up to the meeting, and even then only about half of those who had promised to come had been there waiting for the ride on the night of the meeting. The others had not been at the agreed on meeting place or else had been ready with excuses.

The members were scattered throughout six rows of folding chairs in the main room of the center, an area about 20 feet wide and 30 feet deep. The chairs faced a oblong table, where no one sat at the moment, since that was where the president usually sat. Beyond the oblong table and the waist-high partition just behind it, was a smaller, square-topped table holding a coffee brewer, a plate of cookies, and Styrofoam cups in neat rows. Actually, the folding chairs, set in six rows, only occupied about two-thirds of the width of the room. In the other third, to the right of the chairs, three black children and two white children, all appearing to be of a pre-school age, played with some toys and books amidst an area where was children's furniture painted in bright solid colors.

Arlis Simpson directed the group from the first seat in the front row on the right side. John Sledger, dressed in his customary green work suit, sat on the other side of the front row, just in front of Tom and Kris Steward. Next to them were the ever-meek Rachel Shoats and her blind husband Ray, who leaned forward, with his head turned to one side, as he waited for the sound of the next person to speak. Behind the Shoats' was the pixie-faced Clara Mohs, the shy, girlish woman who had been helped at the welfare office day the week before. With her was the husband that she had claimed she no longer lived with and who was attending at the moment because she had asked him for ride. His name was Lawrence. Then there were the Boland's, Cyril and Virginia, and a leaner man of a more thoughtful countenance who had been introduced as Cyril's brother, George. Rounding out the group were two elderly women, introduced as unmarried sisters, Mable and Ester Jensen, and two young women, the mothers of the five children on the side of the room. Their names were Buela Howard and Samantha Sawyer.

Steward, watching the hesitant people around him as they struggled through the meeting, thought to himself that their need of the moment to decide on a leader was really at the heart of their collective inability to get anything done. They were almost to a person quiet and shy. They hardly interacted with one another. Had it not been for Arlis, prodding the group along, they would have sat in silence.

"What exactly are we looking for?" she asked at one point, as she tried to work up a discussion on the upcoming election. "Maybe we ought to think about it a little bit?"

No one replied to that while Ray Shoats sat a bit more forward with his head to the side as he listened for someone to speak.

"What do you think, George?" persisted Arlis, turning to the one new face in the meeting, that of Cyril's brother George, who had never attended before.

"Well, I would say, it ought to be a person who won't just look in this room," George answered slowly. "It ought to be someone who'd go out to people's relatives, and so on, to see what kind of other people there were that might come in, someone who'd maybe look around to some of these other counties, see what they're doing. Sometimes you can get some good ideas that way, asking around."

This gem of lucidity and common sense, in the midst of the bland interchanges of the previous ten or fifteen minutes, brought a smile to the face of the blind man, Ray Shoats. The workers all perked up seeing a sudden gleam of promise.

"Well, George, you ever think of putting your own name forward?" Arlis said.

"I'm not much for stuff like that," George replied.

With that, he sat back on his chair, which somewhat took him out of view into the shadows. He was in the last seat on the end of the back row, partially shielded from the view of the others by the hulking form of his brother Cyril.

"Oh, I don't know, George. You seem like quite a good man to me," Arlis persisted. "Ain't he a good man, Cyril?"

"God damn right!" Cyril thundered.

"Let me ask you this, George. Would you consider letting me put your name up for nomination?" Arlis continued. "Let people decide with their votes, just like it always is in this great country."

When George didn't answer, she said again. "Would you consider that?"

"Yes, I would consider," George answered.

Next to be nominated, thanks to Arlis' continued prompting, was the one black member of the group, the young mother, Beulah Howard. She didn't seem especially promising. She showed no evidence of the "in your face" assertiveness of her Morgantown counterpart, Violeta Moss. The most that could be said about her was that she was nice. She always smiled when addressed.

"Well, I guess that about does it then," John Sledger remarked, "unless somebody else got a name."

That was Sledger's first remark of the meeting, and it could have been read as being motivated more by a desire to close down the meeting and go home than by any inclination to find another name.

"Well, Clara, here, she's pretty good at bein' president and things like that," Lawrence Mohs abruptly announced. He, too, had said nothing throughout the proceeding. He had spent the meeting looking fidgety and bored. "Her and me, we don't always get along, as some of you know, but that's one thing I know about her."

"Well, what do you say to that, Clara?" Kristine Steward asked. She, too, had not spoken, up to this point in the meeting, but she had struck up a conversation with Clara before the meeting began.

"I would consider," Clara replied with a sheepish smile.

The meeting broke after that, and the members filed out and stood chatting on the sidewalk as Lawrence and Clara Mohs roared off in an old car that looked like it had been pieced together with spare parts from a junk yard.

Tom Steward, on the ride back down Route 7, listened as his wife spoke in a soft, kind voice to Rachel and Ray Shoats. The notion of the crucial need of the group for leadership, brought to light by the meeting, had lodged in his mind.

"I've been thinking the best way I could help this group would be to concentrate on leadership," he remarked to Kris as they left the Shoats' at

their corner and continued down the highway. “I think I could work with that George Boland, if he gets elected.”

“And you’d be so good at that!” his pretty wife answered, nestling against him. “Everyone likes you!”

Their ride did not lead, however, as it had for the past two months, back to the cheerful lights of Morgantown. Instead, from the one intersection in Masontown, they turned onto a narrow road that seemed to get narrower, or at least more impinged upon by trees, as the distance grew from town. The road was dark, and they didn’t even know yet where the road led beyond their farmhouse.

“I do really love this house,” Kris remarked to Tom as they entered the quiet kitchen. It seemed immense sometimes with its high ceiling and tall, narrow windows. “But sometimes it just seems like the end of the earth here, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does.”

“Don’t have to worry about noise, that’s for sure!”

“No, we don’t.”

That was certainly the case. The old house seemed as quiet at night as the environs seemed dark and unknown. The resulting aura of mystery had made for some intense moments of romance but Tom could tell also that Kris was beginning to be affected by the isolation. She got a look on her face at times that could only be described as forlorn. He had not been able to cheer her up at such moments though she was always affectionate toward him. Throughout the night, she slept within his arms.

Steward began hinting around, among WRO members he saw during the week, that George Boland would make a good president. The group needed a strong leader, he told several people, including the old Jensen sisters and Ray and Rachel Shoats.

Two weeks later, when almost exactly the same group met to elect a new president, Cyril and Virginia Boland emerged from John Sledger’s car alone.

“Where’s George?” Steward asked Sledger, who had been appointed to pick him up.

“Don’t know. Weren’t nobody around down at that farm there by that trailer he lives in.”

“Cyril doesn’t know?”

“Said he went to the fire fighters’ meeting.”

“Wow, this is not good! Now what’ll we do?”

“Clara Mohs maybe?”

That was no need for Steward to even reply to that, as the shared assessment of such a development hardly needed to be said. Clara didn’t look as if she could speak in front of the group much less lead it in a commanding way. Beulah seemed equally unpromising, and no one

expected that she had a change of getting elected anyhow.

"We ought to stall maybe, see if we can get George up here next time," Sledger offered matter-of-factly.

"Yes, let's do that. We better talk to Arlis."

With the meeting managed accordingly by Arlis, Steward went down to Masontown the next morning looking for George Boland on the farm that John Sledger had referred to. It was a horse farm located about two miles from town in the other direction from the Steward's farmhouse. If the farm had ever had a house, such a past life was no longer in evidence. The farm consisted of a large white barn set on a wooded hill above a rolling pasture enclosed by a white board fence. The barn had an open lean-to on one side providing the horses with shade. The only other building, a silver trailer about ten feet long, was where Boland lived. Steward found him standing there, on a porch-like platform outside the door, looking down at him as he drove up the rutted road from the highway.

Boland explained that he fed the horses twice a day and in exchange received free use of the trailer including utilities. His other expenses, mainly food, he covered by disability payments, which he received because he had been injured in his previous job.

"I don't like gettin' gover'ment payments," Boland told Steward. "I been looking for a job."

"So, as I understand, this was your first meeting at the center up there in Kingwood?" Steward said.

"Yes, sir, that's true, and that's why this president thing is kind of crazy. I don't know where it come from."

"They see you as a leader," Steward ventured.

"They don't know me, and that's the sad truth."

"They see a quality of leadership," Steward persisted. "You don't see it, maybe, but they do. And maybe you don't need payments forever, but some of these people need their payments pretty bad."

"Yes, I know."

"I liked what you said about asking around about people's relatives and going around to other counties. Have you thought much more about that, what the group could do?"

"Have not thought about it A-TALL, and that's the sad truth."

Steward and Boland continued a strained conversation about the general concept of the WRO, which Steward explained as everyone has a right to a decent life, not just the bare necessities. Boland didn't seem convinced about that. He frowned as Steward spoke, running his large hands through his unkempt hair. He seemed anxious for the meeting to be over. Steward stayed long enough, though, to make a final pitch for Boland to accept the office if elected.

When the appointed day arrived, however, Cyril Boland announced right away that his brother wouldn't be coming to the meeting.

"He's got another fire thing," said Cyril. "Said he might come to the meeting some other time. Said go on with the election. He don't want to be considered."

Clara Mohs had not arrived either as the time for the meeting drew near. That left only Beulah Howard. Steward saw the problems in that at once. She was young and unattached, therefore he could hardly work with her alone. She was black in a white county. She showed no keenness of insight and no desire to assume a leadership role.

Steward was contemplating this when several cars pulled to the curb on the quiet street in front of the center. One of the cars he recognized as the junk heap that Lawrence and Clara Mohs had driven off two weeks before at the previous meeting. They emerged from the car, followed by several others from the back seat,—lean, lanky men of the same body type as Lawrence and bearing a family resemblance.

From another car came an older couple, only middle-aged maybe, but more decrepit in appearance than most people that age. With them was an old man with a cane, limping slightly. From the third car came a motley group of a half dozen men and women of indiscernible age. Two of them appeared to be retarded.

"Thomas, can you believe this?" Kristine Steward whispered to her husband. "She brought her whole family."

It looked like more than a family, in fact. It looked like a clan in a hillbilly movie. They filed in and took seats, filling up the last two rows of the six rows set up for the meeting.

No one had any doubts who the new members for an evening would vote for when the names of the two nominees were presented. Clara Mohs was elected president by a vote of 16 to 8.

After the meeting, she stood beaming and accepting congratulations as if she saw nothing amiss in how she had relied on her own family to swing the election in her favor.

185. Steward's visit Clara Mohs then stop at Rachel Shoats' house

With Clara Mohs elected as president of the Preston County Welfare Rights Organization (WRO), the goal remained, for Tom Steward, of building group leadership, and that meant turning his attention to her. Obviously, though, owing to his being married and to Clara's state being undefined with respect to her husband (or was it ex-husband?) Leonard, the effort would have to be an endeavor of him and Kris together.

"Maybe this is for the best anyhow," he said to his lovely wife as they left the farmhouse the morning after the election. "Maybe it's just meant to be. We've been here working in this project for,—what is it now, more than two months?—and we've never really collaborated on anything like that."

"Sounds exciting to me," Kristine replied. "And I like Clara. I like her a lot."

Steward tried to explain some of what he had learned in VISTA training about building leadership, as he and Kris rode into Masontown, but he could tell her attention was waning. Lately he had noticed that she had begun to grow weary of his explanations.

"Well, the first thing is, we don't know where Clara lives," she pointed out.

"Maybe we can find Sledger up in Kingwood. He must know where she lives. He picked her up that one time."

Up in Kingwood, they came upon Sledger in the project store-front office. He was inside by himself mopping the floor.

"We were thinking of going up to see Clara Mohs," Steward began. "Talk to her about running the group."

Sledger and Tom Steward had talked about Steward's idea of building leadership and Sledger had agreed with the concept, though with his typical lack of enthusiasm or commitment.

"She lives a way out," Sledger informed. "Way down by St. George. You know where St. George is?"

"No."

"St. George is this little town on the Cheat River. Way down in the next county. Tucker County, on Route 13 there on the way to Parsons. Ever been to Parsons?"

"No."

Sledger provided the general details of where the Mohs' lived. It was about eight miles outside of St. George on a winding road, he said. "Long piece up there, maybe 8 miles. I'll draw you a little map."

"Getting to like them little maps."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that, Tommy."

It was the first time Sledger had called Steward by any name at all

much less “Tommy” so Steward felt like he was making progress in breaking through Sledger’s impassive shell.

“Say, by the way, Rachel Shoats left her bag here last night. Think you could bring it to her on your way back down?” Sledger called as the Steward’s left.

“Sure. Of course.”

“Know where she lives, right?”

“Yes, I think we can find it.”

The day ahead was thus structured into first a visit to Clara Mohs then a visit to Rachel Shoats.

Route 13 was a two-lane highway leading more or less south and, as John Sledger had said, it wound around, following the course of the Cheat River, which could be seen through the trees. The valley was narrow with the hills becoming steeper and more densely wooded as the young couple continued south.

About 25 miles from Kingwood, a little town that Steward assumed was St. George came into view. It consisted of a grouping of about a dozen buildings with a single white church steeple the only prominent feature. It was nestled in a spoon-shaped widening of the valley created by a division of the river into two streams around a flat island. A trestle bridge spanned the island from the highway into town.

The town, as the Steward’s approached it from the bridge, revealed a tan stucco service station with a blue Mobil sign and two gas pumps and a line of box-frame houses along a tree-bordered main street, leading to the white church with the white steeple seen from the highway. But before that came the T-intersection that Sledger had identified, on his map, as the turnoff point for the road to the Mohs’ house.

The identified road led north along the Cheat River, then, as the map indicated, it followed in a wide, semi-circular arc around the base of a nob-like hill, and turned to the right up a steep, wooded slope.

The road continued upward through unbroken woods for several miles, becoming increasingly narrow as the surface changed from paved to gravel. A pickup truck approaching slowed and moved off to the side, which the Steward’s also had to do in order to pass.

“This must be the right road,” Tom said, looking at the map. “It’s the only road around.”

Kris also looked at the map. “This must be it,” she agreed.

About eight miles out from town, the Steward’s saw a house ahead in the trees at a turn of the road and with a shed behind it, as indicated on the map. The house had an a single upstairs window on one side and a long slanting roof extending out from the house to cover an open front porch. Behind the house, a TV antenna was fastened to a tall pine in a space cleared of branches. A cord wound down into the back yard.

There was no need for the Steward's to announce their arrival. Several dogs in the yard had taken care of that. As they drew near, they saw Clara Mohs looking from the open door.

"Hope we didn't startle you!" said Kris from the car window. "Oh, no, I ain't start-owed. Come on out of there now," Clara replied. "You come right on in."

At this, Clara Mohs came out further from the front door, beaming with same pixie smile that she had displayed at the meeting. She had an unusual face, appealingly girlish but not really pretty except for the keen blue eyes. The eyes on closer examination had a quality of shrewdness. She held her hands in front of her as she talked. She was wearing a worn rust-colored sweater and a knee-length, pleated blue skirt with white anklets and green tennis shoes.

Tom and Kris Steward followed Clara Mohs across the pine boards of the front porch into a small living room holding a couch, an armchair, and a TV. A girl about three and a boy a head smaller peeked out from behind the couch. The room was pungent with the smell of cooking. Steam wafted from the kitchen. By the armchair was an ashtray with a pack of Camel cigarettes and a partly smoked cigarette. A pair of men's boots was visible by a back door that apparently led to the backyard.

"What you got cooking, Clara?" Kristine asked. She talked to Clara Mohs exactly as she would have talked to one of her "Valley Girl" friends back in Sunland, California.

"I'm canning ground hog," Clara answered, waving toward the table where she had Mason jars and covers set up in neat rows. Steam streamed up from a kettle on a black stove.

"Ground hog?"

"Never heard of ground hog?"

"Heard of them, yes."

Clara seemed as amazed that Kris had never heard of canning ground hog as Kris was that anyone would do such a thing in modern times.

"Leonard brings 'em and I cut 'em up and boil 'em."

"Really? Are they pretty good?"

"Uh huh. Want to taste some?"

"Sure."

Kris did taste some with a curious expression that turned to a smile. "Tastes like chicken kind of, or pork."

"Uh huh. It's real good."

They stood smiling at one another as the children peered in from the living room. Clara showed a completed jar in which marbled pieces of meat were jammed in yellow juice.

"Come on outside. I'll show you somethin' else," Clara said.

She led her guests outside to where there was a lean-to chicken house

built against the side of the shed. Brown and white chickens and a white rooster were inside perched on a stepped up stand that looked like seats in a stadium. She went inside a screen door to the stand, reached down into it, and brought out an object in her hand.

"This here is a chicken egg," she said. "Ever see one of these?"

"Clara, I think I've seen a chicken egg," Kris replied.

A little business meeting followed soon after this at the kitchen table as Clara continued with her chore of canning. Steward went through the typical agenda of the meeting: minutes, old business, new business, votes, committees, and so on.

"What kind of business is there?" Clara asked.

"Well, a lot of times it's how to help somebody," Steward replied. "Or, sometimes it's forming a committee for something like housing, to go and see a housing project or something."

He realized as he said this that the narrow range of what the group could do, in a rural area as compared to a more intense urban setting, was a good part of the reason why the group was so lacking in energy.

"Seems like everyone is just kind of trapped in that little office," Clara remarked.

That seemed a keen insight, Steward thought as he and Kris drove away. There was a reason for the shrewdness in her eyes.

"She's got quite a situation there," he remarked to his wife. "She's really industrious with the ground hogs and the chickens."

"And the TV antenna in the tree!" Kris replied.

"You think she's really separated from Leonard?"

"I don't know. Camel cigarettes and boots?"

"She's working the system," said Steward.

"I guess you can't blame her."

The sky had clouded over during the visit with Clara Mohs. Without sunlight, the narrow road seemed like a tunnel through the dark woods. The scene from the highway, on the way back to Kingwood, seemed bleaker, with the gray sky low above the tree-rimmed mountaintops on both sides of the narrow valley.

The day had turned colder, too. Steward noticed smoke rising from the black chimney pipes of the three white houses on the side of the hill where Cyril and Ginny Boland lived in the middle house.

Turning onto the road where they had previously dropped off Rachel Shoats, without going further, they searched for a road into the woods that would go in the direction of where she had indicated that her house would be. Not finding such a road, they came to a modern house that looked liked it belonged in a suburb. It was a pink, brick-front rambler with a picture window facing the road and a walkout basement below the house facing the woods where some shirts hung on a clothes line.

Three young boys were playing there. They appeared to range in age from about ten to about five.

Tom Steward lowered the window and called out to them: “Do you know where Rachel Shoats lives?”

“Down that road there,” answered the oldest boy, pointing.

Tom looked then and saw an opening in the trees with some old tire ruts in the tall grass. He waved thanks to the boys and turned in that direction.

“Better watch out!” yelled the youngest boy. “She’s a witch!”

“No, she ain’t,” said the other boy. “He don’t know.”

It was rough-going along the overgrown, rutted road. Obviously the road was mainly used for walking. Branches hung over the roadway. In some places, they had to be driven into to be pushed aside.

A couple of hundred yards down the road, a clearing came into view where sat a small, paintworn house that looked like a sharecropper’s cabin from on old photo of the postbellum South. The house was set up on cement blocks. It was a simple, rectangular structure about 30 feet wide with no front porch and a single door in the center (ascended to by two pine board steps and with no roof above it). The house, on its facing side, had a single window on the left of the door, exactly halfway between the door and the end of the building, and an identical window on the right side of the door. Beyond that end of the building, there was a lean-to roof below which firewood was stacked in a neat pile. Next to it was a rusted iron pump with a long handle and a small, four-legged table set with a wash basin and a towel hanging on a nail.

Coming closer to the house, Steward saw two boys, young teenagers, standing under a tree by a chopping log with an axe planted in it. The boys watched him warily as he exited the car.

“Is this the Shoats’ house?” Steward asked.

The boys didn’t answer. They drew together and stared at him like children much younger than their age. They appeared to be not quite right. They had the characteristic flat face with small mouth and thin lips of the mentally retarded.

“I’m looking for Rachel Shoats,” Steward persisted. “I’m a friend of hers. From the WRO. I just brought her bag.”

At this, the oldest of the boys pointed to the house by flicking his head in the direction of the door. At the same time, he made a sound that was not quite a word but a single, drawn out syllable that sounded the “a” sound in “add.”

“Say you’re lookin’ for Rachel Shoats?” came another voice from the side of the house by the wood pile.

It was the youngest boy, Tommie, apparently. He was about eight or nine, with a bright, hopeful face and intelligent brown eyes.

"Yes, I brought her bag."

"She ain't here now."

"Is your dad home?"

"Yes, he is."

"Will you tell him I'm here, please? Tell him it's Tom Steward from the meeting."

"Yes, sir. I will."

"I hear your name is Tom, too."

"Yes, sir, it is."

The boy then went to the door and opened it, leaving it open, while Steward drew nearer. Kris, who had also exited the car, waving and smiling at the boys, came up behind him.

From where he stood, Tom could see a single room covered all around with pieces of cardboard of various sizes tacked up with nails. There were mattresses set up on end and leaning against the walls. In one corner, on an easy chair covered with a brown Army blanket, Ray Shoats was feeling around for his white cane.

"No need to get up, Mr. Locke," Tom yelled in the door. "Just brought Rachel her bag. She left it at the meeting."

"Well, that was right kind."

"Glad to do it."

'I'd invite you in.... We don't have much to offer."

"No need for that now. We just stopped by."

"Rachel will be glad to get her bag. She's been looking all over for it."

"Glad we found it."

Kristine stuck her head in the door and said in her pleasant voice, "Hello, Mr. Shoats. It's me, Kristine. I talked to you at the meeting."

"Well, how do you do, ma'am?" the blind man said, leaning forward as if to get up from the chair, though he did not actually rise. "We're honored by your visit."

"Hope you're doing okay."

"I'm doing just fine."

"See you soon," said Tom.

"Y'all take care now."

"You, too."

The sun was low in the sky when the Steward's headed down the hill toward Reedsville. It seemed as if a long time had passed since they had talked to John Sledger, earlier that same day, before their trip down to see Clara Mohs. Memories lingered of narrow mountain roads hemmed in by trees, the Shoats' plain house, and the Shoats boy who was apparently unable to speak.

186. Steward's feel increasingly isolated as mountain winter sets in

Something clicked somehow in that trip down to see Clara Mohs in St. George and in the subsequent visit to Rachel Shoats's house. Whatever it was, it made the pleasant summer days in Morgantown seem far behind for Thomas Steward and his new wife Kristine.

Something else came in, just as hard to identify, in place of the summer days gone. Whatever it was, it was scary. Whatever it was, it made the rural setting seem more sinister. A feeling of loneliness came in with that, too, and a sense of detachment from friends left behind in Minnesota and California.

The transition began that very night (after the visits to Clara Mohs and Rachel Shoats) as the young couple nestled together in their king-size metal frame bed in the dark, quiet farmhouse.

"You know, that scene today at the Shoats'," Tom said, "I've thought about it a lot."

"I have, too."

"It seemed medieval, almost."

He wondered as he said this if she would understand that word. He had learned that, while she was smart in her own way, she had gaps in her knowledge from her disinterest in school, gaps in academic facts and terms such as he was used to his college friends knowing. But he had gotten into the habit of speaking with her intellectually as he would have to his college friends. Sometimes she asked for meanings of words; sometimes the effect of them was simply to intellectualize the conversation in a vague, general way without imparting the exact meaning. She liked that he was smart, she had told him often.

"That poor little boy, Tommie," she remarked softly. "What must he think about his family and where he lives?"

"That boy that grunted!"

"Wasn't that strange!"

As she spoke, she wriggled herself further into his arms. He threw one leg over her to enclose her more completely. She was independent in the day, he had learned, where everyone else was concerned, but at night she revealed a basic fear like a little girl wanting to be protected. He was aware that the dynamic of this interaction had had an effect on him of making him more vigilant against potential dangers in almost an animal, instinctive way.

She was big-hearted, too, he had learned, and affected at the core by every experience of seeing people in destitute situations. She said often that this or that wasn't right, without taking any interest in details of the social policies that might have had a bearing on the continuance or resolution of such situations.

A weird noise came up in the darkness one night at this time, as of the sound as of a motorcycle in the distance. For both of them, the noise brought a California memory of Steward's rowing friend Bill O'Rourke, who had briefly used a motorcycle owned by the Farmworkers in his trips around to make his presentations. The motorcycle noise came nearer and actually passed the farmhouse; then continued down the road, fading off; then returned and passed again outside.

"Would you believe it if that was Bill!" Kris whispered.

"Out of the Army somehow..."

"And trying to find us!"

"Wouldn't that be something!"

It had not been O'Rourke, they knew, but the event was typical of their state of mind at this time as the farmhouse became a more and more lonely place and their former friends seemed more distant.

Tom and Kris Steward were starting to have more money worries, too. Their savings were down to a couple of hundred dollars, and they had not yet bought any supplies to fix up the farmhouse, as they had promised to do to reduce their rent.

Tom did go into the hardware store in Masontown, one day in early October, to buy six sheets of 4 x 8 wallboard which he brought in the back door of the house with the landlord watching from the back door of his own house about a hundred yards away. Lately, Tom had noticed the landlord watching more often, as if to exert a subtle pressure for him to begin work on the farmhouse.

As for the promised fixup, the impractical Steward had no idea what to do, really. His intention was to pound off the plaster inside the house and replace it with wallboard, as he had seen being done in the project in director Janis Kulas' farmhouse. The only tool he had been able to afford up to that point was a hammer. He had started pounding out a wall in an unused bedroom upstairs, just to make noise to give the appearance of working.

He and Kris had maintained the schedule agreed to with their co-workers Arlis Simpson and John Sledger. The job kept them continually in the car, on their way to pick up people or in some cases to meet people to recruit them for the meeting. Often they were met with cold stares and Kris drew hungry looks from men.

They stopped in again to visit the Shoats' and this time Rachel was home and invited them in.

"I got some coffee brewing," she said.

In the house, they sat at the kitchen table with their coffee cups before them while Rachel stood at a black stove holding her own cup with both hands. From here it was possible to talk across to Ray Shoats in the other room; the house had no physical divisions, just the one large room

divided into the two areas of living room and kitchen.

Both of the older boys had never been able to speak, Rachel Shoats told her visitors. “They just can’t learn. They don’t go to school. They help around, though, best they can.”

The boys had all come in to listen as their parents talked. The two older boys listened with open-mouthed smiles. Tommie had a thoughtful expression; he watched the visitors’ eyes to see what they were looking at and he looked at the same thing himself.

Ray Shoats talked about his mining accident, leaning forward as he gestured with both hands: “It was just this white light, and it got all dark. I thought the mine opening was blowed, you know, ‘cuz it got all dark, but it was my eyes wasn’t working.”

“Oh, that must have been so scary!” Kris remarked.

“Yes, ma’am, it was.”

Stacked in the kitchen were bags of flour, beans, and rice, marked as surplus commodities. The house had no running water and no electricity. Kerosene lanterns, placed around, were the sources of light. The black, cast iron stoves in each room were the sources of heat.

The nature of the situation was obvious to see. Mrs. Shoats was the only one able to meet the family’s main needs. She did that by constant industry, combining physical chores such as cooking and washing with trips by foot to places like Reedsville to secure items and carry them home in her bag. That was why the bag was so important.

People came at night, she said, knocking around on the outside of the house when her family was in bed.

“I don’t know who it is,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Who would do such a mean thing?” Kris exclaimed.

“I don’t know, ma’am,” Rachel replied.

“You ever to stop to think,” Kristine commented that day as she and her husband drove away, “what good is a program like ours, really? They need so much more! Something should be done more drastic!”

“Yes, I know.”

Maybe these people really did need a guaranteed annual income, as the WRO claimed, Steward thought, in response to that, but he didn’t say that to his wife.

“And Rachel!” his wife continued. “Can you believe that woman, really? She never complains or apologizes.”

“Never seems to get angry.”

“She’s just beaten down.”

This second interaction with the Shoats’ had had a further effect on his wife, Steward saw in the succeeding weeks. With fall weather settling in, the days had become shorter and colder. A hard rain had pounded the leaves from the trees, stripping the steep hillsides of their autumn color.

Kris seemed to be visibly fading, also. The increasing darkness and the lack of sunlight seemed to be having an accumulative effect. Each day she looked for a letter in the mail as if it was very important to hear from old friends.

Tom had planned to spend Saturday working on the house, but when he saw how glum his wife looked at the kitchen table, and observed sunlight outside, flickering in the branches, he came up with an idea.

"Krissie," he said. "Why don't we take a little one-day vacation, go on up to Pittsburgh?"

"Think we could afford it?"

"Sure. It won't cost much. We can stop at the bank in Morgantown. All we need is gas."

Once that was decided, there was an immediate change in Kristine's mood. She dressed up in a frilly blouse and mini-skirt and arranged her lovely blonde hair with curls hanging down by each ear. She wore her best earrings and a golden chain necklace.

The young couple had a wonderful time driving through the pretty countryside on the way to Pittsburgh. It was a bright sunny day and the trees in this area still had the brilliant colors of autumn.

In Pittsburgh, near the Pittsburgh University campus, they strolled together through a student area, and Steward couldn't help but notice all the looks she drew from men along the sidewalk. Had he forgotten what she had been before they had moved to West Virginia? He realized, in thinking of that, how she had been whittled down by their need to economize and by the growing isolation of their new situation. She thrived on excitement and social interaction, he thought to himself. She thrived on the stimulation of being seen in her physical beauty.

After a quiet meal together in a charming restaurant in the same neighborhood in Pittsburgh, they drove back to Morgantown past some of their old haunts and then up highway 7 to Masontown. There was no way to mollify the increasing feeling of loneliness and darkness in that route; the physical settings and changes from the big city lights of Pittsburgh to the lesser lights of Morgantown, then to the quiet house lights of Masontown and the greater darkness of the rural road to their farmhouse contributed so exactly to that feeling of increasing loneliness and darkness.

Steward noticed, as he and Kris arrived at home, that the landlord neighbor was working in his workshop at a double window there and turned his face in their direction with an expression of displeasure. Kris was already talking about some kind of outing the next day, not a long trip, maybe just a ride to a nearby state park.

"I'll do my hair and look really pretty!" she whispered. "I'll have rollers in tonight, but we can still make love."

She spent a good part of the evening doing her hair. It involved drawing water from the well on the back porch by dropping and lifting the canister within the extraction tube, then pouring the water into a pail, carrying it into the kitchen, and heating it on the stove, then washing and dying her hair in the kitchen sink, rinsing it by having Tom pour water over it, then combing it out and setting it in rollers.

For the first time she revealed something that up to then she had kept secret; she used "Summer Blonde" to lighten her hair.

"Do you think less of me for it?" she asked.

"Not at all, Kris. I'm glad you keep yourself so pretty."

"I do it for you."

"I know you do, honey."

She seemed vulnerable and unsure of herself suddenly, for no obvious reason, after the excitement of the day. She slept all night burrowed into his chest with his arms around her.

Next morning she got up first, went to the mirror in the bathroom, and came into the bedroom at once to wake up her husband.

"Tom, something is wrong with my eyes," she said.

"What's the matter?"

"They're all red. They really sting."

He saw that her eyes were inflamed and teared. She was in obvious need of medical attention. Forgetting their plans for the day, they went at once to a medical center in Morgantown. There the matter was quickly analyzed and resolved; the dye she had used on her hair had gotten into her eyes and had not been washed out so it had caused a reaction. Her eyes were irrigated and she was let go.

In the course of being examined, she had to admit to several people that she dyed her hair, which she did with obvious embarrassment.

Back home, she announced that she was going for a little walk down the road from the farmhouse. She didn't go far, just about a quarter mile, before she returned looking slumped and defeated.

Steward watched his wife walking back toward him, thinking again of the contrast between what she had been when he had first met her and what she had become in their life together since marriage. Her hair was combed flat down. She had not worn her false eyelashes,—as she almost always did even when they spent the whole day at home. She looked small, weary, and almost plain. But he did not feel critical of her because of that. He felt an intense love and responsibility for her such as he had not felt before.

He and she were becoming part of the scene that they had meant just to participate in as helpers, he thought. She could have been any of the poor, beaten young women that he had seen in the various places they had visited together in their work. Where was the whole situation

leading, he wondered. Could he and she really spend two years in this situation, getting gradually poorer and more cut off?

She recovered from this low point within a matter of days. Soon she was her usual self, dressed up prettily and joking with Arlis Simpson as they and Tom sat in the project office waiting for someone, anyone, to come through the door in need of assistance.

About the same time, something else occurred that lifted Kris's spirits considerably. Coming home to the farmhouse after dark one evening, they found a letter in the mailbox, addressed specifically to Kris, from Mary Brandt.

As his wife's invitation, Tom stood behind her at the kitchen table as she read the letter, which began like this, in Mary's neatly printed block letters:

"Dear Kris,

Here it is, October already, and we are in the midst of preparing for the big demonstration here in DC. The Moratorium. I'm sure you must have heard of it. Too bad, we didn't think to invite you up, but they're talking already about another one next month. Any chance you and Tom could attend? You can camp out here in our apartment on the floor. It will be a little wild because Dennis Kelly, Matthew's old friend from the MVs, is coming down, too, and all our friends will be hanging around, from our Woodstock family. (I'll have to tell you about that!) But it should be fun. What do you say? Let us know..." Kris stopped reading there.

"Wouldn't that be grand, Tom? Do you think we could?"

They made arrangements with Janis Kulas the next day. They would take several days off, scheduling that as soon as the exact date of the demonstration was established.

187. D.C. "Woodstock family" meets to go together to first Moratorium

The "National Moratorium Against the Vietnam War," the event that Mary Brandt had referred to in her letter to Kristine Steward, brought together, on the evening of Wednesday, October 15, 1969, in Washington D.C., the same group of people who, on August 15, exactly two months before, had attended the Woodstock concert together.

Included in this group were Matthew Brandt, Mary Brandt, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue. They assembled in the basement of the Whitney Pratt school with the intention of eating supper together and then walking together to the National Mall to take part in the planned demonstration and candlelight march.

Houghten had brought down a flyer from the school bulletin board showing the route of the candlelight march.

"Looks like it starts at the Washington Monument," he remarked, "goes up around the ellipse to the domicile of Tricky Dick."

"Think he's going to be watching?" asked the petite, pretty redhead Jane Larue in her soft voice.

"That I doubt very much."

"You see he wrote a letter to that student, some guy at Georgetown, on that very subject?" Mary threw in, in her earnest manner.

"No, I didn't, actually. What did he say?"

"Said he doesn't need to listen because he's already aware of what the demonstrators stand for, he has to consider all sides of the issues, he's already been doing that in great detail."

"Well, I must say I give him credit for his willingness to engage," Houghten replied.

"I do, too."

Of those in the room, Houghten was the only one expected to take up Mary's serious concerns,—and he usually did. The others were used to listening as he and Mary talked.

"On the other hand, the man has no shortage of casuistry," Houghten added, as he leaned on his single crutch. "Or, at least, he moves like a snail, as far as the war is concerned,"

"Yes. That, too."

This meeting was not the first for these five people. It was, in fact, the fourth meeting, and the fourth one held in the same high-ceiling basement in the spacious, former Masonic lodge. The first meeting had been simply a group supper, arranged by Houghten, to bring everyone together again after the Woodstock trip. But, in discussions at that meeting, the group members had discovered that there was a mutual desire to actually form a "family" such as they had joked about in the van on the way back from New York. Since then, the meetings had been held

every other Tuesday (the current week being an exception because of the demonstration). The trip together to New England that this group had also joked about in the van had never happened. It was still being talked about, however, along with other ideas such as buying a farm together sometime in the indefinite future when everyone would be finished with school.

On this evening, as usual, they had brought food to prepare while the four children (two each of Gail Martin and Jane Larue) played in the dark hallways of the castle-like building. Matt and Darren stood at a table cutting vegetables for a salad, while the three women readied hamburger patties and cut up potatoes for frying.

They had not proceeded with the meal because Dennis Kelly, Matt and Mary's old friend from the Mountain Volunteers, was expected to arrive in the next hour to eat supper with the group and go along to the mall. He was driving down from Kentucky, a distance of about 300 miles. He would spend the night at the Brandt's and drive back the next day.

Jane Larue interrupted her chores now and then to go listen in the hallway for her children. "I have to watch Dylan," she explained to the group in her quiet voice. "Sometimes he's mean to Mandy."

Her son was named after Dylan Thomas, the poet, not Bob Dylan, the singer. The boy had been born in 1961, a few years before Bob Dylan had made the scene.

Jane Larue had been just 17 at that time, and she seemed beset with problems that might have been expected for someone who had started as such a young mother and had wound up alone. She had been caring for her children by herself since her husband's entry into the war three years before and since then owing to his death in combat. She lived on compensation she received from the government.

"Well, when you find a new place, we'll fix him up a nice room," Houghten said to her. "We can help you paint it."

"Damn right," Matthew threw in.

Houghten didn't live with Jane (as might have been assumed from this remark), and he didn't date her or interact with her in a romantic way, but it was known in the group that he had an interest in her. She seemed to respond to his interest at times, but never with any sign of ardor. Photos the group had seen of Jane's husband, sitting erectly in his Marine uniform, showed a clean-shaven, athletic, boyishly handsome young man, quite a different type than Houghten who, with his refined manner and his neatly cut brown hair and beard, had an appearance of being a settled professor, almost, though he was not really a professor and was the same age as Jane. (Everyone in this group was the same age, 25.) Then there was the crutch,—Houghten's crutch,—but it was not just

that he was, in old parlance, a cripple; on a more fundamental level, he was simply not a physical person; he lacked physical vigor, and that seemed to matter to Jane.

"I think he would like that," she answered in reply to Houghten's offer to fix up a room for her son. "Sometimes he seems so angry."

"Have you come on any more ideas? For apartments?"

"Yes, actually, I wrote down a couple today."

"I can drive you around to look at them."

"Oh, you don't need to do that."

"I don't mind. I'd enjoy it."

"Well, okay. Maybe tomorrow."

"Sounds grand!"

A half hour later, with Kelly having not yet appeared, the group went ahead with the supper, drawing the children back to the basement with the smell of food wafting up the stairwell.

First to appear was Jane's son, Dylan, guffawing as he looked over his shoulder at his sister behind him. He was a blond, tussle-haired boy with skinny limbs and a sullen face, set with the anger that his mother had just referred to.

His red-headed sister of six seemed aware of the eyes of the adults in the room.

"Told you to wait, Dylan!" she called with a dramatic pout as she looked around to see who was watching. "Now I'm going to get you!"

"Oh, gee! I'm scared, Mandy," was the boy's response.

Entering next were the two smaller children of Gail Martin. They were Angela, 5, and Matthew, 3. Both, like their mother, had brown hair streaked with gold, animated faces, and bright brown eyes. They were markedly more tame and well-mannered than Jane's children.

"There's the little guy," shouted Matthew Brandt as the boy ran up to him and jumped up into his arms. "How's it going, slugger?"

"It going okay," the boy replied.

Matthew was still called "Bomb Dog" or "Big Dog" at times, harking back to the dog cadre nicknames from Kentucky. The boy had been given the nicknames "Little Matt" or "Little Dog," based on him and Brandt having the same first name.

They had just sat down to eat, with Little Matt next to Big Matt, when a familiar bespectacled face peered from the corner door that led to the stairwell. It was Dennis Kelly, dressed in his customary blue jeans and blue work shirt.

"God damn! You made it!" Brandt exclaimed at once.

"Traffic 'uz a mite snarly," Kelly replied, imitating the mountain accent, as he and Brandt had used to do in Kentucky. He extended his hand for a handshake as Matthew came across the room with Mary close

behind him.

Matthew would have nothing of that. He pushed through the hand to give Kelly a hug. That brought smiles and some curious looks regarding the guest. No one in the group (except for the Brandt's), had ever met Kelly, though there had been stories about him and talk about maybe inviting him to join in any common venture to buy a farm. Kelly, being single, was also of interest to the two single women.

After receiving the hug, Kelly stood awkwardly, as he was inclined to do, looking around the room. Seeing that everyone was looking at him, he waved his hand.

The children laughed.

"He's funny," Little Matt said.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not so funny," Kelly replied. "I bet your name is Matthew."

"How you know that?"

"You just look like a Matthew."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Kelly knew of the boy from Mary's letters, in which recently she had described the growing bond between the boy and her husband. Thanks to Mary's letters, a steady friendship had been maintained between him and the Brandt's for the ten months since he and they had last been together in Kentucky.

Next there were introductions. Everyone had heard stories about how Dennis Kelly was basically shy but had managed out of sheer zeal and will to thrust himself into extroverted situations such as organizing workers in his factory. Kelly showed himself worthy of such stories in how he first stood flat-footed, nodding without smiling, as he was introduced, then spoke quietly but fervently at supper, describing his union activities in the idealistic language of a dedicated politico.

"Sad Dog, I can see you haven't lightened up any," Matthew Brandt said at one point.

That brought a gentle rebuke. "The situation hasn't lightened up, either, Matt, up in the mountains. The situation is still dire for a lot of people."

Matt let that comment pass without a challenge as the topic turned from Kelly's steward tasks at the shoe factory in Kensington to the scene and people the Brandt's and Kelly had shared in Kentucky. Each topic was explained to Darren, Gail, and Jane, who followed the conversation with their eyes, and now and then smiled or laughed at a comment.

Of special interest was Fletcher Bourne, his son Bumper, still a truck mechanic in Vietnam, and Hattie Beecher, the Bourne's neighbor and fellow coop member with Mary.

"I haven't seen Fletcher a lot," Kelly said, "but I did see him one Saturday down in Berea, at a hardware store there. Talked to him a little bit. He's always friendly, you know."

"How has he been doing?" asked Mary.

"Alright, I guess, but he looks tired. I think it's been hard on him not having his son around," Dennis went on. "And the limp has gotten worse. Looks like he's been losing weight."

"And there was not much there to begin with."

"No, that's for sure."

"How old do you think he is?" Mary inquired.

"Now, that I did actually hear from someone, I think it was Hattie," Dennis answered. "As I recall, he's 62."

"So he had Bumper when he was 44."

"Yes. That would be right."

"You ever hear any story on that?" Mary asked.

"Story on it how?"

"Who the mother was, and what became of her."

"No, I never heard. That has always been a big mystery, as far as I know. Never heard anyone mention that."

They talked about Hattie Beecher for a while, also, although Mary knew more about her, from the letters that she exchanged with her (with Fletcher Bourne being a behind-the-scenes partner in that, since he was the one who wrote out her letters for her).

Hattie had been visited by some people seeking to document the old Appalachian way, Dennis had heard. These people, young people from a local college, had recorded her speech on a tape recorder.

"They say it is an example of the true Appalachian dialect," Dennis said.

After supper, the group cleaned up the kitchen together and then headed out for Gail Martin's house, where the four children would be let off with a babysitter, allowing the two mothers to come along to the demonstration.

[Chapters 187-189 notes]

188. Woodstock family and Kelly march together in first Moratorium parade

"Well, this is an evening to think of Jim Morris," Matthew Brandt remarked to his wife Mary as he descended the broad front steps of the Whitney Pratt School with his little namesake, Mattie Martin, riding on his shoulders.

"I know," Mary replied. "I thought of that, too."

This was all that was said about it. As letters from Mary's sister, Ellen Morris, had recently disclosed, Morris's status remained unknown. He was listed as MIA (Missing In Action).

Walking along the sidewalk, strung out for about 100 feet, were the rest of the group that had just eaten supper together in the basement of the school. Darren Houghten and Jane Larue were ahead, trying to keep up with Jane's son Dylan, who insisted on crossing streets against the red light when he could dart between traffic.

"Dylan, you won't be going to the zoo tomorrow, if you keep this up," she called after him.

"I don't want to go!" he answered.

Jane's daughter Mandy walked beside her, hand in hand, frowning as she watched her brother dashing ahead.

Just behind them was the always pleasant Gail Martin, with her own daughter, Angela, skipping along just ahead of her as she tried to avoid the cracks in the sidewalk.

Indistinct, amplified voices could be heard from the direction of the Washington Monument, about two miles away. The floodlit pyramidion of the monument could be seen above the buildings in that direction, with a crescent moon beside it in a clear twilight sky.

Their route took them across S. Street. It was about a half mile to Gail Martin's apartment near the corner of S. and 10th, on the edge of the black neighborhood called the "U Shaw" after its central intersection at U. St. and Shaw Ave.

A chilly wind swept along the roughhouses of S. Street, under the ash trees that bordered the sidewalk. The wind brought the smell of cooking food, an olfactory hodgepodge too complex to sort out into individual aromas.

Matt Brandt was familiar with the neighborhood because the Garrison Elementary School, where he worked as an audio visual aide (as part of his graduate program), was in the same area. He could see the brownstone upper story, lined with identical, cross-sashed windows, from a corner where the group paused for a moment to wait for traffic. The sight of the old school brought to mind his photos of the black children who attended the school. He thought of photos he had planned for his masters thesis project, which would begin in a few months,

repeating to himself again the rationale for the project that he had explained to Mary in Shenandoah Park the previous spring, and that he had defined further in his mind on the ride home from Woodstock. Many of the photos, as he foresaw, would involve the monumental buildings he would be passing by in the next few hours. He would use these buildings as symbols of national power, setting them up against images of the city's people, especially disadvantaged people such as he had worked with at Garrison school.

Gail Martin's apartment, never before seen by the other members of her group, was in a three-story brick row house with bay windows on a block of similar buildings, white or brown in color, all of them set back about eight feet from the sidewalk, with tiny front yards bordered with hedges or chain link fences. Her building, like the others, was entered from a stoop with three steps. A straight stairwell led up to her door on the second floor.

A teenage girl from the same building was soon at hand as the six adults and four children crowded for a moment into the small open area of the front room between a couch, an easy chair, and a corner TV. As might have been expected for someone with Gail's cheerful, optimistic outlook, her apartment had a happy, feminine appearance with flowered curtains in the front room and toys and stuffed animals unfussily strewn in a back room with bright children's colors.

The apartment had few of the trappings often found in the homes of students and friends of Whitney Pratt. There were no political posters or pretentious art hangings on the uncluttered walls, no drug paraphernalia or trendy books on the coffee table. The refrigerator, visible through the open door of the kitchen, had no slogans or announcements. It was decorated with children's drawings and photos.

Instructions followed with special directions for the boy Dylan not to go out into the neighborhood alone. He was defiant, as anticipated, but suddenly demurred when his mother talked to him on the side, though still within audible range.

"We'll just have to go home then," she could be heard saying in her soft voice like a whisper.

"I won't go out," the boy answered.

"Promise?"

"Yes."

"It's important for me, Dylan."

"I know, mom."

"I love you, Dylan."

"I love you, too."

Much could be gained from this brief mother and son interaction, in the troubled urgency of the mother's voice, seeming overwrought for the

actual circumstances, and in the unexpected compliance and tenderness of the son's response. This was a physically small, naturally unassertive woman in charge of a boy just eight years old but already growing too big for her to handle. He realized his growing independence, the interaction suggested, but he understood when he had pushed too far and he cared too much to do that.

Soon the group was on its way down 12th Street toward the National Mall, about a mile distant. Other people, mostly young, could now be seen here and there along the sidewalks. The mood was festive, with many groups of a half dozen or more people like their own, and with shouts and hellos being exchanged between them.

A group moving in parallel on the other side of the street carried signs marked with peace symbols. Just behind them was a group of serious-looking young men wearing black shirts with Roman collars. A banner about three feet high and six feet wide could be seen to say "Peace Now," when it was stretched out momentarily between two students, but no attempt was being made, in general, to hold up signs for view. American flags and the blue and white flags of the South Vietnamese rebel force, the Viet Cong, could be seen in the distance, giving the impression of military units moving to a parade ground.

Matt and Mary Brandt walked on either side of Darren Houghten who moved quickly despite his crutch.

"This is going to be spectacular!" Houghten exclaimed, as he peered ahead, bearded chin raised and lips drawn back in an expression somewhere between a smile and clenched teeth. It was the same expression that had been much on Houghten's face throughout the four days at Woodstock as he had surveyed the crowd and talked to other people that he regarded as kindred spirits.

Dennis Kelly, with his hands in the pockets of his olive drab Army jacket and his shoulders held rather stiffly, moved along in an apparent thoughtful mood, with Jane Larue and Gail Martin on either side of him. Though he and the women had been acquainted for only a couple of hours, it seemed already established that neither regarded him as a potential match. There was something about Kelly that seemed too bleak and zealous, in the way he talked so fervently about his political activities at the shoe factory. He seemed like a Russian revolutionary, like someone out of *Dr. Zhivago*. Who could live with such a person? He seemed not meant for ordinary, day to day life.

Reaching the mall, the group got their first clear view of the open lawn extending toward the 555 foot tall, white marble obelisk of the Washington Memorial. People with flags and signs were converging from all sides on the area below the upward spikes of the flood lights, where the crescent moon seen earlier was still in view. There was a stage

set up there, just below the monument, with technicians moving back and forth amidst the light and sound equipment and other people, dressed more formally, waiting to speak.

Crossing into the spacious mall, with excited young people on all sides of them, the six friends were swept up in the grand scale of the event. The setting was immense, with the vast open area extending, on the left, to the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial and, on the right, to the Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial, each about a mile away. Beyond those landmarks, defined by strings and clusters of lights and the areas of darkness between them, were the Ohio Drive along the Potomac River, the river itself, the national cemetery in Virginia, and the long, graceful span of the Arlington bridge.

There were thousands of people crowded into the area under the obelisk when the first speaker came forward into the overlapping circles of the stage lights. The six from Whitney Pratt were standing about a hundred yards back from the stage, directly out from its center.

"Friends, fellow countrymen, we are gathered here tonight for a solemn ceremony, a candlelight procession with each candle representing one of our fine young soldiers killed in this war," the announcer said. "Let us bow now in prayer."

A black man dressed in a suit and tie then came forward and stood at the mike without speaking until the crowd fell silent.

"On this solemn night, O Lord, give peace to our great nation, give us dignity who mark this night with candles. Let the light of our candles reach the eyes of the leaders who decide our nation's policy. Give them strength in their hearts to see a new way."

Next speaker was Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., widow of the slain civil rights leader, somber in demeanor as she walked to center stage, dressed in a white hat and knee-length black coat.

"Forty thousand Americans have been given as sacrificial lambs to a godless cause," she said. "When will it cease? While we spend billions of dollars in Vietnam, we have ignored our problems at home."

When Mrs. King had completed her remarks, marshals with white arm bands came into the crowd from the stage handing out candles, each about a foot long. Flames flared up in the dark in several places as the first of the candles were lit. A circle of light expanded backwards from the first flames as successive people reached across to have their own candles lit and then passed on the fire to the next person.

Mrs. King, in the meantime, began the march toward the White House, following a mock coffin carried at shoulder height by six young men from the crowd. The demonstrators filed out behind, starting from the stage and continuing down a central aisle, under control of the marshals with the white arm bands.

The crowd was quiet and subdued in the moonlight as the hundreds of points of light of the marchers, strung out in a long column, four or five abreast, processed from the central mass of demonstrators around the left arc of the Ellipse and from there toward the floodlit southern portico of the White House, visible, about a half mile distant, above the fenced in dark grounds of the President's Park.

A mixed contingent of about a hundred youths, many of them dressed in Georgetown sweat shirts, started singing, "All we are saying is give peace a chance." The song, known to everyone, spread through a section of the crowd, rose in intensity, and faded off, succeeded by silence.

The column of marchers had extended around the east wing of the White House, past the Blair House and to the right out of sight, between Lafayette Square and the north portico of the White House, when the six friends from Whitney Pratt were directed into the march.

Jane Larue, before joining in the column, placed over her head a string necklace holding an oval-shaped, framed portrait of her deceased husband dressed in his Marine uniform.

Proceeding around the Ellipse, the six friends could see the first of the marchers returning around the other side, their candles appearing and disappearing behind the foliage of the central lawn.

Looking behind, Matthew Brandt observed that there were still thousands of demonstrators massed below the floodlit needle of the obelisk, forming a sea of flickering candles, with the dark figures of more demonstrators approaching from the direction of the Georgetown campus. At the far edge of the mall by the Arlington bridge, the red and blue lights of several police cars were spinning around, giving the scene a surreal dimension. Apparently, there had been an altercation there between students and passing traffic.

Near the top of the gradual hill leading up from the Ellipse to the White House, there were crowds of onlookers watching the procession from behind a cordon of policemen. Among them were counter-demonstrators with signs that said "Stand Fast, Mr. President" and "Takes Two to Negotiate, One to Capitulate."

On Pennsylvania Avenue, a recorded drum roll played as the group passed the glass globe where Mrs. King had placed her candle. It sat on a brass stand surmounted with a peace symbol.

"The whole world is watching! Why aren't you!" someone just ahead called out as he passed the stand.

Aside from that shouted comment and the recorded drum roll, the line was silent. Soldiers with rifles stood behind the wrought iron fence, betraying no emotion as the demonstrators passed before them.

It was nearly midnight when the group of six left the Washington Monument and headed toward home. At Scott's Circle, they separated

into two groups, with Dennis and the Brandt's heading up Connecticut toward the Brandt's apartment and Darren, Jane, and Gail heading up Rhode Island toward Gail's apartment.

"Well, we did what we could," Mary remarked with a shrug as she and

Matthew walked on either side of Dennis Kelly.

"Yes, we did," Kelly replied. "And from what I was hearing there was a regular groundswell all across the whole country."

"Is that right?"

"That's what some guy was saying. You have to consider, though, the groundswell moves slow, to have an effect. It has to influence the people with power, the people in Congress or the president, and that takes an election to materialize."

Brandt listened as his wife and friend talked, not joining in any remarks. He was thinking of the day in the boat house—when had it been anyhow? two and a half year before,—when Jim Morris first announced his intention to fight in the war as a pilot.

[Chapters 187-189 notes]

189. Mary reads newspaper accounts of Moratorium events across the nation

With Dennis Kelly already departed for his drive back to Kentucky, her husband Matthew gone to school, and no classes of her own scheduled, Mary Brandt decided to spend the afternoon after the October Moratorium sorting through her thoughts.

The event, with its emphasis on the war and fallen soldiers, had been especially meaningful for Mary because of her recent involvement with her sister Ellen following the downing of Ellen's husband, the pilot Jim Morris, almost three months before.

As she sat in her apartment at the table by the windows looking out to the street, Mary thought of her sister and wondered how she was faring. Before her, she had a cup of coffee, her current journal (as usual, just a three-hole spiral notebook), the day's edition of the *New York Times*, and some personal letters (including her last letter from Ellen).

Mary had flown out to Las Vegas to see her sister immediately after first learning of her brother-in-law's crash and indeterminate status. She had spent a week trying to buck up Ellen's spirits, but circumstances had been so dismal, at that time, that it had been a struggle for her to know what to say.

"I feel so confused," Ellen had told her. "I want to mourn, and yet I can't mourn, you know, because that would mean almost that I accept him as dead."

"Accepting it would help to make it true?" Mary had replied.

"Yes, maybe. I know it's superstitious. And he may be still alive! He may be alive... or dying at this moment. I don't know what to do with my emotions. I wish I could pray."

Mary had wished, too, at that moment, for something of a spiritual nature to offer her sister. But her intellectual journey, by this time, had taken her past any sureties she could offer to others.

"Well, alive or dead, I think he can feel your love, somehow it can get communicated," had been her effort, at last.

"Do you really believe that?" Ellen had asked.

"As much as I believe anything," Mary had answered.

Since that interchange, occurring on a walk Mary and Ellen had gone on together on Spring Mountain, above Las Vegas, letters exchanged between the two sisters had continued along the same line, providing an emotional release for Ellen, if nothing else, and the same kind of vague assurances of the power of love in face of death and distance—assurances such as Mary knew she would not have accepted for herself, had she been Ellen; still she was glad to offer them to her beloved sister.

Mary had her last letter from Ellen close at hand, among those she had placed on the table. Looking at it, her eyes fell on two sentences:

“One trying thing now is the lack of any official word on Jim, from the Air Force. It’s like he’s ceased to exist, he’s forgotten.”

For some reason, Mary didn’t know why, those sentences had kept coming into her mind during the candlelight march as she had passed the soldiers in uniform standing along the parade route and in front of the White House.

All across the country, there had been demonstrations and marches, Mary had learned from the newspaper before her, but involvement had been spotty and inconsistent, not the “regular groundswell” that Dennis Kelly had alluded to on the walk home from the march.

She read in one article by Bernard Weinraub:

“Marching in crisp 50-degree weather, nearly 10,000 students and professors from Harvard, Tufts, Brandeis and other local schools surged onto Cambridge Commons for a noisy rally that heard from George Wald, the Nobel Prize-winning biologist.

“‘You cannot have an honorable peace to a dishonorable war,’ Wald told the students who then marched almost jubilantly to downtown Boston Commons for another rally with nearly 100,000 demonstrators, including tens of thousands of high school youths and students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston University and Brandeis.”

Other demonstrations mentioned were only in the hundreds, in number of participants.

“The impact of the moratorium on campuses was wide-ranging and curiously disparate,” the same article by Weinraub said. “The protest turned out sparse crowds at such traditionally radical campuses as San Francisco State and C.C.N.Y., where most students remained at home and failed to appear at college antiwar rallies... There were surprisingly small turnouts, too, at the University of California, Berkeley—where rain probably reduced rally crowds—Brooklyn College, Princeton, and Dartmouth—as well as the University of South Carolina and Arizona State.”

“At other schools, however—barely known for radical activities—the antiwar protests and the moratorium’s impact proved considerable...

“At President Nixon’s alma mater, Whittier College in California, the wife of the acting president, Harold Case, lit a butane ‘flame of life.’ Demonstration organizers said that the flame was ‘a constant reminder of those who have died and are dying on the Vietnam battleground.’”

Mary Brandt read on.

“There were odd, affecting moments, too. At the State University of New York at Stony Brook, 200 students of the Asa Gray Dormitory planted daffodils and tulips in the design of a peace symbol.

“Nearly 200 miniskirted Vassar College coeds stepped through the gates of the United States Military Academy at West Point in

midafternoon and handed daffodils and apples to dozens of startled cadets. The girls walked to a sun-dappled lawn, sang ‘America the Beautiful’ and then left, smiling as readily as when they arrived.”

In other articles throughout the paper (of Thursday, October 15, 1969), Mary encountered other reports and commentaries.

In New York City, as an article by Homer Bigart described, “tens of thousands” of protesters had rallied in Manhattan in Bryant Park, creating “a colossal traffic jam during the evening rush hour.”

“The park was saturated with people,” the article went on, “many of them unable to see the speaker’s stand or hear the denunciations of war by Mayor Lindsay and Senators Charles E. Goodell, Jacob K. Javits and Eugene J. McCarthy.”

A front page photograph showed McCarthy on the speaker stand (from a point of view directly behind him) as he addressed a throng of people that spread out in front of him in all directions, completely jamming the park (noted elsewhere as 9.6 acres) and extending into trees and streets that appeared to be about a hundred yards away.

Many previously non-committal groups, with respect to the war, such as politically middle-of-the-road labor organizations and churches, had announced support for the Moratorium. Business people and stock brokers, dressed in suits, had joined in a rally on Wall Street.

“President Nixon now can no longer harbor any illusions that the desire for a break with past policies is held only by radical splinter groups,” an editorial proclaimed (under the heading, “In the Wake of the Moratorium”). “The nature of the coalition which joined in the war is not dominated by those who demand an unconditional pullout of American forces nor is it seriously influenced by a fringe that wants not peace, but revolution in alliance with Hanoi.”

Mary had noticed, also, however, in the article by Weinraub, that the *Crimson*, the official student newspaper of Harvard, “had come out editorially in support of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, the political arm of the Vietcong.

“The *Crimson* said that the front, ‘whom we’ve been trying to exterminate, has the support of the people of Vietnam’ and therefore ‘it deserves our support.’

“‘And we can best support the N.L.F. in exactly the same way that we can best support our own troops—by demanding that all American troops be withdrawn from Vietnam completely.’”

Counterdemonstrations had been widespread, also, Mary read. Most of them had been less organized and more subtle, but still they had shown an intense opposition to the demonstrators: flags flown at halfmast, jeers thrown at passing marchers, isolated individuals with signs such as one Mary had noticed the night before—”United We

Stand."

A cherished American concept, Mary reflected, but obviously the direction of the nation, at the moment, was not toward such unity, but toward greater division. That national movement toward division, when she thought of it, struck her as a more significant movement than the movement of bodies that had marked the Moratorium. She had begun to feel a great tension and opposition and tearing asunder that seemed part of the zeitgeist, even affecting her private life.

She wondered, continuing this thought, if the lack of participation at the more radical campuses really represented an apathy toward the war, as she had understood the *Times* article to imply.

"I don't think it's that," Mary said to herself. "I think what it is, they've gone beyond" (by which she meant, she knew, without carrying it over into words, beyond the naive college activism, that people like herself had begun with, to a mature activism aimed at a more fundamental change).

Mary saw an indication of such activism in the *Harvard Crimson* editorial that she had just read about, as well as in opinions she had heard expressed at her women's group and in some classes in Georgetown. In general, this activism, as she understood it, aimed at a more egalitarian distribution of material wealth and political power than seemed possible within the current American framework. Perhaps such a redistribution could be gained, she thought, by political change toward a more socialistic, more democratic, political system (she saw no incompatibility between socialism and democracy). Perhaps it could be gained by rejecting the "system" completely, as many were doing,—by forming a communal farm, for example, and sharing wealth and power that way.

She was surprised at times by the rapid radicalization of her thought and the extent to which her whole mind and even her feminine self were being taken up into this new outlook. In this personal process, she had encountered division, also, she observed to herself, an inner division reflecting the societal division occurring outside her. It was a division that had set her radical tendencies, on one side, against her resistance to such changes, on the other; a division felt poignantly at times in nostalgia for the intellectual innocence she had left behind.

She felt the division in her personal relations, also, such as with her parents. She had recently signed up to go with a group to Cuba to help in the sugar cane harvest—Venceremos, it was called, "We will win." She knew her parents would be shocked to hear of it, when she eventually told them, which she intended to do before the group left for Cuba within a few months. Her father, the World War II veteran of the D-Day invasion, would especially not understand. He would see it as betrayal.

"He doesn't understand that what I am fighting for is the same thing

he fought for," she said to herself.

With Matthew, too, there was growing division. He had gone beyond his dislike and distrust of words to a general antipathy toward the fine phrases and theories of the Movement. He was still part of it in sympathy, she knew, but he had separated from the dialog that meant so much to her. As a result, the tendency for her and him to be together physically but not intellectually had continued and grown.

Sometimes, too, she yearned for what she had verbalized in her own mind as the "male dynamic in thought," by which she meant a cast and flow of ideas such as expressed by a thoughtful, idealistic man. She could not get such a thought process from Matthew. Parts of it, she could get from others in their circle of friends (from Dennis Kelly and Tom Steward, for example), but never quite in the desired form. She longed for what she had described in her journal as "a knight-in-shining-armor of thought." That yearning was a romantic vestige, she knew, of her maidenhood dreams. She knew, also, as she had told herself often, that it was not possible or necessary to find everything in one man; that was another maidenhood expectation that would best be left behind.

In Matthew, also, she sensed a division was happening. It was a division, similar to her own, between his "new self," as represented by his continuing emotional involvement in the Movement, and his "old self," represented most strongly by his father and the family farm back in Minnesota. She had seen that side of him brought out the previous summer by his work on the barn roof. She had heard it expressed in his plain remarks about the land and physical labor.

Mary had noticed, also,—with a level of envy such as she hadn't thought herself still capable of,—that her husband had an eye for the ever pleasant Gail Martin. Mary knew that Gail was appealing to Matthew, in part, because she was devoid of the "heaviness" that Matthew disliked in herself. She didn't think that Matthew would be disloyal, but his wandering interest had alerted her to the direction her marriage was going. She didn't want to lose him.

The sound of the phone ringing interrupted Mary's thoughts. She crossed the kitchen to answer it, and heard the voice of her sister Ellen. At once, without saying a word, she gauged the meaning of the tone in the voice and assessed it as hopeful rather than as auguring bad news.

"Mary," Ellen said without introduction, "I just received a letter from a person who may know, and he said he has what he thinks is fairly reliable word that Jim was seen in a prison camp in Laos."

"Oh, my God! That's wonderful! Word from whom?"

"Well, it's a long story, but he's an intelligence officer Jim and I met in Bangkok, on our vacation there last year. His name is Orin Brown. He's a friend of Tom Steward, actually."

"Do you think he would really know?"

"Maybe, Mary. Maybe he really would. Like I say, he's an intelligence officer and Jim told me his job is talking to people that come down out of Laos and China. He says in this letter that he really anguished over whether to write, he couldn't say anything official, but he thought I would want to know what he had heard."

"And what was that exactly?"

"Well, just that this man he had spoken to, this informer, had traveled across Northern Laos, in the area where Jim went down, along this road they were bombing. The 'China Road,' he called it. And at some little camp there, he had seen an American soldier, a pilot, and the pilot had told him very clearly that he was out of Tahkli,—that's where Jim was flying out of,—and his name was Jim Morris."

"That's wonderful, Ellen."

"Yes, it is."

"All of a sudden you have hope."

"Yea, you would think, if they were going to kill him, they would have killed him already."

"Yes, I would think that."

"I even went to a demonstration yesterday, Mary, against the war. I'm just hoping and praying for the war to end."

Later, recalling her sister's mention of the "China Road" as the site of Jim Morris's crash, Mary went back to the *Times*, where she located a headline which she recalled from earlier in the day. The headline was, "China Road Force in Laos at 20,000."

Reading this article (by Richard Halloran), Mary learned that work on this road important enough to almost claim Morris's life had stopped because of the rainy season and had now been resumed. Chinese forces were involved as well as Pathet Lao. The first stretch of the road from China to Muong Sai was done, the article said. The link from there across Laos to Dienbienphu was also nearly done. It was in that area, near North Vietnam, where, she recalled Ellen saying, Morris had gone down.

[Chapters 187-189 notes]

190. Arrival of new prisoner alerts Morris to try an escape

In the two months or so since the death of his fellow POW, Elwood Erland, Jim Morris had remembered what Erland had told him about the POW camps being set up like a "large collection apparatus" for the torture camp at Sam Neua. Morris had also remembered what Erland had advised him about trying to escape from the relatively less secure camp, where he was at present, before such a collection happened. In late October, 1969, two week after the Moratorium demonstrations back in the States (which Morris, of course, had no knowledge of), an incident happened that alerted him to the necessity of evaluating his situation for a possible attempt at an escape, using a plan he had already devised.

The incident that effected this evaluation was the arrival at his camp of a military truck, about the size of a dump truck, with a canvas-covered cargo compartment. From this compartment stepped two soldiers with guns and a man with hands and feet bound, dressed in blue jeans and a blue cowboy shirt, and with somewhat of a swaggering manner, considering his predicament.

One of the guards untied the man's ankles. Together, the two guards prodded and pushed the man down the steep bank to the fence-surrounded pen where Morris stood watching.

The man was wearing cowboy boots, Morris observed. The boots were in good condition, as were his clothes. Based on that, Morris concluded that the man had just been captured or had been in captivity for only a few days.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume," the man said as he drew near.

"Looks like you got the wrong place," Morris replied.

"To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"Jim Morris. Captain, U.S. Air Force."

"Is that right?" the man replied, extending his hand. "Pleased to meet you, captain. My name is Bryan, Bryan Zastrowski. You can call me 'Zas.' I'm an old Air Force man myself."

The man's voice had a distinctive quality. It was high in register with a nasal compression of the vowels and with an accent that sounded vaguely Southern,—maybe Texan, Morris thought.

"That right? How so?"

"Did a fair stint, '58 to '66. Including a tour in Nam."

"You're retired now?"

"Well, yea, kind of. Still here. Still flying."

"Flying with who?"

"Air America. Spotter."

"You fly a Bird Dog or something?"

"Now you're cooking."

"Well, I may have used your services. I fly a Thud."

"Is that right. Out of where?"

"Takhli."

"Yea, I believe I've talked to you fellows at times."

"Yes, I would think so."

"Small world."

With that established, the two men were at ease with one another, standing together in the bare dirt, bleak pen. But Morris had another line of thought going, for which his attention was directed to the olive drab truck that, after dropping off Zastrowski, had not departed. The driver was talking to one of the guards, and now and then looking directly at Morris. From this, Morris concluded the driver was contemplating the prospect of having an additional passenger the next day. Also, as Morris had learned in his months of captivity, the road, in the direction the truck was pointed, led to Sam Neua.

The two Americans stood facing one another obliquely as Zastrowski looked the place over from side to side within the range of view, which extended from a steep, pine-covered hill on the right, to the two stone-walled buildings above them, to another steep, pine-covered hill on the left. Beyond the stone-walled camp buildings, visible above the canvas back of the truck, steep hills and limestone cliffs ascended further in a series of inclines going upward. The top of the mountains was partly covered in fog.

"Ever get out of here?" Zastrowski said, for the first time losing his look of cocky nonchalance.

"Yes, for work duty up in the woods. Cutting down logs."

"Well, that's a relief to hear actually."

"Can't tell you how glad I was first time it happened," Morris said.

"What are the logs for?"

"Fence poles. Like those over there."

"That's all we need, more fences."

"Tell you the truth, my main concern has been lately that that pile is getting pretty big."

"Figure you've worked yourself out of a job.

"Exactly."

"Maybe they need some other kind of wood."

"That's what I'm hoping."

Morris was thinking, though, along his other line of thought, that the amount of wood in the pile was irrelevant and that there was little doubt that he and Zastrowski would be on the truck in the morning and headed for Sam Neua.

His assessment was confirmed when the truck remained parked in the same spot as night came on and he and Zastrowski ate their plain supper of steamed rice. Laughter and interchanges in jocular voices came from

the buildings on the side of the hill.

"Looks like we're missing the party. Goddam!" Zastrowski remarked in his nasal twang.

"Well, they don't get much company," Morris replied.

"What is the function of this camp anyhow?"

"Far as I know, just to watch the road."

"The Pathet Lao are solid through here now," remarked Zastrowski.

"Is that the case?" Morris asked.

"Oh, yea."

"More than a few months ago?"

"Oh, yea."

This was the first Morris had had, since his capture, in anything resembling the intelligence briefings he had received at Takhli. It sobered him to realize that the mission he had been part of to reduce the Pathet Lao presence along the road had not been successful.

"Listen, Zas, there's something I need to tell you," he said.

Finding Zas attentive, he went on to explain his analysis of where the truck would be heading the next morning and his plan for escape. The plan was simple. In the course of his captivity, working each evening at a certain time, about 3:30 to 4:30 in the morning, when he had observed the guards to be least vigilant, he had weakened a corner of the fence, near an overhanging tree. He would go through the fence at the same time and head upward into the woods,—not downward toward the river, as he done on his previous attempt to flee the region, along the Nam Ou River.

Zastrowski listened seriously.

"You're talking about tonight?" he said somewhat incredulously.

"Yes, I think this will be our only chance."

"Because we'll be on that truck in the morning?"

"Yes, exactly."

"You realize if you're caught, the odds are pretty good they will just shoot you, not even bother to bring you back?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Well, Jim, I don't mean to be the reluctant party, but I'm not sure I'm at that point yet."

"Yes, I understand. There's no need for you to go with me."

"Let me think on it."

"Alright."

At this point, the driver Morris had seen above the hill talking to the guard, emerged from the door on the hillside, in an extremely drunken condition, made his way down the hillside, falling and laughing, and emerged into the single light above the pen with two bottles.

"Man, you got to be kidding me, this guy brought us two beers,"

Zastrowski said.

The driver stood grinning as he stuck out the beers toward them and withdrew them the first time offered in a playful tease. He then laughed, loudly, handed them the beers, and headed back up the hill.

This incident just confirmed in Morris's mind all the more that the truck was headed for Sam Neua. The driver knew what was in store for his charges, apparently, and he had a kind heart enough to provide a moment of pleasure before whatever would come next, which Morris didn't expect to be pleasurable.

Morris and Zastrowski sat down together and sipped on the beer ever so slowly as they settled back against the fence.

"So you say you did a tour in Nam in the Air Force?" Morris said. "When was that, exactly?"

"Came over the first time in April of 1961. Did a tour up in Hue with the 57th Tactical, then signed up again, did another tour without even going back to the States."

"Why was that?"

"I don't know, man. Nothing for me back there. I guess the Air Force was just my life. No real danger at that point, either, you know. I wasn't being a hero."

"After that, you went back to the States?"

"Yea, I was stateside a couple of years, out of Bristol there in California. Had occasion then to see kind of the start up of the whole hippie thing."

"What did you make out of that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Went around to some bars and various places, heard a lot of people talking. Even went to a couple of demonstrations up in Berkeley there, just to see what was coming down. Talk, talk, talk, you know. I just got so damn sick of the talk."

Morris listened quietly, recalling his first experience with such a demonstration, back on the West Bank in Minneapolis, on the evening when Matt Brandt had rescued him in his fight with the demonstrator who had flicked off his glasses.

"Now one thing about the hippie thing I did like," Zastrowski said.

"What was that?"

"The free love, man. I was trying to get me some of them long haired, long legged girls."

"You succeed in that?"

"Little bit, when I let my hair grow a little and got me some beads."

"That's all it took, huh?"

"A little 'wow' and 'man' and 'right on,' and a lot of listening and dreamy, contemplative eyes."

"Why did you come back here then?"

"Got an offer from Air America. Guy came by."

"CIA?"

"Well, that's a secret, you know. And, tell you the truth, Morris, where the guy was from, I did not give a rat's ass. I was just so god damned sick of the talking, like I said. And here was this offer, go off to Asia again, fly a plane."

"You don't believe in the war?" Morris said.

"Sure, I believe. I believe," the Air America pilot replied with a grin, making the sign of the cross on his forehead, chest, and shoulders, ending up with his hands together in a prayerful pose.

"Where'd you wind up then?"

"Vientiane."

"That suited you better?"

"Man, did it suit me? Fly a plane. Bars and booze and some of them little dark-eyed sluts. Even smoke a few reefers now and then."

"Marihuana?"

"Yes. I don't suppose you approve. But why the hell not? I'm not a soldier anymore. I'm just a guy with a job, and I'll live my goddam life as I please."

Later, as the two men continued to talk, Zastrowski told Morris some of the news from the States, in the midst of which he described the Moratorium demonstrations that had occurred a couple of weeks before. The idea particularly struck Morris that there had been one candle for each soldier killed in the war.

Later, as Morris thought about this with Zastrowski asleep beside him, the information of the night settled into his mind as a mish-mash of conflicting pieces: thousands of people such as he had regarded all along as being in an opposing camp,—against the war,—seeming now to be the only ones who cared about his fallen comrades; a comrade—of sorts—beside him, seeming not to truly believe in the war, yet risking his life in it, as a way of life more than as a philosophy; and that way of life was a hippie way of life, almost, as he had heard it described, involving booze, drugs, free sex.

It was more of what he had seen in Pat Pong, in the fleshpot area in Bangkok, Morris thought, where he had gone with the intelligence officer, Orin Brown. Hadn't he learned from that that the war, on both sides, was being fought mainly by people who didn't care while there were some, just a few, "true believers" such as himself who did care? Why did he find that so troubling?

191. Morris executes his escape plan but find Pathet soldiers waiting

Jim Morris tried to work himself into a positive state of mind as he prepared for his escape attempt, well before daybreak the next morning, but he felt as if the endeavor was foredoomed. If that was the case, he thought, then the coming days would bring either death or torture: death if he was killed when captured; torture if he was not killed and taken to Sam Neua. He repeated to himself that his only hope was in the escape he was about to attempt. He would have to escape and then accomplish the seemingly impossible feat of making it through the mountains for more than a hundred miles to the Plain of Jars. Even then,—if he made it through,—what would be the odds of finding friendly forces in a contested area for which he had no maps or intelligence?

He felt like not trying the escape at all. He felt like settling back into sleep, just allowing things to happen, even if the things were bad. Why not just do that as his new pen mate, Bryan Zastrowski, was doing beside him? Maybe the next day would not bring the trip to Sam Neua that he expected... Maybe, if he was taken to Sam Neua, it would turn out to be just another camp, without torture... But he had the story of Ellwood Erland, his murdered former pen mate, to contradict that... He felt confused and tired.

Even so, at the appointed time, which he knew from his observed behavior of the guards (they predictably dozed off late in the night when they saw that he had dozed off himself), Morris roused himself for the task of attempting an escape, acting not on any impulse of the moment, but solely on the force of self-discipline as he launched his predetermined plan.

“Zas, I’m heading out,” he whispered to his pen mate, grasping him by the shoulder.

“Good luck to you, pal,” replied the other man, waking and turning his head toward him.

“Thank you.”

“See you back in the States maybe.”

“I’ll look you up.”

Like an automaton, Morris approached the corner post on which he had carefully loosed the binding wires to the main fence wires over the course of the past several months. With him, he carried the empty beer bottle from several hours before, thinking to use it as a canteen for water when needed.

Passage through the fence was accomplished in a few minutes, with no apparent disturbing of the guards. Jim Morris felt a jolt of excitement as he crawled into the darkness toward the trees about 30 feet from the perimeter of the camp. Once in the trees, he stood and carefully pushed

into the branches.

It was a cloudy night, so dark he could hardly see, but the slope of the surface told him a basic direction: either down, toward the bottom of the valley below; or up, toward the higher slopes of the mountains. In the valley, he assumed there would be a river, though he had never seen it, providing an easier mode of navigation. On the mountains, the going would be more difficult but there would be less people.

As part of his predetermined plan, Morris had decided on the "up" direction. "Down" would entail a repeat of his previous attempt at river travel, on the Nam Ou. He didn't know for sure whether the story of his previous capture had remained with him for the ensuing months, in the minds of his captors, but there was enough chance that it had for him to consider travel by the river as too risky.

"Up," for the moment, meant pushing through pine branches into an odd, never-revealed depth of darkness, with each step taking him an ankle height above the step before it. Meanwhile, he listened for any sound from the camp, but there was no sound at all, no indication that anyone had noticed his departure.

About an hour later, Morris saw the first light of dawn visible in the eastern sky in the "V" shape formed by the northern and southern sides of the valley below him. He could see that the valley extended to the west for about 15 miles. The narrower eastern part of the valley was obscured in the shadow of the cliffs on both sides.

Morris continued his upward climb, reaching a cliff, turned to the south below it, and found himself soon at a shelf of rock that provided a wide range of the valley below. The sky was light enough by this time for the land features around him to be seen. Most of them he was familiar with from having taken note of them from the various vantage points gained in his logging work for the camp. His vantage points were primarily peak with distinctive profiles.

About 400 feet below, he could see the camp buildings from which he had departed about two hours before. Zastrowski was curled in sleep in the same place in the pen where Morris had left him.

As Morris watched, a guard emerged from the door on the side of the hill and shouted as he discovered that a prisoner was missing. For Morris, it was an interesting scene as the other soldiers of the camp came out of various doors, scurrying here and there in alarm until an officer emerged and called them into a small group on the side of the hill above the pen. They then broke into several units in a more purposed movement.

One unit of three soldiers went immediately to a truck which backed out and headed down the road in a southerly direction. They were heading to another, larger camp, Morris assumed. He had never seen the larger camp but he had deduced its existence from the passage in and out

of his own camp of various personnel on a regular basis.

Soon Morris saw something else of interest, also. Bryan Zastrowski, with his hands tied behind his back, was butted and pushed up the hill to the truck he had arrived in the day before. He was pushed into the back of the truck and the truck left the camp traveling in the opposite direction, toward Sam Neua.

Following this, the scene was quiet as the escaped pilot held his same position on the shelf of rock. There was just the sunlight widening into the lush greenness of the valley, revealing the blue ribbon of the river that he had never before seen. Now and then he heard noises of motors. In his imagination, he saw units of soldiers heading into the woods to search him out. But he heard no shouted orders as he had done after his plane crash two months before.

He started in again, moving warily through the woods. He was high on the side of a steep slope, obscured from view by trees, and so not in danger of being seen from below, but the going was rough.

To Morris's amazement, the whole day continued like this, with no sign of anyone in pursuit. He thought to himself he could have been on a backpacking trip in the Rockies. Only no one could have mistaken these odd mountains, with their limestone cliffs, as the Rockies. They were Asian mountains somehow, with an ancient look like mountains in an a Chinese tapestry. The higher peaks were shrouded in fog even in the sunlight.

It was an eerily beautiful scene, but Morris gave it no more than a moment's notice. He was all wariness still, and he still felt weighted down with the same fatalism that he had felt in the pen before he had begun his escape.

He tried to remain high on the slopes, but, each hour or two, there was a crevice of wooded rocks into which he needed to descend in order to go up again continuing in a general western direction as determined by the position of the sun. In these crevices, he found cold water trickling down between the rocks, and in one place lizard-like creatures that he killed and forced himself to eat raw.

The whole day continued like this, and night came on, bringing a cold wind. Morris could not find a good place out of the wind to rest. He was tired and hungry, and fell asleep at once in a depression he found behind a large rock, but he awoke in the middle of the night, shivering from the cold.

He was glad to see the first light of dawn. He headed off again at once. The day brought more of steep slopes and rocky terrain. To keep from tripping or turning an ankle, he had to constantly watch the ground. When he did pause and look up, he saw more slopes ahead, always thickly wooded, and, about 20 or 30 miles in the distance, sheer cliffs

rising from the trees at a point where the valley narrowed.

On the second day, Morris heard no noises of people or animals in pursuit of him. No planes flew overhead. Had he escaped so easily?

Morris thought to himself again that, with so much accomplished, he ought to feel relief, he ought to feel hope, but he could feel nothing at all but hunger, fatigue, and the persistent, underlying desperation that had been with him for several weeks, starting even before his decision to attempt an escape.

Passing through another valley, he found more of the lizard-like creatures he had eaten the day before, but he gagged when he tried to eat one and did not try a second time.

Night came on again, a long night spent leaning into a crevice of a cliff where an overhang captured some warmth, but not enough to provide any real comfort. He was watching for the light in the eastern sky when it appeared. He rose to a sitting position with a sigh of desperation and at once set out again.

How long could he continue like this? He realized that his strength was steadily being drained away by the long, arduous days without food or adequate rest.

All day long, he continued hiking again, until about mid-afternoon he realized that, in approaching the sheer cliffs that he had seen two days before in the distance, he had brought himself to a successively narrower corridor. Why had he not thought of this before? Slumping down into a sitting position, he surveyed the terrain ahead where the river could be seen in a canyon no more than a half mile wide. If there was anywhere they would be watching for him, it would be there.

Looking back behind him, in the direction from which he had come, Morris assessed the option of returning to a point where he could find an alternate route. He would have to cross again through the ten rough up and down miles through which he had just traveled. Could he climb up the sheer cliffs somehow to go to the north or south, perpendicular to his main route of travel? The cliffs appeared to several thousand feet high.

Unable to bring himself to a decision, Morris remained in the same place. Hours later, at nightfall, he was still in the same place. When night came on, he slumped over onto his side, sleeping for part of the cold night, then, near dawn, watching for the light to appear in the eastern sky.

Morris did not start off immediately at dawn as he had done the past few mornings. He remained in the same place, weighted down with the same oppressive mood of fatalistic dejection that had never left him during the entire time outside the camp.

Another full day and night had passed before he rose and went forward toward the narrow valley between the cliffs. He paused often, assessing each possible hiding place of his pursuers, before moving

forward.

A motion off to the side of his field of vision, sensed like the movement of an animal in the woods, was Morris's first sign the situation had gone awry. Soon after that, he saw two men in uniforms watching him from about a hundred yards ahead.

He was surrounded by soldiers when one of them, the same he had seen first, approached him without speaking. Morris saw the man moving toward him suddenly with his rifle, then he felt the impact of the rifle butt on the side of his face. Several other blows followed, a thud on his side after which he realized he was on the ground, more blows to the side of his head and his body, before he lost consciousness.

Morris awoke in an enclosure that he figured out eventually was the interior of a truck. Sunlight through the slats of the boards on his side, the bumpiness and back and forth movement, and the sound of a large motor led him to this conclusion. Groggily, he fitted together the pieces of his situation. He had been captured, had he not? His desperate journey through the mountains had the quality of a remembered dream more than of reality. Now he was on his way somewhere. Sam Neua, he said to himself.

Morris was pushed from the truck near nightfall into a scene that he recognized from Ellwood Erland's description of it. The place in which he found himself had the surreal look of a monastery built into the hills, as Erland had described. Morris could not actually see the buildings, but he could see the dark forms of them, extending backward into the other dark forms of rocks and trees. Some of the windows had lights in them.

He was not taken to any of the buildings but instead to a cave dug into the side of the hill. He was pushed in headlong, the door was slammed behind him, he heard a lock being fastened, and then all was darkness. There was no light at all. By groping around, he determined the size of the enclosure to be about the size of a small room with a higher area about the size of a bed.

Later that night, Morris heard in the distance a gruesome, piteous sound like the wailing and shrieks of an animal being wounded in a fight with another animal. He had heard such a sound one time as a boy, coming from the woods at a boy scout camp he had attended.

Only after five or ten minutes, did Morris begin to suspect that the sound was human. This suspicion brought him to an intense state of listening.

Yes, he confirmed to himself, the sound was someone groaning and screaming. Having recognized that, as he lay in the dark, Jim Morris began to put on the voice other human characteristics. The voice had a highness of pitch, a nasal quality, he realized with a start. It was the voice of Bryan Zastrowski.

192. Steward's drive to DC for second Moratorium, reunion with Brandt's

With their isolated life in their West Virginia farmhouse causing them to feel more and more lonely, as the calendar progressed from October to November, 1969, Tom and Kris Steward were looking forward more and more to their planned trip to Washington D.C. to meet with Matt and Mary Brandt for the second National Moratorium Against the War. At the same time, they had become increasingly bothered by their ever tighter financial situation and their as yet unfulfilled promise to fix up the farmhouse, as they had agreed to do as partial payment of their rent.

The Steward's had made arrangements to take off four days of work, leaving on Thursday, November 13, and returning on the following Tuesday. That left four days, Friday through Monday, to be in D.C. There would be two main Moratorium events, as they understood, based on a recent letter from Mary Brandt. The first event, the "March Against Death," would take place on Friday evening. In this event, as they understood, each marcher would carry a candle and a large card with the name of one soldier killed in Vietnam. The march would start at the National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, and proceed to Pennsylvania Street in front of the White House, where the name of the soldier would be called out. The second event, a rally at the Lincoln Memorial, was scheduled for Saturday afternoon. News reports had told of thousands of people all over the United States organizing chartered buses for the trip to D.C.

The Steward's had given considerable thought and discussion to how they could get to D.C. themselves. They had heard of no charter bus being organized for the logical place where it might be, in the near vicinity, the WVU campus in Morgantown. One option they had considered was for Tom to hitchhike and for Kris to take the Greyhound bus, on the way to D.C., after which they would take the bus home together. The other option was to drive the "little green Rambler." The Rambler would be the cheaper option, in the short run, but it would involve the unknown factor of how the car would do on the steep slopes of the Appalachian mountains. Tom had recently heard the car making a rattling, vibrating noise when it was driven uphill.

"I haven't heard any noise," Kristine said.

"Well, you don't listen the way I do," Tom replied.

"What kind of noise is it?"

"Just a little knocking noise."

"Tom, I think you're going crazy!"

"Yea, well, that's a separate issue."

He was aware that, with regard to money, he had acquired a crazy intensity he had never had before. What had begun as an occasional

worry had developed into an undercurrent of anxiety that was with him all the time. Though, on the face of it, he and Kris shared equally in decisions about money, he felt that he had the preponderance of responsibility as the male partner, per the traditional male role. Kristine was content to simply trust that everything would turn out alright, but he was keenly aware that he and she had only about $300 left in their savings. That little amount was all they had available to deal with any crisis or extraordinary expense.

Steward was ready to forget his money worries for the duration of the trip, at least, but a chance encounter with the neighbor landlord as he and Kris headed out brought his concerns back for a moment.

The landlord, dressed in jeans and an open suede leather jacket, waved to them from the road between the houses as they pulled out from the back yard where they parked the car. They stopped to talk to him through the open windows of the car.

"Heading off on a trip?" he asked.

It was a question that, on the face of it, could have simply been a friendly inquiry, but the Steward's had learned that the landlord seldom talked to them unless it was related to the promised repair of the house. In this case, the look that accompanied the question was one of being perturbed.

"Yes, actually, we're going to see some friends," Steward replied.

"Oh, yea? Where is that?

"Washington D.C."

The eyes narrowed at that, and it was not hard to extrapolate from that that the landlord had immediately made a connection involving young people and political radicals, a connection lately drawn out on the local television news.

"Think you might see some of them troublemakers down there?" the landlord said.

"I don't know," Steward replied.

"You ain't one of those, are you?"

"I'm against the war, if that what you're asking."

"You are, huh?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, it takes all kinds."

"Yes, it does."

"Well, you have a good trip now."

"Thank you."

That was the kind of interchange the Steward's had gotten used to having with the local people that they interacted with informally in their goings and comings from their various project-related activities. There was a suggestion of disapproval that never showed itself outrightly, a

dynamic that tended to cause a feeling of being disliked and unwanted. Tom had felt the feeling himself, but he was more bothered by the effect it had had on Kris. Since the morning after the hair washing incident, when she had come back from her walk looking so discouraged, he had been aware of this effect and increasingly concerned about it.

From the farmhouse, Tom and Kris Steward drove into Masontown and up Highway 7 to Kingwood, following the same roads that they often took to the project office. From there they continued east on Highway 7 toward the little section of the Maryland that juts down between West Virginia and Virginia in the northeast corner of West Virginia. They had never before been on this stretch of Highway 7, and they had never before seen the two ridges of mountains (Allegheny and Blue Ridge), that lay to their east, and the long, fertile valley between, stretching along the Shenandoah River between New York and the Carolinas, that Steward had heard the pioneers had called “the Great Valley.”

It was a crisp, sunny day with the sky a brilliant blue above the steep slopes of the mountains. In the thick covering of trees, there were still splotches of fall color amidst a background etching of bare limbs and pines. After traveling through green country with horse farms, they reached the Maryland border.

A few miles further, at Mountain Park, they turned south for about 30 miles onto Highway 139 to the junction with Highway 50, the main two lane highway that led southeast to Washington D.C.

They were in an expansive mood, with the loneliness and worries of their daily life left behind for the time being. The day promised to be glorious throughout. The evening would bring a reunion with the Brandt’s who, despite the lack of frequent contact, they had come to regard as close friends. The little Rambler hummed along like a new car with no unusual noises.

Kris had prepared a cooler packed with sandwiches and drinks as she had done on her and Tom’s honeymoon on their long drive together from Los Angeles to the Twin Cities. She sat in the middle of the front seat with her hand often resting on his forearm.

“Tom, have you ever wondered where we’ll go when we’re done in West Virginia?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe out West again.”

“Wouldn’t that be wonderful! Back to California, for a little while, at least!”

“I could get some kind of job there, or go to grad school, or something.”

“Let’s think about it!”

“Okay.”

They got a sense of the openness of California again later in the day

on the eastern sky of the Alleghany Mountains where they got their first view of the Shenandoah. Far below, extending for many miles, they could see patches of green fields and fall-colored woods, with the sunlight glimmering on a lake or stretch of the river in the distance, along a northern horizon that blended indistinctly with the sky like the horizon of the ocean. So much seemed possible, all of the old shared dreams came back, as they embraced and looked off together without speaking.

Beyond the second ridge, the Blue Ridge, on the eastern side of the Shenandoah, they began receiving news reports on the radio describing the upcoming rally and related events that the Steward's hadn't been aware of, including an appearance of President Nixon before Congress to address them regarding the war, happening at the moment, and a moon launching scheduled for the next day.

"President Nixon has said, on several occasions, that he could not, and would not, be influenced by this and the previous moratorium, a month ago," one announcer said. "Yet there seems to be some design in having the Apollo 12 launching so soon before the demonstration, to remind ordinary Americans,—what Nixon has called 'the silent majority'—of the national achievements that continue despite the war...

"And they are impressive achievements," another announcer said. "Yes, bringing men on the moon for the second time in a period of less than six months, I would say that is impressive. And Nixon will highlight that by being on hand to watch the rocket take off."

"And his appearance before Congress,—separately before each chamber,—that is without a doubt an extraordinary event. I can't think of any time a president even FDR has ever done that. It surely shows that this president is aware that he must win over public opinion as well as the Congress."

Details of Nixon's speech followed. In addressing the House, he had emphasized his collegiality in having himself been a member of the House for 15 years. He had talked about how he and John Kennedy had been freshmen together on the Committee on Education and Labor, and how he and Kennedy had each drawn the last straw in their respective parties when seniority was assigned.

"And I can only suggest to those who think sometimes that the luck of the draw is not with them," the president was heard saying, "we both did rather well politically since that time. But, more importantly, the record will show that John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, on those great issues in that 80th Congress and in the 81st Congress, involving foreign policy, voted together."

Nixon had asked the members of Congress for constructive criticism, the announcers said.

Again, the president's voice was heard: "I can say as I stand here

today... that we will achieve a just peace in Vietnam. I cannot tell you the time or date, but I do know this: that when peace comes... it will come because of the support we have received not just from Republicans but from Democrats, from Americans, in this House and in the other body and throughout the world."

The sun was low in the sky behind them when the Steward's reached Arlington, Virginia, 20 miles out from D.C. They continued along Arlington Avenue past the National Cemetery and over the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. From there, they could see the Lincoln Monument and the Reflecting Pool off to their right, with, beyond that, the obelisk of the Washington Monument and, in the distance, the illumined dome of the Capitol.

Following a map, the young couple exited the bridge and drove down Constitution Avenue alongside the National Mall, then turned left onto 17th Street and up past the White House to Connecticut Avenue N.W. From there, it was just about a mile and a half to Dupont Circle and the Brandt's apartment.

Slowing to look for the exact address among the roughhouses on R. Street, the Steward's saw Mary Brandt in a typical meditative pose seated at the table by the double windows on the second floor.

They parked the little Rambler, rang the doorbell, and ascended the long, straight stairwell to find Matthew and Mary waiting together by the door and beaming with delight as they came near. Matt looked rugged, and hairier, with by this time a full beard. Mary, with her dark hair pulled back in her typical understated manner, regarded them with the look of keen intelligence and generous regard that set her off so markedly from other people.

"Now don't tell us you ate supper already because we've got a place all picked out!" Mary said.

"Really, sounds great," Steward replied, despite himself thinking right away of the expense on his and Kris's limited funds.

"And it's on us," Matt threw in, quickly reading and understanding the look on the face of the former crewmate that he had spent many hours with in a double shell.

Within an hour, they were seated in the Golden Dragon restaurant on Connecticut Avenue, an intimate, candle-lit setting at a corner booth with large windows providing a view of a scene bright with city lights and busy with the constant movement of traffic and people.

The expected influx of thousands of young people for the events of the next two days was evident already in the many groups of youths, in various modes of countercultural dress, passing along the street amidst other pedestrians, many in professional attire, displaying the typical range of types of the cosmopolitan city.

There was much to talk about including old college friends, for the three from Minnesota, and the common experiences of anti-poverty work in a rural area. Matt and Mary also provided some details regarding the March Against Death the next day.

"This thing is turning out to be a big get together," Matthew said. "We got this one friend, old MV, Dennis Kelly, coming down from Kentucky. Should be here around noon tomorrow. I think he's staying over somewhere tonight... He'll be crashing at our place..."

"Yes, I'm afraid you'll have to share the floor," Mary threw in.

"Oh, we don't mind!" Kris replied.

"Sometime this weekend we hope you can meet some of our other friends," Mary continued, "People from Whitney Pratt, kind of... Darren, Gail, and Jane, people we went with up to Woodstock... Our very own 'Woodstock family.'"

Tom and Kris Steward puzzled a little on this, since at this time they didn't even know what Woodstock was; they had been so caught off in their isolated existence in Preston County.

"Looks like... what we've been thinking," Matt said, "is we'll all go over to the march with Jane when she goes over. Her husband was killed in the war so she's in a little group they asked to lead off the march. Then the rest of us will sort out by states."

"How's that?" Tom asked, with he and Kris again looking puzzled together.

The Steward's learned that the march was arranged by state, with each state assigned a start time throughout the entire night. Slots for eastern states were expected to be easily filled. Proxies would need to be found for some states further away from D.C.

"Oh, let's go for California!" Kris said.

That was soon decided, the bill for the meal received and paid, and the four friends headed up Connecticut Avenue, closely bunched in a group similar in appearance to the many groups of youths they had seen earlier from the restaurant window.

For the Steward's, less than a full day removed from their isolated farmhouse, the contrast was poignantly felt between the loneliness and darkness of that scene and this bright, bustling city scene where an evening could be shared with people of a like age and mind.

[Chapter 192 notes]

193. Brandt group carries names of Vietnam dead in candlelight procession

Dennis Kelly arrived late the next morning to the smell of food and brewing coffee. Entering the apartment after a perfunctory knock, without waiting for the door to be opened from inside, Kelly saw his old MVs buddy Matt Brandt and Matt's pretty, dark-haired wife Mary. Beside them were a curvaceous, striking blond and a clean-shaven, athletic-looking young man that he assumed were Tom and Kris Steward from West Virginia (whom he had heard about in advance from Mary). The two couples were cooking omelets together, with a TV screen in the background displaying a live image of the Apollo 12 Saturn 5 rocket at the Cape Kennedy launch pad 39A. Behind the rocket was a dark sky that appeared to harbinger an impending storm. Smoke streamed from the side of the rocket. Letters displayed at the bottom of the screen said: "T Minus 00:29:10." The time was counting down: "00:29:09... 08... 07."

"Sad Dog, amigo mio, you made it!" growled Brandt.

"Yes, I did, comrade Bomb Dog. How are you?"

"Fine," said Brandt. "What route you come up by?"

"81. Right up the Great Valley!"

"Long trip by yourself?" Mary asked.

"Au contrar! Au contrar!" Kelly responded with gusto. "I'm all into this 'on the road' thing!"

With that, he extracted from the side pocket of his Army jacket a paperback book that he held up for everyone to see. The book had a yellow cover with printing that appeared as if hand-printed. The printed words said: "ON THE ROAD The riotous odyssey of two American drop-outs by the drop-out who started it all, JACK KEROUAC."

The words flowed around a cartoon of a young couple kneeling on the hood of a car and locked in a face to face embrace, with what appeared to be a jug of wine on the hood beside them. The car had a flat tire on one side. On the other side of the car, in a standard font, were the words: "'Hip, Cool, Beat and Frantic.' The Nation."

"This the guy that just died?" Matthew inquired.

"Yes, actually, last month."

"Just like you, Sad Dog. The guy has to die for you to take an interest."

"Well, Dennis, we need some introductions," Mary interjected. "You've probably guessed who this is..."

Tom and Kris Steward then stepped forward to be introduced, with some quick references back and forth, to the mutual experience in rural, anti-poverty projects.

"I've heard of the WRO," Kelly remarked, staring at them all with his persistent, awkward seriousness. "But I guess my take on it is a much

bigger change is needed, a more systematic change. Maybe we can talk it over sometime."

"Yes, I'd like to," Steward replied.

The attention of the group was soon diverted to the TV where the display switched from the Saturn 5 rocket beside the launch pad to a view of the spectator stands in some unidentified location. The camera focused on U.S. President Richard M. Nixon, dressed in a shirt and tie and trench coat, seated beside his wife, Pat; his blonde-haired daughter Trisha looked out from the seat in front of them. The three had a look of excitement like spectators at a parade or football game.

The president made some comment, leaning over toward his daughter, in response to which his wife and daughter laughed.

"Well, you've got to give it to the guy, he can sure look like he's not paying attention," said Kelly.

"To the peace march, you mean," Mary responded.

"Yes."

"You got to think this was deliberately scheduled on the same day," said Steward.

"Who can doubt it?" said Kristine.

The announcer's voice from the television came in just then: "This is Apollo Saturn Launch Control. We have passed the 24 minute mark in our countdown, now T minus 23 minutes, 53 seconds and counting. Still counting at this time. All aspects of the flight, with the exception of weather, looking very good. We have no problems other than this weather front that is upon us. The countdown continuing, we will count if we can down to the 10 minute mark at least where the final determination will be made."

"Well, Dennis, what this is going to come down to," said Matthew.

"Pick your spot on the floor. You bring your sleeping bag?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, we can tend to that later, Dennis," said Mary. "Sit yourself down here and have an omelet."

"I might be convinced of that."

There was a glorious moment soon after that as the display counted down to "00:00:00" and the flash of the takeoff explosion swelled under the rocket before the rocket ascended slowly from the launch tower and quickly gained speed.

All eyes were on the TV as the rocket reached the cloud cover and was soon lost in it, as the plume faded out behind it.

"It does make you proud," said Mary.

"Yes, I have to admit it," Kelly answered.

"So great in space, so confused on the earth."

"Yes, a case could be made for that, surely."

They sat down to eat together, discussing the order of the states and whom Kelly would march with (he decided on Wisconsin), while the radio interchange between the astronauts and ground control (with the speakers not identified) came from the TV in the background.

"Looks good... Roll's complete."

"This thing moves, doesn't it?"

"Roger, Pete."

Suddenly the mood of that changed.

"What the hell was that?" said one of the voices.

"Huh?"

"I lost a whole bunch of stuff; I don't know ..."

"Turn off the buses."

"40 seconds."

"Mark. One Bravo."

"Roger. We had a whole bunch of buses drop out."

"Roger. We [garble] on that....

"There's nothing. It's nothing ..."

"A circuit..."

"Where are we going?"

"I can't see; there's something wrong."

"It appears there is some problem now," the announcer's voice said. "We're trying to ascertain what happened."

"As surely the astronauts are, also," said a second announcer. "Of that you can be sure," the first announcer replied. Everyone's attention in the apartment on R. Street in Washington D.C. was on the rocket's problem, also. The display had shifted to the control center in Houston where the engineers were huddled in several locations on the wide floor of computer work stations.

"We are hearing now the Saturn 5 was struck by lightning," the announcer said. "The problem is apparently capable of being corrected. We'll switch back to the audio."

"Apollo 12, Houston. Go for staging."

"Roger. Go for staging we had some really big glitch, gang?"

"Flight Director Jerry Griffin taking a staging status now," the announcer said. "Apollo 12 down range 17 miles. Altitude 20 miles."

"What do the buses read, Al?"

"Stand by."

"Inboard engines."

"Okay."

"Try to reset your fuel cells now."

"Reset the fuel cells."

"Hang on."

"25... 27... 32..."

"Got a clock running over here?"

"Yes. Hang on."

"There's 41. Hang on, there it is."

"That's it."

"That's it. That's it."

"Well, that was too close," Kristine said.

There was a look of common relief on the faces of the group eating omelets, and in their unspoken thoughts a shared feeling that maybe the president had been right in staging the rocket launch as a reminder of the essential unity of the nation on the same weekend as the demonstration against the war.

Later, as the day progressed, the same five were ready when Darren Houghten came by in his van, at about 5 P.M., to drive everyone over to the start of the march, which was scheduled to begin at 6.

"Did you bring your ponchos? It's supposed to rain," Houghten called out from the van as the group emerged from the outside door of the row house.

"And better wear a sweater. It's cold," Gail Martin added.

She herself was dressed, as she often did, in jeans and a flannel shirt, like a big, hearty farm girl.

It was, indeed, cold,—near freezing,—and a light drizzle was coming down. The group, now of eight people, jammed into the van (with Darren and Matt in the front, Tom and Kris Steward and Mary in the middle, and Jane, Dennis, and Gail in the rear), exchanged pleasant greetings as they passed Dupont Circle and continued down Connecticut to Constitution and alongside the national mall toward the Memorial Bridge.

All along the mall, long-haired youths dressed in ponchos or rain coats, some carrying umbrellas, could be seen. Others with white arm bands stood at intersections, waiting for the march to begin.

On the Virginia side of the Memorial Bridge, signs directed traffic to a knoll about a quarter mile from the bridge where there were several circus-like, pole-supported big tents. Youth were milling around there as more marshals with white arm bands handed gave instructions. From the tents, a steady stream of people moved up the knoll to an area where a crowd had formed before a wooden platform protected by a roof of stretched canvas.

"I'm supposed to go with the first people," Jane told a marshal in her soft, almost inaudible voice.

"Oh, yes. You're Mrs. Larue? Go up to the top of the hill there and go right up to the people at the mike."

At the identified location, the group of eight found the ceremony about to begin.

A woman diminutive like Jane, and introduced as Mrs. Judy Droz,

had been chosen to be the first marcher. She was the mother of a ten-month-old daughter, the person who introduced her said. Around her neck she wore her card with her husband's name, Donald Droz.

Before starting, she spoke briefly.

"There is no light at the end of the tunnel," she said, "only the darkness that came over my husband."

She stood for her candle to be lit and headed down the slope toward the bridge. The drizzle had stopped. The candle flickered but kept burning as she walked.

Behind her went other widows and relatives of soldiers killed in the war. A man and woman marched with the name of their son, followed by their five other grown sons carrying candles.

Jane Larue, her head bent in a reflective pose, was about the 20th person to move forward with a candle. The sun broke briefly through the western clouds as she walked, projecting a sunset glow on her red hair. The glow made her stand out from the others in the line of marchers as they wound down the autumn brown grass to the granite pedestals at the entry to the bridge.

On the other side of the river, the 500-foot tall obelisk of the Washington Monument glowed briefly in the same sunset light before the gray shadow of another cloud moved across the mile-long mall extending eastward to the White House. The line of candles soon reached the other side of the bridge and could be seen winding to the left at the base of the bridge between the brick buildings of the Georgetown campus and the trees beside the Reflected Pool.

"It is an amazing sight," Tom Steward said to his wife as he and she nestled together on the side of the knoll, watching the march as it progressed.

"It reminds you how big this is, what we're part of," Kristine replied.

When the time came to sign up for the cards, she searched through the list for a name she recognized, eventually finding the name of a young man named Steven Flood that she recalled from high school.

"He was the real quiet type," she told her husband. "You would never think he would be the type to volunteer."

"He volunteered?"

"Yes, I remember people talking about how could do that. It was like he was a traitor to the cause. We were all against the war."

An hour later, after sunset, the Steward's were in line with their cards and unlit candles as the last people filed out from Arizona.

The California delegation had more marchers, 3075, than any other state, the official word was. Many of them were proxies.

Tom and Kris Steward moved forward to have their candles lit by a marshal.

"Just move at a steady pace," the marshal said. "Keep in a single line. If you hit a red light, stop and wait. If anything says anything to you, be courteous. We don't want any confrontations."

Tom and Kris headed off silently with their lit candles flickering in the breeze. There was not much noise at all from the long, snakelike line of people, just some few muted comments now and then. The line ahead could be seen extending all the way to the white dome of the White House. To the right of that, candles could be seen here and there, between the buildings, moving along Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol.

At the White House, where the names were to be called out, several people ahead said their soldiers' names quietly. But Kris, when her turn came, raised her fist dramatically and shouted out at the top of her voice: "Steven Flood is dead!"

The procession along Pennsylvania Avenue was silent as a steady rain doused the candles. There were no counter-demonstrators, as on the march the previous month. Before the Capitol dome, dozens of black coffins were on hand for the depositing of cards. Soldiers stood in a line there preventing people from ascending the steps toward the building.

The Steward's placed in their cards silently and headed off together walking toward the Brandt's apartment on R. Street.

Shouting and popping noises carried across to them from the side streets off Pennsylvania Avenue. Based on the changing location of sirens, police cars and ambulances could be audibly tracked as they raced toward the same side streets.

Looking down one street toward the origin of the noise, Steward saw jeeps and other military vehicles moving in formation toward an area where a mob of youths wheeled from a surface cloud of smoke.

"Everything is on a different level here," Kris observed. "It's all out in the open. Where we are, everything is secret."

The background demonstrations were still going on, after midnight, when Matt and Mary Brandt completed their own march, with the contingent from Minnesota. Matthew, looking down the same street, saw amidst a group of demonstrators about a half block in the distance, someone he thought he recognized, a young man who stood out for the stylishness of his clothes and the neatness of his blond hair and Trotsky-style goatee.

Could it be Bruce Harris, the former MV's leader, "Meat Dog" of the "Dog Cadre"? He recalled that Harris had taken a teaching assistantship at Georgetown.

He paused, thinking to call out to him. But something held him from it. After a moment of hesitation, he went on.

[Chapter 193 notes]

194. Brandt friends march and then discuss Kerouac, drugs, and spirituality

The plan for the next day (Saturday, August 15, 1969), was for Tom and Kris Steward, Matt and Mary Brandt, and Dennis Kelly to meet at Dupont Circle with Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue. From there, the eight would walk together to the Washington Monument to join the thousands that were expected to be gathering there for the main event of the second moratorium, the grand march from the national mall past the White House and up Pennsylvania Avenue (not all the way to the Capitol, just for two blocks). After the march, the group of eight would bring their day to an end together with a spaghetti supper in Houghten's alley apartment.

The five from the Brandt's apartment left at about 8:30 A.M. as the march was scheduled to begin at 10. It was a crisp day, with temperatures in the 30's.

Even a mile and a half away, around Dupont Circle, the five could see evidence of the buildup to the day's event with young people visible here and there along the sidewalks, some carrying American and Viet Cong flags and signs. Cars and vans crammed with young people moved along the street mixed in with the usual light Saturday morning traffic.

As they approached Dupont Circle, the five from the Brandt's could see approaching them, from about a half block away, their unmistakable friends: Darren Houghten, limping along, crutch in hand, and looking like a stage Hamlet with his thin, pale face and ragged hair and beard; Gail Martin, in jeans and a Peabody coat, swinging her arms cheerfully as she strode strongly toward them like a healthy farm girl; Jane Larue, the red of her hair catching the sunlight, looking small and dainty, her pretty face set in her usual tentative pose.

"This one will be larger than the last, I think," Houghten remarked after the group had met and turned down Connecticut together.

"They say a quarter million," Mary replied.

"Is that right?"

"Yes. Larger than '63."

She was referring to the 1963 civil rights march, everyone knew, when the largest crowd ever (up to that time), 200,000, had assembled in the mall to march up Pennsylvania Avenue.

The magnitude of the event became clear when they were still more than a half mile from the mall. By then, they had joined into a stream of people, four or five abreast on the sidewalk, all heading in the same direction. The major part of them were young, of a collegiate age, and in a general mood of elation at their own strength in numbers. All along the street, as far as could be seen, were young people moving along together with signs and waving flags (both American and Viet Cong, though the

American flags far prevailed in numbers).

This could have been the same crowd as had been at Woodstock except for a thorough salting in of older, more serious types who appeared to be clergy, professors, intellectuals, or (in the case of women) feminists. The older people wore more conservative dress—sweaters, sport coats, or suits. The younger people wore, almost unanimously, khaki pants or jeans. Many wore military jackets or coats, and most had long hair: young men had mustaches or beards, with hair to their shoulders; young women had longer hair to mid-back or waist. Many of the older people had a look of partial detachment; they seemed to regard themselves as philosophical kin rather than full members of the ragtag army around them.

As at Woodstock, there were high school students among the crowd, also, both boys and girls, in general, more boisterous in manner, laughing and joking as they moved along with the others, often running, jumping, or hopping, or spinning around for a few backward steps as they continued joking and laughing.

Entering the mall, the group of eight saw a larger mass of people than any of them had ever seen in person before. It extended the full half mile length of the quarter-mile-wide mall, down beyond the tall obelisk of the Washington Monument and on both sides of the Reflecting Pool. Even at the southern edge of the mall by the Jefferson Monument, people with flags and signs moved across in a steady stream to join with the main contingent by the Washington Monument. Marshals with blue and white arm bands stood alongside the crowd, shouting answers to questions. Some people had taken higher positions on lamp posts and in branches of trees.

A chant went up as the group of eight waded into the crowd.

"What do we want?" hollered marshals from a stage below the obelisk.

"Peace!" the crowd replied.

"When do we want it?"

"Now!"

The chant began near the stage and moved across the mall in layers of sounds like echoes as thousands of more voices joined in. Chant after chant spread through the crowd, with waves of different chants colliding at times to be drowned out by one another.

At the appointed time, the event began with remarks made from a stage at the base of the obelisk and amplified to speakers strung from lamp posts along the side of the mall.

Among the speakers was Eugene McCarthy, the senator from Minnesota who by his antiwar challenge to the then sitting president Lyndon Johnson in the 1968 New Hampshire primary was widely

regarded as having brought about Johnson's decision not to seek reelection.

"The record of history, I think, is clear," McCarthy said, "the cases in which political leaders, out of misjudgment or ambition, in ancient times or in modern times, basing their actions on the loyalty of their people, have done great harm to their own countries and to the world. The great loyalty of Roman citizens moved the Caesers to war. The great loyalty of the French moved Napoleon to actions which should never have been taken. Let us in the United States take warning from that experience."

Among others to take the stage were the folk group, Peter, Paul, and Mary, who sang "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" Sen. Charles Goodell of New York, notable for being a Republican in the mostly Democratic crowd, said: "We are not here to break a president or even a vice president. We are here to break the war and begin the peace."

Following the stage presentation, the lead elements of the march assembled near the base of the obelisk. Police cars with blinking lights moved out first onto Constitution Avenue. Behind them were three young men with drums. Then came a dozen or so groups of youths bearing black wooden coffins. An announcer on the stage explained that these coffins contained the cards carried in the candlelight march the night before with the names of soldiers killed in the war. Behind the coffins stood a man with a giant wooden cross. Then came marchers holding a streetwide banner saying, "Silent Majority for Peace."

Hundred of marshals with blue and white armbands took up position along Constitution Avenue, linking arms in a continuous line on both sides of the streets.

"Not taking any chances," Houghten remarked to Mary.

"Oh, no. They want this to go right," Mary replied.

The police cars moved forward with blinking lights. The drummers, following the police cars, began a funereal roll. Then came the coffins, the banner, and the first of the marchers, arranged by the marshals into streetwide rows of about 17 people.

At the head of the marchers were recognizable notables. Among them was Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, whose two brothers, John (the former president) and Robert (the former senator) had both been victims of assassination. Not far from him was Coretta Scott King, widow of the slain civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. Also at the front were Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota, the folk singer Arlo Guthrie, son of Woody, and the black comedian Dick Gregory.

"All we are saying is give peace a chance," people in the one part of the crowd began singing. The song spread through the crowd as more and move voices joined in.

Two hours passed before the group of eight, including Tom and Kris

Steward, Matt and Mary Brandt, Dennis Kelly, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue, reached the obelisk to be routed into the march.

Counter-demonstrators with signs stood here and there behind the marshals. “America is worth saving,” said one sign. “Communism is the total enemy of freedom,” said another. A low-flying plane trailed a banner: “Will Vietnam satisfy the Reds?”

The counter-demonstrators seemed insignificant, however, compared to the great river of people filling the street from side to side. At the corner of Constitution and Pennsylvania, where the marchers turned around the northwest corner of the enclosed grounds of the White House, the wide column of marchers could be seen stretching a half mile back to the Washington Monument and a quarter mile east up Pennsylvania to the point where the parade route bent south again back to the mall.

The group of eight friends, marching side by side, locked arms as they passed the White House, chanting “Peace Now” with the crowd around them. Further up the street, another chant sprung up at the same time: “Ho, Ho, Ho! Ho Chi Minh!”

For the group of eight, there was a feeling of power of generation, of strength in one another, continuing through the march and afterward as they walked together to Houghten’s apartment through streets that seemed everywhere still abuzz with the excitement of the march, as young people were everywhere evident moving along sidewalks or passing by in vehicles with flags waving out of windows, honking horns, and exchanging peace signs, thumbs up handshakes, and shouts of farewells and congratulations for the success of the event.

Later that evening, after the march, the group continued in the comradely mood of the day with their supper together crowded into the living room of Houghten’s apartment.

The apartment, with its eclectic clutter of books, record albums, collected objects, and wall hangings, and its “Ash Can School” vista of the back porches and fire escapes of other buildings, seemed appropriate for the occasion.

The atmosphere in the candle-lit room was at first celebratory and then more thoughtful as the evening progressed from spaghetti and wine to grass,—now done in Mary’s presence, but with Mary never taking part. Darren, Dennis, Matthew, and Jane were, in fact, the only ones who partook of the grass, though the others sat in the same smoke-filled room.

Kelly had never smoked before. He kept looking around the room, and after various tangential switches in conversation, he and Darren Houghten began talking about Jack Kerouac.

“For me it has been part of this process, you know, of tying it all together,” Kelly said. “That’s what I call it in my own mind. It used to be school over here, everything else, the world, over there...But that has

changed. That's what he did for me, Kerouac, he brought it all together. Look, see," he said, holding up the paperback which he had shown to the Brandt's and Steward's earlier that day, "it says he's a drop out. But that's not what it was. He didn't leave school. What he did was, he brought school with him, he brought it out there. Especially as relates to the American experience, understanding the American experience, the physical nature of America, the nature of American speech. That's what I was thinking coming up here on the road. All these places and people, tidbits of conversation. I heard one guy use a triple preposition, guy that I asked for directions. 'Go on up over that bridge,' he told me. How American is that?" Kelly broke out laughing, shaking his head. "'On up over,' how goddam American is that?"

The others seemed more amused at seeing the usually so serious Kelly laughing, than by what he was saying, which was so oblique in meaning as to be understood, apparently, only by him.

"One thing I heard that really impressed me," Houghten said through closed lips as he held the smoke in, "is that whole thing, the whole beat phenomenon, it all took place in just three places, really. Venice Beach in LA. North Beach in SF, Greenwich Village in New York. Just those three places. It wasn't in the least sense national, but then you have Kerouac and Cassady, in a way, striking out from that..."

"Into the rest of America," said Kelly.

"Precisely. It's a great image, you know, this junk heap of a car, this mad driver, with this immense wake behind..."

"Cassady was Dean Moriarity?"

"Yea, the mad driver. And Cassady was the one who really invented the style that Kerouac uses, the jazz burst, you know, in his rambling letters to Kerouac."

"I didn't know that."

"That's what I heard. You know, Kerouac, before that, he was like Thomas Wolfe."

"There was a spiritual side of it, too," Jane remarked in her soft voice when there was a lull in conversation. She was quite a sight in the candlelight, with her dreamy green eyes and her fiery red hair. "They were looking for something spiritual... They weren't just roaring around."

"Spiritual as in Zen?" asked Kelly.

"Spiritual as in 'spirit,'" she answered. "The spirits that exist everywhere. Your spirit. My spirit. The spirit of this wine."

"Jane, you are a pagan!" Houghten exclaimed.

"But wasn't a lot of it just being zonked out on drugs?" Mary said. "Not to break your enjoyment of the moment."

"Well, yes, but the drugs brought about a different consciousness,"

Houghten returned. “Mary, I know this is a little sore point with you. A different consciousness. That’s what’s behind experiments with acid, like D.J. Leary was conducting. Forcing people to be totally altered on acid for weeks in a row, combined with things like the *Tibetan Book of Dead*, to experience the spiritual reality that Jane is talking about.”

“Well, that I would never do!” protested Jane.

“To me, it would be utterly frightening,” Mary added.

“Well, yes, actually, to me, too,” said Houghten. “But that’s the extent to which they believed in this alteration. That’s the extent to which they wanted to experience this spiritual side.”

“*Teachings of Don Juan*,” said Matthew.

“Precisely.”

“Then you have Kerouac, dead at what, 43?” said Mary. “And I heard the other one you mentioned, Cassady, he just died, too.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“Froze or something. Too drunk to get up.”

“Yes, I heard that.”

“Well, that’s the other side of it. They kept looking and looking, for whatever it was, don’t ask me... and where did it take them? To greater and greater excesses.”

“Yes, that too.”

“Meanwhile there are all these real problems, like people were dealing with today, this problem of the war. Social problems.”

“Maybe it all fits together, though,” Kelly replied. “That’s what I’ve been thinking.”

The group of eight went on like this late into the evening, airing their differences with one another, but feeling at the same time that they were breaking new ground and, in the process, forming a deeper bond with one another.

[Chapter 194 notes]

195. Steward's bid farewell to Brandt's and return to face changes

With Dennis Kelly having departed for Kentucky early Sunday, on the day after the moratorium march, Tom and Kris Steward spent that day and the next with Matt and Mary Brandt before returning to West Virginia on Tuesday, August 17, 1969.

Their activities together included visits to the national monuments on Sunday afternoon, a sunrise cookout breakfast at Rock Creek on Monday morning, and a final, pleasant supper together on Monday evening in the Brandt's apartment.

On Sunday morning, Tom and Matt also went down to the Potomac River together, to the Potomac Rowing Club, located below the Roosevelt Bridge, where Matt said he had recently been going for walks. They went running by the river, and then hung out on the boat club dock, which was reminiscent of the dock at their college haunt, the Minnesota Boat Club.

"Know what I think sometime?" Matthew said when he and Tom were standing on the dock watching the water of the Potomac flow past as they had often watched the water of the Mississippi together.

"No, what?"

"I think, in my whole goddam humble life, two things stand out as the pure absolute truth."

Steward was used to this kind of language from Matthew, who used it not at face value, but in a dismissive manner in his native dislike for lofty words of any kind.

"And what is that?"

"The farm, you know, just the goddam, humble, peon work on the farm. That's one. And rowing. That's two."

"Seems like you forgot something."

"What's that?"

"Mary."

"Oh, yea. Mary. Well, sure, Mary is bright and shining. No doubt about that."

Another remark not to be taken at face value, Steward knew. There was no way that Matt would ever be caught saying anything sappy, or even simply direct, regarding his relationship with his wife—or regarding his relationship with any human being, for that matter, or regarding anything he considered precious.

"I thought you were so into photography," Steward said; and he knew this to be the case, as he had seen Matt's carefully produced black and white photos lying around the Brandt's' apartment.

"Yea, I suppose I am. I guess I'm just the true artist, the honest documentarian, you know," Matthew said. "But, hey, you know,

Stewball, I was just talking off the tip of my head. No need to get analytical."

"I wasn't getting analytical, Matt," Steward replied softly. "I was just trying to get a better sense of where you're at."

"What do you think of this boat club?"

"I like it a lot. I've been thinking of becoming a member."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

The interaction stopped there, with Steward left to interpret the cues in order to understand where Brandt really stood on the matters they had touched on.

Steward was keen to observe later how Matt acted with Mary, since Matt's comment seemed to imply that he had begun to tire of his wife's intellectualism. Though this development was well established, by this time, in Matt and Mary's mutual sense of their relationship, it was new to Steward. He noticed that Matt and Mary seldom talked to one another anymore at any length, while Mary seemed eager to converse with anyone who would engage her interests. She had done this the night before, Steward had noticed, at Houghten's apartment, talking in her earnest manner with Darren and Dennis. Matthew had remained silent, though often his facial expressions conveyed concern for the topic at hand.

At Rock Creek, the next morning, at the cookout breakfast the two couples went on together, Matt roamed about on the side, picking up sticks to throw in the creek, while the others sat by the fireside. Seeing that, Steward recalled how Brandt had used to roam around in the same way on the boat club island, throwing drift wood in the river. He thought to himself that it was if Matt's previous sullen, nonverbal personality of college days had reasserted itself, as if it had been contained for a while by Mary's influence but had proven too basic to his personality to be suppressed.

There was no doubt, though, Steward thought further, that the Matt of the moment was not the Matt he had known in college. This Matt was, to begin with, much hairier. He looked like a mountain man, with his unruly hair and beard. But, also, the Matt of the present had a new intellectual depth that could be seen in his eyes especially as he looked out over a natural setting. It was more like he had grown past his intellectualism; he was deliberately unlearning.

Steward talked to Mary about this on the Steward's last evening in D.C. as the two couples relaxed in the Brandt's apartment over supper and wine with music playing in the background. In general, he had found Mary eager to talk with him, as with everyone else, and his friendship with her had in the few days of the visit become more substantial.

Actually, for Steward, this was a new experience, an intellectual relationship with a woman he was attracted to but didn't have any expectation of becoming physical with.

Mary knew at once what Steward was talking about in his comments about Matthew.

"You and I, Tom, we're the verbal types. We came into all this on the basis of rational arguments about the war, and so on," Mary said. "And we've thought of what we're doing as opposition to the war, opposition to social policies, things we could explain. But the Movement,—or whatever you want to call it,—has become so much wider than that. Sometimes I think it is just being a different way. It involves a lot of things that haven't been talked about yet, that maybe won't be talked about, don't need to be talked about."

"Because it's become almost instinctive."

"Precisely, yes."

Tom Steward thought about this as he listened to the music the Brandt's had selected to play. The music was Crosby, Nash, Stills, and Young ("Suite Judy Blue Eyes" and other songs played at Woodstock), and Bob Dylan's new album that had just come out, "John Wesley Harding." Steward had never much listened to music, except when it was set out before him; but he could see, in the lyrics of these songs, that the subject matter had evolved, as Mary had said, beyond the war and politics to themes of spiritual exploration and cultural regeneration.

Dylan was especially interesting, in this respect, Steward thought (struggling to make sense of it all with his poor basic understanding of music). Here was the man who just a few years before had written the major protest anthems of the Movement, the great anthems against the war such as "Masters of War," but nothing in this whole album related to the war. The pervasive theme, if any, was moral corruption brought on by greed or self- betrayal. Beyond that, there were mystical images, premonitions of doom, such as in "All Along the Watch Tower," set into an electronic rock rhythm in contrast to his previous folk music.

Steward thought to himself that he didn't understand anymore how all of these pieces of the Movement fitted together.

Meanwhile, as the evening progressed, Steward could hear his wife Kristine in the background talking to Mary Brandt. At Mary's urging, Kris was telling her whole story of the RFK campaign, the assassination, and her involvement afterward with the memorial concerts.

"How could you possibly have gotten all these people to cooperate?" Mary was saying. "These are some of the biggest names."

"And that's just it. They were just names to start out with. A list of names. And all I had to do was call. They wanted to help."

"Because they thought so much of Kennedy?"

"Yes. It didn't have anything to do with me."

"But you put it all together. You organized for them all to attend and have what they needed. They must have learned to trust you."

"Well, I think they did."

"That's really astounding, Kris. You have a true talent there."

"Thank you."

It was in fact astounding, Steward thought, and in hearing the story again, he realized how far he and Kris had come from the bus ride where they had met somewhere between Santa Barbara and L.A. She had felt then that somehow she would continue with that in the future and she hadn't. He could see what a flush of pride it brought to Kris's face to be told of her abilities. She had waned in West Virginia, he knew. He thought, also, that she represented the new counterculture more than he did himself, this new subject matter that had gone beyond the war and politics.

Throughout the visit, Kris and Mary had spent much time together talking intimately like sisters, with Mary being the attentive bigger sister and Kris the younger sister looking for advice. Steward could see that there was a great deal of mutual admiration in the relationship. Kris admired Mary for being educated and assertive and for being pretty without any obvious attempt at it. Mary admired Kris for having accomplished so much without formal education and for her Hollywood type beauty which Mary clearly regarded as superior to her own.

On the following morning, there were emotional goodbyes as the Brandt's accompanied the Steward's to their car, helped them pack in their things, and watched them drive off. There was a mutual feeling that the visit had been a success, even among the men for, despite the lack of words, there had been a sense of a renewal of the bond going back to college and rowing.

"Maybe we'll make it up your way sometime," Matt said. "Once and a while we get the wanderlust."

"Oh, we would like that!"

For the Steward's, as they left Washington behind them, there was a feeling of increasing isolation as they continued through the mountains toward West Virginia. It was not just the city that they had left behind, but the sense of community that they had had with the Brandt's and the group in Houghten's apartment.

That the trip had had a profound impact on Kris was obvious from her conversation on the way home. She said that she had realized that she really did have a talent, as Mary had said.

"Tom, you know, I've been holding back," she said. "Janis is talking all the time about running out of funds. I'm the one person who could maybe really help her."

"You think your musician friends would come to Morgantown and stage a concert just for us?"

"Yes, I do think they would."

"You think Janis would go for it?"

"Why not?"

"Because she's cautious. She would be worried about the radical image, how it would affect the agency."

That prospect seemed to deflate Kris a great deal from her expansive mood.

"Well, I should try anyhow," she said at last. "That's one thing Mary impressed on me. It's important to take the first step, it's important to assert yourself when you see a need."

The densely wooded mountains were beautiful as they left Virginia and progressed through the panhandle of Maryland into West Virginia late in the day. Sunset brought a lonely mood as miles of darkness intervened between the island of lights of little towns.

Reaching Masontown, they turned off for the final five or so dark miles before they reached their farmhouse. They went in and turned on the lights to an interior that seemed very bare and dim compared the Brandt's cheerful apartment in D.C.

In the bedroom, where the steps led up to the upstairs room where Steward had started to knock the plaster off, for his promised improvement of the farmhouse, he noticed that the door to the steps was open. He was sure he had left the door closed as he always did to prevent dust from upstairs to settle downstairs.

That could mean only one thing. There was nothing to steal in the house, certainly upstairs.

"I think our landlord friend has been in here," he told his wife.

She was startled by that. "What would he want in here?"

"Wants to see what I'm doing."

"That's not right! He should ask us to come in."

Next morning, when Steward went out to the car, he saw the landlord approaching him along the dirt road.

"You probably noticed I was in the house while you were gone," the landlord said at once.

"Yes, I did. That didn't seem quite right."

"Well, I wasn't snooping around, if that's what you mean. I was just looking at the repairs, where you been knocking around."

"I'm going to put wallboard in there," Steward said.

"Listen, Steward, I'm going to have to ask you to move out. I'll give you to the end of this month."

"I'm intending to do the work."

"Yes, I don't doubt that. But, first thing, I don't think you know what

you're doing, good intentions or not. And second thing, it's going much too slow. It's not what I had in mind. The way I look at it, you agreed to do a lot more than you're doing."

"Yes, I know. Other things have come up."

"You've had a couple of months here pretty cheap. And you've got two weeks to find something else. I don't think I'm being unfair. I ain't got nothing against you personally."

"I know."

"I got to take care of what I have."

"Yes, I know."

Steward went back into the house to tell his wife.

"You know, Tom, in a way I'm relieved," she said after a moment of surprise.

"So am I."

"It would be nice to have running water."

"Yea, it really would."

"Hot and cold water."

"Yes, it would."

That very day they began looking for a more modern, less isolated place to live.

196. O'Rourke corresponds with nurse Carpenter, arranges flight to see her

Spec 2 William O'Rourke heard of the November moratorium on the same day that it happened. His understanding of the event fed into his evolving sense of the war as he was confronting it firsthand as a triage medic at the 91st Evacuation Hospital in Chu Lai, Vietnam.

O'Rourke learned of the moratorium from two sources: the network TV news, taped and available for view in the base exchange each day; and the service newspaper, the *Pacific Stars & Stripe*.

One comment, made by a TV news anchorman on the day of the march, stuck in his mind: "Who could now doubt the tremendous national scope of the protest against the war? Who could doubt how bitterly the nation is divided into opposing camps?"

O'Rourke wrote a letter about this to Barbara Carpenter, who was still in Vietnam working as a nurse 600 miles away at a medical facility south of Saigon.

He began the letter: "Dear Barbie, sweetheart, ma'am."

"One thing I've observed," he wrote, "is this so-called cultural divide exists here in 'Nam probably just as much as at home. You got your grunts and your lifers, your enlisted men and your officers, the guys who went to West Point. Just this week, when that demonstration was going on back home, I saw guys here, soldiers in uniform, wearing peace signs and beads.

"I also came upon an article in the *Stars & Stripes*, telling the other side of it, some guys who set up a little counter-demonstration on the base here, outside the BX. I didn't actually see this myself, but the paper said they had flags and were carrying signs saying, remember everyone who died, remember the war is not won yet.

"So that's how it goes on here. Muted, you know. But even here in sunny 'Nam."

About a week later, O'Rourke got a reply from Carpenter:

"Dear Bill," it went, "I don't know much about the cultural divide you talk about. Tell you the truth, I don't try anymore to answer the big questions. I did once in my life, back at the U, when I was a student there, but I don't even ask the questions anymore."

The letter continued with details of Barbie's new room. Her unit, the 3rd Surgical, had recently moved from Can Tho to a smaller base called Binh Thuy, a move of only a few miles, as she explained it. Her new quarters were regarded as more secure. There were no longer sand bags stacked up along the walkway outside her door.

O'Rourke got the impression that Can Tho and Binh Thuy formed a complex similar to his own Chu Lai, a little city of Americans with the war going on "out there," in a world that many of the inhabitants of the

little city never encountered.

Overall, for Bill O'Rourke, it was an interesting letter, but the last paragraph most piqued his interest.

"Bill, you know what I think about often?" Barbie wrote. "I think about that night in Chicago when you showed up at the clinic there after the march. That was such a pleasant surprise! Sometimes in the evenings I leave the clinic here and I think I just wish Bill could be here again like that. Remember that pizza place on State Street, how we were talking about maybe we would both wind up in 'Nam? And now here we are! 600 miles apart! Looks like now maybe we never even will cross paths here. Gotta admit that makes me a little sad."

The letter ended: "Keep in touch, Bill. Fondly, Barbie," followed by the usual three X'x and three O's.

O'Rourke read this letter after finishing his shift for the day. He had a Friday evening ahead with nothing to do. There had been a lull in activity during the past week. He had been given the weekend off, his first entire weekend off since arriving in Chu Lai. Wasn't there some way he could get down to Binh Thuy? It seemed an impossible feat.

Leaving the dorm where he lived, O'Rourke headed up the road toward the USO. It was a beautiful evening, with the surf rolling in from the China Sea, bringing to mind the California coast around Malibu Beach, except that there was no sunset sun hovering over the water as would have been the case in California. Some bare-chested soldiers on the beach, wearing beads, were passing a joint between them.

There was that cultural divide again, O'Rourke thought. Further up the road, he saw the other side of it, Navy officers in their black and white dress uniforms gathered for a social function at the elegant officers' club that fronted the beach.

Passing the airfield later, O'Rourke saw a pilot walking in from a courier plane and recognized him as the officer he had flown with to Chu Lai, the one who had rowed at Wayne State.

"Mr. William O'Rourke!" said the man. "You just coming from rowing practice?"

"Don't try much rowing any more, sir," O'Rourke replied good-naturedly. "Let me see now, trying to remember your name."

"Ken Forland."

"Yes, of course. El Capitan."

"'El Capitan,' I like that," the pilot remarked with a jaunty pull back of his head. Indeed, he did like it. It was consistent with his self-image of being a little bit outside of the mold.

"Still flying that little plane, sir, what was it anyhow? Ute?"

That name had stuck as being like the Ute indians, which the former coxswain had once heard of.

"Oh, you're very good in that department!"

"Yes, I am, sir."

"Hey, Mr. O'Rourke, you're just what the doctor ordered. Let me buy you a beer."

"You think it'll be alright, sir, you being an officer?"

"Hell, why not? You can be my assistant."

The thought came immediately into the former coxswain's mind, as he sat down beside Capt. Ken Forland, that this was a pilot who flew between bases. Maybe Forland would have an idea for how O'Rourke could get down to Binh Thuy to see Barbara Carpenter. But he held back from saying anything, not wanting to be pushy about it.

Instead of heading directly to that, the conversation went to the topic of the moratoriums against the war that had taken place back in the States in present month and the month before.

"Well, I, for one, was glad to see it," Forland remarked. "If it weren't for stuff like that, the war would go on forever."

"I thought you were so gung ho on it, though, sir. Thought you told me this is your second tour."

"This is my second tour, O'Rourke, because I like to fly. I like the particular job I'm in. That's the extent of how gung ho I am."

"Is that really true, sir?

"Goddam righteous... Just between you and me."

Forland said further without being prompted that another reason he had done a second tour was because had been burned in a romance prior to coming in the service.

"That must have set you back a little."

"It did, O'Rourke. But, hell, I'm only 25. Guess I got a little time left to situate myself in love, when the time comes. Meanwhile, there are other options—and, as the song goes, 'I do declare, I took some comfort there.'"

"Where do you do that, sir?"

"Down in Saigon," said Forland. "Up in Hue, when I get up there. Just between me and you."

From these remarks O'Rourke gathered that Captain Forland was far from being a straight arrow officer and that was borne out in the familiarity of his interaction.

"You ever seek such comfort yourself?"

"No, sir, I'm not at that point yet."

"You got some nice sister soldier doing your bidding?"

"No, not that either, really."

"Nothing going for the present?"

"Well, actually, I do to a certain extent..."

The details came out then of O'Rourke's situation with respect to

Barbie Carpenter and he found Forland to be a sympathetic listener. “Hey, man,” he said, “you can’t go wrong with that as far as types of women are concerned. Those are some of the big-heartest girls in the world, far as I’m concerned,” Forland said. “If I was looking at present, I’d look that way myself.”

He paused, though, and frowned. “You know, though, buddy, that could be a little complicated with her a lieutenant and you a private, don’t mean to make you feel bad. Where is she anyhow?”

“Binh Thuy.”

“Binh Thuy?”

“Yes.”

“Well you’re not going to believe this. Guess where me and my little plane are going tomorrow?”

“Where is that?”

“Little place called Binh Thuy.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, I am. Just staying there one night.”

Now it was O’Rourke’s turn to frown. “I don’t suppose, Captain Forland, please forgive me, just got to throw this out, is there any way in the universe, I could kind of a be an assistant?”

“You got time off?”

“Yes, actually, next two days.”

The captain considered. He was a very young looking and unorthodox looking captain, O’Rourke noted. He seemed to revel in this role of cutting against the cloth.

“Tell you what, Billy,” he said. “Long story short. You can be my aide carrying some details about medical supplies, which in fact is one thing I will be carrying. Be here tomorrow at noon. Right over by the parked planes. Make sure you show yourself and sign out. Once we get to Binh Thuy, you can stay at the enlisted men’s bunkhouse by the field. No one will care. I can reserve a visitor bunk for you. I won’t keep track of you, though. If you know what I mean. You think she’ll be okay with you showing up like that?”

“Yes, I do, sir. She just told me she wished she could go out for a pizza together.”

“Well, there is a little funky pizza place, I’ve heard.”

There was an interval of silence.

“I am really super tempted,” said O’Rourke.

“Case closed then. See you tomorrow. I’ll be glad for the company.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“All right!”

“El Capitan!”

[Chapter 196 notes]

197. O'Rourke flies to Binh Thuy for a friendly welcome from Barb

Bill O'Rourke headed out to the Chu Lai airfield the following day hardly believing that he had so unexpectedly arranged a way to bridge the 600 miles that separated him from Barbara Carpenter. He felt excited about that and apprehensive about how he would be received. At the same time, the former coxswain was still mulling over the new reports he had seen regarding the Moratorium and the growing opposition to the war. That had continued as a background mental process in the midst of his preparations for his trip to see Carpenter.

"O'Rourke, my man, are you ready for your adventure?" chimed the lanky, always cheerful Capt. Ken Forland when O'Rourke approached the plane across the hot tarmac.

"Yes, Captain, I am."

"We've got a good day for it! I got my maps handy. I can give you a little tour!"

Once in the air, the plane wound in a wide arc above the sparkling water and rolling white surf of the South China Sea, then turned inland toward the ridge of coastal mountains on the western horizon.

"Those mountains in the distance are the Truong Son, so called backbone of Vietnam, as you've maybe heard," Forland said, pointing. "We'll be following them down for about a hundred miles."

The flight course, parallel to the southeast line of the main ridge of the mountains, brought a panoramic view of forested slopes and narrow valleys etched with an arterial pattern of rivers and streams. Picturesque villages, nestled in trees, showed little sign of the war waged in the country for more than ten years.

After many miles of such landscape, a city came into view that Forland identified as Buon Ma Thuot. Its most prominent feature from the air was a wide boulevard where the traffic was a chaotic flow of vehicles of widely varying sizes and types between a row of square roofs that Forland said were the canvas tops of outdoor shops.

"Now this is our point where we arc to the southwest," the pilot informed. "And the reason we do this, Bill, if we had gone in a straight line from Chu Lai, we would have been flying over Cambodia."

"Little riskier over that way?"

"Well, you never know, you know, but I ain't heard a lot of good things about the Khmer Rouge."

"They're the commie group there?"

"Let's just say they are not our friends."

Beyond Buon Ma Thuot, the topography changed from mountainous to hilly. Between the wooded hilltops were wide, flat valleys with flooded rice fields surrounded by dikes and other crop fields that

appeared to be leafy plants like potatoes, though not in as orderly rows as might have been seen in a similar scene back in the States.

Again, O'Rourke was impressed with how removed the area seemed from the touch of the war.

"Think I could throw out a question, sir, something on my mind."

"Hey, Bill, on this whole flight, you have my permission to talk freely."

"Okay, Captain, thanks," O'Rourke ventured, "what I was wondering is this, you think if those commies we were talking about all of a sudden overwhelmed this scene, it would really make much difference?"

"Tell you what I think truly," Forland replied. "Army aside. This scene right here would look just the same. These people, most of them, would not give a rat's ass one way or another."

"They would just go on with their rice farming."

"Exactly, yes. Tell you, though, the way I further see it, expanding from that, back in the States, you have farms and farmers, too, and would they do anything different either, day to day, if the political situation was different? Probably, not, really. But would they mind not having the ability of free speech, all the trappings of liberty? I think they would."

"And you think if the commies took over here, sir, all that would go away here?"

"Yes, I do, Bill. Because there's a lot of things wrong with South Vietnam, but they do have a democracy, or the promise of it, at least. That's what we're fighting for, aren't we?"

"And here you told me you're just in this to fly, sir."

Forland laughed. "Yea, I guess you caught me acting like I care. Sometimes, I don't know, I get thinking back to those good ol' boyhood days, you know, the freedom. I want other people to have that."

O'Rourke gave some thought to that as the plane proceeded to a new wide-spreading area that was flat to the curved horizon on all sides, and suffused with water. His impression of what Forland had said was that it didn't really make sense. O'Rourke thought of this almost not wanting to think it because it seemed impolite almost to his pilot host. What Forland was saying, though, equated personal freedom with political freedom, two very different concepts. But then again he had heard the same sort of logic from other soldiers he had talked to, and he did know what Forland meant by the "feeling of freedom" that in his own experience, also, was somehow so quintessentially American. Maybe somehow Americans were trying to give that kind of feeling to the Vietnamese peasants living in the vast wetlands spreading out below the plane.

The talks of summer nights soon led him off to thoughts of Barbara Carpenter, back to the evening in Chicago that she had mentioned in her letter. He thought of how he had denied that he had other pen pals but her

and of how she had replied, “A tad of blarney, Mr. O’Rourke?”

“That river that you see down there is the fabled Mekong which I’m sure you heard of,” Forland informed him later. “Actually, what you see there is just the northern part of it. They call it, Song Then Giao. Off to the right there, you can see the two branches splitting.”

“Yes, sir,” said O’Rourke.

“Well, if you follow the other part, off ahead of us there, by the horizon, that the southern branch, Song Hau Giaog. That is where we will find Binh Thuy.”

“How big is it in people, sir?”

“Not quite as big as Chu Lai. I’d say about five or six thousand. Chu Lai has maybe three times that.”

“Army, mostly, sir?”

“Everything, man. You name it. Actually, Binh Thuy has a Navy Seal base too. And these people down here are kept pretty busy.”

“Is that so?”

“Oh, yea. There are some major areas around in here that are totally within control of the Viet Cong.”

The two-lane highway directly below the plane brought the first sign of the American presence, a caravan of about a dozen military vehicles of an olive drab color strikingly distinct from the prevalent green and blue landscape.

“That there’s the main highway down here, Highway 4 from Saigon” the pilot said. “Kind of ‘Nam Highway 101 or whatever.”

A classic three-pronged branching of the delta could be seen just to the left of the city that the highway led out from.

Forland identified the city as Vinh Long. “I think those trucks are going the same place as us.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, and now you can see Can Tho. It is right down the road there, on the other side of that bridge.”

Can Tho came into view as a mish-mash of white buildings crammed onto on a peninsula formed by the Mekong and a smaller river flowing into it. Beyond the disorderly jumble of the town was an orderly grid of roads and oblong, rectangular buildings where O’Rourke could see an airfield with two long, parallel runways. The bridge that Forland pointed out spanned the Mekong River. A two-lane highway ran in alongside the river and, as Forland pointed out, about three miles to the northwest of the bridge on that highway was a smaller airfield with a smaller grid of buildings. That was Binh Thuy.

They had descended lower over the river, which was brown with silt. Along the shoreline were dwellings on stilts built right into the water, with the water visible here and there on all sides of them and amidst the

trees like an area in the midst of a flood. Flat-bottomed boats of the type called sampans were parked along the shore, some in open water, others anchored to docks.

The juxtaposition of cultures was striking, thought O'Rourke. The base, with its geometric design and its crisscrossed power wires, seemed forced onto a scene that appeared otherwise to be a natural outgrowth of the delta landscape.

"Now, if you look over there, on the far right corner of the base there, you will see a very large Quonset hut," Forland said. "That is 3d Surgical."

"Thank you, sir, I can hardly believe we're here."

Within a few minutes, they were rolling on the runway amidst the tin buildings and poles.

O'Rourke got out and at once noticed the sweltering heat. He undid the top button of his shirt.

"Now, if you look over here, on your left," said Forland, "you'll see some big ol' hangers. That's my outfit, one of our docks. That other long building is the enlisted men's barracks. If you wind up going there, just show up and tell them your name, say you're with me."

"I may take you up on that," O'Rourke answered, squinting to see across the airfield in the bright sunlight. "Who knows? Maybe she'll say, who the fuck are you, showing up on the spur of the moment."

"I'd wager on a friendly reception."

"Well, thanks for that."

"And 3d Surgical, as I showed you, is back over there. See that little control tower? Go toward that, along the side road here, and you'll see the road turns to the left there by the tower. Follow that around to a little pond, by a T in the road there, and you'll see a little building painted in big broad stripes, red, white, and blue. That's the so called base bank. 3d Surgical is right behind that."

"Well, Captain Forland, thanks again very much!" O'Rourke replied with a thumb's up. He set out along the route that his pilot friend had suggested, past the control tower, then on to the left past the little pond, then to the right past an officers' barracks and a communications center where he found the bank building Forland had mentioned.

There with the Quonset hut hospital in view on the other side of the so called base bank, the former coxswain paused and stared blankly at the odd red, white, and blue stripes on the bank building and the odd mix of signs plastered on the front side. One sign said "Northwest Airlines." Another said "American Motors."

"Well, I came all the way here," he said to himself. "Let's just hope I didn't presume."

Continuing on his self-determined mission, O'Rourke went around

the bank to the Quonset hut, which was unremarkable as such except in being of the large size used for warehouses. It had a glass panel entryway with a single door, located in the center of the long side of the building. Above the door was a semi-circular sign with the words “Surgical” and “Hospital” in block letters on either side of a drawing of the Lucy character from the comic strip *Charlie Brown*.

The sign was of the inane sort that was everywhere to be seen on military bases. O’Rourke observed it without amusement and proceeded into the interior of the hut where the medicinal, ammoniac smell he was used to from Chu Lai reminded him quickly of the urgent environment he had become familiar with there. Litters crowding the hall hinted at a recent glut of arrivals. He could hear a patient gritting against pain above the soft voice of someone attending to his wounds.

He had gone just a few steps when a nurse came toward him. He could see by a subtle change in her face that she recognized him, by the medical insignia on his uniform, as one of her own.

“Sir, I’m here from another base, Chu Lai,” he said. “Friend of Nurse Barbara Carpenter. Stopped by to see her.”

“Oh, Barbie,” the nurse replied. “Normally, she would be here at this time. But we had a rough time of it last night. Double crew all night. She went to rest this morning.”

“You know where I could find her, Lieutenant?”

“She’s expecting you?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied, aware of telling a little fib, which he would soon be either verified in, he thought, or extremely embarrassed by and maybe officially out of line somehow.

“Sure,” the nurse answered at once, providing directions from the hospital to a nearby hooch where the nurses, she said, had individual rooms. “I think her number is 34.”

“Okay, thanks.”

O’Rourke found the hooch and continued through the dirt passageway between the hooch and another building, looking for the number provided. He found the number and knocked on the door.

“Be with you in a minute.”

It was her.

After a pause, the door opened, and there stood Barbara Carpenter in a bathrobe, looking much as he had remembered her, with her new pulled back brown hair appearing very lady like and her brown eyes wide with her typical girlish look.

“Oh, my God! Bill!” she said. “What are you doing here?”

“Took you up on that offer for a date,” he explained. “In your last letter. You know, the Chicago pizza. If you’re available, ma’am.”

Any doubt he had about the wisdom of arriving without warning was

dispelled by the expression on her face, which indicated gladness and welcome without the least sign of ambivalence.

"How on earth did you ever get here?" she said.

He told her the circumstances while she kept shaking her head and smiling with a look of amazement.

"Well, what a pleasant surprise!" she returned. "I'm just so complimented! Let me give you a hug!"

For a moment they were locked in an embrace, but with no attempt to go further, even to a kiss, on either side.

"We do have a pizza place here," she said, drawing back from him. "Sort of. It's a little outdoor stand. We can just say you're an old friend from Minnesota."

"I do have a formal bunk assigned to me."

"We can talk about that later."

"They got picnic tables or something?"

"Yes, in fact they do."

"Sounds great to me."

"And I think they serve beer."

"Now it's startin' to sound wonderful."

"Alright!"

Soon later, when she went to take a quick shower, O'Rourke walked down to the end of the passageway between the buildings where he could see out to a sunset scene of rice fields and trees. In the distance, he saw Viet women in cone-shaped hats bending over to tend rice plants.

The scene reminded O'Rourke again of where he was and of how he had finally fulfilled the promise that he and Carpenter had made in Chicago to meet in Vietnam if they both wound up there. Was it fate or will or mere circumstance, he wondered, that had brought him and her full circle to this evening in Binh Thuy?

198. O'Rourke romances with Barb, ending in a meeting of eyes

In his brief first interaction with Barb Carpenter, Bill O'Rourke had looked for the girlish face he remembered from Minnesota and Chicago, but instead, as just described, he had found in that face a combination of ladylike and girlish in addition to the lack of bangs, and then, as he kept looking at her, as he did constantly, he saw a subtle change around the eyes, a deepening that to his mind conveyed the emotional strain of dealing with the wounded. The former coxswain thought about this as he walked back from the end of the building where he had gone to get a view of the surrounding countryside. He had seen a similar change in the faces of various buddies from his medic training group in Texas that he had happened to run into again after a few months in Vietnam.

Back at her room, he looked in to see Barb Carpenter all fresh and pretty in a crisp Army uniform, and smiling at him with a bright mood that she had pulled up from somewhere. Seeing that, he recalled the wholesome quality about her that he had always found appealing. With her wide-open, trusting brown eyes, she looked like a Midwestern "good girl" ready for a date.

"Well, where exactly is this great pizza place?" he said, taking both her hands in both of his and shaking them lightly.

It seemed a stupid gesture once he had begun it. He had a moment of wondering whether to hold on or let go.

She seemed to find the gesture amusing, judging by the twinkle that came to her eyes. "Oh, it's not so far, Mr. O'Rourke. Just up the lane a tad. It will be a nice jaunt."

"Sounds great to me!"

"It's just a little place, I'm warning."

"I'm sure it will be fine."

He gave her hands a final shake at that, and they set out through the same corridor between the buildings that he had passed through a few minutes before.

It was near sunset by this time. Their walk took them up one of the main roads of the base past the small pond that the pilot Ken Forland had mentioned in his directions to O'Rourke the previous day. Other soldiers were walking up the road on their way to the base mess hall. Some of them shouted at Carpenter and waved.

"I'm sorry I was so distracted before, when you first stopped in," the girlish nurse remarked.

"You didn't seem so distracted," O'Rourke answered.

"You know how it is. We had a rough day yesterday."

"So I heard."

"Total chaos. We were at it all night."

"What were the circumstances there?"

"Battle up around Khe Sanh. The group got separated somehow. I think it was a full company."

O'Rourke's mind was brimming with thoughts. He had held much in in the past few months. He was glad to be with someone he trusted to talk with about his impressions. There was much that he wanted to talk about, and much that he wanted to hear about from Barb Carpenter.

"We have our crises," she remarked softly, "and then it's quiet. And when it's quiet, it's not much different than it would be at home. I mean, as I imagine it, I never actually worked as a nurse at home. Must be the same for you, I imagine."

"Yes."

"You like what you're doing up there?"

"At times, yes."

"How come sometimes no?"

"Seems too far from the action."

"Oh, that sounds like you!"

"Seems like what we're doing is important, though."

"Yes, it certainly is."

At the mess hall, which was on a corner of two dirt roads, the two friends from Minnesota turned to their left between the omnipresent tin buildings. From here, at once, the pizza stand could be seen. It was a small cement block building, painted yellow, with the appearance of an outdoor hamburger stand beside a two-lane highway.

On the side of the building was a serving window (actually, two windows side by side) with a sign that said, in the unadorned military style, "Bin Thuy Pizza and Ice Cream Stand."

The sun had gone down, leaving a pale twilight sky above the green fields in the distance. Two flood lights had come on above the serving windows and a string of lights like yellow Christmas lights in a board-floored outdoor garden, fenced off for privacy, with picnic tables under a lean-to extension of the pizza stand roof.

Within a half hour, with the sky dark above the buildings in the distance, the setting in the outdoor garden had acquired the ambiance of a quiet bar for Bill O'Rourke and Barbara Carpenter. They were the only ones in the softly lit area. They sat with bottles of beer in front of them, talking softly.

O'Rourke noticed that Carpenter had something on her mind. Now and then, as they talked, her face would cloud over with sadness and her eyes would lower in thought. Then, with what seemed a deliberate effort, she would return to a more festive mood.

"You know, I have to tell you, there's an incident I've been trying to shake it off," she explained when it became obvious that he was trying to

understand what was going on.

"Oh, really. What's that?"

"Soldier that came in last night, with a blow to the head, to one side pretty bad. I think he knew to some extent, but he didn't realize the extent of it as I did."

"He ask you about it?"

"Yes, he did. And I said I thought he would get back to normal. But some of the bone around the cheek, on that one side, was completely broken off. I was thinking to myself, he wouldn't get back to the extent I was telling him he would."

"He was disfigured?"

"Yes, terribly. You could compare it against the good side. He's just a kid, a good-looking kid."

"He live?"

"Far as I know, yes."

"Well, he has his life, at least."

"Yes, I know that."

"They can do wonders sometime."

"Yes, I know. I kept telling myself that."

"So you did good for him, Barb."

"Thank you."

O'Rourke got up for another couple of beers and stood in the balmy, humid air, looking off to the perimeter of the base. Beyond the lights of the base, there were no lights visible at all, except above the horizon where some stars glimmered from the clouds.

When he came back to the table, he was ready to embark on a serious topic of his own. He had been thinking lately, he said, that maybe he would apply for combat duty.

"You really think you want to put yourself in harm's way like that?" she said, looking concerned.

"I guess, I really don't know. It's a long process."

"Long process, how?"

"Long process of thought knowing what to do. You know, the weird thing, back there, looking off to the sky, I was thinking about this night I spent with Tom Steward on a rooftop in Indiana, when we were hitching together. We had this long discussion about what to do about the war. I remember thinking there was deciding to do and it would continue until I actually went into the Army, which I was contemplating to do at that time, and got over here. Now, here I am, over here, and the thought process hasn't stopped."

"The process of deciding about the war?"

"Yes."

"Where had it led you?"

"Well, it may sound simplistic, but it leads me to a kind of least of evils argument. That combined with being impressed with the complexity of everything."

"Complexity, how?"

"The complexity of this base, for example. Contrasting that with the bigness and eternalness of Vietnam. I was thinking of that coming down here, looking out from the plane. How impervious this land seems to the war. How complex the military machine is. Our military machine. And how complex our enemy is. No doubt there are some noble qualities there. But there's the question of freedom, liberty, too."

"Whether they have it?"

"Yes, and whether we really provide it, or stand to provide it, by our presence here."

"And if we do, is it worth the cost?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I can say, Bill. I don't share your exact concerns. But I know the complexity. And I see the extent of the pain and see how it pulls people into situations beyond their control. Like that poor, sweet boy I mentioned."

Their conversation was interrupted briefly by the sound of talking and laughter as a group of young men passed by on the street next to the pizza stand. They were on their way to the EM club, most likely, Barbie explained.

"We could go there ourselves, if you'd like to," O'Rourke said.

"No, this is perfect, as far as I'm concerned."

O'Rourke settled back in a thoughtful pose.

"So the thought process, the complexity, is what has led you to this idea about being where the action is, as you put it?" Barbara Carpenter said, touching his hand on the table.

"Yes, it is. But like I said it's a thought process, you know. I don't know at this point where it will lead."

"Well, I admire your thought process, Bill. I admire your integrity and how you're so honest with yourself."

"Thank you."

They settled into silence, their hands still touching.

"You know that rooftop in Indiana, where Stewie and I camped," the former coxswain said, "there was a wall there, along the top of the roof, so you could sit against it and not be seen from the road. We had a little fire there. For supper, you know."

"Sounds like that was an adventurous time."

"Whole world ahead of us, you know."

"You ever hear from Stewie?"

"Well, you know, I was his best man, at his wedding out in

California."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

Barbie was keenly interested in that owing to her former involvement with Steward. She wanted to know just what Steward's wife looked like. The setting of the wedding, outdoor by a fire, was of considerable interest to her, also.

From there, the conversation continued to other details regarding the vagaries of the old gang from the boat club in St. Paul. There was a sense that the weave of their lives, with respect to one another, had become complicated, indeed, with people spread from Southeast Asia to Washington D.C. to West Virginia to Las Vegas.

There was some quiet talk regarding Jim Morris, also. From their correspondence with Mary Brandt, both O'Rourke and Carpenter knew that Morris had gone down in Laos and that he had been reported to be in a prison camp there.

Arm in arm later, the nurse and medic walked back to her hooch. It had turned out to be a clear, starry night. From various places on the base came the muffled sound of voices and rock music such as might have been heard on a college campus back home.

"You know, Bill, when we get to that door," Barb said, "I don't want there to be any misunderstandings."

"Barbie, you don't need to worry about that," O'Rourke replied. "There's a place arranged already where I can stay, over at the bunkhouse where the guy who flew me down here, Ken Forland, is staying."

"I don't want to be a prude."

"You should do whatever you feel right about, in my opinion."

"What I'd like to do is lie down together and cuddle. I mean, let it stop there. You think you can do that?"

"Yes, I can."

"It's just too much all at once."

"I know that."

"I do find you very attractive."

"Thank you."

Later they lay in the dark talking for a long time. There was much to talk about still—various incidents that they had each experienced in their work, new friends, new insights, the experience of being far from home, in a foreign country.

"You know, I imagined, once I got here, I would go all around at some point," said Carpenter. "And I haven't seen anything, hardly, except the little towns here, Can Tho and Binh Thuy. Supposedly, the coast all along here is really beautiful. I don't suppose I'll ever see that."

"How about this. You've heard of China Beach, right, the R&R base there?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, sometime, if you can get R&R there, go up there with some of your women friends from here, I could maybe meet you there. We wouldn't have to stay together, if you wouldn't feel comfortable about it, at that point."

"Oh, I'd love that."

"So would I."

"It might be months from now."

"I can wait."

"In the meanwhile, we'll keep in touch like we have been. Does your friend get down here much, the pilot?"

"No, I don't think so. Actually. He said this was an unusual destination."

"Oh, too bad," she replied softly.

"We'll keep in touch, though."

"Whole world in front of us, Bill."

"Yes, it is."

During this entire conversation, as O'Rourke and Carpenter lay side by side, he looked into her face as she talked. Her brown eyes were wide open, looking directly into his own eyes from a few inches away.

O'Rourke was up at daybreak the next morning, and out to the airfield where he found Ken Forland waiting with a smile.

"El Capitan," he said.

"O'Rourke, my man. You must have fared okay."

"Yes, I did, sir."

The plane lifted into the sky soon after that, with the sun rising in brilliant light above the green fields and sparkling waterways of the delta, seeming as eternal as they had looked the day before.

No change in the land, thought Bill O'Rourke, but he felt that he himself had changed. In his mind he kept seeing the wide open brown eyes peering directly at him.

[Chapter 198 notes]

199. Steward's move to busy Masontown as their money problems increase

With the coming of winter weather in December, 1969, life for Tom and Kris Steward became increasingly grim and increasingly complicated by money problems. This was the case despite a betterment in their everyday situation brought about by their move from the farmhouse where they had lived for three months to a mobile home in Masontown.

Compared to the solitary setting of the farmhouse, the little town to which they had moved seemed a hub of activity. It had a filling station with an attached convenience store, a hardware store, railroad tracks with trains passing by, coke stoves that glowed red beside the railroad tracks, and cars and trucks passing by on Route 7, the highway between Morgantown and Kingwood, which was also the main street of the town and visible from the living room of the Steward's new home. When the long dark nights of December brought blowing snow, it was reassuring to see an open road so close at hand and the arc lights shining above the filling station and hardware store.

Moving into the mobile home was the first event that had affected the Steward's financial situation. The security deposit required by the new landlord had claimed a hundred dollars, which had amounted to a third of their savings. Then, about a week later, Steward's boss, Janis Kulas, had announced, with typical coldness, that the project that Steward was working in had failed to qualify for a renewed government grant. As a result, the project would run out of funds in about two months unless some other source of funding was discovered.

"Tom, now I'm just going to have to act," Kris told her husband. "I'm the one person that could come up with these funds."

Kris meant, of course, by staging a rock concert, Tom Steward knew. Despite the resolution Kris had expressed on the trip back from D.C., to approach Janis Kulas about staging such a concert, and despite her talks about it in D.C. with Mary Brandt, Kris had continued to hold back from broaching the subject with Janis Kulas.

Tom had also held back from discussing the idea of the concert, not only with Janis Kulas but also with his wife. He had been hoping that the idea would just go away. He still believed that Kulas, with her native cautiousness, would reject any event that might tend to put the project in jeopardy with the non-academic, socially conservative part of the college vs. town divided community, the churches and social clubs that continued to support the project through the United Fund.

"Don't you think I should?" his wife persisted when he made no reply to her original comment.

Now, as he thought of it, the idea seemed as if it had to be tried. Kris wouldn't be able to forgive herself if she didn't try it. If Kulas went for

it, there would be a real chance of securing funds to keep the project going. If Kulas rejected it, the blame would fall on her for not being more forthright about the project to everyone concerned. Either the project would go in some new direction for funds or the Family Services Agency would shrink back to what it had been before the WRO project add- on, a counseling service for families with problems.

"Maybe you're right, the time has come," Tom said.

The whole thing was over in a half hour, on the day when Kris arranged to talk to Janis Kulas. She went into Kulas' office with a resolved expression and came out looking defeated.

"You know, what I've been thinking, Tom?" she said as they walked from the office to go have coffee together in the MacDonald's on the hill. "I should just look for a job somewhere. That would be the best thing I could do to help us now."

"Outside the project?"

"Yes. Just somewhere in town. I could be a waitress or something. There's a lot of things I could do."

Steward had no doubt of that, knowing how pretty his wife was and how everyone was constantly telling him how poised she was. He knew there would be plenty of such places to inquire at in Morgantown. But he could also, see, in her proud face, that she had suffered a severe blow from having the idea that she had been contemplating for months rejected so directly.

"What would you think of that?" she persisted.

"You wouldn't work with the project anymore?"

"No. You know, I know we haven't talked yet. But I just feel so stupid not getting paid."

"Too bad about Janis. She's just too cautious."

"I used to think she cared about me. I don't think so anymore."

"She's just too cautious."

"She gave me this little talk about tiny steps."

"That's how she sees it."

"She's not a good person at all."

Steward was relieved that, with Christmas approaching, money would maybe be coming from somewhere else beside his own salary. His doctor brother Art, who was by this time in the Army and stationed in Kentucky at Fort Knox, just 500 miles away, had written suggesting that Tom and Kris could take a bus down to Charlestown to meet him and Nancy, and then drive back to Fort Knox together, in his car, for a brief stay there after which they would all drive together to Minnesota for Christmas. Maybe the trip would be possible, Tom was thinking. His parents had offered the air fare back as a Christmas present.

Kris got all decked up in a mid-thigh skirt and a white blouse with a

bow, on an afternoon soon after this, and spent a few hours looking for a job. Tom, waiting for her at MacDonald's after he finished work, saw her sashaying up the street with her wide mane of blonde curls bobbing up and down with each step. She looked professional and proper and still somehow sensational, in her California valley girl style, as she managed to do whenever she had a mind to.

"Well, I got a job!" she proclaimed at once.

"Wow! Did you really?" Tom exclaimed. "Where?"

The restaurant she named was one of the best in town.\

"As a waitress?"

"Yes."

She reported for her first evening of work the following night and when he went to pick her up came out to the parking lot smiling.

"Guess how much tips I made?" she said.

"How much?"

"47 dollars!"

One twenty, two ten's, and two one's—it was the most extra cash they had had since coming to West Virginia. They celebrated by going out to the pizza place on the WVU campus by the football stadium, the place where they had used to go when living in their basement apartment.

Two evenings later, however, when Kris emerged from her job, there was no smile on her face. She announced that she had quit.

Dispelled in a moment were Steward's calculations of cash building up toward a pleasant Christmas without financial woes.

Her new boss had made comments about her, she said. She wouldn't stand for it. "There was this big long table all set out with dishes, see, with a table cloth under them. I got so mad I pulled out the table cloth and all the dishes crashed on the floor."

Steward winced as he considered this development. He could see that in her state of mind it wouldn't do any good to raise up the prospect of possibly having to pay for the broken dishes.

"When you quit, you quit," he said.

"Are you sorry?"

"No, actually, I guess not. It was too good to be true."

"I'll find something else."

Kris did go out again looking the next day, but the impulse of the change seemed to be lost. She did not meet with refusals exactly, but there were no definite offers. After another day of looking, she was ready to give up the search for the time being.

"I can look again after Christmas," she said as she and her husband drove back to their mobile home. "Everything is going into the holiday. Nobody wants to commit."

On their ride home, it began to snow. The snow flakes were so thick

and steady that the headlights shone on the snowflakes instead of the road ahead. It was a strain to stay on the road and they were glad to reach the haven of security provided by the little town.

That evening after supper, they huddled on the living room couch, looking out to the snow drifting across the highway and wisping up from the bright areas of new snow under the arc lamps. The hardware store had lately installed a Christmas tree with colored lights in the storefront window that faced in their direction.

After the hardships of the farmhouse, the mobile home was comfy. It had hot and cold running water, mock wood paneled walls, a kitchen with modern appliances, and a cheerful bedroom with a queen size bed. Still, the undercurrent of financial problems was with them always.

"Kris, you know, I've been thinking we should just go ahead and go to Minnesota," Tom said as they sat together. "We'll just need to be careful of what we spend."

"We can work out a budget together," Kris replied.

"Yes, let's do that."

"We can have a little meeting."

"Tomorrow."

They did have their meeting the next day, going item by item through their expenses. It was a process neither of them liked. The items were paltry ones like oil for the furnace. They discussed how much oil the furnace was using per week, and how many weeks ahead they would have to stock up for before leaving.

"We'll maybe get some money for Christmas," Kris said.

"I was thinking of that, too."

"We'll meet your brother in Charleston then?"

"Yes, that's the plan."

"You think he really meant it about sharing a room in the motel?"

"Yes. I do."

"It won't be strained?"

"No, I don't think so."

Next day, Art Steward called to repeat his offer to pay for the motel room and the gas home.

"Don't worry about it. We've got virtually no expenses now thanks to Uncle Sam," Art said. "All you'll have to pay for is the bus down to Charleston."

Even the bus fare would be a slight problem in their limited budget, Tom thought. But he didn't want to admit to his older brother the extent of his problems.

With the Christmas trip agreed on, Tom Steward began again at this project duties, sometimes with Kris beside him, sometimes alone, driving from Masontown to Kingwood to the project office or around to churches

or community centers to drop off fliers or to houses of the members to talk about items to discuss at meetings. A couple of times he drove up to see Clara Shoats, the new president, who still lived up in the hills in Tucker County, 50 miles away. When the weather was bad, he was glad not to have his wife with him. Often on the narrow, rural roads, he had to get out in the cold and, barehanded, put on chains. The noise on the bottom of the car, when driving up hill, had gotten worse. He felt that the car was no longer dependable.

Steward's activities for the past month had revolved around an idea Clara Shoats had come up with, to have a contingent of WRO members at the welfare office each working day to assist anyone who happened by. For a couple of weeks, the idea had gone well, and the people who had agreed to sit in the welfare office on each particular day had been available as promised. Gradually since then, however, the excuses for not showing up had increased until now Steward often spent half the day driving around with nothing to show for it in project activity.

Secretly, Steward had come to think the project had little chance of success on any level. With Clara's idea tried and so quickly retired, there was no prospect of anything further to give the group life. The group now consisted of about a dozen people. Many, such as Rachel Locke and the Boland's, seemed only to come to the meetings to get a ride into town to go shopping. Three full-time paid staff members to support this motley group of 12 people—no wonder the project was running out of funds! What could be said to justify the continuance of such a project? The whole concept of a rural group somehow taking on the confrontiveness of the blacks in the cities seemed preposterous, Steward had decided. It was a concept concocted as an interesting sociological possibility to be presented as matter for an academic journal,—such as in the article by "the other Janis," Janis Wulfe, (on "The Social Work of Social Change") that he had come upon three months before in the agency office.

Thinking of that, Steward recalled the whimsical speculation of the article on the possible financial crisis of local government brought about by unfulfillable welfare demands, leading to political unrest and a more radical response. He recalled the parenthetical expression, "socialistic if you will." It seemed to Steward that the intelligibility behind that statement summarized, in a single phrase, what was rotten about the whole setup, the duplicity of a program seeking, on the one hand, to fashionably invoke radical concepts—among the limited academic audience that might come upon such a journal,—while, on the other, shying away from staging a rock concert that might jeopardize the financial support of the conservative town. Then, combine that with Kulas's personal coldness and her interest in dominating the process apparently just for the ego rush of authority, and the totality of it was

hard to defend or to feel any enthusiasm for as something that really mattered.

No doubt the poverty of the rural poor, such as Rachel Locke, was genuine and widespread. Sometimes, as he headed out of Masontown, on these cold, wintry days, Steward saw her trudging like a medieval peasant up the long hill from Reedsville to her cabin. She had gotten a child's backpack from somewhere, and now she walked with that, with her kerchief tied under her chin. Whenever he saw her, he offered her a ride, and then he saw the cabin again with the blind husband, and the two older boys who were unable to speak, hunched in the half darkness of the drab single room with its cardboard fortified walls. The young boy Ronnie, the one who was normal, always greeted Steward with a bright smile.

No doubt these people needed something, but the program in which he had been working was not the answer, Steward had come to believe. These people needed a different, more hopeful, more compassionate situation from the foundation up,—and how that could be realistically provided he didn't know. Perhaps some charismatic, forceful leader, placed in a situation such as he had been placed in, would have created a groundswell of protest that would have overwhelmed the present system and replaced it with a juster system, but obviously he was not that person. Had he been that person, he would not have even known in which direction to lead.

He was secretly glad of the prospect, which seemed possible now, of having to look for some other form of alternative service to satisfy his work requirement as a conscientious objector.

200. Steward brothers and spouses go to see *Easy Rider* together

A strange incident happened as the time approached for Tom and Kris Steward to leave for Christmas in Minnesota. Early one evening, just after dark, after letting off Rachel Locke at her cabin, Steward was surprised to encounter a man brandishing a pistol.

This incident occurred as Steward, traveling alone, pulled to a stop at the junction where the paved road from the Locke's neighborhood intersected with the highway. The man came not from the road but from a path in the woods. As he came toward the car, he gestured for Steward to roll down the window.

"What is your business up here?" he said.

"I just dropped off someone who lives down there," Steward replied.

"And who is that?"

"Mrs. Locke. Rachel Locke."

The man considered for a moment with the gun in hand. "Well, if I was you," he said. "I would not be messin' in people's affairs."

This whole interaction took place in the brief time it took for the two parties to speak these words. The man had had such a crazed expression as he spoke that Steward wondered as he drove away whether the words had been directed at him as a mistake or meant as a veiled threat. The words did not seem to be a threat, when he replayed them in his mind.

The strange incident faded off; still it added to the general level of anxiety that Steward felt building in him regarding his job insecurity, his and Kris's financial problems, Kris's increasing depression, and the winter darkness and loneliness that had persisted in their life despite the recent move to the lighted corner in Masontown.

The departure soon later for Charleston, after a final check of the furnace oil gauge, brought the welcome prospect of temporary change, but the trip began on shaky ground. First, in Morgantown, the dropping off of the car at the house of the mild-mannered, ever-obliging student intern, Dale Kuypers, was a little stressed, as Kuyper's graduate student wife Lisa displayed some annoyance, suggesting that she regarded her husband as being used. Then, at the bus depot, the scene was grim as the Steward's sat in the waiting room amidst shabbily dressed, obviously poor people. They were both aware that a thin line, growing ever thinner, separated them from being poor people themselves.

Lisa Kuyper was the topic of conversation as the bus headed out on the highway. She knew Tom Steward from the city library where she worked as a part time librarian and where he had gone a few times in the evening to read while waiting for Kris to finish her shift during her waitressing job. For some reason, she had formed a resentment against Tom and seemed irritated whenever he spoke. Kris also knew Lisa

because the Steward's had been the Kuypers' guests one time for supper and Lisa attended some project social functions.

"You know what I think?" said Kris. "She resents you because you're not a push over like Dale."

"Well, thanks, but, you know what I think?"

"No. What?"

"She just doesn't like people who claim the high ground. She wants to level things off. And I do try to do that, so maybe she's got a point."

"She treats those cats better than poor Dale."

Steward laughed at that.

"That's a real teller," she continued. "Cats and those big glasses and a pissed off face!"

The trip was lighter after that. They remembered together that the bus trip on which they had first met had been in February, just ten months before! And what a great deal had happened since then! The move from L.A. to Santa Barbara, Steward's job at the zoo, their decision to get married, their separate moves back to L.A., the fireside wedding by the Andrew's backyard pool. Then the breakdown in the desert...

"I guess that was a real harbinger of the future," said Tom.

"It was a real test."

"And we passed it, I guess."

A bright sun came out from the clouds as the day progressed and the trip brought open views of wide valleys of clean, new snow stretching out between ridges etched with the frosted, crisscrossing snarls of winter bare trees.

Between such spacious scenes, there were the usual narrow valleys, coal washing plants with piles of gob, lumber mills with tall smokestacks, gray smoke tumbling up, and little towns of paintworn buildings that for Steward conveyed the atmosphere of suspicion of outsiders and resistance to change that he had become familiar with in his work in Preston County. Here and there, also, he saw dwellings, marked by a general dreariness of appearance, that he registered as the homes of the poorest of the poor like Rachel Locke.

In Charleston, Dr. Arthur Steward stood waiting on the curb outside the double doors leading into the bus terminal when the bus carrying Tom and Kris Steward pulled in.

"We wound up getting a little suite," he announced. "It has a bedroom and a separate little living room with a pullout."

"Sounds wonderful, Art. Thanks for doing this."

"I'm glad to see you. How was the trip, Kris?"

"It was fine."

"We were thinking of maybe dinner and a movie tonight. Little treat on us."

"What's the movie?"

"*Easy Rider*."

"Oh, I heard that's good."

There was a slight strain as the brothers stood facing one another, owing to the younger brother's necessity of accepting the ride, the hotel fare, and the evening ahead from the generosity of his sibling. But, with his financial situation as it was, there was nothing he could do except to accept the situation in silence. He thought to himself that he could not say he would return the favor at some time in the immediate future; he could see no time close at hand when his situation would be any better than at present.

Later, the couples sat together in a restaurant in downtown Charlestown enjoying a good meal, wine, and the shared memories that the brothers could easily draw upon for congeniality and amusement. Even here, however, the slight stain continued as the couples struggled to find common ground beyond the shared past.

The younger brother's description of the WRO project provided the first rough spot as Art Steward predictably could not sit patiently by while his brother explained the "guaranteed annual wage" and then admitted that he didn't quite accept the concept himself.

"Then why don't you come up with something that makes sense then," Art remarked, "something that people can really get back of."

The younger brother's own doubts, formed in recent weeks, came into play at this time. He felt like he should defend the project, but he no longer had a rationale at hand that he could draw upon with a sense of really believing in it himself.

"Well, I have been trying to do that, Art. It's just a complicated situation. Personally, I mean. We're obliged, I'm obliged, to continue. Legally..."

Tom noticed as he said this that he received a puzzled look from his wife. He had never really explained to her how greatly his faith in the project had eroded.

Art got the sense of that at once and relented. "Sure, Tom, I know that. You got to choose your battles. Sure I know that."

"He already did a big battle, with the draft," Nancy threw in.

"Yes, I know that," said Art.

"We maybe should have fought that battle ourselves," Nancy added.

"Yea, I'm not so sure prison would have been any worse than Fort Knox," Art replied.

"Well, all I can say is there are some very poor people we're working with," said Kristine, and she described the situation at the Locke's—the blind father and his retarded sons.

"Well, that is horrible," Nancy remarked.

"Yea, there's no excuse for something like that," Art added.

With the first disagreement between the brothers thus placed under control, no one ventured into the minefield of how such poverty could be addressed by social policy, if carried into that realm.

From the restaurant, the brothers and their spouses rode together, jammed in Art and Nancy's Volkswagen bug, to the movie agreed up earlier, *Easy Rider*, where they found themselves in an audience of mostly hippie- looking young people, some of them smoking dope.

The movie portrayed the odyssey of two young men, newly rich from a drug deal, who buy motorcycles and ride from California to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. Enroute, they encounter a rancher with a large, loving family on an idyllic ranch in the Southwest, a hippie who takes them for a brief stay in a commune, and a rich-boy, alcoholic lawyer who joins up with them and winds up getting beaten to death after he flirts with some girls in a Louisiana small town. Amidst all this were scenes of the American West, a tableaux of American places and events: the two-lane highways, wayside stops, trestle bridges, and mainsheet storefronts and cafes of common experience.

Tom Steward, watching this, found much to think about along the lines of what he had begun to think about the month before in D.C. A main part of this had to do with use of drugs. He had been aware in D.C. of the presence of drugs, both in the use of grass at the gathering in Dennis Houghten's apartment and as a topic of discussion that same evening (in the observations about Timothy Leary and his use of acid for "spiritual exploration"). Drugs were prominent in the movie, also, Steward observed, starting in the first scene depicting the cocaine deal that provides cash for the trip the movie portrays. Fireside grass-smoking scenes, similar scenes at the commune the travelers visit, and the surreal depiction of an acid trip, fraught with existential questions, at Mardi Gras, continued the movie's emphasis on drugs. Steward didn't make much of this either in feeling against it or for it, but he did take note that the movie, as he understood it, portrayed a journey of exploration and drugs were an integral part of the journey.

Then there was the journey itself, as depicted in the movie. It was a cause for reflection, also, and likewise, for Tom Steward, continued the thought process begun in D.C. To where was this journey directed? It was directed, it seemed, to discovering the "essence of America." In that, the journey depicted in the movie was similar to the journey depicted in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, as Dennis Kelly had explained that novel in D.C. Steward recalled Kelly's delight at the "American triple preposition" that Kelly had heard on the drive from Kentucky to D.C. The journey of the movie, as Steward understood it, (and, by extension from the movie and Kerouac, the journey of many of his peers,) was to

"find America" or "regain America" through such fragments of American life.

Then there was the music: a continual backdrop in the movie just as music had been the backdrop of the gatherings in D.C. And its breadth, as in D.C., was as wide as the Movement itself had become through its growth beyond its original political and verbal components, as Mary Brandt had pointed out.

Last of all, there was the "hippie talk" in the movie, talk such as Tom Steward had, of course, heard spoken all around him, especially during his time in California. He had held off from such talk himself out of his inclination to avoid using slang as a way of looking hip. He had thought of it as phony to do that. But the hippie talk in the movie did not seem to be part of a pose; it seemed to be an integral part of a new, more careful way of thinking and speaking.

"I never realized it could be so intelligent," he remarked later as the couples sat together in a second restaurant in Charlestown where they went for desert after the movie.

"You never realized it's intelligent?" said Kris. "It's probably the most intelligent talk there is!"

"Now that I doubt," Art replied at once, his voice taking on the odd little edge it acquired when he was about to argue.

"Yea, where's the intelligence?" said Nancy.

"I don't know," said Tom. "I've been trying to figure it out."

"It's in the poetry of it," said Kris.

"Yes," said Tom. "Maybe that's it. This sense of wonder, this sense of another dimension."

He was thinking of the interactions between people at the commune, their apparent attempt to connect with the earth again in a way that modern people, in his estimation, often lacked.

"A spiritual dimension," Kris added.

"Oh, here comes the dope talk!" said Art.

The comment was not much different from Mary's comment to Jane Larue in D.C. But the criticism seemed more alien coming from Art.

"It's not a matter of dope," Kris replied softly. She regarded this as an area in which she had more knowledge, being from California and five years younger than anyone else at the table. "Haven't you ever heard of Maharishi Yoga or Steve Gaskin or anyone like that?"

"Now you got us," said Nancy. "Maharini Yogi, or whatever, I've never heard of him."

"You've heard of Yogi Bear, though," said Art.

"Yes, I have."

"Actually, I've heard of Gaskin," said Tom. "He has these weekly meeting where everyone just sits together and tries to feel a common

spirit, a common vibration."

"Heavy, man," said Art sarcastically.

"You ought to read him sometime, Art," said Kris. "I'm not kidding. Just read him sometime with an open mind."

"He writes books, too?"

"Just one book from his Monday night meeting."

"Now he's a preacher."

"That's just what they call it. You should read it. Really."

Art relented when he saw how determined his new sister-in-law was in defending her position. "Okay," he said. "I will."

"This I got to see," said Nancy.

"What do you mean, you think I'm not cool?"

"Oh, you are so cool, Artie. You're hip, man!"

"Far out!"

"Well, you know, though, I think it's something of a California thing," Nancy added.

"Yes, that's for sure. Kris," said the doctor brother, "you got us there. We're just a couple of Midwestern slugs."

"Yea, Kris, I bet you and your friends were talking about things like this when you were in high school."

"Yes, we were."

That was the extent of the discussion of the movie, but Tom's mind stayed on it. As was often the case in his interactions with his brother, there was the strain and indignity of having his older, more accomplished sibling dismiss his own ideas as unimportant. Art didn't really understand in a personal way the turmoil going on in the nation, Tom said to himself. Art had been sheltered from it by being in school continuously throughout the whole time. He had gone from living at home to being married. And Art didn't understand, in any real way, that a kind of cultural confrontation was going on. He didn't realize how intense feelings were on both sides, as depicted in the movie in the violent end.

Thinking of that, Tom Steward's mind went back to Preston County and the man he had met with the gun. He still didn't take the incident as a real threat, but recalling the incident brought back to him again the vague paranoia he had been feeling lately in West Virginia.

201. Steward brothers and spouses talk about dope and the war

At Fort Knox, Kentucky, Art and Nancy Steward were living in a brick, two-story house such as supplied to all of the incoming doctors in the medical officers program. It had come completely furnished. All they had had to do was move in.

Tom Steward went running early on the morning of the first day of his and Kris's two-day stay there. Returning toward his brother's house, he saw his brother, looking a little odd in athletic clothing, walking up the quiet street toward him.

Despite the occasional arguments with his brother, Tom Steward was always glad to see him. They had a bond owing not only to their childhood together but also to their years of sharing the same bedroom, with their beds side by side. In the early years, Art had told Tom stories at night, arranging the stories into serials (such as Art had liked to listen to on the radio) with a new development each night.

"I don't know. What is it about the Army anyway?" Art said as they walked along together. "Everything is completely bland. It must appeal to people of small imagination."

"Or the imagination is ordered out of them."

"Yea, something like that."

They soon reached the house but Art didn't turn to go in.

"Hey, Tom," he said. "Let's keep walking a while. There's a couple of things I want to tell you."

"Alright."

"Want to see the building where they keep all the gold?"

"They really do that?"

"Yea, they really do."

"Sure, let's go."

They headed off from the house alongside an immense training field where tanks were lined up one side.

"Fort Knox is the 'Home of the Calvary,'" said Art.

"Is that right?"

"Yes. Used to be horses, now it's tanks."

They stopped for a few minutes to watch some of the tanks moving out into formation in the field.

"One thing I want to tell you," said Art. "Word is, I'll be going to Vietnam—'Nam,' as we call it in the crack corps."

"When you hear that?"

"Soon as we got here, actually."

"From who?"

"From people like, for example, our staff sergeant. One thing about the army I've found out is the only ones who know anything are

sergeants and all they know is rumors."

"And the rumors are always true."

"Precisely. So I heard."

"From another sergeant."

"Precisely," said Art again, laughing softly, but his face remained serious. "As far as Vietnam, however, I've heard this from several people. There is really no doubt."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Art."

"Oh, well. One year, 12 months. If I can just play my cards right, maybe I won't wind up in the middle of a firing range."

"12 months is the length of duty?"

"Yea. Two years in the service, one year tour of duty."

"Must be unnerving."

"Scared out of my mind."

They walked along in silence for a while, as both brothers took the matter into consideration. A trait they had in common was being thoughtful in this manner.

"Listen, Tom," said Art a while later. "I got to ask you something else. Please forgive me. I don't mean to offend you."

"No, Art. Go ahead."

"I'm just concerned about Kris, that maybe she brought some kind of dope with her."

"Why would she have dope? She doesn't use dope."

"Tom, I'd be in major trouble if I was found harboring someone, you know, with someone in my house having dope. I mean, much more serious than in civilian life."

"She doesn't use dope, Art. Trust me."

"You heard about the North Tower, right?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I think they still got it."

Art walked along in silence, his face remaining serious. "All that talk about Yogi Magarushi, or whatever," he said. "It just makes her a little suspect."

"Art, in all the time I've known Kris," Tom replied. "I have never ever seen her use dope."

"Maybe she does it when you don't see her."

"Art, I'm with her night and day. She doesn't do dope. She doesn't talk about dope as something she ever did or enjoyed."

"Okay, okay. But you understand the consequences..."

"I wouldn't put you in jeopardy."

"Okay, Tom. Sorry I'm so uptight."

They continued their walk around to see the building where the gold blocks are stored. It was a square building in the midst of an open field of

about 40 acres.

"Pretty crazy, when you think of it," said Art. "All of the wealth of our country is in a bunch of bricks."

"Yea, it is crazy. What a system!"

Having seen the block house, the brothers turned to go back home, though it was apparent from the expression on Art's face that there was business remaining to conclude.

"One more thing I got to tell you," said Art.

"Sure. Go ahead."

"This is a big one."

"Sure."

"Nancy is pregnant."

"Nancy's pregnant?"

"Yes."

"Wow, that is a big one!"

"Yes."

"What's the timeframe?"

"She's about two months into it."

"Seven months to go."

"We've been talking, you know. I think she might go back home, to Minnesota, live with her mother."

"Then she'd have some support."

"Yea, no reason for her to hang around here."

"Are you glad about the pregnancy?"

"Yes, actually, I think I am. We didn't plan it, exactly, but we kind of mutually let the precautions lag, or relax, or whatever, if you know what I mean."

"So Nancy is happy about it?"

"Oh, yea."

Here Tom had occasion to again consider the differences between his brother and himself. He and Kris had talked only one time about children, and her reaction had been, "I don't know. I just can't even imagine myself with my own house and a kid." At such times, Tom thought, Kris showed her youth. She was still just a year or two out of high school and, though she was good at times at projecting her professional woman image, yet in many respects she didn't consider herself to be a full adult; she didn't even want to look that far ahead in her life. Looking to the future, Tom didn't see a house of his own and kids, either. He didn't know what he saw. He just felt outside of everything conventional.

That evening, to candlelight and wine, Nancy's pregnancy was again the subject of conversation and toasts. Kris was surprisingly delighted about it, despite her dismissal again of having any such ambitions for

herself in the near future.

"Well, if you ever need a babysitter, I'll be glad to help!" she volunteered at once.

Hearing that, Tom recalled how easily Kris had interacted with the Andrew's daughter Sandy on their outings in California. He realized that her attitude of liking kids would someday maybe naturally progress to an attitude of wanting a kid of her own. If she changed to that attitude, likely he would, too. There would be no problem.

That was the end, for a while, of direct talk about the expected child, but the war that would affect Art and Nancy's situation during the pregnancy remained an underlying interest in the next few days as the two brothers and their spouses left Fort Knox and drove the 1100 miles to the Twin Cities, crammed together in Art and Nancy's VW bug.

The trip wasn't easy. A snow storm had blanketed the midsection of the country from Kentucky all the way up into Wisconsin and Minnesota. But the same news that brought weather warnings and reports of road closings brought news of the never-ending war, also.

There was a brief discussion of whether to stop in a motel to wait out the storm. But plans had already been made for events at home. They decided to push on.

One report of interest to all came over the airwaves as Art, bent close to the windshield, negotiated a poorly plowed section of freeway in southern Illinois, about a hundred miles out of Chicago. Traffic there was single lane with piles of snow on either side, some it blowing over into the icy roadway.

"The level of fighting in Vietnam was reported to have dropped last week, at least on the American side," the announcer said, "according to a report just out from the *New York Times*. Combat troops dropped from 100 the previous week to 85 this week."

"Oh, that's encouraging," said Nancy.

"Yea, except if you're one of the 85."

"South Vietnamese casualties increased, however," the announcer went on, from 411 last week to 421 this week."

"Now why does that get tiresome?" said Art.

No one replied.

On the other side of Chicago, as night came on, another report came on of more length and more interest, at least to the two brothers, who by this time were both in the front seat, bent toward the windshield, while their two spouses slept in the backseat.

This report talked about a message that had recently been issued by Chinese leaders to the Vietcong. The message exhorted the Vietcong not to lessen their war efforts but instead to hunker down for a protracted war. The message had praised Vietcong "great victories" and warned that

the United States was not yet “completely defeated.”

“This message was signed by the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Tse Tung, and the party Vice Chairman, Chou En Lai,” the radio announcer said. “It is part of a Chinese effort that apparently looks far beyond the two- or three-year timeframe contemplated by President Nixon in the Peace Talks in Paris.”

“Do I see a little trend here?” said Art. “We are taking less casualties, the South Vietnamese are taking more, as we ‘Vietnamize,’ as Tricky says. Meanwhile, the Chinese are telling the Viet Cong to keep on going forever.”

“The heck of it is, I think they will,” said Tom. “It’s their own country. They’ve got a little more interest.”

“Why don’t we just get out now?”

“Where you been, Art? There were a half a million people chanting that last month in D.C.”

“That’s where you and Krissy were?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m glad to see somebody is doing something. If you ask me, these so-called peace talks are just a delay tactic.”

“I know, Art. I know.”

This is the way the Steward brothers went on, as the VW bug chugged along through the storm, with the older brother, at times, seeming to come over to his younger brother’s side. Neither had any doubt, however, that Art would go ahead into his tour of duty, whether the war, in general, made sense to him or not.

[Chapter 201 notes]

202. Steward, in Minnesota, reconnects with tradition and his father's "fragility"

In Minnesota, a few days later, the big talk in the Steward family was Nancy's pregnancy, especially for the grandfather-to-be, Joe Steward. At the family dinner on Christmas eve, he left the table after the main meal and returned in a Pilgrim outfit, complete with a black hat with a buckle, to read a "proclamation," as he called it: "Hear ye, hear ye, we of the Steward clan, here assembled, have these, our own tidings..." The proclamation ended with the news known already by everyone at the table except for the two youngest children, Nate, by this time 13 years old, and Karen, a freshman in college.

The reason for the Pilgrim connection wasn't clear. The Steward's were of German and Swedish origin. No one was surprised by stunts of this kind, however. Joe Steward was known for them. Just the month before, he had dressed up as an old man with a white beard, topcoat, and cane to receive a long-service award at a banquet attended by hundreds of his fellow agents at the insurance company he worked for.

Tom Steward had seen photos of this latest stunt,—shown to him by his father. These occasions when his father seemed to play the fool were a matter of amazement and embarrassment to him. He knew his father thrived on public attention of this kind. Even on this family gathering, the effect of the stunt was evident as the elder Steward relaxed on the couch later, still seeming worked up by it.

"Kind of crazy, huh?" the father said.

"No, it was amusing," Tom answered.

"Need to mark the occasion somehow."

"Well, I guess that did it."

"A little crazy, though."

"No, it was fine."

"It's great to have you and Art back here."

"Thank you."

"And your lovely wives."

The son, in the course of this interchange, assessed his father's mental state. His father was, at the moment, buoyed by the activities of Christmas and his central social position in the family. Not long after Christmas, when everything became quiet again, his father would begin to show signs of a downswing that would gradually grow worse for several months until something,—who could say what, maybe the incline of the rays of sunlight at the beginning of spring,—would awaken his father from that and start an upswing again.

Later the same evening, Tom went down with his father to the room in the basement that his father used as an office to look over some of his father's recent journalistic efforts, done on a typewriter there. The room,

in a corner of the walkout section of the cement block foundation, was the same room that Tom and Art had shared as teenagers, and it was being used, at the moment, for Tom and his wife's bedroom during the visit home, but the desk, typewriter, and mail stacker that his father used has not been bothered.

For Tom, under the influence of a bit too much of the dinner wine, the scene was an interesting sight. The typewriter was a boxy, old Corona Standard that required a hearty plunk of the fingers to operate the keys. His father had picked it up at a garage sale. Next to the typewriter was a gray enamel mail sorter with three shelves upon which his father's typed pages were neatly arranged. Typed sheets of his father's that Tom had seen on previous occasions had the pecked out look of an amateur typist. On the wall behind the desk was a photo showing his father receiving the president's gavel of a local Lions' club. The same gavel, of a polished brass construction, was displayed on a wall-mounted shelf between the desk and the photo. A second gavel, made of varnished wood, was also displayed there. In addition to these objects, there were three trophies and three wall plaques awarded for high sales.

It was a scene, thought Tom Steward, that captured his father's odd personal trait of seeming without a sense of himself except as reflected from others. He had talked to his father at times, wanting to connect with him as he had been able to connect with thoughtful people of his own age group, but with his father it was a futile enterprise. There was no self-image except as created and buttressed by such objects as these. That was why his father was always showing them, to revive the image. That was why his father was always doing things in public, to see himself in the looks of others looking at him.

This scene, though, showed his father's strength, also, Tom Steward thought. It showed a man able to talk with anyone and lacking in any self- importance that would have stopped him, a man who could talk easily with a waitress in a restaurant, a cop on the street, a janitor in a hallway, passing by with a broom, a minister, a lawyer, a doctor, it didn't matter who, Joe Steward treated them all the same, like people from the old neighborhood he had grown up with.

"Remember that article I told you about, the one about the wall on Case Street?" Joe said as he and Tom stood by the desk together.

"Yea, the high wall? Sure."

Joe was referring back to details he had given Tom more than a year previous, on the evening before Tom had left on his first hitchhiking trip with Bill O'Rourke, but he knew from past experience that his son retained facts of this kind.

"Well, I got to thinking from that about all the walls around that were built in the 30s by the WPA and I did an article on that."

He leafed through his articles to find the one he had mentioned and handed it over for his son to look at.

“There are three magnificent walls in our city of St. Paul that all have a similar look of rough-hewn limestone blocks with thick cement,” the article began. “These walls have a common history. They were all built by the Workers Progress Administration, better known as the WPA.

“I went around to a number of official places, like the historical museum downtown, trying to come up with an official list of these walls,” the article continued. “There were no such lists to be found. But I did wind up finding a pretty good list in my own mind.”

The article then went on to describe walls that the younger Steward was also aware of, at Indian Mounds Park and Battle Creek Park, places where he had often gone on family picnics. His father also described a wall “just across the street from the “old Bluff playground, here on the East Side.” The younger Steward knew of this wall, too, because he had played on sports’ teams at Bluff as had his brother Art.

Joe Steward had taken care to record the exact words of some of the metal plaques built into the walls at observation points such as Indian Mounds Park in St. Paul overlooking the Mississippi River.

“This point commands a view of one of the great water courses of North America. The stream which once filled this valley, named the River Warren, was larger than any river in the continent today.

“During the past million years, Minnesota was partly covered by glaciers at least four times. The short summers and long winters of the great ice ages caused an accumulation of ice and snow to a thickness of several thousand feet...”

There was a picture, also, that had been printed with the article, Joe Steward said. He had taken it himself. It showed the view from the bluffs looking southwest toward Hastings, where the most prominent feature was the immense railroad yards at the base of the bluffs, the exact scene that the younger Steward had looked off at with his father about a year and a half before when they had taken their “little trip” together to the old neighborhood to revisit the old family house and various places of family historical interest.

The next morning, being Christmas morning, brought the Steward’s all into the family room overlooking the lake where there was a Christmas tree with presents. It was a happy occasion, though young Steward noticed that his Californian, Valley Girl wife Kris, with her luxuriant Hollywood blonde curls, was still struggling to fit into a Midwestern family. One topic after another fell flat as her talk of rock music and her past experiences, with prominent names thrown in here and there, merited the expected suspicion. She wound up sitting with Karen, the Steward’s college aged daughter, who was her age, to be sure,

but was far from being married or even thinking of being married. She was a great hit with the younger members of the family and never quite accepted by the older ones.

"Your family thinks I'm odd," she whispered to him at one point as they wound up in the kitchen together while the rest were seated in the living room.

"You're just a little outside of their range of experience," Tom answered.

"Yea, and to them that's odd."

"They like you, though."

"I don't think so. Your mother thinks I'm a pagan."

"You kind of are."

"No, I am not!"

She said that with her usual dramatic flare, with a quaint gesture of both hands, and she seemed at times to be doing fine among his family, but Tom could see that a process had continued through their lonely life in West Virginia and now this slight discomfort with her new in-laws that had taken her further and further from her base in the sunny places and open attitudes she had grown up in.

Tom tried to counter this later in the week by taking her out to dinner out at the university campus, a Chinese restaurant that she really did seem to enjoy, but coming home from drifting snow he could see that something had lodged in her that was hard to extricate.

"Sometimes I think maybe when we get back to West Virginia we should look for some other kind of situation," he said.

"Like what?"

"Some other place like out West, maybe in the Southwest or something where the sun shines more."

"Oh, do you really think we could do that?"

"Yes, why not?"

"I'd like that very much!"

The next day, with Kris having been invited by the women in the family to go shopping together, to return various Christmas presents and take advantage of post Christmas sales, Tom Steward drove the family car over to the East Side by himself to look at the plaque his father had written about. He found it, and stood for a while under a low, brilliant sun, watching a diesel with a yellow blinking light moving boxcars around in the rail yard below the bluff.

This was a spot where as a boy, emulating St. Francis of Assisi, he had made his first efforts at meditation, sitting on a bench just around from the plaque at the base of an Indian mound where he had sat watching airplanes land in the small airport on the other side of the river.

The river, he noted, was not frozen. It was dark and thick looking,

like liquid lead flowing between the piled up snow on either side of the river.

Walking around from the first plaque, he went to look at a second he recalled by a different vista looking west toward the downtown bridges and his old haunt the Minnesota Boat Club. Beyond it, he could see the High Bridge extending from the west side bluffs dear to his former teammate Jim Morris.

Later he drove downtown and across the Wabasha Street Bridge to the street that doubled back under the bridge to the smaller bridge that led to the boat club island. No one was there at all. There was no trace at all of his old world and old friends.

Tom Steward rode out the St. Thomas college campus, also, and from there to the University of Minnesota campus, where he drove past the rooming house where Barbara Carpenter had lived. A young woman leaving the house looked toward him briefly and averted her eyes.

Returning home after dark, he found his wife already asleep in the basement bedroom. He left the room without waking her and went upstairs to the living room where he saw his father sitting alone in the living room by the big windows that looked out to the lake.

His father was hunched into an easy chair in a posture he often had especially in low moods with his chin resting on his cupped hands. It was a posture that made him look smaller than his actual size.

"You know, lately," he said, "I think about time passing and I think I should really these events when they're happening. But, I don't know, when you try to do that, you can't get a handle on it."

"Dad, you're only 57," Tom replied.

"Well, I don't mean to make it sound gloomy. It's just that I see that I'm running out of time."

"I just wish you would lighten up." Tom said.

Joe Steward chuckled at that. "Well, I would like to."

"Well, just do it then."

"I'm sorry to be a burden."

"You're not a burden."

"I just get to thinking."

They sat in the dark room quietly, looking out the window toward the frozen, snow-covered lake. On a hillside about a mile away, the red lights on a tower blinked off and on. Beyond that, amidst the far-flung lights of houses and Christmas decorations, the white and red lights of traffic passed along a highway.

"We sure like having you guys home again."

"Thanks."

"Next year there will be a new little one."

"Yes."

Tom gathered from this that Art had not talked to his father about the likelihood of being sent to Vietnam. He interpreted his father's comments about age as an indication that a mood downswing would begin soon after he and Art left to return to their respective situations in West Virginia and Kentucky.

He was left with a feeling of much in transition around an insecure foundation. He thought of the walls his father had written about and the plaque regarding the River Warren. The breadth of time seemed so immense and human attempts against it so small by comparison.

"Fragile" was the word that came to his mind. His father's state of mind was fragile. His brother's security against the war was fragile. Or something like that. And he himself was fragile. He felt a menace looming, he didn't know where.

[Chapter 202 notes]

203. Steward's return to frozen pipes, get evicted from mobile home

After the brief respite from their financial problems provided by their Christmas holiday in Minnesota, Tom and Kris Steward returned to West Virginia on Sunday, January 3, 1970, to find that the financial problems were still there.

The first bad omen was cold. It was bitterly cold, they discovered when they exited their plane in the small Morgantown airport and crossed the frozen tarmac to the plain, one-story terminal.

No one was on hand to greet them this time, as they hurried with their luggage to the warmth of the terminal. A worker informed them it was ten below.

"How long has it been like this?" Tom asked. "All through the holidays."

His thoughts, during the cab ride into town, were on the oil furnace in the mobile home and the carefully calculated amount of oil he had bought in an effort to manage expenses before the trip home.

The Rambler was covered with snow but the motor turned over at once and started. With their baggage packed in, they proceeded along the familiar route to the lonely little town 20 miles up the highway. The noise in the bottom of the car had grown worse, Steward noticed.

At the mobile home, the situation was not good. Arriving there, the young couple found the front door open and a man lying on his back, below the mobile home, with a blow torch held above him. It was the landlord, a person they had talked to only two times since moving in.

"Is there a problem?" Steward asked when the man crawled out and approached them.

"Furnace ran out of oil. Pipes are frozen."

"I ordered oil before we left."

"How much?"

"75 gallons."

"Tanks holds 250."

"I thought it would be enough."

"Get your stuff together. I want ya outa here tomorrow."

The Steward's went inside to find heat had been restored. There were footprint of melting snow where the man had gone to gain access to the water pipes. They went into the bedroom and closed the door. The man could be heard knocking at the pipes below them.

"Can he just kick us out like that?" Kris asked.

"I don't know." Steward replied.

"What if we don't go?"

"I think he can evict us."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of water pouring into

the bathroom and kitchen sinks. Steward went out to tell the man.

"Well, thank God for that!" said the man. "I don't think any pipes got busted."

"I'm sorry," Steward said. "I was trying to conserve on money for Christmas. I thought I ordered enough."

The man went apart a distance and began gathering his tools. "I had to buy these torches," he said. "I'll deduct what I paid from your rent for this month. I'll give you the rest tomorrow morning."

"Thank you very much."

"I want ya outa here tomorrow."

The man came by the next morning with $80 in cash. The Steward's were already ready to go and they did soon later.

"I'm just relieved to be leaving here," Kris remarked.

"So am I."

They had decided the previous evening that they would move back to Morgantown. Tom would talk to Janis Kulas, the project director, about the change in situation. Assuming her permission, he would drive up for his work in Preston County. Kris would look for a job in Morgantown.

With that resolved, another problem set in. The car was laboring under the weight of their belongings, piled into the backseat and trunk. Fortunately, the route to Morgantown was downhill for the most part. With no definite plan, they headed into downtown and turned toward the familiar McDonald's on the hill. That last hill was one too much. The car clunked and stopped.

"Unbelievable," Steward said. "Still up for coffee?"

"Sure, let's go."

In McDonald's, they sat looking down the hill toward the quaint scene of brick buildings. The cold weather had broken. The sun was shining brightly from a cloudless sky.

They had $306 total, they figured. The car would have to be fixed. There was a car dealership at the bottom of the hill. They would let the car roll down the hill and make arrangements there.

"Then we can figure out where to live," said Tom. "Let's just stay calm."

"At least, we're back in Morgantown."

"Oh, my God, yes!"

Inside the car dealership, they found an unshaven, rough-looking fellow in coveralls who made no pretense of being friendly. Upon being informed of the symptoms, he said at once, "That's a U-joint. Almost certain."

"What's involved with that?" Steward asked.

"New u-joint and labor. Maybe 75."

Steward was relieved to hear the amount.

"We'll put it on the hoist and make sure."

"Okay. Please do. I'll wait."

Steward waited while his wife went on to Family Services.

Soon the man came back.

"Not as simple as we thought," he said.

"How's that?"

"Them Ramblers got a casing, long pipe, round the whole drive shaft. U-joint's inside. To get to the U-joint, you gotta remove that casing. Hell of a job."

"So what does that mean, costwise?"

"Parts and labor, 150."

"All right. Go ahead."

Steward walked down to Family Services, thinking hard. He was not due to get paid again for another two weeks. Even if Kris found a job at once, she would not be paid for maybe two weeks. The car was nearly out of gas. He would need gas to do his work. They would need money for food. If they used their cash for temporary lodging, then there would be nothing left to use as a deposit on a new apartment.

At the agency, he ascertained at once that Kris had told everyone about their predicament, but there were no sympathetic glances except on the face of the ever-obliging student intern, Dale Kuypers.

Going in to see Janis Kulas, he found her waiting with a cold expression that remained on her face as he explained his plan.

"Well, this is not quite what we bargained for, you know," she said, enunciating carefully to pronounce the "s" without a lisp. "The original idea is you and Krissy would work together, you would live up there to connect more with the people."

"Yes, I know," Steward said.

Her attitude made him feel angry, but he checked himself from letting the anger come into his voice.

"You know, though, Janis, being honest," he resumed. "There's no way to connect. There's no neighborhood. The people are scattered all over. We're just living up there."

"Well, you are entitled to mileage, you know."

"Thank you."

That was the extent of what she intended to offer in the way of assistance, Steward saw. He could not bring himself to ask her for an advance in pay.

Outside, in the "project room," he found Dale Kuypers waiting to speak to him. "Tom, come stay with me and Lisa," he said at once. "We can figure out something."

Steward had, up to this moment, portrayed himself as the seasoned, experienced man of world to the young student. He realized he would

have to forego that role.

"Lisa seemed annoyed by us before Christmas," he said. "Are you sure she wouldn't mind?"

"You got her wrong!" Kuypers insisted. "She's the kind of person she's easy to ruffle on the surface, but, as soon as she thinks about it, her better sympathies come out."

Steward's further hope then was to retain a shred of independence by regaining use of the car. But, upon calling the dealership, he learned that the special casing required for the Rambler had been special ordered from Wheeling and would not arrive for two days.

"I can give you guys a ride over to our place," Kuypers said.

"Alright," Steward answered.

He saw that he would have to swallow his pride. There was no other option.

"You and I can drive around tomorrow, looking for apartments. The semester is just ending. It's a good time to be looking."

"Okay. Thanks."

Lisa Kuypers was waiting for them at the door, with wariness in her eyes but nothing but courtesy in her voice and manner. "I've set up a place for you right here in this little porch," she told them.

"Oh, Lisa, you're so kind!" Kris responded.

"Everything will be fine," Lisa said with a smile, "assuming you have no unusual problems."

"Only unusual thing, I usually go running early in the morning," Steward said. "I'll be real quiet."

"Actually, maybe it would be best for you to do that as some other time. I think that would really disturb the cats, having a stranger coming through the main room like that so early."

"Okay," Steward replied. "No problem."

It was more of a sacrifice than she knew, he thought to himself. That evening he made the mistake of brushing one of the cats aside as he sat down on the couch.

"Tom, he was sitting there," Lisa said quietly. "I don't like that when you do that."

"I wasn't aware. I didn't think of it."

"Well, next time, please do."

"Lisa is just kind of bonkers about the cats. You have to forgive her," Dale noted to Steward later as the two men walked to a Chinese take-out to get supper for the foursome.

"I don't mind," said Steward. "I just wasn't aware."

They had spent the day together with no problem, from Tom Steward's perspective, other than the blandness, inanity almost, of the intern's unfailing good temper.

The evening was harmonious for a while, as the two women, relaxing into a traditional mode, set out the food and dishes for the meal. Soon, however, the strain began to build again,—not between the two men but between Lisa and each of the Steward's individually.

Lisa's main grudge with Kris seemed to be that Kris was younger, made a conscious effort to be beautiful, and succeeded at it. Lisa seemed to regard herself as superior, however, because of her higher educational achievement (as a graduate student) and her work as a librarian (which she presented as a job that took a high degree of intelligence).

"Well, I would explain, Kristine," Steward heard her saying, "but I'm afraid I can't give you a college education in fifteen minutes."

"Well, I do know something, Lisa!" Kris replied.

"You are learning. I grant you that."

With the other Steward, Tom, Lisa had a different dynamic, treating him as an intellectual peer, but seeming to take him as a representative of all of the politicos and hippies and similar types that she lumped together as "elitist."

The culmination of a long buildup in that dynamic came with the 10 P.M. news, which led with a report that Jake Yablonski, a dissident union leader well-known among local miners, had been found dead in his home in Clarksville, Pennsylvania beside his slain wife and daughter.

"Groups have come forward already claiming that these deaths are the result of a corrupt union crackdown," the report said. "Only last month, Yablonksi was defeated in a UMW election that was widely reported as compromised, and Yablonski since then had threatened law suits against the current leader, Tony Boyle."

Some of the "groups that had come forward" were shown—young people who looked much like Tom Steward, standing beside miners.

To that brief footage, Lisa shook her head in disgust. "I guess they were bored over Christmas," she said.

"It's not far fetched, Lisa. It happens," said Steward. "It happened with King, didn't it? It happened with RFK."

"You see plots everywhere, don't you?"

"No, I really don't."

Dale and Kris, who were also watching the news, laughed at that, but the interchange had an edge that remained in the air as Lisa went to the kitchen to make herself some tea.

"People like you, Tom, they think all of society is over there, and they're over here," she said from the kitchen. "Society is this big bad boogeyman and they're the messiahs with the new way."

"I don't think that," said Tom. "I just think there a legitimate reason in some cases for change."

"I see it all the time at work. They come in the library. They don't

play by the rules. ‘The book belong to the people.’ They just walk out with them. They don’t play by the rules.”

“Well, I have to admit it, I’ve done that myself.”

“Stolen from the library?”

“No, Lisa, I did not steal. I took out a book one time without signing out. I brought it back the next day.”

“Well, yea, sure, that’s how you look at it. The infraction is for you to define.”

“I don’t defend it. It’s just something I did.”

“You use what you want to use, just the same way you come here and use us. You don’t give it a second thought, do you?”

“Yes, I do. I appreciate it very much.”

“Lisa” Dale interjected. “We invited them to stay here.”

For once the mild intern appeared to have lost his composure. Lisa demurred, but the damage was done. Tom Steward resolved that, by whatever means necessary, he and Kris would leave the next day.

As if propelled by that, arrangements fell into place the next day. A phone call in the morning brought the news that an apartment had become available that the Steward’s had looked at. With a $75 deposit, they could move in at once. Another call brought the news that the Rambler was fixed and ready to go. After paying for the car and the apartment, the Steward’s would have only $35 left, but, by another turn of good fortune, Kris had gone for a job interview and had been hired.

“What is it exactly?” he asked her.

“Records clerk. Huge room with drawers and drawers of files.”

“Does it look okay?”

“Yes, it looks fine.”

That evening the Steward’s were settled in their own apartment with their own car parked outside. It was a roomy basement apartment on the outside of town. It had no river view, such as their previous Morgantown apartment had had, but it provided privacy again. They had learned from the events of the past week how dear that was.

Steward went for a walk after supper, his thoughts tumbling from the incident before Christmas with the man brandishing the pistol, to the *Easy Rider* dope scenes and panoramas of highways, to the Steward family Christmas, his father’s article on walls, the empty boathouse absent of old friends, and the bizarre chain of events by which he and Kris had been evicted from their mobile home and had their car break down, ending up amidst the madness of Lisa Kuyper’s pronouncements and cats. Then the murder of the union leader and his family. That brought the matter full circle, back to the man with the pistol. Steward thought to himself that he was so glad to be back in Morgantown again, in the security of city lights, students, and familiar scenes.

204. Brandt and Houghten discuss the positive artistic effect of grass

In mid-January of 1970, Matthew Brandt began on his master's thesis photo project in Washington D.C. In doing this, he had a sense of personal achievement, as his prerequisite for the project was to have successfully completed his first year at Whitney Pratt. At the same time, he was aware of a dynamic in his life that had originated and grown in the same year, and that at times seemed to diminish and complicate his achievements in photography, and this was his use of grass.

A year had gone by, exactly to the day, he figured, as he walked to school one morning at this time, following the route through the U. Shaw neighborhood that he had followed on his first day at Whitney Pratt. Many of the scenes he saw had become familiar. He prided himself on having become a true citizen of a great city that he had grown to love. Yet he was aware that a major part of him remained in Minnesota, tied to his experience of the family farm and the ethic of physical work he had learned there under the tutelage of his down-to-earth father.

At the "14th Street Corridor," Matt paused, thinking that the past year had brought no further unrest to the street where the riots had taken place in the summer before he had come to D.C. Some of the store-fronts that he remembered as being boarded-up the previous year had been restored to service. Still the graffiti was there: "Power to the people!" "Kill the Pigs!" "Revolution Now!"

Later, from the vantage point of a low hill above a vacant lot, he obtained a clear view of the dome of the White House and the obelisk of the Washington Monument beyond it. No further demonstration had been held there in the National Mall, he observed to himself, since the Moratorium events that had brought Dennis Kelly from Kentucky and Tom and Kris Steward from West Virginia for those days of community shared in by him and Mary, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue. The past year had brought that "family," he thought, and it really was a new family, in some respects, as people said.

From the mall with its great monuments, a sweep of the eyes to the left brought Brandt a scene of a ghetto street such as common to the urban black areas of the capitol. The juxtaposition, of mall and ghetto, brought to his mind antitheses that he had heard: wealth vs. poverty, access vs. exclusion, power vs. impotence: antitheses such as he wished to make the stuff of his project. No pairings of words he had heard, however, rang true; he felt more repelled than ever from such words, more drawn to a visual representation.

Soon later, Brandt saw the limestone facades and round arches of the former Masonic Lodge where the Whitney Pratt School was located. He climbed the wide stone steps and proceeded through the open porch to

the front room of the mansion, where he found students seated in impromptu groups as they talked preceding classes.

Brandt didn't pause there, though he saw several students he knew. He proceeded at once through the room to the back hall and through a side door to the stair well that led up three stories to the attic where the photography workshop and darkroom was located.

Arriving there, he stopped for a moment at the dormer window in the photo workroom, with its familiar view, directed at a 45-degree angle from the corner of the roof. The parking lot below displayed an even arrangement of vehicles in neat rows. Beyond that, traffic passed steadily on the busy street beyond the red brick A.M.E. church with its three-striped, green, white, and brown banner. Two men, dressed in traditional African dress, their breath vaporizing in the chilly January air, stood in front of the storefront community center on the corner. The brand of cigarette advertised on the billboard above the basketball court at the far end of the parking lot had changed from Marlboro to Camel.

Moving from the window to a long table on the other end of the room where he had cabinets assigned for his personal use, Brandt set out photos he had taken in the homes of various children that he had gotten to know through his internship at the Garrison Elementary School.

One of these photos, Brandt had decided to use as a front piece for his project. The photo, taken the previous summer, showed black children in swimsuits playing at a water hydrant before a backdrop of squalid buildings. Between two of the buildings, the white dome of the Capitol Building was visible.

Brandt was absorbed in his work when the corner door opened. Darren Houghten entered the room, negotiating his progress with his single crutch, secured with a looped metal band to his forearm.

"Ah! My good friend!" the bearded director of seminars chimed. "Could I go wrong in the morning, looking for you here."

"Well, it's been a while, since before Christmas."

"Glad to be back?"

"Actually, yes."

"And I see you are hard at it!"

"Just trying to get organized."

"For your project?"

"Yes."

There were only a few people that Brandt had confided in regarding the details of his project. Darren Houghten was one of them. He and Brandt had become as close as Brandt had been with Dennis Kelly in Kentucky. The relationship was quite different, however. Houghten had little interest in the political issues that had absorbed Brandt and Kelly in their days with the MVs. What Houghten shared with Brandt mostly was

delight in the visual and cultural aspects of the city. Houghten gave voice to what Brandt left silent. For all of his dislike of words in general, Brandt was glad at times to hear Houghten's descriptions.

"Time for a brew together or perhaps a number?" Houghten asked. "I've got some new stuff if you care to indulge."

It was an inviting prospect, though the mention of "number" and "stuff," which Brandt knew meant grass, brought up the conflict he had been struggling with lately regarding his increasing use.

"Yea, actually, I would like that," he said, despite his momentary hesitation.

"Van's outside."

"Alright! Let's go!"

Later they sat together in Houghten's apartment, on the couch in his blue and white living room, each with a bottle of beer on the coffee table in front of him.

"So, Houghten, tell me, where do you get this so-called stuff?" Brandt asked.

"Fellow up on S. Street. Hippie type. You ever want to meet him, I'll take you along."

"Figure I better stick clear of that."

"Too much of a good thing?"

"I don't know, Darren. Lately I'm been studying on the matter."

"Studying on it how?"

"Studying on it in the sense, I want the stuff very much. A little too much, you know."

"So go with it then."

They were silent again as Houghten went to the kitchen and Matthew reclined on the couch gazing at the picture on the wall there that he had noticed before of the woman on the rooftop hanging clothes on a line.

"You know what really is my hang-up about it?" Matthew said.

"No, what."

"I feel, as far as photography, under the influence, or whatever, I see differently."

"See differently how?"

"Remember that speech Tyler gave one time about 'strangeness' and how he came into DC one time and it was strange to him like an ancient city, like the Aztecs or something."

Houghten knew Matthew was referring to Dr. Tyler Moy, the school president. "Yes, I do recall that," he said.

"That's what I yearn for."

"That strangeness."

"Yes."

"Well, Matthew, you are not the first artist or mystic to seek such an

alteration. Coleridge, for example. Keats. They say they were on opium, or some liquid form of it. Laudanum, I think they called it. Baudelaire. The list goes on. No, you are not the first to seek reverie in some magic plant or herb."

"Well, Darren, let's get real, okay?" Brandt answered. "I am not an artist or mystic and grass is not a magic plant or herb."

Houghten laughed. "Matthew, Matthew, my dear friend Matthew, you are always so cruel in your application of reality."

"Is that so?"

"Reality cutting out everything! Reality cutting out the romance, cutting out the vision! Is that what you want?"

"No. It is not."

"Let us suppose then, you and I, that this strangeness you speak of is the vestibule to the true inner sanctum."

"Now I remember, you were raised as a Catholic."

"As were you. Need I remind you?"

"No."

"The true inner sanctum. Not an illusion. Not reality altered. But true reality. And closer to the other side of reality, the reality behind the shadows in Plato's cave."

"Now you lost me."

"I mean the visionary sense they were all after, all the people I mentioned. Coleridge, Keats, Baudelaire. They were not after a moment of abandonment or profligation. They were after a moment of contact."

"Well, that I can relate to, the contact. It's just that right now I want so much to see it and to get it down, in the photos."

"Well, Matthew, for God's sake, go for it then."

"I don't know."

"Well, let me ask this then, what's the negative? There's obviously a negative that's holding you back."

"It's hard to explain. There's a tightness in my lungs, a feeling of dirtiness almost."

"You've been such an athlete always."

"Maybe that's part of it."

"The dirtiness is the main thing then?"

"No, it's more involved. There's a yellowness, a heaviness. I don't know how to describe it. And I'm quiet anyhow, you know. It makes me all the more quiet."

"Problems with Mary of the Words?"

"Yea, that, too, to a certain extent."

"Well, Matthew, my friend, far be it from me to be the one to push you into anything. Maybe it's time you stepped back from it, or maybe, if the concept is feasible, with drugs, you could use in moderation. Use for

the sake of your craft, and otherwise stay away from it."

"Well, that is an excellent concept," Brandt replied.

"In consideration, you mean, if not in practice."

Brandt sat back on the couch, coffee in hand, looking out to the alley, where branches were framed by the sash, much as they had been on his first experience of grass. When had then been? he asked himself. Just the previous spring, nine or so months before. He seldom felt that initial magic with his use of grass anymore. Still there was an effect. No doubt about that.

"I think it may be worth a try," he said.

"The moderation approach?"

"Yes."

"How about this? Take a joint with you tonight. You can choose the proper time, when Mary's not around."

"Well, actually, Mary's off for an overnight tomorrow."

"With her women's group?"

"Yes."

"Take two joints then, Matthew. One for tomorrow. One for tomorrow evening."

"No, you know what? I think I'll stick with one."

"Don't know for sure I'll be here tomorrow. May go up to Baltimore with a friend."

"One will be enough."

Brandt left soon later, after a few beers with Houghten, taking a route across P. St. It was after dark and he was aware of a more sinister element in the unlit alleys between the rough houses that fronted the street. At Logan Circle, the collision of the circular park and the worst aspects of the U. Shaw neighborhood could be seen in shadowy figures of hookers and pushers prowling for trade not far from the statue of the Civil War general who had lent the park its name. Once more Brandt thought of his project as he tapped on the shirt pocket where he had placed the single joint obtained from Houghten.

205. Brandt keeps himself stoned as he evaluates his photographic project

Matthew Brandt's first stop the next morning was the United States Capitol Building. He had obtained an official pass to take photos as a student journalist.

Going to the Senate chamber, where the business of the new session of congress was just starting, Brandt saw that only a dozen or so people were present. One of them he recognized, Sen. Mike Mansfield of Montana, the majority leader. Another senator with a familiar face, but whose name escaped Brandt at the moment, was sitting in the president's chair, acting as the president pro temp. Amidst the people in the chamber were soldiers in uniforms.

Turning to the lectern, the majority leader said: "Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the military promotions reported yesterday by the Armed Services Committee."

To this, the president pro temp answered: "Without objection, it is so ordered."

"Mr. President," the majority leader continued, "I ask unanimous consent that Maj. Dugal McFarland, an Air Force fellow in the office of Senator Humphrey, be granted the privilege of the floor for reading of the nominations."

"Without objection, it is so ordered."

Several other staff members, military and non-military, were named in similar language and granted floor privileges.

After some muffled exchanges, one of the people from the assembled group, a man in an Army officer's uniform, began to read:

"The following named officer for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601: to be lieutenant general: Maj. Gen. Michael Milton Deck, 7355.

"The following named officers for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 624: to be brigadier general: Col. Charles James Dunbar, 5552; Col. Michael North Manson, 3003."

Brandt positioned himself to take some photos, wanting to give a sense of the Senate from the floor. While doing so and absently listening to the continuing litany of names, he heard:

"The following named officers for appointment in the United States Air Force... to be major: Capt. Martin Marcus Just, Jr., 5756; Capt. Kenneth Nathaniel Keller, 3235; Capt. James Ernest Morris, 3223..."

Brandt paused at that. The name just read was the correct full name of

his brother-in-law, James Morris. He was aware of it through the family connection. Of course, in the entire Air Force, there may have been more than one James Ernest Morris, even more than one captain of the same name, but the chance seemed small.

Later, satisfied that he had obtained several photos showing the Senate in its unique blend of mechanics and solemnity, Brandt headed out of the Capitol Building.

Standing on the steps of the Capitol, he felt the draw of the open space of the National Mall, extending for two miles in front of him. With no definite plan, he headed in that direction, camera in hand.

Down the granite steps he proceeded, crossing through the traffic on 1st St. NW and pausing to gaze at the towering, horse-mounted figure of Ulysses Grant and the life-sized statues of Civil War soldiers, complete with horses and cannons, on either side.

Continuing around the Reflecting Pool of the Grant statue, just west of the estuary, he observed that the water in the pool was unfrozen, reflecting the low rays projected from the January sun in the clear southern sky. The mall beyond was covered with snow, however, the juniper trees frosted in an idyllic winter scene.

He continued into the mall, walking quietly between the monolithic museums on either side. There was no one nearby, on this weekday winter morning. He could have been by himself, he thought, in the north woods of Minnesota.

By a stone wall in a cluster of frosted bare trees, with the dome of the White House in view about a half mile to the northwest, Brandt paused to smoke his joint.

Soon the “strangeness” returned that he had described to Darren Houghten. The change to it was subtle, a distancing of traffic noise, a dropping off of mental distraction.

For a long time, Brandt gazed back toward the Capitol building where vehicles streamed past or stopped to let off passengers who walked up the monumental steps. Groups of people paused in consultation at the door before proceeding inside. Over to one side stood a larger group with signs. From somewhere amidst them came a cadenced voice from a bullhorn, indistinct in the general noise of the city. “We will make them listen,” were the only words Brandt heard clearly.

For a moment, Brandt’s thoughts went to Jim Morris,—Maj. James Morris, if he had indeed been promoted. He thought of another bullhorn he had heard once, at the University of Minnesota, on the evening when he had charged off from Mary, angry at her the first time, the night when he had come to the aid of his then rowing teammate in Morris’s ill chosen fight with a much larger man.

Many images and emotions welled up in him with that: a sense of

how much Mary had meant to him then, when he and she had been so fresh for one another, a sense of how strong the bond had been between him and his team- mates like Morris, Tom Steward, and Bill O'Rourke. And Dennis Nyberg, the stroke oar, the combat veteran of the Vietnam war that he had seen at the boat club the previous summer. Brandt thought of how beleaguered Nyberg had seemed and how Nyberg had brightened up at the discovery of their mutual use of grass.

Within the disjointed time of his stoned state, Brandt proceeded down the mall, looking for images for his photo project. At the Ellipse, he looked off to his right, toward the White House, but he saw no image there, at the moment, in the mansion on the wooded hill in the distance. Continuing past the Reflecting Pool, he saw, in the distance, the stately Doric columns of the Lincoln Monument. With his camera slung over his shoulder, he headed toward that.

There, at the Lincoln Monument, Brandt encountered a group of black children looking at the carved words of the Gettysburg Address. He took a series of photos of the children looking up toward the last words of the address, "that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

After the children left, Brandt walked around the outside of the monument, along the columns, to the west side where the leaden, silent water of the Potomac River could be seen, flowing between the Arlington Bridge, in front of him, and the Teddy Roosevelt Bridge, about a half mile upstream. By the cement piers of the Roosevelt Bridge, the water joined from the two sides of Roosevelt Island, shimmering with the dull sunlight filtered through the high-level, thin clouds in the west, above the riverside hills of Virginia.

The sight of the river flowing between the bridges reminded Brandt of the boat club scene in St. Paul. He was no longer fully stoned, but he was aware of the lingering effect of the drug as the heaviness around him that he had described to Darren Houghten. The involuntary progression of memories and emotions that he had experienced earlier in the day resumed. His thoughts returned to his former teammate Dennis Nyberg. He recalled how Nyberg, before he had driven off with his crazy smile, had given him the thumbs up Movement handshake, as if to say he and Nyberg had a common bond based on the grass. What had become of Nyberg anyhow? What had become of Jim Morris? Was he dead? Was he a P.O.W., holed up somewhere? Brandt had not seen Ellen Morris, nee Ellen Kass, since Morris had gone down. Mary had said that her sister had taken it hard.

Brandt was still preoccupied with his memories when a subtle change in light alerted him to the waning of the short winter day. He looked up and saw a red sun above the Arlington House on the other side of the

river. He rose and walked around the north side of the Lincoln Monument to the Reflecting Pool and then northeast from there in the general direction of home.

On the north border of the mall, finding himself at the corner of Constitution and 21st St. NW, Brandt continued toward the brick buildings of the George Washington University campus, a block ahead, intending to take 21st to R. and then follow R. across toward Connecticut and his and Mary's apartment.

By the time Brandt reached the edge of the campus, the sun had set, leaving an orange red glow in the clouds above the procession-like stream of red tail-lights and white head-lights on the four freeway lanes of the Roosevelt Bridge.

At G. St., seeing the inviting lights of windows in the buildings around the snow-covered University Yard, he took a diagonal across toward 20th St, encountering there a single other person, a young man in a fur coat with a blonde hair and beard. Though this person was on the other side of the yard, Brandt recognized him at once as Bruce Harris, the former MV from Kentucky.

The surprise would have been greater had Brandt not seen Harris on the night of the Moratorium march.

On Harris's side, the recognition was not so quick. But, when he noticed Brandt looking at him, he focused in. "Matthew Brandt!" he said. "Could that be you?"

"Yes, it is, Harris. How are you?"

"Splendid, my man! What brings you to D.C.?"

"Live here. Me and my wife."

"Mary, as I recall."

"Yes."

"Well, splendid, splendid!"

"Still a T.A.?"

"Oh, no! Got my degree! Got hired! I'm an assistant professor."

"Poly sci, right?"

"Yes. Political science. 'The science of the political interactions of human society,' as Thomas Macaulay said."

This brief interaction between the two former coworkers, vacuous as it was for the most part, nonetheless served to remind Brandt of how much he had come to dislike Harris. There was the proud tone in the voice, the cocky inclination of the head, the too perfect, almost pretty, eyes, nose, and chin, the careful arrangement of the blond hair and blond Trotskyite beard, and then, to top if all off, Harris's final statement with an air of intellectual snobbery as he carefully pronounced each word as if to say that he alone could speak in such a manner.

Brandt would have just as well shook hands with Harris and let that

be the extent of his connection with Harris forever, but Harris had other plans. “Well, how about this, Bomb Dog,” he said, “how about coming up to my place for a beer together for old times?”

“Sure,” said Brandt reluctantly. “You live around here?”

“Right up on L. St.”

“Okay. Just one, though.”

With that, they turned in the campus yard together and headed back in the direction from which Harris had just come, speaking in awkward spurts with long pauses of silence.

Harris’s apartment, in a stylish brick row house, was just what Brandt would have expected it to be had the former MV leader continued in his self conceptions without any correction. Books and albums in vogue were set out on shelves along two walls, with what seemed to Brandt to be a calculated blend of creative disorder and professional neatness. On the walls were revolutionary posters such as Harris had had in the cabin in Kentucky. The poster of Che Guevara that Brandt had noticed then was among them still. Another poster contained the then well-known photo of three black athletes on a winners’ stand at the 1968 Olympics raising their fists in protest at the black condition.

The apartment suggested that the assistant professor was quite comfortable financially. He had a leather covered couch and chair, a sound system with two immense speakers, a large TV, and a coffee table piled with new books.

Brandt also noticed something else on the coffee table, amidst the books: three neatly rolled joints. He inquired about Harris’s courses and listened absently to the long response, but his mind stayed on the joints. Despite his resolutions of the day before, and despite the heaviness he had experienced once more within the past few hours, he felt an urge to get stoned again.

After an inner struggle, he nodded toward the joints as he leaned back casually with his beer. “Harris,” he said, “do my eyes deceive me, or have you taken up a new vice?”

“Oh, yes, I’m afraid. But, then again, ‘to understand all is to forgive all,’ as Victor Hugo says. On the forgiving side, it’s a vice that accommodates a fair degree of extenuation, in my opinion.”

“Is that so?”

“I don’t suppose you partake yourself.”

“Actually, I do.”

“Well, how about this, I have a committee meeting I have to go to, informal affair at another prof’s apartment, how about, for old time’s sake, I give you a couple to take with you?”

“No need for that.”

“Brandt, this is grass such as you’ve never experienced, I can assure

you. This is a high worthy of the gods. For old time's sake, let me treat you to this one."

"If you insist, Harris. One will do."

"Take one with you then. When you're in nirvana, give a thought of me, your old leader."

"Okay, Harris. I will."

It was the best arrangement he could have hoped for, Brandt thought as he walked home through the dark winter streets of D.C. with the joint in his coat pocket: a clean escape from Harris's tedious company and an evening ahead to get stoned with Mary away, with a roll of new photos to develop. He had recently set up a dark room in the pantry, sharing the space with dishes and boxed items seldom used.

Back at home, Brandt smoked the grass at once and soon discovered it had not been overbilled. It was something more than grass surely. He felt enclosed in it, so absorbed in his thoughts that he could hardly comprehend what was just beyond his immediate circle of attention.

With the joint partly smoked, he set it down, not deliberately, but simply because it no longer commanded his attention. For a long time, he studied the camera in front of him on the table by the windows overlooking the street, where he had drawn the curtains to wall himself off from the outside view.

Later, Brandt remembered his photos and walked with the camera to the pantry on the other side of the room. The pantry door opened into a space that he had spent many hours in before but it seemed more strange and separate than he had ever known it to be.

Brandt placed the roll of film in a cake pan filled with silver nitrate and watched the images appear on the film. There were the black children, with the words of Lincoln above them, shown from a direct point of view as he had carefully done to allow the image to be seen as it was without any angles or artistic effects to remind the viewer of his own presence as taker of the photo.

He thought to himself that he had gone a long way toward achieving the documentary style that he had tried to learn from the photographers of the FSA "photographic project," the style discussed in letters exchanged with his friend of volunteer days, Fr. Dan Riley. He had learned to bring in the human element, also, he noted with pride, in this case, in the keen eyes of the children that so thoroughly expressed their cognizance of the promise of Lincoln's words and the extent to which it was realized in their own experience. The look in those eyes was the "cross light on silvery tin" of Walker Evans.

When Brandt came out into the apartment again from the pantry, he looked between the drawn curtains and noticed the first light of dawn in the clouds above the apartment buildings on the other side of the street.

He smoked the rest of the joint then, with each drag drawing him deeper into the private world of his photos.

[Chapter 205 notes]

206. Brandt sees Mary's aura and tries to re-connect with her

Matthew Brandt was still under the influence of the drug when steps in the stairwell alerted him that his wife Mary was coming in. Apparently, she had returned from her trip early, or a complication had resulted in a change of plans.

Even before she entered the apartment, Matthew noticed how unique and strong her presence was, as evidenced by the peculiar pace and timber of her footsteps as they sounded on the stairs. The door opened lightly. She came in, saw him, and smiled. Her pretty face was bright in the dawn light pouring in from the eastward-facing windows. He had just thrown back the curtains and opened the windows to let in light and fresh air after his night of absorption in his photos.

"Surprised to see me?" she asked.

"Yes, a little."

"Turns out the restaurant that Gin wanted to go to was closed, on account of repairs or something."

"You couldn't find something else?"

"We did look around, but the one place we found had a lot of people waiting, and everyone was tired, you know."

"Well, I'm glad to have you home."

Matthew stepped warily through this interaction, feeling himself to be still within the walled off little world that he had been in all night. The curtains on the windows were fluttering in the draft of air coming in, creating a staccato effect of shadow and light. He assessed, as he spoke, that his words were normal and delivered in a normal tone, but he felt at a great distance from his words.

He knew without asking why Mary and her friends were tired. They had spent the night talking, as they often did, like girls at a pajama party, only on more serious, adult topics. Thinking of that, his mind flashed on the morning after his first night of getting stoned when his wife had made such an effort to turn him in another direction. Mary no longer tried to do that, he observed to himself, and he was more careful to disguise the effects. He felt a momentary weariness, thinking of all the talking she and her friends had most probably done, and a little disappointment, also, at how she no longer even expected him to ask questions or pretend an interest.

"I meant to tell you," she said. "I got a new coffee maker."

"Oh, did you?" he replied.

"Yes, I saw a good deal, so I went ahead."

"Good for you."

"Should I make some now?"

"Yes, please do, or I can, if you're tired."

"No, I'll be glad to."

As Mary stood there then, Matthew had an extraordinary experience. She turned to speak to him, and he saw, around her head, a distinct aura such as he had heard about one time from Darren Houghten. It was a golden aura. She looked like a medieval painting of a saint. Then she moved and he was struck by how she was so much more than a painting. She looked at him suddenly with keen, bright eyes.

Her eyes were utterly beautiful, he thought, dark like her hair but glowing from within. He had never really looked at eyes, he thought, in terms of how they were called "windows of the soul."

"Just a quiet Sunday morning," she said. "Like we used to love so much."

"Yes, we haven't done one in a while."

"Rather lie abed, as Fletcher Bourne would say."

"Yes, that, too."

Mary went over to the kitchen cabinets, seeming to Matthew, in his stoned state, to float almost across the floor. He noticed the voluptuous form of her hips and breasts and the classical cast of her face with her full lips and downcast eyes.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" she cried out suddenly, without explanation, with the throaty laugh she sometimes had.

"What's funny?" he asked.

"No coffee!"

"Oh, no."

"I was really up for some, too."

"I was thinking, in the backpack."

"From Shannon!"

"Yes."

They had come to have that abbreviation for Shenandoah Park, where they now went at least once every two months or so.

"Goddam, Matthew. I think you're right!"

She went over and found it.

"Goddam, you're right!"

Obviously, her frame of mind was far from his own, he thought. She had no idea how stoned he was. He had succeeded in carving out another little disjointed segment in which everything had gone well.

"Such a beautiful morning!" she exclaimed softly as they sat at the table by the window later with the coffee. "Any chance I could persuade you on a walk?"

"Actually, yes," he answered.

He was glad at the prospect of moving out of the apartment where he had boxed himself in in such intense absorption. He went out at once, leaving his wife behind for a moment to find the warmer hat and gloves that she wore for winter walks.

In the chilly, wintry air and glare of the winter sun on patches of ice on the sidewalk, Matthew discovered that the effect of the drug had diminished. But there was the heaviness again, the familiar sensation of tightness in his forehead just above his nose where his thoughts seemed to lodge. Momentarily, with the intensity of the previous night, he focused on the sunlight sparkling from droplets of ice on the leaves of grass on the boulevard, then he felt his attention wrenched from that and back to his wife as she approached him. The break in attention registered in his forehead in the same place where the sparkle of sunlight had knotted. The transition left him with a sense of having left an impression behind that had not been fixed into thought and that could not be recovered for more careful analysis.

Mary was dressed in her determined plain style, in a Navy pea coat, blue jeans, and sturdy black boots, with a blue stocking cap pulled down over her ears. A single wisp of black hair, escaped from the confines of the cap, was the only hint of feminine frill.

"Where to?" she asked cheerfully, growing animated, as she often did, at the first draft of fresh air.

"I was thinking, let's take the van, down below the mall somewhere, along the river there," Matthew answered.

"Down by the Jefferson!"

"Yes."

"That sounds wonderful!"

"Let's go."

"The river will be beautiful in the morning light."

"Yes, it will."

Soon they were off in the van in the growing, glorious light of the new day. Matthew, however, was carrying with him still his surreal sense of a few hours before. He knew that the aura he had seen had been an effect of the grass, or of whatever drug it had been, certainly it had been more than just plain grass, but he was nonetheless certain that the aura had actually, perceptually happened. Maybe it had been more than a perceptual trick. Maybe he had gone through the inner sanctum Darren Houghten had talked about. To the real reality...

Whatever had happened, though, he had had enough of it for the time being, Matthew thought to himself. He was tired of the feeling of being partly stoned. He wanted to shake it off, but he felt himself going in and out of his stoned state of mind.

At the Potomac, as he and Mary walked along a paved path, he tried to clear his thoughts. He was determined to engage with her. He asked her what she and her friends had talked about the previous night.

"What did we talk about? Well... how we compartmentalize," she said, "how we split ourselves up into parts... We were reading from Doris

Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*... Incredibly beautiful, elegant prose."

Matthew adopted a pose of listening as she spoke, but his attention jerked back and forth from her words to the play of light on the river. He observed how a pool of sunlight appeared to be located not on the surface of the water but slightly above it. The knotted feeling in his forehead had become a dull headache such as he remembered from sleepless nights of study in college.

She continued with her rapid delivery of words for a few minutes until she detected his waning interest.

"But I tire you out, don't I?" she said, turning toward him.

"No, I'm glad to listen," he replied, thinking to himself that he wished he had, in fact, listened.

"I go on so. I'm sorry."

"It's not just you, Mary. I zone out on it too easily. I've heard too much. Not from you. From all the phonies."

"Yes, I know. There's so much everywhere, so much theorizing. It wears me out sometimes, too."

They had reached a natural midpoint in their walk, at a point where a freeway bridge cut overhead. Without noting that in words, they simply turned and headed back toward their point of origin.

"Sometimes I think you would have been a happier man in a simpler life," Mary ventured, studying her husband's bearded, inscrutable face as she spoke. "A simpler, physical life. On a farm like your parents or something. If the times had permitted it."

"Maybe, yes."

"You've always been so physical. That's why you loved rowing so much, don't you think?"

"Yes."

He was thinking that those were the two things, farming and rowing, that he had told Tom Steward stood out in his life as "the pure absolute truth," and how, in response to Steward's inquiry (something to the effect of "how about Mary?") he had added, "Oh sure. Mary is bright and shining. No doubt about that."

He hated that cynical trait in himself at times. He looked out to the water flowing swiftly past, as he remembered it from his days on the crew. What had he become? Memories came to him, only partly formed, of the boat club scene. For a moment, his recollection placed him at number four oar at the height of a race. Bill O'Rourke was pounding out the cadence on the gunnels of the boat. Tom Steward and Jim Morris were there, at five and six, their oars sweeping the water cleanly then turning up from it like wings.

The thought of his old rowing buddies, including Morris, reminded Matthew of what he had heard the day before in the U.S. Capitol.

"I meant to tell you," he said to his wife. "I think I heard that Morris was promoted."

She stopped at that and turned toward him to look into his eyes. "And what makes you think that?"

He told her of the announcement he had heard in the Senate, with the reading of one name, James Ernest Morris, for promotion to major.

"It must be him!" Mary said. "I'll write Ellen tomorrow! She hangs on every bit of news!"

There was such earnestness in Mary's voice as she said this, and so much of her best qualities of good-heartedness and sympathy, that Matthew was reminded of the days when he had first noticed such qualities.

He turned to look at her at this moment and had a remembrance, with a vividness approaching re-experience, of how she had looked and of how he had felt about her at the exact time when he had first realized that he had fallen in love with her, on an evening walk up along the river from the boat club in his last year in college. With this, he had a sense of personal closeness irrevocably lost.

Was he still stoned? He hardly knew anymore where the stoned state ended and his normal state began.

"You could even call, maybe" he said, his words once again seeming distant as he spooled them out.

"No, I think a letter will be better," Mary replied softly. "It's more intimate."

"That makes sense."

"I know she appreciates the letters. She tells me so all the time, and she always writes back."

He had a impulse to take her hand, as in previous times, but even as he thought of this he realized that the situation between them had changed to the extent that to do so would seem juvenile or somehow no longer natural between them.

"If you do long for simplicity, you aren't the only one, Matthew," she said, switching back to that subject again.

"And how is that?"

"More people are saying things like that. Just live a simple life. One day at a time. Moving out of the city."

"Yes, I know."

"I enjoyed our walk."

"So did I."

"We should do this more often."

"Yes, I'd like to."

The sun had risen high in a clear sky, Matthew noticed, promising a beautiful day such as in the past he and Mary would have gladly shared.

This day would not be shared, however, he acknowledged to himself. He felt too tired and weird from having been stoned all night. He was keenly aware that, despite his feelings of wanting to reconnect with Mary (exaggerated, he assumed, due to being stoned), despite knowing that his use of dope was erecting a barrier between him and her, yet he was looking forward to her imminent departure for Cuba because during her absence, he assumed, he would feel less constraint in getting stoned.

"I do have a problem," he said to himself, recalling his talk with Darren Houghten of a few days before.

[Chapter 206 notes]

207. Mary writes Ellen, researches for her upcoming trip to Cuba

The next morning, Mary Brandt wrote a letter to her sister Ellen Morris to ask if Ellen had received any news that her airman husband had been promoted.

"They must have some hope that Jim is still alive if he's been promoted," Mary wrote. "What have you heard lately? Has the official Air Force been around?"

She knew that Ellen would be glad for an opportunity to tell about any recent developments regarding her missing husband.

After writing the letter, Mary rode the "T" bus across Northwest D.C. to Georgetown University, as she had done many times since beginning her graduate work in Nutrition a year before. She still went each day to the campus though she had only one scheduled class. Her one class was in independent research, a framework for her to spend a semester writing a thesis paper on food and health delivery systems in Cuba.

Mary had arranged to do this in conjunction with her trip to Cuba to work in the sugar cane harvest. Her scheduled departure for Cuba was only three weeks away, on February 9.

At the campus, Mary walked first to the student "whole foods coop" where she was a member and also had jam, syrup, and craft items displayed from the Mountain Women's Coop in Kentucky. It was her ambition that this coop, the mountain coop, and something she would set up in Cuba (just what she didn't know) would function together as an example of "sisterhood" spanning the three different cultures.

Going in, she was greeted warmly by several women cutting pieces of cheese from a bulk slab in one corner.

"Have you had any sales?" she asked, gesturing at her display of items on a side wall.

"Oh, yes. Quite a few!"

From there, Mary went on the women's center in Ryan Hall. Through no design on her own part or on the part of her mentor, her mentor for her independent study had turned out to be Joy Kasberg, head of the woman's program, a member of her women's group, and also a faculty member of the Nutrition Department.

"Survived our sleep-out, I see," was Kasberg's greeting when Mary arrived at the women's center on the tenth floor of Ryan Hall.

"Yes, I did."

Kasberg had her office set up in a homey fashion with curtains and wall coverings amidst the usual functional accoutrements of an office. In appearance, she maintained an image consistent with this deliberate mix of old and new: a bouffant hairdo of the sort popular at the time among ordinary housewives, a skirt or dress, never jeans. But in her eyes and

voice there was the new independence of the women in Mary's group.

"You know, Mary, I've been thinking quite a bit about you since our weekend," Kasberg said when the two women had sat down for a cup of tea at a table in a corner of the office with a spectacular view of the Keys Bridge and Potomac River at the edge of the campus 12 stories below.

"And how is that?"

"Well, I have to tell you, I read a little article about your Cuba group, the first one that went down," Joy Kasberg said, "and the way they described it, Black Panthers, SDS, that's some company you're getting into— 'heavy,' as they say."

"Well, I don't necessarily share in all that."

"I heard from someone there were federal agents there," Joy Kasberg continued, "or people they thought were agents, when the group was boarding the plane to Mexico."

"Yes, that's true. That's why we're going through Canada."

"To avoid being monitored?"

"Yes."

"That's a little scary, to have to do that."

"Yes. I have to admit it. It is."

"How big is that first group that went down?" Kasberg asked.

"216 people. 126 men, 90 women."

"They've been actually working in the fields?"

"Seven hours a day. And in the evening, they have meetings, presentations."

"Propaganda."

"I don't think it's that."

"Well, I'm just concerned for you."

"I know you are, Joy. Thanks."

All this passed without animosity in the spirit of the group the women belonged to. In general, these were women who encouraged one another to be adventurous and bold and yet were protective of one another.

From Ryan Hall, Mary crossed the Georgetown campus to the graduate library where she had been spending about four hours trying to inform herself on Cuba, not only for her paper but because she felt compelled to understand the situation as thoroughly as possible before traveling to Cuba herself.

In her thorough, methodical manner, Mary had identified, and listed in her notebook, in her neat block letters, nine key points with respect to the history, validity, and status of the current Cuban regime. These nine points, as she noted them, were:

"(1.) The 1959 revolution of Fidel Castro is not the first in Cuban history. Cuba has a history of violent swings between left and right. The repressive government of Gerardo Machado was overthrown in 1924.

Reform government of Ramon Guiterez was overthrown in 1948. Students, workers, labor leaders, politicians, armed forces, all took part in forcing these changes. Fulgenico Batista, leader prior to Castro, took power in coup d'état in 1952.

"(2.) Batista had, in fact, been in power since coup of 1948 (in which he took part). Ruled behind scenes through presidents that he placed in power. (They were "elected" but he controlled them.) Regime was marked by political suppression, wholesale turnover of Cuban resources to foreign investors. Mafia figures (Lucky Luciano) were invited to Havana to open casinos. Cubans themselves owned only 20% of their own land. Cubans with land were wealthy few. Big farms (*latifundia*) were being sold cheap to fake third parties to escape real estate taxes. (Government law was passed against this, however. Gave government the right to buy the cheap farms at the offered price.) Cash crop (sugar, tobacco) profits went to small upper class. Rest of people were poor. Bad health care, schools. (American Sugar claims it assets seized are worth 81 million dollars.)

"(3.) Castro government reacted to Batista excesses by taking over private companies, making them state-controlled. Happened in increments, over five years or so. Started with sugar farms and refineries, then oil refineries, then public utilities (telephone, power), then Cuban-owned businesses. Even small, family-owned shops.

"(4.) Our retaliation: the current economic embargo. No Cuban goods can be sold in America. No American goods (except medicine and some types of food) can be sold in Cuba. Embargo, too, grew in increments (as Cuba 'took' 'American' property.) Now covers all Cuban raw products. Finished goods made anywhere with Cuban materials cannot be sold in U.S.

"(5.) What has Cuba done with all its new resources?" (Mary's notes continued,) "Seems that most funds actually available to expend have gone into improvements in public services. New clinics, new schools. Bringing free health care and free education to common people. New housing, new roads. Prices for utilities have been slashed. Electricity price is 40% of what it was before the revolution, for example.

"(Along with this, according to an article by Herbert Matthews in the *New York Times*, 'there has been the typical leveling down of the whole social and economic structure that accompanies revolutionary "equality." This also means, however, that the poorest and most backward elements, especially in the rural areas, have been "leveled up." Cuban Negroes, for the first time, have equal status with whites, economically and socially.')

"(6.) There have been reports, also, of constraint of free speech. Bad side of the revolution. The government not allowing people to express an adverse opinion. Radio and TV stations, newspapers, repressed or shut

down. (This I do not approve!) The government has declared itself to be socialistic, Communistic. Problems here cloud the whole issue (in my opinion) of whether Castro/Cuba can be defended.

"(7.) As might have been foreseen, many Cubans have fled Cuba for America. Included are people who have been 'leveled down,' such as just described, people who lost material wealth or the economic independence of their small businesses. Exodus of managers, engineers. Sugar and oil industries left without key skills.

"(8.) Due to this and economic embargo, Cuba is in a dire state economically. All foods are rationed. Cuban postage stamps issued lately show apples, bananas,—i.e. glorify production of foods. Even sugar is rationed. Sugar harvest fell to 5.2 million tons two years ago, in 1967. Lowest in past 20 years. Castro has called for national effort to raise this harvest to 10 million tons.

"(9.) Cuba has depended more and more on Communist countries to get by economically. Russia bought 5.5 million tons of sugar this year. Cuba receives and refines Russian crude oil. Second biggest part of Cuban GNP. Sells gasoline back to Soviet block countries."

Mary concluded under this list: "Not a clear case for or against. Not a clear case at all. Cuba has treated its poor and minorities better than we treat ours. But Cuba is becoming repressive. Back against the wall. Fighting for its life."

Beyond her list of nine key points, Mary had been keen to find the voice of the person in the center of the whole situation, Fidel Castro himself. His actual words, at any length, were strangely absent, she thought, from many of the reports about him. She did find a transcript of a speech he had made in connection with an agrarian law that expropriated land from wealthy landowners and distributed it among peasants. She wrote part of the speech out word for word in her notebook.

"What we have done, what we are, what we represent, and what we do, are mainly consequences of the past," Castro was reported as saying. "In fact, anybody in Cuba who thinks about what this country has been up to now, about the destiny which would have been Cuba's destiny if changes were not introduced, if this person who thinks is conscious and honest, she will have to a admit that these measures are absolutely necessary. It was not fair that our country would continue to go toward misery, toward chaos.

"It is not our fault if the nation is what it has been up to now; the mistakes of the past generations are not ours. You do not understand this until you go to the country, until you visit the peasant's houses, until you see shoeless, hungry, sick children who cannot read or write. In spite of all this, you are surprised to see how much kindness remains in the hearts

of our peasants. When you notice those things, you feel the absolute conviction of the justice of the measures we are taking, which are necessary and of benefit for the country."

What was this the voice of a Hitler or Stalin, as she had heard some people saying? It was a reasonable voice, an empathetic voice. The appeal made was to the well-being of the common people.

Why was this voice not heard more in America, in the newspapers and on TV? She suspected at times that there was a cooperative effort on the part of wealthy interests to prevent the possibility of the voice becoming persuasive to common people in America. Surely, someone powerful or some powerful group was involved, powerful enough to cower the media.

In this light, Mary Brandt started to look more specifically into American involvement in Cuban affairs.

She soon learned that American involvement in Cuba went back to the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, in the "Platt Amendment" of 1903, which required for the newly-independent nation of Cuba to give certain guarantees to the United States.

Most germane, thought Mary, was article three of the seven article document. Mary wrote it down: "The Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, for the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the Government of Cuba."

The U.S. had intervened twice during the 31 years of the so-called "Platt Republic," Mary had learned, in 1906 to quell and uprising of sugar cane workers, in 1914 to restore order during a strike of railway workers. Following the mutual termination of the Platt provisions, the U.S. had intervened more subtly, primarily through the covert workings of strong ambassadors, (including one, Sumner Welles, during the FDR years, who had appeared to side more with the leftist side of the government).

Most questionable, thought Mary, were American actions during the Batista regime. Here was a man who had first staged a coup in 1934 to end the suppressive government of Gerardo Marchado,—being regarded then as friend of the people,—but who over the course of several decades had become increasingly corrupted, and this during a time in which he had played a role as a kingmaker of presidents, then as a president himself, then as a dictator, being in all cases the strong man behind the scenes pulling the strings of Cuban society, in particular, with respect to any aspect of the society that generated money. It was Batista (as Mary

understood) who had orchestrated the turnover of key industries to American investors. It was Batista who had invited in Mafia figures to turn Havana into a "little Las Vegas" safe from American law. Always, in these arrangement, there had been payoffs, as Mary understood,—as much as 30 percent of the casino profits, for example. And always the U.S. had held back in involvement, apparently because (again it seemed beyond dispute), American kingpins had been raking in huge profits from their Cuban ventures.

Mary contrasted that, in her thoughts, with the U.S. reaction to Castro. The U.S. had recognized the new Cuba in January, 1959, the first month of Castro's regime. Within 18 months, however, in response to Cuba's nationalization of the Cuban Telephone Company, and trade deals with the Soviet Union, the U.S. had officially banned all sugar purchases in the U.S. and all oil deliveries in Cuba. Succeeding years had brought an incremental polarization, with the U.S. tightening its economic embargo of Cuba and Castro gravitating to the Soviet bloc, leading to the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion and Cuba's complete alienation from America.

Had anyone believed that the U.S. policy would bring Cuba back into line as an American ally? No one had seriously believed that that would happen. The policy from the start, as she saw it, had had a single, clear objective, to safeguard the interests of American big business in Cuba.

Yet, through this period of more than a decade, she noted, there had been groups in America, particularly in the academic arena, who had advised for rapprochement with Cuba.

"Per J. A. Sierra," she wrote in her notes, "resolution published in 1961 (in N.Y. Times) called for more moderated approach toward Cuba. Endorsed by 70 professors and writers. 41 from Harvard. Others from Boston University, M.I.T., Brandeis. Lillian Hellman, David Owen, David Riesman, Noam Chomsky, Timothy Leary, among them. Aim to 'detach Castro regime from Communist bloc,' 'relax diplomatic tensions, resume trade relations,' 'focus more (in other parts of Latin America) on eliminating social conditions on which totalitarian nationalism feeds.'"

Elsewhere, in comments about Cuba, she found others with similar opinions, advising for a more restrained policy toward Cuba.

Returning from school one day on the bus, she thought to herself that she was of this same school, for the time being. There was no need to go further, for the time being.

"Object is let best of Cuban revolution come out," she said to herself, "give them a chance to grow democracy."

Upon forming this attitude, she felt that her present period of research on Cuba was ended.

On this same evening, she found her letter from her sister Ellen in the

mailbox.

"Jimmy did get promoted," Ellen wrote. "And you're right, it did mean,—it does mean,—a great deal to me. It means he isn't totally forgotten. No word on him otherwise, though, I'm sorry to say. I keep waiting to hear something."

[Chapter 207 notes]

208. Morris resorts to his "inner home" as Sam Neua changes

Maj. Jim Morris's first encounter with another American in his time at Sam Neua occurred one morning in early February, 1970, when he found himself positioned for a moment beside an emaciated fellow prisoner. This incident occurred as he and the other prisoner were being moved separately to different locations.

Examining the man's face in the hope of recognizing someone he had known before, Morris recognized him as Bryan Zastrowski, the Air America pilot that he had shared his former prison camp with for just an evening, the man he had thought he had heard screaming.

"You're Zas, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes, yes, I remember you. Morrow?"

"Morris."

"Yes."

Zastrowski was greatly changed in appearance. He had lost his look of jauntiness. He looked spent of spirit, tired to the core. The backs of his arms and thighs were pitted and scarred. His knees, visible through holes in his ragged pants, were swollen like gourds. He held his shoulders stiffly, as though movement of his arms caused pain.

Morris had no need to conjecture where the injuries had originated that he observed on Zastrowski. He had been lashed himself, repeatedly, on his arms and legs, sometimes until skin and flesh had hung from his limbs in shreds. The swollen knees, he knew, were the result of hours of forced kneeling. The stiffness and pain in the shoulders were from having hands that were bound at the wrists pulled up behind the back until the shoulders had begun to twist out of their sockets.

"You think, after they have a go at you once, that's the end of it?" Morris asked, meeting his colleagues eyes once more.

"Yes, that's my sense of it," Zastrowki replied.

"Good times ahead then."

Zastrowski chuckled at that. "Yea. Starvation and darkness."

The guards nearby, seeing the two prisoners enjoying a moment of levity, prodded them away from one another.

"Keep up the good fight," Zastrowski called back as he was being led away.

"Strength to you, too," Morris returned.

Morris's interest in whether the regimen of abuse might end and then start in again had been precipitated by the unexplained cessation of his long ordeal about a week before. The only reason for the cessation, as far as he could tell, was that his tormenters had simply lost interest in him as an object of amusement.

After being separated from Bryan Zastrowski, Morris was led, with his ankles linked together with a chain, up along a hillside where he was

directed to shovel out some dirt that had washed down into a rock-walled aqueduct preventing the downward flow of water.

Looking below to determine where the aqueduct led to, Morris saw thatched roofs between the treetops above a dense undergrowth of foliage. He cast several glances in that direction, as this partial view was his first view of the base buildings. He had previously, for his entire stay at the base, been led around in a blindfold.

His two guards, each of whom had a rifle, seemed too bored with the day's activities to care what Morris looked at.

Later, as Morris was moved to another location, he noticed another prisoner working under armed guard on the side of the hillside above him, about a hundred yards away.

The face he saw drew his keen attention as a recognition took form. This man on the hillside was a second tour pilot that Morris had met upon first arriving in Takhli, a pilot who had gone down in combat and who had been reported as MIA.

"Knowles! Kyle Knowles!" Morris yelled. "God damn anyhow! Thought you were a goner!"

"Not quite! Not quite!"

In response to the shouted communication, one of the guards slammed a rifle butt into Morris's face. The other, close after the first, shoved Morris into a nearby muddy ditch.

That night, as Morris lay in his bed, in the darkness of his cave, his pants still caked with mud and his face throbbing from the welt left by the rifle blow inflicted by the guard, he repeated over and over in his mind the communication he had had with Kyle Knowles: "Thought you were a goner."—"Not quite! Not quite!"

Morris felt an inner joy at that development, but the joy was brief and soon superseded by the prevalent mood of dejection that he had carried with him since his capture by the Pathet Lao on the banks of the Nam Ou River more than a half year before.

Often during this time and especially during his ordeal of torture, Morris, as taught in survival training, had relied on his "inner home" to protect the fragments of hope, and belief in the inherent meaning of life, that he still retained.

For Morris, the inner home was built upon a foundation of people. Most central of these people was his wife Ellen, for whom he still had an intense romantic affection. Though he and Ellen had been married for more than a year and a half, he had been with her physically for less than four months in total. Also fundamental in Morris's inner home were his mother and father. His mother, as far as he knew, was still alive and battling with cancer. His father was a memory, as for Morris he had always been, with the addressable presence Morris had given to that

memory as a boy. Tom Pitt, Morris's fallen comrade-in-arms and former best friend, was there, also, in his mind, among those he held dear.

Upon his foundation of people, Jim Morris had placed a construct of ideas and ideals. He had done this on the basis that these were ideas and ideals that would provide him with a moral and philosophical mooring when he was under duress. Paramount among these ideas and ideals was the idea of America as a beacon and defender of democracy and justice in the world and the ideal of his service to America as a soldier. Closely related was the concept of manly strength and sacrifice that he associated with his forbears of the Oregon Trail. Morris had consciously placed this in his inner home.

Sometimes, to regain his inner home, Morris determinedly recalled the day when he and Ellen, in the heady first days of their romance, had stopped at Scotts Bluff, Nebraska. He remembered climbing up to the top of the bluff and looking out from there to the dreamlike landmarks of the Oregon Trail, floating in the sunlit haze in the expanse opening westward below him. He remembered seeing the white streams of the planes overhead and talking to his dad about that, as he had talked to his dad about the many events that had happened since then in his tour as a combat pilot. He remembered feeling that his dad had almost talked back to him, and he remembered how Ellen had looked at him with such a bright welcome when he had returned from his walk, her chestnut hair gleaming in the sunlight, her green eyes sparkling with joy of life.

How many times, Morris asked himself, in the midst of his ordeal of torture or in the loneliness and darkness of his solitary confinement, had he evoked this memory of Scotts Bluff to regain his inner home? At least once a day he had had recourse to it. It had been a portal through which he had connected with the other parts of his inner home.

Still, Morris was keenly aware that often, after connecting like this with his inner home, the prevalent mood of dejection, sometimes close to despair, had returned. There was something deep and unassailable about the mood of dejection. He was aware of it as a growing menace inside him. In a conscious effort at self-defense, he had identified the elements of the mood of dejection. He had come to recognize that the elements were not only present in his current dire situation, but went back further in his past. The elements of the mood of dejection went back to Tom Pitt's death and the conversations between himself and Pitt in settings such as their old haunt, the Vue en Rue restaurant in Takhli. Such conversations, Morris knew, had led to the strongly resisted but persistent thoughts of the ultimate senselessness of the war in which he and Pitt had had been engaged. These thoughts had contributed to his mood of dejection, Morris acknowledged to himself. He had tried to argue against these thoughts in his mind. Often, though, he had argued against them

with little change in his true assessment of the war, and with little result in countering the mood of dejection. Along with this, troubling memories that had bothered Morris in his bygone days had returned, to be reprised in the manner of motives: the frantic faces of the women and children he had killed in his collateral damage incident of some nine months before; the television image he had seen, at the time of the Tet Offensive, of the wounded marine in Khe Sahn with the blood streaming down his neck; the killing of the pig he had seen from the church rooftop in Puerto Penasco on his trip to Mexico with Ellie before he had gone overseas.

Morris had often had another odd feeling, also, as he had lain in the dark in his cave,—in the long days of random, unpredictable torture when he had not even known the time of day,—a visceral feeling of being in the cockpit of his plane, with the plane in an arcing motion in which the centrifugal force of the motion created a sensation of being slung to one side. It was a feeling he had often felt in the height of combat, as he had banked toward a target, his shoulder jammed into one side of the cramped cockpit, his head askew to watch over the nose of the plane toward the rapidly changing perceptual field in front of him,—only this feeling, experienced in the cave, had lasted much longer than the original feeling, experienced in the plane. Who could say how long this feeling of being slung to one side had lasted in the clockless darkness of his isolation? Sometimes it had seemed to last for ten or fifteen minutes or maybe even a half hour. In the midst of it, the old images had assaulted Morris, his inner home mixing with images of the war,—himself killing, people being killed, Pitt being killed, villages and people going up in flames below him,—images that were not part of his inner home, and that lessened its effect.

Still, in the main, the inner home had served him well, Morris knew. It had been much like a real home in his conception, an enclosure he could go into, and in which, at times, as in a physical home, he could shut himself off from the world outside.

For the present, though, Morris decided, the inner home could be put aside as each new day brought a bit more of the mysterious change in venue, with outdoor work replacing isolation and torture.

Gradually, as the outdoor days continued, Morris pieced together a picture of the camp at large.

He was in a narrow valley, he saw, about a mile long (before it bent out of view), with a stream in the middle of the valley and steep, forested slopes leading up on both sides. Limestone karsts, of the type now familiar to him from his previous experience of the rugged mountain country, protruded from the trees, forming jagged bluffs and knifelike upcrops of stone.

In the midst of the valley, next to the stream, ran a rutted dirt road,

and that road, Morris saw, led to the scene that his former fellow prisoner, Maj. Ellwood Erland, had described to him four months before, a temple-like cluster of buildings, located on the side of the slopes in a clearing in the dense trees. Apparently, as the major had supposed, it was, in fact, a monastery that the soldiers had taken over.

Morris, when he first saw the place in daylight, recalled his first sight of the shadowy shapes of the same buildings in darkness on the night he had arrived. He recalled that, upon seeing those buildings, Erland's words of warning had come to his mind: "You find yourself at that place, prepare your mind, because it has one purpose, torture." He remembered hearing agonized sounds in the distance, as of an animal being wounded in a fight, and he remembered recognizing in those sounds the characteristic high, nasal qualities of Bryan Zastrowski's voice. That had been the harbinger of the nightmarish events that had followed.

Morris had been keen, also, on his new outdoor days, to observe and mentally catalog his fellow prisoners, whom he saw from time to time now, though always from a distance. In eight days of looking, he had identified 11 people, including Zastrowski and Knowlan. They all appeared to be the expected age for men in the service, generally in their 30's or 40's. They had gaunt figures, downcast faces, with hair shorn and thin to the point of baldness and prematurely gray. Morris recognized no one other than one sorry fellow with an absent gaze who he thought was maybe a pilot from Udon Thani that he had met in the rare social event that had brought men from the different bases together. If the man in question was that pilot, thought Morris, the months of captivity had taken their toll, for only the look of the close-set eyes conveyed the resemblance in the ravaged face that Morris had observed from a distance.

Days later, as Morris continued in his outdoor work (during which, despite his new mobility, he often felt weighted down with his continuing despondency), he was prodded by two guards into a scene that he would have found unbelievable a few weeks before: there, in an enclosed square before the temple-like buildings of the camp, in a proximity that made possible recognition and communication, were seven of the men Morris had identified in the previous week, plus two others he hadn't yet seen. These last two appeared too weak to do physical work. They seemed to be exhausted from the mere act of standing upright.

As Morris approached the group of his fellow prisoners of war, they greeted him with silent nods, and a few with thumbs up gestures. Knowland and Zastrowski grinned.

Morris noticed another feature of interest, also. Above the central building flew a red flag with a large white star, and below the flag stood four soldiers wearing the visored caps of officers and dressed in uniforms

consisting of dark gray pants and light gray tunics with white epaulets. Morris recognized the flag and uniforms as those of North Vietnam.

Soon later, four other men were separately prodded into the square under guard. They were the four others that Morris had identified in the previous week.

At first, none of the men spoke as they stood in rough formation, then exchanges of name and origin passed back and forth, and assessments of the scene before them.

"Looks like a change of command."

"You think so?"

"The Pathet are still here. I've seen them."

"They've pulled back a little."

"They'll be back, mind you."

One of the four Vietnamese stood out from the others in having a prouder, nobler bearing. He was an officer, judging from the insignias on his cap and shoulders.

As soon as the prisoners were assembled, the officer with the noble bearing came forward and spoke to the group in what to Morris seemed not only impeccable English but also English with a perfect American, Middle Western accent.

The officer said that the camp had come under control of the North Vietnamese army and the character of the base would change at once. "You have learned the hard lesson of physical persuasion," he said. "We will try to persuade your mind."

"Propaganda!" said one of the soldiers.

"Indoctrination!"

In the next few days, Morris thought a great deal about what this would mean. An assault on his mind, in his present, dejected state, seemed a greater threat to his well-being than a further assault on his body. He began at once to determine how he would defend against the onslaught of a subtle logic such as he had heard might be employed.

Several mornings later, instead of being led out to work, the major was brought to one of the buildings in the center of the camp,—in fact, to the very building that the officer had been standing in front of, where the North Vietnamese flag had been flying, and still was.

Morris was brought inside under armed guard and was led to a table where his legs were shackled from the metal rings on his ankles to rings on the floor. The officer that had spoke a few days before then came into the room from a interior door, dressed neatly in the dark gray pants and light gray tunic that Morris had recognized earlier as the uniform of North Vietnam.

[Chapter 208 notes]

209. Morris listens as Xuan Than talks about "contention" and "egalitarianism"

"Good morning, sir," the officer began as he stood in the room like a professor before a class, at about that distance from Morris. "You are starting today a series of meetings that will take place in the next few weeks. The purpose of these meetings, major, is, in the spirit of our being fellow soldiers, to explain to you the rationale for the war from the perspective of the Vietnamese people."

Morris, seated at a table with his ankle irons chained to rings on the floor, reminded himself that, as a prisoner of war, he was required to give only minimal information about himself. Also, per the U.S. Military Code of Conduct, he was to avoid participation of any kind. He could not help but listen, however, and he noted at once that the enemy officer had addressed him as "major."

"I am James Ernest Morris, Captain, US Air Force," he corrected. "ID number 3223."

"Ah, see, I know some things you don't know!" the North Vietnamese officer replied with a courteous nod. "For example, I know, sir, that you were recently promoted, and that is why I call you 'major.' We have our ways of knowing such things!"

If he had indeed been promoted, Morris thought, then he was regarded as "missing in action" (rather than dead). That was a matter of importance to him, in connection with Ellen.

"And I know, sir, that you are determined not to participate in this exercise," the officer went on. "I want to assure you at the outset, you will be treated corresponding to the Geneva Convention. You will not be coerced or mistreated in any way."

Morris made no response to this comment.

"I know some other things about you," the officer went on. "I know you are from Minnesota. I know you attended the University of Minnesota and were enrolled there in Air Force ROTC."

Again, Morris made no response, though he quite surprised that the officer knew this information.

"I am familiar with the scene to some extent, Maj. Morris. I was a student at a Big Ten university myself, a foreign exchange student, sent through a family contact in South Vietnam. I attended four years at Northwestern. I'm sure you're aware of it, in Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. I was there from 1958 to 1962."

Morris said nothing but his mind took cognizance of these presented facts, placing the officer as several years older than himself,—if his word could be trusted. Four years in the States. That was the explanation for the perfect English.

"Maj. Morris, let me introduce myself," the officer went on. "I am a

major also. I am Maj. Xuan Than of the People's Army of Vietnam. I am a veteran of combat, also, though not in an airplane. I joined the Army in summer of 1964, and I have been a continuous soldier since then. Until three months ago until I was relieved of combat duties and placed in my current assignment."

Morris was tempted to say, "And just what exactly is your current assignment?" But he did not speak.

Maj. Xuan Than paused at this point and walked across to the window where some potted red flowers sat on the window sill in the sunlight. He touched them with his hand.

"But we began with Evanston," he said, "my American experience. I don't know if you've ever been there, major. It is a beautiful campus on the shore of Lake Michigan. And, in the neighborhood at the edge of campus there, where all the professors live, are many big, beautiful houses set in trees. I remember going at times on the 'L'—the elevated train they have there—from the campus downtown, to what they call the 'Loop,' and noting, along the way, the many, much humbler places where people lived in that same city. And I noticed there, also, I think this is the right word: contention. Contention for a place to live, with homeless people passing between those buildings of so many kinds, some of them so elegant, some of them so shabby. Contention for money. Contention for food. I remember being in a restaurant one time,—a "deli" as you call it,—and a young man came in, and he had some potato chips in a bag, the little bags you can buy, and he was pouring the red stuff,—"ketchup," I think you call it,—into the bag, and mixing it around with a spoon. I laughed at that... But I was with someone else, a good person, and she shook her head at me and told me the reason he was doing that, he was a hungry person off the street and he had come in and found the potato chips and he was trying to make a meal out of them. He was eating them like a hungry dog, with no regard for who was watching him. Contention, contention, while always in the distance are your marvelous sculptures of buildings that remind you how rich and powerful America is, how rich and powerful some people in America are.

"Then came the war, war against my own people,—I had always been in sympathy with the Viet Minh cause, as I will explain later, in another meeting, in more detail. And I went home, Maj. Morris, much as your own people go into the Peace Corps or into something like the Green Berets, I went home to place myself in the service of my people."

Here the North Vietnamese major paused as he turned from the window and returned to his previous position in front of Morris. "I was eager to see, Maj. Morris, upon returning to my own country, how my experience of Chicago would play against the situation in our own city, Hanoi," he said with a thoughtful glance. "When I got back, I trained in

Hanoi for several months, in 1964."

Jim Morris, despite himself, had found the comments intriguing that the enemy officer had made. He looked at the person before him. The face was resolute, the eyes intelligent without a hint of arrogance. The lean figure gave an impression of self-discipline.

"What I found in Hanoi," Maj. Xuan Than continued, "were many fine houses, also. And there, too, there is a story. These houses are mainly in an area of the city by a wide, tree-lined boulevard that the French built for themselves, the Phan Dinh Phung, we call it, a Champs-Élysées in Hanoi. In this area, the French had a city within a city, complete with their monumental buildings,—the Grand Opera House, the Cathédrale St- Joseph, the Hotel Sofitel Metropole, the Presidential Palace... and, of course, another important building, a monumental bank...the Bank of 'Indochina,' as the French called it."

Maj. Than paused and returned to the window, from which he looked out to the scene below. Morris could not see the view himself, but he knew the parade grounds were below the building and, beyond that, the banks of the creek that ran through the valley and the steep slope of the mountain that rose up on the other side.

"Later, in battle, in hills such as these we have here, I thought at times of those grand buildings and how they contrasted with the little country villages where my people often lived. And, many times, when I was at times in various parts of Hanoi, I noticed other places where my people lived, so humble compared to the houses the French had built for themselves and their families.

"I had the honor one time, also, to visit the Presidential Palace, for reception of an award there from our esteemed leader, Ho Chi Minh. And I must tell you, I learned firsthand then what I had heard, that Ho Chi Minh did not live in the palace itself, though he was entitled to live there. He lived behind the palace in a simple house on a pond, a house built on stilts, as are many of the houses along rivers in Vietnam. It was not just a show, as you may be thinking; he really lived in this house, rejecting the comforts he could have easily obtained. And when he came forward to give us the award, he was dressed in a simple gray tunic such as the common people wear."

Maj. Than looked back from the window to the prisoner seated at the table. "I have thought about this in particular in these past few months because of the recent death of Ho Chi Minh. You most likely have not even heard about his death. He died on September 23..."

Morris wanted to say, "And what is the date now exactly?" But he kept his silence while Xuan Than continued.

"Why did Ho Chi Minh live in this manner? I have often asked myself this question. And I think I understand now why he did this. He

did it to show the rest of us how to end contention—by living simply as a common person, by not taking too much for himself."

Morris had maintained his silence throughout this presentation but he had followed with interest the sequence of ideas.

"I know you have a quite different impression of Ho Chi Minh," Maj. Than said, as if reading Morris's thoughts. "You think he was a Hitler or a Stalin. But, in reality, he was a humble man who gave his whole life to building a free, socialist Vietnam. When he addressed us, he spoke in a soft, gentle voice. He was in no sense a tyrant."

Morris saw at this point that Maj. Than had taken up a piece of paper from a small table in the corner of the room where he had placed various materials at the beginning of the meeting.

"With your permission, major, I would like to read you some of Ho Chi Minh's writings, to give you a sense of the man, and, through him, a sense of our revolution."

Morris arched back in the chair at that, thinking he was in for a lecture of a kind he had hated in college. His upper back ached, up beneath the shoulder blades and in the core of his shoulder joints, from his hands being yanked up behind his back weeks before. His face was still throbbing from where the rifle butt had hit him. Likely he had an infection there, in the wound. He had not been able to look at his own reflection to determine the extent of the damage. He moved his legs within the circle the chains on his ankles permitted. His knees were swollen from forced kneeling. That, too, was from weeks in the past, before Maj. Than had arrived with this strange, new face of benevolent socialism.

"You think, for example, that Ho Chi Minh was against democracy, that he wanted the Communist party to run the government without any opinion from the people?

"Well, that is not the truth at all! He was eager for all the people to learn to read and write so as to participate in government. Here is what he said in connection with that:

"'If you want our nation to grow strong and our country prosperous,'" the major read, "'every one of you must know his rights and duties. He must possess knowledge so as to be able to participate in the building of the country. First of all he must learn to read and write quoc ngu'—'Quoc ngu' is our written language. —'Let the literates teach the illiterates; let them take part in education. Let them study hard.

"'The husband will teach his wife, the elder brother his junior, the children their parents, the master his servants; the rich will open classes for illiterates in their own houses. The women should study even harder for up to now many obstacles have stood in their way. It is time now for them to catch up with the men and be worthy of their status of citizens

with full electoral rights.'"

Maj. Than paused and looked at Morris. "As you can see by this, Ho wanted women to participate fully, also. We in Vietnam have for centuries included women in our highest offices."

Again Maj. Than looked to the table and he found something else and read it. It was a statement by Ho Chi Minh at the end of World War II when the Vietnamese declared themselves an independent nation. The statement began with the words: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

There was then an acknowledgement of the obvious connection, the major said. He continued reading from the statement:

"'This immortal statement appeared in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, it means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth; all the peoples have a right to live and to be happy and free.

"'The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, made at the time of the French Revolution, in 1791, also states: "All men are born free and with equal rights.

"Those are undeniable truths.

"'Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

"'Politically, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.'"

Other readings followed as the enemy officer, in the tedious manner of a Thomistic philosopher, laid out various details to elucidate the point of view of the Vietnamese party. But he saved his strongest effort for a part of his presentation when he laid out the party's position with respect to the theme of "contention" with which he had started the present meeting. As he explained it, the party had a primary mission of ensuring social justice.

Again the major read from Ho Chi Minh, emphasizing that Ho Chi Minh had stood for various principles that he had tried to explain to his cadres.

"'Ours is a Party in power,'" the major read. "'Each Party member, each cadre must be deeply imbued with revolutionary morality, and show industry, thrift, integrity, uprightness, total dedication to the public interest and complete selflessness.'"

The point being made here, Maj. Xuan Than pronounced, was the same point that Ho had made by living in his simple house instead of a palace. The point was that the cadres should exercise "industry" and

“thrift” not for self-aggrandizement but out of “complete selflessness,”—to advance the common good. The point was that resources and goods should be shared among all the people.

Someone knocked lightly at the door at this juncture, the door opened without any word from Maj. Than, and the guard entered who had brought Morris to the session.

The meeting was coming to an end, Morris thought to himself. He noted that the enemy officer, continuing in his professorial mode, had paused for a moment as if to direct all that he had said so far in the meeting into a summary statement.

“‘Egalitarianism’ is the word we use for it,” Maj. Than went on. “And what is the meaning of this big word that is so easily tossed around? Egalitarian, of course, means something like ‘everyone is equal,’ and that is true. But here is an essential point. By egalitarian, we mean not just equal in concept, not just equal in potential, not just equal in ability to speak freely, not just equal in these immaterial things...” He walked to the window. “Not just equal in these immaterial things. We mean equal,—actually equal,—in access to material things, also. Food, shelter, health care are among these. Agricultural land. Anyone who has grown up poor and hungry, seeing others welling in luxury, knows the meaning of this principle.”

Maj. Xuan Than turned from the window and crossed the room toward Morris again, his face animated with emotion.

“I cannot stress this too much, my fellow soldier! Socialism, egalitarianism, mean actually equal in material things!”

[Chapter 209 notes]

210. Xuan Than describes the "French War" and the "American War"

"Maj. James Morris, I realize you are a man of integrity, you are patriotic and loyal, and I assume, being a fighter pilot, you are brave, as are nearly all men who take up this duty."

In this manner, Maj. Xuan Than of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam began his second meeting with Morris, and, as the captured airman would soon learn, thus also began a series of meetings that would all have to do with the history of Vietnam and the various wars that had involved the Vietnamese people, going back to ancient times, though the emphasis fell on the two wars that the enemy officer said were known by his people as the "French War" and the "American War."

This chronological structure for the topics of the future meetings became quite clear soon after the start of the second meeting when Maj. Xuan Than, continuing in his professorial mode, presented the structure like a class syllabus. Before he did that, however, he completed his oddly knightlike appeal to Morris's soldierly ideals.

"You have come here from your own country, Maj. Morris, with the best of intentions," he said. "You have shown your conviction in how you have endured your treatment here.

"I want you to know, sir, by the way, your treatment was entirely the work of the Pathet Lao and not of the Vietnamese army. As you and I both know, however, the Vietnamese army has also mistreated prisoners of war. There are many people, good people and bad people, in our army, as in your army. I myself have been against mistreatment of prisoners the whole time I have been in the service, but I have seen it done. Those days are over, I can assure you.

"In any case, as I say, you have shown your conviction in not giving in to the mistreatment. You have gained the respect of the Pathet Lao. I have heard this myself from one of their men. And, as a soldier, a pilot, you have flown almost a hundred missions, in each of which, of course, you risked your life.

"You are known as an excellent pilot, I must say. You are credited with shooting down one of our MiGs.

"There are many people in your country who are cynical and filled with greed. They talk of bringing democracy to Vietnam,—democracy and freedom are the key words. But their real interest, major, is in securing my country's resources. I do not think, however, that you are one of these cynical people. You are a good soldier such as we would be honored to have in our own army.

"So I know in speaking to you I need only to speak truly regarding social justice, I need only to make the truth known to you as truth, and that is all you will need to see the legitimacy of our cause."

With this appeal thus completed, the enemy officer went on to the overview of structure already mentioned.

"Maj. Morris, our nationhood, our wars on behalf of our nationhood, did not begin just 200 years ago, as is the case with your country," Xuan Than began, "though, please forgive me, sir, I don't mean to disparage your own nation. I merely mean to emphasize the longevity of our own struggle. Our nation, our struggle, began more than 2000 years ago, when a Chinese warlord, Trieu Da, conquered my people and set up a country, Nam Viet. We fought against him then, and we have fought many wars since against people who have tried to make us their servants."

Morris, on hearing this, remembered a letter he had received months before from his former teammate, Tom Steward. Morris had asked Steward for his take on the war, and Steward had replied, in his annoying way, with a long list of facts, one of which had been this fact that the history of Vietnam went back to pre-Christian times. As presented by Xuan Than, however, the fact had an added vividness.

The image that came to Morris's mind, as the enemy officer went on, was of a vague form that rose and sank in the sea of time over the course of centuries, indeed, of all the centuries from the time of Christ to the modern era. The form was Vietnam. Each time it sank, after a struggle to remain afloat, another form arose, an elaborate, embellished form. That form was China. Vietnam had created itself out of its collective will to not just be a part of China, but to retain instead its own unique language and culture. The heroes of Vietnam, as Xuan Than portrayed them, had been soldiers in this effort.

To certain facts, Xuan Than gave a more impassioned expression. For example, he pointed out that some of the most important events in the history of Vietnam had occurred under the leadership of women. Trung Trac, Trung Nhi, and Phung Thi Chinh were among names he mentioned. There was also a warrior named Trieu Au.

"Our Joan of Arc," Xuan Than remarked. "She said, 'I want to sweep the whole country to save the people from slavery.'"

These facts had not been among those that Morris had learned of in the letter from his former rowing teammate, though Steward had discovered them himself in his self-study in the fall of 1968 before submitting his claim to be a war-selective conscientious objector.

"When I was a student in Evanston," Xuan Than continued, "I knew American women, fellow students, who were frustrated because they felt it was impossible for a woman to be independent and make a mark in American society. This was in late '50's, of course. A different time, I know. But we have had independent women in Vietnam, women who have made a mark, for hundreds of years. And I can tell you about one of them, a friend of mine named Mai Thi Li. She studied in Evanston, also,

and returned to Vietnam, about the same time I did, to attend medical school in Hanoi. Then, four years ago, she went off to be a combat physician. She has been one ever since, living in harsh conditions, sacrificing her personal life for our soldiers."

Maj. Xuan Than's lean face became suffused with emotion as he spoke about this. Seeming embarrassed by that, he crossed the room to the window and looked out without speaking.

"My mother, Xuan Julin, was on the anti-aircraft guns in Hanoi," he said, turning back toward Morris, "Of course, so were many, many ordinary people. But my mother was a soldier. She was a soldier for many years of her life."

That information ended the first of the three meetings on the war history of Vietnam. The second meeting began with another fact of Xuan Than's personal history.

"I mentioned my mother at our last meeting," he said. "This meeting I will mention my father. My father, Xuan Han, was a soldier, too. He died in our glorious battle at Dien Bien Phu."

Morris calculated in his mind how old Xuan Than would have been at that time. He had been, he figured, about 14 years old.

"Dien Bien Phu, as you probably already know, Maj. Morris, was the final battle of the war I will speak about today," Xuan Than went on. "We call it the 'French War,' as I told you at a previous meeting.

"I studied some of your own history when I was a student in your country, sir, and I remember reading about how your partisans, before the Battle of Bunker Hill,—in Boston, in your Revolutionary War,—brought cannons all the way across New England from Fort Ticonderoga. In winter, along frozen roads. By doing so, you surprised the British and defeated them when they attacked. We performed a similar feat at Dien Bien Phu. We brought our cannons all the way across Vietnam from the Red River Valley. Three hundred miles through our rugged mountains. Not pulling them with trucks, but, as your people did often, pulling them by hand. Barefoot soldiers did that, pulling the cannons with ropes.

"We heard that the French commander, at that battle, Col. Christian de Castries, said to his general, 'Au revoir, mon general, au revoir.' He knew he was defeated when he discovered that our cannons were situated all around his forces in the lows hills that surround Dien Bien Phu. It was a great victory for the Vietnamese people."

Maj. Xuan Than paused and gazed for a moment directly at Morris, looking, as always, proud and erect in his crisp uniform of dark gray pants and light gray tunic, the neatly polished insignias of his rank glinting with light from the white epaulets on his shoulders.

"The French governor of Vietnam, Paul Lasougne,—later to be the president of France,—once said, 'the Annanites are ripe for servitude.'

He said that, sir, in 1887, when the French first established their colony of Indochina. It took us 67 years to prove him wrong. That was the length of the 'French War,' really. Our resistance against the French began even earlier even than the colony of Indochina, in fact. Not long after the French established a base in Hanoi, at the time of your American Civil War, we began our attacks. Guerilla attacks. Groups of soldiers hardly even organized into an army. A spontaneous eruption of anger at their presence in our country.

"Think of it, Major Morris, all of that time when, in America, you had your Civil War, your 'Reconstruction,' your expanse into the American West, your war with Spain, in Cuba, through the years of World War I, the Roaring Twenties, the Depression,—I know all your historical names of your various periods,—through the years of World War II, your war in Korea... all of that time, our patriots here, five or six generations of father and son, mother and daughter in uniform, were fighting for the independence of Vietnam!"

Xuan Than walked to window, paused for a moment with his hand on the red flowers, and turned back into the room again.

"As we do now, major, as we do now!" Morris made no reply.

"Our success in the French War, Major Morris, was in part due to our great leader, Vo Nguyen Diap," Xuan Than continued. "For the first time, he brought to the war something France had not seen in their other colonies, division sized units that were capable of meeting the French in a conventional battle. Vo Nguyen Diap combined that with our traditional practice of fighting and then fading into the countryside,—disappearing from the perspective of the French. We were able to do that, raise armies by a mere call to duty, forming units out of men who would then be let go, only to return again, sometimes bringing others with them, because the soldiers, and the common people who supported them in the villages, believed so strongly in our common cause.

"After World War II, when the French tried to regain control of the North, our area known historically as Tonkin, they set up a cordon of six garrisons between Cao Ban and Lang Son, along the road that runs along the border between Vietnam and China. The purpose of the line was to stop the influx of Chinese weapons. It was called the Lattre Line after the man who devised it, their Gen. Jean de Lattre de Tassigny. Lattre trusted that the garrisons, with 10,000 men between them that could be moved back and forth as needed, would be impregnable to the guerilla-level strikes he expected. But our general Giap mobilized a force of eight battalions to assault one French battalion at one of the garrisons, Dong Khe. And Dong Khe fell in two days. Later that same year, at Vinh Yen and Mao Khe, with a force of 22,000, Giap failed. We learned in that campaign, however, that we could mobilize such large forces at will.

"At Dien Bien Phu, three years later, on 20 November 1953, when the French paratroopers dropped in to defend their main garrison, our 148th Infantry Regiment was driven out from the attack we had started. But we returned with our 308th and 312th Divisions on 13 March 1954. That same day, we took their outpost at Him Lam, the outpost they called Beatrice. Within the next four days, we took their outpost at Doc Lap that they called Gabrielle, then the outpost at Ban Keo that they called Anne-Marie. We took their airport, too, at Ban Kho Lai. With all their outposts gone, their airport shut down, and our cannons, our howitzers, brought in, as I told you, from the Red River Valley, through a mountain range with ridges of 8000 feet above sea level, the French were surrounded and isolated and no longer capable of being supplied by air. They were dug in, in bunkers. We dug tunnels to approach them. On 1 May we began our final assault. By 7 May the French general had surrendered.

"For us, it was a costly victory. The French lost 2000 men. We lost 8000. My father was among them, as I told you. But we captured 10,000 men. Within two years, the Geneva Conference established our territory north of the 17th Parallel. That was before the promise was reneged on for national elections. That was before the 'Association of Vietnam,' south of the 17th Parallel, was established under Bao Dai, where the old Colonial structure was preserved."

Thus ended the second of the three meetings on the war history of Vietnam. The third meeting started on the same item of information on which the previous meeting had ended.

"Bao Dai was a monarchist, as you may know," Xuan Than began. "He was last of a royal family that had ruled that area, our historical Annan, since 1802, last descendant of Nguyen Anh, who had called himself Emperor Gia Long and whose descendants, up to Bao Dai, had been supported by the French. No matter that Bao Dai, who had already abdicated once, in 1945, had no real interest in the well-being of Vietnam, no matter that his successors, non-royals of the same family, Nguyen Diem and his brother Nguyen Nhu, had no real interest in it, either. These men were placed by you Americans in control of South Vietnam as mere puppets, while your key words of democracy and freedom and the mechanics of democracy were raised up as a smokescreen to mask the underlying purpose. And that, again, sir, was none other than to maintain an economic climate in which your large corporations could secure our national resources. The appearance, the mechanics could not fool the people, however. Our people were organizing in the South as what Nguyen Diem called the 'Viet Cong,' the 'Vietnamese Communists.' But the Viet Cong are simply our common people united to fight for real democracy, real freedom.

"I was a student in Chicago when all of this was happening, in the

years after our victory at Dien Bien Phu. The Viet Cong were fighting in the South. In the North, we had our own state. We had peace for the first time since World War II. Letters I received from my mother told me of how people in the countryside were being taught to read. I wanted to be part of that effort. I was told this was the best thing I could do. We did not, at that time, need more soldiers.

"I did become a teacher when I returned in 1963. I spent a year teaching third grade students. But in summer of 1964 the American bombers came. We moved the school, and the children, too, to the countryside where they would be safe. I, for a while, continued living in Hanoi, bicycling the ten miles each day between the two locations. Coming from the school in late afternoon, I would see your bombers in the sky. I would see your bombs falling.

"We thought the bombing would be temporary. I was told I was doing my best service to my country by remaining as a teacher. When the bombing continued, however, I volunteered to be a soldier. I was sent to officer school, to be an infantry officer, as I have been ever since. I learned how to use the AK-47, antitank weapons, hand grenades, bayonets. I had to learn to be tough and to be calm in battle. Many battles have happened since then. I have fought in many battles, major."

Following from this personal introduction, Maj. Xuan Than went on to talk in more general details about the war in the North. To Morris, by this point, he seemed to be talking not from a professorly or propaganda perspective, but merely as one soldier to another. Morris found himself listening on that level, also, even as he cautioned himself that Xuan Than was indeed acting in a manner utterly unexpected for an officer such as he was in the current situation, and that maybe Xuan Than had a hidden object of subtle persuasion, brain-washing of some kind. For this reason Morris still never spoke, but his posture, as he listened, was more relaxed. Since the previous meeting, his ankles, during the sessions, had not been chained.

"In face of your superior American firepower, what could we do?" the enemy officer said. "You have weapons such as men, even of the World War II era, could not have imagined! We could move not our supplies to the South by sea because of your superior naval forces, so we developed our

'Ho Chi Minh Trail,' as you call it. We could not meet your forces head on, with your Patton tanks, so we learned to use what you call in your Westerns, 'the ambush.'

"And consider this, Maj. Morris: You Americans come here to fight, and fight bravely, as you have, but you go home and the war is far away, the war is forgotten. We go home and the war is in our home. Imagine if you were fighting this war in Minnesota. Imagine if the bombs were

falling on Minneapolis. Imagine if your brothers and cousins had died in this war, as mine have. This is why America cannot win, major, because we are not just going off to war. Vietnam is our country."

[Chapter 210 notes]

211. Morris accepts refreshments at his last meeting with Xuan Than

At his fifth session with Maj. Xuan Than, on a beautiful morning when sunlight flooded the cabin-like room, Maj. James Morris reached for one of the wavers that had been placed in front of him.

The enemy officer, upon seeing that, came across the room and, with a bow, poured Morris a cup of steaming green tea from the silver server in the center of the table.

Only after this interaction had been completed did Morris realize what had occurred. He thought at that point of pushing the waver and tea away from himself. But what was the point of it? There was nothing in the protocol of prisoners of war that prevented him from eating a waver and drinking tea. And, the truth of the matter was, he had come to like and respect the intense, earnest man who each day was propounding to him on the validity of the socialist cause.

Except for his gesture of a bow, Maj. Xuan Than made no reference to Morris's participation. He seemed to understand that Morris had slipped, and he gave the impression that he was sympathetic to that slip and not in any way contemptuous of Morris, either for holding out, until this point, or for giving in. In this way, Xuan Than gave the impression that he had changed, also, in the course of the meetings, from formal courtesy to a more sympathetic regard for Morris's condition. But this change was as subtle and unspoken as Morris's own change.

Meanwhile, the meetings went on to a new section of three meetings that the enemy officer said would cover: first, the damage caused by the war; second, the attempts of his government to recover from the damage; and third, the projected goals of his people after the war.

Maj. Xuan Than expanded on the first subject, the damage caused by the war, in great detail.

"You cannot understand our struggle," he said, "until you understand what this war has done to my people.

"I have heard, for example,—are you aware of this, Maj. Morris?—the United States has dropped on Vietnam three times as many bombs, in total weight, as the United States and Britain dropped on Germany in World War II. More bombs in total weight, and, of course, per pound, your modern bombs are more destructive than bombs of that era.

"Then, your chemical agents dropped on our jungles to clear them of foliage where soldiers can hide. These are horrible chemicals that cause innocent people to get sick and children to cough and get rashes. What kind of government does this?"

There were many details of this kind.

Xuan Than also read from letters of his doctor friend, Mai Thi Li, which he said he had translated into English the night before. The letters

conveyed a generous, hopeful idealism, such as young women sometimes have as almost an intrinsic part of their being.

"We are camping now in a jungle near Mount Liang Biang, and I woke to see, in the morning sunlight, just outside our tent, a little yellow-bellied bird with bluish green wings, a golden throat, and a bright red head. Someone said it was a 'golden throated barbet.' Such a beautiful sight! Then the bombing started, hollow booms in the distance, and soon they were bringing our soldiers in. A young man, he must have been still in his teens, was brought in with one leg nearly blown away. He asked me if he would be all right, pleading with his young eyes. I could see right away that he had lost too much blood through the leg. It was a matter of minutes. He died in my arms."

In another letter that the enemy officer read, Mai Thi Li told of an encounter that she had had with American B-52 bombers when returning from a clinic in a rural village.

"We were in an open valley where a road runs through that the army trucks use. My first hint of the planes was a distant, rumbling sound like thunder. Then we saw them coming in the distance, flying high in the sky, above the scattered clouds. As they came above us, they started dropping bombs. The bombs came in a continuous stream, each plane dropping one bomb every few seconds. From where we were, looking up, the bombs looked like a curtain of dark shapes, like a falling roof, 200 meters wide. I was with my aide, Nguyen Julu, a young pretty woman. In a panic, we looked for a place to hide. I directed her to a cavelike crevice below a shelf of rock. Seeing there was room there for her only, I ran across to another crevice about 50 meters away. By the time I reached it, the bombs were exploding all around us. I prepared myself to die. But none of the bombs hit the shelf where I had hid. Julu was killed. Parts of her body were strewn all around. Later I saw that children had been killed in a nearby village. Their mothers were weeping for them when I passed."

Maj. Xuan Than said that Mai Thi Li had several times come across villagers killed by American forces. In one case, the killings included women and children and without doubt had been deliberate.

"This was in March of 1968," he said, "about two months after the Tet Offensive. It happened in a village called Song My in the Quang Ngai Province in South Vietnam. The people killed were not soldiers. They were not uniformed and armed, and they offered no resistance. Over 400 people were killed. Many of them were women and children. Who could possibly do this, you ask in your mind? The perpetrators were soldiers of your 23rd Infantry Division, that you call 'Americal.'"

Morris, following along closely with what Xuan Than said, took note of the date mentioned. The time period of the Tet Offensive was clear in

his mind because he recalled having heard about it during his and Ellen's vacation together in Mexico, in Puerto Penasco. The March date that Xuan Than referred to would have occurred about the time when Ellen had surprised him with her move to Las Vegas. He and she would have just started living together in the apartment that Ellen had found.

Xuan Than read from Mai Thi Li's letter.

"We came upon the bodies the day after the incident when American soldiers had left the scene. Many bodies were strewn along the road and in drainage ditch, side by side like grass cut down with a scythe. Many of the women had babies or little children in their arms. There were slain people in piles around some of the buildings where apparently they had gone to hide.

"One woman from the village said she saw a soldier shooting at a baby from a distance like the baby was a target in a shooting contest. When he missed, the other soldiers laughed. The soldier went closer and missed again to more laughter, then he walked right up to the baby and shot him in the face.

"The woman who saw this was hiding in a pig barn. The soldiers came up to the barn and shot the pigs but they didn't see her. This same woman saw an officer give a command to soldiers who then sprayed bullets into the bodies laying along the road to make sure everyone was dead. She said a boy rose up and was shot. She said some teenage girls were raped and then shot.

"These are the monsters who have made war on our people! What kind of society produces soldiers like this who kill without remorse and kill little babies?"

Xuan Than came across the room with photos that he set on the table before Morris side by side so they could be seen without shuffling through them. He didn't check to see whether Morris looked at them.

Morris did look at them and they verified that the incident was as extreme as the enemy officer said.

In the first photo that drew Morris's attention, a young man and a boy were lying splattered with blood. The man's body was in ditch beside a dirt road. The boy was beside him at the edge of the road. The boy looked to be about ten years old. He had one leg extended in what appeared an effort to touch his toes to the man's bare foot. There was blood on the boy's right leg, from the groin down, and on the side of his face that faced upward. Beside his head was a large woven basket. The man had been carrying the basket, apparently, and the boy walking beside him, when they were shot.

The second photo that Morris looked at showed a group of about a dozen bodies on a dirt road with other bodies strewn along the road into the background. The bodies were mostly of women and children. Many

of the women appeared to be young. The children included toddlers and babies. The bodies in the main group were so twisted together that in many cases it was hard to distinguish which arms and legs went with which torsos. These people had been standing together, apparently, and shot with a sweeping spray of bullets from an automatic weapon. Amidst them on the road were cloth bundles that they had been carrying.

The other photos showed similar scenes of dead bodies in various different places in the village. Morris did not look at the closely, but he looked enough to ascertain that dozens of dead people, mostly women and children were shown, and none of them had weapons.

"I know you are wondering, how could such a thing happen?" Xuan Than said as he crossed the room again without turning to see whether Morris was looking at the photos. "Because you yourself, I can tell, would never commit such atrocities. And many of your soldiers are noble, just as many of our soldiers are bad. War is a horrible experience, as you and I both know. It brings out nobility and heroism in some people and from other people brings out the basest of human instincts.

"But tell me this, Maj. Morris, we have people in our intelligence group who monitor your TV stations and newspapers—how can it be that this atrocity was never reported? We heard that American helicopters were flying overhead as this happened. There were many higher up officers in a position to know what occurred in this village. Your officers, all the way up to your colonels, and maybe above, surely knew of this incident and chose to keep it quiet."

The timeframe of the incident reoccurred to Morris that night as he lay alone in his cave. Surely, being in training then, as he had been, he would have heard of such an incident if it had been reported in the press. Was Xuan Than lying or in error? Little remained of his initial suspicion about the enemy officer's intent. Perhaps the entire cause that Xuan Than represented, the Communist cause of North Vietnam, could be examined and rejected, but Than himself was utterly convincing in his earnestness and idealism and devotion to that cause. Morris did not believe that Xuan Than would lie, and he did not believe that Xuan Than would present such facts without having checked them out first for veracity. In addition, there was the part played in the revelation of Xuan Than's friend,—and perhaps lover, Morris thought,—the combat surgeon, Mia Thi Li. Could her word, as quoted in her letters, be disputed? As self-presented in her letters, she was a person of such unassailable integrity and dedication that her word could not be doubted.

If the incident had, in fact, occurred, and if it had, in fact, not been reported in the American press, Morris concluded, then it had been suppressed at the colonel level or higher, as Xuan Than had claimed.

After this meeting, Morris, despite himself, was looking forward to

the next meeting, which he remembered would cover the plans of Xuan Than's government to recover from the damage of the war. But, for the first time, the content of the meeting did not unfold according to the enemy officer's prior announcement. Morris could see this at once in the distracted look on Xuan Than's face as he entered the room.

"Maj. Morris, I am sorry to tell you now," Xuan Than said, "this will be our last meeting. And it will be a short one, also, I am sorry to say. I am sorry for myself because I have enjoyed our meetings. I have felt a growing bond between us despite your silence."

The officer, as usual dressed neatly in full uniform, walked to the back of the room by the windows, where he stopped there by the red flowers on the window sill and placed his hand lightly on a flower that was bent toward the sunlight.

"I respect you for your silence, major," he said softly. "I myself, in your situation, would have remained silent."

Morris then, after a brief inner struggle, spoke for the first time since the meetings had begun two weeks before.

"Where are you going to?" he said.

"There has been a general realignment," Xuan Than replied. "I will be sent back to combat. I can't divulge the details, of course. I was put temporarily in this assignment with prisoners of war because I spoke out against abuses I had heard of. Ho Chi Minh himself assigned me to this duty. But I am a combat officer. This is what I am trained to do."

"Maj. Than, I wish you the best personally in your endeavors," Morris said.

"And, Maj. Morris," replied Xuan Than, "I wish to extend to you the same good wishes."

Maj. Xuan Than then extended his hand. Morris extended his own and grasped it firmly. There was a brief meeting of eyes. Without further word, Than left the room.

With that, Maj. Xuan Than was gone from the camp as suddenly and as mysteriously as he had arrived. Along with him, apparently, went the whole contingent of North Vietnamese soldiers. Morris soon again heard the Lao dialect being spoken that he had come to recognize in the months prior to his meetings with Xuan Than.

Soon, also, the work details were over. Morris was left by himself for days on end in the isolation of his cave. If not for the tiny opening to the outside world in one wall of his cave, he would not have been able to even tell the passing of days. Thanks to that tiny hole, he had been able to continue his tracking of the days, which he now did by placement of pebbles on a shelf of rock beneath the opening. He calculated that the date was in within several days of March 10.

One day without warning, he was prodded out of his cave again, as he

had been in the days of torture and a hood was placed over his head as at that time. Sensing his direction as he was pushed roughly along, he realized he was being taken to the building where the torture had occurred.

Inside the door, a sudden blow brought whiteness to his eyes. After a moment of confusion, he realized that he had been struck on the head with a rifle butt or with some similar blunt object.

"No school today" someone said in English heavily inflected with a Laotian accent.

Morris recognized the voice of the man who previously had been his tormenter. He stood braced for another blow which again would come without a warning because his head was still covered with the hood. Another blow came, harder than the first, and he fell to the floor.

Yanked to his feet again, Morris waited for a blow to his groin or in the back of the legs.

His tormentor, whoever he was (Morris had never seen him face to face), obtained a perverse satisfaction, apparently, in delivering a blow at a moment of relaxation.

No further blow came, however. Morris was led back to his cave and shoved into it.

The after effect of the blows to Morris's head was enough to send him reeling again, as in previous months, slung as in his plane toward one side while the old images of killing and killed assailed him, intensified by the images and descriptions received from Xuan Than.

The photo of the man and the boy, with the boy's bare foot extended toward the man's bare foot, came to Morris's mind. He recalled the comment Mai Thi Li had made in her letter about what kind of society would produce men who would kill "without remorse."

When he managed to rest, he felt as if lying on a raft on a tumbling river, the raft swirling around so fast that he needed to jerk his eyes open to bring himself out of the spin. When he opened his eyes, he could see only the darkness of his cave.

Where was his inner home? Morris asked himself. The meetings with Xuan Than had struck a crack in it surely. He felt that he was just starting to understand the ramifications of what he had learned.

[Chapter 211 notes]

212. Mary meets a Cuban woman doctor in a government clinic

On a morning when Jim Morris, in Sam Neua, Laos, experienced only the darkness of his cave and the tumbling of his own thoughts, Mary Brandt began her Cuban workday in the back of a horse-drawn carriage, scrunched in with nine other volunteers as the single horse pulling the carriage plodded toward the field chosen for the day's assignment.

"Today we complete Quince," the good-natured Cuban job boss yelled back to the workers from the seat in front where he sat with the driver. "Se possible?"

"Mas que possible! Seguro!" one of the volunteers hollered back.

The carriage in which they were riding was of the type commonly used in Cuba for the equivalent of buses between small towns. It was of the size and shape of a circus wagon, with varnished sideboards about waist high and a flat overhead canvas roof. The seats were like church pews, long benches each seating about five people and facing out to the side of the carriage.

The view from the carriage, in this case, was of flat fields in which rows of chopped off sugar cane stalks extended out for about a mile toward the base of a densely-wooded steep hill. Toward the front of the carriage, over the shoulder of the driver and the bobbing ears of the horse, the field referred to as "Quince" (meaning, in Spanish, 15) could be seen. The unchopped cane in that field consisted of long stalks about 15 feet high. The stalks looked almost like bamboo and they were seared brown from a fire deliberately set to burn off the dry leaves. The juicy stalks didn't burn. With the leaves gone, they were more accessible for the machetes used to hew them down.

Nothing more reminded Mary each morning of the basic situation of Cuba, with respect to her own country, than this ride in the horse-drawn carriage, which everyone knew was necessitated by the dearth of gasoline resulting from the embargo that America had imposed on Cuba. Everywhere she had seen cars, buses, and farm machinery relegated to roadsides and back lots due a lack of gasoline and parts. The American government, as she saw it, was trying to strangle the young Cuban state to create the false impression that the Revolution had failed because of the inherent inability of socialism to meet the material needs of the people.

This morning, as she and her fellow volunteers rode to the field in the carriage, the conversation turned to the first group of volunteers who had returned to the States after completing a stint in Cuba about a month before. Someone had heard that a senator had complained, in a speech in the U.S. Senate, that the volunteers were returning without being punished for having defied the embargo.

"He said something like, quote, these students are guided missiles aimed at the heart of America," the person telling the story related.

"Who was that anyhow?"

"I think Eastland, of Mississippi."

"They're afraid somebody'll tell how it really is here. That's the problem," someone threw in.

The day was Monday, March 9, 1970. Mary and her fellow volunteers, numbering 266, had arrived in Havana three weeks before. They had traveled on a Cuban freighter from St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, a route taken to avoid U.S. officials enforcing the embargo. After an official welcome and an orientation lasting five days, the volunteers had separated into ten groups to work in the sugar harvest, called in Cuba *la zafra*. A group of 24 volunteers had been assigned to this village, Recita, located about 80 miles from Havana on the southern side of the island. An excursion to a lookout point on the high hills behind the village, the previous week, had brought a vista of the southern coast, about five miles distant, and the bluish-green, shimmering expanse of the Caribbean Sea looking southward toward the Cayman Islands.

There was no such view on this particular morning, as Mary stood with her fellow workers, waiting for the chopping lines to be formed, but the view back toward the village was one that she looked forward to every morning because it showed the whole world of her Cuban involvement. There, at the end of the dirt road that she and her coworkers had just traveled on, about a mile and a half back, were the adobe buildings of the village, clustered around the central features of the village, a Colonial-style church with a bell tower and an immense building with a single broad roof and two high smoke stacks from which white smoke tumbled into a clear blue sky. That was the sugar mill to which the chopped off cane was brought each day in wagons.

Over to one side of the village, separated from it by a corridor of palm trees, was another building that told a great deal about the history of the scene. This building, with its elegant lines and tile roofs above tall windows, was the estate where the previous owner of the fields in view had lived. Next to that estate were low buildings that, a century before, had been the slave quarters. The same buildings had later served as the quarters of hired workers who had done the same manual labor that the current workers, including the volunteers were doing.

The entire valley, in fact,—composing, in tillable land, about 1500 hectares, or 8000 acres, by the American measure,—had been all a single latifundia owned by that one family, whose family name, Mary had heard, had been Cortez. Now the land was co-owned by the workers (87 men and 33 women) through a cooperative set legally up by the Agrarian Act of 1962. The cooperative was democratically governed through

weekly meetings at which job bosses were chosen and work strategies decided. The sugar mill was run by the same cooperative.

The cooperative was required to sell its product to the state at a non-negotiable price, Mary had learned. After a quota was met, the surplus funds were distributed equally among the members. They could then be used for private expenditures such as furniture. Basic needs, such as housing, education, and rationed food staples (such as bagged rice and beans) were obtained free from the state (whether or not the quota was met). Medical care was also free. A local clinic had been set up in a church building expropriated in 1960.

"Buenos dias, Mary!" chimed the work boss as Mary, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, took her place in the work line. "Looks like, today, has much sunshine, much heat!"

Thinking he had maybe not gotten the point across, the young man gestured first with an upward look toward the sun and then followed with another gesture, with both hands downward, as of something being draped over the body.

"Yes," said Mary.

"Mucho duro."

"Yes."

Mary was not at all daunted by the prospect of hard work and hot weather. She was feeling healthy and happy as she had not felt in a long time. For her, the brilliant sun was a delight to behold each day above the tumid fields. She loved the lean, tight feeling her body had acquired from the daily exercise. She loved the vigorous, rhythmical motion of chopping cane.

The general scheme of the operation was simple. The workers lined up, one per row, in a long line extending across about 24 rows. Each worker wielded a machete with a blade about two feet long. They worked in unison, moving up the rows, as the stalks fell behind them. Other workers gathered the fallen stalks and piled them into a wagon (or a truck when gasoline was available).

Mary was moving heartily along, about two hours later, when she paused for a moment to feel the sharpness of the machete blade by running one finger over it. That was a mistake, she saw at once, as a stream of red blood ran down from the blade to the ground.

"Oh, my lord, Mary. That looks severe!" called out the youth working to the left of her.

"The amazing thing is, it doesn't hurt!"

All the workers within earshot were soon gathered around. The work line stopped.

Closer examined revealed that the cut was about halfway through the tip of the finger. Obviously medical attention was needed.

The driver of the wagon presently in the field took Mary at once to the medical clinic in town with the horse being prodded to pull the empty wagon at an accelerated pace.

In the neat, unadorned interior of the clinic, Mary found her whole day had taken on a new complexion as the driver explained the situation to an aide.

An elegant-looking young woman with black hair pulled straight back from her forehead and intelligent dark eyes, and with a stethoscope around her neck, came forward at once from a back room. She wore a white doctor's jacket over a knee-high blue dress.

"Is it bleeding?" she said without introduction, in English with a slight accent.

"No," Mary replied. "Not when I keep squeezing it."

"I've got a little girl to finish, then I'll be with you."

"Thank you."

Mary took a seat on a bench at the side of the open room, observing the scene with a keen interest. A woman with a quiet, sad little boy came timidly into the clinic. The aide came forward to her at once and spoke to her in Spanish.

"Pobrecito!" said the aide to the boy, leaning toward him. "Venga entra. Vas a estar bien pronto!"

Mary knew enough Spanish to know that the aide had told the boy to come inside and that he would soon feel better. She noted that there was no filling out of forms, no complications at all, as the mother and her son went promptly to a back room for treatment.

Soon a mother and young girl came out, apparently the girl that the doctor had referred to, and Mary was escorted by the aide to a back room where a nurse who spoke only Spanish did the usual entrance routine of blood pressure, temperature, and so on.

The doctor then appeared at the door.

"My name is Juanita Tancredo," she said. "I am the doctor at this clinic and I will look at your hand now to see what we can do."

She took Mary's hand gently, removed the cloth Mary had wrapped the finger in, and held it under a light for examination.

"You will need stitches," she said. "We will do the stitches right now. We will numb the finger first, with novocaine. You will need about eight stitches, I think."

"Will I be able to use the hand?" Mary asked.

"Well, you are fortunate it is not your chopping hand. You are right handed?"

"Yes."

"You should maybe take a day's rest, then you can go back to work with the finger bound tightly."

"Thank you."

"We are very grateful for the work you and your friends have come to do."

"Thank you. We're glad to be here."

As the young doctor did the stitching later, she said, "Your name is Mary Brandt, they tell me."

"Yes."

"They say you are a very hard worker."

Mary laughed. "Well, I'm not so sure about that."

"Where are you from in America?"

"From Minnesota. But I've been going to grad school in Washington D.C. At Georgetown."

"What are you a student in?"

"Nutrition."

"Well, you will see here then how a society tries to cope when there is not enough to go around."

"Yes. I have been observing."

"What do you think of our system?"

"I think it's fair."

"Yes, it is. I think so, too."

The young doctor finished the last stitch, applied a cotton wrap on the finger, and secured it with tape. Then she rested against the counter behind her, regarding Mary with a close-lipped smile.

"I went to grad school in the United States myself," she said. "To medical school, I mean."

"Oh, really! Where was that?"

"Washington, in St. Louis."

"Really. In the heartland, then. Did you like it?"

"Oh, yes. I liked the river there. And there are a lot of jazz places. I enjoyed it very much."

"And you came back here."

"Yes, in 1961."

"I heard there were a lot of doctors going the other way."

"Yes, that's true. I heard two out of three, actually."

"Why do you think that was?"

"Well, I think they would say, they wanted freedom, they couldn't find freedom anymore in Cuba."

The doctor paused as if for thought.

"But I think the bigger reason... well, the uncertainty, of course, not knowing for sure what the Revolution would bring... but the bigger reason, really, was money, since doctors are now paid by the state. And it's true there's a lack of freedom in picking a work site."

"How do you mean, picking a work site?"

"Well, previously, Cuba had a lot of doctors, per capita, but more than 60 percent of the doctors were in Havana, and the rest were in the other big cities. Since the Revolution, there are slots, based on population, and you have to choose from the slots."

"So there are more doctors in the rural areas?"

"Oh, yes. We've started over 200 clinics like this one, and medical care is free, so the clinics are very used."

"I was impressed how well people are treated here, how easily they got in for treatment."

"Yes, I like to think, two out of three doctors left, but the ones that stayed were the best, the ones that really believed in medicine for what medicine should be, a service to the people. And there is cramping a little of the right of movement, the loss a little of freedom, but the people have a right, too, the right of access to medical care, and now they have the freedom of good health."

"Well, I've been very impressed. And I'm impressed, too, your being a woman and in this role."

"Well, thank you, sister," replied the doctor, laughing. "You know, though, the upper classes in Cuba have had liberated women, professional women, for a long time. It's been kind of a hip thing to do, especially when you didn't need the money."

The wail of a little boy went up in a near room. With a nod toward that, the young doctor moved toward the door.

"But, I'm afraid to say," she said with an air of finality, "there is still a double standard, even after the Revolution."

"How is that?"

"Oh, the usual thing... The men are expected to be bad boys, you know, to demonstrate their virility, and the women are expected to be pure, to hold up the banner of purity for future generations. You stay here long enough, you may experience some of that yourself. You're a pretty girl."

"Thank you."

"Well, once again, we appreciate very much the work you are doing for our people."

"Thank you. And thank you for the care."

"You're very welcome. I was pleased to meet you."

"Igualamente."

"See, you are learning your Spanish!"

"Yes, trying."

[Chapter 212 notes]

213. Mary confronts a cadre, Xavier Cortez, about centralization in Cuba

During the following day, bringing her brief, forced interlude from field work, Mary Brandt opened a three-hole spiral notebook (marked on the cover as "#5") and wrote there, in her trademark box letters, all of the same size: "The clinic in Recita is an example of what medicine could be if it could attend to its proper purpose."

Later a local woman stopped in at the dormitory where Mary lived to see how she was doing and announced that a visitor was coming to a village celebration the next day. The visitor was named Xavier Cortez, she said.

He was a zealous cadre known for devotion to the new regime. Presently, he was an agent for the government in Havana, sent to the villages to check on how the harvest was coming.

"Cortez? Isn't that the name of the family that ran the latifundia here?" Mary asked, after translating in her mind the information she had been given in Spanish.

"Si, but this man is not that family," the woman replied in broken English. "Se dice que es un primo. 'Cousin,' you know?"

Mary was glad to hear that this man was coming to visit, but she had heard rumors—for her, disturbing—that cooperatives such as Recita were being consolidated into larger government farms.

"There is always the danger of reification when individuals become part of large organizations," she wrote in her notebook later, borrowing the familiar word from Marcuse. She was thinking, also, of comments she had read in essays by her old standby, Simone Weil. She wrote down a quote she remembered from Weil: "The social machine has become a machine for breaking hearts and crushing spirits."

It seemed to her a such a dynamic could occur even in a situation where workers supposedly owned their own land through the state if the ownership was so remote that they didn't really feel it.

In these thoughts, Mary continued a mental process regarding work that she had given a lot of thought to over the years, with respect to the Mountain Women's cooperative that she had started with Hattie Beecher in Kentucky and the various coal mining work situations she had seen there, though she had little actual work experience herself, only a few summer jobs in college.

She was involved in this, with the whole day before her, when she was surprised by a visit from Juanita Tancredo, the doctor at the clinic that she had met the day before.

"I knew you would have the day off," the elegant woman said from the door, "and I had a free hour, so I thought I would stop by to see you and take a look at your hand."

"Well, that's very kind of you!" Mary said.

"I mean it as a social visit, also, I should directly say. I feel very fortunate... to have your acquaintanceship."

"Well, as you would say," Mary returned, "'Igualamente'."

They both laughed.

"Should we go out into the sunlight?" the doctor said. "I can see the hand better in the full light."

"Yes, of course."

They sat down together on a wall, facing a line of two- and three-story adobe buildings that directly fronted the dirt main road of the village, with no front yards.

"Well, the hand is healing quite well," Juanita said.

"Thank you."

"There's a little coffee shop up the street here. Tanta Clara's, it's called. Would you care for some coffee and a roll?"

"Yes, very much."

"Cuban pastries are very delicious, as I suppose you've found out."

"Yes, I'm afraid I've sampled too many."

In the coffee shop, the two women were quickly at ease one another, being, in a way, kindred spirits,—young, serious, and intellectually inclined. In appearance, they were quite similar, also, having, as the most prominent feature, their thick, dark hair pulled straight back. Dr. Tancredo had the more settled look in her face, however, from her slightly older age (she was 33), and she had a high Hispanic forehead and long, Aquiline nose while Mary's features were decidedly Germanic in her close- set eyes and small nose and mouth.

"Now what does a person such as you, in such a different situation for you, find to do on a day like this?" the doctor inquired.

"Well, I was thinking about work, actually," Mary answered, "in a philosophical way," and she went on to describe her recent thoughts and how she was concerned that cooperatives like those of the village were being consolidated into larger farms. "These things bother me too much, I'm afraid. I guess you must think it's a little strange for me to make them so personal," she said.

"Oh, I don't think it's strange at all!" the soft-spoken doctor replied. "You feel as if you care because you do care. I've had many thoughts like this myself."

"Regarding the Revolution."

"Oh, yes."

"And I think what you must do, Mary, if you would like my friendly advice—"

"Yes, I would."

"You must make your thoughts known. I mean, this evening, when

Sr. Cortez speaks to the group, simply say what you think."

"You know him?"

"Not personally, no. But I know he is a sincere and caring builder of our new society, and this is the way we will build it well, by talking to one another about it."

"But I'm just a visitor."

"Oh, no! No one feels that way. We are all in this together!"

Later, after they had finished their coffee and rolls, the women walked out into the street again, and stood for a moment watching as a horse and buggy came by and some children on bicycles.

"I have just a little time," the doctor said. "Since you are so interested in work, would you care to go see the mill together? I know quite a bit about it. My father was the manager there for many years."

"Is that so? Where is he now?"

"He and my mother left Cuba in 1960."

"Where are they now?"

"In Miami."

At the mill, Juanita Tancredo showed Mary how the immense building was organized into several main operations. First, the sugar cane stalks were crushed in giant presses to obtain the watery juice, then the water was boiled off leaving a thick syrup, and then the syrup was placed in long, flat pans and baked (in a vacuum oven to prevent burning, Juanita pointed out). The pans came out of the oven bearing a flat, thin cake of sugar. Last of all, the baked sugar was centrifuged to remove impurities and form crystals of raw sugar that then came down a conveyor belt to a worker guiding it into canvas bags. Under an arching canopy of tall palms at that end of the mill, another worked piled the bags neatly in an old flat bed truck.

"Here is where our gasoline, what we have of it, is used," the doctor said.

"Yes, surely this is the best place for it."

"And the workers, you see, are like workers everywhere. Except here they are part owners of their own business, and it shows in a subtle way, in a sense of dignity."

"Yes."

"And, again, if you fear that this feeling of ownership will be lost by consolidation, Mary, I think you should say so."

"Will you be at the celebration yourself?"

"Maybe for a while. But I'm the only doctor, you know, so I must be available if I'm needed."

With that, the doctor's social visit came to an end, but she was at the village center that evening, as was Mary Brandt, all of the Venceremos volunteers, more than a hundred local workers and their numerous

children, and Xavier Cortez, from the Havana government. He was a dark, handsome young man, aristocratic in manner, and clearly an object of interest to the young women.

The occasion was the feast day of the village's patron saint, Santa Rosa, though the church part of the festivities were no longer observed. The celebration began with a baseball game that pitted the volunteers against the locals. It was a great source of amusement for everyone, with some fantastic athletic plays and some fantastic errors. There were also some emotional confrontations with the umpire in a style familiar to the American players.

After the game, under a twilight sky, lanterns were lit around the mall, and the special food stored for the occasion was brought out, along with cases of beer that Cortez had brought from Havana. A band provided background music and some of the people began dancing. It was a quaint, delightful scene with the mall transfigured by the lantern light and the people all joyous and dressed in bright colors.

For all the fanfare about his appearance, Xavier Cortez spoke only briefly in a deep voice that carried easily over the crowd. Everyone was quiet as he made his remarks. He talked about the national goal of "las diez milliones," the ten million tons goal of the harvest, pointing to a billboard above that displayed the same words.

Finally, he made a brief reference to the process of consolidation. "Our primary objective," he explained, "is using the most effective means of harvest, and that is machines,—combines, as they are called. With larger groups, we can share these resources, and we will need to, once gasoline becomes more available."

He made the same remarks in English, turning toward the American volunteers who were all seated together in the same area, some of them with baseball gloves in their hands.

"Are there any questions or comments?" he asked.

Mary looked at this point to see whether Juanita Tancredo was still present, and she saw that the doctor was leaving with a couple of other people who were updating her on some situation as she left the mall.

With a great effort to summon her courage, Mary rose and softly but firmly stated her concern, somewhat on the lines that she had explained them to the doctor the previous morning.

"This process concerns me greatly," she said. "I see it leading to a loss of that sense of personal dignity that people fought the Revolution to obtain. Then, consider what happens, if another Revolution must be fought to regain again what was lost."

Mary, with her lack of vanity, had no sense of what she looked like as she made this comment, but she was a striking sight with her mane of dark hair, her tanned, pretty features, and her full figure trained down by

her daily physical work to a trim perfection. She was dressed in her plain style in just a T-shirt and jeans, but she looked better in jeans than most of the women who had made an effort to be alluring.

Xavier Cortez regarded her for a moment, pulling his dark mustache with his fingers as he did so. “Your concern is very touching, hermanita,” he said. “But consider this. In the Hegelian dialectic, there is only one revolution of the masses against the owners of the means of production. Once the production is gained, there is this process of refinement, of which you speak. But there is only one revolution.”

Mary was taken aback. “Hermanita,” she knew, meant “little sister” and that seemed a put down and too intimate. Then, to her amazement, he had defended the present policies with an appeal to the Marxist party line. She was stunned by the inflexibility of the remark. She felt as though speaking to a Catholic priest about a matter of dogma.

“Well, I appreciate your comment,” she said.

“You are very welcome,” Cortez replied, turning to take another comment.

Later, as Mary sat by herself in the mall, with a plate of food in front of her, she saw the dark-haired, dark-eyed government agent moving with a determined stride directly toward her table.

“Con su permisso,” he said with a slight bow. “May I sit down?”

“Yes. Of course,” she replied, stiffening throughout her whole body as she felt the weight of his body sinking down on the bench.

He leaned at once toward her, looking into her eyes from a distance that seemed too close, though she had been told, in preparation for the trip, that the distance between faces considered comfortable was closer for Latin people.

“I thought about what I said to you, back at our little meeting,” he said, “and it seems to me I answered too... Oh, I don’t know, how do you say it, too ‘ideological,’” he said, pronouncing that last word with the Spanish accent.

“I was surprised by that, in fact,” Mary answered.

“What I should have said,” he continued, “is we must keep two goals always in mind. One goal is the democratic process, as pertains to work, also, as you mentioned. The other goal is for the society as a whole to have the resources, the money, to answer the needs of our people. Sugar is our main source of money, as a people, as it now stands. That is why we must be as efficient as possible in producing sugar.”

“I can see why that is so important,” Mary replied. “More so than I did before.”

She was impressed by his sincerity. He seemed a different man, a much more appealing man, at this close range.

“We must... how do you say it... we must trust. We must trust in

ourselves as a people that we can do what we need to do to survive and will not lose our great dream."

Mary merely nodded.

"It is a great dream, senorita Mary."

"Yes, it is. How do you know my name?"

"I asked the others where you were sitting, and they pointed to you by name. My name is Xavier Cortez, as I think you know."

"Yes, of course," said Mary. "And I appreciate very much that you stopped over to talk to me."

"You are very welcome, senorita Mary."

Mary was hoping then that the soldier would leave because she felt awkward maintaining the conversation, but he remained seated beside her without speaking.

"We have beer, you know," he said. "Could I get you one and return? They're right over there."

Xavier Cortex looked at Mary as he said this and she noticed to her alarm that his dark eyes were taking her in. She felt a butterfly feeling, a queasy flip flop, in her lower stomach, in the area of her womb. She stood up at once.

"I don't mean to be rude," she said. "But I promised to meet some others. They're waiting for me, I think."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," he said.

"I appreciate again that you came over to speak to me."

"It has been my pleasure," he said.

Mary Brandt went back at once to her dorm and lay on the bed with her mind whirling. She didn't know what to make of it at once, it was maybe just a normal feeling, but she couldn't remember having ever before, even with Matthew, experienced such a feeling inside her, in merely talking to a man.

Mary thought also of what Juanita Tancredo had told her about how the men in Cuba were expected to be "bad boys" while the women were expected to be pure. She was resolved to avoid Cortez in the future, and was relieved to hear the next morning that he had left.

[Chapter 213 notes]

214. Lonely Brandt completes his project stoned, finds solace in Gail

With Mary gone for two months, Matthew Brandt soon did what he had told himself repeatedly not to do and yet knew he would eventually do: he bought himself a bag of grass.

Arriving at home, at his and Mary's apartment, he rolled his first joint carefully in a piece of Zigzag paper, touched the trailing edge of the paper to his lips, and pressed the edge down on the joint to seal it. Then, ceremoniously, with the air of someone about to enter a different realm, he lit the joint, drew in the first puff of grass, and pushed down with the bottom of his throat and his upper diaphragm to force the smoke into his lungs.

For almost a month, Matt had resisted buying his own grass, though he had gotten stoned a few times with Darren in Darren's alley apartment. But with spring break at Whitney Pratt having begun the previous Saturday (March 21), Houghten had left the school for a spring term in a creative arts program in Bennington, Vermont, leaving Brandt with no grass at all. Brandt had held out under those circumstances for three days, until the total lack of grass had demolished his last shred of resistance.

In addition to his struggle to resist grass, Brandt's month alone had brought him his first experience with being a de facto single person since June of 1968 when he and Mary had gotten married and had headed off to Kentucky together. At first, he had reveled in his new freedom; then, as his sense of Mary had diminished, he had begun to miss her disciplined presence, her hearty, often cheerful comments, and even her arguments, in addition to missing the obvious other advantages of having a female companion.

For a while, something subtle had remained of Mary in the two-room apartment. Some warmth from her body still lingered, or maybe the odor of her body, or of her soap or shampoo. Or maybe, he thought to himself, some of the golden aura had remained that he had seen on that one occasion when he had been so totally zonked out on the weird grass he had gotten from his old Kentucky coworker, Bruce Harris.

"I really miss her," he admitted to himself at one point, though he understood, too, that at times he was glad to be free of the seriousness and heaviness that she brought to so many occasions.

Despite the increasing coldness and lifelessness of the apartment, Brandt had been able to distract himself from it through attention to his masters thesis photo project. At the moment, the project consisted of an unorganized, unwinnowed collection of hundreds of photos, a kind of visual first draft, though he had begun to form a better sense of which photos he would retain for the final draft (which he expected to be a

much smaller collection) and of how the photos would be organized to obtain the effect he intended of showing a nation in conflict against the backdrop of the national buildings and events in D.C. This was another reason why Brandt felt so compelled to get stoned; he thought he would able to understand and organize the photos better in a stoned state of mind.

As he smoked the first joint rolled from his own grass, Matthew sat quietly at the table by the windows that faced the street, waiting for the other world brought about by the grass to take form around him. He had no classes for the present term, just his project. With his usual schedule related to Mary also not in effect at the moment due to her absence, he had no constraint of time.

It occurred to Brandt as he waited that he had completed about two thirds of the work required to obtain a masters degree. Much of what he had learned had been the technical aspects of the camera and other audio-visual devices. But, in addition to these technical aspects, there had been another thread of development that he was aware of related to the audio-visual experience.

His mind went back to his first day at Whitney Pratt and the speech he and Darren Houghten had recently discussed, the speech by Dr. Tyler Moy, the school president, presenting “the mode of strangeness, the mode of waking up” as a mode worth learning and practicing while at Whitney Pratt. On the same day as that introduction, as Brandt recalled, he had experienced his first taste of strangeness when a limousine passing within a cordon of motorcycles had evoked a sense of an ancient chief in an ancient city.

Since then, there had been a continuous progression, a convergence of elements from disparate sources, Brandt acknowledged. “Plainness,” as emphasized by his mentor Fr. Dan Riley; the “cross light on silvery tin” of Walker Evans; and the “accidental frame” of Gregory Lorentz had all been part of it; as had Houghten’s alley apartment with its eclectic collection of objects and books. Brandt recalled also his first experience there of being stoned, how sounds had separated and the branch framed by the window sash had appeared so lovely. Then the landscape of sound heard from the barn back home came to mind. He recalled how he had felt as if his whole life had been placed on it. He recalled how Mary had run down the hill from the family house, seeming like a dream image in that transfigured world.

That progression, as he thought of it, seemed as important a part of his study at Whitney Pratt as anything he had learned in the classroom. Yet he knew that, if asked to describe just what he had learned from the progression, he would be without an answer. He had no doubt that he had changed as a result of it, however. It was as Darren had once told him,

there was no going back.

He was thinking these thoughts when he realized that he was stoned. He sat for a long time looking at a cup with an embossed, painted design of two birds seated on a pine bough with pine cones crossed in front of them. He had not seen before how intricate and carefully rendered the design was and how subtle the colors were within their muted range of reddish brown and pale green hues. The cup seemed so quiet and solid in its own being, its shape rounded with orange light reflected from the windows of the townhouses across the street.

It was near sunset then. How long had he sat at the table? He rose, went to the pantry he had made into a darkroom, and came back with a stack of photos, about three inches high, composing his entire project. With no one but himself in the apartment, he thought, he could lay them out on the floor to obtain a pictorial view of the whole project at once and a better sense of how the photos related to one another. He did that, absorbed in the images, as he arranged the photos on the floor.

For a long time after this, as the sunset colors faded and darkness grew in the sky above the lighted windows across the street, Brandt was engaged in an intuitive task. The result of it was a sequence of photos laid out on the floor in the order to be presented to the viewer, on an exhibit wall or within a book. The sequence began with street scenes of blacks in the U. Shaw neighborhood, with the Capitol and other national landmarks visible at the end of the corridor of a street or above flat rooftops of humbler buildings. It continued with scenes of young people with placards watched by the inhabitants of the same neighborhoods as they passed through on their way to the Moratorium demonstration. Following that were scenes of the same demonstration, the multitude stretching across the National Mall, youths on lampposts holding flags and yelling out chants and directions, veterans in uniform marching under a banner saying “GIs Against the War.” Then came scenes within the Senate chamber, taken on the day when Brandt had heard of Jim Morris’s promotion; then scenes of Woodstock, the massive stage, the crowd of young people swelling back from it, the same crowd in pouring rain, huddled under tarps and jackets, youths passing sandwiches between them; then scenes of people talking earnestly together,—whites and blacks, college kids and older people, demonstrators with one another, demonstrators with the soldiers positioned along the street. Last came a scene showing demonstrators with placards and a bullhorn by the statue of Ulysses Grant across from the Capitol steps.

Brandt looked at the clock when he had finished this arrangement of photos on the floor, and saw to his surprise that it was after 1 A.M. He went to bed, satisfied that he placed the photos in the basic sequence he wanted, though he felt there were gaps in the presentation.

For the next two weeks, Brandt was absorbed in filling these gaps. During this time, he was continually stoned. He always kept several joints with him in his chest pocket, as he rode the bus and walked the streets, looking for the right setting for his photos. He kept no schedule and paid no attention to time except in occasionally noting the general time of day (or night). He ate at once when he was hungry, usually something he had purchased at a storefront store of the kind everywhere in the city. He smoked his spare joints when the urge to do so arose, but he no longer had a sense, after doing so, of acquiring a new state of mind. He hardly had a sense anymore of whether or not he was high at any particular moment. Low and high moods occurred within a continuous, odd state of mind combining the dull heaviness of air he had associated with his previous states after being stoned with the aesthetically and perceptually alert state of his best moments.

The gaps he had noticed that he was trying to fill were the lack of a wide range of types of people (beyond countercultural types like himself, the black people of U. Shaw, and the conversation exchanges just mentioned), the lack of demonstrations staged for purposes other than against the war, and the lack of images of national buildings and monuments at times of non-conflict when they acquired the templar, meditational ambience that he had experienced, and that he imagined many people had experienced, on quiet walks alone.

Gradually, the gaps were filled, as Matthew Brandt went back and forth between from the city and the dark room in his apartment, until an evening arrived when he emerged from the dark room and placed on the floor, amidst his other photos, the last photo that he felt was needed. He at once began the process of removing photos to diminish the total number, a process that occupied him all through the night until the light of dawn had appeared in the sky above the buildings across the street. The creative content of the project was done, though the task still remained, for later in the spring, of matting the photos.

For a long time again, Matthew sat on a chair, on one side of the arrangement of photos on the floor, looking at the pictures. Then he gathered the photos, in the order arranged on the floor, into a two-inch stack similar to the three-inch stack he had brought out of the dark room several weeks before. He placed the two-inch stack in the dark room and the photos that had been winnowed out into a shoe box in the closet.

He was hungry, he realized. How long had he gone since eating? He didn't know. He walked several blocks to an all-night store and came back with a one pound steak and a six-pack of beer. He grilled the steak in the oven and ate it in a single sitting, gulping it down with beer. From there, he went at once to bed.

With no idea of when exactly he had gone to bed, he woke the next

day and went out into the empty front room to see that the sky above the buildings across the street was dark with rain. He sat down at the table, as he had begun to do by habit, and looked in the tea jar for his bag of grass. About a fourth remained of the amount he had purchased. Would he get stoned again? The prospect seemed dismal. He took the bag of grass to the bathroom, emptied it in the toilet, and flushed it down.

At once Brandt went to the closet, donned his blue jean jacket, and went out despite the rain. He walked down Connecticut toward the National Mall, crossed the mall to the Lincoln Monument, and went around behind it to a hill from which he could see the gray water of the Potomac passing under the Arlington Bridge. He felt as if awakening from being stoned, and as relieved and affected by the transition as earlier by the transition in the other direction. The feeling of relief was short-lived, however. He felt forlorn and lonely. He no longer felt any sense of satisfaction at having completed his photos.

Returning home later, he turned on a single light in the empty room. Whatever after-effect of his wife's presence had lingered in the apartment was gone. The apartment seemed as cold as a room in a cheap hotel. He looked in the refrigerator. The shelves were bare.

He went into the bedroom, where the bed was unmade, and lay down on it without even smoothing out the covers. The next day he rose and again went at once to the closet for his jacket. The day was bright and sunny, but the somber feeling remained as Brandt chose and followed a different route, down into Rock Creek Park and up along the creek for a while past the spot where he and Mary had often cooked breakfast together on an open fire. Several days continued in this way, with his depression and loneliness increasing.

Passing near Whitney Pratt on an evening at this time, Brandt used his key to enter the school's main building. He had no business to attend to; he was looking for human activity of any kind. No students were present, but soon he heard footsteps on the back stairs. The door opened, revealing a sturdy, bright-faced woman dressed in a flannel shirt. Behind were two well-behaved children. It was Gail Martin with Angela, five, and Matthew, three.

"Matthew Brandt!" she said. "It's been a while!"

"Yes, it has," he replied.

"How come you're here?"

"Just dropped off a dish in the basement."

The "family" composed of himself, Mary, Darren, and Jane Larue had not met in a while for a basement supper due to the temporary absence of Mary, still in Cuba, and Darren, still in Bennington, Vermont.

"Hewwo, Matthoo," said the little boy.

"Little Dog!" Matthew replied as he swept the boy up into his arms.

"How are you anyhow?"

"I'm fine."

"I'm fine, too," said Angela.

Matthew reached down and picked her up in his other arm while the mother beamed.

"You guys are getting heavy," he said. "You eating rocks?"

The children laughed at that but had no response.

"Still leading the bachelor life?" Gail inquired.

"Yes, I am for another week or so."

"Well, join us for supper. It's cooking already in the oven."

"Sure you want me to?"

"Of course."

Soon Matthew was seated at the kitchen table in Gail Martin's cheerful apartment with its feminine curtains, colorful walls, stuffed animals, and toys.

Gail kept up a buoyant conversation, as she always did, laughing readily while moving around the kitchen like a big, healthy farm girl just in from the barnyard chores. She was not petite, by any means, but neither was she fat. She had wide shoulders and large hips with strong but feminine legs and arms.

She talked for a while about her own personal history and how she had learned to survive being single and expected one day to be married again, when the right man turned up on the scene.

"What if he doesn't?" Matthew asked.

"Oh, I'm sure he will," she replied.

"How do you know?"

"I just do."

That comment was so characteristic of her, Brandt thought to himself. She was the most thorough optimist, the lightest spirit, he had ever met. She seemed to be not prone, either, to serious ponderings such as he was used to from his earnest wife Mary.

Matthew and Gail wound up talking late into the evening after the children had gone to bed. Then, at Gail's invitation, Matthew spent the night on the couch while Gail went off to her room.

In the whole interchange, there was nothing amiss, no dalliance on either side, but later in the night, when a plea for water from one of the kids brought Gail to the kitchen sink, Matthew could not prevent himself from looking in that direction, for the first time really looking Gail over as a man looks over a woman. She was dressed in a shoulderless camisole with her long legs bare from the hips down.

The legs and buttocks were large, as he expected, but really quite shapely. She looked like one of the big, danceline girls you see with the tall, feathered hats in pictures of Las Vegas shows.

She had not come into the kitchen to display herself, he knew, just to answer her child's request. She had assumed him to be asleep, as he had pretended to be. But for a long time this image remained in his mind and it was there still as he continued through the next week.

215. O'Rourke takes part in Orin Brown's "medical civic action program"

In March of 1970, Spec 3 Bill O'Rourke came upon a bulletin board notice, in his worksite in Chu Lai, Vietnam, asking for volunteers for the local Medical Civic Action Program. The former coxswain had heard about these programs (commonly called by the acronym MEDCAP or MEDCAP2). He had been looking for an opportunity to get involved. So, without hesitation, he attended the kickoff meeting held that same day in the hospital lunch room, intending to join up with the program.

At this meeting, O'Rourke happened on a person he had never met who was a common acquaintance of two of his old rowing team-mates, Tom Steward and Jim Morris. This person was Orin Brown, the intelligence officer who had been Steward's Air Force officer camp roommate several years before, in summer of 1967, and who had subsequently, in January of 1968, chanced to meet Morris in Bangkok, Thailand, when Morris had gone there on R&R with his wife Ellen. Brown was the one who had gone with Morris to the Pat Pong red light district in Bangkok, the person whom Morris had pegged as a detached observer both of the war and the flesh trade going on right before his eyes in the bar in Pat Pong.

Brown, by this time a captain, was not just attending the meeting, he was in charge.

"If some of you are wondering what an intelligence officer has to do with this program," Brown said to his audience of six people, "let me be frank. These MEDCAP programs have multiple objectives, and one of them is intelligence. Another is plain ol' PR. That said, the med goal is still there. The med part is still valid, in my opinion."

He then went on to describe the project activities.

"The way it goes is this," he said. "First, we strategically select villages that are possible to go to because one, within driving distance, two, secure or securable for the duration of the visit, three, on the border so to speak of contact with U.S. forces. These are people, in other words, who as far as we can tell neither hate us nor like us, they are undecided voters, so to speak. We go to these villages, any of them we go to, just one time, unexpectedly. This is to avoid an ambush which well could happen if anyone knew we were coming. This is for the good of everyone and for your own safety. Because we're operating at the envelope of security here. We're out on the border or edge like I said."

"So there's no continuity then," said someone. "Isn't this a problem, in terms of medical follow-up, if something is started and not carried through?"

"Is it a problem? Again, let me be frank. Yes, it is a problem. But, you know, welcome to 'the land of problem,' because that's what this

whole world around us is here, starting about a hundred feet from the perimeter of this base. So all I can say, if you're looking for perfection, this is the wrong program for you. This is 'better than.' That's the only rationale."

O'Rourke took heed of all this as Orin Brown spoke, but he knew all along that he wanted to go ahead with being involved. There would surely be some good from the project, he thought, and he was eager to get away from the base and out in the country to see the real Vietnam.

The connection of Brown to O'Rourke's former rowing buddies didn't come out until after the meeting when O'Rourke hung around to ask a few questions. Brown then asked O'Rourke where he was from, O'Rourke said from Minnesota, and one thing led to another winding up in an amused recognition on both sides.

"God damn!" said Brown. "If this war lasts a couple more years, I'm going to meet your whole team!"

"Yea, sir, small world," O'Rourke replied.

"You know," Brown continued, "I've been following the whole thing with Morris. Too bad. I'm sure you must be aware of it."

"Last I heard, Captain, he was reported as maybe being a POW," O'Rourke replied. "I got that from the grape vine somewhere."

"If he gets out of there," Brown replied, "I imagine I'll be seeing him."

"How's that. sir?"

"That's my main job here. I interview people, process them out, so to speak. Some of them are POWs. Most are Vietnamese that for one reason or another leave out of the North and relocate here."

Their brief conversation then went on to Tom Steward, who O'Rourke was able to update on due again to the communications that had gone around within the old gang from the Steward's to Mary Brandt and Barb Carpenter. Brown was especially interested in hearing about Steward's wedding when O'Rourke mentioned he had been best man.

"So they got married outdoors by a campfire," Brown remarked. "Now why does that not surprise me? Ol' Stewie, you know, he just could not see being in the Air Force without being a pilot. With him, it was 'go, go, Air Force,' or not at all."

"Yes, sir, he would take such an attitude," O'Rourke replied.

"Me and Stewball had some good talks in that barracks in Spokane."

"I can imagine that. We were hitching buddies, you know."

"Is that so? Isn't that amazing! What a coincidence!"

"Some good firesides."

"Yea. I bet."

The following weekend, O'Rourke went out on his first "medcap" (as the individual outings were also called). The destination was the village

of Song Ly about 30 miles from the base. The group going out was a diverse crew including,—in addition to O'Rourke and Orin Brown,—a doctor and a nurse from O'Rourke's medical group at the 91st Evacuation Hospital, a Navy medic from the Swift boat contingent at Chu Lai, a security detail with radios and guns, and an ITT translator named Ton That Dao.

In this case, the village selected was not quite on the "border" of contact with America that Brown had referred to in his introduction to the program. A U.S. Army "clearing detail" had been in the area for a couple of weeks using bulldozers to clear out an area of dense foliage where the Viet Cong had been reported to be storing supplies. Owing to a report of some alarm having been expressed in the village regarding the destruction of the trees, a decision had been made to bring out the program as an indication of the other side of America.

Brown had filled in the group on these details before the five jeeps left Chu Lai.

The caravan created a stir of interest as it rolled into the quiet, little village. Soon a group of women and children were on hand to listen to a spiel delivered by the serious-faced translator, Ton That Dao, whose gestures to parts of his body conveyed the impression he was explaining what kind of maladies the medcap could attend to.

These people were a far cry from the sophisticated people O'Rourke had observed in the native area of Chu Lai just outside the base. These were simple people who looked like peasants.

After Ton That's introduction, a woman with a fussy baby came up at once to the jeep where the doctor, nurse, and O'Rourke were standing. The doctor looked in the baby's mouth, listened to his heart and lungs with a stethoscope, and gave him the mother some pills. Various people from the group that had listened to the translator then came forward, followed by others who appeared on paths leading up to the road from simple dwellings partially hidden in the foliage.

On the doctor's instructions, O'Rourke took down information on several people coming forward, working with the translator to note down the main symptoms on a sheet of paper that he then presented to the doctor.

"Tell her not to worry," he asked Ton That to tell one woman who was coughing. "We have some anti-biotic that might help that. It sounds like a bad cold or maybe even TB."

"Excellent! O'Rourke," said the doctor. "You've got a knack for these things."

"Thank you."

By this time, the sun had risen high and hot in the middle of the cloudless sky, and soon several dark-haired pretty girls in traditional Viet

pants suits appeared on the scene hawking soft drinks.

O'Rourke, when he took off his cap for a moment to wipe his brow, won the immediate attention of one of the girls.

"Red," said the girl pointing at O'Rourke's head.

"Oh, my hair," he laughed. "You got me there."

"Cute," she said.

Apparently she thought that "cute" was an odd word by how she said it, and the other girls apparently thought that, too, because they all giggled when she said it.

"Oh, thank you," said O'Rourke, embarrassed.

"You want buy soda?"

"Soda? No, not right now."

The girl leaned toward O'Rourke and gave him a close-up, coquettish smile. "Later you buy, get from me?"

"Sure, sure. Yes, I will."

"Promise?"

"Okay, sure."

So that was the logic of things, O'Rourke thought to himself. Maybe he wasn't as cute as he had entertained for a moment. He was good for his word, though. Before the cordon left, he bought not just one soda but a round for everyone.

The girl was smiling in triumph, O'Rourke observed as he and his associates drove off. He noticed also that her smile was directed toward a family group consisting of an older woman, who appeared to be her mother, an old man, and a little boy who was crippled.

That evening, O'Rourke thought about the day's interactions at Song Ly. It had been his first real encounter with the local people, reminding him of his volunteer days with the GRIT project in Georgia. In talking to some of the people who had come forward, he had had the same feeling that he had had in Georgia of doing something good on a human level.

He kept thinking about the dark, beautiful eyes of the Vietnamese girl who had sold him soda. She struck him as so innocent in her use of her sexual appeal to trick him into a sale. Who could blame her for trying to help her family (if that was who the woman, old man, and boy were, and he assumed they were)? He was sorry he hadn't asked the girl her name. She struck him as representative of the beauty and intrinsic unspoiledness of Vietnam.

O'Rourke was glad for having participated in the medcap. He went out the following weekend, on the next medcap, expecting a replay of the first one. And he did, in fact, feel again that he had served a good cause in assisting in the evaluation and treatment of the villagers who came forward to be looked at.

Almost not wanting to, however, O'Rourke, on the next few times

out, all occurring within the space of a couple of weeks, began to see flaws in the program.

The negative side first appeared when he looked more closely at the meds he was helping to distribute. They were all outdated. Some of them appeared to have been stored a long time and shipped in old cases. Who knows, he thought, maybe they went back to the Korean war.

O'Rourke then noticed that one of the nurses who had gone with him on the first three treatments no longer showed up. He saw her at the Chu Lai hospital and went over to ask her why. She told him she had heard from a doctor at the hospital that the meds being handed out might be harmful because many of them were antibiotics based on an incomplete diagnosis and in an insufficient dosage and with insufficient follow-up to counteract any serious disease.

"This doctor said the antibiotics might disturb the microbes that are already there in balance with one another, that have been in balance for generations, really," the nurse said.

"Create havoc, sir, in other words," O'Rourke responded thoughtfully.

"Yes."

On an impulse, O'Rourke walked down the main road of the base to a Quonset hut where he had seen a sign posted for Orin Brown's intelligence group, called Detachment K.

He found Captain Brown seated at a desk in the front room with another man, an older officer, in an alcove behind him. O'Rourke introduced the officer who nodded perfunctorily and continued his work.

O'Rourke proceeded to explain what he had heard, speaking respectfully since despite the veneer of friendship and old times Orin Brown was also an officer, way higher in rank, though O'Rourke by this time had been promoted to the equivalent of a Corporal (Spec 4).

"And what do you see as the remedy?" Brown inquired.

"Well, sir, I know we're operating with limited resources," the former coxswain answered. "But I think the remedy might be to apply through the channels, whatever they are, for better meds. And for better guidelines as far as how to use them."

"No harm in trying," Brown responded.

"O'Rourke," said the officer, looking up from his desk,—he had been introduced as Maj. Dennis Doren,—"this is a war, you know. This is not the Peace Corps."

"Yes, sir, I know that," O'Rourke replied.

O'Rourke then turned to leave and Brown rose from his seat at once and went with him outside.

"Sorry you're upset a little, Bill," Brown said. "Thing you got to understand, we're coming at this from different angles. You're concerned

with the medical aspects. We're concerned with the intelligence aspects. And probably we burn in on that a little too much, you know."

"What exactly is the intelligence aspect?" O'Rourke asked. "Is that something I can ask?"

"Sure you can ask, but, needless to say, a lot of it is classified," Brown answered. "But I don't mean to be mysterious. For us, this activity that to you is medcaps, is part of this vast enterprise all through Vietnam that we call 'Phoenix.' And what this involves is the whole gamut, you know, local intelligence committees, and so on, trying to identify what we call VCI... Viet Cong Infrastructure."

"You're out on these medcaps spying?"

"Yes, O'Rourke, I am. For example, some of the villages we go to have almost completely no young men. That tells me something. The extent of use of the roads and paths, and so on..."

O'Rourke listened without comment as Brown went on.

"Bill, what I really want to convey to you, though," Brown said, "is you and I are not at cross purposes here. I mentioned Phoenix. A big part of it is community development, economic development, infrastructure building, to help these people to stand on their own without the Viet Cong." Brown laughed. "So, there you got it, it is the Peace Corps to a certain extent."

"I can accept all these complications, sir," said the former coxswain. "What I've got trouble with, though, is doing people harm."

"Well, let's just not do that then. Me and you together, we'll resolve these problems. We'll get some better meds. And some better follow-up, to the extent possible."

O'Rourke stood with his hands in his pockets, thinking.

"Think we can do that, Bill?" Brown persisted.

"Yes, sir, let's give it a try."

"You got my word, I'm gonna address these problems."

"Thank you, sir."

[Chapter 215 notes}

216. O'Rourke sees Xuan Than being withheld treatment to extort information

A few days later, Bill O'Rourke was surprised to see Ton That Dao, the Vietnamese translator he had worked with at the clinic, seated in the cafeteria of the Chu Lai 01st Evacuation hospital. Next to him, faced in the other direction was a U.S. soldier, an officer of some kind.

"Hey, Dao, how's it going?" O'Rourke threw out in passing.

"Good," the always serious translator replied.

"Got some business here?" O'Rourke asked.

The officer then turned around. It was Maj. Dennis Doren, the Intelligence major that O'Rourke had met the previous day.

"We've got business wherever the enemy is," the major said before the translator had a chance to answer O'Rourke's question.

"Are you saying the enemy is here, sir?" said O'Rourke.

"According to our reports, he soon will be," Doren said. "There's some Medivac choppers on the way in, and they say they're bringing in a few gooks with wounded wings."

O'Rourke didn't like that comment, whether the object of it was an enemy or not. He had heard stories of enemy soldiers being interrogated by intelligence officers, but he had never seen any instances of it himself. Some rumors had been going around lately, though, that a more aggressive policy was in the making because of recent reports of infiltrations from the North.

The scene soon materialized that Doren had predicted, augured by the whack-whack sound of approaching choppers. The familiar silhouettes of UH-1H Hueys approached from Rocket Ridge, just west of the base, with the low afternoon sun behind them.

There was a swarm of them,—six, at least,—the yield of a major battle.

For the next hour, O'Rourke was absorbed in the organized chaos of evaluating the wounded men and instructing the nurses and other personnel who had come out from different duties inside the clinic to route the stretchers in the correct direction.

A half dozen or so soldiers were taken at once into the surgical ward for immediate procedures that had a chance of saving their lives. Several others, designated as "expectant" were left where they were, attended to by a chaplain who had arrived about the same time as the choppers.

As he worked, O'Rourke could hear the familiar low sound of prayers being said in the background. Interspersed with that was the weeping of a soldier protesting that he didn't want to die.

"No need to worry, son. Everything will be fine for you," O'Rourke heard the chaplain saying.

Over in a corner of the tarmac, on stretchers, were three enemy

soldiers who had also brought in. They had received no attention at all while the American soldiers were being attended to. One of them was moaning in pain.

Soon, though, O'Rourke noticed that Maj. Doren, the intelligence officer, and Ton That Dao, the translator, had arrived on the scene and were passing slowly through the area where the enemy soldiers had been set aside. After looking over the prisoners, they focused on one soldier that O'Rourke had noticed earlier was an officer, judging by the insignias on his shirt collar.

O'Rourke saw the major poking with a stick at the man's stomach while the translator gave the man some threats or instructions received from the major.

Later, when the enemy soldiers were finally brought into the clinic, into a separate area removed from the American soldiers, O'Rourke saw that the man had a open stomach wound, gaping wide enough to see the entrails wound around inside as in a picture in a biology book. The man also had a torn shoulder, with the muscle sheared off on the top of the shoulder right to the bone. It was blunt and irregular as if from the sloppy blow of an axe.

A doctor came in, one that O'Rourke had observed before not for outright cruelty to wounded enemy soldiers but for indifference bordering on neglect. O'Rourke had seen the doctor sewing up a wound without use of any pain medication and not wearing gloves as was standard practice to prevent infection.

As the doctor approached the wounded enemy officer, Maj. Doren stepped in with a wave of his hand.

"We're gonna have a go at this one," he said. The doctor stood back impassively and watched. "How long will this take?" he asked.

"Long as he wants it to," Maj. Doren replied.

"Major Doren, this man needs laparotomy or he will die."

"What the hell is a lappa-roh-doh-mee?"

"Sewing up his intestines inside."

"How long can he last."

"Maybe a couple of hours."

"Well, let him wait a little then."

"I have other tasks to do."

"Go ahead."

Maj. Doren turned to the translator, who was standing by with his typical serious but inscrutable expression.

"Tell this guy about the doh-ray-me. His guts are tore up inside. Tell him there's some stuff we want to know or he's gonna die."

Ton That Dao took off with that, speaking in a gentle tone. Whatever he said took considerable more words than Maj. Doren had said.

The wounded soldier replied with a negative shake of the head when the words were said in Vietnamese. In response to that, he mumbled some words. O'Rourke observed, however, that the man followed along with the words in English and appeared to understand them.

"What did he say?" asked Maj. Doren.

"Said his duty prevents that."

The major poked the man in the bare entrails with some object he had in his hand. It appeared to be a wooden ruler that he had picked up from the desk on the side of the room.

"Tell him again, talk to us or die."

Ton That Dao said a few words again.

O'Rourke stepped up at this point. "Should I go get the doctor now, sir?" he said.

"Hell, no. Let the fucker wait," the major replied, shaking his head with exasperation. "Tell this fool again, if he doesn't cooperate, he's going to die."

Ton That Dao took off with that again,—in an earnest, almost pleading tone,—but the wounded soldier closed his eyes with an expression of resignation.

"I'd like to give him some xylocaine, sir." O'Rourke said.

"What the fuck is that?"

"Pain medication."

"Do you understand, corpsman, this soldier is an officer that knows the position of soldiers that may kill American soldiers? It's their pain I'm thinking of."

"Yes, sir."

"Stay out of the way."

Suddenly the wounded man began shivering. The shivering extended to include teeth chattering, then shoulder and arm motion.

"I'm going for the doctor," said O'Rourke.

"I'll get him," said a nurse by the door.

Maj. Doren watched for a moment with an impassive expression, then wheeled and awaked away.

A nurse went running for the doctor while O'Rourke leaned over the man to stop him from falling off the bed. The man uttered something, gave a loud sigh, and jerked his head backward.

"The doctor is on his way," said the nurse returning.

"I think it's too late," said O'Rourke.

Simple tests soon verified the lack of vital signs.

Ton That Dao, the translator, was still standing by, his typical serious expression transformed by lines of tension around the mouth and eyes into a look of remorse.

"What did he say before he died?" asked O'Rourke.

"I don't know. I couldn't make it out."

"Anyone see his name tag?" O'Rourke asked.

"Yes, it's here on his wrist," said the nurse, who had also stayed at the scene.

Ton That Dao took the name tag and looked at it.

What's his name?" asked O'Rourke.

"Xuan Than. Maj. Xuan Than."

O'Rourke didn't know, of course, that this enemy officer was the one who had presented at length to his former team-mate, Jim Morris, in the POW camp in Sam Neua. Xuan Than, returned to combat duty, had participated in an assault in Xuan province that had come under heavy America counterfire, resulting in his wound.

"Dao," said O'Rourke, "will you help me identify this man a little more? Maybe we can notify someone that he died."

The translator nodded and stood by ready to assist.

O'Rourke felt around at the dead man's pockets and discovered a small, leather-covered, three-by-five inch spiral notebook in the chest pocket of the torn shirt. The notebook cover had a hand-painted floral design.

Inside the notebook, within a plastic case on the first page, was a photo portrait of a dark-haired, lovely Vietnamese woman with a face that at once suggested intelligence and compassion. Scribbled in the bottom corner of the photo were some words in Vietnamese.

"What does it say?" O'Rourke asked the translator.

"It says, 'With my love, Thi Li," Ton That Dao replied.

Inside the notebook were comments scrawled on various pages. The notebook was obviously a personal journal of some kind. One the back cover was what appeared to be a scrawled address.

"What is the address."

"I think it the address of the same woman as in the photo," the translator replied. "It says, 'Mai Thi Li, doctor" and then a military unit, a medical unit."

"The woman is a doctor?"

"I think so, yes."

"Dao, is there any way you could get this to her, this journal, and a little letter telling her that Xuan Than is dead."

"Yes, Bill, I can do that."

"Can you tell her, please, how he died?"

"You tell me the words now and I will write them down."

O'Rourke dictated: "Dr. Mai Thi Li, I must regretfully inform you that your friend Xuan Than has died in our clinic in Chu Lai after being brought here wounded in battle. I am an American medic who was with him when he died. There was an attempt made to extract information

from him as a condition for him to receive care. He refused to give the information and died as a result."

Having done this, O'Rourke went off after the end of his shift, disturbed by what he had witnessed.

[Chapter 216 notes]

217. O'Rourke and Brown discuss whether Xuan Than was treated properly

That same evening, in a bar just off base frequented by Americans, Bill O'Rourke came upon Orin Brown, seated outdoors under an awning decked with lights. Brown hailed O'Rourke and waved him over to his table.

"Good evening, sir," said the former coxswain with a smart salute.

"Heard what happened, Bill," Brown said at once, before the former coxswain even sat down.

"Who'd you hear it from, sir?"

"The translator, Dao."

"What did he say?"

"Said he didn't think Doren intended to let the soldier die. He just misgauged it."

"Sir, I witnessed the whole thing. Doren was warned."

"Well, I'd be the first to admit, he's a mite too intent. But I don't think he would flat out let someone die."

O'Rourke made no reply.

A Vietnamese waitress in a mini-skirt stopped at the table, and O'Rourke ordered a beer. She brought it at once from the bar, which was right at hand.

O'Rourke took a sip of the beer and sighed.

"Whole damn situation here," he said, "sometimes, sir, it boggles the mind."

"You got that right."

Down the street was the usual scene of local hookers and American soldiers joking with them as they passed by to the bar.

"Maybe later," said a soldier.

"You ask for me?" a pretty hooker replied. "Me good, you know. You no like, money back."

"Fat chance of that," said another soldier.

The group of a half dozen or so soldiers continued on into the bar, scanning the crowd for their friends. Minus the uniforms, they could have been taken for a bunch of college kids back in the Midwest.

"You know, way I heard it, the guy that died would'a pro'bly died anyhow," said Brown. "Maybe by going along, he could have bought himself a couple days. But Dao said the wound was pretty bad."

"So you condone this kind of thing?" O'Rourke said.

"No, I don't condone it, O'Rourke. But let's get one thing straight here. Doren didn't pull out a gun and shoot the guy. His intent was merely to put on the pressure a little bit. The guy died. I grant you. That's too bad. But a lot of people are dying around here, O'Rourke. That's what Doren meant, this is not the Peace Corps."

"I'm aware this is a war, sir," O'Rourke answered. "I see the results every day."

"Yes, you do, Bill, and more than me. But, even despite that you have to admit you lucked out with a pretty posh assignment... As I did myself, as I just said... Here we are in this seaside town... Surf rolling in... Sitting here in this bar. A la Parie... Most of these guys you're referring to—who come in with these results,—they don't see anything like this 'cept when they're on R&R. They're hot and sweaty and bit up by bugs, and they stand a good chance of dying."

O'Rourke winced at the suggestion that he had somehow weaseled out of the real war. He knew he hadn't done that, intentionally, but Brown was right, here he was nonetheless in a pretty posh situation where he didn't have to worry about dying.

"Well, my hat is off to them," he said.

"Something I've learned, Bill," said Brown, "you hear when you're a kid, you know, about all these heroes in war, but when you actually see the war firsthand you don't see many of them around."

"What are they then, Captain?"

"They're just trying to get through, same as you and me."

"I've seen some heroes, sir," O'Rourke remarked, "and this guy Xuan Than was one of them, in my opinion."

Orin Brown leaned back thoughtfully with his drink, watching the hookers peddling their trade. "Xuan Than was his name, soldier that died?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll grant you he was brave and noble, and all that. But you know what, Bill?"

"No, what?"

"You can be brave and noble and still be on the wrong side. You can be brave and noble and believe with all your heart in what you're doing and still do harm, so far as the world is concerned. And you can be non-brave and non-noble like you and me and still do good so far as the world is concerned... So this guy, Xuan Than, was hero enough, or sap enough, to die for a bad cause. I don't have a lot of sympathy for that, to tell you the truth."

"Maybe to him, Captain Brown, it was a good cause," said O'Rourke. "It was good enough to him to be worth giving his life for."

Orin Brown negated that concept immediately with a shake of his head as he formulated an answer.

"See, to me, Bill," he said. "with all due respect, a comment like this is just a bunch of relativistic bullshit. And, believe me, I've heard this kind of thing before. Are you saying, objectively, there's no difference in his cause versus ours? Are you saying, what it comes down to is how

people ‘feel’ about it? I don’t believe that.”

“We’re the good guys, you’re saying.”

“Yes, I am.”

O’Rourke made no comment. He knew that he did believe that, really, and he was surprised at himself in having to be corrected about it.

“Let’s take a closer look at this cause that Xuan Than died for,” Brown said emphatically, leaning forward with his beer. “Let’s start back when the Commies took over up there in North Vietnam, in 1954 when the Red dictator, Ho Chi Minh, first came to power,—you know how many people fled that area, Bill, came down south here, soon as the word got out of how the country would be divided up?”

“No, I don’t, sir,” said O’Rourke.

“One million, Bill. One million people voted with their feet, so to speak. And that was just the start of it.”

“Where’d you hear that, sir?”

“Where’d I hear it? This is documented fact, O’Rourke, and I’m in a position to know it, being in Intelligence here. With the liberal press in America, maybe, coming through school, you never got the real story.”

“I guess I didn’t.”

“You want to read about it, sometime, read *Deliver Us From Evil* by Dr. Tom Dooley, U.S. Navy doctor that was in the midst of it all.”

“I heard of him.”

“Well, read his book sometime. These people were Catholics, mainly, fleeing from religious persecution. And this was no fiction. You can read some of his horror stories about what these Commies did, doing the bid of their dictator, the one the hippies are so excited about. ‘Ho, Ho, Ho,’ I heard one of their chants goes.”

O’Rourke’s mind went back to Chicago, 1968, the day when he and his brother Pat and Pat’s roommates Lee Cobus and Marsha Collins had joined up with the demonstrators marching down Michigan Avenue toward the Sheraton Hotel where the Democratic convention was being held. He had heard this chant, as he recalled, not long before the Chicago cops had charged in with tear gas and batons.

“You ought to have some sympathy for Catholics,” Brown said, “with a name like O’Rourke.”

“Sure, I got sympathy. I went to a Catholic college.”

“There you go… You know what these freaks did, Bill, they jammed chop sticks in some of the kids ears to punish them for listening to prayers.”

“I didn’t know that, sir.”

“This is no lie. This is all documented fact.”

Orin Brown stated directly into Bill O’Rourke’s eyes as he spoke. Obviously, he felt deeply about the information he was conveying.

Having concluded, he sat back in his seat, looked around the smoky room, crowded with soldiers. He raised his hand to order another round of beers for himself and O'Rourke.

With his new beer placed squarely on the table in front of him, the intelligence officer leaned forward to resume his exposition.

"Then consider this, Bill," he said. "You know what happened when 'Ho Ho Ho' sent his cadres down south here to Vietnam? You know how they go about their business of, quote, winning over the populace?"

"No, I don't," the former coxswain replied.

"Well, first thing, Bill, and this is documented, also, they go into a village they've scoped out ahead of time, and they round up the village leaders, everybody they know of who might put up a voice of protest, and right there, just like that, they take these people out to the edge of the village and kill them."

"I know there have been irregularities, Captain," O'Rourke remarked in a soft voice, nodding.

"Irregularities? Atrocities!"

O'Rourke sat quietly with his beer listening.

"Summarial execution, that's their mode of persuasion," Brown said, sitting back again to look around the room. "I heard one story about this incident where the VC came in and, as a warning, took one of the kids of the village chief. The boy emerged from the rice paddies a few days later and ran up to his parents. Both of his hands had been chopped off. This is not just hearsay. A Marine colonel was on hand at the moment and he saw this incident happen.

"Heard about another incident that happened up around Da Nang. All the villagers were prodded out to the village chief's home. Then, as they watched, in front of this guy's wife and little kids, the tongue of the chief was cut out and his balls were sliced off and shoved inside his mouth. As he died, the VC went to work on his wife, slashing open her womb. Then came the kids. I'll spare you the details.

"There have been many incidents like that, O'Rourke. Soldiers not killed in battle lined up and shot... Beheaded, disemboweled, hung up with signs telling the people if they keep supporting Saigon, this is what's going to happen to them.

"These atrocities are not isolated cases, O'Rourke. This is their mode of warfare. 'History's grisliest catalogue of barbarism,' I read in one article. Mutilations and murders that would have been shocked Adolf Hitler and the SS in World War II.

"So, you know, Bill, I certainly don't condone what happened to the soldier who died in the clinic, Xuan Than, but all this has to be taken into context. That death was accidental... These things I'm telling you about are not accidental."

Orin Brown had more accounts to tell later as he and O'Rourke left the bar together, and walked back into the base where their hooches were only about a quarter mile apart. He talked about the repression that he claimed had followed the Viet Minh victory in North Vietnam. People who dared to speak out against Communism had been rounded up and imprisoned, he said. Many had been executed or brain-washed.

"This is all documented, Bill," he said again. "That's what I meant about this not being a matter for relational ethics. This is a matter of a world struggle between good and evil, in my opinion."

At Brown's invitation, O'Rourke stopped by briefly at Brown's hooch where he had a separate, small room with a bed, desk, and a collection of books reflecting his love of history.

"Tell you what I believe in," Brown said, "this whole domino thing. One nation falls to Communism, then the nation next to it, and so on."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"That's what we're up against, in my opinion."

Brown took a historical atlas from his stack of books and opened it to a map labeled "The Free World and the Communist Block," which he handed across for O'Rourke to look at.

This was the same book and same map Brown had shown to Tom Steward more than two years before when he and Steward had been roomies together in the Air Force ROTC program at Fairchild AFB. The map was of the entire world viewed from above the North Pole, with massive areas colored red and blue. Within the red area were the Soviet Union, China, and the Warsaw Pact countries. Within the blue area was the U.S., Canada, the NATO countries in Europe, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, South Vietnam, the Philippines, Formosa, South Korea, and Japan.

The map also showed the locations of strategic air bases, inter-continental ballistic missile sites, and fleets. The Red and Blue, as depicted here, were two great armies lined up for a great battle.

"The whole world is involved in this struggle," said Brown, "and so are you and I in our humble little part."

World struggle or not, O'Rourke departed from Orin Brown after this discussion, still disturbed by Xuan Than's death and the part his fellow Americans had played in it. But a few days later, in the exact same room where he had observed the doctor withholding treatment to Xuan Thuy, O'Rourke witnessed another incident that was just as striking. In this case, a young doctor refused to cooperate when pressed upon in the same way by the same intelligence officer, Maj. Dennis Doren, in a similar incident involving a wounded enemy soldier.

"Let me clear," the doctor said. "You are a major, I can see, and I know you outrank me, but I have an obligation here to act as a doctor

with a man who needs medical assistance."

"There's plenty around here for you to visit your obligations on," the major replied. "Attend to someone else until we complete our work with this man."

"Get out of my way, sir," the doctor said. "If you have a problem, talk to the commanding officer."

O'Rourke was in an adjacent hall when he observed this interaction, and the doctor was turned away, so his face could not be seen, but had O'Rourke been nearer by, with a better view, he would have been led by a family resemblance to recognize the doctor as the brother of his old rowing teammate, Tom Steward. Art Steward, newly arrived in Vietnam, had been assigned to the clinic while awaiting reassignment.

From the incident with Xuan Than and the aftermath with the other doctor, he had learned that there could be good and bad in both armies, O'Rourke reflected later, as he walked along the Chu Lai beach. On the other hand, he could not deny that what Brown had said was true, that the struggle of the war was of greater importance than individual morality; it was a struggle between freedom and slavery for all of humanity.

He would have to keep both these realities clearly in mind, he noted, in order to be both a good medic and a good soldier, as he had entered the war wanting to be.

O'Rourke also recalled with shame what Brown had said about he and O'Rourke having wound up with "posh assignments" while others were facing combat and losing their lives.

That evening he wrote a letter to Barbara Carpenter, suffused with his usual emotion for her, and containing many little details about life at the base, as his letters to her often did.

At the end, though, he wrote down a statement that he knew Barbara Carpenter would get the importance of right off.

"Barb," he wrote, "I've been thinking more about what I told you I was thinking about when we were together,—volunteering for another tour here as a combat medic. It's been just an idea up to now, but I've decided to go ahead with the paperwork involved. I know you understand why I want to do this, and, as I recall, you also put in to serve another year. So, the good part of it is we'll both be here together with a chance to see one another now and then. I do hope we can do that.

"Yours fondly,

"Bill XXX OOO."

[Chapter 217 notes]

218. Steward resists self-compromise as a letter from Barb suggests "expectation"

About this same time, in April 1970, Tom Steward was surprised to receive a letter from Barbara Carpenter.

The letter began as follows:

"Dear Tom,

"For some reason this past week when I was sitting writing a letter to your old friend Bill O'Rourke (who's over here now, I'm sure you know), I got to thinking about you and me, and that one time when we went to the crew party together and I did that 'little show' for you out in your car, outside that house I was living in. I'm sure you must remember, Tom, you rammed me up against the car door pretty hard! It was such an innocent, confused interaction on both of our parts. We were just kids, really. Now, here we are, you're a married man, and I'm a nurse here in Vietnam like I thought then I might be but at the same time just kind of half believed would really happen. But anyhow, what this is all a wind up to say is, remember that night how we talked about how we were going to write back and forth to keep up our friendship? And we never did because I know, from your side, Bill came in the picture, and he still is in the picture, I don't mean there's anything wrong with that, it's been so great between him and me, you know, but I would still like to be friends like we said and still would like to exchange letters now and then—as we were saying that night of the crew party we wanted to do.

"Whew! I better take a breath..."

The rest of the letter was just as charming. It was not coquettish in any way. It merely conveyed a simple offer of friendship, and Steward was touched by that.

He wondered, though, just what had led Barbara Carpenter out of the blue to send him a letter again. He decided that the answer was near the end of the letter in a paragraph that read:

"My committed time of service, the year I promised to spend here, is just three months into my tour of duty which is one year, but I'm already considering doing a second tour. The need is so great, it's something I can do, and your buddy Bill has been talking lately about how he wants to become a combat medic, which, far as I know, would involve doing another tour of duty. I know it seems crazy with everyone else running the other way. His original objective was to be a combat medic, and he still wants to do that. I don't know what the chances are of it actually happening. There's all kinds of red tape, you know. He would have to change units. The army is a big organization. But there's an element of fate to it, too. I just feel that Bill is driven to complete something he began, he has that level of integrity, to do that. As far as him and me, it's awful sweet, you know. I think, as far as him and me, we'll work out our

life here together, and maybe we'll be back together for another crew party sometime in the future. Then all of this all of us have been searching for and groping for, kind of, will maybe come to pass, with us being part of that, when we come back there. I just feel there is this great future for America that we have all been striving for together, even though you're there in that seemingly so different world. I get the same sense from Mary Brandt…

"Whew! I don't have the least idea what I'm talking about."

What Steward found in this paragraph was a nostalgia for the past that he and Barb and the rest of the old gang in Minnesota had shared, a past associated with the boat club and the activities that had happened through it. He had felt this same nostalgia himself. But more importantly there was the expectation of something else coming to pass that they were all part was, the people that had come out of college together, whether their lives had taken them to Vietnam or into the various never anticipated situations at home that people like him and Kris and Matt and Mary had stumbled into to. He thought to himself that he didn't have the least idea, either, how to define this exactly.

When Steward showed the letter to his wife Kristine, she was strong in her approval of his keeping up the old ties. "I know that part of your life is really important to you," she remarked in the maternal manner she had when issues like this came up.

She had demonstrated in her own dealings that he had observed how much importance she placed on maintaining contact with friends, both with her own old friends like the Andrews', back in California, and with friends of his that had become her own friends, like Mary Brandt. She had begun to promote the idea with her husband that maybe, somehow, she and he could visit California in the coming summer, and she was trying to arrange for the Brandt's to visit her and Tom in early May (about a month distant), when, according to Mary's recent letter, the Brandt's would be passing through on their way to Kentucky for a revisit of their own, back to the places where she and Matthew had been volunteers.

Kristine Steward, in general, was in a much brighter frame of mind now that she and Tom had moved back from their isolated living situations in Preston County to the hustle and bustle and city lights of Morgantown. The Steward's new basement apartment, located just outside of town, was cozy and sunny (on the walkout kitchen side). She had begun working at a job as a file clerk in a university office in town, for which she dressed up prettily each morning and from which she came home every evening with stories of office intrigues.

With the new income from Kris's job adding to Tom's project income, which he still received (despite the continuous prospect of the

project's running out of funds), the Steward's had been able to have a normal young people's life without constant anxiety about money. They were saving money as a couple for the first time, so visiting California in the summer, as Kris wanted to do, now seemed a realistic possibility. The Steward's had become happy newlyweds again, enjoying evenings out and their love life together.

Tom Steward, in the meantime, while coming home to this new life in Morgantown each evening, had maintained a foothold in the Family Services Agency and its rural welfare rights project, per an arrangement agreed on with Janis Kulas, the agency head and project director. The arrangement agreed on was that he would spend three days a week in Preston County, maintaining his contacts with the local organization and attending the bi-weekly meeting. On the other two days, he worked in the Morgantown office, writing funding proposals. The government (Office of Economic Opportunity) was no longer a realistic possible source of funds, under the guidelines put into place by the Nixon administration, but there were various private foundations that funded projects. Equipped with an alphabetical list, he had been going through them methodically, tailoring each proposal to the stated goals of the targeted group.

Janis Kulas had also appointed Steward to attend an Appalachian poverty conference scheduled for early the next month. The idea was that maybe he would come with some ideas for proposals from networking with representatives from other agencies serving the poor.

On the day after receiving the letter from Carpenter, when it was still fresh on his mind, Steward spent the day on one such proposal, this one directed to a foundation with an expressed mission of strengthening the traditional Appalachian culture. With this in mind, he was making a pitch that family life was basic to Appalachian traditions so through strengthening families the traditions would be preserved.

He was in the process of writing an opening statement when the project director, Janis Kulas, came out from her office and looked over his shoulder.

The words he was writing said: "Hopefully, with the new activities made possible by the new funds from your organization, the tentative self-help groups now in existence will solidify their membership and grow into an effort spreading to nearby counties. Membership in these organizations will, in turn, strengthen the served families, and thereby strengthen the Appalachian heritage."

"Tom, in general," said Kulas, speaking in her careful manner to avoid her habitual lisp, "whenever you put down 'hopefully,' just cross it out automatically" (the word "cross" took extra attention as she drew it out), "and never, never, never call any of our groups 'tentative.' You must learn to write in a positive tone."

"Yes," he said, nodding in assent.

"And think in one, too."

"Yes."

"That's what makes the dream happen."

"Yes."

Steward thought about this interchange with Janis Kulas as he drove around Preston County the next day. As usual, he had nowhere in particular to go, nothing in particular to do. He stopped at the storefront office in Kingwood. No one was there. The empty meeting room brought a recollection of the many meandering meetings he had attended there, exercises in inanity, accomplishing nothing. He drove past Arlis Simpson's house and saw her car was not parked out front; she wasn't home. From Kingwood, he headed down the two-lane highway toward Tucker County, where the WRO president Clara Shoats lived. He could think of no reason to talk to her, so he turned around and headed home.

Meanwhile, he continued to mull over his brief meeting with Janis Kulas the day before. What struck him most about what Kulas was said was the stilted, compromised language it led to, contrasted with the earnest, explorative language of the letter he had received from Barbara Carpenter. He realized that, as never before, he was being forced to think and write words that he didn't really believe in.

Did he really see any good in the project anymore, any hope that it would effect any true change or true amelioration of the conditions of the people it was purported to help? Did he really believe that the project was connected somehow with realizing a "dream," as Janis Kulas had said. The romantic language of "hope" and "dreams" seemed ill suited to her cautious, duplistic efforts.

He still saw Rachel Locke at times trudging up the long hill to her cabin. When he did, he always stopped to give her a ride, and then he saw again the cabin in the woods with the retarded boys smiling at him with open mouths as he and Rachel approached in the car. The project had not helped her to improve her situation. The project had not helped anyone, really, except by providing people with a ride to town to buy groceries and the social aspects of the meetings.

"Sometimes I think it would be best for me to quit this project, whether or not we get funds," he told his wife as they sat in the pizza joint on campus eating.

"What would you do then?"

"Look for some other alternative service assignment. I don't know what, exactly. It would be back to that book I had before, with all the listings, mailing off letters again."

To this she nodded her head thoughtfully. "Maybe I could find something else, too," she said. "If we're in a place where there's a

possibility."

He knew that she was referring again to her idea of raising money for some worthy cause through concerts. The girl he had met on the bus had not let go of that ambition, obviously, though she seldom talked anymore of the accomplishments that she had so proudly told him about when he had first met her. He realized again the extent to which she had allowed his interests to eclipse her own,—with them both having arrived through that, ironically, in a situation not suited to either.

"Maybe you should see what happens at the conference," she said. "Maybe that will give you some new ideas."

They resolved on the plan to allow the conference to have whatever effect it would have, followed by a decision within the next month about whether to remain in their current situation.

219. Steward attends conference with Matt's old colleagues, considers quitting project

Tom Steward's trip by bus to the "Appalachian Poverty Conference, as it was called, took him through Charlestown, West Virginia, and about 75 miles southeast to the little town of McCollums Mill, where the local priest hosting the conference was none other than Fr. Daniel Riley, AKA "Plain Dan," the friend and photography mentor of Steward's old rowing buddy and doubles partner, Matthew Brandt.

Attending this conference were some other friends of Brandt, also, including Brandt's former boss, Fletcher Bourne, and Brandt's former MVs colleague, Dennis Kelly. Riley and Bourne were unknown to Steward at this time, but Steward remembered Kelly, of course, from the recent Moratorium Against the War in Washington D.C., where he and his wife and Dennis had shared the Brandt's living room floor, sleeping side by side in their sleeping bags for two intense nights of post-midnight talks.

Steward, wondering what to expect of the conference, watched from the bus window warily as the bus crossed the iron-frame bridge at the edge of town, continued past the old stone mill, and headed up the main street past the red-brick church that was Fr. Dan's center of operations. A sign there, outside the school, which had a brick exterior matching that of the church, announced that the conference check-in was inside. Cars and pickup trucks, most of an older vintage, were parked at the curb. Several women, dressed in old-fashioned, pleated skirts, and carrying shabby suitcases, were being directed into the school.

The town had no bus depot. Steward was the single passenger exiting at the filling station two blocks down from the church. With his backpack slung over his shoulder, he headed back to the school.

It was late in afternoon, near sunset. A fresh, springlike breeze wafted down the street of the little town as Steward walked, his face set in a typical meditative expression. Though he had been involved for almost three years in what might have been loosely described as "the Movement," he had never adopted the bearded style of his peers. He was clean-shaven still, and still as ruddy in complexion as he had been in his days on the St. Thomas crew. Only the slightly longer cut of his hair, and the usual jeans and Army jacket of the times, indicated his activist inclinations in the common lexicon of style.

Pools of melted snow lay on the sidewalk. Streamlets of sparkling water flowed down the street within crevices in the ice. That and the sun shining brightly from above the tree-lined ridge of mountains to the west of the little town evoked in Tom Steward a sense of wanderlust, mingled with memories of his days heading west with Bill O'Rourke. He thought again of the vague nostalgia and expectation expressed in his recent letter

from Barbara Carpenter.

At the school, Steward paused on the sidewalk outside. The setting was not what he had expected. There were no official-looking, dignified, agency types in view, but more types such as the full skirted women he had seen from the bus. There were also not many young people such as himself, recognizable by age and dress as college expatriates from somewhere not Appalachian and not poor, who had come out for a year or two of volunteer service. Several older men who appeared to be factory workers or miners passed him on their way into the school, speaking tersely to one another. These were people such as might have attended one of his meetings back in Preston County though many had looks of keener cognizance.

Flipping his backpack over one shoulder, Steward continued inside, thinking he should not have come to such a meeting. He would be set out from the others at once. He was growing weary of struggling with his quiet personality. He just wanted to go in, as to a class at college, and sit down in a desk without speaking to anyone.

Inside the school, in a gym led to by signs on the walls, about 50 people, mostly of the types already described, were clustered in informal groups. Several people waited at a registration table on the far end of the gym.

Steward, feeling eyes upon him, crossed the gym with his backpack slung over his shoulder, noticing at once the one young person in view, who, at this moment, by coincidence, turned around toward him, revealing a bespectacled, serious lean face with thoughtful, intelligent eyes and an expression that suggested gentleness and generous regard of others.

It was Dennis Kelly.

Steward was delighted to see someone he knew. He remembered Kelly as being likeable and easy to talk to, despite the unrelenting intensity of his political interests.

“Oh, my God! Tom Steward!” Kelly said.

“Hey, how’s it going, Dennie?” Steward replied, extending his hand with his ready smile.

“You come all the way down here from Morgantown?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Hey, well, welcome, man!”

“Thanks very much.”

It was in this initial greeting that Steward soon also met Fletcher Bourne and Fr. Dan Riley who were looking on from a short distance away as if waiting to be introduced. His first impression of Bourne, before being introduced to him, was that Bourne was a sallow old miner or manual worker of some kind, though the gray eyes peering at him had

a look of uncommon intelligence and good humor. Fr. Dan was dressed in tan work pants and a white shirt, open at the collar, with nothing in his dress to suggest his clerical status, yet Steward, with his experience in Catholic schools, had pegged him at once as a priest and had concluded, before being introduced, that this was the priest who had organized the meeting.

Kelly called the two men over, introducing Fr. Dan as "this kindly old priest" and Bourne as "this contrary lookin' ol' coot."

"Just call me plain Dan," Fr. Riley said at once, as he extended his hand.

It was a big, thick hand, Steward noticed, and this, combined with a glance at the priest's beefy neck and limbs, led him to suppose that Fr. Dan had been a product of a boyhood where physical work had been a common experience. That was true; the priest had grown up on a family farm in Pennsylvania, as he had described to Matt Brandt on Brandt's visit a year before.

"Now how is it you two young men are acquainted?" Bourne inquired. "Are you another MV?"

"No, we've got a mutual friend," Steward answered. "Both stayed at this friend's house in D.C... For the moratorium against the war."

"And who is that?"

"Guy named Matthew Brandt."

The eyes of the newspaperman and priest lighted with interest upon hearing Brandt's name, and Steward soon learned that Fletcher Bourne had been Brandt's first boss in the MVs, that Fr. Dan had first met Matthew and Dennis at a poverty conference in Covington, Ohio, and that Fr. Dan and Matthew shared an interest in photography and corresponded about it.

"How is it, Thomas, that you and Mr. Brandt came to be acquainted?" Bourne inquired.

"Oh, Stewie and Matt go way back," Dennis Kelly interjected. "Went to college together. St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Rowed together on the same team. You know, the long boats with eight guys."

"With the little guy hollering orders," said Fr. Dan.

"Yea, 'crew,' they call it," Kelly replied. "Stewie and Matt even rowed in a double together."

"Is that so?" said Bourne.

"Oh, yes."

"Now, I imagine Matthew had no patience with any high-falutin' talk of teamship and discipline," Bourne remarked with a twinkle, "and yet he was the best team member and the most disciplined, or close to it."

"Exactly," said Tom.

That brought laughter to the group as they moved across the gym to

an event they had agreed to attend together, a workshop to be presented by Fr. Dan. Steward, by this time, had gone from his initial wariness about the conference to a good feeling about it. The topic of Fr. Dan's workshop was funding, in fact, which directly related to his reason for attending the conference.

In the workshop, however, Fr. Dan offered little hope for funding of the sort Steward had been involved in soliciting lately in his office hours in Morgantown under the watch of Janis Kulas.

"The first thing that must be said," Fr. Dan began, with the index finger of his right hand extended upward, "is the day of the big buck is over. And by this I mean, the day of the government support coming down, from the Office of Economic Opportunity, is over. LBJ's so-called 'War on Poverty' is over. We won't see that kind of money coming from Washington any more supporting programs like the local community action programs, government outreach workers, and so on. And we don't see it so much in the private funding sources, either. There's a different mood in the air, seeming projected from Washington."

Steward, hearing this, realized that the designation of "outreach workers" applied to him. He listened intently at the priest described the changes that had occurred in the "whole landscape of social change" (as Fr. Dan called it), owing to the shift in the Nixon Administration from federally-sponsored programs to a policy of distributing funds to state and local government, which in many cases were not inclined to put the funds back into those programs.

"What will happen then to these programs, these organizations, that came about in the LBJ era?" Fr. Dan asked rhetorically. "What replaces them is people like Dennis Kelly here, who used to be a Mountain Volunteer and who now works in a shoe factory and is the steward there. Not being outside as a helper, but working within. What replaces them is something our friend Fletcher Bourne here has often talked about in his paper, the *Miner Mountaineer*, a longer effort, patience to keep pressing for change, allowing it to happen according to its own good time. We've got to think less about money and more about resourcefulness."

Later, Steward went with a group of about a dozen people on a tour of the various enterprises in McCollums Mill established through Fr. Dan's sponsorship. These were the same enterprises that Matt Brandt had toured with Fr. Dan on his visit to the priest just before the election of 1968. The tour began in the church basement where several women were repairing clothes that Fr. Dan explained were sold to people throughout the county, "bringing an income to these women and cheap, sturdy clothes to families throughout this county." Next on the tour were three houses with studs and plywood visible on the upper story. The houses were being built by a local cooperative, the priest said. Then came the

two tomato hot houses and furniture shop that Matthew Brandt had also toured.

Steward also accompanied Kelly on a little side trip to visit a friend of Kelly, also a former MV, who had a situation quite similar to Kelly's, as a steward in a nearby mine.

"For me, I don't know, I just found this is the best way to bring about change," the young man said, holding his little daughter as his wife looked on. "And I've got this little one to look after. You know, got to think about where the dough comes from."

The cozy living room of the little house where this former volunteer lived had fully stocked book shelves that reminded Steward of the bookshelves he had seen in his bedroom (actually Seymour Frankel's study) while staying at the Frankel house in West L.A. just prior to his wedding. Steward recalled how the Trotsky look-alike printers' union president had told him about "starting on a shoe string" with his wife Penny, and how the bookcase in his study had included *Das Kapital* and other books that on closer inspection had seemed rather grim.

Later, after claiming one of the cots set up for the conference attendees in the basement of the school, Steward went over to the rectory, at the priest's invitation, for an evening meal with Fr. Dan, Dennis Kelly, and Fletcher Bourne.

The dish of the evening was Fr. Dan's specialty, "West Virginia Roman Catholic Lasagna," same as he had prepared for Brandt on Brandt's visit there, and, as on that occasion, there was a big bottle of wine in the center of the table to liven the atmosphere with friendly talk.

The conversation went in twists and turns from Fletcher Bourne's newspaper and the continuing strip mine demonstrations in Lecher County, to Fr. Dan's church and community programs and recent attempts at documenting them with photos, to Dennis Kelly's efforts as union steward in the shoe factory in his adopted town of Kensington, Kentucky, winding up eventually at Tom Steward, who talked about his activities with the Morgantown Family Services WRO project and their stated goal of a guaranteed annual income for people on relief.

That information brought a sympathetic regard and nodding of heads on the part of the three other men seated at the table in the priest's pleasant kitchen.

"Well, this kind of thing, the guaranteed income," said the priest, "the problem with it, is it sets the poor against one another."

"Yes," said Bourne, his sallow features set in thought, "what do you say to the fellow next door then, who's grubbing in the fields or in some low-ceiling mine? They work and make less than those who don't work, or they work and make the same."

"Yes," said Kelly. "Either way, there's a demotivation. People are

just people."

"It's a good concept," said the priest. "It's a Christian concept. But we human beings are not quite ready for everything that Christ asked us to do."

"Sad but true," Bourne said.

There was no meanness at all in this reaction of the three men to what Steward had said. There was a gentle attitude that sought to minimize any conveyance of criticism or any assumption of superiority or greater knowledge. Even so, Steward felt the edge of their dismissal of the effort he and his wife had been involved in.

Hadn't he known all along that something was wrong with the project he'd been working in, that at the bottom it just didn't make sense? Surely he had, he said to himself. But these three men at the table with him were so completely lacking in self-importance and personal ambition, as far as he could see, so devoted to service, that he felt obliged to admit to himself how compromised he had become in his work, especially in the funding proposals that he knew were replete with false claims and grandiose expectations.

220. Steward quits project; realizes Barb's expectation is for "cultural breakthrough"

On the bus trip back to Morgantown from McCollums Mill, Tom Steward thought about how he and Kristine had discussed whether he should quit the WRO project and had looked forward to the poverty conference that he had just completed as possibly providing an answer.

"Well, the answer is clear," he said to himself as he looked out the bus window to the West Virginia countryside, where pools of snow melt reflected the morning sunlight. "I'm going to take care of this as soon as I get back."

Steward also thought about Fr. Dan's claim made at the conference that "the day of the big buck is over," meaning, as Steward understood it, that the era of the agency and federal program was over.

To be replaced by what? Obviously, the conference had provided an answer to that, also, he said to himself, in the kinds of groups taking part. These were organizations of workers led by workers, organizations of church people led by other church people, and so on.

Was this not the true participation of people driven by their own "felt need," as he had learned about in training? Yes, certainly, it was. One had to admit, though, that the activity was on a much smaller scale, and led by people on a more part-time basis, than had been the case with the agency-driven, government-funded programs that he himself had been part of for the past several years.

The bus passed through a long, narrow valley displaying some of the staples of West Virginia society that he had become acquainted with in his work with the WRO project,—a lumber mill with stacks of new lumber, a coal processing plant with a pile of gob, a little church with a steeple. Behind them, gray smoke tumbled up into a clear blue sky above a densely wooded mountain. Isolated houses could be seen amidst the trees. At the end of the valley, a bend in the two-lane highway led to a cluster of houses with an "unincorporated" designation on a road sign and a gas station with a single pump.

There was a dignity peculiar to the people who lived here, thought Steward, a dignity that seemed related to the loneliness and clannishness of hamlets such as this. The dignity and clannishness would go on, hardly affected by the puny efforts the "war on poverty" had temporarily brought. Perhaps there would be some deeper changes in attitudes, as reflected by the self-help projects he had witnessed.

Steward thought back to Dennis Kelly and Kelly's life as a steward in a shoe factory. He thought of Kelly's friend who had taken up a similar life as a worker organizer, complete with the bookshelf of socialist books. Was he willing to take up such a life, or even a life such as Fr. Dan and Bourne had pursued, dedicated to community service? Once,

from a greater distance, a life like that had seemed appealing. Now it seemed bleak, he acknowledged to himself. Maybe it was his experience with Kris, seeing her wilt away and get progressively worn down by the grind of not having enough money.

No, he didn't want to proceed in such conditions, Steward thought. He didn't want to become a secular missionary such as Kelly and Kelly's friend had become. For the first time, he admitted to himself that he was unwilling to make such a sacrifice. He saw clearly again how compromised he had become in writing the proposals he'd been involved in, making claims he didn't believe in.

"It's all been bullshit," he said to himself, thinking of the hackneyed language of the proposals. "I've given over my mind to bullshit to keep a secure position."

Back in Morgantown, Steward watched as the downtown terminal where he could see his wife waiting among a group of about ten people, marked out at once by her fluffy blonde hair, arranged in big curls. She looked very young, girlish almost, and very pretty, he thought, dressed in blue jeans and a jacket with a fake fur collar and cuffs. His mind went back, for a moment, to his first sight of her as she had stood in line at the bus depot in Santa Barbara.

"Get some new ideas?" she said when they kissed.

"Not like I thought."

They went at once, before driving home, to the pizza joint by the football stadium that had become their special place in Morgantown. As they sat and talked, they agreed on the decision both had anticipated, that Tom would quit the WRO project immediately and then start making arrangements to find another alternative service assignment for the remainder of his two year commitment.

Steward also announced some other ideas he had thought of on the bus. If he quit at once, then he could get a regular job for a month or so before they visited California,—if they did that, and the prospect of it seemed more and more likely. He could work all of the month of April while writing his draft board and researching for other alternative service jobs. Maybe, if they left in early May, they could spend a month or maybe even two months in California, living with the Andrews, before they went on to his next job.

"Oh, Tom, wouldn't that be wonderful!" Kris exclaimed. "Wouldn't it be so wonderful to see the ocean again! And Don and Audrey! And Lyn! And Susan and Sandra! They would be so glad to see us!"

"You don't think we'd be an imposition?"

"Oh, no!"

"Maybe I could find a job out West somewhere, somewhere where the sun shines more."

"Oh, yes!"

Tom Steward realized from this interaction with his wife, and from her subsequent comments, how greatly she had missed her sunny home and how direly the winter darkness had affected her mental state. The darkness of the mountains, the closedness of the little valleys below the low hanging clouds, had worn them both down, he realized, as much as the experience of being poor.

Next day Steward went in to talk to his boss Janis Kulas and told her at once what he wanted to do.

"I would like to complete the proposals you're working on now," she said. "There are several of them, aren't there?"

"Five."

"I'd like you to complete them."

"Janis, I just can't write another word of them. I don't believe in what I'm saying."

"You've gone a long time then in being compromised."

"Yes."

"I would think you would have had the honesty, considerably before now, to bring up this matter."

"I didn't fully realize it in my own mind."

Janis Kulas did something unusual for her at this time. She got up out of her desk, which she seldom did when speaking, and stood a short distance behind the desk regarding Steward with a look that indicated displeasure and exasperation.

"Thomas, you came here self-billed as a community organizer, as someone adept at working among the rural poor," she said. "I must say, you certainly did not live up to that billing."

"Yes, I know. I was used to working in a little community, with the same people each day," Steward replied. "I just couldn't function well out among people I didn't interact with on a daily basis."

"To say the least, Thomas! To say the least! And I realized, at one point, that you have a verbal ability and could maybe help us with that. I thought you could be put to service there, but apparently your ideals are so precious you can't tell a little lie for the greater good."

Steward thought to himself that there was really no greater good to be served. The whole project was nothing but rhetoric. It had been nothing but rhetoric from the start, concocted partly to impress the academic community and partly to get funds to grow the Family Service Agency into a little two-county fiefdom. He thought these things but remained silent.

"And Krissy, she could have been an asset, maybe, with her personal appeal, but you wouldn't let her flourish on her own."

"I don't think that's true," said Steward.

He thought to himself that she could not resist making a strike at him in the area where she assessed him as most vulnerable.

"Well, I think it's true," Kulas replied. "You are like many men, you are sensitive, maybe, but there's a blind spot in your sensitivity that you're not aware of."

For a moment, Steward thought that Janis Kulas would begin to cry, but she quickly recovered her composure and seemed displeased at herself for having revealed emotion.

"Well, it's done then," she said softly. "I do appreciate some of the work you've done, and you have done some good work, also. The people have come to like you, the ones you've seen often."

"Thank you." Steward got up from his chair. "One thing, Janis, I need to define the arrangement with my draft board. I need to tell them exactly when I'm through her."

"Of course," she said, all at once seeming unusually sympathetic. "When did you arrive here? Wasn't it in late July?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's just say I'll cover you, as far as saying you're under my supervision, until that same date, one year. That will give you a little time to arrange your affairs."

"Well, thank you very much," he said.

"Tom, I would just ask for one favor."

"What's that."

"Explain the proposals you've started on to me, so I can finish them, or get someone to do it. And attend the meetings until you leave. To give some continuity there. Even if you don't believe in the philosophy, you believe in those people, don't you?"

"Yes."

That was the way it ended up. He left the office, already plotting ahead. It was Thursday. He would go up to the campus employment office at once to look for a job. He would be able to work the whole month of April. With the income from that combined with what Kris was earning, he and she would maybe be able to buy a better car. They could leave for California in early May, as she had said.

Steward headed down the long steps from the second floor offices to the street and out into the bright morning sunlight, feeling a great sense of relief and an excitement for the future such as he had not felt since the intoxicated days of his early romance with his wife. He drove up High Street toward the university campus and went directly to the employment office (which he knew the location of from his wife's recent application in the same office).

Within the office, Steward found a notice tacked on the bulletin board for a groundskeeper fill-in for one month, just what he had hoped to find.

Following the directions given there, he located the groundskeeping headquarters in a lot dug into the side of the hill where several trucks were parked and steps led up to a little office on top of a garage. There he met the foreman and made arrangements at once.

"Monday look alright?" the foreman said.

"Yes. It looks fine."

"7 o'clock. Then. Right here."

"Alright!"

"See you then."

From there, in a jubilant mood, Steward drove back down High Street again with a full day of freedom ahead.

Continuing down through the Morgantown downtown to the Mongahela River, he parked below the bridge and walked along the gleaming water, thinking back to his rowing days in Minnesota.

The war on poverty era was over, he thought, but something much bigger was happening in his own generation, a great ferment of some kind that had arisen somehow in protests against the war but that had greatly transcended that origin. What was the meaning and extent of it? He felt such a yearning inside.

Barbie Carpenter's letter came back into his thoughts as he walked along the river. That was what he had sensed in her letter, he observed to himself, that same ferment. That was the expectation that he had felt that he had not been able to figure out. It was the expectation of his entire generation that the ferment would lead somewhere, not just to a solution of social problems, but to some kind of immense breaking through, a cultural breakthrough.

Yes, that was what Barbie had been trying to express in her letter, Tom Steward thought to himself, that feeling of ferment breaking through to a new cultural reality that would incorporate the best of what they had learned and the best of what they had been in the past.

And going West again, as he and Kris were about to do, that was part of it, too, Steward thought, the great exploration that his generation was involved in, the point of arrival they were still all searching for together but had not yet found.

221. Steward's and Brandt's discuss "cultural change" (as Mary calls it)

The concept of "cultural breakthrough" that Thomas Steward had been thinking about was a topic of discussion when Matt and Mary Brandt visited the Steward's on the first weekend of April 1970. Mary had a less dramatic term for it. She called it simply "cultural change," when she referred to it in passing in her other comments about the trip back to Kentucky that had brought her and Matt through Morgantown.

Steward was quick to set that new term, in his mind, against its old counterpart, "social change," the term that had been, as he saw it, the prevailing theme of his own generation since the days of social leaders like John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Martin Luther King Jr., who by this time, under the new Nixon reality in Washington, seemed to be slipping into the past.

The new term "cultural change" no doubt had its antecedent in the old term "social change," but the new term was grander in focus and application than the old term. Social change had been pursued through social and political programs such as he and many of his peers had been involved in in the past few years. Cultural change was more amorphous. What did it involve, really? In his usual fashion, Steward mulled over this question in his mind.

"You notice how lately you hear a lot about cultural change?" he said that evening as he and Kris and the Brandt's sat together around a fire in a state park just outside of Morgantown where they had come for a picnic supper and an evening of talking. "Mary, you referred to it earlier."

"Yes," she replied, turning to him with interest.

"Well, I have to say, this is another case where, you know, I think I'm working things out, thinking things through in my own mind," Steward said, "I'm not even paying attention to what everyone else is saying, then I come up with an insight, and I realize everyone else has had it at the same time."

Brandt laughed, as he reclined on one elbow, watching the fire. He was the same old Matt in many respects, but, with his long hair and full beard, he had begun to take on the appearance of a patriarch as depicted sometimes in illustrated bibles.

"Why does this not surprise me, Stewball?" he remarked. "Oar in the water just a tiny bit behind the stroke."

"Aw, come on! That's not true!" Steward replied, laughing. "I was always exhorting you on!"

"Yes, I have noticed that," threw in the ever serious Mary, her handsome features set in thought, with the straight eyebrows lowered in the Kass family trademark frown. "It's the 'zeitgeist' as they call it, spirit of the times. It's like it's outside of all of us, you know, and we're being

carried along with it somehow."

"Well, you know me," said Steward. "This cultural change idea just occurred to me lately, actually when we were at your place in D.C., and I've been mulling it over, trying to figure it out."

"Well, what I think it means," said Kristine Steward, looking very young and pretty in the firelight as she paused to form her thought. At a full five years younger than any of the others, she had not yet turned 21. "What I think it means is, not to change them, not to change that. The goal is to change us, to change this, right here."

She accompanied her statement with charming gestures of both hands and dramatic tosses of her big curls of luxuriant blonde hair, indicating something in the distance for "them" and "that," and the circle of the fire for "us" and "this."

"Right on, sister," said Matt.

He had a wry, sarcastic way of saying most things, but he said this in a way that made it clear that he meant it sincerely as an expression of agreement and kinship.

"It's like I heard the hippies are saying," Kristine continued in a soft voice. "'Just be here now.'"

"Amen," said Mary with a smile.

"And it's not that, only," Kris went on, leaning forward from her position beside Steward, where she sat cross-legged, close to the fire to keep warm, with a shawl over her shoulders, a present from the Brandt's. It was from Honduras, complete with an Indian design, a stylized eagle with straight, boxlike wings. "It's *Easy Rider*, too. Exploring, looking, trying to understand... I can't explain it."

"Precisely," said Tom. "You say it very well."

He was impressed with how closely his wife's thoughts on the matter paralleled his own. They had not talked about this particular topic.

"Well, me and my little wife here," he said to the Brandt's, "we certainly are heading in the same direction."

That brought a hearty laugh from both of them.

"Hey, I don't mean to blow your little bubble, amigorino Stewball," said Matt. "But I don't think you're traveling together, man. I think she's pulling you along."

"Oh, that's not true!" Kristine replied. "He's still my hero." She leaned toward him to kiss him. "You really are!" Then, as his arm came around her, she brought up her legs against him and remained cuddled against him holding his hand.

Steward was very touched by this. He wasn't sure at times of how he had ever won the sympathy of a woman such as this. His situation, with respect to her, never ceased to amaze him.

"Well, there is a vast amount of exploration involved, to come up

with a life that makes sense," Mary Brandt said. "Matthew and I are doing that, too. Aren't we, Matthew? That's part of the reason for our trip to Kentucky."

"Yes," he answered simply.

"We've talked a lot about this, you know," Mary continued. "How long can life go on as it is for us now in D.C.? It doesn't feel like it's really a home, really a permanent place. Kentucky is a real place, you know. We had such a good life there."

"What are the other places?" Kristine asked.

"Maybe back to the Midwest," said Mary. "But, I don't know, can you go back to that? Can you keep on being what you've become? It's a big dilemma."

"New England's another option," said Matt. "New Hampshire."

"Yes, New England. Matt's got a friend from there. You know, Darren Houghten, the man with the crutch? You met him in D.C."

"Of course," said Tom.

"Yea, we call New Hampshire the double K," said Matt. "Kentucky with Kulture."

Mary shook her head with a smile. "We've actually never even been there. And it not just that. We've formed our little group in D.C., you know, our own little 'Woodstock family,' so to speak, and we've talked about maybe living somewhere together."

"Farm kind of thing," said Matt.

"Yes, some kind of communal farm. There's so much involved in it. So much to think about and figure out."

Later, at Mary's suggestion, the women went to the Brandt's van for marshmallows and chocolate bars while the men went off to the border of the picnic area to cut sticks.

Brandt, when he ranged out like this into an expanse of physical terrain, seemed to become transfigured somehow, despite the long hair and beard, into the lanky kid with the buzz cut that Steward remembered from his and Brandt's days together at the boat club.

"Spring in the air," Brandt said as he swept through the branches in the dark, looking for a long limb to cut off as a stick. "Makes you want to hit the road. You guys got the right idea heading out to California."

"You ever been there?"

"No."

"Yea, I can hardly wait."

"Mary and I will just got the week in Kentucky," said Matt, as he ran a knife along a branch to slice off the leaves. "Still in school, you know. Just one more semester, next fall, and we'll both be done. That's why we're looking around."

"You'll have your masters, though."

"Yea, man, I guess that's an accomplishment. I don't know. Wish we could get to Kentucky and just keep on going, you know. I don't know where. Just hit the road like you."

Steward thought as he and Brandt walked back to the campfire that that was the most substantial interaction with his former teammate that he had had in a long time. So often, with his old friend, there was so much sarcasm and dry humor that it was hard to know if anything he had talked about had been conducted in a serious vein.

"Say I've been meaning to tell you, I met some friends of yours down at a conference I just attended," he said.

"Oh, yea, who's that?"

"Guy named Fletcher Bourne. This priest, Fr. Dan Riley. And Dennis Kelly, your old buddy from the MVs."

"Is that right?" said Matt.

"Where was that?"

"Fr. Dan's little town."

"McCollums Mill?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, I'll be damned."

Matthew announced this at once to his wife when the women arrived at the fireside at about the same time. "Stewie was just telling me he was down in McCollum Mill with Fr. Dan. Fletcher and Kelly were down there, too. Some kind of conference."

"Is that right?" said Mary. "What kind of conference?"

"Oh, you know. The usual thing."

With a smile, Mary set out a surprise for her husband, a 12-pack of canned beer that she had kept hidden in the van.

"All right!" he said, snapping one open.

The conversation then turned to Fletcher Bourne, Fr. Dan Riley, and Dennis Kelly for a considerable time as Matthew, soon into his second and third beers, told some amusing stories.

"Fletcher and Matthew had a kind of falling out," said Mary. "And, ever since then, they haven't talked."

"Is that so?" said Kris. "What was that about?"

"Hey, you know, to tell you the goddam truth, I can't remember," Matthew answered.

"He sure didn't give any indication of that," said Tom. "He was very complimentary about you."

To that, Matthew had no response.

"What did he say?" said Mary.

"Said something about how Matt was the kind of person who would never talk about teamship or discipline, but would be the best team member and have the best discipline."

"When it came to discipline, Stewmeat, you were the best. Everyone would say that," said Brandt.

"Thank you."

"I think the whole thing with Fletcher has gone on too long," Mary pronounced. "You ought to make peace with him, Matt. Hattie says Fletcher is always talking about you."

Again Brandt had no comment.

"You ought to do that, Matthew."

"Okay, Mary. Maybe I will."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Por favor, relent."

Next day, back in Morgantown, the couples broke up temporarily with Matt and Kris taking the van together into town to get some groceries for supper and Tom and Mary left in the apartment together, cleaning up the kitchen and doing chores.

In this, as in his few other occasions with Mary alone, Steward was impressed by the total package she presented. She was undeniably a lovely woman in every physical respect. Somehow she managed to be intimate and warm without giving the least impression of being flirtatious or coming on. Intellectually, she was substantial, serious to the point of being fervent, and persistently analytical, while never seeming overly serious, and while never seeming, either, arrogant or self-centered in thought.

In short, he found her quite a woman to be alone with. He had no designs on her. He would not, under any circumstance, have been disloyal to his old friend Matthew, in making some kind of pass at her. But he was conscious, nonetheless, at every moment of his interaction with her, of her magnificence as a woman.

He found her, also, a sympathetic ear, as she solicited to know his feelings about this and that, and then listened keenly, with her face set in a maternal expression, to various details.

Steward, under this influence, touched on the subject of his boss Janis Kulas's comment that he had stifled Kris somehow and had kept her from coming forward on her own account.

"When she said that, I dismissed it out of hand. But since then I keep thinking about it. I do like it when she takes my lead, but I don't want to hold her back."

"Well, my own impression of this," Mary replied gently, "is, first of all, Thomas, you know, she and I talk together a lot, we've become very close, and I know from that, I can tell you with complete assurance, she loves you and respects you very much. But, the other part of the picture, and I don't want you to think this is your fault at all, she's just very young, very unformed. She's like we guys were back how many years

ago, you know, when we were a bunch of kids going to the rowing meets together. Part of her is still like that."

"Yes, I know," said Tom, listening closely.

"So she's trying to grow into this adult role of being a good wife, but, and again, Thomas, this is not your fault, she's very exasperated in having left things behind, you know, her professional things, the concerts she was putting together, things like that. She's like any person her age, she doesn't just need to be morally good, she also needs to be good at something. That's where her great need is. It's not in you. Heaven knows you're the sweetest husband imaginable, and you obviously care so much about her."

"Thank you."

"And you're a dang handsome man!"

Again, he thought, only Mary Brandt could say such a thing, with her big dark eyes so close, and not have that seem like an invitation to close the distance for a kiss.

He rose from the table where they were sitting.

"What would you think I should do then?" he said.

"What do I think? Now I do feel an awesome responsibility!"

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to put you on the spot."

"What I think you should do, Thomas," Mary replied, "is, love her with all your heart, as you do. Give her freedom as much as you can. Let her go off to do what she needs to do, professionally, as much as you can. And hope that you will grow in the same direction together."

"Thank you, Mary," he said. "I will."

"The other thing is, Thomas, accept that sometimes, when she goes off, it's going to hurt you to see her go off. It's going to tug at your heart strings. You're going to want to just walk away from her and leave her go her own way. But the braver and better thing will be to be there for her still. Because she does need you, she does love you. You can see that so clearly when you and she are together."

"Thank you."

Matthew and Kris soon returned and the two young couples enjoyed a last meal together, laughing and talking.

The next morning, they all went outside to the parking area beside the basement apartment where they posed for photos together, using the timer on Matt's camera, and then hugged and said their farewells.

"Say, I been meaning to tell you," said Matthew to his former team mate before the Brandt's drove away. "You got to do something about that clean-shaven look, man. Time for some facial hair, amigo."

"Are you serious?"

"Goddam right, I'm serious."

Since his wife heartily assented to this idea as it was presented, Tom

Steward began growing a mustache at once, the Manchu kind with the long ends of it coming all the way down to the chin.

222. Brandt's visit Fr. Dan, talk about powers behind the scene

The talk of Fr. Dan Riley, when Matt and Mary Brandt were visiting Tom and Kris Steward, resulted in a changed route for the Brandt's as they proceeded to Kentucky on Monday, April 20, 1970. The change took them from Charlestown to McCollums Mill, the little town Steward had visited for the poverty conference, the town where the priest had his church and center of operations for his community projects. More importantly for Matthew, this was also the place where he could see the photos the priest had recently taken (announced in a recent letter) and where he could talk to Fr. Dan firsthand regarding his own ongoing efforts in photography.

Indeed, the issue of what role photography would play in Matthew's future life was for him an intrinsic part of the personal evaluation that he had been involved in related to the general issue of cultural change that he and Mary had talked about with the Steward's. The big question for Matt,—and he had talked about it with Mary in these exact terms when prodded by her, as usual, to verbalize his thoughts,—was whether he could go forward into photography while still somehow going back to the farm background in Minnesota that was so much part of him.

Actually physically going back to Minnesota was one option that the Brandt's were thinking about. Other options were settling in for a longer time in D.C., moving back to Kentucky, and moving with their group in D.C. to a mutually owned farm in New England. The group in D.C. included,—in addition to the Brandt's,—Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, Jane Larue, and their four children. Three other people associated with Whitney Pratt had also expressed an interest. All this was tentative and just mixing around in the air as the Brandt's drove to Fr. Dan's.

Matt didn't call ahead, figuring that the priest would be somewhere within driving distance of his church if not at home. There was no need to drive anywhere, however, because the priest was immediately visible as the Brandt's came driving down the street toward the rectory. He was standing in the front yard, leaning on a rake in a contemplative pose.

"Oh, my Lord, it's Matthew Brandt!" the priest exclaimed when the van pulled up on the other side of the street with the bearded former MV beaming from the driver side window.

"The purpose of that thing is to drag it over the ground," Brandt said in his dry manner. "It's not a prop to lean on."

"That I know well!" the priest replied.

"We're on a little vacation," said Brandt. "Thought we stop by and see how you're doing."

The priest then, taking note of the "we," replied. "And I'm very glad you did. Is that Mary with you then?"

"Yes, it is."

Mary leaned over into view and waved.

"Well, I'm honored indeed! So glad to have you both."

Arrangements were soon agreed upon, at the priest's insistence, for Matt and Mary Brandt to stop over for supper and then to stay overnight at the rectory (as it was, by this time, late afternoon).

"You can have the den to yourselves for sleeping," the priest said. "I have my own bedroom, and the kitchen and bathroom are between."

"We don't want to impose," said Mary.

"Impose? Impose? My dear, young lady! You do me an honor if you stay, and I'm glad for the company. We'll have a good time."

Compared to his usual joking, irreverent manner with Matthew alone, the priest had a more gracious, more formal manner with Mary present as he led his guests into the rectory through the oak-paneled parish meeting room adorned with the pictures of former rectors.

"Well, as you can see, Mary, I have a worthy line to live up to, in my predecessors here," Fr. Dan remarked. "I've only known one of them on a personal basis, my immediate predecessor, but I've heard many good things about them from the people of this area."

"And they say the same about you, too, I bet," said Mary.

"That I can't say. The Church is much denigrated in the modern era, as we all know, but not so much in this little town. They respect priests. They want priests. They still have the old fashioned regard. It makes it much easier for a person like me to work among them and be accepted."

"And I'm sure you're worthy of it, Fr. Dan."

"Well, as I've said so many times to Matt that he has made a joke about it, just call me 'Plain Dan,' but I appreciate the deference coming from a good Catholic girl like you."

"Not so good any more, as far as church goes," Mary replied.

"Oh, I'm not so old fashioned, Mary, as to think good and church always go together, or even good and religion."

"Well, I won't tell the pope on you."

"Mercy! Please don't!"

From the meeting room, Fr. Dan and the Brandt's continued through the formal parish dining room to the blue-walled kitchen with its white table and chairs and double doors open to the small den that the priest had just referred to. There were dishes piled in the sink. The coffee table in the den was strewn with books. An indentation in the couch, across from a TV and next to a lamp, indicated that that was the place where Fr. Dan habitually sat as he watched TV or read.

Mary set to work at once on the dishes in her cheerful manner while the priest set out plates and ingredients for his "lasagna special" (once again) and Matthew headed to the town store for wine.

There was much to talk about as the three friends ate their meal: the recent poverty conference; parish work and community projects; the situation over-all with the "war on poverty" ended; the continuing efforts of others such as Dennis Kelly and Fletcher Bourne.

Later, at the priest's suggestion, they went to the living room to watch a national address by President Nixon regarding the Vietnam War. The Brandt's had not even been aware that the speech had been scheduled. Since the Moratorium, the war had been far from their minds.

"Good evening, my fellow Americans." the president began. "I have scheduled this television and radio time tonight to give you a progress report on our plan to bring a just peace to Vietnam.

"When I first outlined our program last June, I stated that the rate of American withdrawals from Vietnam would depend on three criteria: progress in the training of the South Vietnamese, progress in the Paris negotiations, and the level of enemy activity."

The president then went on describe a complicated situation, as he viewed it as commander-in-chief of American forces.

In the first category, of training the South Vietnamese, he said "progress has substantially exceeded our original expectations in June."

In the second category, negotiations, he said, "no progress has taken place. The enemy still demands that we unilaterally and unconditionally withdraw all American forces, that in the process we overthrow the elected government of South Vietnam, and that the United States accept a political settlement that would have the practical consequence of the forcible imposition of a Communist government upon the people of South Vietnam. That would mean humiliation and defeat for the United States. This we cannot and will not accept."

In the third category upon which he had said the rate of American withdrawals from Vietnam would depend, the president also had not much good news to present, from his perspective.

"In several areas since December, the level has substantially increased. In recent months, Hanoi has sent thousands more of their soldiers to launch new offensives in neutral Laos in violation of the Geneva Accords of 1962... And south of Laos, almost 40,000 Communist troops are now conducting overt aggression against Cambodia, the small neutralist country that the Communists have used for years as a basis for attack on South Vietnam..."

Even so, said the president, there had been "an over-all decline in enemy force levels in South Vietnam since December."

"As the enemy force levels have declined," he said, "and as the South Vietnamese have assumed more of the burden of battle, American casualties have declined."

Taking all of this into consideration, he said, he had decided that the

United States would continue with the schedule of graduated withdrawals begun the previous summer. “In June, we announced withdrawal of 25,000 American troops,” he said, “in September another 35,000, and then in December 50,000 more... We have now reached the point where we can confidently move from a period of cut and try to a longer range program for the replacement of Americans by South Vietnamese troops.”

“But I again remind the leaders of North Vietnam that while we are taking these risks for peace, they will be taking grave risks should they attempt to use the occasion to jeopardize the security of our remaining forces in Vietnam by increased military action in Vietnam or in Cambodia or in Laos.

“I repeat what I said on November 3 and December 15: If I conclude that increased enemy action jeopardizes our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation.”

When the speech was over, the priest turned off the TV set and sighed. “Well, what can you say?” he said. “There’s the basic premise that the government of North Vietnam is incorrigibly bad, that it has no valid standing among its own people, or with the people of South Vietnam, which, in my opinion, is not true. There’s talk of being faithful to the Geneva Accords, with respect to Laos, and yet the Geneva Accords called for national elections in Vietnam, which were never held because all knew that Ho Chi Minh and the Communist party would have won the election in both North and South Vietnam.”

“And then,” said Mary softly, “the reality of the situation is it never ends. There’s talk of peace talks, withdrawals, and there are peace talks, there are withdrawals, over months and months, and years. How long has it been going on now? I remember talks of it way back when I was in college. It just never ends.”

“Yes, that too,” said the priest. “People have grown tired of it. Even many of the common people who supported it before. Either they are tired of it or they are more extreme in their hatred of people like you who they see as opposing American values.”

“Fletcher ever talk about his son?” Matthew asked.

“Bumper? Oh, yes,” the priest replied. “He’s a truck mechanic, you know.”

“Yes, I heard that.”

“Said Bumper was working in some kind of depot where he felt he was pretty safe, and then lately he’s been put on some kind of road details, with transports or something.”

“More exposed to gunfire.”

“Yes.”

“Bet Fletcher’s worried,” said Mary.

"Yes, I think he is."

Later in the evening, as the group set in the priest's comfortable den together, talk turned to Mary's recent trip to Cuba.

In this, as in any such interchange, the priest could be trusted to have a sympathetic and attentive regard. His most peculiar trait, as Mary assessed him, was that, while he never seemed, in any sense, "heavy" or an intellectual, yet it was clear that a strong intellect with a complex system of ideas was present behind his diffident façade.

The priest had many questions regarding the condition of the Cuban people, their attitude toward the Revolution, and their ability to speak freely. He asked, also, about the effect on Cuba of the American embargo. He seemed truly concerned when he learned of shortages in gasoline and other commodities.

"Something I've observed, Mary," he said, "and I don't know how to say this without seeming like some kind of kook, is that information is filtered somehow before it gets to the American people. So what is heard eventually here, what our people make decisions on, is not the real story, it is something that has been prepared with the object of producing an effect."

"Propaganda," said Matthew.

"Propaganda, yes. But sometimes less than that, not as systematic. Filtered, as I said. And who does this filtering? This is a question I've often asked myself."

"Who do you think does the filtering?" Mary inquired.

Fr. Dan nodded thoughtfully when presented with this question, as he reclined on an easy chair with a glass of wine in his thick farmer's hand.

"I've come to the conclusion myself," he replied, "that it's some higher power that, as ordinary Americans, we never even hear about it, a higher power behind the scenes."

"A big brother type?" said Matthew.

"Oh, no, no! Nothing as sinister as that! I'm not talking about an Orwellian scene. What comes to mind more is people with financial power, people who own media outlets, maybe even people with good intentions and sincerely held ideas."

He paused in thought.

"But these are also people protecting vast wealth such as we cannot even imagine having, or acting to protect ideas that they feel the common person cannot be trusted to understand or uphold."

The next day, Matthew sat the green metal desk in Fr. Dan's photography workshop in the church basement, looking at the priest's recent photos as he set them out for view.

This particular series was all of scenes and people within the wood shops and tomato hot houses set up by Fr. Dan's community programs.

They were direct pictures without a hint of deliberate artistry and yet so solid in their portrayals of the people involved in the projects.

"Very good, very good," Matthew remarked.

He rose and moved around within the high-ceiling, cement-floored room. For once he was in a voluble mood, eager to express ideas that had been fomenting in his mind.

"I've thought a great deal about this project I just completed, the one I wrote you about. I was so absorbed in it. I can't tell you how much. Mary was gone, and I was stoned all the time, not just to get stoned, but to focus on it more."

He paused there and saw no judgment on that matter in the priest's eyes, just a look of attention.

"I was so absorbed in it," he continued, "and now, when I look at your work, I realize that somehow I went wrong. Because I wanted the project to be grand, and I thought big meant grand, but your work is so specific, so contained, and it says so much more."

"Grand is important, too," said the priest. "We need grand to get a larger view of our life. We need grand to get a view of our society. Our society is grand."

"I suppose that's true," Brandt answered. "But there's something more, something in the very nature of what I've been doing... Something's not right. I feel at times I've gone in the wrong direction, and now I'm locked in. You know when I felt best, in the whole past two years of grad school? When I was up on the barn roof with my father, tearing off the old shingles."

The priest got up and put his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "Well, you and I are both sons of the soil, from our heritage, from our growing up. So I can understand that, Matt. And look, Matt, you're not locked in. You could leave all of that behind today. But there's no need to hurry about it. I heard a saying one time, 'The roots of change are deep.' I think that's so true. Sometimes, too, after we complete something that seemed important in the midst of it, we get that let down feeling and we walk away from it, but then,—this has been my experience,—when you get that distance, and a little distance of time, you realize how important it's become to you, you realize that you don't really want to leave it behind, it's become a part of what you are."

This was the extent of the conversation on the topic between the priest and the man soon to be the holder of a graduate degree. Matt and Mary left the next day with Matt grateful for the insights he had been helped to and feeling that much remained to be resolved.

[Chapter 222 notes]

223. Brandt's sense a "different time" as they continue to Kentucky

From McCollums Mill, West Virginia, Matt and Mary Brandt drove over the mountains along Highway 119, the two-lane, winding highway that had become familiar to Matt, in his days as a Mountain Volunteer, from his occasional visits to Fr. Dan Riley.

The Brandt's immediate destination was Kensington, Kentucky, where they planned to spend two nights with Dennis Kelly,—at his insistence. Kelly had also arranged for the Brandt's to stay a week in their former cabin home in the next county. The cabin was at the present unoccupied though another MV, announced as the last of the line, due to shrinking funds, would be offered the cabin in June.

Coming over a ridge providing a view for the first time in their trip of Kentucky in the distance, Brandt saw a rusted coal tipple above a deserted railroad track grown over with weeds, and the saga came back to him that he had become so familiar with in his time in Kentucky, the saga of hills mined and left behind as the search continued for more veins of minable coal. He soon saw a chopped hill in the distance, also, bringing to mind his first sight of a strip mine more than two years before. And, after this, came other familiar sights of houses nestled in trees at locations deemed to be most remote from intrusion by people such as he had come to know in Kentucky who valued seclusion more than access to roads or other people.

Something was different, though, as he endeavored to explain to his ever thoughtful wife, nestled tightly against him as they both were drawn into the intimacy and romance of returning to the country where they had been newlyweds together.

"You know, what I think it is," Mary said. "It's time, just plain old time. The place is the same, but the time is different. You can feel the different time."

Matthew was silent as he contemplated this interpretation. "You wouldn't think that could be. But I do feel it," he said. "It's a very strange thing."

"Yes, it is. It really is."

This notion so stuck in Matthew's mind, as he drove past familiar sights along Highway 119, that he was still thinking of it as he and Mary reached Kensington, where Dennis Kelly lived. There, too, as he regarded the hillside where the windows of Kelly's apartment looked out over the brick buildings of the humble downtown, he had a sense of encountering physical objects that had not changed, in external appearance, but that had a different feeling about them.

"You made it then!" Kelly exclaimed from behind his trademark wire- rim glasses when Matt and Mary Brandt appeared at his door.

"Welcome! Welcome!"

"Well, thank you!" said Mary.

"I've been looking forward to your visit."

"Well, thank you."

As usual, the intense and basically shy ex-volunteer pushed through these social niceties in such a way that they seemed at one and the same time sincere and forced,—as indeed they were known by all to be, based on Kelly's own accounts (put forward at various late night talks) of his struggles in becoming the socially effective person he had striven to be in his political activities.

Within the door, for the Brandt's, were other familiar sights such as the day had been providing steadily and, for Matthew, the same feeling of same place different time that he had stuck on coming into town. He considered the high-ceilinged, oak-trimmed three rooms of Kelly's humble abode, so familiar to him from his occasional overnight stays in the days when he and Kelly had worked together as volunteers. The coffee table was strewn with books and notebooks, as it had been in the old days. Beyond the three tall windows on the far wall was the familiar view of the red and brown brick buildings of the Kensington downtown and the smokestack of the shoe factory where Kelly still worked.

Matthew immediately recognized something else, also, the aroma of Kelly's garlic-flavored spaghetti sauce, which was simmering on the white stove in the kitchen, next to a large pot from which came the rhythmic low rumble of boiling water and white fumes of steam.

Without being invited, he went over to the refrigerator and opened the door.

"It's there, Bomb Dog. I didn't forget," Kelly said.

"Ah, yes, Sad Dog, I see you have lost none of your original form," Brandt replied, reaching for a bottle of beer.

"Church key's in the drawer."

Soon the three old friends, each with a second beer in hand, were focused intently on a topic of mutual interest occasioned by an object on Kelly's coffee table that Mary noticed at once, a *Whole Earth Catalog* with the often reproduced front cover showing the small sphere of the earth as it appeared from the moon, a blue, green, and white marble-like jewel in a field of dark blue.

It was the same catalog that had brought been back from Woodstock, as Mary recalled, the one that had been passed back and forth in the van between the group of five (consisting of her and Matthew, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue) who had attended the event together. Dennis had come upon the catalog on his stay over in D.C. during the Moratorium and had asked to borrow it.

Opening the catalog to a page marked by a bent sheet of paper, Mary

found an item circled with a red magic marker. It was a tentlike structure described as a “Mongolian yurt.”

Matt came over, beer in hand, to look over her shoulder as Kelly busied himself in the kitchen, draining the spaghetti and setting the table for supper.

“So now you’re going to be a nomad,” Matt remarked dryly.

“Goodbye to Kentucky?”

“Oh, not so drastic,” Dennis replied. “I have been thinking of this idea, though.”

“And what is that?”

“Got that little truck outside. Gonna buy this yurt or maybe really just a little tent. Then off I go for about six weeks this summer.”

“Off you go where?” asked Mary.

“Off I go west. This is something I’ve always wanted to do. Just head off with no particular destination.”

“You ever been out west?”

“Well, that’s part of the great excitement,” Kelly responded in his serious manner. “No, I have not. No.”

“And where will you stay?”

“Well, just by the roadside or in parks here and there. And I heard there’s people, longhairs, you know, setting up camp in national forests, just living there, you know.” (Lately, the term “longhair” had come to replace the old term, “hippie.”)

“Living there. Why?”

“Just to have an alternative, simpler life. I heard there’s people doing that out in California. Around Palm Springs somewhere. There’s the valley where the cities are, which is irrigated and very hot, and next to that are mountains, about 10,000 feet high. You go up in the mountains, through a long canyon, I read, and the climate changes. There’s a forest there and these high meadows, inaccessible by roads, in the national forest. People have just set up little villages, almost, I read, like Indian villages, living up off the land.”

“Somehow I don’t think the park rangers would go for this idea, “said Matt.

“Oh, you’re right about that, Matt. The way I heard it, there have been a lot of disputes.”

“Not quite nirvana.”

“No, not yet.”

Kelly was by this time dishing up supper in kitchen while his face remained set in a thoughtful pose.

“The main thing, though, for me, is the travel, the freedom, the open road,” he said. “That’s what I’m interested in most of all. Just seeing America, you know. Looking for America, the real America, you know.

Easy Rider. *On the Road*. This has been cooking in me for a long time."

Matthew and Mary both separately recognized, though neither made mention of it explicitly, that this conversation continued along the same theme that they had found themselves discussing with Tom and Kris Steward in West Virginia, the theme of cultural change overtaking the social and political change that they had been concerned with in the years since college. And again, as in West Virginia, Mary thought of "the spirit of change," "zeitgeist," that she had mentioned to Tom Steward, but she did not mention this idea again to her husband and Dennis.

Later, after supper, she crossed over to the window and looked down to the creek bordered with a stone wall that ran between Kelly's apartment building and the backs of the brick buildings of the main street of the small town. A teenage girl with long dark hair was approaching the creek from a narrow, lighted sidewalk between two of the brick buildings, Mary noticed. The young lady was carrying something on a plate she held with both hands, baked goods or something, covered with a piece of plastic. As she crossed the creek on the narrow footbridge there, illuminated by an arc light, she looked up toward the window.

Mary recognized the young lady at once. It was Darla Roan, the pretty teenaged mother who, the previous summer, had attended the strip mine demonstration at Simers Branch with her mother Lois and her little boy, Hodie, the one who had gotten the ride in the truck to everyone's amusement.

Mary turned at once to tell Kelly and her husband.

Kelly was not surprised, though he looked a little bit embarrassed. "Oh, she's on her way here, then," he said. "She stops here all the time. She takes classes in town there. She's trying to get her GED."

Darla Roan soon appeared at the door, smiling at Matthew and Mary shyly as she was ushered in. She knew them, of course, from the old days, but a full year had intervened since she had seen them, and both Matt and Mary had acquired a slightly different, more sophisticated, urban look that gave them a quality of strangeness.

"Well, I'm so soo'prised and all to see y'all again," the girl said in her sweet voice. "I was wonderin' how you all were."

"Oh, we've been fine," said Mary. "How have you been?"

"Oh, I been fine, too," said the girl. "Ain't much to tell, you know. I been going back to school, kindly, you know, over to this here little center in town here, trying to get my high school diploma."

"Yes, that's what we heard. Good for you."

"Won't you sit down and have some supper with us?" Kelly said. "We got plenty extra."

"Oh, me. No. I just brought you these cookies here. My mother made them. She's waiting over in town there. I just run over here, you know,

and I got to get right back."

"How's your little boy?"

"Hodie? Oh, he's fine. He's a little tiger now. Dennis can tell you that."

"Yes, that he is. He's a handful alright," Kelly said.

"Dennis takes him sometimes when I got something in town here for school, when my mother's a little late," the girl explained.

"And I'm glad to do it," Kelly said.

"Oh, yea, Hodie, he's big on Dennis."

"He beats me up all the time though."

The girl laughed. She was a lovely sight with her blue eyes and dark hair, though her teeth were revealed as uneven when she smiled. She had blossomed into a full-figured young woman, also. She was dressed simply in jean shorts and white blouse.

"Well, I don't know as he can beat you up now," she said in her gentle voice. "Sure thinks he can, though."

"Please tell your mom, thanks so much for the cookies," Dennis said. "Looks like we got some desert now."

"Well, you enjoy."

With that and a goodbye to Matthew and Mary, the young lady was gone, leaving Matthew and Mary with expectant smiles as they waited for a fuller explanation from their inveterate bachelor friend.

"It's not what you think," he said at once, looking to Mary.

"What is it then?" Mary said.

"It's just a friendship, Dennis said, "or not even that. I'm like a big brother to her, a family friend, going back to the demonstrations. I see her and her mom. Now and then I help them out."

"Is that what she says, 'older brother'?" Mary persisted.

"She doesn't say anything about it at all, as far as I know. But I think if you asked her, she would say something like 'I jes' appreciate his advice.' She'd be shocked to hear of anything else."

"She's a very pretty girl, or young woman."

"Yes, she is, Mary. And you know how old she is?"

"No, I don't."

"She's 18. She had that little boy when she was 14. She must have set some record for onset of puberty. She got pregnant with him when she was just 13."

"How did that happen anyway? You ever hear?"

"What Lois told me once was after her dad died in that explosion at the Simers Branch mine, Darla had a rebellious period for a while, angry at everyone because of losing her dad, and she met some wild kid in the midst of that, and one thing came to another. This kid never admitted to getting Darla pregnant, and Lois never pressed it, and now the kid's not

even around anymore, or so I heard. Heard he got drafted. I doubt he'll ever be back to this county again, from what people say."

Kelly brought forward these last facts with an air of finality as if to say there was nothing more to say on the subject, but Mary, with her women's intuition, remained convinced that there was something on a more romantic level forming deep below the superficial interactions of Dennis Kelly and Darla Roan, maybe something that neither he nor the young mother were aware of at the time being.

Darla Roan was soon left behind as a topic, for the time being, however, as the Brandt's and Kelly went on to other matters. The MVs were in their final year, Kelly said. He had stopped publishing his little "Dog Daze" newspaper, as no one understood the significance anymore of the "dog cadres" inside joke of the past group.

"As for your old cabin," he said. "It's not much changed from how you had it. I think even the same curtains are still there, the blue and white ones you put up, Mary..."

"Oh, yes! I put so much love into those!"

"And I think the dark room is still there, too, Matt."

"Good, I'll be glad to see it."

"What do you say, three of us go up there tomorrow morning? I'll help you put things in order," Kelly said.

"Yes, let's make a day of it," said Mary. "We can go for a hike and have supper together."

With that, the three friends ended their evening together with a sense of old ties having been restored at a time of flux between old and new. For Matt and Mary Brandt there was a sense, also, of continuity from the topics they had discussed with Tom and Kris Steward in Morgantown, a sense that, for Dennis Kelly, too, old concerns with "social change" were giving way to new concerns with "cultural change," and that this switch in emphasis had been born somehow in the ferment of the past several years and was being carried forward by a mysterious process of peers—the "spirit of the times" or "zeitgeist" that Mary had referred to in the fireside talks in West Virginia

224. Brandt's, with Kelly, meet Bourne and visit their former cabin

One issue that remained to be resolved for Matt and Mary Brandt as they drove with Dennis Kelly to the Brandt's former cabin the next morning was what to do about possibly stopping in at some point to visit Fletcher Bourne and Hattie Beecher.

Mary had no doubt that she would arrange sometime during her stay to visit Hattie, who still participated with her, through mail, in their common enterprise, the Mountain Women's Coop. But how she could do that without stopping by to see Fletcher or without offending him because of stopping by without Matthew was a matter of concern to her.

Matthew was also concerned, to some extent, Mary knew. Just a few days before, at Fr. Dan Riley's place in West Virginia, she had observed the attentive expression on Matt's face as he had listened to the priest's accounts of Fletcher and his son Bumper.

Though Matthew and Fletcher had not communicated in person or through mail since their falling out a year and a half before, each had made it known to the other,—through both Mary and Kelly,—that no bad feelings lingered from that unfortunate occurrence. Even so, there was enough awkwardness on both sides that neither had proceeded toward a reconciliation.

Mary, with these concerns on her mind, broached the subject of Fletcher Bourne as she, Matt, and Dennis rode together along the winding, wooded roads toward the cabin.

"I suppose Fletcher still lives in that same little house," she said as their route took them within several miles of Crabtree, the little town where Brandt had his newspaper offices.

"Oh, yes," Dennis replied.

"And Hattie in the little house behind him."

"Oh, yes. Some things never change, and I think you will never see Fletcher or Hattie going anywhere until they die or are too old to remain independent."

This interchange between Mary and Kelly, with Matthew not betraying any interest or joining in, left the topic still unbroached of whether or when to stop by to see Fletcher.

In the next town, however, the matter was quickly resolved. Coming out of a groceries store there, where he and Mary had just purchased items for their stay in the cabin, Matt ran directly into the old man, limping out with a bag of merchandise from a store just down the same street.

For a moment, there was mutual embarrassment as the two men stood facing one another, but Fletcher, with his old-fashioned courtesy, took the matter in hand.

"Well, golly gee," he said. "If it ain't Matthew Brandt! Heard you were around, Matt. I'm right glad to see you!"

The statement was so sincere,—and so lacking in any apparent concern with gaining the long due apology,—that Matt was won over at once. The statement reminded Matt of the plain, good-hearted qualities he had once so admired in Bourne and reminded him also of the kindness the old man had shown to him in the past.

"I'm glad to see you, too," Matthew replied.

"I know you been avoiding me a little," said Bourne. "I guess fate has played a little trick, bringing us face to face."

"Yes."

"Word gets around these parts, as I imagine you must remember from your own experience."

"Yes, I do."

"You and Mary are back up at the cabin?"

"Not quite yet. We're heading up there right after we leave here. And, actually, Mary is with me now. She's back in the store there with Dennis. Here she comes now."

Mary emerged from the store as her husband spoke. She looked clean and wholesome with her clear face and alert hazel eyes and her thick dark hair pulled straight back from her intelligent brow. She was dressed simply as always, in jeans and a flannel shirt.

The face lighted with recognition as she took a little bouncing step with both hands extended.

"Fletcher!" she chimed. "Hello!"

"My pleasure, young lady! So nice to see you again!"

"Same for us, seeing you!"

"Hattie and I sure have 'preciated all your letters."

"Well, thank you. I've appreciated yours, also."

Mary, with her keen sense of social interactions, through a quick appraisal of the postures and facial expressions of her husband and the old man, had already concluded in her mind that the chance meeting had gone smoothly on both sides.

Dennis was next to appear, looking awkward and earnest behind his wire rim glasses, as he came forward with the formal bearing of a teacher or doctor. Between him and Bourne, there was no real friendship or bond, while each held the other in high regard.

"Now we got the whole crew!" Bourne remarked.

"Yes, it appears so," Dennis replied.

"Still working at the 'Shoe'?"

"Yes, I am."

"Still the shop steward down there?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, more power to you," the old man said simply, nodding as he regarded the three young people before him.

It was just a matter of time, amidst the usual small talk, before Bourne made the expected invitation. "I've been thinking, Matt and Mary," he said, "you sure would do me kind if you would stop by one evening. We could whip up a supper like we used to when Matthew was living with me and Bumper."

"We would like that," said Matt.

"Yes, we would," said Mary.

"No bitterness from the old days, I hope, Matthew."

"No, Mr. Bourne. It's long gone."

"It has been for me too. I always did have a fondness for the both of you and I was right sorry when you and I lost our tempers a little bit, there, Matthew. I guess it's to be expected people working together on these contentious issues."

"Yes."

"We'll invite ol' Hattie over. Cook up some hamburger hot dish and bean casserole, just like she loves."

"That sounds fine."

"You can come, too, Dennis, if you'll do us the honor."

"Well, thank you. I will."

"Mind if we bring a few beers?" said Matt.

"No, not at all. I might just have one myself."

Plans were thus made. Fletcher Bourne ended the interaction with an old-fashioned courteous bow similar to the one with which he had begun it. The Brandt's and Kelly's waved and headed off.

"Well, that settles that," said Mary from the backseat as the three friends settled in Kelly's pickup truck.

"Yes," Matthew replied.

"I'm glad."

"Yes," said Matthew again.

As they turned onto the street of the little town and headed off, Fletcher Bourne came into view again around the next corner, where he had stopped to engage in conversation with someone else. The man to whom he was speaking was a big man who appeared by his dress to be a construction worker of some kind. Bourne looked small and almost frail next to him as he nodded attentively while the other man spoke.

"Ol' Fletch looks pretty tired at times," Kelly remarked. "I wonder at times how long he will be able to keep up that newspaper, or what will come of it when he goes on."

"You've got an interest yourself?" Mary said.

"Oh, no. I just wonder for his sake."

"Bumper has no interest? His son?"

"Not that I know of."

"That's too bad."

"He's become a lonesome guy with Bumper gone."

"When will Bumper return?" Mary asked.

"That I don't know."

"Mysterious man, in a way. Living all by himself with his son all his life. Never talks about the boy's mother."

"Yes, that too."

Twenty familiar miles of winding roads brought the Brandt's and Kelly into the next county to the mailbox on the side of the road where Mary had looked each day for mail from her sister Ellen. The three friends stopped there for a moment as Kelly pulled a scythe from the bed of the pickup and quickly cleared the area around the mailbox.

"Don't imagine we will be getting much mail," said Mary.

"It's just the idea of it," Kelly replied. "We are going to do this right, so you have a real homecoming here."

This was all Kelly had said regarding the Brandt's visit, but Matt and Mary both got an impression from this that Kelly was hoping for their permanent return.

There was more chopping to be done as the group progressed in the truck up the overgrown, rutted dirt road for the half mile to the top of the hill. It was a beautiful, enchanted scene, when now and they paused for rest, with sunlight filtering through the new leaves of the spring- growth trees and white nasturniums covering steep slopes in a dappled pattern of light and shade.

At the top of the hill was the familiar meadowlike, grassy clearing with the pine-board, unpainted cabin commanding the ridge beside the gray, slablike pillar of rock that Matthew had climbed on his night of revelry with Bruce Harris and Dennis Kelly.

Some branches that had fallen over the rutted dirt road arrested the progress of the jeep at this point. The three friends got out to clear out the path, and then Matt and Mary continued on foot for the remaining hundred yards or so to the cabin while Kelly brought up the jeep from behind.

Mary reached for Matthew's hand as they walked side by side. "Matt, I remember my first sight of this when you and I came up, the week after we were married. I thought it was just the most unique, splendid place I had ever seen."

"That it is," Matthew replied.

He was thinking of his own first sight of the place on the evening when he had driven up the hill for his first MVs meeting with Bruce Harris and Dennis Kelly.

"You know what it was," said Mary softly, struggling to express her

thought. “We came past this point exactly, right here, this view, with the cabin in the waving grass just like that, on the hillside, and I felt like I had stepped out of my past and into a completely different future. It was like a window, a door. I went through it and I ceased being what I had been in the past.”

There was not much changed in the view from the hillside of the valley in the distance, in fact, no visible change at all. Smoke rose up there from isolated dwelling obscured by trees. The cluster of the town below at the far end of the valley looked the same.

Inside the cabin, as Kelly had noted, the blue and white curtains still hung in the windows, the ones that Mary had recalled putting so much love into.

Other sights with associations from the past soon came into view within the single, open room of the cabin with its knotty pine walls and its two large windows looking out to a valley below. First to meet the eye was the fireplace, its roughly mortared field stones evoking a pre-modern era (as Matthew had learned at one point they authentically did, the cabin having been built in 1918). There was the single bed, on the wall of the room away from the windows, of an intimate size that the newlyweds had felt no need to change. The old furnishings that had been passed down to Brandt from Bruce Harris still remained, including the plain, sturdy table, the four chairs around it, a Scottish-patterned easy chair, a brown couch, and the three bookcases and coffee table by the couch that, when Matt had first come upon them, had been strewn with books.

“I have many fond memories of evening by this fireplace,” Mary said as Dennis Kelly swept up the ashes left by the previous occupant of the cabin.

“Yea, for sure,” Matt replied, settling into the couch across from it, with his arms sprawled to both side.

“We had some great meetings here,” Kelly remarked.

“Yes, that, too,” Mary replied.

Matt sprawled on the familiar couch with his arms extended to both sides, thinking of his first meeting of the MVs in the cabin, when Bruce Harris with his neat, professorial clothes and Kelly in his uniform-like brown Khaki shirt had been new people in his life. He thought of the book he had come upon on top of the pile of the books on the coffee table—”One Dimensional Man” by Herbert Marcuse—with its dense prose and the sense it conveyed of urgency and importance. He vaguely remembered the exact passage, something about the “exploited and persecuted of other races and colors.” The words “their life is of the most immediate and real need” came into his mind. Odd, he thought, how those words still remained in his memory despite the many other books and words that had intervened since then in the verbal world he had

entered.

He thought of Bruce Harris, also, the last time he had seen him in D.C., still the neat professor, still somehow claiming to be part of a revolution that apparently made no claim on his comfort... and the choice grass Harris had provided, leading to the intense night when he had seen or imagined Mary's aura (which it had been he still didn't know, he thought to himself).

Such strange events. So much had happened since the day when he had sat down for the first time in this couch, he thought, looking across the room at Bruce Harris and Dennis Kelly.

All of this passed through his mind in a few minutes. Kelly, in the meanwhile, had gone outside and could be seen through the window pulling the scythe from the back of the truck, the same one he had used to clear out the long grass by the mailbox.

Matt jumped up and went out after him. "Goddam Sad Dog, give me the damn scythe!"

"Well, now, amigo Bomb Dog, just happens I have two."

"You might as well let up on it. I can do whatever you do about four times faster."

"We might have a little wager about that."

Within another two hours, the area around the cabin was completely cleared, with the tall grass raked into piles.

Mary, in the meanwhile, busied herself in the cabin, sweeping and washing the floor and setting the cooking pots and dishes into order. Despite her feminist tendencies, she had never been one to refuse a traditional feminine role in such circumstances. To the contrary, she gave the impression of being glad to assume them. She did come out at the end, however, to help the men as they cut down some branches that were scraping against the roof in the wind and sawed up the branches for firewood.

"Well, what do you say, should we have supper here?" Kelly asked.

"I can help make it."

"No, how about this? Matt said. "Why don't we head down to Linsburg to that restaurant we used to go to. This one's on us. Right, Mary?"

"Yes," said Mary. "Then, one of these evenings, Dennis, we'll have you up for a good old-fashioned meal."

With that agreed on, the three friends drove down the hill with a sense of having re-established a mutual connection to the past though all of them individually had a feeling, also, that much remained that could never be fully recovered.

225. Re-union with Fletcher and Hattie leaves a strain of difference

When Matt and Mary Brandt arrived at Fletcher Bourne's house for the supper they'd been invited to, they exited their van to find the old man and Hattie Beecher rising from lawn chairs to greet them. The slight formality of this gesture alerted the young couple at once that personal distance had accrued in the year and a half since they had left Kentucky for Washington D.C. There was a suggestion, too, that maybe some strain remained from Matt's breach with Bourne despite the kind words exchanged in the street between the two men.

"Welcome, Matthew! Welcome, Mary!" Fletcher called out as he limped forward to greet them. The words on the surface were friendly, but they were said in a formal manner, also. "Looks like we got us a beautiful evening for your visit!"

The lean, sallow-faced old man was dressed in neatly pressed tan slacks and a white shirt open at the collar. Hattie Beecher wore a blue ankle-length skirt, with her gray hair pinned back severely around her wide, no nonsense face, but with none of the contrariness evident there that had been there when Mary had first met Hattie.

"So pleased to see both of you again," Hattie said with a stiffness of manner like a person not used to such interactions. "Come here, young Mary. Let me give you a hug."

The evening was beautiful, indeed, as Fletcher had remarked. The trees that bordered the small backyard had just budded into leaves, the grass around Hattie's garden was a brilliant new green amidst the long gnarled shadows of the fruit trees. A late afternoon sun shone there before the natural wall of limestone behind the garden. The fruit trees had budded on the fruit trees also. Yellow flowers carpeted the low hill on the other side of the road.

In Fletcher's back yard, beside the small garage and the tree that Matthew had cut down for the Bourne's on his first visit, a red '58 Ford pickup was still setting on blocks where Bumper Bourne had left it before reporting to the Army.

Matthew had noticed this even as he came from the van into the yard and his eyes had gone just as quickly from the pickup truck to the tree, in both cases evoking a memory of the long-limbed kid that he had helped with the old car in the yard at that time and who had then returned the favor and helped him with the tree.

"Well, you sit right down," said Bourne graciously to Matthew as he held a chair to place it under Mary. "We've got some good lemonade, if you like some, or did you bring your beer?"

"Dennis is bringing that."

"Well, for the time being then, let me get the lemonade. Hattie's been

asking me how you two have been faring back up in the old cabin. She sure would like to hear about that."

The old man limped off into the humble back door of the house, with its two step entry, while Hattie, given a topic of conversation, merely had to nod her head.

"Well, the cabin's been good," Mary said, looking at her. "We got it all cleaned up and brought in some wood for the fireplace. Made a good meal there, Hattie, like you once showed me, green beans pickled in a crock jar with salt."

"You brought that from home?"

"Yes, we did."

"Well, yer lernin' then, ain't y'?" said the old woman.

"Yes, I am."

"Y' got ya a nice lookout up on that hill?"

"Yes, we do."

"Breeze comes up cold in the evenin' though, don't it? Rushes down the hill, I noticed m'self."

"Yes, it does. When did you notice that?"

"Oh, I lived up on a hill once't. When I was a young'un. Down by Lawrence there, where that little white church is. They's a road goes up there. Nar'a' little road. I expect it's still there."

Bourne by this time had come back with the lemonade and was passing glasses around when Dennis Kelly's jeep appeared on the dirt road a way down from Hattie's house where the road first came into sight.

"Well, here's the lemonade and there comes the beer," he said with a laugh as Dennis Kelly jumped from the truck with a brown paper bag. He was wearing blue jeans and his customary Army issue tan shirt.

"I'll take that from you, my dear friend," said Matt.

"Yes, Matthew, why don't you hand around the beers to everyone that wants one," said Bourne. "Rest of them, if you want, you can bring in to the house for the time being and set them in the frig to keep them cold. I guess you must still remember where that is."

"Yes, I do." Matthew was glad for the chance to go inside the house where he had lived for six months. "Mind if I look around?"

"No, you go right ahead, Matthew. I know how it is, going back to old places. Go up to your old room if you want to."

"Well, thank you."

"You're welcome. Glad to have you here."

Inside the house, in the small kitchen where Matthew had once come upon loaves of bread and other food items jumbled in with scrawled early drafts of Fletcher's newspaper articles and Bumper's tools and car parts, the table was nearly empty. The only items on the table were salt and

pepper shakers, a pen, Fletcher's notepad, and an open newspaper on which some scribblings had been made. A chair by the notepad was pulled out at an angle to the table. The other two chairs that Brandt remembered were neatly in place and obviously seldom used.

On the refrigerator, where Matt went first to put the beer inside, he found a newspaper clipping with a photo of eight GIs standing in front of a huge truck. The article was from the Armed Forces newspaper, the *Pacific Stars & Stripes*. The headline above the photo said, "Mechanics Keep the Trucks Rolling."

Looking closer at the faces of the eight soldiers, Brandt recognized the face of Bumper Bourne. The face in the photo was not as boyish as the face he recalled. There was a new maturity and perhaps some tension in the lines about the eyes.

Brandt skimmed over the article and learned from it that Bumper and the other depicted GIs were part of a battalion assigned to roadside repairs. "These are mechanically complex trucks," the article said. "well constructed and equipped for their tasks, but still maintenance is required on the average every hundred or so miles. Without these soldiers accompanying the caravans, complicated arrangements would often be needed to get broken down machinery back to the depot for repairs."

Bumper Bourne's unit was also mentioned, Brandt noticed. It was the "163rd Transportation Company, headquartered at Can Tho." The name was familiar. He recalled that Mary had told him that Barbara Carpenter was working as a nurse at a hospital in Can Tho.

As he passed through the rooms of the quiet, simply furnished house on his way to look at his old room, Brandt noticed that a newspaper on the kitchen table was open to a page on which a transcript was printed of the speech by President Nixon that he had listened to ten days before with Mary and Fr. Dan Riley.

Bourne had circled there two quotes:

"In June a year ago," said the first, "when we began troop withdrawal, we did so on a cut-and-try basis with no certainty that the program would be successful. In June we announced withdrawal of 25,000 American troops, in September another 35,000, and then in December 50,000 more."

"We have now reached the point," said the second, "where we can confidently move from a period of cut and try to a longer range program for the replacement of Americans by South Vietnamese troops."

Further down the page, Brandt saw that Bourne had circled Nixon's warning to the leaders of North Vietnam: "But I again remind the leaders of North Vietnam that... they will be taking grave risks should they attempt to use the occasion to jeopardize the security of our remaining forces in Vietnam by increased military action in Vietnam, in Cambodia,

or in Laos."

On the same page of the newspaper was another article that Bourne had circled.

"Le Duan, First Secretary of the North Vietnamese Communist Party, in his address today at the Kremlin, during Lenin centennial ceremonies, seemed to be giving an indirect answer to Richard Nixon's warnings about Cambodia and Laos. 'In order to defend sacred national rights, the peoples of the brotherly countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos will carry on the struggle against the common enemy, the American imperialists,' Le Duan was quoted as saying, in an article by James P. Clarity in the *New York Times*. 'By strengthening their cohesion they will tighten their ranks in order to undermine decisively the adventuristic plans of aggression in Indochina. The peoples of the three countries will undoubtedly be victorious.'

"Elsewhere, reports of the military reality behind that and similar statements emanating from Hanoi suggest the strategy that accompanies this determination for ultimate victory. In South Vietnam, where the U.S. will be withdrawing troops, the Communists will pull back and wait. Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the supply caravans will continue,—at a level just below what would provoke a response by the U.S. Air Force. In Laos and Cambodia, military actions will be overt and continuous,—but, again just to the edge of what the Communists estimate the U.S. will tolerate without a response."

Brandt paused at this point, feeling suddenly that he should not be reading Bourne's newspaper clippings, though there was nothing personal in them except in what was circled, and though he did not really think that Bourne would have any objection from what he had known of him before when he had lived in the house with Bourne and his son.

Thinking of that, he proceeded through the house to the little room on the second floor that had been his room.

The book shelf was still there that Bourne had given Brandt to fill with books as he read them. Brandt had left it behind when he had left the house after the fallout between him and Bourne regarding his use of terms that the old man had regarded as too radical. Brandt thought to himself that he didn't begrudge Bourne anymore for his reaction to that language. In retrospect, he realized that the words he had used that evening with Bourne was near to the inflated language that he had come to dislike so much among some of his peers at Whitney-Pratt.

Matthew returned outside, thinking his brief reacquaintance with the war was over for the time being, but the war came up again, in the midst of the light, congenial conversation, when Fletcher remarked that probably Dennis hadn't seen the Brandt's in quite a long while and Dennis replied that he and the Brandt's had just been together at the

recent Moratorium march in Washington D.C.

"But I see you don't have too high an opinion of that," Dennis said when he noticed the expression that came over Bourne's face in response to this topic. The expression was not one of indignation or disapproval so much as of grave contemplation.

"Well, let me be clear," Bourne said in his polite, soft-spoken manner. "I have nothing against demonstrations, peaceful demonstrations, of the kind, you all know, we have had here and have encouraged to happen. And I do want the war to end as soon as possible, of course, for the sake of my son, if for nothing else. But when I see the flag of North Vietnam, the flag of our enemy in the war, being waved in the midst of the crowd, as I saw on TV, many such flags, and no one apparently raises a voice of protest, a peaceful voice of protest, that concerns me a great deal."

None of the young people answered this at once. They were each forming an answer calculated to be least offensive.

"In what other American war as this ever been done?" Bourne persisted.

"Well, Mr. Bourne, some people sympathize with the cause of North Vietnam," Mary ventured in a voice just as soft as Bourne's. "They see the government of North Vietnam as a true government of the people, led by leaders like Ho Chi Minh who have the true interests of the people in mind. It's possible to read what these leaders say, to read their speeches, and so on."

"Oh, yes, I suppose," Bourne responded, sitting back on his chair. "But Mary, I think we need to take a wider view."

For the first time, despite himself, his voice had taken on a slight edge of anger such as Matthew had heard only once before, on the evening when he and Bourne had had their previous falling out.

"Think what has happened just in this century," he continued, leaning forward. "You have the Communist Party coming into power just about a half century ago in Russia and now the Soviet Union commands one seventh of the land mass of the entire world. Surely you must agree that that was a suppressive and frightening government under Stalin and continues to be with maybe some slight easing of constraint. Then China. A state with a new parliamentary government just 25 years ago under Chiang Kai Chek and that has fallen to the Communist Party in China with their recent Cultural Revolution which as I see it is just a means to purge out any elements of protest and change."

This remark brought such a dramatic change in mood in the gathering that the young people again remained silent not wanting to challenge the older man in any of his convictions. The connection that occurred to everyone was that Vietnam was not Russia or China; it was an oppressive

regime of the same type.

"Now you see it here closer to home, too," Bourne went on, seeming perturbed that he had gotten no response. "Right down here in Cuba. That there is a repressive government, too. What do you think would happen in Cuba if you tried to stage a demonstration such as you took part in in D.C.?"

Again, there was no response, leading him to a visible increase in animation.

"As I understand their system down there," he said, raising one finger as to children, "you would be arrested and put in prison for the mere idea before you ever got so far as the street."

Again there was a strained silence but Hattie Beecher ended it by announcing it was time for food. Mary had noted, though, that Hattie had nodded with approval while Bourne spoke, and that reminded Mary that Hattie's soldier son had died in the Korean War.

Mary was keenly aware of the personal dishonesty that she needed to accept in herself in order not to utter a protest in response to Bourne's comments about Cuba. There was another small compromise, she knew, in going into the kitchen to assume the traditional female role of carrying out the food.

As the steaming dishes came out, Bourne then made an obvious effort to bring the group back to a lighter mood, while at the same time his face maintained an expression of sadness, around the eyes, as though he was aware that he had caused or had extended the slight rift between himself and his more liberal young friends.

"Well, do you continue to do your fine photography?" he asked Matthew.

The conversation then turned to the photos Matthew had done for his garden project and how much the families had loved them.

"You know, Matt," said Bourne, "the dark room downtown in Crabtree, in the newspaper building, is still available for you anytime you feel inclined to use it."

"Well, thank you."

"You've got a fine talent then, and I'm glad to help it along any way I can."

"Thank you."

Later, the spring scene around the house grew beautiful with sunset colors, prompting an idea by someone to go for a walk over across the way to see where Matt had had his garden in his summer at the Bourne's. From there, the group went to Hattie's backyard for a look at the turned up black soil in the plot she had readied for planting next to her newly budding plum trees and the limestone breaks on the side of the hill.

Through these mutual efforts, the strain of earlier in the evening were

again dispelled, though only partly. Something of the old breach between Fletcher and Matt and the new disagreement about the war still hung in the air.

[Chapter 225 notes]

226. Brandt's leave Kentucky realizing that they can no longer fit in

"Well, so much for Bourne," said Matthew Brandt as he drove away. "You can't blame him as far as the war. But I don't think he'll ever be close again like he once was."

"Yes, it did devolve slightly," Mary replied, looking at him with a thoughtful expression. "Did you think that yourself?"

They reached the highway and headed down a winding corridor through the dark trees as they had done as newlyweds, snuggled together, in their first months together in Kentucky.

"Yes, I did," Matthew said.

"It was our fault, too," said Mary.

"Oh, yes, for sure. Ol' Fletcher, he did his best like always."

"Yes, he's such a sweet old man. He's so kind."

"Things went a little smoother for you and Hattie."

"Yes, they did, in a way."

After miles of dark highway, they came to a town familiar from the old days. There, a news report on the radio told of developments in the war such as they might not have even listened to, had it not been for their just completed discussion with Bourne and the newspaper on the kitchen table.

"Dispatches from the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam told of a new joint military campaign that will take South Vietnamese forces and U.S. support elements into Cambodia for the first time.

"The *New York Times* reported that the force crossed into Cambodia from Tayinh Province at 8 A.M. this morning (9 P.M. this evening Eastern Standard Time). 'This morning' is actually tomorrow morning in Southeast Asia because the region is 11 hours ahead of American time zones. The forces are said to be nearing the Cambodian district town of Bavet, which is described as a stronghold for Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces.

"'Our objective is the destroy caches of weapons being built up by Communist forces along the Mekong River in southern Cambodia,' a military spokesman said. 'This "incursion," as we are calling it, 'will involve South Vietnamese ground forces, and American advisers, tactical air strikes, medical evacuation, and some logistics assistance.'

"'The lid is off,' one analyst was quoted as saying in a Times report by Terence Smith. 'The advisers will be doing everything on this operation that they normally do inside of South Vietnam.'"

Matthew and Mary listened in silence as the report went on and the little town from their past faded behind them, succeeded by another winding corridor through the dark shapes of the steep slopes on both side of the two-lane highway.

"More concern for ol' Fletch, I imagine," said Matthew. "Article he had on the frig had Bumper in a picture with some other guys, said they are operating in that southern area."

"Yes, he must be having some lonely, worried nights."

General background information on Cambodia followed the report of the "incursion."

The recent instability in the country was related to the overthrow six weeks ago of Norodom Sihanouk, the announcer said. "The king who had become a prince and then a prime minister and then a permanent head of state, as he is called," said the announcer, "all in a successful effort to retain control, finally after 25 years lost it in a coup d'etat led by his lieutenant Lon Nol. Seeing an opportunity, local Communist forces of the Khmer Rouge, reorganized and renamed the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces, the CPN-LAF, have entered into open conflict with the loyalist Khmer National Armed Forces, called by their French acronym FANK. Meanwhile, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces have transferred their military installations away from the border of Vietnam, where they fear a possible American strike, to locations deeper in Cambodia around a new command center in city of Kracheh. The large amounts of supplies that are expected to be stored there are reported to be the object of the current incursion..."

The staticky sound of this further report faded off in volume as their continued progress along the two-lane highway took them further from the radio tower in town. The details of internecine politics in a country hardly known to either of them seemed to be a rephrasing of something heard before in a slightly different form.

"The war is still here. 400 miles from D.C." Mary said. "Dark highway in the mountains. And the war is still here. As we learned tonight."

"With the usual complexity."

"The never ending complexity. It just goes on and on."

Back at the cabin, they found the hilltop serene with a balmy wind fanning the grass. Overhead, a clear sky displayed a myriad of stars such as could not be seen from the lighted streets of D.C.

At Mary's suggestion, they went for a walk along the ridge, looking off to the valley below. The only lights visible were those of the distant town from which they had just come, the town after which the radio report of the war had faded off in the darkness.

"I was going to say sometime while we're here we should have a long talk," Mary ventured, "but I guess we already know the answer."

"About staying here?"

"Yes."

"I don't know," said Matthew, growing more animated as he

struggled for words, “sometimes I get these moments, you know. I remember what it was like when I first started here. It was almost scary at first. It was so different. But then I got to like it so much. I felt like I really understood.”

“Like you really belonged.”

“Yes... But then I think say we did come back here what would I do for work, what would I do?”

“You could work with AV in the schools, I suppose. They must have that here, Matthew.”

“Yes, I suppose.”

“I could be a nutritionist.”

“Yes, I suppose.”

“We will have graduate degrees.”

“Another little thing I think of though who would we talk to?”

“What would be our community?”

“Yes.”

“People like Fletcher and Hattie, I suppose.”

“But you see tonight you can only carry it so far.”

“Yes, I saw that, too. Especially when Cuba came up. I was thinking the people I met in Cuba are not so different than Fletcher and Hattie, they are good decent people, you know, they are idealistic and well-meaning. But how do you say that?”

“You run into a wall.”

“Yes.”

“You think Fletcher was right about what would happen to demonstrators in Cuba?”

“Well, that is valid, maybe. I think there’s some people who might react in that manner. People like the cadre I told you about.”

“The Xavier guy?”

“Yes. The impression I got of people like that is just they are so very very afraid of losing the revolution. They are so very very afraid of having to go through it a second time.”

“Yes.”

They ended in silence as Matthew got up restlessly and moved along the ridge looking for a rock or stick to throw as he might once have when they were still dating before they got married.

“Well, if we did move back here, there would always be Dennis. You can’t beat ol’ Sad Dog,” Mary said.

“No, that is the one truth in the universe that remains absolutely constraint,” Matthew replied. “I wonder though would he really always be here? He is talking quite a bit about On the Road and hitting the highway and his yurts and so on.”

“The man has a far off look in his eyes.”

"Precisely."

"Somehow Kentucky and Kelly go together," Mary said.

"Can't imagine one without the other," Mathew agreed, "there's a lot of places around here that would seem awful lonesome without ol' Sad Dog to toss a couple down."

There was one more meeting with Dennis Kelly, however, the agreed upon final supper together before Matthew and Mary returned to D.C. One more time, on that evening, the Brandt's stood in the waving grass on the hill, beside the familiar pillar of rock, listening as the distinctive sound of Kelly's jeep, with its occasional backfires, presented in the distance below the hill, and proceeded steadily toward them on the winding road through the trees. Then the green hood of the jeep appeared where the road emerged from the trees to the open area on top of the hill. Kelly greeted them then with a wide wave such as they recalled from similar occasions two years before.

Later, the three friends once again sat together in the single large room of the cabin, which Mary had restored to the arrangement and ambience of two years before.

Kelly was not surprised to learn that the Brandt's had decided not to return to Kentucky.

"I got a sense of that in D.C.," he said. "With all your new friends there. Your family, as you call it."

"Well, you're a member, too," said Mary. "Everyone thinks so."

"Distant cousin, I guess."

"You think you'll be staying around here, Dennie," Matthew asked from the counter on the one end of the room that served as a kitchen. He was a familiar sight, standing not sitting as usual, and with a bottle of beer in his hand.

"Well, I imagine I will. After I do a little rambling this summer, like I told you," Dennis replied.

"You'll have to keep us informed of your travels," said Mary. "How long you going to do that?"

"Maybe two months. Mid-May to mid-July or so."

"Out to find America."

"Yes."

"You and a lot of us, it seems."

"Yes."

"Everyone's looking at the same time."

"You really think you'll be working in that shoe factory the rest of your life?" Matthew inquired.

"Yes. Why do you find it so hard to imagine?"

"I don't know, Dennis. Seems like you got a little intellectual process going there, too," said Mary. "It's hard to imagine that you'll never

address that more directly."

"Well, I have thought of that. Being a teacher or something."

"You'd be one hell of an excellent teacher."

"Ever think of coming out East, maybe joining us if we ever actually look for land?"

"You think that will really happen?"

"More and more, yea."

The talk turned earnest as this matter was considered. It had become a serious option in everyone's mind as a possible way to combine daily life and beliefs.

"Well, how about this?" said Matthew. "If we do head up to New England just to look around, why don't you come with us?"

"When do you expect that will happen?"

"Sad Dog, we will make it happen when you can come with us," Matthew said. "I mean, I can't speak for everyone, but I'm sure they'll agree. We want you involved."

"Well, I'm touched by that, Matthew. Really, I am," Kelly replied in his awkward, persistent manner, staring into Matthew's face.

"I feel the same way, Dennis," Mary threw in as she set plates out on the table around the centerpiece of white flowers.

"Thank you very much."

"How about later this summer? When you're back from your trip."

"I would like to do that."

"Okay, Sad Dog, I'll do my best."

Matt and Mary Brandt left Kentucky the next day feeling that they had reached a point of further resolution with respect to the options for their future that they had discussed at the start of their trip. Kentucky was out as option was out because of the problem of community, though they agreed that they wanted to stay friends with Fletcher Bourne and Hattie Beecher. As a sequitor to that, because Kentucky was out, and also because of Dennis Kelly's possible involvement, a commune in New England was a stronger option. As they discussed this option more seriously, however, issues loomed that would need to be resolved, such as how the group would buy and manage common property. Minnesota, as they saw it, was a less drastic option. In Minnesota, there would be a chance for a community of old friends, though not in the same house. There would be a chance of buying land for themselves as a couple.

"You know, Matthew, that sounds so appealing in a way, but I don't know..."

"It like going back."

"Precisely."

"Just becoming again what we were before."

"But maybe that doesn't have to be."

The last lesson of the trip that they talked about, as the winding highway led over the mountains, was how much they had forgotten, despite the recent moratorium, that the war was still going on, involving people like Fletcher and Bumper Bourne.

"And of course there's Jim," Mary said. "It's like he's gone on a trip sometime, and then you have to remember he may be a prisoner."

"Or dead."

"Oh, yes! Poor Ellen!"

This, too, was left hanging as the day faded and evening came on. They drove all night, feeling that they were going back to where they had been living but not exactly going home, with home yet to be defined in their quandary of personal change.

[Chapter 226 notes]

227. O'Rourke resolves to make decisions about Barbara Carpenter and combat

Bill O'Rourke spent the month of April 1970 contemplating two important concerns that he was consciously aware of as such, having identified them in his mind. His first concern was what to do about his steady but long-range relationship with Barbara Carpenter. His second concern was whether to proceed with his idea to volunteer for combat duty and, if so, how he could do that.

The former coxswain was also keenly aware that these two important concerns were intricately related to one another. He had been reluctant to ask Barbara for any kind of romantic commitment, he knew, due to a feeling that it didn't seem fair to her to do that while at the same time placing himself in jeopardy by putting himself forward for combat duty. Because of this bind, he had also not proceeded in thinking through whether he really wanted to put himself forward for combat duty—irrespective of her. He had simply put that thought process on hold for the time being, resulting in an impasse that he didn't want to continue. He wanted to move forward in resolving both concerns.

Letters exchanged at a rate of about two each per month had been the only contact with Barbie that O'Rourke had had since his trip down to see her in Binh Thuy. O'Rourke's pilot friend Captain Ken Forland, who had made that trip possible, had been reassigned to duty that had kept him down south in the area of Saigon. With Forland removed from Chu Lai, O'Rourke no longer had the option of making spur of the moment arrangements for flying down to see Carpenter. Even so, the relationship between the two Minnesotans had become steadily more intense, with repeated mentions on both sides of the trip together to the R&R resort at China Beach that they had first talked about on O'Rourke's trip to Binh Thuy.

Then Barbie wrote: "You know, Bill, seems like we've talking about this too long. Let's just go ahead and make arrangements. If you find out when you can go, I'll try to arrange the same time. Because of the rank issue, we will have to get separate rooms, but I think we can find some ways to get around that.

"As far as the war, you think about these things a lot more than me. I am interested in what you're thinking, though. I'd like to hear about your 'thought process,' as you called it when you were here in Binh Thuy. I mean, in detail. Write it down for me sometimes. I promise to be a good listener, or reader, in this case."

With that letter, matters between O'Rourke and Carpenter took a definite direction.

He went to the base exchange the next day to ask about China Beach. Although China Beach was just 55 miles to the northwest, outside the

city of Danang, O'Rourke had never been there. He had been given an opportunity once to go there for "rest and recuperation" (R&R), but he had opted to remain home at Chu Lai for his time off.

"April 15 to 21 is open," the duty sergeant told him. "Single room in the west wing. That's right above the beach. I've been in that wing myself."

"Can I claim it tentatively?"

"Far as I go, it's definite. If it changes, just come on back and tell me so I can let it go to someone else."

"Okay, I'll do that."

He wrote at once to tell Carpenter the tentative date. Arrangements would be more complicated for her, he knew, as Binh Thuy was 500 miles from Danang. But Barbie had told him that twice a week or so a plane went up with a contingent from Binh Thuy and the nearby base of Bak Noy.

She wrote back at once.

"I can do it! Isn't this exciting!"

She said she had arranged to room for five days with another nurse. "Not that I want to preclude ever staying with you," she explained. "I just think I need a home base of my own."

Then she ended with a serious statement. "One thing more I would like to say, Bill, is I think you should keep these two things separate, whether you are going to volunteer for combat, and what happens between you and me. With me, I would like you to proceed, or not proceed, just as if we were back in Minnesota, going to regattas together—or not going to them, if you know what I mean."

That evening at supper, O'Rourke re-read this last paragraph. One of his two concerns, how to proceed with respect to Barbara Carpenter, was resolved by it, he thought. The other concern remained of how to proceed with respect to combat duty. But there, too, he was making progress, he thought, because the thought process she had invited him to share with her was exactly what he had been holding himself back from and had wanted to proceed with.

The next morning, with a day off, O'Rourke headed down a familiar path to the beach, resolved to do just that.

With his red hair tussled by the wind, and his face covered with a red stubble prominent enough to suggest his glorious red beard of the old days, O'Rourke might have passed, momentarily, for the irreverent coxswain who had commanded the crews so saltily at that time; but the blue eyes were more serious. Anyone who had known O'Rourke in the old days would have noted that change.

It was a beautiful morning with the sun rising far out on the China Sea where the sky and sea blended in indeterminate water and cloud

layers of blue and green colors. The surf was rolling in as he recalled it from his days in California (though a similar lighting there in the westward- facing beachscape would have been of sunset rather than sunrise). Evoked by that ambience, many memories passed through his mind,—nostalgic memories from his days in California with Tom Steward in the days when they had worked for the Farmworkers together.

He recalled standing with Steward on the beach at Santa Monica on the morning when he had dropped off Steward there for Steward's hitching trip up the coast to Santa Barbara. He recalled how he and Steward had joked about maybe hitching together up to Big Sur, a trip that had never happened. He recalled the garage home he and Steward had shared in East L.A., cottage-like in the soft light projected from the single bulb above the tool bench stacked with cardboard boxes of the supplies given to the migrant workers. He recalled the late night talks, but not the words, just the feeling of camaraderie they had engendered.

Why did such fragments of memories come forward, O'Rourke wondered. There seemed to be no explanation for them. He had not thought about the cardboard boxes on the tool bench for many months, if ever since being in that garage. But for some reason, that memory presented itself at this moment on this beach in Vietnam, O'Rourke reflected.

Vietnam! Vietnam! For so long he had thought about it, and wondered what to do about it, when Vietnam had been just a topic of talk, the topic common to his entire generation. Now here he was in, actually in Vietnam, and the topic of "Vietnam," meaning the war and what to do about it, continued still as the subject of the "thought process" that Barb had referred to in her letter,—the thought process that he had told her about himself. Here, in the actual Vietnam, the war was closer, of course, yet somehow, farther away, fuzzed over in its totality by its reality on the ground, which could not go far, he acknowledged to himself, given the limited range of the individual experience.

As to that thought process: O'Rourke reminded himself that that was his business of the day: to figure out the thought process to explain it to Barb,—as he so much wanted to do, both in the figuring out and in the telling to her.

"I am sweet on that girl," he said to himself, and, with that, an image settled in of the wide-open brown eyes that he had stared into at close range for the entire night in Binh Thuy.

The former coxswain had, by this time, rounded the point below the General Quarters, and he could see, on his left, above the tin roofs of the base buildings, an immense, U-shaped chopper with blades on front and back,—a CH-47A Chinook, as he identified it,—settling down by the Ky Ha control tower. On his right, far out on the swaying water of the South

China Sea, two Swift boats, in tandem, moved swiftly toward the Yong An Hoa channel, where he knew their pier was.

But the thought process... When had it begun? His mind moved next to the rooftop in Indiana where he and Steward had spent a night on their hitchhiking trip from Minnesota to Tennessee, the rooftop scene that he had described to Barb Carpenter in Binh Thuy. Since mentioning it to her, he had thought about that scene from time to time in passing, and now, as he walked on the beach, the scene came back to him quite clearly,—in particular, the later part of the evening, after the fireside supper, when he and Steward had climbed up on the second, little roof (where the air conditioning unit had been located) to get a better view of the countryside. From there, as he recalled, they had been able to see beyond the low hill in the distance to the clustered lights of a small town where a red light had blinked off and on from some kind of high smoke stack or tower as he and Steward talked about what they planned to do in response to the war. That exchange of ideas with his old teammate struck the former coxswain, as he pondered on it, as a moment of crystallization in the thought process that he was trying to complete in his mind.

He recalled saying to Steward, as he sat on that upper roof, that the way he looked at his responsibilities in the matter was that he was an American citizen and his country was at war, it was as simple as that. He recalled saying that he was okay with the idea of first finishing school and then going to the war, if the war was still on, and okay with the idea of going to war as a medic, while not carrying (or at least not shooting) a gun. He recalled telling Steward that he was glad medics were in danger, just as much as regular soldiers in combat, because he didn't want to be regarded as a coward.

Was that what was behind the whole thought process then, O'Rourke asked himself, not wanting to be regarded as a coward? No, he answered at once. Of course, he didn't want to be regarded as a coward, but, more importantly, he wanted to be consistent. Yes, that was it. He wanted to be consistent in that his actions followed completely from what he believed and in that the sacrifice he accepted from others was the same that he expected from himself.

The medical part was important, too, wasn't it? Of course. So very important. His mind went back further still to the bulletin board at St. Catherine's where he had run into Mary Brandt, then still Mary Kass, when she had been looking for a way to go down to see Matthew (as he had later figured out) and he had been looking for a way to volunteer in a medical program. He recalled Mary asking him, in her earnest, sympathetic manner, whether he had ambitions to be a doctor, and he recalled how he had answered no, not for the time being, at least, his grades weren't that good... Well, truth be told, he did have those

ambitions now. Maybe he would go back and do that, after the war. His thoughts continued through his various experiences with medical settings. The Hispanic boy he had befriended on the field trip in Georgia came to mind. Yes, maybe he would apply to med school when he got back, and maybe he would find a way to bring Barbie into that picture after the war.

After the war. But the war was his reality for the time being. Why not just leave the war after his present tour was done, and proceed with his other plans? Barb would reenter the picture, he felt, if it was meant to be. Meanwhile, she would remain to do more. Why should she be the one to make that further sacrifice and not he, also?

Thus O'Rourke proceeded in his thoughts, his mind settling next on the intelligence officer, Orin Brown. Obviously, Brown was an individual who had no scruples about consistency in the sense of allowing others to make the sacrifice not made oneself. But what Brown did have was a reason for the war that was quite compelling. The reason was quite simple, in his image of a world split into two camps, one of which stood for freedom and other of which stood for lack of freedom, suppression of freedom.

A complex of fragments from the past came into O'Rourke's mind in response to this image of a world divided into two camps: not personal memories but pictures seen in newspapers, news clips heard on TV or the radio, stories heard in school. He recalled seeing a picture of the grim-faced Soviet leaders lined up on Lenin's tomb to watch the Soviet army marching past, a picture of some Chinese landowner with his hands tied behind his back standing in front of a group of peasants, another picture of his body on the ground after he was shot. Another picture came to mind of a frightened Russian boy; as O'Rourke remembered, his parents had been arrested as spies, turned in by their neighbors for some offense that had amounted to an illegal expression of thought or to listening to someone else making such an expression.

Later, after coming up from the beach, O'Rourke happened upon a military review on the athletic field by the Officer's Club, an award ceremony of some kind with martial music and flags. He could not help but swelling with pride when the American flag came past him as he stood on the side of the field.

Those assembled were honoring three who had died.

"These men were our fellow soldiers," said the officer speaking, a one-star general. "For many of you, they were brothers, they were friends. Because of their great sacrifice, because of the sacrifice of many others like them, we stand here today under this flag."

The unit on the field was a brigade of the 23rd Infantry Division (commonly called Americal), the former coxswain ascertained from the

unit colors, a Navy blue flag with a diamond of four white stars. He knew the unit was headquartered in Chu Lai.

Among those standing in formation was a man close to O'Rourke who wore the combat medic badge, an oval-shaped badge with a Swiss cross and the two entwined snakes representing medicine. Had he forgotten how much he had aspired to wear this badge, O'Rourke asked himself. To be awarded it, a medic, or "medical aidman" as the function was technically called, had to serve in combat for more than 60 days.

Leaving the field, O'Rourke happened upon a poster with this same badge used as a backdrop to a picture of a medic attending to a wounded soldier. The poster said, "The Grunt's Best Friend."

"No doubt there are valid reasons for being against the war, as are many of my friends back home," he wrote to Barb later. "No doubt there are atrocities on both sides, and I've heard of misdeeds by American soldiers,—not stories in a newspaper but personal stories of people I have known here. But to me the essential point is, does this world struggle that Orin Brown talks about in fact exist? It seems to me, in this imperfect world, it does exist and that, in this imperfect world, our own country, imperfect as it often it is, also, is the chief guardian and defender of freedom.

"If this is the case, truly, and if we send some of our brothers and sisters out into battle, how can the rest of us stand by? I suppose there are many reasons for standing by, as Orin Brown would be quick to point out, but I've reached a point where I can't stand by any longer.

"I think often of that soldier I told you about that died in the hospital, Xuan Than. He refused to give up information about his fellow soldiers even though he clearly understood that in so doing he would lose his own life.

"I want to be as noble as he was, though I regard his cause as ultimately flawed. I want to be willing to make the same sacrifice, though I love my life dearly.

"It just a matter of consistency, Barb. I want to be consistent in this war and then I can go home."

[Chapter 227 notes]

228. O'Rourke volunteers for combat and woos Barbie at China Beach

In the days leading up to his vacation with Barb Carpenter, Spc4 Bill O'Rourke completed his request to be transferred to combat duty. He turned in the request to his commanding officer at 91st Evac and asked for it to be submitted to both of the command centers above him, including the 67th Medical Group, one level above, and above that, the U.S. Medical Command Vietnam, which, as successor to the 44th Medical Group, was in charge of all medical operations in Vietnam.

"Well, I'll put it through for you," O'Rourke's CO remarked, "but I won't recommend it."

The CO, as O'Rourke knew, was not a soldier in the strict sense. He was a doctor, an M.D., who had been in the medical corps since the Korean War.

"Could I ask, sir, why not?" O'Rourke replied.

"Because you're good at what you're doing right here, O'Rourke, and we need you doing it."

"Thank you."

"And another little thing."

"Yes, sir, what?"

"I'd rather not see you killed. I think you might be good at what you do when you get back home. I'd like to see you have that opportunity when this war is over.

"Just the same, sir, I'd be grateful for your approval."

"Like I said, O'Rourke, I'll put it through."

After this, so far as this possible transfer was concerned, there was nothing to do but wait and, also, as he asked around about it he got the distinct impression that the Army would be inclined to keep a medic where he was if that person was doing a good job, which O'Rourke knew everyone thought he was.

The former coxswain was quite aware, additionally, of what the possible assignments could be in light of the overall structure of the Army medical Corps in Vietnam.

Within his own 67th Medical Group, which was assigned to support of Military Region 1, under the control of the XXIV Corps, there were two possibilities for medical combat duty that O'Rourke was aware of.

The first possibility was the 23rd Medical Battalion, which was assigned to support of the 23rd Infantry Division, the group O'Rourke had seen parading the week before on the athletic field at Chu Lai. The 23rd Infantry was involved in "clear and secure" operations not far from Chu Lai, in the coastal lowlands just a few miles inland and in the rugged highlands about 25 miles further west.

The second possibility for medical combat duty that O'Rourke was

aware of, in 67th Med, was the 26th Medical Battalion, assigned to support of the three brigades of the 101st Airborne Division headquartered about 75 miles up the coast in Phu Bai. The 101st Airborne, O'Rourke had heard, was involved in similar lowland, highland terrain in a similar but more extensive clear and secure operation called Texas Star.

The 23rd Infantry and 101st Airborne were at the moment two of the most active divisions in Vietnam, O'Rourke had heard. Both battalions were also involved in the training of the South Vietnamese army units that would supposedly take over after the American units were gone.

Going out further, into the three other military regions within the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, there were, O'Rourke figured, nine other medical battalions supporting Army combat divisions. The most active recently were those located far to the south in the Mekong delta area where Barb Carpenter was stationed. Some of these battalions had been active in support of the divisions that had participated in the recent incursion into Cambodia, O'Rourke had heard.

There, too, a wind-down was in progress as American units tried to transfer duties to analogous units of the South Vietnamese army (commonly referred to by the acronym ARVN). As in the north, the ARVN was being assembled, unit by unit, as a shadow image of the American army.

Now that he was actively contemplating being moved to one of these U.S. units that would presumably be replaced, O'Rourke gave some thought to whether such a replacement would actually happen in the foreseeable future. He also found, as he traveled by plane from Chu Lai to meet Barbie, that others were wondering about the same subject. Various conversations he heard went back and forth about it.

"Well, let me ask you this," he heard one regular Army "lifer," a full sergeant, saying to another man that, like the first, appeared to be old enough to have taken part in the Korean war. "Have you ever seen or heard of the ARVN actually performing against the DVR?"

"They don't have the same intensity."

"No, they don't, and there's no way to get around it."

"This thing's gonna drag on for another five years."

"That's what I'm thinking myself."

The former coxswain took that into consideration as he had learned by this time that non-commissioned officers such as these often had the best sense of what was really going on in the war.

His thoughts went elsewhere, however, as the plane banked toward Danang providing a view of the long white beach below.

"They say you can walk out a hundred yards and the water's only about waist high," someone said.

"Look at that white sand! Does it ever end?"

"Up there, see them bunkers on that hill? They call that 'Monkey Mountain.'"

"Forget the monkeys, man. This place have any women?"

"Now they I heard are in scarce supply."

"Not if you're willing to pay the price."

"I'm not that desperate, man."

"I'll check back about midnight."

It was indeed a vacation setting such as the best he could imagine, O'Rourke thought to himself. As for locating women, he was very aware that he would be soon be meeting a woman that was as good among women, in his estimation, as was this splendid beach among beaches.

Per their plan, she arrived a few hours later on the long flight up from Can Tho, looking more like a pretty college girl on vacation than the concerned carer for the wounded that he had come to know lately. She was wearing a sleeveless, single-piece blue dress with her shapely legs bare to mid-thigh. Her brown hair was freshly curled. In each ear she wore a gold loop earing. Around her neck was a gold necklace with a gold heart positioned in the cleavage of her breasts.

She had worn perfume, too, he discovered when he leaned forward to kiss her. The scent conveyed an association that formalized in his mind as Chicago 1968, after the demonstration, when he had chanced to meet her at the streetside clinic and had then spent the evening with her when their relationship had first taken a serious turn.

"Ah, well, what can I say?" he said. "You look beautiful, Barbie. I'm overwhelmed."

"Isn't this exciting?"

"Yes, it is."

"I'm so glad to see you, Bill."

"I'm glad to see you, too."

"I've been thinking a lot about you."

"I've been thinking about you, also."

Later, they stood together on the main street of the beach area, surveying a holiday scene of restaurants, shops, and milling people, most of them young, male soldiers. There was not much distinction between the banner-hung sidewalks and the streets, with people and vehicles mixing in a medley of commotion and noise. Off at an angle, between the buildings, the surf rolled in on a white beach extending to a distant point where the coast curved out of view. It was a balmy, bright day without a cloud in the sky.

"Well, where to, Mr. O'Rourke, where can we begin?"

"I don't know, Barb. Just up the street here? I guess we can't go wrong."

That was indeed the case as the day progressed from the shops to the beach to a candlelight dinner in a restaurant looking out to a full moon high above the South China Sea, but it did not end, as might have been expected, in a shared bed. As had been worked out in advance, the couple separated at that time and the girlish nurse from Minnesota went back to a room that she shared with a fellow nurse who had come up with her from Binh Thuy.

"You must think I'm a prude," she said when she left after a final kiss.

"No, Barb, I want you to feel right about everything," the former coxswain responded.

Actually, thought O'Rourke as he walked off by himself one evening after a romantic day at her side, he was glad the encounter had not taken the usual route. He was glad to have a way to act toward her extraordinary enough to convey his extraordinary feelings. Sex, he thought to himself, would have seemed too common, too easy. He was aware, also, that she had a personal history going back to her college days of sex being problematic. He didn't want to force that upon her.

After two days together, however, something else occurred as they walked along the beach in the moonlight with the surf crashing in beside them. They began talking about something they had never really discussed in detail before, their lives after the war.

Then, for the first time, to another person, O'Rourke divulged the ambitions that had been forming inside him regarding a possible career in medicine after he returned to the States.

"Well, I think that's a splendid idea," Barbara remarked. "I really do, Bill."

At this the former coxswain nodded gravely. "You know, though, much as I hate to admit it to you, my grades back there, in the rowing days, were not exactly stellar."

"Oh," she said thoughtfully. "How unstellar were they?"

He knew that she asked this in order to protect him against maybe forming an unrealistic goal from which he would be eventually dashed, if his grades were truly "unstellar," as she said, but it mortified him that she felt compelled to ask this question and that he was therefore compelled to answer it.

"Oh," he replied with a sigh. "I guess you could say I got the usual C's, about half C's, and I got some B's in there, quite a few B's in there, maybe about a third B's, and a few A's."

"How many D's and F's in there, Mr. O'Rourke?"

"Oh, none of them! Geez, Barb, you make me feel like a real dummie!"

"You brought up the subject."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, let me ask you this, do you think you could have gotten more A's if you had applied yourself more?"

"Yes, I do. I was capable, Barb. Just not directed."

"I think then, Bill, what you're contemplating is possible."

"Thank you."

"If you went back and put together a good year and maybe were in the midst of a good second year. That combined with your war experience. I know you're an excellent medic. I know how devoted you are."

"Thank you."

"You would get some good recommendations."

"I think so. Yes."

"Surely it would stand you in good stead that you had the integrity and courage to put yourself in this war."

"You would think so. But I don't know. A lot of people hate this war. They hate anything connected with it."

"But not the individual soldier!"

"You wouldn't think so. No."

"Where would you go to med school then, if you could?"

"I was thinking, Minnesota."

"Wouldn't that be grand?"

"Yes, it would."

They walked along together, arm in arm, barefoot on the wet sand, with the waves washing in beside them and sometimes throwing surf across the tops of their feet.

"You know, in my heart of hearts, what I've imagined, Barb?"

"No."

"There's an area down along the Mississippi River, just below Lake City, little place called Camp Legapoulis, of all the odd names. Used to go down there because my grampa had a cabin there. I've been indulging this dream lately of living in a place like that, having a family, you know, being a family doctor."

"I know the exact place!"

"You do?"

"Yes, we used to always drive down through there, when my sister was going to college there, at St. Mary's!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I love it down there!"

"You could almost say it's an enchanted world."

"Yes, it is," she replied softly looking toward him. "You know, in my heart of hearts, what I imagine, Bill?"

"No."

"I imagine going back home, to Minnesota, and becoming some kind of nurse specialist, some kind of outreach nurse going out among the people, and in just a place like that."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"You would make a great outreach nurse."

"Thanks."

"And I heard they had those now, working for the counties."

"Yes."

Having reached a turn of the beach about a quarter mile from the main street of town, they paused to look back at the cheerful, colored lights of the resort, from which music came drifting across toward them from the one of the bars facing the beach.

They looked into one another's faces at this point, and the girlish nurse from Minnesota took both of the former coxswain's hands and smiled at him crazily, shaking her head. "Wouldn't that be the dang'est thing, Bill, if we wound up doing that together?"

"Yes, it would, Barbie. I would like that very much."

"So would I."

That was all that was said, but they both felt that a mutual island of the future had thus been established,—with the bridge of the war between them and that, as they were both so well aware.

[Chapter 228 notes]

229. Chance encounter moves O'Rourke a step further toward combat duty

After exchanging dreams of the future with Barbara Carpenter, Bill O'Rourke felt relieved that this personal matter that had been unresolved for so long had been resolved. As for his other unresolved personal matter of whether and when to volunteer for combat duty, O'Rourke felt a sense of incompletion about it, though, at the same time, he was apprehensive enough about the dangers of combat to not rush forward.

At least, so he was thinking, early in the morning on the day after his talk with Barb, when the sight of the sun rising over the South China Sea beckoned him for a solitary walk along the wide expanse of white sand. With the seaside scene again reminding him of the many similar seaside scenes he remembered from his days in California, the former coxswain considered his odyssey from college to Vietnam, by way of Chicago and California.

He thought about a letter he had received just the past week from his brother Patrick, who still lived in Chicago in the same apartment in Rogers Park. Patrick had never been the same since being clobbered on the head in the Chicago demonstrations. He had gone from that to ever more "radical" endeavors, and recently had been arrested after he and a group of others had refused to vacate a college office that they had occupied, not at Loyola, where he was still a student, but at the University of Illinois just west of the Chicago Loop.

This had been one of the many demonstrations in the States against the Cambodian incursion, as the young brother knew. He still kept current on such events back in the States, and still somewhat considered himself as a kindred spirit to those who were protesting, and yet he was also aware of how far he had gone in the other direction, toward accepting the war as a necessary evil in the global struggle between Communism and democracy.

"I'm just trying to do what I feel is right," Patrick had written to him. "I know you're doing that, also."

"I still have to follow through on it, though," the former coxswain replied to his brother in his thoughts.

The beach was nearly deserted, O'Rourke found. Apparently, not many of the vacationing GIs made it up so early in the morning after the usual night of carousing. He was glad for the moment of solitude. After walking about a mile, however, he saw a figure ahead of him, a lean, well-built man who was limping along painfully as if just newly injured from some mishap.

As he approached closer, he could see that the man was an American and most likely a soldier, judging by the neatly clipped haircut. He was not a typical young soldier, though; he was well beyond his prime,

maybe in his late 50's.

"Is there someway I can help you?" O'Rourke asked.

"Hate to intrude on your walk."

"You're not intruding."

"Maybe if you could just give me a shoulder to hang on to. I twisted my ankle pretty bad."

"I'd be glad to."

Looking like a football trainer with an injured player being helped off the field, they hobbled along together toward the distant cluster of buildings where the main part of the resort was located.

"Are you a soldier?" the man asked.

"Yes," the former coxswain replied.

"Doing what?"

"Medic at Chu Lai."

"91st Evac?"

"Yes."

"I know of it. Dedicated people."

"How about you? You're a soldier?"

"Yes, stationed with a headquarters group up at Danang. 101st Airborne."

"What do you do there?"

"Administrative stuff."

"You like it?"

"Yes."

They struggled along in silence, with the sunrise beautiful and sea gulls flying. Far out on the swelling water, a ship proceeded slowly northward in parallel with the coast.

"So you're going to finish up your service at Chu Lai?" the older man asked.

"Well, I don't know," O'Rourke replied. "I've applied to go elsewhere."

"And where is that?"

"AMERICAL or your own group, actually."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

"What's your reason for the transfer?"

"I want to be a combat medic."

"Combat medic?"

"Yes."

"Hey, did anyone tell you," the man said, "that's some dangerous stuff?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Still want to do it, though?"

"Yes, I do."

"How come?"

"I don't know. It's just been a long process, going way back to when I first decided to join up. I just had this idea, I wasn't quite sure of the killing part of it, you know, but I wanted to serve where I was in as much danger as anyone else."

"That's some hard thinking."

"Yes, it was."

"Still not sure about the war, huh?"

"I've just come to this conclusion that nothing is absolutely pure," O'Rourke replied, glad for the opportunity to unburden himself of his thoughts on this matter with someone in addition to Carpenter, who thus far had been his sole confidante. "This war is not pure on our side, but it's not pure on their side, either, and, the ultimate truth is, we're fighting to help these people have freedom."

"Yes, I believe that myself," the man replied with a serious, thoughtful expression.

They had reached a stretch of deep, soft, bumpy sand, and it was rough going through it. They paused for a moment to rest on a piece of driftwood the size of a tree trunk, watching the surf rolling in as they caught their breath.

"Well, I did submit an application for whatever goddam good it does," the former coxswain remarked in his irreverent manner.

"You don't have much hope for it?"

"Hell, tell you one thing I learned about this army. It's a goddam mountain of paper and red tape. You try to talk to somebody. There's nobody to talk to. Everybody refers you, refers you, you know. It's worse than a fuckin' bank."

The man laughed. "I've had some experience with that myself."

"Well, you think we should head out again?"

"Sure, if you don't mind. You're doing all the work."

"It's no work. Glad to do it."

"I can really hobble along by myself."

"Hell, no. You ain't gonna hobble. I ain't got nothing else to do, for the moment. Hell, we're in this war together."

They started in again together along the sand.

"Down here by yourself? At the resort?" the man asked.

"No, with another soldier. A nurse, actually."

"Is that so, a young lady?"

"Yea, maybe that seems out of line with our ranks. But she and I are not in the same chain of command. She is stationed in Binh Thuy and we were going together way back in college."

"Sounds like a nice break," the man said, ignoring the whole spiel

about the chain of command."

"She's a fine lady, let me tell you. She and I have exchanged about a hundred letters."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"She approves of your combat ambition?"

"Yes, she does. She knows how I feel about it."

Soon they came in sight of the club, on a knoll about a quarter mile in the distance.

"You know, I don't think I got your name," the man said.

"Bill O'Rourke."

"Good Irish name."

"Yes."

"My name is Jake, Jake Landers."

"Pleased to meet you," said O'Rourke, extending his hand for a handshake.

"I know some people in personnel up there, at the 101st," the man remarked. "I'll try to put in a good word for you."

"I'd appreciate that."

"Alright."

Soon O'Rourke saw five men in uniform approaching him and the man he was helping, walking toward them swiftly. As they drew nearer, O'Rourke saw they were officers. Two of them were junior officers. Two were bird colonels. One was wearing a baseball cap with a single star.

O'Rourke expected that the man he was with would stop with him to salute the one-star general, but it was the one-star general who saluted along with the other officers.

"Looks like you had a mishap, sir," the general said.

"Yes, I did, Scott," replied the man with his arm around O'Rourke's shoulder. "This young man here was kind enough to help me."

"Klein and Tinucci," said the man with the star on his baseball cap. "Give General Landers a hand."

"Yes, sir!" responded two junior officers standing at the one-star general's side.

O'Rourke realized then that the man he had assisted was Lt. Gen. Landers, the three-star general in command of the entire 101st Airborne. He had heard the name, but he hadn't put two and two together.

He stepped aside at once, when the general was taken from his shoulder, and saluted.

"Sir, I had no idea," O'Rourke said with his hand kept in the salute. "Sorry for the language."

"I've heard worse from these guys," the general said to smiles all around. "You sure did me a good turn. I should have known better than

to go off by myself. But, you know, the sun was coming up and this whole area is secured. Reliving my youth."

"Yes, sir," said O'Rourke. "Glad I could help."

"I'll remember your request."

"Thank you, sir."

That had been no trivial encounter, O'Rourke thought to himself as he walked away. He believed that this general would do what he had said, and make the arrangements he had asked for. There was no doubt, also, that this man had the authority to do so.

"I guess I should be glad," he remarked to himself as he proceeded along the beach with his head bowed in thought. "Goddam truth is, I'm just plain scared."

Even so, he continued in his mind, he had no doubt that things had turned out as they had had to with respect to both Barb and the war. Barb had come into his life with such assurance. Surely she was meant to be the one woman of his life. The war had come in assuredly, also, starting back with his first encounter with the draft in college. The war had required him to be honest and consistent in his response to it.

These two experiences together, of Barb and the war, he thought to himself, were a foundation that had to be established in order to proceed to his further ambition of becoming a doctor after his military service was completed.

O'Rourke stood on the beach, watching sandpipers scurry across the wet sand. Waves were tumbling in, as he had remembered the waves tumbling in in California. How beautiful life was, he thought to himself. He just wanted to be worthy of it, worthy of Barb, worthy of being a soldier, worthy of whatever talent he had to do good in the future.

230. Steward's, driving toward California, observe cultural change and culture war

As Bill O'Rourke and Barbie Carpenter were enjoying their respite from the war in China Beach, in Vietnam, Tom and Kris Steward, back in the States, in West Virginia, were preparing for their trip to California with a sense of having come through a difficult time and triumphed.

For the Steward's, there was an element in this, also, of being in the midst of a time of great personal change, represented visibly by the Manchu-style mustache Tom had grown. A similar change in Kris, they both knew, had occurred less visibly.

"Mary has a word for it, 'radicalization,'" Tom said to his wife as they packed their belongings on the day before the trip. "You know, this idea that we are all becoming more radical, in tiny steps, growing more separate from what we were in the past."

He looked to his wife upon saying that, knowing full well that she would not be drawn into a discussion about a concept.

"I just hope their trip went well for them," she replied, blowing a wisp of blonde hair from in front of her eyes. "Mary was so anxious about how everything would go."

In preparation for the trip, Kris had written letters to Audrey Andrews and old friends back home. Audrey had replied that the guest house by the pool was all spruced up and waiting for their arrival. The friends had written that they were eager to see her. Social outings had already been planned. Tom had not written letters, but he had a mental list of people he hoped to see. The list included his old Farmworkers' boss, Joe Terda, and Bill O'Rourke's friend from Georgia, Mark Chambers, the divinity student who had officiated at the Steward's wedding.

As a result of working at regular jobs, the Steward's had spending money and savings again. They had a new used car, a roomy, four-door 1962 Plymouth sedan bought from an old lady who had seldom used it.

Saturday, May 2, 1970 was the Steward's date of departure. They had been in West Virginia since July 24 of the previous year,—a period of only nine months, but to them both the stay seemed much longer. Wanting to exit West Virginia as quickly as possible, they selected a northern route through Pennsylvania to interstate I-70 (rejecting a shorter southern route through West Virginia to interstate I-40).

Upon reaching Pennsylvania, they stopped at a rest-stop to bring a formal end to the West Virginia period of their lives. There they found a spring-green field rolling up toward a farmhouse nestled in trees.

"You know what I think sometimes, Tom?" Kris said. "It was such a lonely, scary experience at times, but it was also our time of being so much in love. It made us so close."

"Still the good buddies."

"Yes, we are."

Later, as Steward watched his wife coming back toward him from the rest room in her simple outfit of blue jeans and a blue tank top with her blonde hair freshly curled, he observed how pretty she looked and how hopeful with the prospect of returning to California. His mind went back to the morning when he had watched her coming toward him from a similar distance on the road outside their farmhouse, on the day when he and she had just returned from having the eye infection treated that she had gotten from rinsing her hair with the water from the old well in the farmhouse. She had looked so small and defeated then and, for the first time in his experience of her, plain. In the previous month, leading up to the visit with the Brandt's, he had observed a distinct change in her self-esteem and appearance.

He and she would have another chance at making a life, he thought, a life with the sunniness and openness she had been used to growing up in California.

He had thought a lot about sunniness and openness in the past few months. The experience he and Kris were leaving behind in West Virginia had seemed dark with the darkness of the mountain winter and closed within the wooded slopes they had found around them in their miles of traveling to their various activities. As a boy, he had thought of hills and woods as a pioneer land of adventure, but the setting had taken on a more sinister connotation as a result of the effect on his wife. For the present, he told himself, that darkness and closedness were left behind. There was a bright sun above and open country ahead as they continued on the two-lane highway to Wheeling and across the steel arch bridge to the Ohio side of the Shenandoah River. There the sleek new interstate stretched out before them, and soon they were rolling down the smooth concrete road with a wide sky opening before them on the western horizon.

For a while, as the Steward's crossed Ohio, a 16-wheel flatbed truck, was beside them, its big tires compressing and expanding under the weight of a load of steel girders. Other trucks of like size held their places in the never-ending procession of cars and trucks passing in both directions. Near Cleveland, train tracks passed under the freeway. In an immense arc, they converged with tracks in a riverside yard. Hundreds of railroad cars sat there in lines. One long train, pulled by four diesel engines, moved in parallel with the freeway. It appeared to be headed toward a factory in the distance where gray smoke rose straight up in the sky above the surface clouds. A skid loader there, with a yellow light blinking, was unloading flatcars stacked with freshly-painted equipment that looked like tractor parts.

Such an amazing complexity of production, product, and transport,

Steward thought. Had he forgotten the complexity and amazement of his own country? He felt as though waking up from months in a situation where his receptivity to the outside world had dulled. Memories came back to him of his boyhood pride in being a citizen of America. “The greatest country in the world,” he had often been told. He had believed that with absoluteness and fervor. He felt again the excitement he had felt going out West the first time with Bill O’Rourke. He recalled how he and O’Rourke had gotten a ride from the hippie couple in Barstow, and how they had come over the hill to L.A. talking about the “akashic record” and the “big vibration” that everyone was feeling at the same time. Where was that big vibration now? It was still going on, judging by the number of young people on the highway identifiable as counterculture types by their long hair and clothes and their vehicles marked with peace signs and psychedelic colors.

Snippets of conversation overheard in gas stations and byways indicated how widely the same concerns were being discussed, concerns with “alternatives” of one kind or another.

At a rest stop in Illinois, Steward passed a bearded young man and a young woman with long straight hair talking beside a school bus they had converted into a mobile home. With their meek voices and plain dress, they could have passed as an Amish couple, but rock music wafted from the open door of the bus. They were looking together at a large map that they had spread out on a picnic table. The bus was marked with the words, “CHUGWATER EXPRESS, Good Land or Bust.”

There was that expectation again that he had found in the Barbara Carpenter’s letter, Steward thought, the expectation that the collective searching of his generation would lead to some kind of fruition. In the case of this couple, the expectation had taken the form of the romantic notion of returning to the land. And, in seeking land, as the pioneers had done, there was that quality of “finding America” or “regaining America” that figured so strongly in ON THE ROAD and other expressions common to his peers. There was that shared progression, the “zeitgeist” or “spirit of the times” as Mary Brandt had called it.

Yes, the zeitgeist, the big vibration, the seeming expectation of cultural change, were all in evidence, Steward noted as he and his wife headed west; and something else, also, that he had not given much attention to since the D.C. marches: the Vietnam War.

The radio news, when he chanced to hear it, came on with reports of the Cambodian “incursion,” as it was still being called. He was not even aware that it had taken place.

“Soldiers of the First Cavalry Division, led by successive waves of B-52 bombers and helicopter gunships, have pushed into the Fishhook area of Cambodia as far as the provincial capital of Svayrieng, about 70 miles

northwest of Saigon," one report informed. "This is the area President Nixon, in his speech on Friday, identified as location of the 'Central Office for South Vietnam,' which he called 'the headquarters for the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam.' 6000 American troops are involved."

"In Washington, Senator Mansfield, the majority leader, expressed alarm at reports of the resumed bombing of North Vietnam," another report continued. "'Events are piling upon events,' he said, 'There is without question a step-up in the fighting, which means, in plain English, an escalation of the war.'

"Four other senators, including two Republicans (Hatfield of Oregon and Goodell of New York) and two Democrats (McGovern of South Dakota and Hughes of Iowa) announced an amendment to the military procurements bill now pending in Congress. The amendment would cut off funds for military activities in Vietnam and Cambodia, and in a third country, Laos, still officially not even in this war.

"American bombings are, indeed, reported in Laos, and described as especially intense in the rugged mountains of the Oudumxai province, where the North Vietnamese and their Laotian Communist allies, the Pathet Lao, have a staging area for the ongoing fighting in the Plain of Jars. This is the area where American POWs are reported kept in caves, in a place called Sam Neua, a name not known to the average American, but known and feared by American flyers."

The mention of Sam Neua drew Steward's attention. He recalled that his old rowing friend, Jim Morris, had been reported as seen there. Other reports followed of renewed student protests at campuses across the country, ranging said one reporter, Linda Charlton, "from strikes to window-smashing melees."

"In Washington, where the Moratorium Committee announced just two weeks ago that it was disbanding, antiwar groups called for 'immediate massive protests.' Demonstrations are planned at Rutgers, Vanderbilt, the U of Texas in Austin, Princeton, and Stanford. At Kent State in Ohio, National Guard units had been put on alert.

"Calls have gone out in Washington and in college campuses for the start of proceedings to impeach the president."

Later, a more analytical report followed that Steward found of special interest. The subject of the report was "the increasing opposition to the opposition, the rising voice of those who are against the 'against' of those against the war." What this amounted to, the program said, was a "second war, closer to home, a culture war."

"Culture war"—the term clicked into Tom Steward's mind beside "cultural change," "expectation," "zeitgeist," and the other terms that had recently lodged there.

Nixon was front and center in this war, also. “Great universities are being systematically destroyed,” he was quoted as saying, “mindless attacks are being made on all the great institutions which have been created by free civilizations in the last 500 years.”

A college professor featured in the program described the “culture war” as being, “at its heart, a war between traditional, absolute values and the relational values of existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus. Life is absurd, there are no verities, these rebels say, while yet we humans are ‘condemned to be free,’—that is, condemned to decide on personal and social directions with no sure compass for which way to go.”

Much of this Steward recalled from his readings in preparation for filing as a conscientious objectors two summers before. He also recalled the conversation he had had with Bill O’Rourke on the rooftop in Indiana when he and the former coxswain had joked about the growing resentment to the counterculture. This “culture war,” he realized, was more of that but ramped up to a new level of intensity. He noticed signs of it all around once he started looking.

Most prominent was the display of American flags. For most people, he knew, the flags represented support of the war and with that opposition to the counterculture. Flags flew above stores and backyards in a greater number than he recalled ever seeing before. Flags were displayed on the other side of the culture war, also, he noticed, irreverently, in the form of patches on clothes, and so on, and often upside down.

Music was also an obvious part of the “war,” Steward noted. A song called “Okie from Muskogie” by Merle Haggard was all over the airwaves in the middle section of the country that he and Kris were penetrating more deeply with each passing mile.

We don’t smoke marijuana in Muskogee
We don’t take no trips on LSD
We don’t burn no draft cards down on Main Street
We like livin’ right, and bein’ free
We don’t make a party out of lovin’
We like holdin’ hands and pitchin’ woo
We don’t let our hair grow long and shaggy
Like the hippies out in San Francisco do

Last but not least, on the old verities side of the battle lines were the representatives of religion, and there, Steward noticed, the intensity was greatest of all.

“You have heard of Sodom and Gomorrah where Lot saw his wife turned into a pillar of salt,” one radio preacher exclaimed. “You have heard of the cities he left behind, destroyed with the fire of Almighty

God. Well, brothers and sisters, Lot saw nothing of evil compared to the evil of our present time where these so-called 'celebrators of life,' these hippie, wholesome-looking girls, with long hair down to their waists, are available for 'free sex,' as they say, to anyone who asks!"

"Oh, my!" said Kris. "I would say the man has a little problem."

"Seems a little repressed."

"Just where does he imagine all this is going on?"

"Well, let's just say it is a prevalent myth."

There was more of that in a coffee stop later when the Steward's passed near a group of young men (construction workers on break, judging by their dress), and received from them cold stares. Steward realized then that his mustache and longer hair were enough of a cue for him to be a target of resentment and maybe even physical harm. The looks at his wife were bold and sexual.

"I think they were thinking of some of that free sex," Kris said. "I don't like it. It's creepy."

That night as the Steward's lay sleeping in a motel, a motorcycle noise arose in the air and came near outside and then faded away in a similar way to how the motorcycle noise had come near and faded on the night in the farmhouse when they had imagined it was Bill O'Rourke.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Tom asked.

"Yes."

They said nothing further about it and Kris soon went to sleep, but they both knew the odd combination of the stares in the coffee shop, this motorcycle noise, and the darkness had brought them back for a moment to the dark isolation and mean looks of the previous year.

Later, with his wife still sleeping, Steward got up and turned on the TV with the volume turned low. The tube lit to an image of a building engulfed in fire. It was the ROTC building on the Kent State campus in Ohio, the anchor announcer said.

"Firemen here have allegedly been hampered by students cutting fire hoses and throwing rocks," an on-the-scene reporter informed with red and blue blinking lights behind her. "Police officers and sheriff's deputies are here now, as you can see. Over there, behind that barricade, are an estimated 500 or more students. This morning about 1000 students marched from campus downtown, where they were joined by another 1000 students. A confrontation with the police ensued. 12 students were arrested. A dusk- to-dawn curfew was ordered, but this fire started after dark."

"This just in, Ohio Gov. James A. Rhode has called up the National Guard," the anchor announcer went on to report. "Troops are expected to arrive on the campus within the hour."

[Chapter 230 notes]

231. Steward's read about the Kent State killings and continue west

The next morning (which was Tuesday, May 5, 1970), Tom Steward came upon a second-hand *Chicago Tribune* in a coffee shop in Gallup, New Mexico, and he at once noticed the banner headline: "KENT STATE RIOT; 4 KILLED." Below the headline was a photograph of a young woman gesturing with both hands as she knelt on one knee beside a face-down, prostrate body. The caption said: "A coed screams as classmate lies dead after being shot during confrontation with national guardsman on campus of Kent (Ohio) State university."

"Kris, look at this," Tom said to his wife.

She turned toward him pleasantly with a fragrant push against his shoulder but at once her attitude changed. "They killed them?" she said with a trademark dramatic flare.

"They actually killed them?"

"Ain't that something?" the waitress, a middle-aged woman with Hispanic features, said from behind the counter.

It was mid-morning, and there was no one else in the coffee shop. The windows faced out to the main street of the town, which was also, for the time being, Highway 61 (until the new interstate was completed).

"Unbelievable!"

"Yes."

"What's the world coming to?"

"I don't know."

The mix of items on the page told a great deal. Below the first photo was a second showing a student pointing accusatively at a helmeted soldier who looked back at him over his shoulder. The soldier was wearing a gas mask that looked like bug eyes, giving him a menacing, unhuman appearance. Over on the right side of the page, a one-column headline said, "Kent State is a Scene of Unreality." Above that were individual photos of two wholesome-looking pretty girls with neatly clipped dark hair. They were identified as two of the students that had been killed. In the center of the page, another one-column headline said "Nixon Tells Sadness at 4 Deaths." A larger headline on the left side of the page announced, "Yanks Launch 3d Offensive Into Cambodia." Below that was another headline: "81 Pct. Back Nixon Move, Polls Shows."

"Those girls are not radicals," Kris said, holding up the paper for the waitress to get a second look. "Those girls are not hippies."

"I was thinking the same thing," said the waitress. "And you know what else? These national guards, or whatever you call 'em, they are not soldiers. Truth to tell, they are a bunch of kids. My nephew is one, and he ain't no soldier. He is a kid."

"Trying to get out of the draft."

"Precisely."

Steward continued to read while the women talked. The soldiers had run out of tear gas, one article said, and were being charged by students throwing rocks and bricks when the shooting occurred. There was either, in fact, sniper fire from a nearby roof, or else a false report had passed between them that they were under fire.

The soldiers had fired in a panic, obviously. They had fired with no definite target, thus the two girls had been hit. They had fired just enough to disperse their attackers. Nothing in their actions suggested a cold-blooded intent. But the significance was clear of a situation on both sides that had gone out of control. It was, moreover, a situation that was reflective of not just a single confrontation but of the confrontations taking place all over the country between protestors against the war and those consigned to keep the public order.

If this was a manifestation of the culture war he had heard of the previous day, Steward thought, it was ripping the fabric of society so deeply that it had begun to bleed. This was a case of the often heard, bravado calls for violent revolution taking real form, as few believed they would actually do.

In the article on "Nixon Tells Sadness at 4 Kent Deaths," by Aldo Beckman, Steward found a statement by the president, read by the White House press secretary, Ronald Ziegler: "This should remind us all once again that when dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy. It is my hope that this tragic and unfortunate incident will strengthen the determination of all the campuses, administrations, faculty, and students alike to stand firmly for the right which exists in this country of peaceful dissent and just as strongly against the resort to violence as a means of such expression."

With that statement by the president, Steward wholly agreed, though he wondered about the seriousness of the "likely investigation" that the press secretary was described as promising in the next paragraph of the same article. There were some, he acknowledged, who would be glad the troublemakers had been taught a lesson.

"Whoever gave the order to shoot, they should find that person and put him on trial," Kris remarked as the Steward's left the coffee shop and waited on the curb for a break in the constant stream of vehicles to dash to the other side.

On the other side of the street, Steward paused to look around at the scene while waiting for his wife to find something in the back seat of the car. Above the coffee shop from which they had just come were three upper stories of a building with a sign that identified it as the "Henry Hotel." It was a formidable brownstone structure that maybe at some

point in the distant past had been a respectable hotel, but it appeared to be, at the moment, a transient hotel of some kind. Just up the block from the front door of the hotel was a vehicle entry door that was closed. A sign there said, “Sleep In, Friday and Saturday 10 P.M - 8 A.M.” Apparently, it was a place for people stranded in town (presumably drunk Indians) to stay overnight. Although it was mid-morning, some Indians could be seen in the shadow of a doorway further up the street, passing a bottle between them in a brown paper bag.

Considered in terms of the so-called culture war, thought Steward, the little city had the look of a place of exile, related to America as Siberia to Russia, a place where those conflicts were removed, though in their stead was another conflict in the collision of the modern and native cultures. The palpable presence of an ancient landscape, the brown and red crevices and upheavals of rock in the distance, and rubble-like piles of rock closer by, removed the scene further from the four deaths in Ohio that the morning paper had disclosed.

The piles of rock were from the construction of the interstate, an orange sign informed. Its current state was represented by a leveled swath of land on the other side of the railroad tracks from where the Steward’s were parked. On the nearer side of the tracks, in front of one pile of rock, was a canvas-roofed stand where Indian rugs hung like banners on all sides above displays of kachina dolls, turquoise jewelry, and pounded- silver belt buckles and tie clasps. A sign above the stand said: “Hand Made, Cut Rate.”

A straw-hatted boy carrying a pail came over a path from the tracks yelling, “Tacos! Burritos!” Someone hailed him, and he stopped to take a paper-wrapped object from the pail.

All that day and through the next, as the Steward’s traveled across the flat mesa of eastern Arizona, with its buttes and tables of rock, and past the mountains of central Arizona by Flagstaff, which could first be seen a hundred miles away, a similar feeling continued of the dissipation of the news from Ohio and the whole war conflict in the vastness and sun-wash of the immense open spaces. Little towns along the road, with their motels, gauche signs, and inane tourist attractions, and their night-time neon signs of restaurants and taverns, located on both sides of the two-lane highway, brought further dissipation in a sense of the multiplicity and gaudery of an American culture that cared little for seriousness of any kind.

For Steward, however, these scenes, far from repelling him, brought an intimation of a new and unknown world to take in and understand. These were industrious people along the highway, he thought, trying to make an honest buck in the old American way. They had no interest in the disputes of students a thousand miles away. They would deplore what

had happened, but would then go on with their lives. In the areas of the towns removed from the highway, Steward observed these lives in sidewalk interactions seen in passing. He noted that the main roads of town extended into the unfenced country all around.

In western Arizona, as the route from Flagstaff to Needles brought the long descent from the mountains to the desert, Steward looked out from an elevated bend of the highway, over a vista that he figured spanned 30 or 40 miles; and he saw, in the twilight, the colored lights of a country fair, with the red and blue lights of a Ferris wheel circling beside the ordered white lights of a little town. The sky above was a high tumble of clouds etched with the red and orange afterglow of the sunset just past. Lightning flashed from a horizon rimmed with mountains. This was their life. He saw no fault in it at all.

The stars came out after that and Steward remembered the sky map his old hitching buddy Bill O'Rourke had given him. He still carried it with him in his pack whenever he moved from one place to another.

Soon, though, the mood changed when the Steward's stopped at the California state inspection gate in Needles, and took on a hitch-hiker, a hippie type who, he thought, judging by appearance, would certainly be no problem. It was by this time 10 P.M. The Steward's had decided to drive through the night to L.A.

The hitch-hiker had the wild long hair and full beard of a Biblical prophet. His eyes had a strange intensity suggesting the cumulative effect of some kind of religious observance or mind-altering drugs. Over the long miles through the desert, he told a story in bits and pieces. He had come a few days before from Taos, in northern New Mexico, he said, where there were a number of new communes, and these communes had lately been the object of violent attacks.

"Who exactly are these people living in these communes?" Steward asked. "These are people who dropped out of college, or something?"

"You got it, man," the hitch-hiker replied.

"Who are these people that attacked them?"

"These are ranchers, Indians, Mexicans, people that have lived out there since God knows when, man. Their mammies and pappies have lived out there. Then you got these starry-eyed types coming out there, dancing around. These old types don't like that, way I heard."

"You seem like the starry type yourself."

"Now why you think that, man? 'Cuz I got long hair?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Yes."

"Trouble with long hair, man, you see what is on their head, but what is in their heart, you do not know."

"That is correct."

"What is in their pocket, you do not know."

"Yes, that's true."

"In their pocket may be money, or a crust of bread. In their pocket may be a bible, or a knife that is sharp and ready to be used. You do not know, do you?"

"No, I do not."

With this exchange of words on the dark highway, the mood in the car became more tense.

"I don't mean to scare you now, man," said the hitch-hiker. "I don't care much for knives myself."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that."

Again more dark miles passed and soon the total silence began to take on a strange intensity, also.

"These incidents you talked about, what exactly transpired?" Steward asked to resume the conversation.

"Way I heard it, man, people got shot."

"People on the commune?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't they have a sheriff or something?" said Kris. "Didn't somebody go up there and put things in order?"

"Well, ma'am, you might say so, yes. Assuming now the officers of the so-called law are not taking sides."

"They were taking sides?"

"Well, that I do not know, but it's what I heard. There's a regular war going on. And it's not just ranchers and Mexicans versus hippies like I said, it's your longhairs, too. Don't think that ain't part of the war, the longhairs taking out after one another, too."

"I've never heard about that," said Steward.

"You never heard about some of your longhairs went out the same way and sliced some people up?"

"No, I have not."

"That's horrible," Kristine said. "That's hard to believe."

"Now, I don't mean to scare you, ma'am," the hitch-hiker responded, leaning forward. "I'm just telling what some of these people will do. I don't associate with such people myself."

"You were living up in Taos?" Kristine asked, moving closer to her husband on the front seat.

"No, I was not. I did not say I was living in Taos. I said I heard about Taos."

"Where were you living then?" Kris asked.

"Where was I living, ma'am? I was living with my mommie when I was coming up. I was living in an alley. 'Cuz my mommie was what I have heard some people call a whore."

"Are you serious?"

"Now why would I make up something like that? We had to beg for everything we got. And lo and behold the beggar boy went wrong."

"The beggar boy, meaning you?" Steward said.

"Got tired of beggin'. Got in trouble with the law, like we was talkin' on before. Got arrested. Got tried. Sitting in a big room and they're all looking at you. Got sent to prison."

"You were in prison?" Steward said.

"That is how I become a man. I did not have no daddie like you to teach me right nor wrong."

Steward looked ahead and was relieved to see a cluster of lights in the distance.

"How was prison?" he asked.

"Prison is what you make it, man. Prison is in your mind. You can be in prison though you are not in a physical prison. And you can not be in prison when you are in a physical prison. Dig?"

"Yes, I do."

Soon the cluster of lights drew near, and Steward was glad to see that there was a gas station there with arc lamps above the gas pumps and lights lit inside a little store. Behind the store were man-made hills of some kind of gravel or powdered rock. Next to them were tall silos with conveyor belts leading from the hills to the tops of the silos. Power wires passed back and forth in a scrawl of dark lines.

Steward exited from the car into the arid air. "If you need to hit the can," he said into the back seat. "This might be a good place."

"Believe I shall," the man replied, heading toward the door of the restroom on the side of the store.

As soon as the door closed, Steward wheeled the car back unto the dark highway. Kris had never left her seat. There was no need to explain to her what he had done.

"That man was very scary," she said. "He was extremely strange."

"You think he was up to something?"

"I don't know."

More dark miles of highway followed and then at last the lights of Barstow in the distance while Steward was left thinking that the fissures of the social fabric that he had thought of earlier were more intricate in mapping than a we-and-they division could define. Something was happening on a deeper level; a substratum of order was crumbling under the tug and pull of forces from all sides.

{Chapter 231 notes]

232. Steward's arrive in Los Angeles for a summer among friends

L.A. again! What a joy, what a relief it was to see it sprawled out in a great valley dotted with lights as Tom and Kris Steward descended the long hill from Wrightwood toward the Pacific Ocean. It was 4 A.M., still too early for the morning rush, but all eight lanes of the Barstow Freeway were occupied with traffic, rushing headlong to somewhere, anywhere, in the perpetual frenetic motion of L.A. life.

Where the area traveled in the previous week had impressed with its vastness and disparateness of human enterprise, this area impressed with its compactness and intense and intricate interworking of lives: block upon block of houses and apartment buildings, indicating all levels of means from poverty to wealth; shopping malls, street-front stores, outdoor markets, theaters, restaurants, and bars; airports, car lots, service stations, body shops, wrecking yards, railroad tracks, train yards, buses, and taxi cabs; sprawling parks, golf courses, athletic fields, block-size squares, municipal centers, and schools; skyscrapers, glass-walled office buildings, sleazy-looking dives, corner news stands, adult book stores, and pawn shops; store-front missions, traditional neighborhood churches with bell towers, cathedrals, synagogues, and muslim temples; elaborate intertwinings of concrete bridges and roads; freeway clover leaves and ramps hung with flowers and vines; semaphores, billboards, neon signs, road signs, hand-painted sale signs; and motor vehicles of every kind; each occupying its allotted space or a moving part in the nexus of life that swept past in the smoggy dawn haze as the Steward's drove the 30 miles of the Golden State Freeway from Ontario to Sunland where the Andrew's lived.

Soon the Ventura hills came into view, distant shadows in the early dawn light, and then the familiar exit from the Golden State freeway to Sunland Boulevard. Following that came the familiar route under the palm trees that Steward recalled from his bike rides to see Kris in the weeks before their wedding.

The area was replete with memories and yet for a moment it seemed again new. With its single-story shopping malls, parking lots, and houses, all appearing recently built and sprawled out into a wide valley that had obviously been semi-desert a few decades before, it imparted a feeling of a seeming excess and extravagance of space quickly used up in an impetus of construction, but not of construction done for necessity alone or for mere financial gain, though that impulse seemed evident, also, but in a joy-of-life spirit that was everywhere present in the brightly colored signs and displays of street-side shops.

"There's Tetro's!" Kristine said, pointing to a corner drive in with a tall figure in a cook's hat. "We had some good times there!"

"I bet."

"That was the hangout for Verdugo high!"

Two miles up, the boulevard bent to the northeast beside a ridge of hills. The first golden sunlight of dawn was visible there on the roofs of houses clustered in trees. Then came the turn on Worland to Barling Street and the tree-bordered cul-de-sac where the Andrew's lived.

As soon as the Steward's turned into the driveway, beside the ivy-covered front yard of the Andrew's house, a light went on inside. Don and Audrey, dressed in robes, appeared in the passageway that led from the garage past the pool to the back door of the house.

"Welcome! Welcome!" said Don. "The strangers are here!" There were hugs all around.

"Hope you're hungry! I've got a breakfast waiting!" Audrey said. "It's not too early?" said Kris.

"Oh, no! We're glad for the early start."

The brief walk past the pool brought other memories. There was the little, fenced in area under the palms where the Steward's had had their outdoor wedding ceremony. There was the pool where they had had many get togethers and talks with the Andrew's and various friends. In the dawn light, it looked like a tropical pond bordered by ferns and flowers.

Audrey soon had coffee brewing and omelets cooking that she had prepared the night before. The smell of food and sound of voices brought the long-haired daughters Lynda and Sandra from their bedrooms just off the kitchen, and with that came more hugs and greetings.

"We've got the guesthouse ready," Sandra offered with a smile. "Yes, she has it all set out with flowers," said the mother in her New Zealand accent.

"Well, thank you, Sandy!" Kris replied, beaming. "We have a recital this Wednesday. Care to come?" "Wouldn't miss it for the world!"

"You, too, Thomas." "Thank you."

"We have the tickets already."

There was much news to catch up on, ranging from the Steward's last month in West Virginia and their trip across country, to the Kent State shootings and the national reaction, to Don's recent new employment. He was working on a movie set, drawing sketches of scenes that were used in setting up takes. He had been working on the movie set with a leave of absence from his job painting backdrops for cartoons.

Later, Andrews took Steward into the next room to show him some of the drawings he was doing for the movie set. They were drawings for the movie "Planet of the Apes," which was being made at the time. They were quick sketches, he explained, done on the spot as people brainstormed for ideas, but to Steward's eye they were perfect

representations of apelike figures arranged in various settings next to human beings who were also perfectly drawn.

Next to these drawings, Andrews had an oil painting set out to dry. It depicted a large sailing ship on a dock before a city skyline appearing to be set in the late 1800's. It again appeared to be a perfect painting. Human figures no more than finger section tall at close range appeared completely lifelike from a distance.

Andrews also had manuscripts setting around that he was in the process of writing or of editing for other people.

"One of these days, buddy, I'm going to hit it with one of these screenplays," he said. "It's a regular game, I can tell you. Don't think talent is the only thing in play, either. There's a lot of politicking and connections."

The young Steward was totally in awe of the older man's ability. He felt drawn to this kind of expression, but he believed there was no way he could approach such skill. He nodded, feeling incapable of an intelligent response. At the same time, he noted the "buddy" title that Andrews gave him (in place of "Stewie" or "Stewmeat" or any of the other abuses of his name that his peers were fond of). He had never heard Andrews call anyone else "buddy" face to face, though he had heard him refer to his World War Two friends as "buds" or "buddies." He took the name as a compliment, an indication of a special bond.

Later, Steward was outside by the pool when Don, dressed in hiking shorts, came out and suggested a hike up the hill just beyond the yard. It was a high knob of a hill covered with chaparral.

"I'd love to," said Steward.

"There's a trail that winds up there.

"Sounds great."

With that, they headed out together. From the house, it was just a short distance to the end of the block where the street ended at a citrus orchard set into the notch of two hills. They turned past that to the hill on the left, the one seen from the Andrew's pool, and continued onto the trail that Don had referred to.

The trail brought an open view in all directions. There were no trees of any size, just chaparral and a few twisted oaks.

For a while, as they ascended, they traveled in parallel with the ridge of hills about a mile to the southwest, just on the other side of Sunland Boulevard; then, as they came around the top of a switchback in the trail, a view opened up to the south and east, revealing a section of Tacoma extending out to a span of the Golden State freeway, about three miles to the south, and the Hansen damn and reservoir to the east where, as Steward recalled, he had proposed to his wife.

Almost a year before, to the week, he thought to himself. So much

had happened since that day.

It was still early morning at this time, only about seven o'clock, with crisp shadows outlining the shapes of the vegetation on the nearby hills, above Sunland Boulevard, but further to the south, beyond the freeway, the sky was rimmed with pollution.

"When we first moved out here," Don said, "in the late 50's... spring of '58, to be exact... how long ago is that anyhow? 12 years...the view out from here, bud, you wouldn't believe it. Clear as New Mexico. Like a mountain valley in Colorado. No smog in sight. We didn't even have such a word, 'smog,' smoke and fog, you know." He looked off with a harried expression. "And goddam look at it now! What have we wrought, buddy? What have we wrought?"

It was a rhetorical question, obviously. Steward made no attempt to come up with a response.

"Then you got this one," Andrews went on, shaking his head. "You got a place like this, that's paradise, really, and you advertise it all around, you build these fantastic roads, you give people these fantastic cars, and of course, what could you expect? You get people rushing in to places like this. In a headlong rush, you dig, like the Oklahoma land rush... That's what it was like here in the early 60's, man." He shook his head and laughed. "Like a goddam swarm of bugs. That's what I am, old buddy, I'm just another bug."

"I don't know, Don," Steward replied. "Look at that house down there." They were looking back to the Andrew's own house. "Look at that pool. Palm trees. Flowers."

"Oh, yea. Oh, yea. It's a seductive prize."

"You've got quite an ideal family."

"Yes, I do, man. I'm not one for the church talk, you know, but you could say I'm blessed."

The two men stood looking out for a while without further talking. The sun, as it rose, brought a balm of brightness and warmth with a breeze from the west. The ocean was there, Steward reflected, though not in sight at the moment, from a distance of 20 or so miles. There would be a day soon to see the ocean again, too.

On the way back down the hill, Steward's mind drifted back to the mobile home that he and Kris had shared in Masontown, West Virginia, with the picture window looking out to the one lighted corner in the town where even when the snow was swirling all around the highway was kept plowed. He thought of how reassuring that sight had been in the long winter nights.

He didn't care to go back to a situation like that again, ever, he thought, with Kris looking to him to brighten things up.

As for the Kent State deaths and the war abroad as well as the so-

called culture war at home, he was just so relieved, he said to himself, to be able to leave all of that behind for the time being, along with the likes of the hitchhiker he and Kris had left out in the desert. He felt so grateful for the graciousness of Don and Audrey in giving him and Kris a respite from all the various stresses for the summer weeks ahead as he looked for an alternative service assignment to replace the job he had left in West Virginia.

"You know, Don," he said as he and Andrews neared the house again, "I've been thinking, I'd like to do some kind of work for you while Kris and I are here, something to repay you for your hospitality... I don't know, paint the fence by the pool or something."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Hell, ol' bud, you don't need to do that! Krissy's like family to us. You're like a goddam son-in-law, far as I'm concerned. And Audrey feels the same way, I know. She thinks the world of you."

"Well, thanks."

"You're welcome."

"Just the same, Don, I'd like to put myself to work at some point, just to express my appreciation."

"You got that ol' Midwest work ethic, don't you?"

"I guess so. Yes."

"Well, how about this? Take a few weeks to relax and unwind. Go to the beach with Krissy. Study. Whatever you're inclined to. Then, before you leave, we can come up with a project."

"Sounds great to me."

"You could paint the big room. I've been trying to get to it."

"I'd love to."

"Alright!"

They walked along the side of the pool together as Don scooped off some stray objects with a long rake.

"Everybody in California's got these goddam pools. You ask me, a pool like this is a pain in the ass!"

"The girls seem to enjoy it."

"Yes, they do, and I'm glad of that."

Andrews, as he passed through the house, had undressed to his usual jockey underpants and T-shirt again, and he had secured himself a cigar that he held unlighted in his hand as he frowned at the pool and looked back to the house. His lithe, long-haired, always beaming daughter Sandra was at the moment coming out of the door dressed in a swimming suit and holding a beach ball.

"Yes, I am glad for that, no doubt, no doubt," he said. "And I was thinking, bud, I know you like to read, I got a lot of old books inside, in

my little study, if you have any interest."

"Yes, I do."

Among the books on a shelf in Don's study, Steward found one that attracted his immediate interest. It was *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Schirer.

"You ever read this?" he asked.

"Yes, actually, I did, after the war. That was one of the few ones I actually finished."

"See any similarities with the present time?"

"Yes, actually, with the so-called time between the wars, the time of the Weimar Republic, as they called it, before Hitler came to power. It was a time of social disintegration. Depravity, you might call it."

"I'd like to read this."

"Feel free."

Steward went away thinking that this book was the next logical step in the sequence of observations and reflections that had proceeded through his mind on the trip west. If the "social disintegration" of that era had led to Hitler, what would be the outcome of the social clashes of his own era—"culture war," resort to lawlessness and guns, the violent tales of the hitchhiker left in the desert?

His activities for the summer were established, he thought to himself. He would run in the morning, as usual, then he would spend the morning and early afternoon reading this book. In the late afternoon and evening, he would have time to be with Kris and the Andrew's. Toward the end of his and Kris's stay with the Andrew's, he would paint the living room, as just agreed.

Of course, he would also need to write some letters to find another alternative service assignment in fulfillment of his two-year obligation as a conscientious objector, Steward thought; but, on an intellectual level, the book would be the main thing.

The day proceeded, like so many others at the Andrew's house, in a harmonious, happy interaction leading to a supper of take-out Chinese food in the cheerful kitchen looking out to the sparkling pool. With that came more conversation, light-hearted and serious in turns, then the evening tea, in Audrey's New Zealand tradition, and the evening news.

Only then did the world that the Steward's had just left come back for a few minutes with scenes of a demonstration somewhere: bare-chested, long-haired young men throwing objects at police equipped with gas masks and tear gas. A report came on of the continuing war also. There had been more troop movements in Cambodia and more bombing in Laos in the Plain of Jars and in the Sam Neua area where earlier the Steward's had recalled that Jim Morris had reportedly been spotted.

233. Morris speculates on the war as bombing approaches Sam Neua

On Friday, May 8, 1970, Maj. James Morris, for the second time in his captivity, happened to find himself positioned briefly beside Bryan Zastrowski, the Air America pilot that he had shared the pen with months before where Maj. Elwood Erland had died.

This time, as they stood together, Morris and Zastrowski could hear the sound of explosions just a few miles away. Plumes of bombs rose above the densely wooded, steep slopes south of the camp in Sam Neua where they had been prisoners since October of the previous year.

"You think they might come this way?" Morris asked in the direct manner of such interactions, without even a nod of hello.

"They might," Zastrowski replied as he was prodded past, "but we would be killed before they got here. Killed or moved out."

"Moved out where?"

"Some place not known."

That was the extent of the interaction, but Morris placed a fair value on it due to Zastrowski's experience as a gatherer of intelligence. He thought that likely Zastrowski (or "Zas" as he called him in his own mind) had a better overall take of the situation than just about anyone else at the camp.

From another interaction, with a new prisoner, a CIA operative from Laos, just brought to the camp, Morris had heard that the seasonal battle for the Plain of Jars was occurring with a new "wet season" just starting. The new prisoner had heard that the U.S. ally, the Hmong general, Vang Pao, operating with the Royal Laotian Army and U.S. Air Force support, had taken control of the entire Plain during the previous wet season (in May through September of 1969). Since then, the prisoner had said, during the subsequent "dry season" (from October of 1969 through April of the current year), the Pathet Lao, operating with North Vietnamese regular Army units, had pushed back into the Plain and were now again in control of the whole region. In response, the prisoner had said, the U.S. had stepped up its dry season bombing. A new wet season offensive by Vang Pao and further bombings were expected.

"What kind of bombings?" Morris had asked.

"B-52's mostly, and I've heard they've also been using the cluster bombs. But that's a dirty little secret," the other prisoner had said before being pushed away.

This information from Zastrowski and the new prisoner was the extent of what Morris had been able to learn. His only other source of information was the occasional comments exchanged between the guards, which he assessed based on attitudes and facial expressions since he didn't understand the words.

In his brief interaction with Zastrowski, Morris had also observed deterioration in the general physical state of his former pen mate. He found it shocking. This was the man who had swaggered into the pen, just eight months before, like a storied desperado of the Old West, young in appearance and bristling with bravado and contempt. By contrast, the Zas of the present day was hollow-eyed and gaunt. His athletic muscles had wasted away or in some cases, Morris supposed, had been beaten away in ordeals such as he had been subjected to himself. Zas no longer looked like a young man, either. He had the look of a dried up old man. The defiance was gone.

Morris, taking note of Zastrowski's deteriorated physical state, wondered to what extent his own physical state had deteriorated. He had no access to a mirror or to even a smooth surface of water or metal to observe his own reflection. But he had only to look at his arms and legs to see that the firm flesh was gone. What would Ellen think, he wondered, if he ever made it out to be reunited with her? She would be glad to see him, he supposed, but she would be as shocked at the change in him as he was with the change in Zastrowski.

He still tried at times to get a real image of Ellen in his mind as he had been able to do early in his tour of duty, but he could no longer do it. He still tried to imagine making love to her and imagine her acting desirous toward him, as she had done the last time they had been together on their vacation in Bangkok, but whenever he did this an image of the man that he knew he had become interposed in this fantasy in place of the man he had been; and, as a result, he could not go on.

He was no longer that man. Would he be able to restore himself to what he had been? He didn't know.

The physical abuses perpetrated on Morris and his fellow prisoners had not been as intense since Maj. Xuan Than and the rest of the North Vietnamese soldiers had left as they had been before their arrival. For whatever reason, after their departure, the Pathet Lao had not resumed the previous regimen. From Morris's perspective, it seemed that the abuse was no longer done for the purpose of gaining intelligence but merely for the sake of meanness. Neither had it seemed as scheduled as it had before Xuan Than. There was no way to know in advance whether a session that seemed to have occurred on the spur of the moment would be followed with others for a period of days. This indefiniteness combined with the physical damage inflicted by the sessions when they did occur had continued to wear him down, he knew.

He had not given in, ever, so far as he knew. He had not answered questions that would have provided actual information of value to the enemy, nor had he answered questions that he knew had been proffered solely as mechanisms for him to respond with any word as a symbolic

gesture of submission. He had not broken.

Even so, Maj. James Morris was acutely aware, with the dynamic sense of his airman trade, that the so-called “inner home” that he had so consciously built and applied as a refuge of meaning and inner stability against torture had been cumulatively damaged and with that his entire mental structure of order.

At the heart of the damage, he believed, was the passionate witness of Maj. Xuan Than to the North Vietnamese cause. “Ironically,” Morris told himself, (ironically because he did not believe that the enemy officer had intended such an effect,) that apologia, in its apparent nobility (in the person and life of Xuan Than), and in its appeal to his own nobility as a soldier, had weakened his resolve by introducing the notion that the enemy was not really evil and ignoble, as he had thought, and not as worthy of defeat as he had thought.

From there,—as Morris, with his dynamic sense, saw it,—the crack had spread out, like a crack in a windshield, he thought, only not with a progressively outward, concentric path such as windshield cracks often have in reality, but with the branchlike path of a root spreading out in soil. In the darkness of his cave,—to which he was often still confined, again not according to any schedule, but for indeterminate and unpredictable expanses of time,—Morris had imagined such a rootlike crack, in color white or red, growing in the space around his felt center of consciousness where he had previously placed the outer shell of his inner home.

It was an obsessive notion. An unhealthy notion. Jim Morris knew it well. But the crack was there, nonetheless; and he could not will or wish it away as it grew around him.

Meanwhile,—because of the crack, Morris suspected,--the good components of consciousness inside his inner home had begun to mix with the bad components outside: images and memories of his mother, his father, Ellen, Tom Pitt, the boat club, Scott’s Bluff, the view from the bluff by the High Bridge in St. Paul, along with the various other determinedly assembled components of his inner home, mixing in with the familiar, non- home components: the pig slaughter in Puerto Penasco, the blood running down the neck of the soldier at Khe Sanh, the faces of the women and children killed in Morris’s collateral damage misfire; components he had identified as destructive to his mental state mixing with others identified as protective.

In the confinement of his cave, Morris also still often experienced the odd sensation that had started months before with the blow of a rifle butt on his head, the sensation of being flung around as in the cockpit of a banking plane. The sensation was so disturbing, he had decided, because it was the sensation of someone entrusted with the control of an airplane

in a situation that was out of control. He had been injured surely, he told himself, in every part of his physical being.

Even outdoors, when Morris drew work assignments, he found good and bad were mixing. He could see the creek sometimes, between the trees, and sometimes the water in the creek glittered in the sunlight, reminding him of a similar effect he had delighted in on early morning rows back in his days as an oarsman; but, no matter where he was, he retained a feeling of the bad components pushing in. It was as if good things could not exist by themselves in their goodness, but carried with them a remembered feeling of bad things.

The light was glittering on the creek, in fact, and the feeling of bad things was there, two weeks later, when looking off toward the main area of the camp, Morris saw Bryan Zastrowski being prodded once again toward him.

The former Air America pilot, as he approached with hung head and stooped shoulders, gave an impression of utter dejection. His hair had turned gray, Morris noted. He was dressed in loose pants pulled tight with a knotted rope. Most likely, thought Morris, these were clothes that had fit him before his captivity.

The camp was in a state of commotion. Prisoners and guards were in movement everywhere. There were more explosions in the distance, beyond the rim of wooded hills, with plumes above the trees. On a hill about five miles away, a building collapsed as the plume of smoke rose up from it.

“Looks like this is it,” Zastrowski said flatly when he drew near. He no longer spoke with inflection of any kind.

“We’re moving out?” Morris inquired.

“Yes, I think so.”

“You think all of us together?”

There were about 80 prisoners in the camp, Morris estimated. Some of them he had just seen one time. He didn’t know their names. Some like Zas had looked so shaky that Morris suspected they might have died in the time since he had seen them.

“No, I would say, in small groups.”

“Where to, you think?”

“All over.”

That seemed to be the case. The prisoners were being assembled into small groups of three or four people each.

Morris, Zastrowski, and a third man Morris had never seen before were prodded into an ox-drawn wagon fenced in with bamboo to form a moving cage. The carriage was being controlled by a native using a stick-like whip to goad the oxen when required to reposition the cage-like wagon or a second wagon laden with supplies. The native was walking,

and he did not look like a soldier, but a dozen or so soldiers were also assigned to the wagon, apparently as guards. The soldiers were dressed in olive drab uniforms that did not quite match.

A man with a constant angry expression appeared to be in charge. He had gold leaf insignias on the collars of his open necked shirt. On his cap, which was in the style of Chou Enlai of China, he wore a Laos flag insignia with a red star inside the round moon in the center, the same insignia Morris recalled seeing on the officer who had approached him after his capture on the banks of the Nam Ou River.

A sharp jab on his shoulder sent Morris suddenly in the direction of the cage-like wagon where the back gate was open. Another push sent him almost onto the lap of Zastrowski who had a dank smell like wet dirt in a cellar. The third man was pushed in, scrunching to the side of Morris as he let out a groan. He smelled like old soup.

A soldier behind the wagon pushed the gate shut, cramming the men in without giving them a moment to rearrange their legs in the crowded compartment.

The man with the angry face issued a sharp command that propelled the group into soundless movement. The soldiers headed off nonchalantly with a continual exchange of comments and laughter such as a group of American soldiers might have made.

The group headed at once up a rough, narrow road that led through dense trees on a slope above the camp.

“Great day for a ride,” Zastrowski remarked.

“Yes, it is,” the third man replied.

Through a hole in the trees, for just a moment, Morris saw, about a quarter mile behind, a thatched roof in the trees and a brown section of the parade ground where the prisoners had been assembled.

That was his last sight of Sam Neua.

234. Morris is relocated from Sam Neua to a Lao village

From Sam Neua, the group that included prisoner of war James Morris headed southwest, so far as he could determine from occasional glimpses of the sun through the canopy of leaves above the road on which the caravan was traveling. Then the shield of leaves dropped away briefly and Morris saw that the wagon was moving along on a road about 400 feet above a town with narrow streets and Chinese-style pagoda roofs. Some of the buildings were demolished and others were in flame.

"That is Sam Neua, the actual town," the third passenger informed.

"Where was the camp then?"

"Place called Xanthon. Just a few miles away."

"The damage here is from bombing?"

"Yes, American planes."

"You're a soldier?" Morris asked.

The man was an American, Morris had already decided, based on the easy informality that he had learned set Americans off from other English-speaking people overseas.

"No, I'm a clergyman. Catholic priest."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I've been working up in the mountains north of Long Thiueu for about five years. My name is Leonard Blair."

"Well, pleased to meet you, Father. I'm Jim Morris of the U.S. Air Force. And this here is Bryan Zastrowski of Air America."

"Pleased to meet you boys."

"How long have you been a captive?"

"For just about a month."

"Group of soldiers came through the area I was working in. Guess they figured me for a spy."

"Well, that was not a good day!"

"No, it was not."

"You speak Lao, I take it."

"I speak Lao Hmong," the priest answered. "As I'm sure you know, there are a whole slew of Lao dialects. In most of the others, I can stumble around."

"How about this one here?" Morris inquired, nodding toward the two soldiers next to the wagon who at the moment were talking.

"I more or less understand them and I can get a point across if I really need to, you know."

"Well, tell them I said to get fucked then, will you?" Zastrowski interjected.

"That might not be a wise move," the priest replied with a smile. "I don't think they would like it. And let me tell you, Bryan, you don't want to get these guys mad."

Zastrowski, since leaving the prison camp, had said not a word up to this one sentence. His dejected posture had not changed. He seemed to be forming a sullen resolution in his mind.

"Heard they're still fighting over the Plain of Jars," Morris said, relaying what he had heard from his interchange with the new prisoner a few weeks before.

"Oh, yes."

"Who's getting the best of it?"

"Last I heard, Vang Pao," the priest replied. "Thanks to your planes. Are you a pilot?"

"Yes."

"Well, as you've probably noticed, the bombings have become more intense. B-52s mostly and now and then some fighter bombers with napalm. They seem intent on clearing the entire plain of any people who support the Communists. And they've been successful, this time around. The bombs have driven most of the Lao Lum, the native people of the plain, who have been sympathetic to the Pathet Lao, out to the edges where they can hide in the foothills when they need to. The planes have also been hitting up here in this area, as you know, which is why we're clearing out."

After this exchange of information, the three prisoners retreated into their own thoughts. They were moving through an area of dense forest. Based on Morris's calculations, he gathered that they were headed almost due west, which would take them back toward the area around the Nam Ou River where his plane had gone down.

"No disrespect meant, but I can't say I approve of the bombings," the priest remarked, breaking the silence. He spoke in an earnest manner as might be expected of a recent seminarian, as he indeed appeared to be. He had attentive clear eyes, big thick hands, and a shock of blond hair like a big farm boy.

"And why is that, Father?" Morris inquired.

"They've been doing what they call carpet bombing. Laying 'em down from 20 thousand feet up. Destroying entire villages, hundreds of people, innocent civilians. No concern with limit yourself to military targets. Killing a sparrow with a shotgun, we used to say back home."

"Where is your home?" Morris asked.

"Western Union, Io-way. Little town."

"War is hell, as they say," Zastrowski threw in.

"I don't dispute that," said the priest. "And it must be especially so for somebody like you guys, in the midst of the action. I've just seen it from the side."

A few hours later, the caravan headed down a steep hill. When the road wound around a bend, permitting a view from the back of the

wagon, the prisoners saw below a narrow, open valley bordered by trees. The first wagon in the caravan, the one laden with supplies, had gotten ahead and had stopped to wait in an area of grass.

"Fellas, I got some news for you," Zastrowski said. "If we get a moment free down there, I'm going to make a run for those trees."

"Make a run for it how?" Morris asked.

"Just dart for the trees, man," Zastrowski said. "I figure, if I can catch them by surprise and make it to them trees, what are the odds they'll come after me?"

"Of course, they'll go after you," Morris said.

"I don't know, Jim. I don't think too far."

"They'll shoot you on the spot if they catch you," the priest said. "I'm seen them do it. Not these particular soldiers, but, you know, the same general bunch."

"If I get a chance, I'm going to try," Zastrowski repeated. "What's the point of this? I'm just wasting away. I should have tried with you the first time, Jim."

"You weren't ready."

"I'm ready now."

"Zas, you've hardly got the strength to run," Morris protested. You'll be exhausted before you go fifty yards."

"Muscles are gone, maybe, but I still got some glands capable of a good shot of adrenalin. I'm counting on them to kick in."

The wagon continued down the hill with Morris thinking Zas would probably actually make a dash for it if he got a chance. He had not seen Zas look so animated since he had bid him goodbye on his own escape try eight months before. Morris was thinking to himself, also, maybe he should make a dash, too, but he didn't feel ready or capable of the effort on such short notice.

At the bottom of the hill, the guards came up to the back of the wagon, unlocked and swung open the gate, and motioned for the prisoners to come out, apparently to answer nature's call, if needed.

Without an instant of hesitation, Zastrowski darted off as he had foretold. He did it so immediately, upon exiting from the cage, that the soldiers were caught by surprise.

The skinny, gray-headed former pilot seemed to acquire strength from somewhere as he moved with long, gangly strides toward the tree line about eighty yards away. He zigged back and forth to avoid being shot, with five of the guards about ten yards behind and gaining on him. He ran awkwardly across the uneven ground, through grass and shrubs about knee high, his hands held to the side to maintain his balance.

Back at the wagon, the angry officer in charge was approaching a point of near hysteria as he shouted over and over, in a high, shrill voice,

“Bak day! Bak day! Bak day!”

About five yards before the tree line, one of the guards dove from behind into Zastrowski’s churning legs and Zas went down. The next guard on the scene kicked him in the side of the head. He was dragged back to the wagon with blood streaming from his ear.

The agitated officer at once stepped toward him, taking a pistol out of a holster and cocking it to fire.

The big farm boy of a priest then unexpectedly went forward with both hands upraised, speaking in Lao in a firm but respectful manner. He was apparently saying something about the Geneva Convention, because the word “Geneva,” spoken in a flat American accent, stood out from the Lao tonal sounds.

With no warning, the officer turned and shot into the priest’s face. Blood splattered out from the point of impact, making a pattern in the air like the pattern of water displaced by a rock thrown in a pond. The priest fell backward into the ditch beside the road where his body shook in an agonal spasm and then was motionless.

Zastrowski had been shoved to the ground between two soldiers less then ten feet away. He sat up straight and looked boldly at the officer as the officer approached and shot point blank into his head. The bullet blew out his right eye and a chunk of skull above it. He reeled back and then recoiled forward, ending up face down.

Morris stood up erectly, expecting he would be the next to be shot. But the officer shouted an order, and Morris was prodded back to the cage and shoved inside. The group went on, leaving the bodies of the killed men where they had fallen. Morris could see that some black birds had lighted down in the ditch near the priest’s body.

The caravan continued up and down steep slopes at a pace, Morris figured, of at most five miles an hour. If they were headed for the Nam Ou River, which he recalled as being about 80 miles from Sam Neua, the trip would require at least two full days of travel.

Later in the day, however, the caravan turned abruptly and Morris saw, from his vantage point looking out to the rear of the wagon, that they had just passed an intersection of two roads and had turned from the road that went east onto a road that headed south, he assumed toward the Plain of Jars.

At nightfall, the group stopped at the side of the road and made a fire. Morris was taken from the wagon with his hands tied behind his back and his ankles linked with a piece of rope. He was allowed to move around and then returned to the cage.

The soldiers cooked rice and greens over the fire and brought him a plateful with a cup of tea. They talked and laughed as they ate their meal and at one point sang a song together.

That night, as Morris lay in the wagon, he could smell the wet dirt smell left behind by Zastrowski and the rancid soup smell left by the priest. Images of the blood squirting out from the priest's head and the eye and chunk of skull flying out from Zas's face kept replaying in Morris's mind.

Morris also found himself thinking about Maj. Elwood Erland, the fellow prisoner who at the end had been unable to pee and then had been dragged off and shot. He recalled the promise he had made to Erland to look up Erland's son back in the States.

"I will do that," he said to himself, "if I make it back."

On that resolution, he fell asleep.

Next day, after about six hours of travel in a steady rain, Morris heard people speaking in the Laotian tongue. Looking behind the wagon, he saw a cluster of thatched-roof houses. The houses were set on stilts above bare ground. Children were playing in the mud under the shelter of some of the houses, Morris observed. Women in black caps and multi-colored skirts with broad horizontal strips sat cross-legged on an open porch looking toward him with curious faces.

Within the cluster of houses, the wagon turned abruptly, bringing it around in an opposite direction. Morris saw that the wagon had turned at a Y of the road leading into a wood timber bridge spanning a narrow river. On the other side of the river were more buildings on stilts, some of them sturdier in construction, Morris noted, with roofs made of corrugated tin. Over one of them flew the red Pathet Lao flag with its blue horizontal bar with a full white moon.

The two roads of the Y converged to cross the bridge together, he observed as the wagon moved away from the river. The road he was on was a third and lesser road, apparently. Through the back of the truck, he saw more brown, thatch-roofed houses on stilts, not in rows or in any obvious order, but randomly placed and facing in different directions. There were smaller buildings, also, sheds or outhouses of some kind. Clothes in solid colors hung from clotheslines strung between the houses. Children of all ages ran around with no apparent supervision, though women and a few older men were also present. Dogs, cats, chickens, and a large bird that looked liked a turkey, none of them penned in or tied, scrounged for food in the bare ground under the houses.

A sudden leaning of the floor beneath him indicated to Morris that the wagon was ascending a steep hill. From his higher elevation, Morris saw a wider scene of the village. It appeared to consist of a hundred or so houses, of the same basic type with little variation, situated along the river on either side of the bridge. The roads that converged at the bridge could also be seen, coming in from different directions. On the other side of the bridge, they diverged again, one road going straight, away from the

bridge, the other curving and following the line of the river, which bent in a wide arc around some rice paddies surrounded by dikes where young women could be seen bending down to plant rice seedlings in the water. Over in that direction, on the far side of the river, the land was fairly flat. On the other side, down a ways from the hill on which Morris was looking out, was a second steep hill, a small mountain, really, with a top hidden in fog. On the side of the hill, about a third of the way to the fog, was a red roofed building. It was perhaps a temple of some kind, a wat, Morris conjectured. There were paths leading up toward it and other paths leading up to an area of the hill, further from the river, where the trees had been cleared and the hillside chopped away to form a kind of platform, Morris noted.

Morris had just begun to look more closely at that, however, when the truck stopped and a soldier appeared at the back of the truck. With words incomprehensible to Morris, the soldier slammed down the gate of the wagon and crawled in to unlock the chains on Morris's wrists. Under the watch of several soldiers, Morris crawled out of the back of the wagon, receiving several shoves with rifle butts as soon as his feet hit the ground.

As he walked, Morris took quick stock of his new location. He was in a military post of some kind with a single building. The building was not on stilts, but setting directly on the ground in front of a row of a half dozen or so cavelike cells carved into a limestone cliff.

None of the cells had occupants, so far as Morris could see. He was prodded into the first one, which he saw had an inner roof formed by the carved out shape. The enclosure was about eight feet wide and ten feet deep with bamboo bars from roof to floor on the open end.

Others might have regarded this scene as grim, but Morris breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that one side of the cave looked out to the valley below.

"I have a view," he said out loud. "Look at this, dad! A view of the real world!"

235. Morris observes daily life in the village of Ban Hatbay

Major Jim Morris was not in Sam Neua that night, his first in the village he would later learn was called Ban Hatbay, but, with dark clouds covering his new opening to the outside world, he felt as if he was back in the cave that he had lived in for more than six months. Along with this came the onslaught that he knew was strange but could not prevent: the notion of being in his inner home, around which the outer shell was cracking, with the red and white rootlike extensions of the cracks all around him and the images of the war seeping in: Tom Pitt's jaunty face before he was killed; the faces looking at Morris from the village he had fired on by mistake; the Marine in the arms of his comrades with blood running down his neck at Khe Sanh; and lately the images of the deaths of Bryan Zastrowski and the farm boy priest from Iowa who had sought to defend Zastrowski just a few days before. Morris felt like there was no place anymore where he could escape these images. The feeling of the war was with him no matter what he did.

On this first night in Ban Hatbay, as he had also done in Sam Neua, Morris tried again to restore his inner home to what he knew it should be, a repository of the ideas and people he believed in; but the same dynamic persisted as he had experienced in Sam Neua in the weeks before his departure. The ideas, when he tried to articulate them in his mind, became all mixed up with remarks he remembered hearing from Xuan Than. The people, including his mother, his father (whom Morris still talked to, not believing he was heard), his friend the downed pilot Tom Pitt, his dear wife Ellen whom he had lived with for just four months before coming overseas, seemed all the more resistant to being held as images and memories. His efforts to hold on to Ellen, especially, were disappointing and draining. He had not seen himself in a mirror, or in a pool of water, even, since being captured, but he assumed, based on his observation of fellow prisoners of war such as Bryan Zastrowski, and on his assessment of his own gaunt limbs, that if he did see himself he would be shocked at what he saw. He could not imagine himself being restored to a physical state that Ellen would admire as she once had, and he was aware this realization made it all the more difficult for him to hold on to her inside. Where she had been, at the center of his inner home, with the good ideas and people not touched by the feeling of the war, there was nothing now, a void.

Just as he was recycling these thoughts in his mind, however, a lighting of the sky, beyond the bamboo bars at the open end of his cell, reminded him that he was in his new situation where he could see the sky if he wished to. He had retreated to the very back of his cell to wedge himself into a long, low indentation of the limestone wall in an effort to trap the warmth of his body. He had not been given a blanket. Rising

stiffly, he walked to the bars and looked out.

It was a beautiful scene, Morris acknowledged, the most beautiful he had seen in many months. The rain clouds had drifted out of view. The sun was rising above a ridge of mountains at a location about 11 o'clock from where he stood. Between him and that point was a plain, or valley floor, in which, beyond the outer buildings of the village, the water of the rice paddies gleamed with the fresh light of the daybreak amidst the spring green of the new rice seedlings. More directly to his left, at about 10 o'clock, was the red-roofed wat he had noticed the day before, on the side of the mountain the summit of which had been hidden in fog the day before and which at the moment rose to a clear demarcation against the blue sky about a thousand feet about the wat. The wat did not have a single roof; it had five roofs, folded on top of one another like stacked up open books. Below the wat was a narrow gorge that cut a long swath in the landscape between the mountain of the wat and the hill on which Morris stood. On those green folds of land, the long rays of the sun were advancing, drawing the hundred or so thatch-roofed houses of the village below into the new day.

Human voices could soon be heard, people speaking or shouting in the Laotian tongue to one another. With that came sounds of children: the rising tone of questions, the rhythmic enunciation of laughter, the short sentences in which children speak to one another. Sounds of non-human creatures could be heard, also. The grunting of something like a hog; Morris traced the sound to a pen constructed of long wood poles where a black animal with a long snout was rooting for scraps of food. A rooster crowed, then came other bird sounds, then came the barking of dogs, and the sight of villagers moving about between the houses on foot or with wagons pulled by oxen. The activities of the day had begun.

As the downed pilot watched the range of the sunlight expanding to take in the roofs of the village, the water-pooled ground, and the groups of children playing under the houses and in the nearby woods, he felt moved by the scene.

"I do have life," Morris said to himself. "There is this life right here. The past life is gone. Maybe I will never have it again. But I have this life here. And how beautiful it is!"

With that insight, Morris felt that he had gained a new lease on life and a new enterprise of looking and learning such as he had reveled in as a boy, by the High Bridge, watching the power plant, the barges on the river, the trains on the riverside tracks, and the distant traffic and people in the business of ordinary life. Here there was no such display of industrial complication, but there was ordinary life conducted with like intensity.

For the rest of that day, and on into the subsequent week, Morris

watched the scene before him from his cell above the village. Except for the sliding in of his daily meal, he was ignored. He examined the make of the buildings, the layout of the roads, the interactions of the people. It was a Lao Theung village, he decided, based on the construction of the houses. He had read about the Lao people in his personal study of Laos prior to the bombing mission in which he had gone down. These were the so called “midland” Lao who lived not on the summits of the mountains (as the did the Lao Hmong) and not in the lowlands (as did the Lao Lum) but on the sloping ground on the side of the mountains. They were known as “slash and burn” rice farmers, as Morris recalled. For whatever reason, however, this group had decided to take advantage of the nearby low areas to flood the fields and plant their rice in paddies (a more reliable, more productive method, Morris had heard). Historically, as he recalled, the Lao Theung had been the main Lao group supporting the Pathet Lao. The Lao Hmong (people of the general Vang Pao) were allied with the Americans. The Lao Lum had gone back and forth in their loyalties, depending on who was occupying their region at the moment. The Lao Theung not only supported the Pathet Lao, they had been the main source of recruits, Morris had heard, though the Pathet Lao leaders including their shadow prime minister, Souphanouvong, were from the Lao Lum.

Morris could see this tradition of Lao Theung support reflected in the interactions of the village people with soldiers who came through dressed in the baggy green fatigues of the Pathet Lao. The soldiers were greeted warmly by everyone. Some of them were welcomed at various houses and climbed up the ladders into them as if they belonged there. Morris noticed boys with green T-shirts and neckerchiefs with emblazoned slides like boy scouts who met the soldiers when they arrived in the village and walked along beside them. Women served food and drink to the soldiers when they stopped for rest. At a campfire ceremony one night, a village leader of some kind presented awards to soldiers called up to stand before the gathered villagers.

The strategic importance of the village was also apparent. The two roads that converged to cross the bridge at the Y in the road Morris had noted on his first day in the village, though just dirt roads and often muddy and rutted with tire tracks, were both important highways, judging by the level of motor traffic on them, mostly green military vehicles. On Morris’s side of the river, one road came in from his left, through the gorge at the base of the wat mountain, the other came in from his right, below his own hill, where the river extended in that direction (which he had determined to be south). Just beyond the Y in the road, on the other side of the bridge, between the main body of the village and the rice paddies, were the buildings with solid roofs that he had also noticed

on his first day in the village. They were clearly warehouses as often the military vehicles stopped at them to leave off or pick up boxes, and a Pathet Lao flag flew over the site. On the other side of them, the two roads diverged again and went off in different directions.

The presence of military sites made the village a possible target for bombing, Morris noted, if the reports were true, that he had recently heard, about increased U.S. Air Force bombing in the Plain of Jars. The villagers were aware of that, he also noted. There was an observation deck built onto the highest red roof of the wat. The wat was about a half mile to the left of the bamboo bar front of his cell, close enough for Morris to watch activity there. During daylight hours, a soldier with binoculars in hand could always be seen on the deck, looking out toward the open end of the valley. That line of view pointed southeast, Morris had concluded based on the location of the sunrise. The western border of Vietnam was in that direction, and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That was also the direction from which the attack planes of his own forces would be likely to fly toward the village, he believed.

Over to one side of the wat, above the chopped off section of the slope that Morris had also noted on his first day in the village, there was further war-related activity, he observed. There were cave openings there into which people went with shovels and from which people came out now and then pushing wheel barrows full of dirt. At one point, a man in a uniform drove up to the opening in a small truck like a Jeep and went into the cave openings one by one as if to check them. The openings were bomb shelters, Morris realized. Later he saw a group of exuberant boy scouts in their green uniforms and neckerchiefs climbing up the steep path to the openings with shovels and picks. For these boys, it was a form of civic engagement, he concluded, to help like this in building shelters though many of the boys looked too small to be much good with the heavy tools they carried.

After several days, Morris watched one evening as a group of these scouts left the cave openings, ran down the path shouting and playing, and made their way noisily through the stilt-supported, thatch-roofed houses of the village toward his own location. There were about 20 boys at first, with boys dropping out of the group here and there to go into their homes. By the time the group neared Morris, it consisted of just two. One boy went down the hill toward the river. The other came up the hill to the last house on Morris's side of the village, only about 100 yards below where he stood.

The boy was a cute kid, about six years old by appearance. He was dark haired and thin, as were all the boys in the village. He walked as if proud of his uniform. When he got to the house, he climbed up the ladder to the door of the house, which was about six feet above the ground. A

feminine voice welcomed him when he went inside.

About an hour ladder, the boy came down the ladder again, still in his green uniform. A lovely young woman with long dark hair knelt at the door and handed down a dish to him.

"Soutsada," she said. "Kah."

The boy took the plate of food, squatted on the ground, and began handing out pieces of food to four dogs that gathered around him. One dog was the size of a terrier; the three others looked like some variation of a Chihuahua. A little boy came over from a nearby house and sat with the dogs with his mouth open waiting for the older boy to place tidbits of food in his mouth like a baby bird waiting for a worm. The boys were both laughing as they did this.

Next morning Morris saw the boy (Soutsada, he assumed his name was) leave the house again in his uniform. The boy joined in with another boy in a green uniform and walked with him down into the village as boys joined from other houses.

The pretty woman Morris had seen the evening before then came down the ladder dressed in plain blue blouse and a straight black skirt reaching to her mid-calves. From the door of the house, she pulled out a basket of clothes that she carried down a path toward the river with a graceful sway of her shapely form. Later she returned with wet clothes that she hung up to dry on a line strung between two stilts of the house.

When people addressed her, they called her "Mayral." She spoke in a soft voice.

For days, Morris watched Mayral and Soutsada (he assumed they were mother and son) as they went about their daily lives. Soutsada appeared to be always energetic and proud of his scout duties. Mayral was quiet and always gentle in her interactions with other adults and with the many children that ran around under the houses.

Morris noticed that Mayral came out one day to bring a cup and a pot of some kind of drink to an old woman pounding out the woof of a rug on a flat table. She stood behind the old woman looking at the rug and offered a comment in her pleasant voice.

Then, the next morning, Mayral and Soutsada came out of the house together with bags hung from their shoulders, as if to go off on a trip. As they left the village, walking hand in hand on the road that wound up the hill past the facility where Morris was being held, they glanced in his direction.

Morris expected that they would regard him with looks of suspicion and disapproval as one of the enemy soldiers that their people were fighting. But the dark-haired woman nodded and smiled, and nudged the boy, who then raised his hand in a single back and forth motion. He too looked at Morris with an expression that, though not exactly friendly,

indicated normal human regard.

That night, scrunched in the back of his cave, under the ledge that provided a modicum of warmth in the chilly hours toward morning, Maj. Jim Morris thought about these looks. They seemed to him to be the best thing that had happened to him since the day he had been captured on the bank of the Nam Ou River.

[Chapter 235 notes]

236. O'Rourke reports to 101st Airborne, is briefed by Orin Brown

On May 18, 1970, Spec. 4 Bill O'Rourke received the letter he had been watching for since his chance meeting six weeks before with Lt. Gen. Jake Landers, commander of the 101st Airborne. As O'Rourke expected, the letter contained an order transferring him to the 326th Medical Battalion, which, as he knew, was the unit assigned to support of Landers's three brigades headquartered in Phu Bai, about 75 miles up the coast from O'Rourke's then current duty at Chu Lai.

O'Rourke flew up to his new duty the very next week. After a day of settling in, he stood with eight other new volunteers before the person he had assisted on the beach. Behind the volunteers was an honor guard with an American flag and the division banner. Behind them, in formation, was the headquarters company of the 101st Airborne.

Gen. Landers seemed, on this morning, the very picture of the "lean and mean" disciplined leader. His green fatigues were crisply ironed and starched, with the three stars of his rank visible on collars and cap. He stood erectly as he talked and made eye contact back and forth with the men before him, lingering on the face of Bill O'Rourke.

"Some people say nothing's more horrible than war," the general said, "but there is something more horrible, I believe. This more horrible thing is a life in which nothing is worth fighting for. It is the life of a man who has nothing that he is willing to give his life for."

At this juncture, the medic took cognizance of his surroundings. He was on a parade ground, with Tonkin Bay, glittering with sunlight, visible in the distance. At times, still, he could hardly believe the extent to which he had ranged from his pre-Army existence.

"Gentlemen, these are my honest sentiments," the general continued, "but I cannot claim to be the originator of this notion or the author of these words. These are the words of a great and learned man, John Stuart Mill, that I encountered years ago in college.

"I contemplated on these words three years later in a situation in which they made great sense to me. I was at Bourgogne, in France, in 1944, in the months after the Normandy Invasion. I was in charge of a platoon in the 82nd Airborne, enough in action to see fellow soldiers die and to feel my own life in jeopardy. It was a comfort to me then to think of these words.

"Of course, that was a different war. That was a war few doubted the need of. Korea was more contested. I was there, too. The cause for which we fought was more obscured. Reading papers then, I came upon opinions, as I recall, that it was an ill-counseled war. But I felt that, for myself, the cause was not obscured, as I still feel today, in this war, the cause we fight for is more important than living.

"And looking at you, you volunteers, and you in ranks behind, also, I can see you are men who believe as I do. Because essentially this is a unit of volunteers, this 101st Airborne. You are here as I am because you are ready to fight for—and die for, if need be,—the same cause that has carried down from these earlier wars."

The general went on to describe the "cause" he was referring to. He said there were three aspects of the cause, as he understood it. The first aspect was the importance, for the West, of remaining steady in the global struggle between communism and democracy. The second aspect, particular to Vietnam, was assisting South Vietnam in winning its war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Part of this last, he said, was the charge to complete the latest mission assigned to the 101st Airborne, which was to assist in successfully handing over the field of battle to the South Vietnamese. The third aspect of the cause, as the general presented it, was to carry forward the tradition of the 101st Airborne and the legacy of those soldiers who had given their lives in Vietnam by not falling back from the progress already achieved, both in the global war and in the current struggle in Vietnam.

Much of this Bill O'Rourke had heard before, but he felt profoundly impressed by the general's remarks regarding the "great battle against a worldwide alliance of dictatorial regimes, encompassing a fourth of the land mass and a third of the peoples of the world."

O'Rourke was impressed, also, with some of the negative features of communism that the general described, including "the so-called 'cultural revolution' in China where" (the general said) "a campaign promoted by Mao Zedong and his wife, Liang Quing, has subjected a billion people to a tyranny of the accepted line of thought summarized in the 'little red book' that we have all seen."

Most impressive for the former coxswain, however, was the tradition of the 101st Airborne, dating back to World War Two, and the legacy of the soldiers who had given their lives in Vietnam.

"Since the first American soldier died here in 1956," the general said, "more than 50,000 American soldiers have given their lives. In our own Screaming Eagles, 898 men have died. 122 died at Khe Sanh. 61 died on Hill 937, called Hamburger Hill by the press. They did this to secure some of the territory we now control in our main area of operations in the A Shau Valley. They did it to prevent the enemy from clamping down here the same grim domain that exists in the North. Those who died were young men with promise, with futures, with sweethearts, wives, and children. In many cases, they did not live to their 21st year."

As for the A Shau Valley and the related operational aspects of the division's mission that the general referred to, O'Rourke had never before heard much about such matters, but he did heard more the next

day when he attended an intelligence session on the A Shau Valley.

Heading the session was someone O'Rourke recognized at once, the intelligence officer Orin Brown, looking, as always, like a buzz-haired college wrestler crammed into a uniform.

"Fancy meeting you here," Orin said. "Heard from the grapevine you got your transfer. Gonna be up here myself, from time to time."

"How is that, Captain Brown?"

"Lot of enemy activity since the Cambodian invasion. Lot of things in motion all over Cambodia and Laos. Bombing in the Plain of Jars. Sent me up here to ply the situation with my superb analytic skills."

O'Rourke took the mention of Cambodia and Laos silently to mind. He had heard news reports about the so-called "Cambodian incursion" and the reaction back in the States, on the part of types he assumed he would have been among himself, not so long before. Now he felt that he saw the pictures from both sides.

The strategic importance of the A Shau Valley and related military operations that had occurred in it and around it were the topic of Brown's remarks. He delivered the remarks like a college professor, standing at a lectern in the well of a room within a half-circle of arced rows of seats stepped upward on all sides. His audience consisted of about 30 men, both E-ranked and officers, from different branches of the service. These were all people new to the topic like himself, O'Rourke concluded. They were being oriented to how the A Shau Valley fit in the overall war.

"The first amazing thing we must note about the A Shau Valley is it less than 30 miles from where we meet in tranquility like students today," Brown began. "So you can imagine the terror and instability that was felt two years and four months ago, approximately, when the North Vietnam Army (the so-called NVA) suddenly broke from that valley all the way to this coastal area including the Imperial City, Hue.

"The second thing we must say, to quote the COMUSMACV, our Military Commander, Vietnam, 'the A Shau Valley is the most important strategic area in this war.'

"Now what is this valley and why it is so important?

"Physically,—or geographically, I guess you could say,—the A Shau is the narrow, northwest-to-southeast-lying bed of the Rao Lao River, bordered by steep mountain jungle slopes. Valley floor's about elevation 2000. Ridges above are 3000 to 4000. Some peaks are at 7000.

"It's a rough area, in other words, and when I say 'narrow,' I mean 'narrow.'" Brown continued, gesturing and speaking enthusiastically in his 'history buff' manner. "In some cases, a couple hundred yards, though the main valley's a mile or so wide. But the narrowness here and there is what has led to the 'crimp points' interdiction you maybe heard about, where we hit the squeeze areas to prevent the passage of supplies.

"Passage of supplies is what it's all about. Passage of supplies is why this valley's so important. You can see that here on this map of Laos and Vietnam. The red line coming down from North Vietnam through Laos, in a northwest to southeast direction, paralleling the border, is a little trail you may have heard about called the 'Ho Chi Minh,' the main supply line of the Viet Cong and NVA troops in South Vietnam. It goes down through Laos because that is a place our ground forces can't go, on account of Laos is a neutral country, or so they say. We do hit the area with our planes. But that's top secret, don't let anyone know."

Here there was laughter that Brown acknowledged with a grin, while all the while keeping his focus on the map.

"How many supplies are we talking about? Our estimates are that thousands of tons per year, on the order of eight tons per day, pass through Tcepone, Laos, here." Orin said, pointing to a point on the map about 40 miles northwest of Hue. "At Tcepone, the supplies are divided and routed in several directions represented by the green lines you can see on the map. These lines have different thicknesses, as you can see, and the thickest line leading into our XXIV Corp region of Thua Thien and Quong Tri is Lao Route 922 going east to Vietnam," he went on, tracing the route with his pointer. "At this point, where this is, or was, an enemy facility called Warehouse 54, the route connects to Vietnam Route 548, which, following the green line, goes southeast through the A Shau Valley to Nam Route 547, and then up 547 to Hue. This was the main supply line for the NVA when they attacked the Citadel during Tet. Indeed, just two years ago, the NVA was actively improving 547, engineering it, bulldozing it, to provide themselves with a direct truck route into Hue.

"Now, A Shau has been called the 'most important strategic area,' as I mentioned earlier, but, as the other green lines on our map show, Lao 922 is not the only spur between the Ho Chi Minh Trail. There are other routes—926, 925, 9,—with pretty much the same situation, tactically, and all of these areas have received a fair share of attention, with major operations launched in this area by the XXIV Corps last year.

"You know the names, probably. Going north to south through Quang Tri and Thua Thien, these operations were Purple Martin, Maine Crag, Dewey Canyon, and Massachusetts Striker, in March to May last year, then, during the summer, Herkimer Mountain, Cameron Falls, and Apache Snow. Some of these have been conducted, as you can see, in the northern province, Quang Tri, but all of these operations are, in effect, past of the same picture, they are part of the A Shau dynamic.

"Going back to the Tet, two and half years ago, that was a low point, we can all agree. Since then, as a result of the operations just mentioned, we have made tremendous progress on the ground. We have learned a lot

about the enemy order of battle and lines of communication in A Shau. We have taken over thousands of enemy documents. We have seized supplies, roads, and buildings.

"To put this into perspective in terms of Allied gains, we can look at one successful operation, Dewey Cannon, which a report by Co. Bert Aton and Bill Thorndale of CHECO summarizes. As a result of this operation, and here I quote, 'Allies captured or destroyed 1233 individual and 243 crew- served weapons, eleven 122-mm and four 85-mm artillery pieces, 56 AAA mostly 12.7-mm and 20-mm guns, and 110 tons of rice. Enemy vehicles destroyed or damaged included 66 trucks, 14 tractors, three armored personnel carriers, and six artillery prime movers. Air Force records showed 15 bulldozers captured or destroyed.'

"So this is big stuff, in other words, though the results don't come without sacrifices, in this case, 130 KIAs on our side. On the enemy side, however, there were 1617 KIAs. That is an indication of our typical superiority in these operations.

"To give another indication of our success in interdicting these supply routes,—and the oft-maligned Battle of Hamburger Hill was a big part of this outcome,—the enemy has found it so difficult to move their materiel down the old routes through the A Shau and these other routes that go directly through the XXIV Corps that they have been forced to detour their main supply line down the Ho Chi Minh to Chavan (this blue line on the map here), then east by Lao 966 and northeast along Nam 14. This detour doubles their distance to their Base Area 112.

"Another result of success in the A Shau interdiction, two and half years after Tet, is we're no longer so concerned with supplies going down Route 458, through the A Shau directly, as we are with alternate routes being developed, such as along Route 546 here, ten miles north of A Shau, and smaller routes, often no more than foot trails.

"This is the area hit last year by Dewey Cannon and Apache Snow. Our recent new firebase, Ripcord, put into place just two months ago, in April, by the 101st Airborne, is continuing in the task of keeping this 'side traffic,' so to speak, under control.

"Ripcord is located five miles south of Route 546 and immediately north of the Rao Thana valley where some of the main alternate routes, now often just foot trails are located, not far from enemy base areas 101 and 114. The rationale is, by keeping the squeeze on in area, we can secure the whole of Thien Thua before we hand it over to the ARVN.

"This is our present course, gentlemen, and we see every reason that it will follow in the success of our previous course."

O'Rourke followed the presentation closely, trying to draw it all in with respect to his own future involvement. He had not yet received a formal assignment. After saying goodbye to Orin Brown, he headed

across an open area of the camp, and to his surprise saw Gen. Landers approaching him from a group of officers standing outside a building.

"So you made it alright, I see, Mr. O'Rourke," the general said as he drew near.

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Been back to China Beach since then?"

"No, I haven't, sir. How's the ankle?"

"It's comin' along fine, thanks to you and some more good guys like you we got up here."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir."

"Well, I appreciate how you helped me."

They stood for a moment face to face as the general scrutinized his new man.

"Might as well tell you, in a few days you'll be heading up to a firebase called Ripcord," the general said.

"Actually, I just heard about it in an intel briefing."

"Heard it's pretty important then."

"Yes, I did."

"Well, that's where the action is, for the time being, Bill, and that's what you asked for."

"Yes, I did, sir, and I want to thank you very much for what you did on my behalf. To arrange the transfer."

"You're the one who deserves the thanking, Bill. You're the one who's going to fight this war."

"Well, I appreciate that, truly."

"O'Rourke, when I encounter young men like you, so willing to make a sacrifice," the general said, extending his hand, "I'm proud to be an American."

"Thank you, sir," O'Rourke replied with a handshake.

"Good luck to you now."

"Thank you."

Two days later, O'Rourke received an order for assignment to Firebase Ripcord, as the general had told him.

[Chapter 236 notes]

237. O'Rourke begins his combat duty at Fire Support Base Ripcord

As Specialist 4 Bill O'Rourke sat in a Huey UH-1H chopper, several days later, waiting to be taken to Fire Support Base Ripcord, he recalled Maj. Gen. Jake Lander's words: "When I encounter young men like you, so willing to make a sacrifice, I'm proud to be an American." That struck him as the greatest compliment he had ever received.

O'Rourke thought, also, of the defense the general had presented of the reason for making such a sacrifice. He observed to himself that he had never before heard such a lucid and convincing case for continuing in the war and for participating in the war as a soldier.

The former coxswain sat forward alertly beside the open door of the Huey, watching the changing scene below him as the helicopter lifted from the landing pad, banked with chopping blades over the corrugated tin roofs of the base, and arced to the right following the gray line of the coastal highway northward toward Hue.

For a few minutes, he watched Highway 1 of Vietnam below him with the white surf rushing in beside it, bringing him back briefly to Highway 1 of California. With that came memories of Tom Steward and hitch-hiking with Steward, not in California, but, by a shift of association, in other places. Then came memories of Barbie Carpenter and the blue eyes he had looked into at close quarters for the whole of his and her dreamlike, sexless night in her room in Binh Thuy.

Soon after that, the Huey banked left from the highway as the young soldier next to O'Rourke, a gunner, pointed out a city, shrouded in mist, a few miles further up the coastline, where the water bent inward into a long narrow bay like a skinny, elongated "C.

"There you got Hue," the gunner said.

O'Rourke nodded, looking back toward it as the chopper headed off from it at about a 45 degree angle northwest, leaving the highway and surf line behind. Hue, where the battle of the Citadel had occurred, he thought to himself. That had taken place in January of 1968, two years and four months before, when he had just been a senior in college.

Just a short distance from the highway came the thatch roofs of some of the houses of the local inhabitants, then flooded fields, then a ridge with an outgrowth of bare rock, followed soon by a lush canopy of hillside trees. A flock of birds sprayed up into the air below.

It was a beautiful day, sparkling with sunlight and with a blue sky marbled with pure white clouds. O'Rourke was aware, however, as he watched the crags and canyons of the densely-wooded landscape below, that this was a scene fraught with danger of a kind that he would experience firsthand when he began his duty.

Within his mind, as the chopper continued on, the former coxswain

acknowledged the extent of his ambiguity regarding his new assignment. His attitude was complicated, he knew. On one level, he wanted the change to combat duty. On another level, he feared it. At night, sometimes, he conjured up battle scenes in his mind. He was far ahead of the actual situation in his imagination. He had resolved how he would act. If rescuing someone meant placing himself under fire, he would do his duty, simple at that.

"Been to this base much?" O'Rourke asked the gunner.

"Ripcord? Oh, yea. Had a rough go of it back a few months ago."

"How was that?"

"Went in there in bad weather. In March sometime. Some of the guys landed but we pulled them out. Lot of hostile fire. Went back in April. Again a lot of fire. Got a foothold, though."

"What's happened since then?"

"It's been fairly quiet."

To this O'Rourke merely nodded.

"Now, as to the surrounding area," the gunner added, "I don't think the same can be said. Patrols out of the base have hit some rough going. There's been some KIAs."

The former coxswain took that into consideration as he watched the oblique shadow of the chopper darting across the hills below. It was rough country, for sure, with steep slopes and rock-lined caverns.

Since talking to Gen. Landers and hearing the presentation by Orin Brown, O'Rourke had looked more closely into the location and organization of the firebases maintained by the U.S. Armed Forces in the Corp XXIV area consisting of the two northernmost South Vietnamese provinces, Thua Thien and Quang Tri. There were more than 30 firebases scattered throughout the area between the border of Laos and South Vietnam, on the west, and the coastal highway on the east. The firebases had names like Normandy, Brick, Rendezvous, Destiny, Goodman, Jack, Lyon, and T-Bone. Many of them were only kept active when used in an operation. They had been set up and used,—not just by the 101st Airborne, but by other units that had operated in the area, including the Special Forces (the first to enter), the 1st Calvary, and the 3d Marines.

"The old concept of the 'front line' of infantry and tanks, with the artillery positioned behind, doesn't work in Nam," an officer had told O'Rourke a few days before. "In Nam, there's no front line. The enemy is all around you. That's where the firebase comes in. It is an artillery base set up in the middle of a circular area about 15 miles in diameter. Allied assaults,—usually 'airmobile' with soldiers lifted to the fight in choppers,—are conducted within the perimeter, with artillery fire being called when needed. It keeps the enemy off balance, keeps their supply lines broken.

"Then what you have, in addition to the one perimeter, are other firebases with overlapping perimeters,—'mutually supporting,' they're called,—so they can come to one another's rescue."

In the case of Ripcord, the firebase to which O'Rourke was headed, the mutually supporting fire bases were Bradley and Airborne, the former coxswain had learned. The three fire bases were configured in a triangle with a point on the north (Ripcord) six miles north of the A Shau Valley and with a southwestern point (Bradley) on the west side of the valley and a southeastern point (Airborne) on the east side, with the result that the three sides of the triangle contained one of the main NVA alternate supply lines, as Orin Brown had pointed out in his presentation. All three bases were on high ground on bulldozed ridges or summits of hills, the former coxswain had learned. The highest points in Bradley and Ripcord were about 4000 feet above sea level. Airborne had elevations of 4500 feet.

O'Rourke had also learned that each fire base was typically manned by one battalion of a new type called "flexible" (as opposed to "fixed") used in the current war. The battalion was flexible in the sense that it was composed of various units assigned to fit the specific needs of each deployment rather than having a fixed number of units. Typically, such a flexible battalion had at least three infantry companies, plus an aviation company, a quartermaster company, and an artillery battery. A battery, in the artillery, was the equivalent, in organization and size, of a company in the infantry. Each battery provided, typically, six howitzers of 105 or 155 mm caliber. There were also support units (for radio, transport, and so on), including his medical unit.

O'Rourke had learned a little about that, also. The 326th Medical Battalion, of which he was part, had a single company, Delta, which had medical people assigned throughout the fire bases. On each fire base, the medical personnel were rotated out to particular fighting units. So they were, in effect, members of those units, when they did so, while being also members of a medical platoon. The result was a dual chain of command extending through both the military and medical hierarchies, with the top components, the 101st Airborne and the 44th Medical Brigade, branching administratively from XXIV Corps.

The fire base commander (since a battalion commander) was a major, O'Rourke had heard. The commander for a company or battery was a captain. Below that there were platoons commanded by lieutenants. Each company or battery had about 200 soldiers. In all, at each fire base, there were between 1000 and 1500 men.

Learning the basic outlay of his new division and location in this manner had occupied O'Rourke's thoughts for the days preceding the present flight. As he watched the scene ahead of a chopper, he thought to

himself that he felt prepared on that score, at least.

Several more ridges passed by and then suddenly the landscape below opened up to a long, narrow valley extending about five miles ahead to a ridge of hills. It was a deep valley, with the valley floor, through which ran the blue line of a river, appearing to be at least a thousand, maybe two thousand feet, below the ridges, and with some summits going up that much again further. All the hillsides up to the highest were covered with such dense foliage that the ground could not be seen except in the lowest part of the valley, beside the river, where there were flooded fields, buildings, and brown lines that looked like dirt roads. Here and there a truck or cart could be seen moving along the dirt road.

"See, over there, on that ridge where it's all flattened out?" the gunner informed, pointing to a ridge about two miles ahead where choppers could be seen approaching and leaving. "That's Ripcord."

The former coxswain watched with keen interest as the firebase came into closer view. It consisted of three hills, he saw, somewhat in a line, bulldozed down to the bare dirt, with areas demarcated by rows of sandbags amidst which were standard drop-in tin buildings, bunkers with roofs made of logs and piled up dirt, and a dozen or so spike-like antennas supported with guy wires. Trucks and bulldozers moved back and forth. Two choppers were parked on the ground. A third had just taken off and was hovering over the landing area.

On top the center hill were gun pads for 105-mm howitzers, O'Rourke observed as the chopper hovered over the area, waiting for another chopper to leave. The sleek cannons with their long muzzles extended upward and stabilizing bars extended behind them on the ground were each set within a circular hole about four feet deep and 30 feet in diameter, bordered by sand bags. Next to one howitzer, the crew was unloading what appeared to be ammo from the back of a truck, placing it beneath the sandbags around them. Within the circle, also, was a bunker of the type already noted with a roof of logs and dirt.

The firebase was bigger than O'Rourke had expected. It appeared to be least a mile wide with rutted roads between the three hills. Soldiers reclined on sandbags or moved between buildings. One group in formation was receiving instructions from an officer in front of them.

"See that guy up there with the clipboard?" the gunner said after the chopper had landed in a whirl of air and dirt.

"Yes, I do."

"That's the base CO. You might start with him."

O'Rourke jumped out and went up toward his new commander while he took in the scene. There was a muddy, bulldozed area around the base of the hills, he noticed, a kind of no man's land, apparently, with several rings of razor barbwire strung up along poles. Beyond that was an area

with danger signs indicating a minefield. Here and there were piles of discarded wood boxes.

'Well, we're glad to have you, doc," the major said when O'Rourke presented himself. "You see that blue building down there in those trees, by the flags? That's the clinic. You'll find some of your colleagues down there. They can show you around."

O'Rourke went down in the direction of the flags. There were three flags flying: the Stars and Stripes; a dark blue flag with the screaming eagle of the 101st Airborne and the motto, "Rendezvous With Destiny;" and a lighter blue flag with a medieval shield showing dropping parachutes and the word, "Currahees." That was the nickname of the 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, the main unit manning the fire base.

Displayed within the apex of the shallow-roofed blue building was another insignia that the former coxswain recognized. It was a blue shield with a white wing, a medical cross, and the word "Assurgams," meaning (in French) "Coming to the Aid." That was the insignia of his own unit, the 326th Medical Battalion. He went inside to find two rows of six beds, with a man in the far bed in the corner and another sitting on top of a table nearer the door having his foot treated for blisters.

"O'Rourke, we've been expecting you," said the medic at the table. "Welcome to Ripcord!"

"Thank you."

"Give me a minute here and I'll show you around."

A short distance from the clinic was a bunker for medics and other medical personnel not assigned to patrols. It was of the sort O'Rourke had seen from the chopper, essentially a rectangular hole about eight feet deep with a roof formed of foot-thick trunks of trees laid side by side and piled with red clay. Inside the bunker, it was dark and dank with cots lined up in a row along the dirt wall. There was no electricity or water. Light was from a peanut butter tube fashioned into a candle.

By evening, O'Rourke had met a half dozen of his fellow medics. He felt at ease with the group at once. They had the kind of earnestness that he had gotten used to with his brother, Patrick, as well as with his some of his intense friends like Tom Steward and the Georgia preacher Mark Chambers from the old days.

After supper on the first evening, he sat with one of them on a sandbag outside the bunker, having beers, which were freely available. The man was from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, O'Rourke was told. He had been a combat medic for about eight months, serving on several different fire bases. His name was Jay Hoffer.

Hoffer explained that he was a Mennonite, brought up in a church in which pacifism was just the accepted thing. "We have a tradition of being medics. A lot of us were medics in World War Two and Korea, so to do

this I didn't have to go far,—mentally, philosophically, or whatever. It's just how I was brought up."

Well, there were many paths to arrive at this place, O'Rourke observed to himself. His own had not been so clean and clearly defined, but he had arrived nonetheless.

Later, O'Rourke hiked up through a sandbag-lined walk to the top of the center hill and stood near a howitzer pad manned by several soldiers, looking off at the valley he had flown through earlier that day. Others, doing so uninvited, might have encountered the resistance often extended to a stranger. But the red-haired former coxswain had a quality still, as years before in a shell, that evoked immediate welcome and respect. He had the bearing of a regular guy from back home while seeming like a sage person that could be trusted.

Besides this, O'Rourke just naturally acted like he expected to be liked a lot, as he had been the case for him from childhood on, and this confidence in being likeable had an effect, also.

"Quite a view," he said simply when the men looked toward him.

"Oh, yea," said one. "Just like the ol' Shenandoah."

"You from Virginia?"

"Yes."

"Ever seen any actual soldiers out there?"

"Well, that's the damn thing. No."

"We sure do try to knock the hell out of them, though," said the other. "We don't like 'em creeping around here in Aw Shit Valley."

"Sometimes lately we see green flares, kind of, after dark," said the other. "They say that's cross-fire from some of our guys out there."

"Yes, we do see that," added the third soldier.

Later, O'Rourke looked out at the black forms of the hills below the twilight sky and saw green flares lofting in arcs like Roman candles on the Fourth of July. Still later, he heard the report of automatic fire and artillery from somewhere as the sky turned as dark as the hills and glittered with stars.

[Chapter 237 notes]

238. O'Rourke carries a wounded soldier down a dark jungle road

During the next few weeks, in late May and early June, 1970, combat medic Bill O'Rourke alternated between clinic duty and patrol, and had his first experience with enemy fire. He also progressively learned about the military situation he had been assigned to, and the men he had been entrusted to provide with medical aid if wounded.

With respect to the military situation he had been assigned to, the former coxswain learned, early on, that the pursuit of the enemy, in the long, narrow, densely wooded valleys on all sides of the firebase, was not as much a matter of guesswork as he had supposed. He learned that a great deal was known about the location of enemy trails, warehouses, and other facilities,—information of a kind that had not been known even a year before, but since then thousands of enemy documents had been captured and deciphered. Add to that the ever active, sophisticated reconnaissance that continued, involving even helicopters that detected human presence in the jungle based on ammonia content of the air above the trees (the ammonia being an effusion of human bodies); and the general result was that much was known, the task at hand was not so much to obtain information as to keep disturbing any traffic along the trails and any rebuilding of enemy facilities that had been destroyed.

The order of battle of the North Vietnam Army (NVA) was also known, in general. The area was under the command of the NVA 599th Transportation group, O'Rourke had learned. There were associated engineering, artillery, and infantry battalions, most of them known by their unit numbers. The known structure was more akin to World War Two than to the prior, more guerilla structure of enemy forces in Vietnam.

There was one major unknown, however, and that the former coxswain learned about from his platoon commander one evening after they were introduced as they stood with a small group of soldiers on a hill looking off to the valley. The commander's name was Kevin Klein. He was a second lieutenant, not long out of OCS, and about the same age as O'Rourke. Absent the rank difference, Klein looked and acted like someone the former coxswain could have known as a member of his crew back in the Midwest, and, in certain unguarded moments, Klein looked like a college kid, really, not quite used to his new situation.

"What we don't know, O'Rourke," said the lieutenant, "is are these guys out there in a defensive mode, just buying time until the known date when we hand this area over to ARVN" (the South Vietnam army) or is this the calm before the storm, they're gathering supplies and making plans for a major assault?"

"You mean on here, sir?" O'Rourke replied.

"Oh, yes, on here. And let me tell you, man, if they decide to go at it, we'll make one hell of a nice target, sitting on these three bald hills. There are hills and jungle all around. They could approach with their shoulder mortars and mobile weapons like that without even being detected. Then when they got us pinned down, they could move in their big stuff. They do have some big stuff."

"You worried about that, sir?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, I hope to do my part."

"I'm sure you will, Bill, from what I heard about you."

"Thank you, sir."

"We're in it together then. Welcome."

"Thank you, sir."

With respect to the men that O'Rourke had been entrusted to provide with medical aid if wounded, the former coxswain had learned that he had a much greater affinity for these men who were actually fighting the war in Vietnam that he had ever imagined he would have in the days back in the States when he had participated in rallies against the war with his brother Patrick.

Kevin Klein, the platoon commander, was an example, as O'Rourke was soon to learn in another conversation remarkable for the sense of unspoken comradery the two men quickly felt toward one another. In 1967 and 1968, when the war was cooking up to a point of gathering the notice of college-aged people, Klein had been an intellectual malcontent, like so many others (as he told his story), but unlike most of the others, he had dropped out of school at the end of his junior year, in June of 1969. Lacking any strategy for avoiding the draft, he had soon been pulled in, and three months later had found himself in basic training. Halfway through that, he had tested into Officer Candidate School, which he had completed in March of 1970. Sent to Vietnam, he had volunteered for the 101st Airborne, and in late April had come to Ripcord just after the initial assault in which his predecessor platoon commander had been killed in action.

Now here was a guy, the former coxswain thought, who could well have been sitting with him and Steward back in the garage in L.A., behind the house of Jose Terda, talking about the various dreamy topics that he and Steward had talked about, only this guy was not sitting on top of a cardboard box in a garage in L.A, he was sitting on top of an ammunition box at Firebase Ripcord in Vietnam; and this guy was not just a soldier, he was in charge of the men around him, and responsible for their well-being and performance in combat, a duty Klein did while looking still like a kid but with a calmness in face of danger that had earned him the respect of his men.

O'Rourke held back from a friendly role with Klein owing to the rank distinction but the feeling of brotherhood initially, instinctively felt, had continued to grow between him and Klein as they were often in tight spots in proximity to one another.

As for the common soldiers O'Rourke had come into contact with, in his new duties,—the "grunts," as they were called,—they had often gone by an initial path of indecision similar to what Cubby had gone through, the former coxswain had learned, only they had done so at a younger age. Most of them, in fact, were only 19 or 20. A few were as young as 18 or even 17, drafted right after graduating or in some cases dropping out of high school. In general, as O'Rourke understood them, these boys pressed into manhood had no great philosophy about the war, or even a basic knowledge about it. Under the demands and occasional terror of their new situation, however, they had bonded to the level of being fiercely loyal to one another. They spent weeks out in the boonies together at menial tasks like fixing wire or clearing brush for landing zones and firebases or in combat where they were often sent on missions they didn't understand.

A case in point of the kind of person these grunts were, so far as O'Rourke had encountered them, was a soldier he came into contact with in his first experience of combat, a boyish-looking young man of just 18 with jet black hair and a "duck back" Elvis-style haircut who said that after dropping out of high school he had just hung around on the corner of his old neighborhood in Poughkeepsie, New Jersey, waiting to get picked by the draft. He described himself as a non-daring type who had avoided the street fights that sometimes happened. His life had revolved around the local night life and driving with his girl down along the Jersey coast. His closest friends in the unit were two kids from his old neighborhood who had somehow wound up with him in the same duty and location.

This young man's name was Lance LaMotte. His friends' names were Vito Vitale and Dino Toricelli. They had shared a common Italian heritage, back in the old neighborhood, complete with Italian restaurants and bocce ball. They all three took to O'Rourke, as many of the younger soldiers did, sensing in him the natural leadership qualities that had made him effective as a coxswain in college.

Lance LaMotte was right at O'Rourke's side, paired up with him by the platoon leader's command, when the platoon repelled down the side of a cliff as the first action of a patrol they were sent on, the purpose of which was to observe an aerial bombing of a particular spot in the valley, about ten miles southeast where this narrow valley joined with the southwestern bend of the A Shau.

"You done this before?" asked O'Rourke as he and the dark-haired,

self-styled “cool kid” prepared to drop down.

“Just one time in training.”

“Me, too.”

“I didn’t do so great at it, either.”

“Neither did I.”

Below the cliff was dense, broad-leaved foliage, about waist high, and a steep slope that plummeted down at about a sixty degree angle. The platoon took up a position there, squatting down in groups of two, over a line about a hundred yards long. It was a hot, humid day, as so many were, with a placid, blue sky and an ominous silence. Nothing could be heard except bird calls. There were no motor noises or sounds of human movement or voices. Then a distant drone could be heard, high in the sky, the forms of planes appeared, and bombs fell in an ordered sequence from the planes to a densely forested slope on the other side of the valley, about two miles from O’Rourke and his fellow platoon members.

The former coxswain had occasion then to witness the precision and might of the American military machine as the bombs exploded in a wave of plumes that moved across the canopy of trees, leaving behind an area of shredded leaves and bare limbs.

There was some kind of movement there, also, 2nd Lt. Klein noted to O’Rourke,—a ruffling of leaves at the perimeter of the area hit by the bombs, a glint of sunlight that was maybe reflected from the muzzle of a gun. Klein, having been in a command combat position for less than two months, looked perplexed as he squatted beside O’Rourke, with his walkie talkie in hand, to report this information to his superior back at the firebase.

“Sir, I wonder about the wisdom of that, or the possible result,” he said at one point. “There is an unknown number down there. Could be a displaced company, I’m thinking? We’re just a platoon, and at a low strength, just 17 men.”

The answer came back, unheard by O’Rourke, but the expression on the face of the young officer gave the impression that his concerns had been overridden.

The instructions that Klein then gave to the platoon was that the men would line up crossways in a single line assault formation. All at a signal would throw one grenade, at different height of trajectories to give a more distributed timeframe of impact. The men would then, upon hearing the first explosion, move as quickly as possible down the steep, rocky slope of the hill, through the 100 feet or so extent of waist-high vegetation, to the cover of the full-sized trees below. Reaching that, they would all begin firing at once into the area identified as the probable area where the NVA soldiers were located.

“Everyone get that?” asked Klein.

"Yes, sir" came a chorus of replies.

"Okay, grenades at the ready."

At the outset, the assault went as planned. With the explosions of the grenades providing cover, the men jolted down the hillside in gigantic steps, pushed along by the weight of their packs. Just when the cover of the trees was a few steps away, however, a spray of fire hit one of the Jersey Italians, Vito Vitale; he dropped to one knee.

Lance LaMotte, in what appeared to an instinctive gesture, then raced ahead, grenade in hand, to rescue his friend, despite his self-characterization of being a scared kid who avoided fights. His grenade hit its mark, the enemy gunner was killed, while a second spray swept across his legs.

As it turned out, there was just one other nest of gunners, and that, too, was taken out at once with another grenade. There was a sudden silence then except for Lamoto's groaning. Vito Vitale was dead with a bullet hole in his forehead.

Pressed upon to perform his first combat medicine, O'Rourke cut off the pants legs around Lamoto's four wounds, which were in a straight line across the middle of his thighs. Finding copious bleeding and flesh torn apart like red meat, he applied tourniquets to both legs, just below the crotch, and set up an IV while the other soldiers squatted around him, watching for any sign of further hostility.

The situation was urgent, obviously. Despite the tourniquet, there was a slow seepage of blood. Lamoto's boyish face regarded O'Rourke with a questioning expression for several minutes, then the eyes glazed over from the effect of medication given for pain. All around the area where the soldiers huddled, there was an eerie silence. Were there enemy soldiers nearby, preparing to attack? A medivac was needed for the wounded kid, but the trees were too close together to allow a chopper to land.

Above, on the higher ground from which the platoon had descended, was a flat area of rock, the young lieutenant noted to O'Rourke, where the medivac chopper could maybe land. "We're going to have to make a stretcher for Lance. Then we got a rough climb."

After constructing a stretcher and placing the wended man on it, the platoon ascended to the higher elevation, using the cover of a vertical crevice that someone had discovered in the descent. It was hard climb that had everyone panting.

O'Rourke was soaked with sweat. His M-5 med pack weighed about 60 pounds. In addition to that, he had the weight of the wounded soldier to contend with. He had one end of the stretcher. The other end was held by the third Jersey kid, Dino Toricelli.

Lance LaMotte opened his eyes and looked at O'Rourke with a

troubled smile. “Guess I been eating too many cupcakes,” he said.

“Hell, no, Lance, you’re as light as a feather.”

“Am I doing okay?”

“God damn right, LaMotte. You’re doing fine.”

Secretly, though, O’Rourke was concerned. He had not been able to stop the steady seepage of blood.

The plan was now that the platoon would call for the medevac from the rock and then exit themselves by returning to the cliff from which they had repelled at the start of the patrol. There was a cliff there, but also an steep area that could be climbed by foot. The sun was approaching the ridge of hills in the western sky. Within a hour or two, the valley would be dark. The platoon had still not established whether there were enemy soldiers remaining in the area.

The descending of the medivac chopper, soon later, brought an answer to that. A hail of fire flared up from the dense trees below the rock platform on which the platoon had taken a position. The source of the fire was only about a quarter mile away.

The chopper made one attempt to come in and was forced back by the fire. On a second attempt, the chopper sustained damage to its landing gear.

“Says it won’t work” the radio operator said to Klein as O’Rourke squatted nearby.

“Is there any other option?” the lieutenant asked.

After discussion, a plan was agreed on. Klein and the main body of the platoon would exit the scene by way of the cliff. O’Rourke and Dino (who both volunteered) would remain behind with the wounded LaMotte until near dark. They would then descend through the crevice to the bottom of the hill again where a narrow road had been observed earlier in the afternoon. Using the stretcher already constructed, they would carry LaMotte along the road under the cover of darkness to a landing zone two miles northwest where a medivac would meet them to ferry them back to the firebase.

It would be a risky business on the dark road, Klein noted, though the NVA troops would likely assume that the whole platoon had left by the cliff.

“We’ll fire from the area of the cliff,” he said.

“They’ll fire back then,” said O’Rourke.

“Yea, and guess what? We won’t be there.”

Brief goodbyes and good wishes followed, and then O’Rourke and Toricelli crawled toward the crevice, lifting the litter every several feet to move LaMotte along beside them. By the time they reached the crevice, it was almost dark, but enough light remained in the sky for them to make it down across the rocks to the bottom of the hill.

As darkness descended, the two men found themselves in a strange situation, indeed, walking along a dark, narrow road through the jungle with the prospect that at any moment they could be discovered and killed. The wounded kid had been given more medication to dope him to the extent where he was completely silent.

The darkness was so dense that O'Rourke could not even see his feet moving silently below him. He soon learned, however, that a wedge of starlit sky ahead provided a point toward which to move surely in the direction of the road.

The former coxswain had been told that a contingent of green berets was moving toward the landing zone from a different direction. They would arrive there first and mark it with a lantern.

The sight of the lantern in the distance at last gave O'Rourke hope that the venture would end in success. When he and Dino were led into a circle of light, however, he saw that Lamoto's condition had worsened. He checked and found no pulse. Toricelli tried CPR, and two of the green berets also tried it.

The medivac had lowered into the trees. LaMotte was loaded in and attached to machines. But an exchange of glances conveyed what everyone knew, that Lance LaMotte could not be revived.

[Chapter 238 notes]

239. Steward tries to be supportive as Kris becomes more independent

Half a world away from his former rowing teammate and hitchhiking buddy Bill O'Rourke, Tom Steward had settled with his wife Kris into their summer living situation at the home of Don and Audrey Andrews in Sunland, California.

Steward's mind was seldom on O'Rourke or the war. More prominent in his thoughts was the warning Mary Brandt had given him two months before regarding his wife. He remembered how Mary had said that Kris was still in a formative phase and that she would need to drift apart from him at times and have more separate activities in order to become a person in her own right. He remembered how Mary had said that hopefully he and Kris could do this for the most part harmoniously, growing in the same direction, but that it would maybe involve some emotional pain on his part to let her go her own way.

There was certainly not much pain in sight, however, in the idyllic surroundings to which he and Kris had moved. The "guest house" in which they were staying could have passed as a cottage at an expensive resort. It was a cheerful place with a double bed, a sofa, and a little kitchen with a counter and stools. The door opened to the large pool surrounded by vines and flowers. Beyond that, the coastal hills rolled up in a landscape of grassy slopes dotted with chaparral and oak. The sky was almost always sunny and blue though often tarnished with the rust of smog.

Bit by bit, though, within these pleasant surroundings, Tom Steward learned more about this world that his wife had come from and what she had been before she had met him, and he was glad to do so as he did want to understand and encourage her as Mary had advised him to do.

He learned, for example, one morning at breakfast in the cheerful, bright kitchen that faced the pool, that his wife had been so popular with boys that the boys had gotten "weak at the knees," as Lyn Andrews put it, when she even stopped by to say hello in the halls.

"She was homecoming queen, too," Sandra reminded with a double-dimpled smile. "Weren't you, Krissy?"

"Yes, I was," Kris replied.

"And you know why Kris was so popular?" Audrey remarked in her soft New Zealand accent. "Because she was not only beautiful but nice. And she still is beautiful and nice, by the way."

"Yes, that's true," said Lyn. "Kris never had a bad word for anyone or about anyone, either. And I never knew Kris to act like she was too good for anyone. She was the same to everybody, even the out of it kids, you know."

"Keep that in mind, young lady," Audrey said.

"Aw, geez, Mom!" said Sandy. "I'm nice to everyone."

"I know you are. I just want you to stay that way."

Later that same day, apparently to carry on the general drift of that breakfast conversation, Lyn invited Tom to her bedroom to look with her and Kris at their year book from their senior year in high school. There Steward saw a picture of a homecoming parade where his pretty wife sat waving from the back of a float, and another picture of a girls' social club in which, as president of the club, she stood with the club banner in the center of a group of smiling girls. He learned, also, that his wife had been president of the senior class and captain of the girl's track team.

"You've got quite a girl there, as you can see!" said Lyn to him as the three of them walked from her room to the spacious living room with the tall plate glass windows facing the pool.

"Yes, I know," Steward replied.

Some of all this he had heard before, Steward thought to himself, but he hadn't fully realized the extent to which she had been a star in this world from which she had come, and the extent to which she had been known for niceness in addition to beauty.

"You know what I think about sometimes," he remarked to Don Andrews later that day when he and the older man went for a hike up into the hills behind the hill as they often did. "How did a guy like me wind up with someone like Kris, homecoming queen, class president? She could have had any guy she wanted."

Don laughed at that. "She is quite a girl, alright. But you're not so bad yourself, really."

"The way I figure it, Don, I was something to her I was never to any girl before her. I was of all of a sudden a romantic type, you know. It was all in the circumstances, being out here waiting to hear from the draft, the community organizer, you know, the chance meeting on the bus, the trips back and forth."

Don laughed again, settling back into a large rock that provided a convenient backrest for the expansive view all around. To both sides of them were the step-like higher false summits of the rolling hills through which they had been walking. Below them was the vast complexity of the L.A. metropolis sprawled outward in a smoggy haze toward the curved, thin line of the ocean visible on the arc of the western horizon.

"Well, then, look at me. Indiana kid," the artist said. "Kind of an odd kid, really, to tell you the truth. I was never the king of the hill, if you know what I mean. Then came the war, the Army, the sketches on the boxes, R&R to New Zealand. And, lo and behold, a pretty redhead saw me sketching by the bay in Auckland and she saw a romantic type, too. And I could hardly believe that a sweet, pretty girl like that could fall for an Indiana boy like me. It's all in the transformation, buddy, the times.

We all get carried along by the times, and we become something the old part of us continues to be surprised by."

Steward thought a lot about this conversation in the next couple of weeks. He was aware that despite whatever his old self thought of his new self, as Don had said, Kris still saw him as a romantic type. She had told him that as recently as the previous spring at the fireside in Morgantown where he recalled she had said, "You're still my hero!" He didn't really care if he was any particular type, he thought to himself, but he wanted to be worthy of her high estimation.

Steward also thought a great deal about the pictures he had seen of Kris in the yearbook. What struck him especially was the extent to which she appeared to be in them the very essence of the Valley Girl as he heard the type described,—healthy, tan, full of life and happiness, and blonde with a blondness that seemed like a distillation of the constant sunniness of the California scene. He realized, also, the extent to which his wife had drifted from that physical state in her life with him, and the extent to which she had regained it in their brief time back in California. She had never ceased to be beautiful but she had wilted like a flower taken out of the light, and now placed back in it she had thrived again. The main problem had been, he knew, not in their personal relations but in their financial problems, and in the lonely winter nights they had experienced together. He still thought of that time in West Virginia as having been dark and contained somehow, and he contrasted that in his mind with the lightness and openness of California. Obviously, she needed that light and openness and thrived on it. He had resolved before, and he resolved again, to never again take her to a place so dark and contained. Wherever they went together, he told himself, would be open and sunny to the extent he could control it.

Steward kept that in mind as he searched for an alternative service job for the next year, using the 100-page or so listing of jobs obtained from the American Friends' Service Committee. It was the same listing he had looked through the year before, though an updated version. He looked particularly at the jobs in New Mexico and Arizona, thinking that these places would be far enough away from California to provide a separate life for Kris and him, but close enough for them to visit from time to time, while, at the same time, being, as California was, and as seemed so important for Kris, sunny and open.

Remembrances came to Steward's mind as he did this of places he and his wife had passed through on the trip out, in particular, the cultural menagerie of Gallup, New Mexico, amidst its brown and red rock landscape, and the little towns along Highway 66 with the streets that ran straight out of town into the unfenced mesa, places that seemed still caught in the American legendary past. He wanted to find a situation that

would combine the intrigue and adventure of going to a place like that with the openness and sunniness that he felt was important to his wife's wellbeing. He wanted to find something that she would be as enthused about as she had been the previous year when he and she, in the romantic days before their wedding, had first talked about going to West Virginia.

Kris came in often while he worked and looked over his shoulder or sometimes sat on his lap, emitting a faint fragrance of perfume. She always had an encouraging word to say,—how well he wrote, how hardworking he was, what an adventure it would be for her and him to go here or there. But, more and more, on the subtle level of facial expressions and tone of voice that he had become familiar with for her, he detected a touch of distraction.

Finally, a letter came that offered some promise of an advance in the direction Steward was hoping for. It was not a job offer but a personal letter from the director of one program who said he had heard that an agency in New Mexico would maybe be taking on another conscientious objector.

"The agency I'm referring to is the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation in Gallup, often called by the acronym WMIF. These things come around through the grapevine of volunteers working out in this area. I'm not sure what the job is. WMIF is a Catholic agency run by the Diocese of Gallup." Steward was especially heartened by this letter because he had retained a sense of Gallup as a unique, interesting place. When he showed this to his wife, however, she didn't display the level of enthusiasm for it that he had hoped to see.

"Wouldn't that be wonderful?" she said softly though in a somewhat unconvincing tone. "That country out there is so beautiful."

"Yes, it is."

She didn't convey the news immediately to Audrey and Lyn, Steward noticed, as she would have done had she been truly excited about the prospect.

Only later that week did he see in his wife the enthusiastic mood that he had looked for, and then, the mood was not for anything related to him, but for the return of her brother and fellow band members from a trip up the coast that had kept them in Portland, Oregon, for several months. Also, at this time, Steward learned that Lyn Andrews was involved with one of the band members, Steven. This was part of the excitement as plans were made to go and see the house that the band was moving into.

"You'll come along, won't you, Tom?" Kris said when she and Lynn were getting ready to go over to the house. "I'd really like you to come along."

"Yes, of course," Steward replied, though he felt a bit of envy at

seeing his wife making such a big deal out of the occasion.

In his typical good-natured mode, he followed his wife and Lyn out to the car, but apparently he communicated a slight uneasiness about the trend of events.

"No need to be jealous, Tom," his wife said, scrutinizing his expression as he ambled along. "This is my brother and some of my old friends from high school."

"Yes, I know."

Before going to Oregon for the gig, secured by an old Army buddy, her brother and his fellow band members had let go of their previous house in the valley, not knowing for certain whether they would return to California or not, Kris explained to her husband as they drove along. They had left some belongings behind, she said, in cardboard boxes that they were in the midst of unpacking.

"They said the garage is right up against a hill," Kris said. "There's no other houses nearby. It's perfect for practice."

"Far out!" Lyn replied.

John DeSolt, Kris' handsome brother with the Manchu mustache, came to the door when the group arrived.

"So you're Californians again!" said Kris.

"Yes, I guess we can't get it out of us."

"Well, this is where the action is."

"You know, I think you're right."

The others were standing or sitting on the floor in the living room just inside the door: Steven the boyish, clean-shaven, long-haired guitarist, always ready with a smile; David, the blond, bespectacled, base guitarist who seemed as serious always as Steven was lighthearted; Harlan, the dark-haired, rugged-looking half-Indian lead guitarist; and Dana, the equipment man, more quiet and reserved than the others, with his bare face and beard around the chin like an Amish farmer.

Steward stayed back somewhat as everyone rose for hellos and hugs but he was soon pulled into the group to share in the same warm greeting and reintroduced to the people he had met just a couple of times before the previous summer.

"So you guys all live together too?" he asked courteously in his formal manner. "In addition to playing."

"Oh, yes, we do. That's the whole idea of it, you know," said John. "We live together. We play music together. We get stoned together. We listen to music and talk about what we like or don't like."

"Yea, we just try to get this total communion," said Steven from where he sat in the corner. "It's a little intense."

"Maybe sometimes a little too intense," said David to laughter.

"Oh, yea, I'll grant that."

Later, they all went outside into the balmy California evening to the garage in the back of the house where the musical equipment was already set up and egg cartons had been nailed up on the wall and ceilings. There the conversation shifted to the gig in Portland from which the band had just returned.

"Oh, well, we learned, we definitely learned," John, the brother, said. "We learned by having people listen."

"Not much on the money side, though," said Dana. "Not much around there, in that area."

"You've got to make some tapes, get some tapes out there," said Kris. "Bring them around to the various promoters. There's people who do these things for a living. They're looking for you."

There were nods as the group focused on Kris Steward. Clearly, she was regarded as an expert on this subject, and they were eager to hear her opinion on how to proceed.

"Well, that might be true," John said. "But we don't know where they are. We've got no connection."

"Well, give me a little time to think it over, and I'll come up with some ideas for you, a list of names to contact."

"That would be fantastic, Krissy."

"Yea, we would really like that."

Steward realized where the outcome was trending even before his wife spoke to him about it later that night in the guest house and said she was thinking of not just giving the boys suggestions but actually going around to meet some people herself.

"They're at the point now where they just need a little help, and I'm the one that could do that."

"Well, if you're asking for my opinion on it, or my blessing, I just think you should go ahead with it," Steward said.

He realized later that this was the separate path that Mary Brandt had cautioned him about, and surely it made sense as a path for his wife because the idea of managing music had been a theme in her thoughts since he had first met her on the bus in Santa Barbara and learned of her work with the RFK concert. Then there had been her attempt to set up a concert in Morgantown. That had been more of that same theme persisting.

As for the pain that Mary had warned about, Steward didn't really see that the pain needed to happen. It bothered him a little to see Kris go off into situations where there were young men that he knew she found attractive, but surely he couldn't put her under a bushel basket as in the old story, he said to himself. He would need to let her go, and let her get stronger, and hope that they would not grow apart, as Mary had also warned about.

As for his and her life together, which he still wanted to make as good as possible for them both, he still felt the best hope for the year to be was some kind of program in the Southwest. He sent a letter the next day to the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation, submitting his name for the job opening he had heard about.

[Chapter 239 notes]

240. Steward journals to sort out his thoughts on "cultural change"

With his wife (per his and her new arrangement) often gone during the day, as the summer progressed into mid-June, Tom Steward had time for reflection and starting a journal. For this, he set up an informal daily schedule. He began the day with a run along a path through the coastal hills to the Hanson Reservoir, three miles away, and back to the Andrews'. The rest of the morning, he worked at painting the fence that bordered two sides of the pool (a job he had offered to do). Then he spent the afternoon reading, reflecting as he hiked in the hills, and writing in his new journal. This left the evening for activities with the Andrews' and his wife.

Steward had begun the journal on the advice of Mary Brandt, using a plain spiral notebook, as she had shown him she did. The general aim he defined for himself was to continue in the line of thought about "cultural change" that for him had begun with Barbara Carpenter's letter the previous spring and that had been further developed by his and Kris's conversation with Matt and Mary Brandt soon afterwards around the fireside by the Cheat River in West Virginia, and that had been carried along further by the Kent State killings and the various manifestations of cultural change and culture war that he and Kris had observed on their recent cross-country trip.

He also defined for himself another aim, which was that he wanted his journal to be a true account of his life as he was at the time,—26 years old, married for a year, in the midst of his alternative service as a conscientious objector (an obligation he took with the same earnestness), unsure of the future. He wanted to do justice to everything and everyone he wrote about, especially to his wife whom he still loved without qualification despite the need lately to support her in defining herself separate from him. He wrote in a careful hand so he could reread his notes when he wanted to. He tried to express his thoughts clearly and to be utterly honest and unpretentious in his entries.

In his first entry, Steward tried to describe what he hoped to gain from his reflection and he tried, also, to express the feeling he had of being not just an individual person making his own way in life but part of a great movement.

"I feel a great need, an urgency almost, to get a wider perspective on this so-called 'counterculture' in which I find myself so immersed," he wrote, conscious of the stiffness of his hand and of his thoughts as well as he sought to set them down in a natural flow. "I want to understand my own involvement in it, as it has evolved since college, and I want to understand how the counterculture itself has evolved in the past year, leading up to the current 'culture war' and the Kent State shootings and

all the other images and memories and half-formed thoughts that are jumbled in my mind.

"'Counterculture' is a term I never heard in college, when the most important thing in my life was rowing. Maybe at that time the term didn't even exist. But since then, this 'movement' has been the focus of my life, as it has been, also, for many of my best friends such as Matt and Mary Brandt and Bill O'Rourke.

"Even Jim Morris, who at a first glance doesn't seem to be part of the counterculture, has been affected by it, I feel, in being forced to react. His letters to me, from the period before he went down, certainly place him among my counterculture peers. They have the same quality of exploration."

Having completed an entire page of neat letters, Steward headed up into the hills, feeling the contrast between the little world of the page of paper he had just left and the vast world of the open, sunny slopes covered with chaparral and oaks. Looking out to the views of the city below and the distant ocean, he thought to himself he needed nothing else, then he reminded himself that he was also a participant in the great changes affecting the nation.

As he walked, with the subject of the counterculture still on his mind, he went over again in his mind the line of thought regarding the counterculture that he was aware of so far,—the letter from Barbara Carpenter with the idea he had gleaned from it of expectation and emergence, the campfire talk in Morgantown with the Brandt's with the ideas of how "social change" had led to "cultural change," his wife's comment that same evening about how the counterculture, to her, was how they were acting and relating to one another at that moment. Indeed, as he thought back to it, the letter from Carpenter and the campfire talk with the Brandt's, both in what they had been in themselves and in what they had led to in his mind, seemed to him to have been crucial points of understanding.

The rooftop talk with Bill O'Rourke, on his and Bill's hitchhiking trip through Indiana, had been a critical point of understanding, also, Steward continued in his mind, another moment of definition, as had been the other talks on the road with O'Rourke and the many talks in North Carolina with Doug Thomasek, his fellow VISTA. In these talks, there had been such a straining for meaning and personal direction. The spirit of the counterculture had been in this heartfelt searching, it seemed to Steward as he looked back.

Such a massive, widespread movement it had been, Steward noted to himself. Had there ever been another movement of a similar scope, in America? The Grange, maybe. The populist movement of the 1930's. The Wobblies. Peter Olson in Minnesota. Lafollette in Wisconsin.

Certainly, the civil rights movement had been as large, he thought. But only the counterculture had so dramatically and so universally affected his own generation.

So much good had been done through it, also, Steward continued. Of that, there could be no doubt. He had only to think of his own efforts in Dulatown. Not the water cooperative. That had failed, he had to admit. But the desire for water had been implanted, at least, leading to the other effort of the black preachers to have the Lenoir city boundaries extended, bringing water in city pipes. Then, too, thanks to his efforts among the kids of Dulatown, many of them had developed ambitions for education and a better life than had been available to their parents. He had heard of many such benefits in the myriad projects and endeavors conducted by people his own age.

This was to say nothing of the great, collective effort of his generation against the war, Steward acknowledged to himself. Surely that had been the center pinion of it all.

But as Steward thought of that idea of the effort against the war being the center pinion of the extensive,—sprawling almost,—energy sweep into American society of his peers, another thought came to his mind, a saying he had read once by W. B. Yeats: “Things fall apart. The center cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...”

That was the other side of it. Not a result as drastic as anarchy, and a result occurring only in the fringe areas of the counterculture, in the same fringe areas where the society at large had reacted extremely in the worst encounters of the “culture war,”—but in these fringe areas, things were falling apart, things had gone amok, surely.

He had only to think back to Gallup, New Mexico, he went on in his mind the next day, the newspaper headline: KENT STATE RIOT; 4 KILLED. The photo of the kneeling student gesturing for help beside her fallen fellow-student. That had been a situation gone amok on the part of the soldiers who had shot into the crowd, but also on the part of the students who had set fire to the armory and cut the hoses of the fire crews.

Then there was the crazy hitch-hiker on the highway, the one he and Kris had picked up in the Mojave desert, with his stories of violence and his strange prophetic manner. There was that new violent trend, too, he had lately noticed, the necessary opposition to authority of the movement against the war distorted, from that legitimate opposition, to hatred, first toward anyone in authority then toward anyone regarded as more favored or more gifted. Thus, the violence of “longhairs,” as the hitchhiker had called them, toward one another.

Along with this had come an assault on anything associated with the old way,—old morals, old discipline, old intellectualism, ordered use of

time—against old idealism, even, although idealism had been at the forefront of the movement all along...

So went Steward's thoughts.

He heard, also, at this time, about a case in point, along these lines, a cult leader named Charles Manson, presently held for several knife-slashing murders along with some of his followers.

"Now this was a guy, Stewie," Don Andrews told Steward as the artist worked at his long table by the windows that faced the pool, painting his cartoon backdrops on cardboard cards, "he took your hippie persona and he used it to manipulate these sweet young things, so to speak, if you will forgive the expression. You know, the gentle personality, the wonder with life, the music... The guy is great on the guitar, too, so they say, even had some weird connection with Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, on account of the music."

"They just all lived together like hippies," Steward asked, "Manson and his followers?"

"Like I say, bud, hippie to the extreme. Driving up and down the coast in a psychedelic bus. Dropping acid. Deliberate disregard of time. I mean, complete disregard. No clocks, no watches. None of them ever talked about time, the way I heard it."

"How could they survive?"

"He would send these girls out doing tricks, panhandling, whatever was required. No sense of conventional morality. They even had these things called 'creepy crawlers' where he would send them out creeping in the dark up to people's houses and stealing little items, food, jewelry, change, things that wouldn't be missed… And then eventually they wound up on this ranch where they just all moved in on the old guy who owned the ranch who, if you will forgive the topic, tolerated it all because ol' Charlie ordered these girls to service the dude sexually, if you know what I mean, the morning blow job."

Steward took all of this quietly in as he watched the artist mixing up a little makeshift palette of paints on another card. He recalled that in a picture he had seen once, Manson had looked much like the hitchhiker he and Kris had picked up in the desert, though that hitchhiker could not have been Manson, he knew, because Manson had been in prison at that time. Still there was that same weird intensity that had been so scary that night when combined with the talk of weapons and murder.

"You know, what people take out of this, Tom, ordinary people like your folks and mine?" Andrews continued. "They see it as a threat to the whole moral order, the whole realm of decency as they know it. They hear about it and they think something drastic needs to be done."

Steward merely nodded.

"This is what happened in Germany in the Weimar Republic, I've

heard, leading up to Hitler. All kinds of weird sexual things, truck drivers with hairy legs and arms dressing up like women, orgies where people would pee on one another, the whole routine. You encounter it in the movies of the time, novels like Isherwood. Or look at some of the artists... Grosz, Schad, Schlichter... Or the prime example, Max Beckmann. What he shows is a world that's toying with every kind of decadence, every kind of extreme. And violence is just another extreme... I've got a book with Beckman's paintings right over there. The big one there. Bring it over. I'll show you."

The Beckman paintings depicted various decadent types in the bold, deep hues of the Expressionist School. Included in the images were a bare-breasted woman in a birdcage; a woman walking on all fours, led with a leash secured in her teeth; a kneeling, red-headed Mary Magdalene with her hand on the groin area of Jesus; and a Roman soldier in a tunic with a sword held in a phallic position.

Among the paintings, also, was one that consisted of three side-by-side panels, as in the three side-by-side frames of a stained glass window in a Gothic cathedral.

"You see, you take a form like this, a 'triptych,' as they call it, a three-part medieval form of presentation," Don said, "a religious form of presentation, and into this form you place these images of sexual decadence, debauchery, a knife dripping with blood... What is the message here? It's a world turned upside down. An upside down world for a lot of people. And these people have a need to restore order, a psychological need. They're looking for someone to do that."

"This is where Hitler comes in?"

"For sure. In my opinion... Hitler with his so-called 'leadership principle,'—which was, basically, 'the whole situation is so goddam fucked up, you need a strong leader.' To bring an end to the political quibbling, the moral relativism. You can imagine a kind of tapestry of the whole era, you know. The way I see it, these Beckman characters in the forefront with their naked, maltreated women and their phallic swords dripping with blood, then off to the side you got a torchlight parade, kind of half in the darkness, you know, with all those tall banners with swastikas, the hordes of people in uniform marching by."

"You think our era is similar to that?"

"Similar in some of the elements. Similar in having excesses like some of your hippie affronts. But will it come to that? I don't think so. I think what you may see, is simply suppression. Suppression like with Angela Davis lately. You've heard about her?"

"Just a little."

"Well, the key point is, this is this person who, to begin with, is a certain type that immediately brings forth a reaction in certain people.

One, a woman. Two, a black. Three, an intellectual with big round glasses. Four, in your face, mother fucker. And she claims to be a Communist. But at the same time she is a legitimate professor, or assistant professor, at UCLA. She has a right to speak, doesn't she?"

"So what are they doing, these suppressive people?"

"Well, our beloved governor, Ronald Reagan, is leading an effort of the university regents of which he is one being governor to oust her from her position and they just have managed that. This is just part of the suppression you could expect, in my opinion, and it will go as far as it needs to go to make the sinister threat go away so people, ordinary good people, mind you, feel secure in their lives."

Steward did come upon a front page article in the *Los Angeles Times* soon after this with a picture of Angela Davis with her trademark Afro hairdo (which he knew in itself represented an attitude of defiance to many white people). She was carrying a sign saying "Save the Soledad Brothers,"—who, according to the article, were four black men convicted for murder that she insisted were "political prisoners."

He also read a quote attributed to her, regarding "cultural change" as opposed to "social and political change," that had given him cause for reflection. "It's true that it's within the realm of cultural politics that young people tend to work through political issues," she was quoted as saying, "which I think is good, although it's not going to solve the problems."

"Although it's not going to solve the problems:" Steward did a switch in his mind on reading that.

That was heart of the matter, wasn't it? he thought. The problems were still there. They were there to be solved as they had been all along. The movement was going forward, but, in the rush of change, in the emergence of so many outward changes of speech and behavior that intimidated ordinary people, as Don called them, the old political ideals were being left behind, the ideals that had been the whole purpose of the Movement at the beginning.

Even Angela Davis had done that, Steward noted to himself, despite all her talk about the real problems. In several speeches, she had called the police "pigs," for example, the article claimed. What had been gained by that? As a representative of the university, how had she expected that to be accepted by the public at large? Such rhetoric just intensified the antipathy on both sides, creating more energy at the extremes, more centrifugal force for the center to lose its hold.

Steward came upon another article, though, that greatly helped him in working out these thoughts. The article, also in the *Los Angeles Times*, was about a "former radical" who had settled in East L.A. and was working there to set up pre-school programs, literacy programs, and other

programs such as the early Movement had set up in such numbers.

"The best situation of all, the way to be most effective, if you really want to be effective in the community, and not just advance your own ego, is to methodically, deliberately reduce causes of friction with those on 'the other side,'" the man was quoted as saying. "The image is not important. The enemies are not all over there. We need to grow beyond this divisive mode and return to the best of what we were when we really cared about social problems in America."

Steward, when he read this, immediately connected it with his current search for a job.

"If only I can find a job like this that involves some humble work with a true social problem, not confronting as I was required to do in West Virginia, but erasing the barriers of them vs. us that have fueled the culture war," he wrote in his journal, "then I think I would really be fulfilling my obligation as a conscientious objector.

"This is not to say to leave behind the cultural changes. I know those are important, too. But to do this somehow in a way respectful of other people, of all people, including ordinary, decent people like Don was talking about."

[Chapter 240 notes]

241. Steward finds a CO assignment as Kris manages the band

In mid-June of 1970, in an eventful week, a letter came that Tom Steward had been hoping for. Then, a few days later, a good development came for Kris Steward, also. She secured two engagements for her brother's band plus an offer from a record executive, an old friend, to listen to their tape.

As soon Steward saw the thick envelope received from the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation, or WMIF as it was abbreviated in parentheses behind the name, he knew that this was not a rejection of the usual sort that he had been receiving in thin envelopes containing single page statements. This envelope obviously contained a packet of information in addition to the cover letter.

The first sentence of the letter conveyed the important point, when Steward opened the envelope: "We are pleased to be able to offer you the position you inquired about."

Within a few minutes, as Steward skimmed the contents to get a full sense of the position being offered, the main facts of it fixed in his mind. It was a social work kind of job, he and Kris running a group home in which they would be guardians for a group of Navajo boys, wards of the Navajo Tribal Court, referred through some already established connection between the court and WMIF. The house and food would be provided. He and Kris would be expected to clean and fix up the house before taking in the first boys. For the first three or four months, therefore, they would live in the house alone. As for location, the project was not in Gallup, as he had expected, but in Winslow, Arizona, located about 120 miles west of Gallup on Highway 66.

That was the highway that he and Kris had traveled across country on a few months before, Steward realized as he looked at the hand-drawn map included in the package. He thought he remembered the town of Winslow specifically. The highway had split there into two one-way parallel main streets, as he recalled, running alongside the east-west dual tracks of the railroad. There had been some kind of mill south of town spouting up white smoke above the flat land, and there had been mountains far in the distance, to the west, and roads running straight out of town to the wide expanse of unfenced land.

For Steward, the situation was appealing. Living in the Southwest, out in the big sky country. Occasional trips to Gallup (the letter had informed), for foundation meetings. No worry about basic expenses since they would be covered by living in the house. No winter. Constant sunny weather. Nearness to California, to be able to visit. Then the project itself. No more cold sells on lonely roads, as in West Virginia. The job would focus on a single, small group of kids who would live in the

house. Contacts with conservative people. This job would be no skirmish in the culture war.

Indeed, with respect to his recent reflections and entries in his journal regarding "humble work with a true social problem" and "erasing the barriers of them vs. us that have fueled the culture war," thought Steward, this situation was perfect. This situation would enable him to put his new resolutions into action.

He wondered, though, what his wife would think of the situation as he crossed the Andrews' house to the kitchen. He heard her talking there with Audrey and the Andrews' girls, Lyn and Sandra.

"This is the one in New Mexico?" she asked when he announced it. "Nearer to here, actually. Winslow, Arizona."

A cheer went up from the group at that, and there could be little doubt that Kris approved the arrangement.

"Kris, this will be another small town all by itself," Steward said. "That doesn't concern you?"

"With sunshine all year. I think I can get used to that."

Don Andrews soon came into the kitchen, also, when he overheard the conversation. He had been working in the living room at his long table by the windows that faced the pool.

"That's some beautiful country out there, kids!" he said. "You're going to love it! Won't they, Audrey?"

"Oh, I'm sure you will!" Audrey replied, directing her answer directly to the Steward's.

"Fantastic big clouds, bud! Then the light comes filtering through in these big long rays," said Don.

"Yes, it is quite splendid!"

"You're not concerned about the kids?" Steward said to his wife. "These are going to be kids with problems. Teenage boys, probably. Living in the same house with us. We won't have much privacy."

"Well, surely you would have your own room," Audrey remarked in her gentle New Zealand accent.

"And I'm used to juvenile delinquents," Kris said. "I've got some in my own family."

"Yes, you have had rather a run with your brothers, haven't you, dear?" Audrey threw in.

Later, when Kris was off on some activity with the Andrew's women, Steward went over the letter again in more detail. One part of the deal that he especially liked was that the foundation had three other workers who were also COs doing their alternative service. The project director was himself a former CO who had been stayed on after completing his alternative service. The three current COs included a psychologist working with the Navajo court, a water engineer who was setting up

community water projects in rural areas on the reservation, and the one who had bought the house and arranged the situation in Winslow. He would be leaving at the end of July when his alternative service ended.

"The arrangement we thought of is you and your wife report out there in mid-July to overlap him for a week or two," the project director had written. "That will give him time to bring you around to meet the various people. His name is Don Martin."

Only bad aspect of the situation was that the three other COs and their spouses lived in Gallup, including the one who had set up the house in Winslow. But there were project meetings once a month, so there would be regular contact.

Steward sent a letter the next day saying he would be delighted to accept the offer. By then he had discussed the timing of the move with his wife, and they had decided to accept the timeframe suggested, which was that they would arrive in Winslow in mid-July.

Three days later, Kris announced her own successes in her efforts for the boys. One gig would be in the Hollywood Bowl, she explained to the Andrews' at supper. The boys would be the warm up band for another well- known group. The second gig would be a concert of their own up in Bishop, California, in the vacation area there at the foot of Mount Whitney. The concert would be billed as a charity event, but the boys would get half the receipts.

"Have you told them yet?" asked Audrey.

"No, not yet. I was going to this evening."

"Let's invite them all over."

"Yea, party!" interjected Sandra.

"Would that be too much, Audrey?"

"No, darling. You go ahead. It will be a good time."

With that established, Steward headed up into the hills. He was glad for a respite before the event began. Though he was comfortable with the Andrews' family, he became increasingly uncomfortable as the social circle widened. He was especially ill-at-ease in the gatherings at the pool, which often entailed hours of small talk about Hollywood and the entertainment field since many of those present were involved in these areas.

With the "boys" in the band, despite being accepted always due to being the husband of the sister of the band leader, Steward was never really one of them. He and they both knew it, leading to a slight strain sometimes when he stood among them, a silent onlooker often or seeming to produce manufactured questions.

As he walked, Steward thought about this. With his habitual self-analysis, he was well aware that his interaction with the boys was part of the whole complex that he had found himself in lately involving his

wife's newly more separate life from him. It was part of what he had to do to encourage her growth, as Mary Brandt had advised him to do.

Of course, much of the problem in his inability to relate well to the boys was in his own social awkwardness, he thought to himself. It was certainly not their fault; he was the same way with many people. But he had understood lately that it was aggravated, also, by the seeming lack of any intellectual interests on the part of the band members. That lack had struck him as odd at first since he and they were all part of the same counterculture, or presumably. But the truth was these people were not of the same kind as his older friends like Matt and Mary Brandt. They did not share the same thread of ideas, he noted, that with himself and his peers had progressed over time through common experiences.

The age factor was, of course, important in this, also, Steward thought. Kris and her friends were five or six younger than he and his friends from college and rowing. These younger people had jumped into the counterculture that number of years later, more or less, directly into the latter phase of cultural change, skipping the earlier, more political, more cerebral phase of the Movement. In any case, he acknowledged to himself, what had happened had happened; he had no right to dictate to anyone what the proper mode of participation was.

Coming around the ridge above the Andrew's house, Steward saw that the band members and a dozen or so of their friends, both men and women, were already by the pool, talking and laughing. He located his wife among them by her distinctive blonde hair. She was the center of attention in a small group, gesturing dramatically with both hands as she spoke, in her characteristic manner. Don Andrews, in a swimming suit, cigar in hand, was by the pool, conversing easily, as always, with several guests.

The sight struck Steward as pure California. It was a lovely sight, really, he thought, with the sparkling water, gleaming with sunlight, and beautiful, happy people. He was the one who did not quite fit into the scene; too "ponderous," as Don put it.

Kris was in the midst of explaining the details of the arrangements she had set up when Steward walked out by the pool on the way to the guest house to change into his swimming suit. As she spoke, the guests gathered around her from several directions, so he joined them.

"Hey, Kris, when you set your mind to it, there's no stopping you," said the key player Steven.

"Hey, let's have a toast to Krissy!"

"All right!"

Steward was glad for his wife, but he couldn't help noticing how much more elated she was in her success for the band than she had been at the news of the job in Winslow.

Throughout the evening, Steward stood around among the others, as good-natured and slightly out-of-sorts as always, as he watched his pretty wife circulating among the other young men. She made a point now and then to come over and stand beside him, and never flirted with anyone, or did anything to embarrass him, but he missed having her to himself as he had grown used to in the previous year.

Later, plans were made to organize a caravan to drive up to Bishop in support of the boys. They would need to rent a truck to carry the band equipment. The whole group could stay in the same motel together and they could go for some outings together on the day after the concert.

It was assumed from the start that Tom and Kris Steward would be part of the support contingent.

"You'll love it up there, Tommie," John DeSolt said. "This is at right at the base of Mount Whitney. Some far out camping, man! Some real cool hot springs, too!"

"Sounds great!" Steward replied.

He did have an interest in the trip and the activities mentioned, he admitted to himself, but he didn't like that the involvement with the band was continuing for his wife and that now he was being drawn into it himself. He didn't like being placed in the role of a groupie for this group of younger guys. He had never cared for the musical scene of concerts and fans.

242. Steward resists being controlled by the pressure to be "hip"

With his wife's work on behalf of her brother's band over for the time being, Tom Steward hoped to forget them for a while, but she soon brought up the idea that maybe Tom and she could return to California after he completed his alternative assignment in Winslow so she could continue helping the band.

"Kris, I don't think they expect that," he said.

"It's not that they expect anything!" she replied. "I'm the one who wants to do it! I know I'm what they need. They need contacts. They need management. I'm the one who can do that best. I know how to do it and I believe in their talent."

Steward realized from this again the intense emotion that the topic evoked in his wife. He had seen the emotion at work in so many situations since meeting her, he thought. It was not going to go away. He would just have to accept it.

"Well, whatever you need to do, we can work it out," he said. "You can count on it. I promise."

Steward did feel this way as he spoke, still he understood at once, with some alarm, that by his words he had locked in his future to a more definite course, which lately he had been hesitant to do.

"But you're not so sure about living in California, are you?" Kris replied, her voice softening as she saw what an effort he was making to accommodate to her wishes.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I guess, you know, the weird thing is, I never think that far ahead. I used to try, before the draft came down."

She took his hand. "Like you say, Thomas, we'll work it out somehow. I don't like to plan, either."

This interaction occurred as they walked along the beach in Santa Barbara after having spent the day revisiting some of the places from their courtship. Included in their tour had been the bus depot where they had met the second time, the hacienda in Goleta where Kris had lived with her archaeologist father and his crew, the zoo where Steward had worked, and the house by the mission where Steward had lived and where they had first made love together.

It had been a magical day, filled with old romantic feelings, and it ended the same way, with the walk on the beach leading to a restaurant on the pier where they talked about memories of their time together.

"Thomas, I appreciate so much all you do to make things work out between us," she said as they sat together.

"I want it to work out, Kris. It's important to me."

With that, the situation between him and his wife seemed resolved again, but the prospect of moving back to California the following year

set Steward to wondering about what he would do in such a situation, with his alternative service completed and the war and the draft no longer constraining and shaping his activities.

He acknowledged to himself that since college he had not held a job without a "romantic connotation" (as he termed it in his own mind). Every job he had had had seemed outside of conventional life or like a step on the way to something "relevant" and "meaningful" that he had never been able to define.

"Young people don't believe in the System," he wrote haltingly in his journal, struggling to be honest and natural in his expression, but feeling the inaccuracy and stiffness of his words as they came out. "They don't believe the System as a whole is going anywhere that is better or even sensible, and thus even to take part in it seems like selling one's soul. That's why the groovy jobs are those that are either outside the System, or else inside trying to change it, whether this be running a house for Indian kids in Arizona, being a VISTA volunteer in a black community in North Carolina, working with UFWOC, or making music that is creative and has social content."

He was aware, as he was putting this down, that the words "System" and "groovy" were not natural for him. They were hip words. Why was he pretending to be hip? He was aware, also, that he was deliberately referring to his own experiences as examples of jobs outside the System. Why just his own experiences? And in referring to music as a relevant activity, he knew there was some falseness there, an accommodation to his wife and her friends. He didn't really believe that music, especially pop music, was as important as he made it sound.

"The problem is these jobs are few," he continued, "and those that exist are mostly for young people, so that those in the 25-30 bracket find it harder and harder to maintain convictions as they grow older, and especially as they have families and need money."

Yes, age was a part of the job dilemma also, he had begun to admit to himself. The younger age of his wife and her friends was a constant reminder of that. He would soon be reaching an age where he would be compelled to be more definite.

Don Andrews soon got into the act, also, when he discovered that his young friend was contemplating the future and jobs.

"Listen, bud, I hope you're not feeling alone. Audrey and I went through the same thing after I got out of art school. Went out to Taos, to the artist colony there. And, you know, I made enough on consignments to scratch by. Glorious time, though! Sometimes I wish we could go back. Then along came the girls. Life got a little more serious, you know. I heard about the jobs out here, in the movies, and we made our play. Now I would not call myself a big success, by any means. But we got

this house, this pool. Let me tell you, bud, you gotta somehow look at it from the perspective of where I started out as a kid to realize how fabulous this is, really. I never thought I'd wind up in a situation like this. And don't think there aren't some fine opportunities, Tom. Just over in Hollywood there, there's still a dearth of real quality screenwriters, in my opinion. Young guy like you with your fine mind and your verbal propensities. You might look into that, Tom."

"Maybe I will at some point," Steward replied.

"Hell of a lot better than social work, bud, if you'll take some friendly advice. There are enough problems in life without making them your business."

The good intentions were obvious, thought Steward as he walked away, but he had grown weary of the subtle and sometimes not so subtle pressure against "social work," against being "ponderous," and so on. There was the expectation always that "success" was just around the corner, and not just ordinary success as most people thought of it but colossal success, big money, prestige.

Steward had begun to understand, also, that that was what his wife had in mind when she talked about how "the boys" could maybe make it big. With her as their manager, they would make the big album, and, from that point on, everyone would be "rolling in dough," as the old saying went. The upcoming gig in Bishop, for example, was not just that. It was a step on the way to the big break. Kris and her friends were still abuzz about it. Twenty-three people would be traveling up in the caravan, by the latest count, with Steward still dreading how he would have to feign excitement.

With these matters still much on his mind and his wife off for the day with Audrey and the Andrew's girls, Steward left the Andrew's house on a bright, sunny morning at this time, and, without knowing precisely where he was headed, turned down Sunland Boulevard, following the route he had taken on his bike back and forth from the Andrews' and West L.A. in the days, just a year before, when he and Kris had been making final plans for their wedding.

The route took him from Sunland to Highland Avenue, under the Golden State Freeway, and then down Highland past the immense Boeing facility and the chain-fence-surrounded scrap yard where he had worked washing parts removed from junked cars.

Everywhere he looked there were reminders of the heady environment in which he had lived just prior to his marriage. There were still hills of rusty parts in the scrap yard, he noticed, and the conveyor belt and counting station were still there in the midst of them, by the vat where the parts would be dumped for cleaning. What a tedious job that had been, he thought, but he had not minded it, really. He had not minded

the lack of money, the lack of a car of his own. The yellow bike had been enough. What glorious rides he had had in the balmy evenings under the palms speeding through Sunland on his way to the Andrews'!

Reaching Ventura Boulevard, and still without any definite plan for the remainder of the day, Steward continued south into West L.A. and found himself in the neighborhood where he had lived temporarily at the home of Seymour Frankel, the printers' union president who had lent his support to the Farmworkers' campaigns. Stopping at the three-story, stucco-covered triplex where the Frankel's occupied a single floor, he went up and rang the doorbell, getting no response.

Standing at the door for a moment, Steward looked around him at the cityscape composed of flat streets arranged on a grid of rectangles of the exact same size and bordered by nearly identical pastel-colored buildings, tiny lawns, and tall palms, a sight he had always felt jarred so weirdly with the other California, just miles away, on Sunset Strip, of hipness and deliberate oddity.

From the apartment, Steward proceeded to another location that he had thought about in connection with Frankel, the print shop about a mile away where as he recalled Frankel worked the day shift. It was a brick-sided structure occupying an entire block and without windows except for the corner in which the office was located. Entering there, Steward asked for Seymour and was escorted into a large, high-ceiling room with printing presses in motion and copy being taken off and stacked.

Steward saw the Trotsky look alike Frankel at once, dressed in a printer's apron and standing by a press where he was in the process of giving instructions to another worker.

Frankel, looking in Steward's direction, studied his face for a moment and then came across toward him smiling.

"Steward, my boy, didn't recognize you at first with your mustache! Genghis Khan, I should call you! So you are back in California?"

"Yes."

"Well, welcome back. It's been exactly a year, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And what brings your fine visit?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. Just stopped to say hello."

There was, indeed, nothing in particular that Steward had come to say or do, and he became awkwardly aware of that as he followed Frankel around for an informal tour of the presses and dies. The tour ended up at the station of Frankel's son, Sol, whom Steward recalled from the Cinco de Mayo demonstration that Sol had attended the previous year. Sol had taken up the printer profession of his father, as he had said then that he would. He was a specialist in tool and die.

"There's not as much excitement in this as I imagine you're used to,"

the young man said to Steward. “But this is regular, good work and the political side of it, in the union, has its level of satisfaction, also. It’s not issue oriented, it just keeps going on. Like the job, really.”

That bit of information seemed in retrospect, as Steward drove away, to have been the message of the entire meeting, that a profession was possible which was neither part of the system nor opposed to it. It was simply a job that had the traditional dignity of labor. “Fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, is what it comes down to,” Steward said to himself.

From his visit with the Frankel father and son, Steward continued with the same lack of definite purpose unto the Golden State Freeway and then across the city, amidst four lanes of heavy traffic, to the other side of the downtown area and the Chicano neighborhood in East L.A. where he and Bill O’Rourke had worked for the Farmworkers’ while living in a garage. There he found the familiar cemetery and shops and the narrow street on which Jose Terda lived with his family, with the map-walled office located in his living room.

Stopping there, Steward noticed that there were still two beds side by side in the garage, in the exact location where he had left them. The poster of Emiliano Zapata was still on the wall above the workbench and stacked up cardboard boxes. Outside the door, the two cement steps were still there, also, and the cement walk across the tiny yard to the door where Steward and O’Rourke had entered each day for the meeting at the kitchen table inside.

Steward felt suddenly acutely aware of the passage of time. Two new people living in the garage, he thought, probably with the same simplicity of outlook that he and O’Rourke had had.

Just inside the door was another familiar person, Steward soon saw. It was Jose Terda, looking a bit grayer, though still with the pleasant expression that seldom left his face.

He waved as soon as he saw Steward and came across to the door.

“Hermano mio, Stewie boy, so pleased to see you again!” he said, extending his hand. “Com’estas, amigo?”

“Bien. Muy bien.”

“Been a long time.”

“Oh, not so long. A year.”

“Oh, well, a lot has gone down, man, as you gringos say.”

There was much that was familiar in the room where Steward stood. The map on the wall was still there, and still marked with colored pins at locations where presentations and demonstrations were scheduled. The lists of phone numbers, some new and some old and more tattered, were stacked on the table.

“Still on the grapes?”

“Oh, no. Lettuce. The grapes are done, kind of. The grapes have been

a big success. Forty percent unionized now."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

The truth of the matter, Steward admitted to himself, was he had not thought about grapes and unions since the day Terda had driven him out to the freeway to hitch up to Santa Barbara after quitting his organizing job. The cause of the Farmworkers had always seemed so abstract to him in his work in L.A., with the actual conditions of the farmworkers never a concrete part of his daily experience.

The room once occupied by the seminarian Bonner was open, Steward noticed as he conversed with Terda. Bonner's bookshelf crammed with the likes of Kierkegaard and Camus, was no longer there.

"So Bonner is no longer here?" Steward said.

"Hey, too bad, you just missed him, amigo. He just left last week."

"Left for where?"

"Boston. He's a teacher at some college."

"Good for him."

"Oh, yea. Pat. He's a smart guy."

Steward noticed on the bulletin board a newspaper clipping likely been posted by Bonner. It was the article about Angela Davis that Steward had come upon in the Andrews' house. He read again the quote that had made an impression on him: "It's true... within the realm of cultural politics that young people tend to work through political issues, which I think is good, although it's not going to solve the problems."

The conversation continued to Mark Chambers, Bill O'Rourke's old friend from GRIT, the preacher who had married the Steward's. Chambers was no longer the head of the California Ministry, Terda said. He had accepted a ministry in a church in East L.A. He was newly married and living in the neighborhood.

"Who did he marry?" Steward asked.

"Girl named Maureen. Used to come to our meetings."

"Oh, yea. I remember her."

"Quiet girl. Serious."

"Yes, I remember."

That was the last revelation of the day, and Steward took it in as he had taken in the others, thinking to himself of the contrast between his own wife and the girl Chambers had married as he recalled her. A quiet girl like that could take up a life of service like that and never feel left out by it, he thought. He could imagine Kris living such a life temporarily, as he and she were about to do in Arizona, but he didn't think Kris would be satisfied in such a life for long. The truth was, what she really wanted to be was "hip" in the same way that Don Andrews also seemed to be promoting. It seemed to be inherent in the California scene.

243. Steward's participate in the Thunder Mountain "hippie caravan" to Bishop

The culminating event of the summer, for Tom and Kris Steward, the Thunder Mountain caravan to Bishop, took place on the weekend of June 27 and 28, 1970.

Early on the Saturday morning of this weekend, the Steward's left the Andrew's house together and drove the three miles to Tujunga Hills High School where the caravan was assembling.

Steward exited from the car and watched as his blonde, pretty wife, trim, tanned, with shoulder-wide curls bouncing with every step, tripped ahead to greet her brother and friends. She was in an ebullient state as she shouted greetings and replied to questions about logistical details, gesturing in her dramatic manner. She had made most of the arrangements herself, from the newly bought used truck that would carry the sound and light equipment, to the motel where the group would be staying, to other activities the group would be doing together including a trip to the hot springs in the Mount Whitney area south of Bishop.

Just a few weeks before, the Steward's had celebrated a romantic first anniversary, and Steward had felt, in connection with that, that the bond between him and his wife had been confirmed and intensified on both sides. In situations like this, however, where she went flitting off among her friends, he felt distant from her. She acted like a sorority girl of his college days, the type of girl that he would have been at a complete loss with as to what to say. Truth was, despite having been with his wife almost 24 hours a day for the past year, prior to their current vacation, he still didn't know what to say to her, or how to act, in such situations. He just stood back and watched.

On this particular occasion, Steward followed his wife a ways toward the others and stood on the periphery of the assembled vehicles, waving hello to anyone he knew who looked in his direction.

"Hey, Tommie," called Kris's brother, John, with a hearty wave. He was sporting his Vietnam swamp hat and a tie-dye shirt. "Why don't you come over and give us a hand getting this stuff loaded?"

"Be glad to," Steward replied, going across.

He immediately set to work in his willing, energetic manner, for which he was appreciated by everyone.

"Big day," he said to the members of the band working beside him.

"Yes, it is, Tommie. Yes, it is," one of them replied.

They had all started calling him "Tommie." Why he didn't know. It was a form of his name no one else used. It was obvious they generally liked him, he thought, though they never really acted like friends or seemed comfortable in his presence, as had been the case all summer. David, the bespectacled blond guitarist, appeared to harbor an

inexplicable resentment.

There were, by this time, about 30 people gathered in the parking lot and they were all young, Steward noticed. He was older than any of them by several years. Some of the women he recognized as friends of his wife he had met at the Andrews. They were attractive young women of the type that could go from stylish for a dinner party to hippie for a beach outing, and they had all come in hippie attire. There were young men in the assembly, also, most of them friends of the band members from high school, and some younger men, boys really, with the hair and builds of surfers. They, too, were all wearing hippie outfits.

The equipment truck had been painted with the newly chosen name of the group, "Thunder Mountain," in psychedelic-colored letters in a design of mandallic swirls. The contingent also included two minibuses, eight cars, and a pickup truck painted in psychedelic colors.

Steward was glad the parking lot part of the event was almost over. He was looking for his wife to walk with her to the car when he saw her coming toward him across the parking lot.

"Tom," she said, taking his arm, "would you really, really mind if I ride in the van with the boys? They want to talk over the arrangements. I'm the only one who really knows them."

"Sure, Kris, that's fine," he said. "We'll have plenty of time together when we get there."

"Thanks for being so understanding."

As an offshoot of this, Steward soon found himself providing a ride for the four young men who looked like surfers in hippie clothes.

"So you're a friend of the guys in the band?" one of them asked Steward as they got under way.

"You know John the drummer?"

"Yes."

"I'm married to his sister."

"Krissy the homecoming queen?"

"Yes. Kris DeSolt."

"Married to the queen. Far out!"

They explained later that one of them was Steven the keyboard player's brother. The rest were just coming along for the ride.

"We're all into music, though," one of them said.

Steward wasn't sure what to say about that so he said, "Far out."

The four riders in Steward's car were all students at a community college in Burbank, they told him. One was a business major. The rest had not yet decided on a course of study. They had no strong opinions about anything so far as he could tell.

The caravan, led by the equipment truck, headed out on the Barstow freeway. Just behind that, two vehicles ahead of Steward's car, was the

pickup truck with several of the more outrageously dressed people sitting in the open bed in back. Among them was a young man with a great mane of frizzy hair and a beard arranged into long braids with red bows. Next to him was a busty brunette in a cut-off T-shirt who was not wearing a bra, as was evident when her large nipples stuck up below the cloth. She had hairy armpits that she seemed proud to display.

As the caravan moved along, Steward could see the blonde head of wife in the back seat of the mini-van. She was clearly the center of the conversation as she bounced around and gestured with her hands. Now and then she touched the shoulders or arms of those around her.

Steward just wanted the portion of the trip over where his wife was riding in the van. But, after a stop at which she didn't make the transfer from one vehicle to the other, he realized she intended to remain in the van all the way to Bishop.

The country turned to a desert of sun-cracked basins rimmed with brown mountains. One of the riders in Steward's car took over the radio and the trip continued with a musical backdrop of pop tunes and ads.

"What have you and Kris done since you got married?" the rider asked as he punched through the radio stations.

"We were working out in West Virginia, in a poverty program," Steward replied, "in the Appalachian Mountains."

"Hillbillies, kind of?"

"Yea, I guess you could say that."

"Far out!"

In a small town, the caravan stopped for gas, creating a sensation for the young teens at a nearby playground.

"Must be a hippie commune," Steward heard one of them say as he stood at the pump.

"Where are you all going?" another one asked.

"Just on down the road," one of the young men that were riding with Steward answered with a flick of his head.

They were posing, Steward thought to himself, but he didn't blame them really. They were just kids showing off.

Out on the road again, in a deserted stretch of desert, the people in the back of the pickup started passing around a joint while they kept looking up and down the road to watch out for cops.

A green sign of the standard type announced the town border and a population of 3192 people. The caravan rolled in with the self-importance of a traveling circus. The fellow with the braided beard and the brunette with the hairy armpits shouted hellos and flashed peace signs at anyone who would look in their direction.

Not all who watched the caravan pass did so with approval, Steward noticed. A gray-haired minister by a church viewed the group with alarm.

Several businessmen in suits, in the parking lot of a restaurant, shook their heads in disapproval.

It was the culture war all over again, Steward thought to himself, deliberately provoked not for the sake of any lofty purpose like the end of the war but simply for the thrill of defiance and shock. There was a self-righteous quality in it, an attitude of contempt of common people that he did not like.

Steward observed to himself that this kind of behavior was exactly what he had thought about during the summer. There was no point to it, so far as he could see. It was just immature.

Further in town, at the high school, it was clear that the posters placed around town earlier in the month had gained some attention. Young people, generally of a college age, buzzed past in their cars to see how the event was shaping up in the high school gym.

"This might be one where we make actually make some money," one of the band members noted.

"Oh, yes!" Kris replied.

The day continued with Steward assisting in the setting up of the sound and light equipment on the high school stage. The equipment included eight shoulder-height amplifiers that had to be moved in with a two-wheel truck. The amplifiers were an integral part of the band philosophy, Dana, the equipment technician, told Steward. "We've got this concept," he explained, "thunder of sound."

The gym was dark and about 200 people were in attendance when the event began. David, the guitarist, began with a spoken hello, then the light show and music started.

Steward, standing at the door, was as much at a loss regarding what to do as he had been in the parking lot that morning. Kris was at the back of the stage assisting in the details of production. The atmosphere of the setting was alien to him. He had never attended dances in high school or college.

When Steward did go inside the dark gym with its flashing lights, he discovered that the music was not just loud, it was almost unbearable. It was so loud that he could not perceive it as a totality. So that was what Dana had meant by a "thunder of sound," Steward thought.

Withdrawing to the door of the gym, where he could hear the whole of the music, Steward listened to get a sense of it beyond the volume. He could hear no melody in the section playing,—just a thumping beat, a throbbing, really. There was no beauty in it, he thought, nothing that uplifted you or carried you off. He listened to several sections, hoping to hear better. For the sake of being in accord with his wife, he did not want to reach a conclusion that the music was bad, but he couldn't find any appealing quality in it.

Later he paced outside. The whole situation was absurd, he said to himself, spending the weekend as a groupie for a bunch of musical hacks who couldn't even produce a melody. He didn't like having to wait around for his wife, especially when she was constantly with other men.

Could it be, he asked himself, that he was just imagining the band was bad out of his annoyance with his wife? It didn't seem possible that that could happen. In any case, he told himself, there would be no need to ever make an issue with her about the talent,—or lack of it—in the band. To do so would be an absolute death-knoll subject, he knew, so far as his relationship with her was concerned. That would be the one issue that she would not abide.

"Isn't this something?" she said when she happened on him later.

"Yes, it sure is," he answered.

"I'm so proud of them."

"How are the ticket sales?"

"Excellent!"

"That's great, Kris. Congratulations."

That night, after the concert, he was hoping to have some intimate time with his wife. But there was a celebration after the concert on the parking lot outside the motel. He never really paired up with her to the extent he wanted. Eventually, he went to bed without her.

Next day everyone went together to the hot springs south of Mount Whitney. With his wife back in the car with him, Steward was glad to have the event almost over. Upon reaching the springs, however, he realized that the intention was for everyone to go in nude. Some of the people were already unclothed. They were passing around joints and bottles of wine as two of the women, including the hairy brunette, stood behind them taking off their clothes.

The brunette was stunning in her nudity, with amazing perky breasts and a great bush of dark pubic hair from her navel to her crotch. The men were regarding her boldly with studied nonchalance as if to say they had left behind the old conceptions of decency, this kind of shock vision of the past was normal for them. Steward realized that the next show horse in the parade would be his wife, whom they were all eager to see, he thought, while pretending minor boredom.

"Kris, I don't like this," Steward said. "Do we really have to do this? The concert is over."

"You don't want me to parade around naked."

"That's a big part of it. Yes."

"No one is even looking, Tom."

"Oh, yes, they are," he said.

"Okay," she said. "Just give me a few minutes. I just want to say goodbye. You can wait here."

He watched as she sashayed to the spring in her cut-off jeans. She said something that brought looks of amusement. David the blond guitarist threw out a joke with a grin. Everyone laughed.

Obviously, thought Steward, that was a comment something like, what are you going to do with a fuddy duddy like that. The thought of it made him angry. The implicit assumption was that there was one cool way to do things and everyone else was square.

Steward didn't show his anger when his wife came back to the car. He was glad to have her back again alone. He kept mulling over what had happened and defending his actions to himself. He may have been right, or at least understandable, he thought, in asserting a normal concern for a husband, but he could imagine what some of them were saying, that he was "an uptight dude" and "had a need to control her." He didn't like being caricatured in that manner. There was no doubt, also, that his wife was willing to entertain any criticism of him that came from her brother and his friends. That was the hardest part of letting go, he thought, seeing her lose the complete respect for him and trust in him that she had had just a year before.

244. O'Rourke hears rumors of an imminent attack on the firebase

In late June of 1970, Spec. 4 Bill O'Rourke began hearing warnings that the units of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) operating in the dense mountain jungle around his current location, at Fire Support Base Ripcord, were planning a full-scale attack on the base itself. With this on his mind, he strolled from his bunker after the evening meal, as he often did, to a secure high point from which he could see the topography that was referred to often in strategic discussions.

"Well, hello, there, doc, how are you tonight?" the boyish-looking officer standing there called out to as the former coxswain turned medic came into view. It was 2nd Lieutenant Kevin Klein, commander of the platoon to which O'Rourke had by this time been assigned for about a month.

"I'm just great, LT," O'Rourke replied in his hardy, upbeat manner. "How are you?"

"Just fine. Just fine."

This manner of address was what the two men,—who were the same age, 25, with similar Midwest backgrounds,— had arrived at in order to observe rank protocol while yet expressing their never formally declared friendship. O'Rourke said "LT" almost like a first name, and the platoon leader said "doc" with the special respect with which all the men in his unit had come to regard the red-haired medic.

"They say a full regiment's out there," the lieutenant remarked as O'Rourke came up beside him within the circular, chest-deep howitzer pad on top the western-most of the three hills of the firebase.

From where they were standing, facing south, at an elevation of 2800 feet above sea level, they could see over two southeastern-flowing rivers, Rao Trang and Khe Doana, which ran almost in parallel about 1500 feet below. Beyond these two rivers, about two miles directly in front of O'Rourke and Klein, was a wooded ridge, called Ko Va La Dut, from which mobile NVA units sometimes fired mortar rounds, moving to a new position before their location could be fixed.

Ko Va La Dut, at about the same elevation as the firebase, extended east to west along the entire east-to-west axis of the firebase, then dipped down about 600 feet and bent around toward the north, to the base of a steep summit called Coc Muen, located west of the firebase. Coc Muen, at an elevation of 4000 feet (1200 feet higher than the firebase), towered over the whole scene. Also in view above the lower section of the ridge on the southwest were three hills,—Hill 902, Hill 805, and Hill 1000,—often referred to in tactical discussions and known to many of the men firsthand as sites of past skirmishes and, in some cases, as places where one or more comrades had lost their lives.

The closest of these hills, Hill 902, located about a mile and half away from the hill on which O'Rourke and Klein stood, had lately been of special interest to their unit,—Charlie Company of the 2d Battalion of the 506th Infantry,— which, at present under the aegis of the 101st Airborne, had responsibility for the firebase as a whole. A plan had been discussed for Charlie Company to strike out at once to occupy Hill 902 if the firebase was attacked. Responsibility for the base would then, in the same general operation, be transferred to Delta Company, who would be flown in from their current field location. With Hill 902 secured, there would be no high ground adjacent to the base from which the NVA could fire. There was also high ground at Coc Muen and Ko Va La Dut, of course, but Coc Muen was regarded as too steep for NVA units to climb with heavy weapons and the Ko Va La Dut ridge was right across from the base's big guns.

Even with Hill 902 secured, Mount Coc Muen would still serve as an observation point for the NVA, and that function of Coc Muen, O'Rourke had heard, had been known and accepted at the time of the initial decision to locate Ripcord on the three hill tops to its east. The site of Ripcord had been selected despite that knowledge, O'Rourke had heard, because it was regarded as the most defensible site from which to monitor NVA movement through the valleys below toward the coast and Hue.

"If we do go to 902, doc, we will be at partial strength," Klein said, nodding toward the thickly wooded slopes. "3rd Platoon is here, but they just got back for rest. They won't go with us. It will be just three platoons: us, the 1st, and the post platoon, the heavy rifle guys. And everybody's down in strength. We're talking 60 guys."

"Think we'll go in with the gunships, sir?" O'Rourke asked the man who had become his usual platoon leader on assignments when he was scheduled outside of the firebase on patrols into the surrounding mountains.

"No, doc. I heard it will be nice and quiet," Klein replied. "We don't want anybody to know we're there. We'll sneak up and dig in. If we use the gunships, that will be at a later time."

The platoon leader, with his shock of sandy brown hair and his clear, often troubled eyes, gave an impression at times of still being the confused college dropout that he described himself as having been when he had set himself adrift, a year or so before, to be picked up by the draft. But there was a suggestion in the eyes, also, of the wish to participate in the Army in a significant manner, commensurate with his ability, that had led him, in the midst of boot camp, to apply for officer candidate school, and to succeed at it, by all accounts, with excellent grades. As a junior officer, and thus a prime target for the other side in battle, he was

statistically most likely of all around him to be killed in action. He knew that, he had once told O'Rourke, but he accepted that fact with the same ambivalent mix of kid set adrift and dedicated soldier that he applied to his entire situation.

"How many is a regiment?" O'Rourke asked, referring back to his friend's earlier comment about supposed enemy strength.

"Depends on their manpower of the moment," Klein replied. "I would say, at least a thousand, maybe two or three."

"Where are they, L.T.?"

"Well, supposedly they are not on Ko Va La Dut," the kid lieutenant replied, "since, as you recall, doc, Delta routed them out of there just about a month ago, in late May. And supposedly they are not by Hill 1000. We've had the Alpha boys out there, clearing out that area, just in the past few weeks. But I wouldn't be surprised if they've made it back into all those areas, including Hill 902, as we've discussed in our meetings."

"If we do go out there, we'll be a little more vulnerable than here. No razor wire, no mines," said a third soldier coming up to them. It was Spec. 4 Mark Chua, a dark-haired radio operator with Asiatic features, a recent report to the second platoon.

"Sappers are the most likely kind of assault, or so I've heard, Mark," O'Rourke replied, referring to the individual NVA soldiers that came in at night in black pajamas carrying bombs in satchels. It was a common NVA tactic.

"Don't forget, though, doc, the sappers almost always have infantry backup," the platoon leader said. "They come in, they sink back, they fire their RPGs and mortars. They're always on the go, never staying in the same place long enough to get targeted."

"They got that figured out alright," Chua agreed.

Later, O'Rourke, Klein, and Chua gathered with their other platoon members in a command bunker for an update by the company CO. The captain, a West Point grad named Weston Morgen was on his second tour of Vietnam and highly regarded by his men.

"Men, these reports are a little more than rumors," the captain said. "They are documents we've captured, talking about an attack in specific terms."

To this the men listened silently.

"Anyone have a specific time?" someone asked.

"The time is imminent," the captain said. "Be ready to go."

The younger men were nervous, O'Rourke observed. Many of them, like himself and Chua, had never experienced battle. He lingered outside the bunker after the meeting, exchanging jokes and putdowns, though he never disrespected or belittled Klein. On this occasion, as on so many

others since O'Rourke had begun in the service, he found he was a source of reassurance to the others. His natural leadership qualities had given him an unbegrudged position of leadership above his rank (which, as a Specialist 4, was equivalent to a Corporal in the traditional ranks). Something about his irreverent manner and easy combination of seriousness and swagger had reincarnated him as the feisty coxswain of his college day while the judgment gained in the years since then had added an appearance of wisdom.

Later, from the top of the hill again, O'Rourke sat with Klein and Chua at an evening meal, watching a giant, dual propped Chinook chopper as it hovered with the equivalent of a truckload of supplies hung from a sling, while the men below it guided it in with hand gestures. The cargo lowered, a group of men set about to unstacking the boxes and moving them to their assigned locations in the carved dirt complex of timber-roofed bunkers, supply depots, fortifications, and corridors lined with sandbags. Beyond the moving men, the lush valleys, etched with waterways gleaming with light, stretched far below toward the pale blue arc of the gulf on the eastern horizon.

Where were the NVA soldiers now, O'Rourke wondered. Were some of them watching from the summit of Coc Muen, a thousand feet above them and already half shadowed with the coming of night? Were they bunkered down in the trees just across the valley from them or just down the hill?

"You got to say one thing for these guys, whatever they do they do it quietly," he said, addressing Mark Chua,"not quite the fanfare of our operation up here."

"Hey, ain't that the truth?" Chua responded. "There might be a couple thousand of them right down in them trees right there. Who would ever know?"

It was a consideration again of the odd juxtaposition of forces: the American soldiers in the firebase having everything the NVA lacked in military force and technology; the NVA having what the Americans lacked, including native son knowledge of the terrain and lightness of footprint, enabling them to move quickly without being detected.

That night, back in the medical battalion bunker, at the base of the middle hill of the firebase, O'Rourke listened in the dark for the nightly popping sound of the Echo Company mortars, six tubes six miles to the north at Firebase O'Reilly, three tubes on the middle hill of Ripcord. To keep the NVA soldiers off guard, the shells were fired on an intermittent basis toward varying targets in the dense jungle all around the firebase.

O'Rourke, during his two months at the firebase, had developed a spatial sense of the configuration of American units providing an extended guard around Ripcord. In addition to Bravo Company of his

own 506th, which was set up in Firebase O'Reilly, there were two platoons of Delta Company (also part of the 506th) operating in the vicinity of Hill 805 and Hill 1000, while eight six-man "long patrols" of the 2d platoon rangers of Company L, 75th Infantry, were camped somewhere in the "boonies" at the very moment, maintaining their continuous reconnaissance sweeps of the jungle areas around the firebase.

O'Rourke was glad for the presence of his fellow soldiers in those areas and for the feeling of security their vigilance gave to the men in the firebase, including himself.

Just about all the soldiers in the infantry companies had their turns in the boonies, however. Since the initial assault for the ground, the firebase been a place to come back to and relax in, in relative safety, though the late rumor of an attack had to some extent diminished that feeling.

Sometimes late at night O'Rourke also thought about Lance LaMotte, the kid from New Jersey who had died after O'Rourke's trek with him down the dark jungle road to the landing zone where Lamotte had died. O'Rourke thought of how he had reassured him before putting him on the stretcher and of how he had told the boy that everything would be alright. The youthful face came back to him, the boyish eyes looking at him to see if that statement that everything would be okay was a mere attempt at comfort and not the actual fact of the situation.

Sometimes, thinking of that, O'Rourke realized that Lance LaMotte had taught him the true meaning of the phrase, "the last full measure of devotion." Because of that, O'Rourke observed to himself, he understood on a more real basis the significance of what Gen. Jake Landers had said in his speech about the responsibility of carrying forward the cause that other soldiers had died for.

"There are still the old complexities about this war," he said to himself on this particular evening, forming words that he intended to put in a letter to Barb Carpenter. "But the war is something on the personal level of men making great sacrifices and seeing friends die that it can never be when considering it on a more abstract basis."

Here, too, when the former coxswain thought about Barb Carpenter, a memory of eyes came back to him, in this case, the clear brown eyes he had stared into from several inches away during his hours of pillow talk with the girlish nurse from Minnesota on his visit to see her in Binh Thuy.

He also thought about those same eyes as he had seen them in China Beach, on his and Barb's evening walk on the beach when they had talked about maybe winding up in the same area around Lake Pepin after completing their service in the war and returning to the States.

"In any case, Barbie, " he went on, continuing in the letter to her in

his mind, “I feel I have something here I’ve never had before, a sense of purpose, a sense of being needed. It’s a strong, pure feeling, and I feel so glad to have been able to feel it.”

[Chapter 244 notes]

245. O'Rourke moves out with Charlie Company to secure Hill 902

At 7:05 A.M. on July 1, 1970, Spec. 4 Bill O'Rourke awoke to the sound of an explosion hitting somewhere near him on the westernmost of the three side-by-side hills of Fire Support Base Ripcord, where he had spent the night in a bunker with members of the Charlie Company second platoon. His first thought was that this was maybe the start of the full-scale attack on the firebase that had been rumored would occur.

In quick succession, four other explosions followed. Following the explosions, there was silence again.

"Those were mortars," someone said. "Five at a time.

"Five, and then they move before we can focus in."

Outside the base was busy as the crews on the five howitzer pads targeted their sleek cannons on Hill 1000, three miles away, where the mortars had come from.

O'Rourke looked and saw that the deep valleys below were shrouded in fog. Only the hilltops could be seen and the craggy summit of Coc Muen, where everyone knew there were NVA observers monitoring the effect of the shells on the firebase.

Another explosion came, then four more. These were from the ridge to the south, Ko Va La Dut. The former coxswain, now outside his bunker, behind an embankment of bulldozed dirt and logs, watched as the soldiers on a nearby pad turned their howitzer in that direction.

Some manned the gun while others brought out the shells from where they were stored under the row of sandbags that lined the four-foot-deep depression in which the gun was mounted. Each time the howitzer fired, they all turned and muffled their ears.

"Looks like they're going to be peppering us all day," said the platoon leader, Kevin Klein, coming up next to O'Rourke.

"You hear any word about '902', sir?"

O'Rourke was referring to Hill 902, both of the men knew, the hill recently discussed that the Charlie Company would maybe occupy if an attack on the firebase materialized.

"Nothing so far."

Another round of explosions came, this time a more intensive mix of fire from several mortars and from what people were saying by the flatter explosions were recoilless rifles.

"Medic up!" came a cry from across the hill.

To that cry, O'Rourke was alert at once. He scanned the carved dirt complex of bunkers, artillery pads, and trenches, trying to determine where the cry for help had come from.

"Rorkie, here! Rorkie, here!" someone shouted amidst the sound of exploding shells.

It was Spec. 4 Mark Chua, the radioman, O'Rourke knew at once. He saw him in the open door of the communications hut, a sandbag-lined tin building below a needle-like metal tower supported by guy wires. Chua was leaning over a man writhing on the ground, as if to hold the man down or apply pressure to a wound.

O'Rourke tossed his pack on his shoulders and sprinted across the open ground toward the hut. As he ran, he repeated to himself the three things he would have to do quickly: "stop the bleeding, maintain the airway, prevent shock." He had repeated this refrain many times so as not to forget it in a moment of crisis.

A shell exploding just to the right of the trench scattered mud on O'Rourke as he passed but the event happened and was already in the past before he took cognizance.

Scrambling up from the trench, O'Rourke saw that the reason Chua was holding the other man down was to prevent loss of blood from the left ankle. The left foot was gone with a bone sticking out from the shredded flesh and blood oozing out below Chua's clenched hands.

The man was holding his chest, however, ignoring the severed foot. He was a quiet young man O'Rourke had noticed before though he had never spoken to him at any length.

"Said he got hit in the chest," Chua said.

O'Rourke tore the shirt apart in that area and below the man's flak jacket found a shard of hot metal stuck in the man's chest below the right nipple. He pulled the shard out with a forceps and threw it aside.

"It's superficial, Dwayne. Superficial. You're not going to die. Settle back, man, we got to tend to the foot."

"Is the foot there, doc?"

"No, it's gone, man. Sorry."

The area of the ankle was a mess of ripped flesh, mud, and tiny shards of metal, but O'Rourke found the slippery tube of the femoral artery beside the shattered fibula and applied a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood.

The firebase had erupted with defensive activity again, with the artillery batteries on all of the three hilltops aiming shells toward the Ko Va La Dut Ridge, a half mile to the south, on the other side of the river of fog between the two locations.

Four American fighter bombers appeared overhead and dove straight toward the same ridge, laying down an area of napalm fire that flowed in four overlapping waves along the slope of the hill.

Following that, the scene became quiet. O'Rourke set up an IV line into the wounded man's forearm, handed Chua the can to hold overhead, and administered a shot of morphine through the secondary port of the IV line. With Chua's help, O'Rourke placed the wounded man on a

stretcher, then he rode with the wounded man in a jeep to the clinic in the saddle of land between the first and second hills of the firebase.

The clinic was a scene of chaos as corpsmen attended to wounded men lying in two rows of beds. Thus far in the day's action, no one had died, though some were in need of the next phase of care. A medivac was on the way, someone said, and would arrive at any minute.

O'Rourke continued with the man he had begun with, debriding the wound, as he waited for a jeep to return to the top of the hill. The man's name was Dwayne Wentworth, according to his tag. For this young soldier, O'Rourke thought, the war was over. He would face a future without one foot, but the rest of his body was intact. He still had a life and his good looks.

"Bill, looks like Charley is going up to '902,'" the medical CO said to O'Rourke as the former coxswain was occupied in these thoughts. "You might as well wait here. They're going to form up down here in the flats by the mess hall."

"Yes, sir."

The flats were a naturally protected area, out of sight of Coc Muen and the high points from which NVA fire was coming. There was an exit from the base to the north where the slopes inclined downward.

Within a half hour, the Charlie Company units were coming down from the western hilltop of the base as Delta Company units, with shouting and laughter, ascended the hill to take over the hilltop.

On the flat, where the Charley Company soldiers were forming for the planned assault, there were about 60 men in total, O'Rourke observed, as Lt. Klein had predicted the previous evening. They were divided into three units consisting of the first platoon, over by the mess hall, the second platoon, closer to the medical clinic, and the headquarters group where stood the company CO and his adjutant. O'Rourke stood near Klein and the radioman, Mark Chua, at the front of the second platoon.

The two platoons, at low strength from the normal 41 men, each had about 25 men, with most of them carrying M16 rifles. A dozen or so men, divided between the three units, carried M79 grenade launchers. A half dozen or so had 7.62mm machine guns and a few carried tube-like light anti- tank rocket weapons called LAWs. In the headquarters group, there were three teams of two men carrying 81mm mortars.

"We are going around quietly, as you probably heard," the CO, Capt. Jack Schneider, told the group. "We are going by the low side of the hill to avoid detection. No shooting, no shouting. And no gun ships, if possible, though we have them ready as you can see."

O'Rourke saw that the AH-1G Cobra choppers, with their distinctive narrow fuselages, were indeed ready, packed to the hilt with bow-

mounted mini-guns, grenade launchers, and wing-mounted, high-rate machine guns. They were parked in a chopped off step of the hill, below a man-made cliff that provided protection from the southern and western highlands where the NVA mobile units usually fired.

"Lord, as we go forward into battle, grant us courage and purity of heart," the base chaplain said. "Lord, protect us in adversity, protect our comrades."

Soon the units were filing out silently in three groups along the known trails below the northern perimeter of the firebase. The trails were narrow and shrouded by dense foliage on all sides.

Not easy to be seen, thought O'Rourke, but the NVA soldiers, if present, would not be easily seen, either. They were not likely to be in this location, however. All accounts had placed them in the areas on the other side of the firebase.

Combat or not, it was a difficult trek along the rugged, up-and-down trails. It was by this time mid-morning. A merciless sun had risen into the cloudless sky. Wisps of vapor rose from pools of water in the sweltering vegetation.

At the base of Hill 902, an hour later, the soldiers of the second platoon stood with rifles cradled in both arms behind their back to lift up the bottom of their heavy packs, providing a moment of relief from the weight of the load.

Lt. Klein, standing in front of them, was soaked with sweat, as he considered the steep slopes ahead of them to the summit of the hill. "It's a thousand foot climb," he said. "We're going have to fan out for safety. Make your way as best we can. Faster we get there, better off we'll be, when we set up a perimeter."

"Where are the other guys?" asked someone.

"First platoon is going up the northwest side. Post platoon a little further south."

"Big party at the top," said someone.

"You got that right," said someone else.

"If we encounter enemy fire, any kind of fire, hunker down," Klein replied. "Wait for an order as to what to do."

"How about some guy is ten feet away ready to shoot you?"

"In that case, shoot first."

Soon they were struggling quietly up the slope, which was so steep that it was necessary, at some points, to crawl on all fours, taking care to maintain footholds to prevent slipping back. Everyone was panting and drenched in sweat. The pairs of men with the heavy mortars were lifting them up several feet at a time.

An hour later, the second platoon found the first platoon already on the summit of the hill, though from appearances the winners of the climb

had just arrived.

"Here come the girls," they shouted down at them. "Hope you didn't mess up your hair."

On top of the hill, there was just a few minutes for more exchanges of jokes and put-downs before the company, all present by this time with the arrival of the post platoon, set to work putting into place the two immediate requirements of a defensive perimeter and a landing zone for choppers from the firebase to bring in supplies.

"We'll put the perimeter along this line here, on the high points above the steepest slopes," said Capt. Schneider, laying a map on the ground before the three platoon leaders and several of the non-com officers, including O'Rourke. "We'll put the landing zone back on the north face, out of view of Coc Muen and the ridge."

The captain knew what he was doing, obviously, O'Rourke decided in his mind. He was a West Point graduate and a veteran of several operations of a similar nature in the A Shau Valley.

Over in the distance, as the men huddled over the map, the triple-domed ant-hill of the firebase could be seen. It was quiet at the moment. A Chinook chopper hovered above the middle hill. Soon, however, a barrage of mortar shells hit the side of the middle hill and the howitzers on the western hill boomed in response.

There was soon more sweat in the hot sun on top of Hill 902 as the men assigned to the perimeter in groups of two's or three's dug foxholes and set up defenses. O'Rourke, with no medical tasks for the time being, wielded an axe in the area being cleared for a landing zone. The felled timbers were dragged off to one side and pulled off later for use in fortifications.

Finally, near sundown, the area was secured, with a landing zone ready for bringing in bigger guns and supplies, or for landing of a medivac, if needed. The company took a break to bring out their "C-rat" canned meals.

The narrow valley below, stretching toward the distant gulf, was again a study in contrast as sporadic shelling and replies of howitzers from the hilltops of the firebase continued amidst the placid scene of forests and waterways brilliant with green and blue hues.

Just then, as O'Rourke sat with the radioman Spec. 4 Mark Chua, just a rock's throw away from the platoon leader Klein and CO Jack Schneider, the newly secured hilltop was first called into action.

The action occurred when the leader of the first platoon noticed NVA units with heavy machine guns in the valley below near a bunker shielded by a cliff from the view of the soldiers in the firebase but clearly in view from the new vantage point atop Hill 902.

Capt. Schneider called in to talk to the Lt. Colonel in command of the

firebase. “I think we could hit those guns, sir,” he could be heard saying as he leaned into the radio, frowning. “On the negative side, we would disclose our position.”

There was a delay, then the captain nodded. “Klein, come here, the colonel wants artillery bearings.”

A few minutes later, the howitzers on the hilltop boomed and the shells landed near but not on the target scattering the NVA troops back into a bunker.

The captain talked into the radio again. “Okay, sir,” he said, “we’ll let you know the result.”

“Says our whereabouts are probably known already,” the captain said to his platoon leaders. “Enemy is not concerned with us up here, for the time being. We should take them out and fall back in silence.”

The captain called for several soldiers to position with the LAWs. They discharged as everyone watched. The rockets sped to their mark. There was a flash above the bunkers and then a pause after which the sound of the blast echoed back through the narrow valley.

[Chapter 245 notes]

246. O'Rourke scurries to save lives as Hill 902 is attacked

After only about five hours of sleep, on his first night on Hill 902, Spec. 4 Bill O'Rourke woke to the sound of explosions and weapons fire all around him. After an instant of confusion, he recalled that he was in an open fox hole, unprotected by the roof of a bunker. Glancing at his watch he saw it was 3:05 A.M.

Within a few minutes, he was within a world more terrifying than he had imagined a battle would be (despite his previous efforts to prepare himself in his mind), as the pace of the explosions increased, creating a staccato effect of grotesque figures of light within a dark chaos of shouting and rapid fire.

Jack Schneider, the company CO, was hunched down in a foxhole only about 20 feet from O'Rourke, leaning into a radio as he attempted to talk to the leader of the first platoon. Lt. Kevin Klein, the leader of the second platoon, was in the same long command foxhole about six feet on the other side of the captain.

"You see movement, you see enemy troops?" Schneider was saying into the phone.

The captain was trying to ascertain the source of the explosions, O'Rourke gathered from what had been explained to him before of armaments they might encounter. If the explosions were from mortars, the enemy was at some distance. If the explosions were from grenade launchers, the fire of them would be at close enough range to be seen. If there was movement, meaning sappers carrying satchel charges, or worse, infantry with guns, then the perimeter of the base was in danger of being compromised. The enemy was close at hand.

"Lt. Klein," the captain said. "If there's movement, we have to illuminate at once."

The platoon leader nodded.

There was a sudden explosion then, with a blast strong enough to throw O'Rourke to the side. He was astounded by the force of the impact. He had never before been so close to an explosion. He looked and saw that the captain and platoon leader were sprawled on their backs. The captain was motionless, his head thrown back and his helmet behind him. The platoon leader was squirming.

O'Rourke went across at once, med pack in hand, as another shell hit behind him. He discerned immediately that Captain Schneider was dead. His face, ripped shirt, and vest shield were riddled with mud, blood, and shrapnel. Klein, beside him, had no obvious external wounds, but he was in a state of shock or perhaps just of confusion. He stared at O'Rourke with an uncomprehending gaze.

The radioman, Mark Chua, coming from the other direction, was soon beside O'Rourke and the two felled men, as the muffled sound of a voice,

broken by static, came from the field phone the captain had been talking into just as he was hit.

"Jack, are you there?" the voice said.

"Capt. Schneider is dead," O'Rourke announced on the phone. "He said, if enemies are sighted, shoot up flares at once."

As was always the case with him, O'Rourke found that his exercise of leadership was immediately accepted. There was an instantaneous response as flares shot into the sky on the northern area of the base lit up the sky like the Fourth of July.

For the first time, the former coxswain saw NVA soldiers, a group of a half dozen or so sappers crouching over as they moved lightly just outside the northern perimeter of the base within the light of the exploding flares.

The word to send up the flares was being passed along, apparently, as a cascade of flares shot up along the several hundred yard length of the camp perimeter.

"We've got wounded. Repeat. Wounded. Need a medic at once," the same person on the radio said.

By his voice, O'Rourke identified the speaker on the phone as the leader of the first squad in Klein's second platoon, which he knew was positioned on the far southern end of the base perimeter. He glanced across the top of the hill, in that direction, where he knew the squad was deployed in a string of foxholes, each with three men. They were receiving fire, he saw, and responding with a volley of fire directed at a position beyond the ridge out of sight.

"Guys, we will need to form an inner perimeter here for entry of the medivac," O'Rourke heard someone say. He turned around and, to his surprise, saw it was Lt. Klein, regained of his senses and once more in command.

The overall scene on the hill was still an eerie mix of flickering fire, exploding shells, bursts of gunfire, and shouting, now with voices of Vietnamese soldiers reminding that the base perimeter had indeed been compromised. Over on the southern side of the hilltop, where movement had first been detected, the brief illumination of a flare revealed soldiers in hand to hand combat.

Without waiting for further developments, Bill O'Rourke swung his medical pack over his shoulder and, from a crouch, appraised the pattern of gunfire, to the extent it could be determined, between him and the location of the squad that had called for assistance.

"Mark, LT, I'm heading out," he said.

Leaving the crouch like a sprinter in a dash, he headed out along a crevice that, the evening before, he had determined would be one of the possible protected routes between points of fire if the base came under

attack.

"Lord, help me now," he prayed as he ran.

To be able to move faster, he had left his rifle behind and, for a moment, he noted that his movement thus far was undetected. But a spray of bullets near him soon alerted him that at least one of the NVA soldiers had seen him.

Reaching the first of the first squad foxholes, the former coxswain found there a tense scene as one soldier with an M16 fired down the hill toward the dark trees while another attended to a man with a gashed open arm from which blood was pulsing out.

It was a situation of a kind O'Rourke had encountered just the day before, with the urgent need to stop the flow of blood. He managed to do that, by locating and tying off the artery in the arm as he had done the day before for the leg.

"You okay, man?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so, doc. Yes."

"Okay, listen, we're going to crawl out of here together. Up the hill for a medivac."

"Okay. I'm praying, man."

"The tie should hold. If it doesn't, I'll fix it."

"Okay," the soldier again.

O'Rourke didn't say what he was thinking, that the wounded soldier was in danger of fainting from loss of blood. If that happened, he would carry him, he thought to himself.

There was intensified fire, by this time, from the trees below, he noticed. A flare went up, providing another starkly shadowed illumination of chaotic scene of battle. He waited for the light of the flare to die out and moved out with the wounded soldier for the hundred yard crawl to the center position of the hill.

"Doc, we got another here," the former coxswain heard as he headed out.

"I'll be right back," he answered.

O'Rourke assisted the man to the center of the hill and observed a medivac zigzagging in to elude hostile fire.

"LT, I'm out again," he yelled to Klein as he dashed into the darkness, heading toward the same general location, where he already knew the second wounded soldier to be, but by another route figured out the previous evening.

This time, as the former coxswain came near the string of foxholes, amidst exploding shells and sprays of fire, he felt a sharp jolt to his left leg and went down in a tumble. He looked and saw a piece of flesh had been ripped off from the lower thigh as with a butcher knife. He huddled in the dark in a natural depression of the ground and with a tourniquet

managed to stop the flow of blood.

He tried to raise himself up but, unable to place his weight on the injured leg, he continued toward the foxhole by dragging himself along on the ground.

Reaching the second foxhole, he found a man on his stomach with a hole in his back in the midst of a shirt drenched with blood. The man was dead, he had been dead since the moment of impact, he thought. A second man was wounded through the shoulder. O'Rourke applied a bandage, set up a line, and set it up on the first man's rifle. A third man, watching over the foxhole for approach of enemy soldiers, now and then turned to O'Rourke as the medic worked.

"Think he'll make it, doc?" he asked.

"Yes, he could. If we get this battle under control, he needs to be carried right away to the landing zone."

"Looks like you got hit yourself."

"I'm doing fine."

"Hate to put this on you, doc," the soldier said, "but the guys over there have been yelling for help."

O'Rourke looked over to a foxhole further in the trees in the darkness. In the flickering light of explosions, he saw a man gesturing for him to approach.

At once the former coxswain set out into the open area between the foxholes where it was apparent to everyone there were occasional sprays of fire from the NVA positions just down the hill. He had gone only ten feet or so before he was hit again, this time in the shoulder. He reeled back and observed the wound. It was bleeding but not pulsing. He crawled ahead, ignoring the wounded leg. It had begun to throb with pain.

Inside the foxhole, O'Rourke found another man with a flow of blood that he knew had to stop.

He struggled to work as he fought against the throbbing pain in his leg and the steady seepage of blood from his left shoulder. Several times he got a got hold of the slippery artery, which kept retreating back into the flesh. At last he was able to hold it and tie off. With trembling fingers, he set up another IV with morphine and looked ahead to further up the bullet-riddle field of battle where he saw another man gesturing toward him from a foxhole within the ghostlike figures of trees with splintered trunks and shredded leaves.

O'Rourke snugged up the bandage on his left shoulder and continued on toward the next place where he was needed, wriggling alone on his right side to avoid dragging across the wounded shoulder. Reaching an area of rock, about six feet across, he paused for a moment to assess how best to get across it without further damage to himself, then went on,

lifting himself up on each movement forward.

He realized that his own life was in jeopardy. He had lost a great deal of blood. He wanted to just lie down for a moment but he knew that would perhaps be a fatal mistake.

“Lord, help me,” he said aloud, but in the cacophony of explosions and gunfire, his voice was audible only to himself.

Meanwhile, a row of closely positioned lights appeared in the sky just to the south of the hill as a Apache gunship zoomed in with miniguns firing at the side of the hill. Two squads from the first platoon appeared on the scene, pushing back the last of the NVA soldiers that had managed to enter the perimeter of the camp.

O’Rourke, by this time, had made it to his fourth wounded soldier of the furious battle nearing completion. Dulled by loss of blood, he managed to tourniquet and bandage the wound before lowering himself to the ground.

Lying next to this last man O’Rourke assisted was a fallen young soldier he recognized, with the face of death turned toward him as he struggled to complete his task.

The former coxswain observed to himself that he maybe now he would die, also. If that was the case, he observed to himself, there were things he should do, but he lost consciousness before he was able to complete this thought.

[Chapter 246 notes]

247. Convalescent O'Rourke gets visited by Brown, Forland, and Barbie Carpenter

Spec. 4 Bill O'Rourke woke up an indeterminate time later on a bed with a mattress. After a moment of confusion, he ascertained that he was in the 85th Evacuation Hospital in Phu Bai, a facility he had visited for a training session before leaving for Fire Support Base Ripcord two months before. His wounded left shoulder was cleanly and securely bandaged, he observed. His right leg, from the thigh down, was in a plaster cast elevated on a sling hung from a metal stand.

Quickly, he put together the facts of his situation. He was alive, obviously, and, based on his own medical knowledge, to the extent he could apply it to his own condition, he had a good chance of staying alive, for the time being. He had survived past the point where his life had been in immediate jeopardy. He had been removed from the battlefield, obviously, but what about those that he had helped on the battlefield? Had they also survived? What about the battle itself, on Hill 902? What about those who had been left behind? What about the larger battle at FSB Ripcord, the assault that by all appearances had just begun?

Seeing him awake, the nurse on duty came in at once to inform him of his status. She was a bright-eyed girl,—like O'Rourke's own Barbara Carpenter, he thought,—with a soft, pensive expression that conveyed devotion to her task.

"Mr. O'Rourke, you're mending fine," she said. "The fibula in your leg was fractured. You underwent surgery and it was repaired. That's how come you have the cast and sling. Your shoulder muscles are badly torn. You will wind up scarred but you will regain function."

"Well, thanks for all you've done, ma'am."

"You know the words, I imagine, being part of our team."

"Yes, I do."

"There are several men here who keep asking about you. They say you saved their lives."

"How many are there, ma'am?"

"As I remember, four."

O'Rourke settled back. "I'm so glad to hear that," he said.

"Maybe later you can have a little reunion."

"I'd love that. Thank you, Lieutenant."

The nurse was leaving the room when O'Rourke called after her. "Ma'am, did you hear any more about the battle?" he asked.

"I heard the hill was deserted. Everyone was flown out. Five men were killed in action. We have a dozen here that were wounded. Another medic was flown in after you were flown out."

Later that day, O'Rourke was surprised to see Captain Ken Forland, the pilot, looking tan and jaunty in his khaki pants and short sleeved

shirt, shaking his head with mock disgust as he came in the room.

"El Capitan," said O'Rourke when he saw him.

"Now some people will do anything to get out of the action," Forland said with a grin.

"Yes, sir," said O'Rourke. "Don't think it was easy to shoot my own leg. And the shoulder was harder, let me tell you."

Forland explained he was due to fly out in an hour or two, so could only stay a short time. He gave O'Rourke some paperback novels and a brief update of his own situation. After working with the headquarters group in Saigon (as Ho Chi Minh City was then known), he had gone back to his old delivery route up and down the coast, he said.

"Say, speaking of that, you still tight with that little lady down there at Binh Thuy?"

"Yes, sir. For sure."

"You written her about this situation here?"

"Not yet. I plan to."

"What was her name anyhow?"

"Barbara Carpenter."

"Nurse, ain't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, you better write her now. She'll be real concerned."

"I plan to. Thank you, el Capitan."

Later when O'Rourke met up with his fellow soldiers from the Charlie Company second platoon, he heard the sad news that the first platoon medic, a new arrival he had hardly had time to talk to before the ascent of Hill 902, had been killed in action. A Mennonite conscientious objector from Ohio, he had been swiped across the midsection with a spray of machine gun fire, O'Rourke was told. He had died where he had fallen within a few minutes.

O'Rourke noticed, also, the obvious gain in stature he had earned from his action on the battlefield, not just from the four men who owed their lives to his efforts but from everyone who had heard the account of his gallantry.

Bit by bit, news came in from Ripcord, where the battle continued between the 101st Airborne Division and the NVA forces attacking the base. Bravo Company of O'Rourke's own Second Battalion of the 506th Infantry had taken control of the firebase, he heard on July 9 (a week after being wounded). Delta and Charlie companies had been inserted in the area of Hill 1000, where they had conducted two assaults.

There was little to do in the hospital except read the books that O'Rourke's pilot friend Ken Forland had brought him. Then, after about eight days of convalescence, O'Rourke was surprised to see Forland peering into his door again.

"El Capitan, I hope you brought more of the damn books," O'Rourke said. "These are thoroughly done. I'm into them my second time."

"Brought something else you might find of interest," the pilot replied with a grin, pointing with his head behind him.

O'Rourke watched as a person came into the light of the window. It was Barbara Carpenter, looking fresh and pretty in an olive drab skirt and jacket of the sleek style, complete with garrison cap, that comprised the official dress uniform of the Women's Army Nurse Corps. O'Rourke had never before seen any uniform on Carpenter except for the usual fatigues and baseball cap that the nurses wore in the field. Obviously, she had made a special effort to spruce up for the occasion. She was even wearing earrings, he noticed, when she continued into the room.

She came in beaming. "William O'Rourke, I came all this way for one purpose, to scold you for not writing."

"I was meaning to, Lt. Carpenter."

"How come you didn't?"

"'Current situation is a little hard to describe."

"Well, I guess I will let you two to your private discussions," Ken Forland said. "I'll get you those books sometime soon, Rorkie."

"I was just kidding, you know, sir."

"I know that."

"Thanks a million, Captain," said O'Rourke.

"Yes, thank you," Barbie added. "You're a sweetheart, Ken."

"Glad to be of service."

The girlish nurse from Minnesota came forward then and settled into O'Rourke's arms for a long hug. She took both his hands.

"They're telling me you're a hero," she said softly, meeting his eyes.

"Barbie, one thing I can tell you, that hilltop was full of heroes. There were heroes all around. What I did gained notice because it saved some lives."

"I heard about that, too."

"There were many valiant soldiers who did their job."

"Yes, I know. I treat them all the time."

Barbie set about at once to do everything possible for O'Rourke in the three-day stay she had been granted. She bought magazines, books, and fruit, and placed fresh flowers by his bed every day. She also obtained permission to push him out in a wheelchair for a visit to the Phu Bai shopping area and a restaurant where they sat together recalling old times and renewing their stories of a mutual future in which they somehow lived in the same place and shared the same experiences, though neither of them took that further toward what that meant in terms of engagement and marriage. That was a subject they had both carefully avoided, and they continued to for the duration of her visit.

Only on the last evening, seated at a restaurant in Phu Bai, with O'Rourke in a wheelchair, did they venture obliquely on the subject.

"Barbie, I want you to know, I feel sure we will find some way to be together after this war, some official way," the former coxswain said as he looked out to the waves crashing in, as he had watched them in California. "Some formal way."

"Tongue gets tied up a little, ey, Mr. O'Rourke?"

"Yes, sometimes the ol' blarney fails me."

"We should do a real R&R together sometime. Some exciting place like Hong Kong. Some of our girls just did that."

"Wouldn't that be exciting?"

"We should look into it."

"I will."

O'Rourke did begin to look into making those kind of arrangements, by talking to various people he came into contact with in the hospital, in the weeks after Barbie left.

The days passed one by one, with scattered news coming back from Ripcord where the battle continued just 20 miles away from the placid scene in which O'Rourke now spent his time. He was trying to negotiate the use of crutches, which, in his case, was more complicated because of his wounded shoulder.

He was surprised about this same time, on July 24, three weeks after being wounded, to receive a visit from his old friend from Chu Lai, Capt. Orin Brown. The always enthusiastic U.S. Air Force intelligence officer, looking like a compact college wrestler in his khaki slacks and short sleeved shirt, appeared at the door with a wave.

"Rorkie, I wasn't aware you were here until this morning," he said, smiling. "I was down in Da Nang at a big meeting we had down there."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, Captain," O'Rourke replied.

"Lots to talk over these days, with the handover going on to the Vietnamese, the so-called 'Vietnamization,' I know you've heard an earful about that."

"How is that going, sir?"

"Oh, it's going, it's going."

"Have you heard any news about Ripcord?"

The wide-faced Mormon, with his buzz cut hair, shorn to the point of looking bald, nodded thoughtfully at that. "Well, on that point, Bill, I'm afraid the news is almost all bad, as of late."

"How's that?"

"Ripcord was evacuated, just yesterday. Got everyone out of there under enemy fire. Three KIAs. Dozens of wounded. From what I heard, it was pretty bad."

O'Rourke frowned. An outright evacuation of the firebase, after all

the efforts to establish and maintain it, seemed incomprehensible to him, from what he knew of the physical layout of the firebase, with its rings of mines and razor wire all around and the ability of directing artillery fire from the hilltops down to those peripheral areas, in the unlikely case of a direct attack.

"How could that happen, sir?" he said.

"Well, first thing that happened, as I heard it," Orin replied, "we had some guys operating in the hills west of the firebase there. I believe it was some of your guys,—the 506th, the Currahees,—and they came across a comm line that had been strung along a trail there, NVA line they were able to tap into, and interpret the messages back and forth, and what they found was there was a whole NVA division, not just a regiment, mind you, preparing for an assault on Ripcord. The 324B Division using their 29th Regiment, one of their most crack units. Close to 10,000 men. This was just three days ago, mind you, things happened fast.

"Then the second thing that happened, the firebase came under a tremendous barrage from all of the surrounding hills. Apparently, they had been sneaking into position from the north and south as our guys operated in the western hills, or they had been infiltrating the area gradually, hunkering down in their bunkers... Tremendous barrage... We're talking about 10,000 troops, mind you, against those our 1200 at the firebase. Supplies were running low and some Chinooks that went out came under direct fire. One of the Chinooks went down. Tremendous explosion on one of the hilltops with howitzers. Took five of the six howitzers out. Lot of guys wounded. Medivacs were having trouble getting in."

"Doesn't sound too good, sir," O'Rourke replied. "They couldn't send some reinforcements out?"

"Well, that was another part of it, as I heard," the intelligence officer answered. "Let me tell you, doc, this went to the highest level, as I heard. We're talking about the Oval Office in Washington D.C. With the war winding down, could we afford another Hamburger Hill, another battle on TV when public support for the war is sinking lower every day?"

"They couldn't afford the publicity, you're saying?" the former coxswain responded.

This publicity side of the war was something he had not thought about much, despite the extent to which he had considered most other aspects of the war in great detail.

"Precisely. The idea was, as I understand, with this Vietnamization going on, and believe me, from my meeting I mentioned, this is a big deal, with us telling the American public the war is being handed over, could we have a battle with American men dying on TV for what looks

like an anthill in the jungle?"

"So they just left it behind, sir?" O'Rourke said.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Believe me, Bill, as you know, this is one hell of a complicated war. It is a war here and it is a war at home, as you know, a political and cultural war for the support of the American people, and with a lot of people out there against the war, including some of your old friends and mine, like our mutual friend, Tom Steward."

O'Rourke thought about that a great deal after Orin Brown left with a promise to return for more visits. The horrible scene of the battlefield came back to him; in particular, the felled soldier that had been sprawled next to him in the foxhole, lifeless face illumined by flares, as he had worked with trembling hands to stop the loss of blood from the other soldier whom his efforts had saved.

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PART IV: LOOKING FOR AMERICA

248. Steward's leave Sunland for Tom's new job in Winslow, Arizona

The day dawned bright and sunny on Friday, July 28, 1970, as Thomas and Kris Steward prepared to leave Sunland, California, for their new home in Winslow, Arizona. Crossing from the guest house to the kitchen of Don and Audrey Andrews' poolside home, Thomas noticed the lovely sunlight on the open, rolling landscape of the coastal hills above the house. A good day for traveling, he thought. How glad he was, he said to himself, that his and his wife's new situation on the Arizona mesa would bring more of such sunlight and openness, and less of the darkness and cramped in feeling that he and she had experienced in their previous situation in West Virginia.

His wife was already in the kitchen, he saw as he crossed between the pool and the house. She was dressed in cut-off jeans and a sleeveless blue top, her lovely blonde hair freshly curled, her shoulders, arms, and legs perfectly tanned, her body lean and shapely,—the "California Girl" incarnate, he thought to himself,—and she was clearly in an animated mood, laughing and gesturing with both hands, as she talked with the red- headed Audrey Andrews and the long-haired, long-legged daughters, Lynda and Sandra.

Don Andrews, passing through the living room in his usual T-shirt and underpants, with unlit cigar in hand, smiled and waved at Steward from the other side of the large windows that faced the pool.

"Big day, buddy! Big day!" the artist said in his typical ebullient manner as he came up the two steps from the living room into the kitchen just as Steward entered the kitchen from the door that faced the pool. "You must be excited!"

"Yes, I am," replied Steward softly, never able, by temperament, to quite take up the older man's expansive moods, at least, in the external manifestation, though inside he felt expansive, indeed, with a new chapter of life ahead of him.

"Time for the final coffee, I guess."

"Yes, I guess it is."

"Well, you come in and have a seat here," Audrey chimed in her pleasant New Zealand accent.

"Yes, come in, Thomas," said the diminutive Sandra. "We all feel so sad!"

Despite the sentiment expressed, she smiled, her big dimples showing in each cheek, while at the same time she went into a mock pout as if about to cry.

"We will certainly miss you. That's for sure," said Audrey. "Well, you're off to a great place, a great place! I envy you, bud," Don said as they sat around the table. "They got some incredible sunsets out in that

country, let me tell you. Unbelievable clouds. A mile high, they say. I remember from when Audrey and I were in Taos. Wasn't that fantastic, Audrey?"

"Yes, it was!"

"You might just have a couple of visitors."

"Or three!" said Lynn, who was standing arm in arm with her still "best friend" Kris.

"Or four!" said Sandra.

"Well, we would like to see you all," Steward answered.

"You had better come visit!" said Kris. "If you don't, we're going to be mad!"

In the driveway later, there was an exchange of thank you's as the Steward's got in their car. From the Steward side, thank you for the six weeks they had spent in a lovely home, in a lovely place, among old friends. The unspoken part of it was, thank you for the respite from the financial and emotional strain they had endured in their first year of marriage. From the Andrews side, there was a thank you for the recent paint job Tom had completed in the living room. True to his promise, he had spent his last two weeks at that, and the result had exceeded everyone's expectations.

"Keep in touch now!" the Andrews shouted as the Steward's drove off. "Let us know when you get there!"

"We will!" Tom shouted back.

"Ill write you, Lyn!" Kris added.

From Sunland the Steward's headed east on the San Bernardino Freeway to the Barstow cutoff, then north on Interstate 19 toward Barstow. From there they headed east across Interstate 40 toward Needles.

It was not the same route that the Steward's had taken as newlyweds the previous year, but it took them from city to mountains to desert, over similar terrain, and Thomas, noting that, observed the changes in his wife compared to that previous occasion. She had brought a cooler with soft drinks and sandwiches, as in the previous year. Now and then she offered something or made a cheerful comment, as she had done then. But often she settled into an expression different from that of the previous year, an expression of pensive sadness.

"Kris," he said, "I'm sorry this move will take you away from all your friends."

She looked toward him and touched his hand. "You're so sweet to care," she replied. "I'll be fine."

"I'm sorry to take you away from your work."

She smiled and shrugged, as if to say, "Is it really work, though?"

"I know it's important to you."

"Life is moving on, Tom," she remarked softly. "I've learned that. The hard way sometimes. We had a great time this summer. Now we have to move on. I'm just so fortunate to be able to do it with you."

"You really mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

Later, the miles of highway had a lulling effect, as Steward drove on across the desert with his wife asleep beside him, while his thoughts continued from the conversation he and she had just completed.

He thought to himself that, though truly concerned with the effect on Kris of the discontinuance of her social and business contacts of the summer, as he had just said, he was also relieved to have her again to himself as in the previous year. He acknowledged to himself, also, that, though he could see the positive effect of the band on his wife, he was nonetheless glad, on a purely personal level, to have these people out of his life for the time being. They were not true friends. He did not feel a kinship with them such as he felt with friends of his own such as Matt and Mary Brandt, Bill O'Rourke, and Jim Morris. Truth was, he was even glad to be away for a while from Don and Audrey Andrews. Despite their friendship and graciousness, they yet carried the subtle burden of his needing to conform somehow, eventually, with the "make it big" ambitions of the California scene.

He just needed a respite from all of that, Steward thought. In due time, he and Kris would be going back to California, of course, as he had promised her. But for the next year,—the final year of his alternative service obligation,—he would have the opportunity to focus on a quiet, unpretentious work of public service such as had set out to do from the start when he had become a conscientious objector. He would have a chance to do this in what he hoped would be a non-confrontive environment, in a cooperative venture involving all segments of the community, across the range from conservative to liberal, as he had done in his VISTA work in North Carolina. This would be his own small contribution to ending the sterile stand-off of the culture war. It would be the fulfillment of what he had decided during the summer would be the proper attitude toward the remainder of his alternative service.

When he did return to California the following year, he thought, he would do so with a sense of having completed his alternative service as he had set out to do, as a true service to the country. With that behind him, maybe he could find a way to better blend in while still holding his own in the California world of his wife.

Seventy miles out from Barstow, with the sun beating down on the rolling dunes and shadowed furrows of the desert, Steward saw in the distance the odd, little service station beside the gravel piles and silos where he and Kris had ditched the hitchhiker on the trip in. In daylight

the place had a look of utter mundaneness with its conveyor belts and power wires. Still, the connection was enough to bring back the sinister mood of that night when the hitchhiker had seemed like such a sinister figure and there had seemed to be threats all around.

From that scene came a host of associations as Steward continued through a rubble-covered basin with spidery shrubs and treeless brown hills in the distance.

He found himself thinking again of the isolated farmhouse where he and Kris had lived and of how they had lain awake at night listening for sounds. He thought of the time she had tried to rinse her hair with the water drawn from the well and had wound up with an eye infection, and how later he had watched her coming back down the road by the farmhouse and had noticed how small and defeated she looked and for the first time in his knowledge of her, plain.

She was a person, he knew, who had pretty much gone through her entire life without ever being regarded as plain. She had been regarded as exceptional in beauty. And, though maybe she would have said to friends like Matt and Mary that she didn't care how she looked,—even believing that as she said it,—the truth was, he knew, that on a deeper level she did care and had been greatly affected by the blow to her self-image that the conditions of West Virginia had visited on her.

He had seen her regain her sense of her beauty in their stay in California, Steward went on in his mind. He was determined not to let that sense be lost again on his account as a result of his not fulfilling his obligation to find a situation that was good for her.

That was the other side, he thought, of his general situation as a husband, and maybe it had to do primarily with her young age. On the one hand, he was expected to encourage her to grow, to grow even away from him. And he did want to do that, surely, if that was what she needed. On the other hand, he was expected,—obligated, really,—to defend her psychologically. She had a vulnerable side, that had been demonstrated, too, though perhaps only he was aware of it. Was it sexist to want to protect her? He didn't know, he noted to himself, but surely he would follow his instinct in this regard, and protect her as best he could, while giving lip service, if need be, to the expected "enlightened" behavior in this regard.

At supper that evening in Kingman, Arizona, at the base of the long upward incline of the new Interstate 40 to Flagstaff, the young couple sat at a table together,—just the two of them again in a strange place as they had not been since arriving in California two months before.

The window where they sat looked out to a yellow-rimmed, red motel sign set on two high yellow posts. A Yavapai cactus with four strands, a roadside lined with weeds, a desert landscape sinking from sight, and a

distant mountain rising from that depression, extended outward from the highway where traffic streamed past. The Steward's sat together at the window wondering together about the reality that the very next night they would be staying at their new home in Winslow where a key would be awaiting them under a rock by the back door.

Soon the ambience in the little restaurant became more intimate as the shadows on the distant mountain merged into a silhouette. Red and white lights appeared in the darkness on a highway that wound up the silhouette and curved out of sight.

"You know, I think I remember from Winslow you can see mountains," she said to him taking his hand. "Won't that be great to go out walking and be able to see so far?"

"Yes, it will."

With the renewed sense of intimacy that followed from that, the demarcation seemed more irreversibly defined between the California summer left behind and the new situation in Arizona.

The next day brought more sunshine and openness, the winding ascent to Flagstaff, pine trees and mountains, roads leading off to places put in memory for future trips, while there was anticipation, also, regarding how the situation to which they were headed would turn out in actuality.

Amidst a mesa dotted with pinyon and sage, the town of Winslow came into sight. It looked, as Steward recalled it, like a long, low strip of mostly white buildings between the brown mesa and the blue sky with a lumber mill spouting white smoke on the south of town.

To the north, a treeless mesa, about a mile from town, was the only elevation of land between the town and the flat horizon.

A Conoco filling station was the first outpost of the town that the Steward's passed, then came a budget motel, and a triangular block with no buildings where the highway split into the parallel main streets Steward had remembered. A bank and an insurance agency came into view, then a sign to the "B.I.A. School," another sign to the train depot, and a red brick church. It was St. Francis, the Steward's noted, the Catholic parish where they had been informed the young priest lived who had been mentioned in the job offer letter.

"Well, this is not West Virginia," said Kris.

"No, it is not."

A turn onto another street brought an orderly grid of neat houses composing a neighborhood in which nothing stood out as being any different from everything around it. Amidst these houses was the particular house that they were both looking to see. It was a two-story house with a tan stucco exterior, a tiny front yard, and a driveway leading back on one side to a one-car garage.

"Nice little house," said Kris.

"Yes, it is."

"Guess we're going to have some neighbors."

"Yes, we are."

They pulled into the driveway and drove back to the closed door of the garage, where a grassless back yard came into view enclosed by one side of the garage and a wood plank fence about six feet high. Steward found the key by the back door, and together they went in.

Inside they found a back hall and a kitchen with white cabinets, a table, two chairs, a refrigerator and stove. Beyond he kitchen were a living room, a dining room, and a small bedroom.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Steward.

"It's nice," Kris replied, nodding her head.

Upstairs there were four bedrooms including a master bedroom in a separate area with a separate bathroom. So they would have some hope of privacy, they noted, when the foster boys arrived.

Later, just before sunset, they went for walk together down their new street from their new house past similar houses to a street that, at the corner, could be seen to extend past the edge of town, a few blocks away, straight out into the mesa.

Just beyond the houses, the view west was unobstructed all the way to the mountain ridge with the three peaks, sixty miles distant, that they had talked about in the restaurant.

"Wow, look, there thy are, Tom!" said Kris, pointing toward the mountains.

"Isn't that grand!"

Between the road they were on and the mountains, there was nothing but flat land, and there was nothing but flat land all around them except for the solitary butte about a mile north of town that Steward had noticed from the highway. The sun was setting above the mountains, between the first peak on the south and the highest peak, San Francisco.

Clouds were billowed there, with light streaming through as Don Andrews had described. This was a world of sunshine. Steward thought. He was so glad for that, for the beneficial effect he expected it would have on his and his wife's relationship and on her susceptibility to be influenced by lack of sunshine.

249. Steward's get their first sense of the local Winslow scene

During the next few weeks (in early August of 1970), Tom and Kris Steward settled into their new house in Winslow, Arizona, and started learning the physical and social structure of their new community and meeting various people that they would be looking to for help with the group home for Indian kids they had been hired to establish. Meanwhile, Tom Steward kept a wary eye on his wife, hoping she would take well to the new situation and that there would not be some kind of replay of the circumstances that had affected her so adversely in their previous situation in West Virginia.

First to show on the scene was Donald Martin, the Steward's liaison with the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation (referred to by just about everyone by its acronym WMIF, pronounced "Wy-mif"). He was the fellow conscientious objector, soon to complete his alternative service and leave, who had bought the house in Winslow and made some initial contacts with community institutions and leaders, relying mainly on WMIF's connection with the Catholic Church.

Martin didn't call ahead. He just showed up in a little black car and stood in the driveway looking toward the house. He was tall and trim with sandy brown hair, and, on this first view, in the sunlight, with his hair blown back by the wind, he looked ruggedly handsome. When Steward went out of the house to greet him, however, Martin did an odd thing. He cocked his head to the side and smiled with his head bent forward and his mouth partly open like someone who was about to tell a joke, and he kept smiling like this all the while Steward crossed the yard.

"Tom Steward, I presume," Martin said, and he then did another odd thing, he laughed for several seconds, a kind of "heh-heh-heh" laugh, with each "heh" accompanied by a nod of the head. "Or is there another goatee in Winslow?" he finally said.

The joke in this, Steward understood, was that he had mentioned, in a letter to Martin, that he had a goatee and hoped it would not present a problem in a little conservative town like Winslow. He would have smiled at this, at least, if not for the awkwardness of watching Martin as he laughed before the punch line.

"Yes, that's me, goatee and all," he replied.

"Well, I was expecting to be shocked," said Martin, who had never stopped smiling, "and you have not left me down."

Later, in the sunny kitchen, Steward proudly introduced Martin to his pretty blond wife who came down the stairs looking as fresh as the bright morning in a white T-shirt and cutoff shorts.

Any doubts he had about her ability to interact easily with a wide range of people, such as he and she would be required to do in Winslow, were at once allayed by how smoothly she adjusted to the oddities of

their guest. She smiled when he laughed, and laughed when the punch line came, touched him on the arm, found out where he was from, and soon was in a conversation about Moderna, California, where Martin had grown up, he said, in "that place where they make raisins, you know, the raison maid with the bonnet."

"Oh, yes! You grew up there?"

"A million raisons for every person."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

Martin had come well prepared, he soon displayed. He had brought a list of the various influential people in town that he had identified, some of whom he had already met and had notified that they would be soon be contacted by one or more of the Steward's. For some of these contacts, he had jotted in comments regarding their connections with organizations such as youth groups. He had also brought a list of vendors where items such as fix up supplies for the house could be charged to the foundation. Last of all, he set on the table a map of Winslow and the local area on which he had jotted down more notes.

Tom Steward took great interest in all of this, especially the map, which showed the grid of the town extending out, on north and south, from the dual axes of the highway and railroad. Just east of town, he noticed, there was a small river, the "Little Colorado," edged by what appeared to be a small ravine. The mill he had noticed on several occasion that was always spouting up smoke on the south side of town was identified on the map as "Lehman Timbering and Lumber Company."

"Now, you wouldn't think there would be much timber to get around these parts," Steward noted with his keen curiosity he always had in such geographical details.

"Au contrar, au contrar," Martin replied, leaning forward with a smile. For some odd reason, he found everything amusing. "Just south of here, about 60 miles, this mesa breaks into a pinyin forest, and just south of that, another 20 miles or so, you get to the White Mountains, pure pine forest for another 50 miles or so."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes."

"This state has everything, as you will find out. South of the pine forest I mentioned is this thing they call the Mogollon Ridge. Like a crest above the desert. After that, you dip down to the desert. Country changes again.

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. The desert is absolutely fantastic."

"I bet."

Steward thought to himself he was starting to like this guy despite the odd inappropriate little runs of laughter. Maybe it was nervousness. Martin was an eager beaver and he was full of facts. He was really quite knowledgeable about the town and surroundings from the lay of the land to the sociological organization of the community.

Talking about that was the start for a tour that soon followed with Martin and Tom Steward in the front seat of his little black car and Kris in the back. A single road joining the north and south sections of town led over some bumpy railroad tracks around in a wide bend past one side of the airport and mill to a Hispanic area of ramshackle houses with ducks and chickens in the yards and little children running through dirt yards and climbing on the low roofs and fences.

"That there building over there is a community center," Martin informed. "I think there is a single social worker connected with it. You might want to look her up at some time. As you can see, this town is divided by class... Wrong side of the track, you know. That's romantic, maybe, but it's a drawback because you don't have to go too far to the extreme before you start to push the boundaries."

The town was exactly as he had expected it to be, Steward thought to himself. This was a place where there was no cultural confrontation, yet. The din of confrontation was far in the distance, in places like California and Washington D.C. This was a place where the old institutions of church and school existed in the old way as services to the community. There was simply a need to engage with the people involved and meet them on their own ground.

Fr. Larry Flynn, whom the Steward's and Martin went to visit later the same day, seemed like a case in point. He was a priest as out of some old movie, clean-shaven, with red hair and freckles. He looked so young that it seemed strange to call him "Father."

"Father Flynn has been here one year," Martin said. "He went through the seminary learning how to fight evil." He broke up laughing. "And they sent him to a place where there is none."

"Oh, I assure you there is evil," the priest rejoined in his boyish voice. "The devil is everywhere."

Talk soon went to the fact that Tom Steward had attended a Catholic college.

"Well, then, you are welcome in our church," the priest exclaimed. "We will be glad to have you."

"Tell you the truth, Father, I haven't kept up with it."

"Well, we'll have to work on you a little bit then."

"Yes, I guess you can try."

"You're really celibate?" Kris asked with a quizzical smile. "I think that's the word for it."

"You were not raised as a Catholic yourself, I take it," the priest replied with a grin.

"No, I was not," said Kris. "I was raised as a nothing."

"I am celibate, yes. I took a vow and I take it very seriously. For some people, I suppose, it's hard to imagine the logic."

"Yes."

That was enough to elicit a raising of the eyebrows from Kris as the Steward's walked out to the car together. "I can't believe he talked about the devil!" she whispered.

"Well, that is the teaching."

"I've heard about the priests and the nuns, too."

Next person to be introduced lived directly across the street from the Steward's own house. He was a kindly-looking Methodist minister with a beard and a pipe. On the outside, his house was a little bungalow with a tan stucco exterior. Inside, it was set up like a cabin with knotty pine walls and a fireplace made of field stones. In a bookcase on one wall were books with titles Steward noticed from his days of preparing his statement as a conscientious objector. Included among the authors were the likes of Buber, Bonhoeffer, and Kierkegaard.

This introduction to the preacher next door was occasion for more raised eyebrows from Kris. "Can you believe? He lives right across the street from us," she whispered. "I bet he's going to be watching if we go to church."

There was humor in that, Steward observed, but a note of alarm, also. The books meant nothing to his wife, so far as he knew. She had never shown an interest in such things in their life together.

Several days later, Martin came around again with more of his goofy jokes. They had become so familiar to Steward by this time they no longer seemed odd, they just seemed like part of what Martin was. He was glad for Martin's company and for the mutual interest he and Martin had in the geography and makeup of the surrounding area.

Martin suggested climbing up to the top of the lone butte south of town. "I heard there's a path up there. It's only about an hour climb," he said. "You up for it, Krissy?"

"Hot sun. Top of big rock. I don't think so."

"What do you say, Stewie?"

"I'd love to."

Steward and Martin found the path on the side of the road that Martin had heard about. It led up an indentation between two parallel ridges of the butte and wound around to the top of the southern ridge overlooking the town.

Looking out at the scene, Steward realized for the first time how vast the setting was into which he had just moved. The mesa had a sealike

quality in its flatness and in the wavelike motion of the wind across the widely spaced clumps of yellow grass and chalky sage that were everywhere in view. A dry sea, as dry as the real sea was wet, Steward thought, and Winslow, in the midst of it, looked like an island,—an island of green trees and pastel-colored houses, with here and there a church steeple or a brick institutional or commercial building.

Smoke rose up from the saw mill by the airport. The brown area of the Hispanic neighborhood, with its dinky houses, dirt roads, and bare yards, sprawled out beside the gray rectangular roof of the community center.

The thin ribbon of the highway, Route 66, extended out of the town on the east and west, Steward noted. The dual tracks of the railroad ran parallel with that, and the dotted line of telephone poles and wires. A freight train, long as the town was wide, was rumbling by at the moment. A single prop airplane rose from the airfield and arced around the white column of smoke rising from the tall smokestack of the saw mill.

"They say a hundred freight trains a day pass through here," Don Martin said, leaning toward Steward. "I never counted them though. Heh-heh-heh. So I can't vouch for it myself."

"What railroad is that?" Steward asked.

"Burlington Northern."

In response to these facts, Steward nodded with keen interest. Some people might have regarded the landscape below him as bleak, but what he saw was country still in a state like the pioneers had encountered, still beckoning to be explored. Some might have regarded the little town in the midst of the mesa as remote and out of the mainstream, but he saw it as a microcosm of American life that he wanted to explore, also, by living in it and blending in with the people.

"The railroads are trying hard to survive, with the competition of the new freeways," Martin said. "I heard they're talking about putting trucks, just the box part, on the top of flat cars of trains. They call it 'piggy backing,'" a "rolling highway."

"The freeway is not in Winslow yet, though."

"It's coming in fast. They're not far way, just down around Grant. I was talking to some guys who live here in Winslow and drive out there everyday. To work on it."

"Is that right?"

"Well, it just hear say, and you know what they say about hear say. Heh-heh-heh. Sometimes it's more say than hear."

"Well, the town has an appeal," said Steward, ignoring that. "It's like a town out of the 1950's."

"Oh, yes, and you know what," Martin replied, leaning forward with his nutty grin, "people around here are in the old days in their thinking,

too. You might just find that out if you ever express any kind of non-conventional opinion."

"You think that's really true?"

"Oh, yea. I heard some people in that Denny's in town talking one night about hippies and you would have thought they were talking about Martians."

"That bad, huh?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'm kind of primed for that, you know," Steward remarked softly. "I'd like to meet some people like that and just engage with them on a community level without all the cultural face-offs."

"How about Krissy, though?" Martin replied. "I just about died when she asked Fr. Lar—heh-heh-heh—if he was celibate."

Steward had that on his mind later when he said goodbye to Martin and went inside to find Kris in her jean shorts with a spot of white paint on her nose as she painted the kitchen wall. They had just stacked up on supplies to start their work on the house.

"Well, let me put it this way," Kris said as she worked. "One, I do not intend to be a nun, whether there is a devil or not. Two, I do not intend to be a member of a women's auxiliary in any church. Three, I do not intend to go to church, or sit in a church, or to do a lot of other respectable things."

Steward laughed. "I don't think anyone expects that, Kris. I don't expect it. Maybe you might want to come around and talk to some of the key people with me, though."

"No, I do not."

"Well, there's no reason for that, either, really, Kris, if you're not inclined."

Kris turned and looked at him with brush in hand. "Tom, you know, seriously, we were together night and day in West Virginia. Maybe we should change that a little, each have our separate area."

"What's your area then?"

"Fixing up the house. Interacting with the kids when we have them. Interacting with any other kids that might come around."

Steward took that in. "I think that's a great concept, Kris," he said. "I really do. I thing you'll be really good at it."

"We can still do things together. We'll be in the house together a lot. We can go out together and go on trips."

They kissed on that, and the more Tom Steward thought about this arrangement, the more it struck him as for the best. He liked the idea of being able to visit people as just himself without the complexity of visiting as a couple.

250. Steward's drive to Gallup office to find "people like us"

Tom Steward began making contacts at once to establish support, in the quiet, little town of Winslow, Arizona, for the group home for Indian kids he and his wife Kris were setting up in their new house provided by the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation (WMIF). He decided to start with the young Catholic priest he and Kris had just been introduced to a few days before by the outgoing WMIF worker, Don Martin.

He set off in the blue Plymouth sedan on a bright, sunny day,—as all the days were, it seemed,—and arrived at the brick rectory building to find the boyish priest beaming back at him in a T-shirt and jeans.

"Well, Tom Steward!" said the priest. "Welcome! Welcome!"

"I'm not disturbing you, Father?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no! And please call me 'Larry.'"

"Okay, I will."

"Can I call you 'Tom?'"

"Why, sure. Or 'Stewie,' 'Stewball,' whatever you wish."

"'Stewball,' that's a good one!"

"It's what my old friends called me in college."

"Well, I'll be honored to call you that then, Stewball."

Inside the rectory, the freckled, red-haired pastor showed Tom Steward around the large and empty, somewhat officious rooms of the old rectory in which he seemed more like a college kid camping than the true resident of the rooms.

"It's quite an old place, as you can see," he said. "I mostly live upstairs in a bedroom that looks out to the depot. Like to watch the trains."

"You're the only one here?"

"Well, there was an older priest when I first started here, but he passed away."

"How long ago was that?"

"About eight months ago."

"You like it here?"

"Well, ever since I was a little kid, you know, I felt I had a vocation to be a priest, and I became that, and I always wanted to work in the Southwest, so I guess I'm where I wanted to be."

"So you like it then?"

"Yes, I do. Maybe to you, it seems quiet. I know your wife laughed a little when I mentioned the devil. But the idea I relate to is there are people here who need God as anywhere else. Their worlds appear uneventful from the outside, but inside those little worlds are their great big lives. Inside their worlds, they want to be the best they can be, to God and their family, their neighbors."

He paused and smiled apologetically as if to say he hoped he was not

getting carried away.

"To them it's a significant struggle, I'm trying to say, as much as your struggle is significant to you, or my struggle is significant to me. I try to meet them in their own worlds."

He smiled again.

"So that's my gig, as I see it."

Steward suddenly felt like he understood more about this boy of a priest than he had acknowledged on first impression. He liked the sentiment, the idealism, if not the religion.

"You just got to be careful, I should warn you," the priest went on. "These are conservative people, for the most part, in a social and political sense. You got to be careful not to shock them so as to turn them away. You've got to meet them in their own worlds same way as I have. And I mean that with respect to this group home you'll be setting up. You just have to proceed slowly."

"I'm aware of that," Steward said, reflecting back to his journal entries of the summer regarding how "things were falling apart, the center could not hold," and so on. "I mean to go slowly. I want this project to succeed."

"You know, the more I get to know you, the more I think it will," the priest said amiably. "You know, I was thinking, maybe you could do something at the school, like teach phy ed or something. It would help you to get to know the regular people."

"I would like that. You could arrange that?"

"I'm sure I could."

Steward took the priest up on that offer. He reported to the school principal the next morning to find that the phy ed volunteer position had already been set up for him, an hour every afternoon. He went around with the priest to meet some of the parishioners, who were generally of the quiet, conservative sort the priest had described.

At the priest's suggestion, Steward also went over to a boarding school for Indian kids run by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. There he talked to the school supervisor and arranged to make some presentations to the older kids regarding college scholarships available through the federal government.

During all of these activities, as Steward drove up and down the neat, quiet streets of the town, the sun was always shining, the sky was always blue. There were no expenses to worry about such as he and Kris had experienced in West Virginia. He felt that he had achieved his goal of finding a place where he and she could have a less stressful life.

Despite his new separate activities, he and she still spent much of the day working side by side, for the most part compatibly, as they had in West Virginia. They had divided the house fix-up tasks along the lines

that he would do the large functional tasks such as painting the walls and ceilings while she did the more creative tasks like painting the kitchen cupboard in different bright colors.

She seemed cheerful as she worked, thought Steward, though somewhat subdued. Obviously, she was less anxious than in the previous year, with the burden of financial worries removed. She was affectionate toward him and talked to him softly, often touching his arm or pressing toward him for a kiss or hug. But an air of sadness at having left her friends and music-related activities behind her in Los Angeles seemed to linger around her still. Much of her attention was on writing letters back home and in looking for and dwelling on responses when they did come.

She soon made a friend, a young woman named Lisa Moelin who lived down the block and began coming by to help in the house. She was a slender wisp of a creature with a boyish figure, long hair that she pulled back from her brow like a medieval Madonna, and a plain face often animated with emotion as she described her fervent ideas. She had graduated from the local high school a year before and since then had hung around without a job. She dressed in tie-dye T-shirts and bell-bottom jeans.

"You are the best thing that has happened to this sleepy, little town in a long time," Lisa told the Steward's, though her eyes indicated she meant the comment to refer mostly to Kris. "Nothing happens here... Nothing!"

"Well, we're not exactly the height of excitement," Kris replied. "Well, I think you are extremely cool," the emotional girl replied.

"You are the only person I can talk to!"

Steward realized, in hearing this, that his wife's new friend had identified the one negative aspect of the whole situation, and that his wife recognized it, too, and this was that the town had no youth culture, no "scene" of any kind. There was sunshine. Perpetual blue skies. Clouds billowed up with mountains in the distance. But there was no "excitement" such as would have readily been found in L.A. He didn't care, but he knew that Kris did, and that she regarded her new connection with Lisa Moelin as important for that reason, especially as the suggestible girl allowed herself to be quickly molded into a Valley Girl with the mannerisms and language that Kris had brought from California.

Meanwhile, Steward also noticed that little children from the neighborhood were coming by the house to gawk at him, Kris, and Lisa, and that often parents watched from yards just up the block with concerned, wary expressions.

"They're not close-minded or suspicious people," the bearded, pipe-toting minister from across the street told Steward when Steward mentioned the scrutiny. "They're good people, really. They're just

concerned about the well-being of their children. You'll understand it more when you and Kris have children of your own."

The suspicious attention was enough to wear on his wife a little and bring out her native defiance, Steward noted. He saw she was looking around for allies in addition to Lisa Moelin. When a phone call came one evening from the WMIF director with an invitation for him and her to drive down to Gallup for a one-day stay, with a night at a local motel included in the offer, she was excited at the prospect of getting out of Winslow for a few days to meet "some people like us," as she put it.

The little trip to Gallup took them out on the highway again. It was their biggest excursion since their arrival in Winslow. At a rest stop, they also saw young people in cars and vans making the cross country trip as they had, with signs on their windows against the war and other indications of counterculture values.

The two towns along the way, Holbrook and St. Joseph, brought the usual tourist traps and beckoning signs, which had begun to give comfort in their familiar inanity. Then came Gallup, low-lying and bleak, and, at the same time, exotic and bland, with its Indian rugs, kachina dolls, and cowboy hats and boots displayed amidst its drab adobe buildings, service stations, and bars.

The address given for the WMIF office turned out to be just down the block from the corner café where the Steward's had stopped on their way out to California the previous spring and had first learned of the Kent State killings. The address was above the single door of a single- story building with exterior walls that appeared to be painted plywood. The name, "Wide Mesa Indian Foundation," in large blue letters, ran under the line of the flat roof along its entire length. Next to the WMIF building, on one side, was the two-story brownstone "Henry Hotel." On the other side of the WMIF building was a corner shop with displays of pounded silver jewelry set with turquoise stones.

Inside the WMIF building, Tom and Kris Steward found an interior as plain as the outside. There was a large desk, behind which sat a young man who, in the hairstyle lexicon of the time, had the appearance of a college activist of several years past. He was clean-shaven with full sandy hair that gave him the look of one of the Kennedy brothers.

"Well, you must be Tom and Kris Steward," he said. "I guess we have already met through our letters, Tom. I'm Sandy Hahn."

Steward recalled then the brief biography the young director had provided, that Hahn was originally from some college out East, had come to Gallup to do alternative service as a conscientious objector under the local bishop, and had wound up as director of the new foundation after it had been set up with the excess of donations sent to the bishop to help Indians during the severe blizzard of 1966.

"Well, you already know the arrangements, I think," Hahn went on, "but, if you'd like, we can over some of the details and then do a little tour of our faculties and where people live. Then we can walk up to my place for supper with everyone. It's only about five blocks. Got some lasagna ready to bake and some beer. We'll have a good time."

"Sounds wonderful," said Kris.

From the plywood front of the WMIF office building, Hahn and the Steward's headed east on Main Street to the garage door entrance of the "Sleep in" that Steward had noted on his previous stop in Gallup. Inside the doorway, the incline went down to several subterranean rooms where folded Army cots were stacked against the concrete walls.

"Not much to say about this," Sandy said. "People get stranded in town. They can come down here. No charge. Used to be a big problem. In winter, especially. In the morning, we arrange rides out."

"How far out do people live?"

"Oh, sometimes quite a distance. 50, 75 miles. A hundred miles, even. You see, the reservation is dry."

"So the Indians come here to drink?"

"Oh, yea. All these towns along the highway here. Call them "border towns" for that reason. Winslow is one of them. Except in Winslow, they keep a tighter lid. No people allowed on the streets after a certain hour. Winslow is a conservative town, as I suppose you have noticed."

"Yes, we have," Kristine replied with a smile.

From the sleep in, the group of three continued a short distance up the street to the single door entrance to the Henry Hotel.

"A couple of our people live here. This is kind of our general dorm for everyone to live in temporarily until they move out to house or an apartment, or something."

A stairwell led straight up to the second floor of the hotel where the sight was as expected: high ceilings, ornate trim on which the varnish was worn thin, a single row of room on the street side, through the open doors of which low dwellings upon a brown red hill could be seen below a cloudless blue sky.

Next to be introduced was Lawrence Dickens, a psychologist doing his alternative service as a conscientious objector under the aegis of the foundation. He was a tall, lean, long-headed man, about 28 years old, with short brown hair and a brown mustache. He seemed shy and smiled frequently with his teeth showing and his chin upraised. He lived in the corner room of the hotel, with windows on the east side looking up Main Street toward the edge of town. He was from Michigan, he said, and had lived for a year in a tent in the woods in the Upper Peninsula.

"I needed that. It straightened out my mind," he said with his chin raised in his peculiar smile.

Standing momentarily in Dicken's room, Steward got a closer view of the scene to the north of the hotel. The traffic passing below on Main Street could be seen, an endless stream east and west toward a low, barren hill in the distance. Running parallel with the highway were the familiar dual railroad tracks. A train was rumbling by.

From the Henry Hotel, the group, now including the psychologist, headed up the adjacent street, Strong Street, where there was a tiny house positioned square into the corner with a bare dirt front yard just big enough to hold a VW van. In this house lived Gerry Klein the water engineer with his blonde, diminutive wife who quickly voiced discontent with the boring Gallup scene.

There were just two other people to be introduced, the spouses of Sandy Hahn and Don Martin, the Winslow liaison. Ruth, Sandy wife's, was as Ivy league in appearance as her husband with neatly trimmed blonde hair. Margaret, Don's husband, was dark and quiet, and when later Don told a joke and laughed his out of place laugh, she laughed the exact same kind of laugh with the exact same cadence.

They were an odd bunch, in summary, not clearly definable by any standard of the cultural divide of the day, with appearances that could go either way, really, but Kris seemed to feel that they were quite clearly people of the kind she had been looking for in Winslow. They were potential friends.

The evening that followed with the Steward's and their foundation partners in Gallup was such as might have happened in California. There was lasagna, wine, and talk about political subjects. Joints were passed around, though the Steward's did not indulge. There was even a light show, provided by a candle inside a rotating can with patterned holes. And there was music, of course, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and other artists made famous at Woodstock.

Later, on the return trip down the dark highway to Winslow, Kris talked for a while enthusiastically about her new friends and then grew quiet. The look of sadness that Steward had observed on her face on the departure from Los Angeles to Winslow a month before had returned to her face again, and again Steward felt as he had often felt when he and Kris were returning in West Virginia to the lonely farmhouse where he had experienced this look on his wife's face for the first time.

251. "Woodstock family" drives to New Hampshire to look for land

On the day after Tom and Kris Steward returned to Winslow, Arizona, from Gallup, New Mexico, the self-styled "Woodstock family" consisting of Matt and Mary Brandt, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue left Washington D.C. for a trip of several days to New Hampshire. In addition, at the invitation of the group, Matt's old Mountain Volunteers friend, Dennis Kelly, had driven up from Kensington, Kentucky, where he still lived, to also take part in this trip.

The reason a formal invitation was necessary was because this was the long anticipated trip to look for land that this group of people would maybe buy and live on together. In other words, Kelly had not just been invited on the trip, he had also, in effect, been invited to join this "family" in this common enterprise.

None of the people involved really believed that this group, as of yet, commanded the loyalty of a true biological family. Still, they all did believe, as they had discussed with one another, that the group had the potential of being a family in the sense of living in the same place with mutual fortunes.

The exact boundary where personal space and property was to be set off from communal space and property, however, was still to be determined. The core group of five had talked about possibly extending the group to a few others who had also expressed an interest. If that were done, there would be more money available for buying land, the rationale went, though the relationships among the people would presumably be less familial. Perhaps for the better, Jane Larue had said. In her opinion, the word "family" created an unnecessary complication.

Money was, indeed, a necessary—and, as they had admitted to one another, "unfortunate"—aspect of what had begun as a wholly idealistic exchange of personal dreams. A normal size farm, of about 80 acres, would cost $50,000-75,000, Matt had learned. To come up with that amount would require a buy in of at least $10,000 from each of the participants. Matt and Mary would put in individually, it had been decided. For all involved, the buy in amount was all or most of their total resources. How would the group pay taxes or pay any amount due each month for loan payments, if any, or other expenses such as utilities and food? There would have to be additional funds to tap into, or the farm would have to make a profit, or some people would have to work jobs on the side. It was a staggering prospect, not to be taken lightly.

As Darren Houghten, in his soft, courteous manner had apologetically explained, at one of the group's monthly suppers, in the basement of the Whitney Pratt school: "This whole thing about money, people, is real. We have got to confront it squarely. It is the one thing that could bring

this whole deal down."

To which Mary had replied: "Darren, I know you don't mean that in a condescending manner. But this is a lesson we've all learned in the years since college, that 'starry-eyed' doesn't go anywhere. If we're serious about alternatives, then we've got to base them on a solid foundation. And that means giving due attention to our normal human desire to maintain some kind of financial independence of one another. Really, what I would propose, let's all give in an equal amount, say seven or eight thousand. If anyone has more to put in, let that be a loan that the other people will pay back. We'll need someone to act as group treasurer."

Mary had been selected for that position, and Darren had been glad to observe that her proposal regarding money had prompted no objection. He was the "richest" one of the group with a savings of about $10,000 above the proposed base amount, and he had been trying to think of some way to bring up the matter of wanting to hold some of it back in case the farm fell through.

None of these troublesome details were in the thoughts of the five plus Kelly, however, as they headed out on this fine, bright morning of Friday, August 18, 1970, headed for New Hampshire, where they had agreed to start looking for land. Everyone was in a happy, buoyant mood.

From Northwest D.C., the group headed up New Hampshire Avenue to Highway 850, then six miles further northeast to the new beltway freeway, I495. Two miles eastward along that took them to the I95 northern outlet of the beltway at Oak View, Maryland. From there they had the I-95 freeway ahead of them for 260 miles, through coastal areas of Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut to a junction at New Haven with a second interstate, I91, that would take them north through Massachusetts to Concord, New Hampshire.

At Concord, per the plan, the group would stay overnight at Darren Houghten's childhood home, an arrangement that between the other five had been a topic of quiet anticipation. It was generally known that Houghten had affected an image at first, with all in the group, of being an Eastern elite. In careful increments, he had begun to reveal that he was not what he had initially portrayed himself as being. The details of his situation were yet to be discovered, though all in the group knew that his father had deserted him and his mother. He was an only child.

The ride began with monumental buildings fading in the distance, then came the ordered suburbs of Maryland, and the low coastal areas of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, along the Delaware River. At Dundalk and Havre de Grace, views opening southward revealed the brown expanse of Chesapeake Bay. The land vistas everywhere were green,—

summer in full bloom,—with fields of feed corn topped with their golden tassels and, further on, near Trenton, fields of newly mown hay, still lying in neat rows, and dairy cows of the black and white Guernsey breed.

Amidst it all were farms, many kinds of farms, flat and rolling, large and small, some with field crops only, some with just cattle or horses, and some with low, flat, white buildings where Matthew said poultry were kept, or hogs.

"Well, now this is the way we will find out what people are really thinking about, as far as farms," Dennis Kelly said as he sat, keen-eyed as always, in the far back seat, looking forward over the shoulders of the other passengers.

"And how is that?" asked Gail obligingly from the seat beside him.

"By just looking and comparing notes. I like that. I don't like that. And so on."

"Well, in the 'I don't like that' column, for me, you can put in pigs," Houghten threw back from the front passenger seat where he was riding beside Matthew.

"Oh, pigs are not as bad as you think. I had some when I was a kid, even got a blue ribbon."

"Well, you are our man for pigs then, decidedly!" said Houghten, "If fortune should misfall us to have some!"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry, Darren," Jane threw in softly. "There aren't too many pigs in New England."

"Yea, if we have anything, it would probably be sheep," said Mary.

"Sheep I could tolerate," Houghten replied. "I've always fashioned myself a shepherd."

"Yes, you and Jesus," said Jane.

The interaction often went on in this way between Darren and Jane with a slight irony and at times a slight bite. The others were used to it, (except for Dennis Kelly, who had not been with the group enough to be aware of it). Darren and Jane were not exactly a couple, though they were some approximation to it,—and that approximation, everyone knew, was a little too far from the actual thing for Darren's liking and a little too close to it for Jane's liking. Even so, Darren and Jane were usually nice to one another, and Jane seemed to feel sorry for Darren because of not being able to be for him what he wished her to be.

Not only farms were visible, along the route northward, with the related promise (to this group, at least) of a simple life, but reminders everywhere of the complexities of production and social organization that militated against such an attempt at simplicity: sprawling factories and plants spewing smoke into a sky rimmed with brown smog; trucks on the highway and trains on tracks alongside the highway hauling the produce

of the factories and plants under the grid of pole-suspended cables carrying electrical power and communications; signs along the highway announcing schools, colleges, universities, city centers, and hospitals; semaphores clicking red, amber, and green as they controlled the flow of vehicles and people through areas of dense population.

The arc of the I95 route from north to east between New Jersey and New York brought another reminder of social complexity in the impressive view from the upper deck of the 3500-foot-long, cable-suspended span of the George Washington Bridge, where four lanes crossed in each direction under the 600-foot tall steel towers with their distinctive crisscrossed steel bracing. From this deck 250 feet above the Hudson River, looking to the south across the Upper West Side and the oblong, lake-dotted green of Central Park, the skyscrapers of Manhattan could be seen, about six miles distant. Between the bridge and that downtown skyline was a vast area of human habitation in which thousands of buildings were packed in tightly. On the six lanes of Henry Hudson Drive, which ran along the east shore of the river, a continuous line of traffic passed beside the long docks and moored ships. On the many other roadways that could be seen amidst the buildings, cars, buses, and trucks repositioned themselves with respect to one another in a constant, ordered flow of replacement. A ship loaded with containers proceeded down the river. Airplanes rose and descended in the distance. A lone helicopter, with air-chopping blades, moved from the New Jersey base of the bridge at Fort Lee across a wide expanse of the river and then over the stone buildings of Columbia University toward the tenements of Harlem.

New England, as viewed from I91, north of the junction between I95 and I91 at New Haven, Connecticut, brought another kind of view by virtue of the striking transition from the aggressive, land-organizing culture of New York City into a culture with an apparently more conservative attitude toward the land bases of the past. In Massachusetts, as the group of six continued north toward Springfield, forests covered hills on both sides of the Connecticut River. Signs and landmarks along the highway reminded of the historical past with Indian names, Pilgrim names, and references to Johnny Appleseed, the pioneer legend. One sign claimed the same forests had covered the area since the landing at Plymouth Rock.

“Now how is it these people have lived here for, what is it, almost 300 years, and this place still looks like this?” Dennis Kelly said. “Haven’t they ever heard of trammeling?”

“Well, that’s just the point,” Mary replied. “This is a culture that respects the past. This is a culture that lives more in harmony with nature. This is Appalachia with culture. That’s just what we want, isn’t

it?"

"Yes, by darn, it is," Kelly replied.

Two hundred miles further north, the first signs announced Concord as the wooded hills in the distance grew steeper and more wooded. Then came the little, picturesque city on the Merrimac River, houses huddled neatly on streets that offered views of an amalgamation of river, local factories, and woods.

The group of six found Houghten's home there on a quiet street. It was a box frame house, not fixed up nicely but not run down, with a tiny yard and a single tall tree, an oak that towered over the dormer windows on the second floor. Down the street, on both sides, were similar houses with similar small yards.

Houghten, taking the lead, limped toward the door with his single crutch, and found his mother there before he knocked. She had a worn face set with what appeared to be travails of many years, but her eyes lighted when she greeted her son and his friends.

"Well, we sure hope we aren't imposing on you, Mrs. Houghten," said Mary as they walked in.

"I'm delighted to have you. I'm glad for the company."

Framed photographs in the living room told a great deal about the childhood life that Darren seldom spoke of. All of the pictures were of him and his mother alone. There was no picture of the long-absent father. The pictures were all of home settings. All the pictures were in family settings. None were of vacations or trips.

In one picture, the child Darren, dressed in a white shirt and white tie, held a prayer book and rosary.

"Oh, look at the communion boy!" said Jane softly.

"Oh, yes, I was quite the saint in those days, quite the beatific apparition in my outer aspect, at least," Darren remarked, regarding the picture with an expression of amazement.

"Darren, just talk normal," Mrs. Houghten admonished. "I tell him all the time, nothing wrong with how we talk."

"She is quite the stern master, as you can see," Darren said. "I have had quite the struggle, as you can imagine, to transform into the grand master of words that I have become."

He meant that as a joke, obviously, and all laughed, and yet it seemed clear, also, that Darren was a little embarrassed in having the contrast drawn so clearly between his childhood circumstances and the image he had sought to convey as an adult.

252. "Woodstock family" discusses issues that might arise in living together

Next morning, the group headed out of Concord to look at farms in the area just northeast of the city. All had in mind what Dennis Kelly had said the previous day, that looking for farms was an excellent way to find out more about what each person wanted specifically from a farm that they would actually buy. Up to this point, the self-styled "Woodstock family" had only talked about this in vague terms.

As on the day before, six people were packed into Houghten's van. Matthew Brandt was driving with Darren Houghten beside him. Behind them, and often leaning forward to talk to the both of them, was Dennis Kelly. The three women, Mary Brandt, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue, were in the remaining three seats, and though this group made a point of trying to interact with complete gender equality, yet the three women often found a topic of common interest that had them conversing together in the back even as the men were forming their own little group in the front.

As for physical appearance and manner, the group as a whole had an eclectic range that defied a neat placement into the culture-defining styles of the times. Matthew had the most extreme and striking appearance with long, wild, and as usual jaggedly home cut dark hair and a full beard that seemed to grow like fur down his neck onto his hairy chest. Every day he looked more like a rendition of a mountain man of the old West, and his mannerisms had moved in an ever more gruff direction, consistent with that general image. Darren Houghten, beside him, with his one crutch propped between the seat and the door, was, by contrast, ever the effete "Prince Hal" in appearance and diction (despite whatever his mother might think of it). Dennis Kelly, in the next seat back, had changed little in appearance since his days as a Mountain Volunteer. He still had neatly clipped hair and he still wore the same style of wire-rim glasses, while his manner was unfailingly serious, unpretentious, attentive, and solicitous of others' opinions. The three women were a study in contrast, also. Gail Martin was, as always, big-boned, hardy, and upbeat in general mood, resisting any serious discussion of anything, except when related to her children. Her plain face, so animated with good will and so lacking in any feature that could be called either lovely or ugly, gave the impression of being a simple object that had been expertly and happily made. Mary Brandt, by comparison, despite all her efforts at plainness, could not hide the natural beauty of her intelligent brow and dark hair and eyes. She could often be seen in one of her trademark, earnest thoughtful poses, with her straight eyebrows lowered in what appeared to be almost a frown, while nonetheless listening in obvious amusement to Gail's lighthearted, whimsical observations. Jane Larue, with her brilliant

red hair, petite form, and husky voice, could not help from being a shapely, little sexy thing, a quality that the other women seemed not quite to approve of, especially since Jane persisted in traditional feminine behavior such as wearing jewelry. On this particular day, Mary and Gail were both dressed in construction boots, blue jeans, and flannel shirts. Jane was wearing white tennis shoes, white socks, nicely fitting, knee-length blue cotton pants, and a pretty white blouse with floral patterned lapels. Now and then, also, Jane had a subtle scent of perfume, and she did not state her opinions strongly as did the other two, but instead brought them forth tentatively, in her soft, soft voice, leaving sentences trail off or ending them with the upward inflection of a question.

An eclectic group, true, with many differences between them, yet a strong bond had grown between them, also, in the 18 months since they had attended the Woodstock festival together. No one among them doubted the seriousness and earnestness of the task at hand of discussing possible problems in buying land together.

The discussion began as soon as they were a few miles outside of Concord, where the countryside quickly become rural, hilly, and wooded, with farms cut out of the woods.

"Well, just driving out of Concord brings up an immediate concern for me," Gail Martin remarked, looking to the two other women, and then to the three men.

"And what is that?" Dennis asked obligingly. "Listen up, guys. Gail has our first issue here."

It was often Kelly's unofficial function within the group to take a comment like this initiated by one of the women and to in effect serve it to Matthew and Darren in such a way as to emphasize its group importance. The comment might otherwise not be recognized as such and fall on the wayside.

"Well, this vehicle we are riding in belongs to Darren. We are driving to a place where a vehicle is essential, from a practical standpoint, to get back into town. I have no vehicle. I have young children. I think you see where I'm heading..."

"Yes."

"Would the vehicles become communal, I think Gail is asking," Mary remarked in her always serious and yet somehow also pleasant and cheerful voice. "And that really strikes to the heart of how willing we are to become communal. To what extent."

"Well, I can answer then to that exact statement, for myself, at least," Darren Houghten replied, intoning his reply as a kind of witty repartee. "Are we willing to become so communal. Am I willing to become so communal. The answer, pure and simple, is no. N-O. No. Now, to put the question another way. Are all of our vehicles available to everyone,

reasonably, whenever they are needed? Yes."

"Easier said than done," Jane responded in her quiet voice. "The ones that have cars..."

"Don't have children," said Mary.

"Yes."

"Still I think that's the only way," Mary threw in. "We all keep our vehicles, meaning say, if Dennis decides to leave, he leaves in his truck. But I really do think, Gail and Mary, this is something we would work out, I can promise you I would insist on it, that for as long as we live together, you have equal access to the vehicles. The children are your children, but they are our joint responsibility."

"Yes," said Matthew.

"Yes," said Dennis.

There was a thoughtful silence again as the van rounded a turn toward a picturesque small valley, again wooded on the hilltops with farms hewn out in the bottoms.

"Well, let's be clear while we're on the subject of children, my kids have one mother, one parent, and that is me," said Gail, gaining a little more firmness in her voice but none the less pleasant.

"As for me with my children," Jane added softly.

"Yes, of course," said Mary.

"And what that means," Gail continued, "if there's any problem with my kids, you don't discipline them yourself, and I mean ever. You come to me, their mother, and I discipline them."

"And that is of the utmost importance," Jane added. "We want to live in common with all of you, but we are not giving up our rights as parents to some kind of vague, common parent."

"Yes, of course," Mary said.

Silence ensued again, with a pause for those to come forward, who had not yet voiced an opinion, in this case, all men.

"Well, that is something that I think we can all agree on with absolutely no ambiguity," said Dennis. "Isn't that true, Matthew?"

"Yes, of course."

"And we will not be means-spirited about it," Darren threw in. "I think I can speak for all of us men, we will help with the children in any way you want us to, and we will never do anything with the kids, take them in the vehicles, or give them orders, or whatever, without your permission."

"Absolutely," said Dennis.

"Yes, agreed," said Matthew.

"And one thing more, I would like to add, there are subtle things, too," Gail said, "like just frowning at the kids if they're noisy, making them feel bad. Kids are really affected by little subtle things. They have

to feel appreciated."

"Well, I think we do, in fact, appreciate the children," said Darren. "And we all want to have a good effect on them."

"Yes," said Dennis.

"Well, how about this?" Mary proposed. "Let's have a regular weekly meeting, say on Saturday morning or something, and at that meeting, we will have a regular agenda, and one of the items will be the children. How are the children faring? How can we make their lives better? How can we help them with any problems? With Gail and Jane being the lead on that, in counseling the rest of us."

"That is an idea I like very much," said Gail. "That would make me a whole lot better about the whole situation."

"Yes, I like the idea also," Jane remarked in almost a whisper. "Otherwise, we'd be thinking, you know..."

The day continued with more roads, more hills, more woods, and more valleys, and with more farms popping up here and there in the midst. All of the farms, it seemed, had their particular appeal, and the distinction between them was in subtleties of production possibilities and in specific buildings such as sheds and barns.

The sight of one farm with a maple wood out back of a sap boiling shed reminded Mary of one feature she wanted to mention.

"It would certainly be nice," she said, "not a necessity but a plus, to have the requirements for making maple syrup. There would be a real possibility to make an income from that."

"What's involved in it, collecting the sap and boiling it down?" Gail Martin asked.

"The way I've heard, boiling it way down, boiling it many times."

"You know, I think I would love that," said Gail.

"We could have a little store, maybe sell other kinds of things, too. Artwork. Knick-knacks," said Jane.

"I really would like that very much," Gail repeated.

The sight of another farm with a flat area beside it in which vines winded around in a tangle with large orange flowers brought up another issue, as Matthew pointed out.

"One thing I would like to note," he remarked, "there is a place for the garden right next to the house and a pump pulling water out of that little creek over there, for watering. And the garden is set up on a higher area than the rest of the yard so the water drains off when you have a big rain. Otherwise, you know what happens..."

"Working in mud," someone threw in.

"Exactly."

"I would so very much love to have a garden," said Mary. "A great big garden. We could grow all our own vegetables."

"Well, let me warn you, Mary," Matt replied. "Gardens are one hell of a lot of work."

"Hey, you're looking at the bracera, Matthew. I am no stranger to hard work."

"You I don't worry about."

"It's me he's worried about!" said Darren. "He mistakes my refinement of intellect for laziness of body. Well, sometimes, Matthew, a towering intellect and a towering strength, or willingness, at least, are housed in the same body!"

"Just giving a warning."

"And duly taken," said Jane softly. "I'm not sure I'll be on the dirt crew myself but I'll be in on the chopping and cooking."

From gardens, the focus of the conversation drifted to houses and housing arrangements as the group continued their random search up and down the rural roads of the area, which were often just gravel.

"I like the traditional two-story house," said Mary.

"Yes, I do, too," Gail responded. "There has to be a place for sleep that is distinctly separate, physically separate, from the part of the house where people socialize and talk."

"You're thinking of the children," said Mary.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, it's not just a children's need to have quiet," said Dennis Kelly.

"No, that's true."

"A fireplace would be nice," said Jane.

"Well, that's on the wish list, for sure. But there's something more important, really," Mary continued.

"And what's that?"

"Size. Number of rooms. Especially if we bring in other people. We're talking about seven or eight adults, maybe, and four children."

"I've seen places with little guest houses," said Darren.

"Yes, above a garage sometimes," said Gail.

"One thing we should establish is the kids stay in the house, the mothers and their kids," Dennis remarked. "Wouldn't you agree?" he added, looking at Matt and Dennis.

"Yes, for certain," said Matt.

"We're all agreed on that," said Darren.

"We maybe will have to work something out for the bathroom, so everyone has access," Dennis proposed. "Or we could even construct a little bath house outside, with a water heater or something."

"You really think we would know how to do that?" asked Gail.

"Well, yes, I do. It would take a little acquisition of skills."

"There must be books on plumbing, basic plumbing."

"We would need wiring, too, to heat the water," Matthew conjectured, "unless we piped out the hot water somehow from inside the house."

With that complication, the group fell into silence again. It seemed as if each new issue brought up another.

253. "Woodstock family" visits a historic commune, the Canterbury Shaker Farm

After another full day of looking for a farm to buy together, the "Woodstock family" of Matt and Mary Brandt, Darren Houghten, Jane Larue, Gail Martin, and Dennis Kelly had seen a fair sample of farms, but they had not found the perfect farm that they would all not just accept but be enthused about. As a result, they set out on their last day a little less energetically.

After going northeast from Concord for about 15 miles, they turned to the south again, along another road, and from that vantage point saw a huge barn on a wooded hilltop in the distance. It appeared to be about the same height but several times longer than an average large barn. The barn had three cupolas, one on each end and one in the middle. In front of it was a long stone wall and beside it a walled-in neat woods.

"I believe that's the biggest barn I have ever seen," Matthew remarked to Dennis. He was at the wheel with Dennis beside him.

"That's the Shaker barn!" Darren threw in, leaning forward between the other two men. "Largest barn in the state, I've heard."

The bearded director of seminars always seemed delighted in this manner at being able to serve up some tidbit of aesthetic or historical interest. Throughout the trip, he had taken a role as the New Hampshire native acting as host to the others.

"This I gotta see," said Brandt.

"You mean there's a Shaker village up there?" Mary Brandt called forward from the last seat where she was sitting with Gail Martin.

"Oh, yes. Canterbury Shaker Village, as it is called. Toured it once when I was a child."

"What say we take a break from looking for farms and have a little tour ourselves?" Mary proposed. "Maybe we'll learn something from how they set up their situation."

"Yes, they were communal, weren't they?" said the ever cheerful Gail Martin from her location in the back seat with Mary.

"Oh, most definitely!" Darren replied. "They were communal to a point that I think we would not even begin to contemplate."

"Scary communal," Mary remarked.

"Oh, yes."

"Made some good stuff, though," said Dennis Kelly. "Quite certainly they did!"

Finding a sign on the road sign soon later for the "Canterbury Shaker Village Trustees' Office and Tourist Information Center," the group of six continued straight ahead toward the crest of the hill.

Off to the right of the road, where a creek meandered down the eastern slope of the hill, an earthen dam could be seen. Behind it was a

narrow pond about a quarter mile long surrounded by trees. This idyllic area appeared to be part of the Shaker village, also.

"These people meant business," said Matthew.

"Oh, yes," Darren replied, still delighting in his role of host. "They certainly did!"

At the crest of the hill, the main body of the village came into view. It consisted of about two dozen, sturdy-looking buildings. A street going off at a right angle was lined with shops and functional buildings, painted dark red or brown. Beyond them were buildings that looked like old-fashioned big houses, but they were not just big, they were immense, several times bigger than ordinary houses. They were all about the same height, two and a half stories with full attics. One of them had a what appeared to be a bell tower. They all had clapboard siding and were all painted light blue.

Soon the trustees' office came into view. In contrast to the other buildings, it had a brick exterior. Vehicles were parked there and groups of people who looked like tourists were entering or leaving the office or walking off toward other buildings.

Inside the office a woman of about 60 who identified herself as one of the three last Shaker sisters gave a talk. She was dressed in a dark blue dress with a full, pleated skirt and a cape-like frontal yoke that hung from her shoulders to her waist. The obvious modest purpose of the yoke was to hide the shape of the breasts. On her head was a white cap that looked like a bonnet without a brim or tie. It was called a "neat," she said; it was a symbol of purity worn by all Shaker women.

"Have you lived here all your life?" asked a tourist.

"I joined the Shakers at age 28," the sister replied. "After my husband died. I was at another village called Sabbathday Lake, in Maine, and, about ten years ago, I moved down here."

"Was it hard to leave the world?"

"The world left me when my husband died."

The woman said that the community had decided in 1963 (seven years before) to stop accepting new converts.

"And why is that?" someone asked.

"Because we are shrinking in numbers and we prayed together and came upon this understanding as the will of God."

To other questions, the sister gave similar simple answers free of embellishment. In her speech, in general, she was as straightforward and simple as were the room and furniture around her. When someone asked a question, she gazed steadily into the questioner's eyes.

Later the sister stood by a map as she explained the basic setup of the village. The functional-looking buildings on the main street going off to the side were grouped together, she said, because these were buildings

accessible to the "outside world." These buildings included a carpentry shop, a fire house, a pump house, a creamery, a syrup shop, a laundry, and a shop offering objects made by the Shakers. In bygone days, the sister said, seeds, straw brooms, fruit products, baked goods, and furniture had been sold. At present, the only objects sold were cloth goods like hats and mittens. The other buildings visible from the road, she said, were the three "dwelling houses." There had been one house per Shaker "family." Each family had consisted of about 50 people with two male and two female leaders, called elders and eldresses. Each family had lived together as a separate community inside the general community. The families had all worshipped together, she said, in a large white building called the "meeting house." It could be seen from the window. It was a large white building with a gambrel roof like a barn.

The sister talked briefly about the Shaker way of life. "We believe in work," she said, "Hands to work and heart to God.' And we believe in order. 'A place for everything and everything in its place.' If you visit the attic in the Church Family house, you will see the many closets and drawers used to store winter clothing. In the carpentry shop, you will see that each tool has a number and is hung on a numbered peg."

The sister said that people could go on guided tours or walk around by themselves to look at the buildings that were open for public view. The group of six from Whitney Pratt decided on the latter option and headed across an open area toward the immense barn.

"So what is so 'scary communal' about this place?" Gail Martin asked Mary as the group walked along together.

"Well, for example, if you look at each building, Gail, you will see two separate, identical doors, one on each side."

"Yes."

"One of the doors is for women. The other is for men."

"Women and men have separate doors?"

"And separate stairways, separate halls, and, in the same room, seats on different sides."

"That is severe."

The huge barn, at closer quarters, was impressive for its perfectly maintained exterior. It was covered down its entire length with clapboard siding, painted a glossy dark brown with neatly painted white trim.

Going inside the open wagon door, Matthew and Dennis were astounded to discover that the entire floor of the haymow, throughout the entire 240 by 50 foot area of the interior, was varnished and polished, as were even the 30-foot-high posts supporting the rafters of the immense A-frame roof.

An informational placard intended for visitors stated the haymow was capable of holding 100,000 bales of hay.

The barn cellar was just as impressive. The ceilings and posts were varnished down the entire length of the two rows, as were the stanchions, which were made of oak. Each row had 50 stanchions on each side.

In the attic that the Shaker sister had mentioned, the group found the extent to which the Shaker penchant for order had laid claim to the space. Under the eaves on both sides were built-in drawers in long rows. Each drawer was three feet long and one foot high. In all there were more than 100 drawers, according to an informational placard. The attic also contained 14 under-eave closets.

Riding away from the village soon later, the three women began one of their intense conversations while the men listened.

"That place seems so much a part of the past," said Mary, "so out of it, really, compared to modern times, but I just have this feeling that there's a point of intersection somewhere between that kind of past and our kind of present. There's a relationship."

"Yes, I feel that, too," Jane offered, for once not holding back as she was usually inclined to. "To me, the relationship is in the attitude of not quite belonging to the prevalent culture..."

"It's an attitude of disaffection," Gail threw in.

"Well, all of the original New Englanders must have had that," Mary said, "breaking out from England."

"Yes," said Jane. "But somehow it seems so grim."

"That it does," Dennis Kelly threw in.

"And you know why that is, I think," Darren said. "They have this tremendous order, this tremendous industry, but it is achieved, really, by denying everything normal that people do that might result in contention. Sex might cause contention, so it is forbidden. Possessiveness might cause contention, so possessiveness is forbidden. Free thought might cause contention, so freedom of thought is forbidden."

"You think there's no freedom of thought?" Mary replied.

"Well, when everyone lives exactly the same, as they do, and the body of basic beliefs can never be challenged, as seems to be the case with them, I don't see how there's room for any freedom of thought in that. The range of thought lies within those narrow bounds."

"That is scary," said Mary.

"Yes, it is," said Jane.

"Well, let's make a compact with one another to find a middle way," Gail replied thoughtfully. "There must be some way to live together and be efficient without being so grim and controlling. Let's try to keep one another a little light-hearted."

"Yes. I know I for one have a tendency to become too heavy, as they say," Mary responded, "I will resolve for myself to avoid that."

"The children will help us," said Jane.

"Yes, they can always put the emphasis back where it belongs," said Gail. "For me, they are a kind of barometer of the overall happiness, the overall health of the situation."

"Isn't that true?" said Jane.

"Well, we are all going to be very attentive to that," Dennis Kelly said. "You can count on that."

They were still considering this when Matthew brought the bus to a stop at the top of a hill looking down toward a farm sitting by itself in the next valley. It was, at first sight, as isolated and individualistic, in appearance, as the Shaker farm just left had been socially connected (within itself) and communal. The farm before them had a look of Yankee self-reliance.

"Hey, this place looks promising," Matthew said.

The six young people piled out of the bus and stood on the side of the dirt road looking down toward the part of the farm that could be seen between the overhanging branches of trees. Prominent in this view was the two-story, box-frame house and, just beyond that, a gambrel roof barn, painted dark blue above a mortised stone foundation. Across the road from these two buildings was a open shed, within which were an old, flatbed truck and a small green tractor. The road curved between the buildings, giving a quaint effect against the calendar-picture backdrop of maple woods and pine-covered hill.

Just down the road from the open shed was two more buildings with pine slab sides, looking somewhat like two cabins joined together with one up the hill slightly from the first. Next to it was a pile of neatly stacked wood and several big tanks.

"Do you see what I see?" Matt asked Mary.

"Is that a maple works?"

"Looks like there's a sign there."

"They must sell it."

"And you see what I see, over behind the house in those trees?" said Dennis Kelly.

"Looks like two guest cabins," said Gail.

"And get this people!" Darren Houghten threw in. "With a water tank and electric wires!"

An apple tree and sheep in a picturesque pasture, beyond the barn, confirmed the impression that this was a farm that satisfied everyone's wish list,—except for the lack of a "For Sale" sign.

Down below the hill, Matthew directed the bus to the side of the road again to look more closely at the maple works. As he did, a woman in coveralls came around from the side of the wood pile.

"Hello, ma'am," said Dennis, rolling down the window. "We don't mean to intrude. We were just looking at your nice place."

"That it is," the woman replied. "Anything I can help you with?"

"No, not really. We're from Washington D.C. Just on a little trip to look for a farm."

"Thinking on buying one, you mean?"

"Yes, we are."

"Well, if you like this one so much, check back with me this fall. My husband died a few months ago, and I've been considering selling out and moving to town. I can't take care of it myself."

"We really would be interested."

"Well, you come back in the fall then, or give me a call."

"How many acres is this farm?"

"One hundred and twenty. Forty on this side of the road, mostly this maple woods and the side of this hill, going up the hill to yonder pines. Eighty on the other side there,—the pasture with the apple tree there and out along the road, there's 20, and over to the other side, by the house, there's 60 there, about 40 of plowed land and 20 of pines."

"Those sheep yours, ma'am?" Matthew inquired.

"Yes, they are."

"What kind are they?"

"Dorset."

"They come with the farm if you sell it?"

"I don't intend to bring 'em to town."

"Mind if we look at the barn?"

"No, you go ahead," the woman said. "And if any of you would like a quick look at the house, I'll give you a little tour."

"We would like that," said Gail as Jane nodded her head.

Matthew and Dennis went over to look at the barn, followed by Mary and Darren, as the woman, Gail, and Jane went to the house.

"Good rafters. Looks like the roof is in pretty good shape," said Matt, looking up at it from inside the haymow with Dennis.

"And look at that platform up by that window," Darren exclaimed, pointing up to the hay door. "What a place for a loft!"

That comment brought Matthew to a curious pose with his head cocked sideways, his brow in a frown, and his mouth in an expression somewhere between a grimace and a smile. "Loft for what?" he said, shaking his head.

"A loft for study, for poetry! The contemplative rustic!"

"That being you?"

"Yes, my good man. Can't you see it in me?"

"Suddenly I can, Darren, and it scares me a little bit."

"And how is that, my dear friend?"

"Just kidding, man. If you want to be rustic above a bunch of sheep shit, feel free."

They both laughed at that, but a realization had sunk in, among the three men and Mary, that they were heading into this experiment with quite different expectations.

[Chapter 253 notes]

254. Steward's host Sandy Andrews for her "open school" Indians project

In mid-September, 1970, after Tom and Kris Steward had been living in Winslow, Arizona, for about a month and a half, the youngest Andrews daughter, Sandra, came out for a visit, bringing a re-connection with the California world the Steward's had lived in the previous summer.

Sandy would stay for a week, the arrangements were, in an "educational furlough" from her "open school." Her assignment would be to learn about the local Indians and report to her class when she returned. Her parents, Don and Audrey, would drive out to pick her up, staying for two nights in the house the Steward's were fixing up to serve as a group home for kids referred from the Navajo Tribal Court.

The just-turned-13-year-old girl, with her lovely, waist-long brown hair, arrived on the train from Los Angeles on a bright, sunny day (of which there were so many in the Steward's' new home). She bounced down the steps from the passenger car in bell-bottom jeans and a "peasant shirt" with lace collar and cuffs.

"Well, I made it!" she announced with her trademark double-dimpled smile.

They were an attractive trio, standing together by the quaint depot with its stucco arches and red brick walkway: Tom tall, lean, and tan from his daily runs; Kris trim and shapely with her blonde curls falling down over her shoulders; the pretty girl raising up and down on her toes, in one of her exercises learned from ballet, as she described the sights she had seen on the way out.

She walked along with "Krissy," as she called her, hand in hand, as Tom followed behind, carrying her one suitcase.

"Well, I just may have an event to take you to that you will find very interesting," Kris said.

"And what is that?"

"An Indian dancer. And, just to warn you, he is a boy. And is he cute? I would say so. Yes."

"How old is he?"

"14."

"It does sound interesting."

"I thought you would think so."

So true to the Andrews, Tom Steward thought. They were big on girls meeting boys and having fun with boys. It was all talked about openly with a lot of laughing and encouragement. Nothing to be bashful about, as had been the case in his own teenage world.

The boy Kris was referring to—his name was Davy Begay,—was the star of a little show for tourists presented amidst displays of Indian crafts

and information brochures on the triangular bare lot on the west side of town where the highway divided into the two one-way main streets that ran through the Winslow downtown. The show had been staged several times a day during the summer and, since the start of school, had just been staged on the weekend.

The Steward's had stopped to watch the show one day, and Kris had struck up an acquaintanceship with the boy and invited him over to the house, which he had taken her up on, stopping over one day on his bike. That social facility was an indication of how effective his wife would be once the group home got under way, Steward thought, but unfortunately she had not been inclined to apply her social skills to the other aspect of the group home, the community contacts that he had mostly done on his own, a definite departure from the year before in West Virginia, in the months just following their marriage, when she had insisted on being at his side at all of his meetings.

She had been conscientious in fulfilling the fix-it tasks she had offered to do, however, and that she proudly showed to Sandy when the three of them returned from the depot.

The kitchen was completely done with the walls a fresh yellow, the cabinet bases white, and the cabinet fronts different pastel colors. The other downstairs rooms were also freshly painted with the hardwood floors clean and polished, though the only furniture in the combined living room and dining room was a single long table with eight chairs and a smaller table with a turntable, beside which records were neatly stacked in a cardboard box on the floor.

"Oh, I love the colors!" Sandy remarked in her pleasant, upbeat manner. "You've done so much!"

A knock on the door brought a fourth person to the scene. It was Lisa Moelin, the plain-faced, straight-haired 19-year-old from just down the block. She had become Kris's closest friend in the little town. As the town's seemingly only "hippie" in her bell-bottom jeans and tie-dyed T-shirts, she had made quite a project of her connection with the Steward's, showing up every day to help Kris with whatever needed to be done as she discussed her fervent ideas,—which were, as Steward saw them, a flaky amalgam of just about everything in vogue, from yoga and astrology to rock music and half-baked political ideas. Kris's brother's band, Thunder Mountain, was a special topic of interest.

Together the four departed the house through the tiny, plank-fenced back yard, got into the Steward's car,—the same as had been driven all the way from West Virginia,—and rode along through the three quiet blocks of neat houses between the house and downtown. There they turned onto the main street that went west, and rode along past two- and three- story commercial buildings to the lot adjacent to a motel and

service station where the boy was dancing.

From a block away, Davy Begay could be seen dancing within a circle of about a dozen tourists, a lanky youth with his head bent downward and his arms extended out to each side. In one hand, he held a round shield with a single feather. He was wearing beaded moccasins, a headdress with horns, a bone hairpipe breastplate, anklets and bracelets with round bells like Christmas sleigh bells, and, a closer look revealed, a loin cloth over cut-off jeans.

All in all, it was an odd scene. The only Indians present were the boy and a Navajo man playing a single drum. The man was not dressed as an Indian. He was wearing blue jeans, cowboy boots, and a black cowboy hat. A carefully coiffed white woman in a high heels and a tailored, knee-length suit stood at a table where brochures were available for local restaurants and motels.

The boy, on seeing the Steward's approach, nodded without smiling, darting a glance at the girl. He had been warned that the group would be coming by to watch him dance and that the girl was learning about Indians for school. He nodded again without smiling, after the show was over, when the group came up to him as he was taking off his gear. He looked quite different out of the costume. His black hair was combed back in a "duckback" hair style like a young Elvis Presley.

"Wow, you got some beautiful stuff there!" Kris said.

"Yea, ain't mine, though," he replied.

"Davy Begay, this is Sandra Andrews, the girl I was telling you about, my little sister kind of."

"I'm very pleased to meet you!" Sandra replied, reaching out her hand for a handshake with another double-dimpled smile.

"Pleased for me, too," he answered.

Later the group, now including the boy, walked to a root beer stand just down the highway, on the outside, west side, of town. They sat there at a round table, looking out to the flat, wind-ruffled expanse of brush and sage that extended with the ribbon of the highway to the three peaks floating on the western horizon.

"Well, you are quite a good dancer!" Sandra remarked with a trace of her mother's New Zealand accent. She looked directly into the face of the shy boy, who made only an instant of eye contact before looking away. "Where did you learn?"

"Grandpa taught me."

"He must be a very good teacher!"

"Yes, he is."

"Are you a Navajo?"

"Yes."

"Are you from Winslow?"

"Come on now, Sandy, you can't make a date with him already!" Kris interjected, touching her forearm. "He is kind of cute though. I have to give you that."

"No. Shiprock," said the boy.

"Shiprock is a little town about 80 miles northwest of here, in the middle of the reservation," Tom Steward threw in.

"And you came all this way to school!"

"See, the way it works, Sandy, all the Navajo kids are required to attend government boarding schools after the eighth grade," Tom explained, "and all the boarding schools are in larger towns like Winslow. The idea at one time was place the kids in an environment where they could learn English more easily, where they could assimilate more easily."

"Take away their culture!" said Lisa Moelin, looking to Kris for a nod of affirmation. "That's not right!"

"Yes, it's hard to defend anymore," Steward remarked.

"Well, that must have been so sad, to have been taken away from your family like that!" Sandra said with doleful eyes.

The Navajo boy seemed to find the show of emotion curious. "It was just me and grandpa," he replied quietly.

"Even so!"

There was a little time, after this, for some interaction remotely related to the expressed purpose of the meeting. The boy spoke Navajo, he informed. He spoke a few words that had everyone grinning at the strange sounds.

"How can you say those sounds?" Sandra exclaimed.

"Don't know, just say them."

The boy said he had lived in a house made of mud and logs called a "hogan." He was smiling before the meeting ended, though still answering questions as briefly as possible. He drove off on his small-wheeled bike, jerking up on the handlebars to jump over a curb.

"They're a quiet people," Steward said as he drove away with his wife, Lisa, and Sandy, "extremely quiet. I did this presentation a while back, couple of weeks ago, at the school Davy goes to,—about college programs, ways to get into college, and so on,—and here I was by myself in this room with these Indian teens, and none of them said a word the whole time. No hello. No goodbye. No questions. They were extremely suspicious."

"That must have been so awkward!" Sandy said.

"Well, you can't blame them, can you?" said the plain-faced Lisa, "The way they're herded around!"

From the root beer stand, they headed out the highway to a rest stop west of town to watch the sunset, which was guaranteed to be

spectacular, with clouds piled high in the sky and tinted with fantastic hues of sunset colors. The weather, too, was always grand in the evening with a dry heat that relaxed the whole body and a gentle breeze bringing the familiar mesa scents of juniper and sage.

Steward watched his blonde, lovely wife interacting in her dramatic manner with her “little sister” and her friend, feeling satisfaction at how happy she seemed compared to the stressful Kris he remembered in West Virginia. He felt good that he had found a situation for them both where the vistas and weather were often like this, a situation where they no longer had to worry about where to live and how to come up with enough money for their basic needs.

Heading back into town later, with the island of the town, in the midst of the mesa, dotted with lights, he felt good, also, about the work he had been doing in his new position. This town was what it appeared to be, surely, from a view of it such as loomed ahead, a little town in the midst of nowhere, cut off from so much of the conflict of main stream American society. It was, on account of this, an essentially quiet and conservative town with an essentially quiet and conservative populace. He felt good about the extent to which he had managed to form a coalition of such people in support of the group home. He felt that he had come a long way toward recovering the part of him that had been so effective on a personal level in North Carolina.

Diablo Crater, with its moonlike landscape and plaques telling of the prehistoric event that had caused its imprint on the mesa, was the highlight of the next day. Then came the Anasazi juniper forest, south of town, and the shallow canyon of the Little Colorado River, just east of town, with its chalky, pastel Arizona colors. The group of four also drove north onto the Navajo Reservation to see the mound like, distant shapes of some hogans amidst the small ranch style houses more common among the modern day Navajos.

Amidst this, Tom Steward noted that the topic of conversation had turned strongly toward the Thunder Mountain rock group, Kris’s brother’s band, and it was obvious from the raised level of excitement and inquiry that this was by far the most intense interest of the three young women. He didn’t mind it so much, he supposed that was just how young women were, except he had also noticed lately how little patience or interest his wife had for the more serious topics that occupied his own mind. She no longer even made a show of interest. Her eyes glazed over when he talked, and that had been the case, also, in his pronouncement concerning the focus of that they were doing in the group home and the importance of maintaining rapport with all elements of the community, including the conservative elements. She clearly regarded that as a kind of fuddy duddy concern; she had not totally gotten over the new sense of

him she had obtained from his objection the previous summer, at the concert in Bishop, when she had wanted to go in the hot springs nude.

He was sorry for that, also, but he just wanted to get through the year in Winslow with her and him on a fairly compatible basis, as in truth they often were. When they returned to California, he thought, he would make it up to her for the sacrifice she had made in leaving her involvement with her brother's band aside for the duration of the time they were spending in Winslow.

At a supper together at the Denny restaurant in Winslow, however, on the fourth evening of Sandy Andrew's, Steward's found that that was not entirely the case in his wife's mind, when she asked about how the band was doing, and grew very concerned when she learned from Sandy that they had not had any gigs since the gig she had arranged for them six weeks before.

"Well, I'll tell you a secret," Kris said, leaning toward Sandra and Lisa, "and Tom doesn't know this yet," she added, smiling coyly at him, "but I've been working on this idea of having the boys come up and stage a few concerts here."

"You mean in Winslow?" said Lisa.

"Yes."

"And maybe Flag."

"That's a fuckin' far out idea!" said Lisa.

"Well, I think it is, at least," Kris said, smiling at her husband again. "It would give us money for the group home and it would give the boys some exposure outside of California."

"Wouldn't that be spectacular!" said Sandra. "Maybe I could come up for it on the train."

"Well, that I don't think your mother would allow."

Steward made no reply at all to this news, though inside an alarm had sounded. He at once thought to himself that he would have to dissuade his wife somehow. A rock band in Winslow, associated with the group home, would destroy everything he had done to build community support. He knew already that his wife wouldn't accept his explanations. He would have to broach the subject with great care.

255. Steward implores Kris not to invite the band to Winslow

In the next few days, Tom Steward watched for the right moment to try to convince his wife to give up her idea of staging a rock concert in Winslow. With Sandy Andrews still present, however, the Steward's were seldom alone. Sandy was even with them at night, sleeping in the same bed, with Kris between Tom and her. Then, on the fourth day of Sandy's visit, the Indian boy, Davy Begay, invited the Steward's and the Andrews girl to an event he was dancing in. Out of this came the time alone with his wife that Tom had been waiting for, and the confrontation with the issue he felt he had to deal with as soon as possible.

The event was quite an extravagant affair with native groups from nearby towns dancing around a campfire in a parking lot by the railroad depot, across from a grand old building that until a few years before had been the La Posada Hotel. During the intermission, when Davy took Sandy to meet some of the dancers from other tribes, the Steward's went off a ways from the campfire to get away from the crowd.

Despite their increasing separation from one another in their daily activities in Winslow, they were still intimate with one another at such moments. They walked along holding hands and wound up on the other side of the depot, away from the fire, on a bench from which the beacon at the airport could be seen blinking off and on in the southern sky.

Tom felt that the time had arrived when he had to speak about the issue that was much on his mind. "Kris, I didn't want to bring this up in front of Sandy and Lisa," he said, after they had talked for a while about other topics. "But your idea about the concert has really been bothering me. I don't think now is a good time."

"Tom, I really don't think it would be such a big deal, such a disaster in the community, as you think it would," she replied.

He gathered from this,—in particular, the "community" part of it,—that his wife had anticipated that he would present an objection to her idea, and had already prepared a line of defense. Probably she had talked to Lisa Moelin about it, he thought. Maybe to Sandy, too.

He proceeded with caution.

"Kris, I don't want to have a difference with you," he said. "It's the last thing I want."

"I don't want a difference, either."

"I just have concerns. I think they're legitimate concerns. I don't think I'm being alarmist."

"Okay," she said. "What are the concerns?"

"Well, the first concern is the timing. Because we are at the crucial point now where we are getting approval to house the kids. The second point is, there are people in this town,—I don't think you're aware of this to the extent I am, Kris,—who would regard this kind of association with

a rock band as a reason to disqualify us... as the runners of a house like this, a group home."

"But how do you know this, Tom?" she shot back. "This is just speculation, your paranoid mind, seeing all kinds of threats where they don't exist. Like this summer when I wanted to go in the hot springs."

He winced at that though he had known that some connection with the hot springs, and his objection to her going into it nude, would be coming out eventually, encouraged by the notion that he knew the boys in the band had promoted in her, some of them, at least, that he had been a fuddy duddy for objecting. The comment about his being paranoid was also one of the most biting criticisms that she had ever thus far levied against him. He felt that he would have a reasonable defense against it,—if he saw any potential gain in that tack, but he didn't at the moment,—so he let it go.

"Well, I have made an effort to get a sense of the community of people in this town," he said. "That's where I'm coming from. It's not just speculation."

"I know you've worked hard, Tom," she replied, softening. "And we'll work it out. Let's not argue now."

With that, the matter ended without resolution, for time being, but Steward continued on with it in his own mind. The next day he went over to talk to his friend, Fr. Larry Flynn, about it.

"Well, I wouldn't want to undermine Krissy now, or cause any problem, Tom, but just between you and me," said the freckled, red-haired pastor, "I don't think what you're saying is far-fetched. Because all it takes is for one person to come forward, and call out the others to respond, and then you got something going. Opposition, I mean."

Steward sat at the kitchen table in the rectory, listening. He merely nodded his head.

"And with the best of intentions. Because what I've observed, dealing with a lot of parents, is it's an almost instinctual thing, a protective action, you know, against a perceived danger."

Steward just nodded again as the boyish priest gazed earnestly in his direction.

"You see, Tom, to begin with... well, maybe you haven't thought of this, but before you ever get to an issue like this, of associations you and Kris might have, that some others might see as questionable, you got to get past the first issue, which is should there even be a group home in that family neighborhood at all. No matter how you do it, it's a change for these people. You're bringing in kids who've been in trouble with the law, and setting them in the midst of these people's children."

"You know, Larry, I guess that's really obvious, but I never thought of it," said Tom, referring to the priest as always by the first name. He

and the priest were more friends than priest and member of the faithful. "I can see where, from their perspective, where it might be a problem."

"Oh, yes. And let me ask you something else."

"What?"

"Are these guys, the band, going to stay in the house? "

"You know, I don't know. Kris and I didn't get that far with it."

"Well, just some friendly advice, talk to her about it as soon as you can. You see where I'm going with this."

"Yes."

"That adds a whole different dimension. Makes it more complicated."

Steward brought up that question later the same evening when Sandy was out in the tiny back yard with Lisa Moelin, the teenage "hippie" neighbor."

"Well, of course, they'll stay in the house," Kris said. "Why not, Tom? The house is completely empty."

"Yes, I know," Tom replied gently. "But just consider a moment. This makes the situation, the whole presence of the house, a lot more complicated to the neighbors. We've got these kids coming in, supposedly in trouble with the law, and now we got long hair musicians."

"Long hair musicians! Tom, that is your paranoia again like you're an old fuddy duddy again. You know very well there's nothing at all bad or creepy about them!"

He thought to himself again that this theme of paranoia and of his being a fuddy duddy was continuing too strongly for it to be just her own concoction. Somebody was encouraging the notion in her,—maybe somebody back in California she wrote to, her brother or Lyn or some other member of the band. He felt annoyed by the intrusion into his and her private life, if that indeed was what it was.

Don Andrews was the next person Steward confided in when Don and Audrey came out to pick up their daughter. He spoke to the artist on a picnic they all went on together when he and Don were out a ways from the others, looking at sunset cloud colors with binoculars that Don had brought along.

"You know what, bud, let me be brutally frank. If the band comes out, you may wind up losing the group home, you got that right. But if you prevent them from coming out somehow, you may lose your wife."

Steward took in this dire warning, but also noticed that Don and Audrey spoke to Kris about the idea before they left, advising her to maybe wait on the idea a little until the group home got established.

"You know, Tom has put a lot of effort into this," Steward heard Don saying to Kris.

To which Kris replied, "Well, I have, too."

"You always work hard," Audrey remarked softly.

Tom noted, though, how his wife visibly reacted with a tensing of her shoulders while she was compelled to listen to Don and Audrey's advice.

"I don't appreciate at all that you went to Don and Audrey behind my back," Kris said as soon as they had left.

"I just talked to Don about it. I didn't think they would bring it up to you."

"What did he say?"

"He said, better watch out or I could lose you."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far, Tom. But I sure would appreciate a little moral support."

He was glad to hear that rather than a seconding of the warning. "Kris, I do want to help you," he replied. "Whatever you need me to do, just let me know."

"What about the group home?"

"I don't know. I guess, let the chips fall where they may."

"I do appreciate that, Tom."

"Just one thing I would ask. Minimize the length of time the boys stay in the house. And the reason I ask, Kris, it would lessen the effect in the community."

She bristled at that. "Okay, I'll try. But, you have to understand, I have to take the dates that are offered. That's one thing I learned in management, Tom, that's a good way to kill the deal.""

The next day, Steward spoke again with his friend, the local priest. "I'm just going to have to try to soften as much as possible whatever bad effect there may be," he said.

"Well, Tom," the priest replied, "I don't think that's an impossible task. I think you will find people are reasonable. We don't have any loonies, really, just some conservative minds."

Steward then found himself in the unlikely position of driving around with his wife trying to make arrangements for the concert tour that at heart he still opposed, so far as the project was concerned. For her sake, however, he did, in fact, want it to succeed.

Their trips together, in this pursuit, were a pleasant break from the work on the house and the community work they had been doing since their arrival in Winslow. It was a little vacation, almost, though it could be regarded as work since the whole idea of the concert, as she described it, was to raise money for the group home. The band would donate half of the receipts in exchange for the exposure of their group in a new locale.

The trips took them, on successive days, to sites quite different in character and quite separate geographically, first through 80 miles of red and brown landscapes to the modernist island of the Navajo Community College in Shiprock, then up the transcontinental highway from Winslow to Flagstaff to the Northern Arizona University, then south from the

railroad track in Winslow to the community center there in the Latino community of humble houses and bare dirt yards.

In all of these places, Kris emerged triumphant, with arrangements having been made for a future concert. All of them would be held in about a month, in late October, but the last, at the Latino center, would be a full week after the first, meaning the band would have to stay about nine days with the Steward's.

His wife was so excited about that that Steward realized it would be futile to raise an objection about how she had agreed to keep the visit as brief as possible. Inside, though, he was concerned and annoyed. His own work had been pushed to the side and delayed. Perhaps it would be damaged beyond repair.

"There's nothing I can do, though," he said to his friend the priest soon later. "I just have to contend with it and control it somehow. I'll have to go around in advance and give people a warning."

"You know, the amazing thing to me," the priest remarked, "to tell you the truth, Tom, is this assumption that the rock music is somehow the heart of everything else,—of all the protests and fervent searching,—the heart of the whole so-called revolution people have talked about. To me, it's not a strong center. It doesn't have intellectual substance. It's all puff and excitement."

Steward was starting to think the same way but he held back from an affirmation. He reminded himself that he would have to be gracious to the band members when they were in the house. He would have to contain his annoyance. For the sake of his relationship with his wife, he would have to pretend interest and enthusiasm over the music. He didn't like the prospect at all.

256. As Morris is moved around, he hears tidbits of news

The Laotian "wet season" of 1970 had brought a number of changes for prisoner of war Major Jim Morris, most disturbing of which had been his sudden transfer out of Ban Hatbay, the Lao Theung village where he had spent about a month after leaving Sam Neua. From there, the downed pilot had been moved to and kept captive in various, usually rain-soaked places on the Plain of Jars or in the adjacent mountains, sometimes as the only prisoner, sometimes in the company of other Americans. All these places had brought their own contributions to his grim experience of captivity. Throughout this entire time, however, Ban Hatbay had remained at the center of his thought.

The always self-appraising pilot had taken note of the importance the village had acquired in his mind. He had no doubt as to why this had happened. Ban Hatbay, alone among the places he had been held in since his capture, had offered an open view of earth and sky and the observation of the daily life of the village people. Also, in Ban Hatbay, Morris had had more meetings of eyes with Mayral and Soutsada, the mother and son he had noticed in his first week in the village. These interactions had remained with him as strongly as the village itself.

Mayral, he had noted, was the first woman since his wife Ellen to have assumed a strong presence within him. She was no competitor to Ellen, surely, on a romantic plane; but the dark eyes that had met his gaze had seared an image into Morris's mind. When he dwelled on that image, he felt something he needed greatly. What was it anyhow, he had asked himself. A sense of the beauty of life, maybe, a hope of regeneration. A sense of himself as still a human being worthy of human acceptance.

Soutsada's face and eyes, so like his mother's, had burned within Morris's mind, also, the downed pilot knew. They were the bright, almost shining face and eyes of boyhood idealism, Morris had observed to himself. Maybe a face such as his own had been at that same age, he thought, the young Jim Morris.

In his long hours of captivity, Morris had tried to recall himself as the young Jim Morris, so proud of how his father had been a pilot and of how his father's family had crossed the Oregon Trail.

Major Xuan Than, the upright soldier who had lectured Morris on the Vietnamese cause, had come to mind at times, also, when Morris considered the volunteer tasks that he had seen the boy engaged in with his troop of young friends. Soutsada was like a boyish version of Xuan Than, Morris thought. (Morris did not know, of course, what his old rowing friend Bill O'Rourke knew, that Xuan Than was dead.)

From that association, of the boy with Xuan Than, Morris had come back again to the odd notion of the "inner home," the notion he had hung onto so desperately through the travail of his confinement and torture at

Sam Neua, and that since then he had been unable to purge from his mind. Surely, as Morris had noted while still in Sam Neua, the outer shell of his inner home had cracked under the influence of Xuan Than. And why had that happened, Morris had asked himself again. Because Xuan Than had made the "enemy" seem no longer so worthy of being killed, Morris had answered; and because, in some cases, Xuan Than had made the enemy seem admirable, noble. Surely, Xuan Than, in his dedication to the Vietnamese socialist state with its democratic and egalitarian ideals, had been an example himself of the soldier ideal.

In any case, Morris had gone on in his mind, the crux of the matter was the inner home was still there, cracks and all. He had thought about that as he had moved from place to place, continuing on the subject from where he had left off before. Yes, the shell had cracked, and as a result of that the good and bad components of his life had merged: his parents, Ellen, Tom Pitt, the boat club, Scott's Bluff, the High Bridge, merged with the killed pig in Puerto Penasco, the wounded soldier at Khe Sanh, the deaths of Pitt, Zastrowski, the Iowan priest, and the women and children in the village he had fired on by mistake.

Morris was aware, also, that Mayral and Soutsada and Ban Hatbay had been added to the mix. There, in the center of his inner home, were the images of their faces and the sight of the villagers amidst the verdant, gleaming scene of the rice paddies of Ban Hatbay,—in those brilliant moments when the sun had broken through the clouds. And there, too, the war had intruded because his memories included interactions he had seen between villagers and Pathet soldiers, indicating how liked, honored, and supported these "enemies" were who had been portrayed in his military past as holding to authority not through the loyalty of the people but through a regime of fear. Morris had not seen any evidence of such a regime of fear in the people of Ban Hatbay.

Yes, the enemy soldiers were now present in his inner home, also, Morris knew. A feeling of the war, with its senseless destruction on both sides, had invaded his whole being. As he tried to sleep, he still often felt himself being flung around in the cockpit of his plane. Jerked awake by that, he would lie for long hours, listening to the sounds in the indeterminate darkness around his unknown location.

He was somewhere in Laos, was all Morris knew. It was the height of the rainy season, as the daily torrential rains and omnipresent streams of brown water made clear. He was being moved, he knew, in response to the events of the war. The sound of the war was in the background often, the rumbling of bomb explosions like thunder, sometimes advancing toward him like an approaching storm, at other times far away like a storm raging in a range of distant mountains. But whatever its form, the war was there, evasive in details.

Once he had experienced the war as a known entity, presented in intelligence briefings and maps, Morris had thought to himself in his first weeks after leaving Ban Hatbay, when he had been alone among his guards. The war had been transformed from that into an unseen beast prowling in the darkness outside.

Since those first few weeks, however, Morris had not always been alone.

One evening, for example, he had been prodded into an enclosure of bamboo, where, in the shadows, sat another American in the driest area of the wet floor, with his back against the wall. The man was 6 foot four so, by appearance, and he was wearing clean fatigues and looked well--nourished,—more than well-nourished, actually, he was a huge, muscular guy,— an unusual sight for Morris, who had become used to emaciated prisoners with ragged clothes.

"Fancy meeting you here," said Morris, restored to a different mind by the sudden presence of another soldier.

"Yes," said the soldier. "Ken Weston, Special Ops."

"I'm a pilot, Jim Morris."

"Pleased to meet you."

"You're out here with some unit?"

"Special to Vang Pao."

"The Hmong general?"

"Yes."

"Captured how?"

"Special circumstance, I'm afraid."

"How's that?"

"Caught with a local girl, Laotian. Guess I got I little too eager, if you know what I mean."

"And where was that?"

"Village we went through. I thought it was secure. Hung around for a little R&R."

Morris stood silently, taking cognizance of that. He had the impression that the act had not been voluntary on the girl's part. The man had been in the midst of an act that in America would have been regarded as a crime. Still Morris knew that crimes of this sort committed by Special Forces were extremely rare. For the most part, as he saw it, they were volunteer, true believer types such as he was himself. So if this had occurred, the man had cracked.

"What do you know of the war?" Morris asked.

"What do I know? Not a hell of a lot. It's been back and forth. Two months ago, Vang Pao had the whole plain. Rain came in. The usual Commie push. Pushed us back down toward Vientiane. Not just the Pathet Lao. North Vietnamese. Regular army. The whole business, if you

know what I mean. Everything the little gooks could get together."

"So the plain is lost now?"

"Yes. But not without problems for them."

"How's that?"

"This year there's been a new dynamic. Bombings. Big time, man. B52's. Clusters."

"I thought the clusters were outlawed."

"So what's new, man. War is hell."

"So that's what the rumbling's been," Morris said, half to himself. "They've been attacking the villages?"

"Laid them low, man."

Soldiers came into the room later as Morris and the other American were sleeping in different parts of the room, with the rain still pouring outside and water streaming in from the windowless bamboo walls. The soldiers jerked the man to his feet and pushed him to the door.

"Fuck you, you goddam dwarves," the man said as he was prodded out. "You can take them rifles and stick them up your ass."

The night resounded with the report of a gun. There was a moment of silence, then a groan followed by more reports of a gun, an exchange of laughter, and the slamming of a door.

Morris assumed that the man had been killed. He felt no sympathy for him. He felt nothing at all. He was starting to be dead inside, he said to himself.

Ellen, his dear Ellen, with her green eyes, could have brought him back to life, Morris had observed later. He had tried again to restore an image of her in his mind, going through his memories: the evening when he had first met her in the boat club, the day at Scotts Bluff when he had returned from his hike to find her in the long grass where the wagon ruts remained from the Oregon Trail, the night in Council Bluffs, Iowa, at the candlelit table where she had asked him about his ambition to be a pilot. Despite these memories, however, her image stayed vague. He could not recall what her voice sounded like, even, or how her touch felt.

With that world so distant, Morris had accepted, that same night of trying to regain her image, that for the time being here would only be his present world of continual movement and his hope of obtaining further news on the war.

He had succeeded in that, at least. In strange places, providing glimpses of rutted roads, thatch-roofed buildings, and suspicious people, he had had brief interchanges with other Americans, weary soldiers like himself, who had shared his confinement for days or hours. They told him other stories confirming the mass bombings that were being carried out across the plains.

"The war, for all practical purposes, is over in Vietnam. It's being

‘Vietnamized,’ you know, turned over to the Vietnamese,” one man, who had identified himself as an Army officer, had told him.

“I wasn’t aware of that,” Morris had replied.

“Well, it’s not something that’s happening overnight,” the other American had said. “We’re talking about a couple of years.”

“You would think so.”

“Meanwhile, you may have heard about this...”

“I haven’t heard anything...”

“We’ve been trying to clean up the scene in Cambodia and here. We invaded Cambodia, you know.”

“I had no idea.”

“Along with that, some of the Army units in Vietnam in the area of Hue, pushed up north along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, staying on the Vietnam side, of course.”

“Of course.”

“That’s why the RVN forces exited Sam Neua, by the way, I heard. They were bombing up in that area. You said you were held there?”

“Right.”

“And that’s why we’re bombing this area here, the Plain of Jars, or so I heard, trying to bomb them back into the stone age before we exit the scene. Trying to demolish their support structure, you know, the villages that feed them, that hide their guns.”

That was the most information Morris had heard about the war in a long time, and, after being separated from this other American, too, and again by himself, he had mulled it over in his mind. He had a new sense of the war as involving the whole of Indochina in a whirl of displacement as American forces pressed inward from all sides. Yet the great irony was, the pressing was not to gain control, as he understood, but to put the area in a state of debility before fleeing the field. What a strange concept, he thought to himself.

So his thoughts went on, as he continued his forced movement in the backs of trucks providing no view toward the outside, but with a winding up and down motion, suggesting that his guards had left the flat land of the plain again to re-enter the more protected setting of the hills that bordered the lowlands.

About this time, in late September, he was riding in the back of a covered truck when the wheels started spinning and the soldiers with him started cussing outside. Pulled outside to help, he saw that he was on a muddy main street of Western-style storefronts with glass windows under Laotian signs. Looking into a nearby window for a moment, he saw his reflection and was shocked at what he saw.

There, where his reflection was, Morris saw a gaunt figure stooped with age. The hair was thin and gray. The face was drawn and pallid. The

arms and legs were like those of a skeleton covered with skin, with none of the normal fullness of flesh.

"I'll be able to regain the weight," Morris remarked to himself as the truck continued on. "But I'll never be able to regain the youth. I'll never be able to regain the vigor."

He knew even as he expressed this self-assessment that it was an exaggeration, to some extent, but he could not prevent himself from the words that he knew were pushing him further down.

"I've become an old man," he said aloud with self-anger almost, to drive it in.

What a blow it would be for Ellen to see him in this condition, he thought to himself, if he ever made it back to his former life. He almost wished he would never see Ellen again, rather than to have to witness the confusion in her face when she realized that the Jim Morris she had married no longer existed.

257. Morris, back at Ban Hatbay, looks for Mayral and Soutsada

On a rainy morning in late September 1970, Major James Morris woke up to find a soldier with a rifle gesturing for him to leave the muddy pen he was confined in and board himself onto a truck with a canvas-covered bed. Within the darkness of the canvas, he rode along for hours until he felt the truck turning steeply up a hill. Pulled outward from the truck in pouring rain, he saw before him a familiar sight of thatch-roofed houses with a Y in the road leading to a bridge below the hill and rice paddies beyond in a valley opening outward. It was Ban Hatbay, the village from which he had been yanked out just as abruptly three months before.

Morris noticed immediately some major changes in the scene. The river below had swollen from the rain to the point of almost reaching the roadbed of the bridge though the roadbed itself was still above the water level. Scanning the familiar scene, in a sweep of the eyes to his left, toward the five overlapping red roofs of the wat on the mountain, on the other side of the gorge, Morris saw there that a section of houses had been flattened to the ground. The trees and shrubs in that areas were damaged and burned.

"Some kind of bomb," he said to himself.

Morris was pushed into a cell (the exact same one that he had been previously held in), before he could examine the scene any closer. But, as soon as he could, he came forward to his old vantage point by the bamboo bars, providing a vista of the village, and there he discerned a further difference; the village was quiet and partially deserted. Many of the houses appeared empty. There were not even as many animals as there had been before.

Morris looked at once to the nearby house where Mayral and Soutsada lived,—the mother and son who had exchanged glanced with him on several occasions,—and he noted, to his disappointment, that the door of their house was completely closed, as he had seldom seen it before, with the ladder hung up horizontally on two pegs.

"They've gone, too," he said to himself.

Then night, unable to sleep, Morris rose from his old wedge on the back of the limestone wall, and walked to the bamboo bars to look off. Some of the houses had lanterns burning within them, he noticed, though not the house of Mayral and Soutsada. The village, aside from that, was so dark and dank that it seemed hardly separated from the woods and mountains around it. The swollen river below could not be seen, but the air carried a feeling of it, somehow, a dark presence moving. He wondered where the river flowed to. It flowed southward, he had determined before. That was a course that would maybe take its water to

the Mekong River, the fabled, wide river that wended its way through the entire Indochina Peninsula to the South China Sea.

It was raining steadily for much of the night. He hardly noticed it after months of captivity often in unprotected outdoor enclosures. Then a cessation in the rain drew his attention to the sky, and Morris saw that the clouds beyond the rice paddies, in the direction of the valley that opened up to the east of the village, were ragged and thin, with a half moon a pale ghost behind them. As he watched for a long time, the moon faded in and out of the clouds, now and then shining brightly in the indigo sky.

Later, as Morris struggled to keep warm in the back wall of the cave, his thoughts went to the sight of the moon he had seen hours before, and from there to his associations with the moon from his past life. He recalled the speech by Gen. Lawrence Moynihan that he had heard in combat training in Texas and the challenge the general had delivered about flying a rocket to the moon. He recalled the Apollo 11 moon landing that he had watched at the Takhli base in Thailand and the pride he had felt in hearing Neil Armstrong's words, "one giant leap for mankind."

Morris, mindful of the dark, flowing water in the valley below his cave, thought of the river in a general sense, also. He recalled himself clinging to his log in the Nam Ou River on his first attempt to escape his captivity and his subsequent capture on the bank of the river. He recalled the boat club on the Mississippi River in St. Paul and his associates from the days when that river and rowing had been so central in his life. Tom Steward, Matt Brandt, and Bill O'Rourke passed through his mind, present for a moment then fading off.

Early the next morning, Morris rose to see the rising sun a pale ghost behind thin clouds, as he had seen the half moon the night before. All morning, as the bomb-scarred village came to life, the sun moved in and out of the thin clouds, now and then throwing bright rays on the rice fields beyond the last buildings of the village, in the flat land that opened out from the village into the adjacent valley. There, too, in the riffs and pockets of the green landscape, transient swaths of sunlight could be seen. Finally, near midday, the sun broke out of the clouds entirely, bathing the whole scene in sunlight. For the first time in several months, Morris saw a blue sky opening above him.

That night, he expected rain clouds to appear as they had for just about every night in the wet season, but the rain clouds did not appear. The moon, waxed a little more toward full, shone from a clear, starry sky and the river below the hill and rice paddies beyond the village gleamed with moonlight. Next morning the sky was still clear. The sun rose into a blue sky. Morris realized then that the wet season had ended.

That same day, Morris noticed villagers that he had become familiar

with in his previous visit returning to their deserted houses. Within a few days, dozens of villagers had returned. Work crews of villagers set about to repair the houses damaged by bombs. Morris also noticed that work crews had begun to work in the rice paddies, bringing in the mature plants to a central area where the rice was being thrashed from the shafts.

By early October, the villagers had returned the village to its previous state, but the house of Mayral and Soutsada still remained empty. Then one morning Morris saw the mother and son approaching the village from the road that ran alongside the facility where he was being kept captive. Without looking in his direction as they came by, they turned to the left in front of him to return to their old house. Once there, they set up the ladder and went aside.

By this time, the full moon had arrived, and Morris noted that the villagers pointed to it on the horizon. That same night, people built fires outside their houses and sang songs together.

On the next morning, Morris watched as the villagers gathered in an open area by the river, which has already begun to withdraw from its high water banks. They were in a festive mood, Morris observed, with adults and children dressed in bright colors.

The girls had flowers in their hair. The boys wore wide sashes of different colors. Many of the younger women wore pleated skirts with white or gray blouses and round hats hung with jewelry. One woman, apparently the festival queen, wore a headdress tied under her chin. On her head, coming out from the headdress, as high again as her face, was a tall black cone decorated with an elaborate medallion and swirls of medal. Mayral wore one of the round hats hung with jewels, Morris noted. Soutsada wore a green sash.

In the midst of this, Morris saw another interesting sight. Monks dressed in orange and yellow robes, secured on one shoulder with the other shoulder bare, emerged from the red-roofed wat on the side of the mountain and came down the winding path into the village, walking in a long single file. There were about a dozen monks in all. They each carried an open basket hung from a shoulder strap and, as they came into the village, people dropped offerings into the baskets. Many of the monks were just boys, Morris noted. He had not been aware that there were monks living in the wat. He had never seen one of them before.

Children came forward with small boats made of curled leaves. The monks raised their hands above the boats. The children placed the boats on the water. Everyone cheered as the boats moved southward on the current. Downstream, another monk lifted the first boat to reach that point from the water. The boy with that boat was given a carved statue.

Following this boat race, there were music and ceremonial dancing. Women with wooden spoons on long sticks stirred rice and vegetables

cooked in large woks placed directly on the fire. The villagers then stood in lines to be served food in round bowls.

Morris thought to himself he had never before seen such a scene of celebration of life and community. He looked around and for the first time realized that the bomb-damaged village had been completely restored. Of course, the people resented him, he thought. In their eyes, he was part of the force that had brought destruction to their village. To them he was an enemy,—"the enemy of the people." That was why he was treated with contempt when he was noticed, though mostly he was ignored.

Toward sunset, the scene grew more beautiful with the orange and golden light falling on the gleaming rice paddies beyond the village and the valley beyond, brilliant with the spring green of a landscape soaked in rain for four months and now brought to life with long days of endless sunlight. The villagers built fires in the center of the village as the children sang for their elders.

Just at this time, Morris saw Mayral and Soutsada coming up the road toward the facility where he was kept. The dark-haired lovely Mayral was dressed in a pleated skirt and white blouse with an embroidered sash over one shoulder and the round hat hung with jewels that Morris had noted before. It was a costume that had been worn by one group of dancers, he recalled. The boy was carrying a bowl of food. They stopped at the guard to talk for a moment. The guard shook his head. Mayral persisted in her soft voice until the guard moved back and let the boy through.

Soutsada brought the bowl of food to Morris's cell and gestured for him to come forward and take it. When he did, the boy smiled. Not knowing what to do, Morris set the bowl down on a shelf of rock, joined his hands together in the gesture of praying, as he has seen the villagers do, and bowed. The boy made the same gesture, smiled again, and left.

The food was some kind of fried mixture of rice, vegetables, and a fatty meat like duck or pork. Morris sat eating it slowly for a long time. It was the most delicious food he had eaten for more than a year. He could not recall when he had last eaten an actual meal.

That night Morris watched as the people gathered with torches and walked with the monks back to the wat on the side of the mountain above the gorge. From the wat came the sound of music and chanting. Then the people returned with torches still burning. Once in the village they extinguished the flames. The village was dark.

Morris sat in his cell, feeling profoundly moved by the festival of life he had witnessed and by the kindness he had received from Mayral and Soutsada. It had been just that, he was well aware, an act of kindness on a religious festival; maybe they had seen it as a way to earn a blessing for

themselves; but the boy's smile had been genuine, there could be no doubting that.

For a long time, Morris tried to hold in his mind an image of the bright, hopeful eyes that had looked into his. That look had restored him to the human community, he thought. He hoped to be worthy of it. How he could do that, he no longer knew.

258. Steward steps aside as the band moves into the house

On the day after Jim Morris had his encounter with the boy Soutsada in Ban Hatbay, Laos, Tom Steward had a meeting in Window Rock, Arizona, the capitol city of the Navajo Nation, with a probation officer for the Navajo Tribal Court. At this meeting, Steward obtained a first commitment for boys to be assigned to the group home he and his wife Kris had been setting up in Winslow.

The probation officer, a man named Tommie Brown, had two boys in mind. The tentative timeframe for them to move to the house was around Thanksgiving, which, at this time, in mid-October 1970, was about five weeks in the future.

"I would just give you one piece of advice," the officer said, "keep it low key. We've been through this before. There is sometimes a chance of suspicion on the part of the community. You can't blame people, they don't want a problem house in their midst."

Steward knew the probation officer hadn't intended this remark to be addressed to the upcoming concerts that his wife had been arranging, but the remark just confirmed what he had been thinking privately that the presence of the band at the house, just before the arrival of kids from the court, would be a possible source of problems in how the group home was viewed by the community.

He made one more effort to dissuade his wife. "Kris, I just ask you to please consider, wouldn't it be better if the concert is held later sometime, maybe next spring, after the group home is up and running? To have the concerts now will just put attention on us as a time when it would be better to lie low."

"But now is when the house is available for them to stay with us," Kris replied. "Now is when the band is available for the concert. Who knows, by this spring, they may have cut a record. That will change the whole picture."

He could see it was futile to argue. "Well, one thing you need to be aware of, I'm really involved in my activities now." He was referring to the counseling he was doing at the Indian boarding school and the physical education classes he was leading at two elementary schools. "I have to keep them up. I can't just take a two-week vacation."

"Tom, everyone knows you're working here. I don't think anyone will resent that," she said.

"Well, I'm going to do my best to help you."

"Just remember, I have my responsibilities, too, she added.

"Yes, I know."

"So don't feel hurt when I need to go off on my own."

He did know and accept that, he thought later. He found it annoying that she had had to make a point of it when he was making such an effort,

as she knew, to meet her halfway. The remark was typical, though, of his and her recent interaction. They had been getting along well in general, but the concert had become a flashpoint for any differences between them. He was aware that she had continued with the process begun the past summer of shifting her identity and interests toward the band and the whole world it represented to her. In doing so, she had continued to shift away from him. He didn't like being less important to her, but he was resigned to accept it as part of the growth to independence that Mary Brandt had warned him would need to happen.

Steward still thought at times of the resolution he had made the previous summer, with respect to the job in Winslow, of trying to find a middle ground between the extremes of the so-called "culture war." It was something he had worked out in his journal and in his private thoughts. He had never tried to explain the concept to Kris. Once he might have done so, but lately she had had less and less tolerance for the philosophical side of his personality. Even so, despite having never explained it to her, he had retained the concept for himself as an active thread in his own thought process. He still wanted to achieve the goal he had started out with, of finding that middle ground.

He had lately also realized, however, that, in trying to find this middle ground, he had gone far afield from some of the core allegiances of the not too distant past. His wife had not done so. It was an admirable quality, he thought; it showed her integrity.

He tried to explain this to his friend, the local Catholic priest, Fr. Larry O'Brien, one day soon after his meeting with his wife when he stopped by at the rectory, as he gotten in the habit of doing several times a week.

"You know what really impresses me, though, Larry," he said. "Kris has really the best instincts and sympathies. For example, I've been going over to the Indian boarding school, trying to help kids get into Upward Bound." (That, as they both knew, was a government program to assist poor kids in paying for college." "Surely, as it's been often pointed out, the boarding schools are an attempt,—historically, at least,—to pull these kids away from their culture, to force them to assimilate. And what does Kris do? She sets up a concert at the Navajo Community College. And what is the intention there, the purpose of that whole school? To assist these kids to hold on to their culture. So, obviously, where she had put her sympathies is the better place."

"I think what you're doing at the school is important, too," the young priest replied. "But I would agree, the college is in the vanguard and the boarding school is not."

"Then, where does she set up the concert here?" Steward went on. "Not on this side of the town, the good side of the tracks, literally, but on

the other side of the tracks, over in the Mexican neighborhood. That's the direction she inclines toward, without ever articulating it."

"Well, I agree, that's the direction we should be heading, toward inclusion," the priest said. "And I can tell you, also, though, Tom, many in this community here, 'on the good side of the tracks,' would maybe praise you for that while not wanting their kids to go over there, because they regard that neighborhood as a crime neighborhood. That's the main problem here, with this whole concert thing, as I see it, you do want to do the right thing, but you have to be careful to move slowly so you can bring people along with you."

"Yes, I know, and I do want to do that," Steward said.

"But I think, Tom, you can still do that. These concerts may not create any problems for you. You never know. People in a little town like this have a lot of fixed ideas."

"Yes, I've encountered some of that."

"In any case, your wife should come first. It's far more important for you and her to grow in your understanding of one another than for this group home to become a reality. A project like this, in the long run, will do a little good and go its way like a lot of other well-meaning projects. But your relationship with Krissy is going to last, hopefully, for the rest of your life."

That was some pretty sage advice from the boyish priest, Steward reflected as he drive away, and he knew, one level, he was proud of his wife for the passion she showed in whatever she did. A memory came to him of how she had shouted out the name of the soldier that she carried a placard for in the peace march in D.C. On another level, though, Steward knew, he was building up a well of resentment for how his own goals in Winslow were being set aside and treated as "not hip" because of the serious intellectualism involved in his own approach. In the eyes of his wife, and lately he had seen in Kris's new friend, Lisa Moelin, rock music was "what was really happening." Rock music and the associated cultural changes were worthy of admiration while a quiet effort like his own was dismissed as square.

Fr. Larry was right, though, Steward reminded himself: the most important thing in this whole situation was for him to maintain a good relationship with his wife. The band would come and go. He and she would be left alone to pursue the project from where it would be once the concerts were over and the band had left.

Steward had managed to fully adopt this attitude by the time the band arrived. When they pulled up at the house on Wednesday, October 21, at about supper time,—bearded, in bell-bottomed jeans, with Vietnam swamp caps and headbands, some of them wearing dark glasses,—he at once went outside and greeted everyone pleasantly as he helped to carry

their stuff into the house.

In L.A. they may have been the usual fare, but in Winslow they were quite a departure from the norm. Within a few minutes, a group of kids of all ages from five to 15 had gathered on the sidewalk to watch them unload their instruments.

"Nice to see you guys! How was your trip across?" Steward said. "It was great, man!" replied the ever smiling keyboard player,

Steven Hanley, the only one of the group with no facial hair.

As always, the band members were in high spirits. There were six of them in all including, in addition to Steven, Kris's brother, the drummer John DeSolt, the lead guitar David Vorgan, the base guitar Harlen Dubris, the sound man Dana Hutten, and the stage manager, Greg Becker. They took turns giving hugs to the Steward's and then to Lisa Moelin, who when introduced seemed almost in a swoon.

Only David, the bespectacled blond guitarist, the group cynic, had anything negative to say. He was the one who had sneered at Steward at the nude scene by the hot springs in Bishop, and on occasions he had shown his contempt of Steward's book knowledge and ideals. "Wow, look at this place, will you?" he remarked in a whisper, nodding toward the little houses lined along the street. "How do people stay awake?"

"They go to work, David," Kris's brother, John DeSolt the drummer, replied softy so as not to heard by the gawking children on the sidewalk. "They lead what is called an ordinary life."

"Spare me from it, man. I still got my eyes open."

Steward knew he meant that criticism not just of the neighborhood, but of him for working there. The anger flashed up inside him again; he pushed it down.

"Well, that's not your fan base anyhow, David," he said. "Lisa here is the local president."

"Is that right?" David asked, nodding at her with a smile.

"Oh, yes, I've heard all of your numbers that Krissie has, on the tape."

"Same tape she used for the promos."

"Yes, I think so. Yes."

"Well, hope you can make to our concerts."

"Oh, I plan to for sure."

"We'll get you a place up front."

"Far out! Thanks!"

Steward could hardly restrain himself not to say something in reply to that. The band members acted as if they were some famous rock group and, clearly in their own minds, they were on the way to becoming that. But, later in the house, he sat with his wife and Lisa listening to a new song idea that the boys were presenting, which is own private estimation

he regarded as just plain not good.

"It's amazing how you guys put those things together," he said when they were done.

"Yes, it really is," Kris added. "You guys are just making leaps and bounds."

"Thank you," several of them humbly replied.

The band members were, if truth were told, as nice as their humble replies indicated, Steward reflected. Why should he fault them because of their ambition to be great artists? If no one had such an ambition, if no one pursued it, starting out as not great, where would great artists come from? They had come out 800 miles from L.A. on what they had been told was a favor to him and Kris, to help in raising money for the group home. Only David, with his contempt of conventional life, seemed out of line. But David could be abided. He would have to be abided, Steward thought, for the sake of his and Kris's marriage.

Steward left the house later, feeling he had succeeded in welcoming the band to the house in a way that had not betrayed his ambivalence toward their presence. With time to spare before reporting to the Catholic school for his volunteer work as phy ed teacher, he drove out idly with no place to go, really, and not wanting to just hang around in the house.

Later, after his gym class was over, he entered the house to find the group fully moved in, their sleeping bags and instruments all around, and their music notes on the dining room table. Steven, the clean-shaven, boyish keyboard player, was clinking out a tune as Lisa sat devotedly at his side.

"Lisa has quite an ear," Steve said as Steward sat down. "She's been helping a lot."

"Is that right?" said Steward pleasantly. He could see she was brimming over with pride at being given such a compliment.

"Yea, that's the righteous truth," David said.

Plans had been made for the group to go on a hike the next day in the mountains by Flagstaff, the same three-peaked range as could be seen from the open country north of Winslow. Steward understood at once that his wife would be going with the group and that no one would press him to go, including his wife, but, if he did not, he would spend the day alone in Winslow while she was off with a group of dynamic young men.

He did go with the group and it was a pleasant day. They were nice guys, for the most part, he thought, though he was often searching in his mind for something to say to them. The mountain slopes were beautiful with the aspen trees golden against a backdrop of green pines and vistas looking off to the pastel landscape of the mesa looking back toward Winslow.

Next day came the trip to the first concert at the Navajo Community

College in Tsaile, and again Steward elected to go along. From Winslow it was a trip of about 120 miles through the sparsely populated expanses of the reservation, doted with sage.

Steward learned then what his wife had meant by "don't be hurt if I go off by myself." She called him aside and explained that she would need to ride in the lead car with her brother and the musicians.

"To go over the program," she explained. "You're not jealous?"

"No. I understand."

He did feel annoyed and angry, though, as he rode with the sound man, Dana, and the stage manager, Greg, trying to keep up a conversation with them. They were his wife's age, five years younger than he. Neither of them had been to college. The reservation and the Indian towns along the way provided a topic for a while and then Steward, in the backseat, resigned to being quietly as he drifted into his own thoughts.

The Navajo college, the group soon learned, consisted of a single academic building, a parking lot, and a two-story dorm in the midst of an open landscape with buttes in the distance. The academic center, a four-story octagon with a green ceramic tile sides and an out skirted concrete base, was meant to represent a traditional Navajo "hogan," a plaque on the courtyard explained. Sheep grazed in the distance amidst the plain, ranch-style houses of the modern Navajo.

The Navajo college students who ventured out as far as the parking lot, did not appear to have come so far in modernization, however, as to appreciate the music. They exchanged glances and jokes in their own language as the music of the band came blaring out from the gym.

"Come on in!" Kris hollered out to them.

"No money," one of them replied.

Informed of that, the band opened the doors and the students came in, seeming amazed by the loudness of the sound. They gave no indication of liking or disliking the music. Over the course of the evening they drifted away until only about a dozen remained.

"Well, it was something new for them," Kris said as the group stood in the parking lot later.

"Progress is slow," Lisa Moelin added.

The group headed back through the vast expanses with dark settling in, as once again Steward rode in a separate car from his wife. The whole trip had been unpleasant for him except for what it had provided in his further understanding of Indian life. He had spent the evening standing around, ignored by his wife, hating the loudness of the music, feeling like he didn't belong in such a setting. He reminded himself that this would only continue for another week after which he would be able to return to his own quiet work on the group home.

259. Steward finds himself isolated and pegged as paranoid and controlling

During the next few days after the concert at the Navajo Community College, Tom Steward tried to continue at his own activities, related to his work, while struggling to maintain a facade of being glad to have the members of the band in his house with all the attendant complications of having to entertain them, pretend an interest in their music, and watch them as they went off with his wife.

The truth of the matter was that his own activities were not that impressive or important, he was well aware. He went each day to work as a physical education assistant at two local schools, both of them church-run. One was the school of the Methodist Church led by the pipe-smoking intellectual, United Methodist minister who lived just across the street. The other was the Catholic school for the parish. St. Joseph, led by Steward's friend, Fr. Larry. The idea of these activities, for Steward, was simply to meet and interact with the young people of the town. He went to the Methodist school in the morning and the Catholic school in the afternoon. Aside from these activities, Steward had been going around lately to meet informally with the local sheriff, the local police, and the youth probation officer attached to the county court. He had stopped doing that, however, while the band was in town, not wanting to have to answer questions about them. He had also delayed a plan to invite people he had met over to the house to see the progress of the future group home. There was no way of doing this while the band was in town, and again he wanted to avoid questions.

When Steward came home each day and found the members of the band sprawled around in various places in the house, he felt annoyed and had to remind himself again that they were in the house by invitation and that from their perspective, they were doing a service,—the service being supposedly that they would contribute some of the proceeds from their concert to a cash fund for the house. Steward had his doubts that much money would come from that, but that was, nonetheless, the purpose of their presence.

Steward figured out one day that he did not really resent the members of the band. For the most part, they were nice guys and pleasant company, except for the cynic David. What he resented, or maybe just felt bad about, was that, in all his reactions between his wife and the members of the band and then him, he had observed the inescapable fact that he had undergone a diminution in her eyes—to be replaced by the obvious admiration she had for the members of the band and their ability to make music. To her, music was life, music was what mattered, music was cool and fun,—and everything else of a positive nature,—whereas his own world, as she had begun to see it, was dry intellectualism and

idealism. He did not feel himself that his life was this way, but he was painfully aware that his wife had begun to see it in this way. She never said so exactly, but there were subtle cues.

Aside from this, he was also aware, there was the issue of plain, old jealousy and what to do about it. Each day he faced the question of whether to continue in his own activities or whether to let the group go off by themselves with his wife among them. When he did go along, it was obvious he had no real function. He had no interest in the music, of that everyone was aware. He was simply tagging along, and he knew that some of the band members thought he was doing so to keep an eye on his wife.

Steward did go along with the group up to Flagstaff, the day before the concert at the university there. The stated purpose was to check out the concert site and do some practice runs for sound.

Kris, on this trip, rode along with him alone in their car. It was her decision. He had not asked her to do it.

"Tom, I know this is hard for you," she said. "I appreciate how you're making so many accommodations."

"I know it's important to you."

"Yes, I know you're doing it for me. And I just want you to know, I am aware of it and I am grateful."

Steward was glad for that, but he didn't know what further to say about it.

"Well, this scene in Flagstaff should be a little different than Tsaile," he said.

"It would be nice if they have money."

At the university, Steward watched as the his wife and several of the band members moved around within the gym talking about the placement of amplifiers and lights. He had no interest at all in the discussions, though he attempted to maintain a look of being interested.

At last, the day was over and the group headed off again, this time with Kris in another car with her brother. Steward drove with Dana, the sound man with the clean-shaven cheeks and Amish beard, in the front seat with him. In the back were Steven, the bright-eyed, boyish keyboard player, and Lisa Moelin, the plain-faced, ever fervent madonna, who by this time had coupled up with Steven and spent hours staring into his face and holding his hand. Dana was pleasant company as he talked of his days in Vietnam, which he described as if his stay had had nothing to do with war and had been a succession of parties and pranks. Steven and Lisa talked without pause in the dark back seat about one of Lisa's favorite subjects, whether aliens had ever visited earth.

Back home in the little house in Winslow, there was the usual wind-down with candlelight, wine, and quiet talk about music and the next

day's concert. Steward sat in on it until Kris said good night and went upstairs to their bedroom, then he followed along, intending for the evening to be over for himself, also, but on the way through the hall he saw Steven and Lisa under a sleeping bag in a dark corner of the dining room.

The sight of that disturbed him. Upstairs, he sat on the edge of the bed, contemplating whether he should let the matter go or try to express an objection.

"Kris," he said. "Did you know Lisa's still here?"

"No, I didn't, Tom. I'm not her mother."

"Well, I don't mean to be prudish or controlling. But her mother is right down the street. That's where I see a problem."

"Tom, Lisa is 19 years old. That is the age I was when you and I got engaged. I think she can take care of her own morals."

"It's not a question of age or morals, as I see it," Steward said. "It's a question of the local mores in this little town and what the perception is of us as being people who would undermine them."

It was dark in the room but he could sense her body tightening on the bed as she reacted to these college type words. Lately she had less and less tolerance for such words when they came from him.

"You know what, Tom?" she said.

"What?"

"You are getting paranoid."

"I'm not getting paranoid. I'm just trying to think in terms of this house and the project. I have an obligation to make this project work. I like Lisa. I don't have any problem with Lisa, in general."

"Well, go downstairs then and tell her you think she's committing a mortal sin."

He sighed at that. He didn't want to cause a confrontation. But, as he still sat on the bed, the front doorbell rang. He went downstairs and opened it to find Lana Moelin, Lisa's mother. She was physically almost an identical, older version of her daughter with the same skinny body, long, thin face, and plain features. Steward had seen her at the Catholic church where Lisa's 11-year-old brother was in one of his gym classes. He knew that Lana was a devoted member of the church, as well as a single mother who freely gave her daughter use of the one family car, a beat up red Plymouth Valiant.

"Is Lisa here?" the mother asked.

"I think so."

"Could you please go tell her, her mother would like to have a word with her?"

Steward went into the other room through the dark living room where there was flickering light from candles. What must Lana think of this, he

wondered to himself. In her eyes, likely, it was a diabolic den where her daughter was being led astray.

Lisa went to the door. There was a rising and falling of voices and then Lisa went to say goodbye to Steven and left.

"Are you satisfied?" Kris asked when Steward returned upstairs.

"I didn't have anything to do with it," he replied.

"But you got what you want."

"I suppose so. Yes."

Next day was the Flagstaff concert and Steward was faced with a decision again regarding whether to tag along, with no real reason for doing so except to accompany his wife. He was reluctant to even speak to her about it after her angry words of the previous night, but there was no indication she had retained any bad feeling.

"Kris, I was thinking of maybe staying here today, while you guys set up, then later I'll come up, this evening, just for the concert."

"I think that would be fine, Tom," she answered pleasantly. "You would probably just be standing around."

"I know."

He watched as the group left from the driveway next to the house. It was a big day for his wife, obviously. She had washed and fluffed her blonde curls. She was dressed in a blue blouse, gray skirt, and blue pumps, as he knew she felt appropriate for her managerial role. She looked sexy, he thought. In her every action, she showed the niceness and ease with men that he had heard her praised for in California. He felt jealous watching her as she moved about. She was beaming with excitement and shouting instructions as she gestured with both hands.

Steward went about his normal business but all day long he felt agitated. In mid-afternoon, after his second gym class, he went running, showered, and headed up the highway toward Flagstaff along the route he followed so often with his wife.

In Flagstaff, at the gym where the concert was being held, there was a crowd of what appeared to be a couple of hundred people. It was not a huge crowd of wild fans, but it was a respectable number of people who had money to pay their way in and seemed to have a genuine interest in the Thunder Mountain band.

He went into the dark interior of the gym, looking for his wife. He saw her blonde head bobbing on the side of the stage in the flickering red and blue glow of the light show.

The band was in the midst of one of their loud numbers. How anyone could stand the sheer volume, he didn't know. He could not hear a melody or comprehensible lyrics, just throbbing electrical sound and shouting. The facial expressions of the musicians were consistent with the sound; they looked angry. He thought to himself they were surely

deluded; they apparently believed that by being loud and pounding they were creating a powerful effect.

"Fantastic, isn't it?" Kris shouted when she saw him.

"Yes, it really is," he answered.

He stood beside her as she rocked back and forth to the music. He hated the whole setting. He felt completely out of his own element.

"I'm not quite sure what to do," he said.

"Just enjoy, Tom. Just enjoy.

"Should I stay here with you?"

"No, you shouldn't be on the stage. I'm kind of working, you know. I'll talk to you later."

"Okay," he said, leaning forward to kiss her, but she rotated her face to turn the kiss into a glance.

Back in the gym, he stood in the midst of the crowd, feeling there was no sense at all in his presence. He didn't like the music. He didn't like the scene. He wouldn't have any real prospect of being with his wife. He went outside, into the balmy evening air of the campus, which had a foresty atmosphere, with tall red cedars and pines. In the quiet air, he felt more collected.

After a second try at the gym, he went up to the front again to speak with his wife.

"Kris, I'm kind of out of my element here," he said. "Would you mind if I just went back home?"

"No, suit yourself," she replied. "Everyone knows you're kind of out of it, Tom. No one holds it against you."

"Okay, see you later."

"Bye. Drive safe."

Back at home, Steward slumped down on the couch, amidst the mess of sleeping bags and clothes, glad to have some time in the house alone. The group would be back within several hours, he thought. Then there would be the usual wind-down all through the night. The next day, Thursday, they would sleep most of the day after the exertion of the concert. Then the next day, Friday, there would be the last concert, in Winslow. Another day of rest would follow. Sunday would be some kind of final outing together. Then on Monday, finally, they would leave and, hopefully, his previous arrangements with his wife could be resumed.

He had just gone through this timeframe in his mind when the phone rang. It was Kris shouting out a message to be heard against the loud sound the background.

"Tom, we met some people here. They're really interested in setting up a tour for the boys down in Phoenix and Tucson. Looks like we're all going to their house after this. We may wind up just crashing there."

"You mean overnight?"

"Don't get your paranoia, Tom. It won't be a big orgy."

"When will you be home then?"

"Tomorrow about noon."

Steward tried to just shake this off, but he felt an unknown threat in it. Did he distrust his wife, he asked himself. No, he did not. But he was losing his closeness with her. There was no doubt about that.

He tried to sleep but he spent most of the night laying awake under the grip of a state of mind such as he recalled from the days before his marriage. It was the anxious state he had felt at the most unstable time of his ill-fated relationship with Barb Carpenter, when she had announced that she was pregnant by another student. It was the state he had felt when Kris had failed to show up for her first date with him, after he and she had met on the bus from Santa Barbara to L.A.

The group did return, as Kris had said, about noon the next day, in an ebullient mood over what they had felt was a successful concert and with the prospect of another tour later in the year in southern Arizona. Again, Steward tried to couple off for a while with his wife, but he could not pull her away from the group.

"It was fantastic, Tom" was all she said.

All that day, the group slept, as he figured would happen. Coming into the house later, though, he smelled the unmistakable aroma of grass in the living room.

Finding his wife alone upstairs, he confronted her about it. "Kris, this is the one thing that could bring this whole project down."

"I wasn't aware of it," she said. "If you don't approve of it, tell them about it."

"It's not whether I approve."

"I know, the perception."

He did go down at once, where the band members were at the long dining room table with their instruments working out a tune.

"Please, just drive off somewhere, out on the road north of town here or something. You can come back stoned. I don't mind that."

"Far out, you're big minded, man," David said.

"It's not a matter of being big-minded. I'm responsible for making this house a success."

"He's right, David," Steven said.

"No need to worry, man. We won't mess up your safe little gig."

Kris had come down to watch, Steward noted when he turned to leave the room. She was standing in the hall with a look of annoyance.

"Satisfied?" she said.

"Not really," he answered. "I don't want to cause contention."

"'Contention.' Heavy," David said from the table where the group had gone on with their music session.

260. After the final concert, Steward discovers Kristine with David

By the time of the last concert, a few hours later, Tom Steward was struggling with anger toward his wife and resentment toward her and the members of the band, and with David, especially, for dismissing his own concerns about the house. He could tell that his wife was also angry and resentful. He knew that the situation, in general, was a tinder box that he needed to respond to as calmly and measuredly as possible. He did not want to do something drastic that would jeopardize his relationship with his wife, though, for the first time, he understood the marriage was on shaky ground.

He watched as the group rounded up their things for the concert and stood by the cars, deciding who would ride where. This time he saw there would no invitation for him to come along.

He went out to the group, attempting a diplomatic tone. John, Dana, and Steven were still amenable to it, at least. Harlen and Greg acted as if they didn't care one way or another. The blond, bespectacled David could scarcely conceal his scorn.

Steward didn't address himself to the group, however. He went over to Kris where she stood in the garage by the tool bench setting out some leaflets for the concert.

"Kris, I don't want to be on bad terms with you," he said.

"You're not on bad terms," she responded, turning away to face the tool bench.

"I think maybe I will sit this one out."

He hoped that that would bring out a response in her, a request for him to come along, though he doubted it would.

"Tom, no one cares if you sit it out," she said. "Everyone knows you know absolutely nothing about music. The way you stand there, you look so completely out of it. You should see yourself, you look like some kind of intellectual zombie."

That brought out the anger he was trying to suppress. "Well, when you're 21 and female, you can pass as a groupie," he said. "That's not so easy for me, I'm a 26 year old man."

"I know how old you are," she replied with fire in her eyes. "And I am not a groupie, Tom. I am the manager of this band. For the time being, at least. On this concert. And I intend to do my job."

Steward returned to the house and watched as the group left. He kept defending in his mind that he had finally told the truth and said what he had had to say. But, upstairs in his and Kris's bedroom, he came upon a large glossy black and white photo of her that she had given him before their marriage. It was a photo that he had always thought brought out how young she had been at that time, with a girlish tentativeness in her

smile. At the same time, the photo showed her unusual beauty, in contrast to that, the beauty that was compelling enough to bring her through any situation where a moment of unsureness might have brought down a less beautiful woman, in the eyes of the beholder.

It was a photo in which he saw her as she had looked the first time he had kissed her, still not believing that someone as grand as Kris had been then in his estimation could have reciprocated his feeling. But she had reciprocated. She had fallen in love with him. She had told everyone about him. She had gone off with him to a questionable future. She had trusted his sense of what was best for them both.

Now he was losing hold of her, he thought to himself, though he had not lost hold of her completely or irreparably. She still hugged him and made love to him with the same warmth and passion as she had had before. But something was amiss.

He had been wrong to call her a groupie, Steward acknowledged to himself. He had hurt her a little maybe, in retaliation for her growing indifference, but in the process of that he had injured the thing that mattered most to him, his relationship with her.

He went out to the car and drove through town past the railroad depot, across the tracks, and around the bend of the road that led beside the airport, with its single, turning beacon, to the treeless, bare dirt Mexican neighborhood where the community center was located.

From a half mile away, Steward could hear the throbbing music, and he observed that people in the houses along the road were looking in that direction from their porches or yards. The parking lot was crammed with cars, he saw as he drew near. There was some kind of commotion on the edge of the lot that had brought forth the local police, probably unknown to the people inside.

He drove past without stopping, not knowing why he had even driven by. The situation inside would be the same as in Flagstaff, he thought to himself, with the same flickering lights and unbearable noise.

The band was blasting out their sound apparently without any sense that this was a quiet neighborhood.

The event had brought out the worse element, judging by the disturbance outside. Two groups of teens were faced off, he saw, with the cops between them.

“Great coup for the group home,” he noted to himself. “How on God’s earth we will ever recover from this?”

No sooner had he thought this, however, than he realized again that out of defensiveness he was failing to act on the thing most important to him in his own life, his love for her. He pulled into the parking lot and went over to the center, finding the sound man, Dana, as the door.

Dana, as usual, greeted him with genuine pleasure and affection. Of

all of the people in the group, he was the one who seemed to appreciate the most what Steward was trying to do with the group home. Dana's older sister, Steward had learned, was a social worker in California who worked in juvenile support.

"Well, if you're looking for problem kids," Dana said, "you can find them here."

Steward went in to the auditorium where the blaring, rhythmic sound of the group was, from his perspective, almost impossible to bear. Over in the darkness, illumined by blue flickering lights, he could see the blond head of his wife, bobbing up and down. He went across toward her, but he saw on drawing nearer that she was surrounded by people she had apparently met at the concert. There was nothing untoward about her behavior, no sign of flirtation or anything amiss, but he could see in a flash how adept she was in such situations, as compared to his own totally lack of adeptness, of which he was at the moment acutely aware.

Without even going up to greet her, he left, going out another door to avoid being seen by Dana as he left after such a short time. Better to wait and talk to her back home, he thought. Or better still, wait to the band was gone and his and her life had returned to normal.

He resolved again, though, to make the best of it when the group returned from the concert, which they did at about an hour after midnight. They were in an exuberant mood. Clearly, they thought the evening had been a great success.

"It was tremendous, Tom," said Kris, coming up to him. "Excuse me for saying it, but it was far fucking out."

"Great to hear that," he said.

"Musically, she means," Harlen, the lead guitarist, who was not one to speak much, added. "Not too big on the receipts."

Steward took that as a hint that the agreed on half of the receipts that would go to the group home might not be forthcoming.

"No one's thinking about the money," he said.

"Far out, man. You know how it is, it's a hard grind."

Steward stayed for a few minutes in the living room where the usual wind-down had already begun with the electric lights out, the candles lit, wine bottles being passed around. He suspected, as soon as he left the scene, there would be joints being passed around, also.

He looked around the room and caught the eyes of his wife, who was seated on the couch with two of the band members, Harlen and David.

"I'll be up in a little while," she said.

"Okay, I'll see you then."

He went up in the bedroom, waiting for her to arrive. He wanted to make peace with her regarding the comment he had made earlier in the evening. From his brief interactions with her since the arrival of the

group back at the house, he sensed she didn't harbor any ill feelings, but still he wanted to make amends, if possible. He wanted to be restored to a her good graces and start moving back somehow to the tenderness he and she had always shown for one another.

An hour went by, then an hour and a half. He had not slept. He was acutely aware of the passing time. To go downstairs would to give the appearance of checking on her, he thought, so he held off for a while, as long as he could, before going back down.

Downstairs, the rooms were dark and quiet with a few flickering candles the only source of light except for the light of the street lamp outside the drapes of the living room window. Harlen and John were on the couch talking quietly as they smoked a joint.

Steward ignored it.

"You seen Kris?" he asked.

"I don't know, man. She was here a little while ago," Harlen replied.

Over in a dark corner of the dining room, Steward saw two people huddled together under a sleeping bag. He went closer and looked. It was Steven and Lisa.

"See Kris?" he asked.

"She was just here somewhere," Lisa answered.

Steward went across the room again and through the hall toward the kitchen, but, as he passed the closet in the hallway, he heard the sound of movement inside. He opened the door and found Kris on the floor with her a shirt pulled over her shoulders to cover her naked breasts. Next to her was David with a shirt thrown over his crotch.

Steward had been aware of some friction in his marriage, but he had never expected that Kris would be unfaithful, and in his own house, with him home, sleeping upstairs.

"This I can't believe," he said.

He had no sense of what to do further. He felt his body trembling as he watched them pull themselves clumsily up from the floor and step out of the closet toward him. David had a defiant, contemptuous expression. Kris looked embarrassed.

"Caught in the proverbial act," David remarked glibly.

"You can get your stuff and leave right now," said Steward. "Kris, you can go with him or stay here. I don't care."

He went into the other room where everyone by this time was alert to the tension in his voice.

"Same for all of you," he said. "The party is over. Get your stuff and get out. I mean, right now."

"Some people are sleeping," Harlen said.

"Within five minutes I want you all gone. If you're here after then, I'm calling the police to come and remove you."

Without further word, in silence, they filed out the door. There were some clothes left by the couch. Steward threw them outside. He felt in such a fury. He was trembling still. He didn't even look to see whether Kris had gone with them. He watched their vehicles back out and head down the street, then he locked the doors, blew out the candles and went upstairs to find his wife sitting on the bed.

"You know that this means," he said. "It starts with a D."

"Well, I just want you to know," she said softly. "It wasn't planned."

"With him, of all people. He's a cynic. He's vile."

"You don't understand him. He's angry, but it's not about you or us, it's about the lack of success."

"In his music?"

"Yes."

"The lack of success is not hard to understand when you listen to their music."

"Well, that's your opinion, Tom, but this is not about David. It's about you and me."

"You and me? What more can I do? I gave up my work. I gave up my job. You make me a laughing stock. You lied to me. You screw around behind my back, in our own house, with people we invited as guests that you asked me to be nice to."

"I know it was unfair. I don't have a defense."

"My God, Kris! What can we do? You've made it impossible to go back, to any kind of marriage."

She was silent.

"That I don't know," she said after a while. "But I know there are issues, Tom. There have been issues. I have tried to ignore them. They've been building up. I'm sorry it happened this way."

He didn't know what to say to that. It seemed as if she was saying that these issues would have ended the marriage anyhow, and the end of the marriage had just come out in an odd way. Her degree of discontent, as she described it, was much greater than he had known.

He lay down on the bed and covered his face with his hands. She lay down beside him and placed her hand on his chest.

"Tom, I am sorry," she said. "I don't want to hurt you. You've been good to me. I'll never forget that."

He accepted that in silence, also.

261. Steward travels to Phoenix to get some distance from Kris

In the morning, Tom Steward woke up and realized his wife Kristine was no longer beside him. He found her at the kitchen table, looking weary and emotionally drained.

"Tom, just to let you know, they're all gone now except for Steven and Dana," she said. "I just talked to my brother. They drove all night. They're in Kingman already."

"Steven is still here?"

"He stayed at Lisa's house. Dana, too. They're going down to Phoenix. In Lisa's car."

"What's in Phoenix?"

"The people I told you about, ones we stayed with in Flag, have got a piano for sale down there. Steve and Dana are going down to look at it. I thought maybe you could ride down with them. It would give us both a break. We can get some space from this and talk tomorrow."

"David is still in town?"

"David is in Kingman. I'm not trying to deceive you."

"Steven and Dana want me to go?"

"They like you, Tom. I'm the one they're critical of. They think I did you wrong. But I've never actually deceived you, I want you to know. I made a mistake in judgment. The issues were pushing me, like I told you. I need some time alone, too."

That was the second time in a short while that his wife had brought up the matter of "issues," Steward observed to himself later, as he rode in the back seat of Lisa's car (actually, her mother's car), watching as the Winslow landmarks of the airport tower and sawmill were succeeded by the scrub juniper trees and shallow canyons of the high mesa. Surely he had known that she had had issues related to her ambitions to pursue her own activities, but he had done everything in his power to accommodate her in these ambitions. Aside from that, as far as he knew, there had been no issues in terms of his general relationship with his wife. He had noticed no lack of affection (except since the concert had begun). He had felt that, in general, she liked Arizona. She liked the sunshine and open vistas. She had said so many times. Obviously, though, the issues she referred to were more serious than he had realized.

It was a bright, sunny day, like so many days in Arizona, and like those of the first week, as Steward recalled, that he and Kris had shared in Winslow after they had just arrived. He had felt so happy then to see the hope in her face, the reflection of the sunlight, knowing the effect it had on her that he had observed in California the prior summer. Since then, something had gone amiss, surely. He still felt the shock of her infidelity, the emotional confusion of being unable to react in some

reasonable manner to the loss of her esteem.

Fifty miles out from Winslow, pine trees began to appear amidst the low junipers of the mesa and pine-covered mountains could be seen in the direction toward which they were headed on the highway that led to Payson and then Phoenix. Then, soon, they were riding through a dense pine forest that continued on both sides of the highway, without a building or other sign of human habitation, for many miles.

"Well, according to the map, this is a national forest," said Dana in his amiable manner, looking more like a pleasant Amish farmer than a "longhair," with his wire-frame glasses and untrimmed beard around the side of his clean-shaven cheeks, "and, over there, somewhere, is a reservation. White Mountain Apache's."

"Is that so?" Steward replied.

"Plenty to see, man. Life goes on."

It could have been just another road trip, and Steward was glad for encouragements such as this that came from Dana, as well as Steven, when he was not being talked to by Lisa. They did seem to like him, as Kristine had said. But this road trip was maybe the start of a new life alone. He was aware of that, also.

At Payson, a quaint, little town, the pine trees ended. Then came the descent into the desert, the skyline of Phoenix in the distance, the stop at a house there to look at the piano, the making of arrangements to buy it, a quiet supper in a fast food restaurant, and the decision to head back, while the tumble of thoughts continued in Steward's mind, part of them looking back to analyze what had happened, part looking forward to sort out his options, with Kris or without her.

Sundown in the desert, red and orange highlights on shadow-edged swirls of sand, brought memories of the restaurant in Kingman where the Steward's had stopped on their way from California to Winslow the previous summer. Then came miles of pine trees and darkness while Lisa went on and on about reincarnation as she charged ahead, creating a moving tunnel of light within the expanse of forest.

"You know what I would come back as?" she asked Steven, who was riding in the front seat with her.

"No. What?" he responded agreeably.

"A tree. With my branches in the sunlight."

Steward and Dana had settled into silence in the back seat by this time, listening to Lisa as to a radio program, when the situation suddenly changed. A dark form leapt from the shadows onto the roadway ahead and Lisa charged into it without applying the brakes. There was a collision as everyone realized, after the fact, that the dark form had been a large animal, something with antlers. The car headed down an embankment about ten feet onto a low area where there were trees just

far apart enough to be able to drive between them. Lisa still had her foot on the gas pedal. She was driving through the forest at the same speed she had been driving on the highway, jerking around to avoid the trees. Steven shouted "Lisa! Brake!" while trying to pull her foot off of the gas pedal, but she had her foot locked down. Then suddenly they were at the bank on the roadside again, and Lisa charged up it to the road, as everyone sighed with relief. On the road, however, she swerved to the side and catapulted the car off the other bank. For a moment, the car was in mid-air, then it came to a abrupt stop in the midst of a marsh.

"Is everyone okay. Lisa, are you okay?" Steven asked.

"Yes. Oh my God!" Lisa answered. "How about you?"

"We better get out. This car might be sinking," Dana said.

They slogged through ankle deep water to the highway, helping one another up the steep incline to the roadbed where they looked around. It was completely dark except for starlight and the light of a crescent moon on the eastern horizon above a jagged ridge of mountains. The car was there, below the moon, sunk to the middle of the tires, with smoke rising from the smashed up hood. They looked up and down the road, as far as could be seen in the darkness. There were no lights in sight.

It was also cold, they soon realized, cold enough to see their breath when they breathed, though the water at the edge of the marsh was not frozen.

"Lisa, how come you didn't hit the brake?" Steven asked.

"I don't know."

"That was quite a ride," said Dana.

"What was it anyhow?" Lisa said.

"It was huge," said Dana. "It had to be an elk."

"Think it's dead?" said Lisa.

"I don't know."

They walked down the road together to look for the elk and saw it below the road in a clump of trees. Its back quarter was twisted to one side. The could see breath coming from its nose.

"Hey, you ever think that thing could charge us?" Dana said. "You gotta know, he's angry as hell."

Without further communication about that, they sprinted together about fifty yards down the road.

Lisa looked over her shoulder and announced: "I don't think he's coming."

"Man, this is goddam ridiculous," Dana said.

Back by the marsh, they saw headlights approaching. As the car came near, they waved their arms, but the car sped by with the suspicious face inside just visible for an instant.

An hour later, they had just started to accept that they were in for a

long, cold night when a car stopped and window lowered just far enough for them to speak to whomever was inside.

"When you get to Payson, can you call a trooper?" Lisa said. "Tell them we're out here. Our car is in a swamp."

Another hour later, they saw headlights again. It was an official car, they discerned, as it drew near. Out of it emerged a man in the tan uniform and tan cowboy hat of the Arizona highway patrol.

The trooper was young, about the same age as the four people he had come to help. With a clipboard and an officious bearing, he walked up the road to look at the car in the marsh as he asked questions. But, then, as the group turned around, they saw that the trooper's own car was smoking from under the hood.

They darted back to the car together. The trooper threw up the hood, revealing a motor on fire, while the other men scrambled for dirt to extinguish the flames.

The young trooper tried unsuccessfully to start the car but he found the radio still working. "I think what I should call the sheriff up there in Winslow," he said, as if asking for advice, "They can contact a tow truck."

"Is there another trooper around here?" Dana asked.

"On this highway, no. They'll send someone from Phoenix."

"How far is that?"

"About 100 miles."

"How far is Winslow?"

"80, maybe.Looks like a couple hours."

The five of them scrunched together in the trooper's car to keep warm. The trooper took off his hat and gave up all pretense of being a cop. He was 22, he said. He had been on the job for six months.

"Seems like a nice gig," Steven said.

"Oh, yea, man, it is," the trooper answered. "You're always moving around, get to see a lot of beautiful country."

"Nice except when you have to pull people over," Lisa said.

"Yea, that's true, but people are okay, you know, if you just treat them with respect."

"You should have seen ol' Lisa here, Kyl,"(by this time they knew the trooper's name,) "driving through the goddam trees," Steven said. "At 60 miles an hour."

"Is that right?" the trooper replied with a laugh. "Well, far as I know, there's no speed limit in the trees."

By the time the tow truck arrived, the group had gone on to trivia questions. With the truck was a car from which emerged a thin woman with a long, madonna-like face suffused with emotion. Obvious to all, she was Lisa mother's, though her face lacked the glow of idealism that

was the daughter's chief feature.

"The car is wrecked, Mom. I'm sorry," Lisa said at once.

"I don't care about the car," Lana replied.

Soon, a second tow truck and a second trooper car arrived from the other direction. The burned trooper car was hoisted up and towed off after a hearty goodbye from the young trooper. The Moelin car was winched out of the marsh and hoisted up, also. The elk, by then dead, was drug to the road and hoisted up on the tow truck.

"It'll make good food for somebody," the driver said.

"I intend to get a few steaks out of that," said Lana Moelin.

"I can arrange that."

"Just kidding."

They headed back with Dana riding with the tow truck driver and Steward, Lisa, and Steven in the back seat of the other car, which was being driven by Lana's sister.

"Well, you guys are nothing but adventure," Lana said. "Kinda comes without looking for it," Steven replied.

"We expect to see an album soon with you guys on the cover."

"Sure hope we can accommodate you, in that respect."

Thus the conversation went on, as Steward listened. He observed to himself that what Lana and Lisa both didn't know was that, at least as he saw it, this group had no realistic expectation of success. What they also did not know, as he did, was that Steven had an ongoing relationship with Lyn Andrews back in California. For Steven, in his carefree life, Lisa was a case of "love the one you're with." After this Winslow episode was over, Lisa would be cast aside. At the same time, it was obvious that Lisa was in love with Steven. She was a simple-hearted girl who assumed a mutual feeling because she and Steven had been sleeping together.

Steward's thoughts returned to Kris. Obviously, she, being a close friend of the group, was to some extent a believer in the same philosophy of love being less committed than he had been raised to believe should be the case in marriage. For them, marriage was a matter of "it's good or it's not," not much different than a simple relationship. He had heard them talk about it.

Still, he thought, he wanted to save his own marriage with Kris. He didn't want to give up on her.

He was hoping the ambiguity of the long night and the possible loss of him in the accident would have brought out a similar feeling in Kris, but he saw at once in her face, on being reunited with her, that she had gone in a different direction.

"Tom, I'm very glad you're okay," she remarked at once, with what seemed a sincere, lingering hug, "but I want you to know, I've made up

my mind. I made a reservation for a train back to L.A. I'm going to leave tomorrow."

"I'm sorry for what I did," he said. "I'm sorry I didn't support you more in the concert."

"You did support me. That's not the issue, Tom."

"I'm sorry I didn't go with you that last night, to the concert here in Winslow."

"You made a mistake in that, and I made a mistake with David, but can't you see, there's an undercurrent here, or something, that's pushing us apart. At least, for the time being."

"Well, maybe we should resist the undercurrent."

"No, I don't think so, Tom. Because it's the result of the issues, like I was trying to explain. And the big issue for me is I need to find my own life. After that, we'll see."

He could tell by the way she expressed these thoughts that she had been formulating them all of the while he had been gone. The next day he took her to the railroad depot and said goodbye to her while she hugged him and cried.

"I'm sorry, Tom," she said. "I don't want to hurt you. I just want to be a person, too."

Steward watched as she waved from the window as the train pulled out, then he drove to the house, and called the foundation director in Gallup to reveal his new situation.

"Well, how about this? Lock up the house, come on over to Gallup. We can use the house somehow or sell it later. You can live in the Henry Hotel free of charge. We'll find you something to do."

Steward was amazed that such a drastic change in his life and living situation had been arranged so easily and matter-of-factly. With his belongings thrown in the back of his car, he headed out of Winslow. He felt bad about what had happened with his wife, but he was glad he would no longer have to interact with the band and try to fit into their world of music and hip talk.

He arrived in Gallup in late afternoon, stopped at the office for a room number and key, drove down the block to the Henry Hotel, and went up the long stairs to the second floor and down the dark hallway to his room. Inside the room was a bed, a desk with a lamp, and a single, tall window that looked out to the highway, the main street of Gallup, where traffic passed in an endless stream east and west. On the other side of the street were the dual tracks of the inter-continental railroad and the corridor of cleared dirt where the new interstate highway was being put in.

Steward liked the scene. He felt that through some inexplicable logic he had wound up where he was supposed to be.

262. O'Rourke receives a Silver Star and a combat medic badge

On Tuesday, November 8, 1970, in a ceremony at Camp Hormuth in Phu Bai, Vietnam, during a brief break in heavy monsoon rains, Bill O'Rourke was awarded a Silver Star for his "conspicuous gallantry" in the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord. O'Rourke also received a combat medical corpsman badge, and he was promoted to the rank of Specialist 5.

O'Rourke made no mention of these distinctions to anyone, not even to Barbara Carpenter. He assumed, however, that he would tell the girlish nurse about them the next time he saw her. When that would be, O'Rourke wasn't sure, though he was continually plotting when and how he could next see her. Since she had flown up from her service location at Binh Thuy to visit him in the hospital during his convalescence from his battle wounds, he had found himself thinking about her often with vague intentions to make the relationship more formal.

Despite his determination not to trumpet his distinctions, O'Rourke soon learned that people were aware of them other than those who had been at the award celebration. This began with the intelligence officer, Orin Brown, who happened into the red-haired former coxswain that same evening in one of the bars in downtown Phu Bai.

"Well, fancy meeting you here, Specialist," the round-headed, buzz-cut, wrestler-built Mormon officer said. "Care to have a seat? The beer is on me."

"Well, hello there, Captain," O'Rourke answered. "There was never an Irishman known to turn down a beer."

They sat at a table looking out to a street drenched from a steady rain. Outside, with heads ducked against the rain, soldiers passed between the bars and restaurants equipped with English signs that catered to the American presence.

"Well, what the latest, sir?" O'Rourke inquired. "You're my main source of the real story."

"So far as you and the 101st are concerned," Brown replied, looking around to make sure no one was in earshot, "you know the main part of that, I suspect, the so-called 'Vietnamization.'"

"I know the general gist of it, yes. I'm not too familiar with any of the details, though."

"What I can tell you, Bill, they got a new operation. Another 'Lam Son.' This one is '719.' Major operation. Your 101st supporting the ARVN 1st Infantry. This one will go into Laos, I heard. Not our guys. The ARVN. This will be real thing. 'Vietnamization.'"

"Is that right?"

"Yes. They're looking for volunteers, I heard. This will be the last

major operation for the 101st in Vietnam."

"When exactly will this happen?"

"I'd say, around Christmas. Don't know for sure. Soon as things dry up. Rainy season's over already up there in Laos. But we got these monsoon rains still affecting us."

O'Rourke sipped on his beer. The idea had lodged in his mind at once that he would have to consider whether to volunteer.

"That's between you and me," Brown added. "Strictly confidential."

"Alright," said O'Rourke, "you got any other fine items of interest?"

"Well, little fact I heard of recently, the number of American troops here just dropped to same level that it has not been since May of 1966."

"Is that right?"

"That's when you and I were both in college, I imagine."

"Yes, sir, that was the case with me."

"I read somewhere else, there are corollary facts. Like number of cans of creamed corn consumed per day by our guys here has gone down from 142,000 cans a day, at the height, to 105,000 now."

"Is that so?" said O'Rourke.

"Can't stand the stuff myself."

"What else you know?"

"Another report I read is morale is low." Orin Brown went on in his history buff manner. "Low enough to be a major concern."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Low where, exactly?"

"Well, ironically, not among those who are in the thick of the battle, risking their lives. It's low in the support people, the people in the headquarters units, the enlisted men."

"And what is the theory about that?"

"The theory is that this is a no-win war that was never meant to be won, and now it's winding down. Then you got the anti-military sentiment back in the States. It makes people feel like they're not appreciated."

"I can see that, Captain," O'Rourke remarked thoughtfully. "Speaking of the war winding down, just what is the status on that, the peace talks and everything?"

"The peace talks are going nowhere. And why should they really? Why should Vietnam concede on the smallest points even when they can see very well we are on the way out?"

The intelligence officer left soon later saying he had to interview an escaped POW who was being evaluated before going back to the States.

"We'll meet again soon, I presume," he said as he left.

Lately, thought O'Rourke, he had been hearing more comments of a

cynical nature like this coming from people like Orin who had been pretty upbeat about the war just months before. He knew that he himself had gone in the other direction: from being qualified about the war to being more supportive. The way he saw it lately, the war had been worth fighting, and was still worth fighting because there remained a chance that America would leave with a democracy continuing in South Vietnam.

O'Rourke decided to stay at his table by the window to have a quiet supper alone. Seeing a folded up newspaper on a nearby table, he went over to fetch it. It was a *New York Times*, dated October 26 (almost two weeks before), and just the first section, but he paged through it anyhow as he waited for his meal.

A headline on the front page confirmed what Brown had just said about the peace talks. "Nixon Peace Plan Rejected Again, 'Definitively,' in Paris Talks."—"We reject it totally, globally, definitively and categorically," Nguyen Thanh Le, Hanoi's press spokesmen, was quoted as saying. "Hasty generalizations" was the response reported from the American team leader, David Bruce.

Other articles described the continuing American pressure exerted against Laos. This was a matter that O'Rourke had only lately been aware of in detail, with respect to the upcoming thrust into Laos (Lam Son 719) that Orin Brown had talked of. Previously, though, O'Rourke had been aware of Laos with respect to his former teammate, Jim Morris, who O'Rourke knew had been downed in Laos, and who (O'Rourke had learned in letters from Mary Brandt) was possibly alive and a prisoner there.

There was an intense bombing campaign being conducted by the U.S. Air Force in Laos, along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in the Plain of Jars, "for the 13th consecutive day," O'Rourke read in one article. In another, he read of "war-weary Laotians" who were "getting chewed up and have no time to rebuild." According to the article, Laotians on both sides of the conflict in Laos were concerned that Nixon, in his speeches about peace, seldom mentioned Laos, though Laotian peace talks were also occurring at the present time,—in Khong Khay, "on the eastern edge of the Plain of Jars." According to the article, these talks between the involved world powers, the neutralist government of Souphana Phouma, and the Pathet Lao, were the counterpart, for Laos, of the Paris talks for Vietnam.

O'Rourke could stand to read only so much of these reports before he set the newspaper down. Barbara Carpenter came into his mind then and he plotted again when and how to see her. He was still regarded as being in a state of convalescence from his wounds, and had a standing offer for time off. He would receive no further assignment, he had been told, until

after Thanksgiving. Say he did volunteer for Lam Son 719. That would kick in, he expected, in early December. Now was the time to go see Barbie if he could arrange it.

Outside, later, with the orange sphere of the setting sun visible in an oblong clearing between gray clouds above the ridge of mountains in the western sky, in the direction of the battle areas where he had been in quite different circumstances three months before, O'Rourke walked along in the rain, still focused on Barbie Carpenter.

What came to his mind first, as had been the case lately, whenever he thought about her, was a central memory of her that seemed to persist in the background of his other thoughts about her, and this one memory was of how she had looked when she had come into his room in the hospital, not how she was dressed (she had been wearing her dress uniform then), but the look on her face, which had been a look of assumed mutual caring between him and her. It was the look of a woman who no longer had any reason (in the strategies of love) to not let him know how she felt. It was a look that said, "I love you, Bill, and I know you love me."

These exact words came to O'Rourke's mind, as he walked along, and with that for the first time he understood why the look meant so much to him. He turned the words around to declare in his thoughts that just as she loved him, he loved her; just as she knew he loved her, he knew she loved him. That was true, he acknowledged in his mind, there could no longer be any doubt about it.

He found himself replaying the long journey that he and Carpenter had been on together since he had first paired off with her at the boat club,—as he figured, two and a half years before. He recalled their chance meeting in Chicago, at the street clinic set up to treat people injured in the demonstrations at the Democratic convention. He recalled how he and she had gone for a walk that evening, talking about how they would maybe meet someday in Vietnam. He recalled her long letters after that, and the night he had spent with her in Binh Thuy, next to her in her bed, staring into her eyes, without having sex. That had to be some kind of record, he reflected with a smile.

So now the journey had come down to the present, O'Rourke thought. Surely it was the time to act, time to establish something with her more formally. What was he talking about? he asked himself. Marriage, surely. He should fly down to see her, he thought, he should show up without a warning, as he had before. He had no doubt that she would be glad to see him. The only thing to work out was how to get down to Binh Thuy. An Army service flight was an option. He could arrange that the next day. But no, he went on in his mind, he needed to work out the service-related complications of that, of him and her being widely different ranks, at least in his mind, before he did that. Surely it had been done before, in all

the years of men and women serving together. Why not let it happen as part of the "real R&R" that Barbie had suggested? Could he propose and get married all on that same trip? Could he and she do it without asking for permission and then just present it as a *fiat accompli*? Who would it affect? They would both return to their duty locations hundreds of miles apart, places where hardly anyone knew of his and her connection with one another.

Next morning, O'Rourke went to the base headquarters to arrange as much as he could of what he perceived of as necessary steps. First, he inquired about upcoming operations, learned officially of Lam Son 719, and volunteered. Then he went across to another building and inquired about the possibility of proceeding to take the R&R that had already been offered to him. What an odd arrangement, O'Rourke thought, to set up these two situations together, combat and marriage, and yet it was he had already determined to do with exhaustive self-searching.

The sergeant on duly was obliging in helping O'Rourke to arrange the transportation, also.

"You can take a plane out of here to Saigon," he said. "From there, you can catch one down to Can Tho."

Where was Ken Forland, his old pilot friend, when he needed him? O'Rourke thought to himself. He would spend an entire day just getting down to Binh Thuy. Last he had heard, Forland was flying parcels out of Saigon, though there was not much chance of enlisting his help for a flight from Phu Bai.

"Now, Hong Kong, I heard lately, is the perfect place for R&R," the sergeant said.

"Is that right?" said O'Rourke. He remembered now that Barbie had also mentioned Hong Kong when he and she were in China Beach.

"Fantastic views. Restaurants, stores, tall buildings. All lit up at night. Just plain spectacular."

"Must be a little complicated to get there."

"Not at all. Everyone doing a tour over here is entitled to one five-day out-of-country leave, as you probably know, and Hong Kong is one of the big destinations, right up there with Hawaii and Australia. They got regular flights going down there, right from the airport here in Phu Bai."

"Been there yourself?"

"You bet. Tons of guys go there. And it's all set up, pretty much, from the soldier's perspective. Hotels that cater to Americans, in this area called Wanchai. Bars and restaurants."

"Well, I got to say, sarge, you got me thinking."

"Wanchai is on the mainland in Kowloon. From there you can get a ferry over to the Hong Kong island. Great little trip, and there's an electric train, tram they call it, goes up to the top of this mountain there.

Now that is a view, let me tell you."

"You got me thinking alright."

"I even knew a guy got married on his leave there."

"The heck!"

"Yes, this guy had his girl come from the States and meet him there. There are a few little chapels around here and there, you know, a la Las Vegas. I don't know, maybe it was a spur of the moment thing."

"They let him do that?"

"How could they stop it? It was a done deal."

Later that day, O'Rourke called the airport and learned that there was a flight for Hong Kong the next day. Hong Kong was 1000 miles away. It was a five-hour flight under normal conditions. The flight left at noon. So it would arrive about 5 P.M.

After learning this, O'Rourke went to the base headquarters again, and, from an empty office now available for his occasional use as a Spec. 5, he called the 3d Surgical Hospital in Binh Thuy, hoping to find Barb Carpenter on duty.

"Just a minute," the person who answered said.

"Bill!" a familiar voice soon answered. "How nice to hear you. I hope nothing's wrong."

"No, everything's fine."

There was a moment of silence then as she waited to hear the reason for the call.

"Barbie," O'Rourke went on, "you know how we talked about getting together again sometime?

"Yes."

"I was thinking this may be a good time. There's an operation coming up and I volunteered for it. I've got a few weeks now."

"You want to come down here?"

"Remember how you mentioned Hong Kong, when we were up in China Beach? What would you think of that?"

"Hong Kong!"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't that be something!"

"Could you get time off?"

"You know, I think I could. I'm long due for it, and it's been quiet around here lately."

"Barb, as far as the sleeping arrangements..."

"I know, Bill, we could talk. I'm not worried about that. I would just be so happy to see you."

Just like that, the arrangements were made. She would fly from Can Tho and meet him at the Hong Kong airport, from which they would take a cab together into Wanchai, where the hotels were located that

American service people used in great numbers.

Two days later, the former coxswain boarded the plane in Phu Bai, looking forward to his reunion and with other vague plans spinning around in his mind.

[Chapter 262 notes]

263. O'Rourke, his mind made up, weds Barbie in Hong Kong

While flying from Phu Bai to Hong Kong on a Cathay Pacific Boeing 747 airline, Bill O'Rourke decided that he would buy an engagement ring and present it to Barbara Carpenter with the attendant question. He would do it soon after arriving in Hong Kong,—very soon, perhaps the first day. First, though, he would tell Barbie that he had volunteered for the Lam Son 719 operation. He didn't think that knowing that would change her mind, one way or another, about what answer to give to the question, and he felt reasonably certain that her answer would be "yes," but he wanted to do everything in the proper order.

He was just completing this thought in his mind when he heard the warning beep indicating the plane was about to descend. He looked out his window, which was on the left side of the plane, and saw that the plane was entering into a large bay shaped like an arrowhead and pointed in the direction toward which the plane was headed. Near the tip of the bay at the far right side (from O'Rourke's perspective), was an indentation of land and sky that appeared to be the opening of a smaller bay, with many ships of various kinds and sizes heading to and from it. On both sides of that small bay, he could see white and gray buildings, hundreds of them, it seemed, wedged into the narrow strip of land between the edge of the water and the steep incline of what appeared to be ridges of low, tree-covered mountains.

So this was the fabled Hong Kong, O'Rourke thought to himself as the plane drew nearer. Among the buildings, he could see a building with the curved up eaves of the classical Chinese style. Close by it was a sleek modern buildings with glass-paneled sides.

About five miles from the mouth of the bay, the plane banked to the right and turned to the south of nearest side of the bay. The buildings could then no longer be seen from O'Rourke's point of view. What could be seen, instead, was one shore of an island. It was Hong Kong island, the former coxswain decided, the less populated side of it more removed from the bay. Then the plane banked to the left, dove sharply, and he saw, as the plane came round, a single airstrip about a half mile long jutting out into the water.

That was Tao Kai Airport, he saw from the route map in a magazine he had been provided. The plane was making the famous "Hong Kong Landing," which required the sharp turn left and swift descent to swoop down into the narrow opening between the island and the mainland.

Then came the soft touching down on the runway, the initial roll, and the surge of the engines as they backfired to brake the motion of the plane. O'Rourke looked to his side and saw that the plane was rolling as on a two-lane causeway next to the water where several junks could be

seen and an extension of the bay where an ocean freighter was passing with a British Union Jack flag. From this view, the buildings along the shore on both sides could once again be seen, hundreds of buildings, most of them ten to twenty stories high.

Coming off the plane, he noted that the runway abutted directly to a modern terminal a modern terminal that was jammed into a semi-circle of high rise buildings. Some of the windows were so close that he could see television sets flickering inside the window.

He disembarked from the plane and headed through the milling people in the terminal commons, looking for Barbara Carpenter. She was scheduled to arrive at about the same time on a different flight. He spotted her on the other side of the room, a pretty figure walking in his direction with a suitcase in her hand. When she saw him, she waved and smiled, and skipped into a quicker, more buoyant stride.

In this first sight of her, O'Rourke noticed a number of things at once. She was glad to see him. She was happy and excited. The world of her service obligations had been cast aside, as evidenced in the lightness of her bearing. There was a distinct girlishness to her face and eyes and a freedom of movement that he thought, with pride, was so American that it marked one at once in any of these international places where people of many nations passed within view.

"So you made it okay," he said as she reached him.

She held out both her hands and shook both of his hands in what had become their own special greeting since the time the gesture had made its awkward premier at their first meeting in Binh Thuy.

"And it's so exciting," she said. "It's a whole different world!"

O'Rourke had the same sentiment as he and she traveled by cab, soon later, out of the airport and around a wide bend that followed the shore, across from the long causeway upon which the plane had just landed. In the distance, for a moment, he could see the wall of buildings, extending for several miles on the Hong Kong island, that he had seen from the plane. Then the cab turned inland along s a street hung with colorful banners marked with Chinese characters, among which were English signs. Cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, and people jostled for position on the crowded pavement. Among the people were young men who appeared to American servicemen on leave.

The bay was called "Victoria Bay," the cabdriver informed them in broken English. The area toward which they were headed, where O'Rourke's hotel reservation was located, was called "Kowloon."

O'Rourke identified Kowloon on a map that he had picked up at the terminal. It was a peninsula, about a half mile wide, extending into the bay directly across from the central district of Hong Kong. The cab was traveling on a main road in that direction, called Division in English.

Soon the cab turned onto another road named on the map, Salisbury Road, and the bay could be seen ahead at the end of a long corridor hung with banners and bordered with signs.

One of these signs he noted said “Gao Lung Hotel” the name of the hotel at which he had made reservations. The name was on the front of the hotel above a shield that showed the face of what appeared to be a boy emperor with four dragons on each side. It was a tall, modern building, about ten stories high, directly fronting the water..

Soon he and Barbie stood in their quarters on a balcony that looked out to the bay. On the other side of the water was the striking array of modern buildings in the most built up section of the Hong Kong island. The buildings appeared to be ten to 20 stories high. Behind them, rising twice again as high as the buildings on the left, and gaining in altitude to the right, to an altitude about three times as high as the buildings, was a ridge with three peaks. The highest was called Victoria Peak, O’Rourke noted on the map brochure. Ferries, it said, carried people across the bay to the base station for a tram that ascended to the top of the peak.

That struck him as a great idea for the next day. He broached the idea to Barbie and she readily agreed.

Just below the hotel, they noticed, was the broad, two-tiered dock where the ferries left from. The area called the Tsim Sha Tsui, O’Rourke noted on the map. A double-decker ferry was approaching the dock at the moment. They watched as the people disembarked and headed across the dock and up the street toward them. The sun was setting, a distinct orange sphere in a cloudless sky on the west horizon. The water and building had taken on an orange gleam from the horizontal light.

“It’s the most romantic place I could imagine,.” Barbie said. “It’s just the perfect place for a vacation.”

Dinner followed, also romantic, and a walk through the streets glowing with neon signs. But, later as they headed back, tension grew that they were both aware, and the reason was clear, they had never made love and had never talked about when and how they would mutually head in that direction. Carpenter brought it up first, as soon as they reached the room. She said she needed more time to get used to being back together, though she was aware now that the sex would happen soon.

“I suppose it’s crazy old-fashioned,” she said.

“I don’t think it is,” O’Rourke replied.

He was actually glad to hear it because in his mind he was still completing the details of his plan to buy her an engagement ring and present to her. If there was sex, he wanted it to follow that.

“I’m not trying to pretend like I’m an immaculate virgin, or something. You know, I was even pregnant. I told you about that.”

“I know how traumatic it was for you, too, and losing the baby. It’s

part of the reason why I've gone so slowly with you. Not with everyone, by the way. You know that."

"Yes, I do know that. I know you've been."

"Yes, I have. But, with you, I want it to be something special. I want it to be elevated somehow. I want it to be noble. Not just to be noble in general, but because it's you."

They said no more about the subject for the rest of the evening, and they did not make love, though the evening was no less romantic with the lights of the island glittering in the distance and reflecting on the water on the other side of the bay.

By early the next morning, O'Rourke went out for a walk alone and bought a ring in a jewelry store just a few blocks away. He carried the ring with him, in his pocket, as he and Carpenter walked together later to board the ferry for the ride across the bay. There still remained, though, to resolve the issue of telling her that he had volunteer for the Lam Som operation. He continued to think about when and how to do that as he and Barbie crossed the bay together with seagulls flying in the wake of the ferry and the silver clock tower of the ferry dock approaching.

From downtown Hong Kong, a three-car tram took them up to the level of the highest buildings, and then high above them, as a view of the bay opened in three directions from their vantage point. At the upper station of the tram, they walked through the Victoria Peak Garden, which a sign said was located on the former residence of the British governor of Hong Kong. From there, they hiked around the peak on the historic Lugard Road, where from the north side they could see the central district, Wan Chai, the several outlays of the bay, and the islands and cities on the other side, including from left to right in their view Tsing Yi Island, the Stone Cutters Island, and Kowloon.

In front of the buildings of Kowloon, they could see the Tsim Sha Tsui ferry dock, where they had started the day, and the hotel where they were staying. About two miles to the right, in an indentation of the bay, was the single landing strip of the Kai Tak airport where a red plane was rolling toward the terminal. Beyond Kowloon, on the north, was a ridge of mountains higher than any of the mountains on the island, a plaque at an overlook informed. The highest peak in view was Tai Mo Shan, according to the plaque. At a height of 947 meters, it was the tallest mountain in the Hong Kong region. North of the mountains, the plaque said, were the cities of Lo Wu and Shenzhen, and beyond these cities was the mainland of China, extending for 1400 miles northward.

"600 million people. A fourth of the people in the world," O'Rourke said to Carpenter. "Living under Communist rule. And, I don't know, is that so bad? We hear it's bad."

"Well, I don't think it's bad in the sense that people, ordinary people,

are starving, or being mistreated," Carpenter replied.

"It is bad, though, in the sense that people don't have liberty. I've heard there's been a lot of suppression in these last few years, during the so-called Cultural Revolution. People can live but they cannot express themselves freely."

"Yes, I've heard that, also."

"The complexity of it all amazes me, Barb, that the world divides into such huge camps. It's easy to dismiss in a beautiful place like this. Then you go back to Nam, back to the war, and you see that the huge camps meet and conflict,—and they will conflict, the two ways of life are diametrically opposed."

"You've come to believe in the war more and more all the while I've known you."

"I don't if 'believe' is the right word."

"What is the right word then?"

"The way I would say it, I've come to accept the ambiguity, I've come to accept the shades of gray,—that, even in this world of shades of gray, black and white decisions have to be made."

"Like the decision you made to go into combat."

"And I've made that same decision again," he replied, seeing his chance. "There's an operation coming up. I volunteered for it."

"Now why does that not surprise me?"

"I've been waiting to tell you because we seem to be getting more serious about one another. This trip here is an example."

"Yes."

"And because of this getting serious business, Barb, I feel like I should tell you more, such as things like this. The significance to me is it just makes me hesitate, you know, to tie you in with me more strongly. I don't want to make you suffer for my ideals."

"Listen, Bill," she said softly, placing her hand on his arm. "I want to tell you something important."

He inclined his head towards her with a smile.

"Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"I want you to tie me in with you more strongly."

The wide-open brown eyes, at the moment, had a playful twinkle and, at the same time, were intensely serious.

"Got that, buddy?" she said.

"Yes, I do, but can I ask you one more thing?"

"Say something did happen between two people, one an officer and the other a lowly Spec 5, how would that go over, you think?'

"What could anyone do about it, Bill."

It was the same done deal argument, O'Rourke acknowledged in his

main, and he would be fine with that himself, he decided on the spot. The moment had arrived for him to propose, he said to himself. He had made all the arrangements. She had, in effect, told him to go ahead. All that remained was to find the appropriate place.

On the way back across the bay, with the wind rushing over the deck and seagulls following in the wake of the ferry, he found that moment as he and she sat at a table drinking coffee and looking back to the spectacular view of the Hong Kong skyline.

"Barbara Carpenter," he said. "I would like to ask you to marry me. I would be greatly honored. I would count myself the luckiest man in the world if you agree."

"I accept," she replied, leaning over to kiss him.

"Even got you a ring."

"Oh, my! Did you really?"

"Yes, I did."

He took it out from his jacket pocket.

"It's beautiful," she said.

They watched as the ferry approached the Kowloon dock where the five flags on the plaza were ruffling in the breeze. They disembarked in the mutual spell of enchantment lingering from the words that had just been exchanged between them.

"So now that we're engaged, Bill," said Barbie. "I was wondering when this tremendous day will arrive."

"When I hope you won't think this is rash," the former coxswain replied, "but I was thinking about today."

She laughed. "So was I."

"There must be a church or something around here somewhere. This city has everything else."

"Well, I don't know. You think I'm dressed for it?"

"Actually, yes. Your dress is white. You look beautiful, Barbie. I think it's perfect."

They laughed.

"Should we have a go at it then?"

"Yes, let go."

They hailed a taxi and rode along through the corridor of signs and shop windows, under the banners of Chinese characters, wending through the bicycles, jitneys, cars, and pedestrians.

"Tell me," O'Rourke said to the Chinese cabbie, who spoke English, "you ever hear of a place around here where people can get married?"

The cabbie laughed. "Oh, yes. I hear very much."

The place the cabbie took them to was a Las Vegas style chapel next to a big hotel. Arrangements were made within minutes. Two witnesses, one of them a Marine, the other a Navy WAVE, were invited in from the

American soldiers passing by on the street. Bill O'Rourke and Barbara Carpenter exchanged vows and were married.

The wedding had happened in the right way for two people tied up in the war, the newlyweds agreed later, a quick ceremony in an exotic place half a world away from where they had first met in the boat club on the Mississippi River in St. Paul, Minnesota.

[Chapter 263 notes]

264. Steward, alone again, settles into the Henry Hotel in Gallup

Two weeks and four days after breaking up from his wife Kristine and traveling to his new life in Gallup, New Mexico, Tom Steward began the day with a run out along the highway to the edge of town and around a loop road that brought him back to the hotel. He shaved and showered, not in his room but in the common bathroom down the hall, then he dressed and sat at the desk in his room, looking out at the highway (also the main street of town), where the east-west traffic seemed to pass without ceasing. In the traffic, always, were vehicles that he recognized as those of his generational peers, continuing in their restless explorations.

Steward opened the three-ring spiral notebook that he used as a journal, intending to write something in it, but no words came to his mind. After reading some old entries and sitting with pen in hand, he closed the journal and prepared to go out.

Outside later, he looked up and down the street, noting that the sun was bright in the sky. He heard a whistle blowing and saw a train far down the track, which ran parallel to the highway. He waited to watch the train come by, then listened as the boxcars clattered and groaned on the other side of the street.

Each day as he came out, Steward was aware that the spot on the sidewalk just outside the door of the hotel was the exact same spot where he had stood with Kristine on the morning when he and she had learned of the Kent State shootings. He missed his wife, at times dearly, especially in the evenings, but he continued to feel that in, some inexplicable way, the logic of his life had brought him back to this spot that had so intrigued him at that time.

Steward was, by this time, quite familiar with this scene, not only because of the hotel door he passed through every day, but because of the vehicle entry door, just down the block, that he went in every Friday and Saturday night to work in the former underground garage at the “Sleep In” for Indians stranded overnight in Gallup. The Sleep In was one of his two new jobs with the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation (WMIF), the organization to which he would continue to be tied for the remaining eight months of his alternative service as a conscientious objector. His other job with WMIF was helping in a “sheltered workshop” located in the Gallup Indian Community Center on the other side of the tracks.

The scene had not changed much since he had seen it with Kris. The planned freeway corridor, across the street, was still nothing but a swath of cleared earth and piled up rocks. The canvas-roofed tourist stand there still had Indian rugs hung around the side, just under the roofline, like banners, and the same sign still hung over the door that he had noted

months before: “Hand Made, Cut Rate.”

A cry of “Tacos! Burritos!” drew Steward’s glance to the path down to the highway from the houses on the hill above the tracks. The Mexican boy who sold them, same one Steward had noticed on that same morning after Kent State, was starting his daily rounds, pail in hand. In place of his straw hat of the summer, he was wearing a stocking cap.

This scene, too, reminded Steward of Kristine. He had sent her a long, thoughtful letter and, after nearly two weeks of waiting, had just the day before received a reply disappointing in its brevity. He had begun to hope that maybe the break between him and Kris was temporary, that he could figure it out somehow in terms of what he had done wrong individually or what they had done wrong as a couple. Her reply had reminded him of the letters she had sent him before they were married, when she had used to say that she was thinking something out and would soon be writing him with the results of her thinking, and then the results had never come. That dynamic had so intensified the relationship it had made him almost crazy with waiting, had he forgotten that?

Steward had written to Mary Brandt, also, in the time since he had separated from Kris, and from Mary, ironically, he had received the kind of careful, reasonable response that he had hoped for from his wife. In this, he had realized anew that the one element that had been most direly absent in his relationship with his wife had been an interaction with an intellectual peer. Kris had never been that, he had acknowledged again, despite her excellent qualities in other respects. She was a person of physical presence, he had understood anew; when she was not actually present, there was not much chance of re-materializing her presence through her written expression.

With Mary, though, the words themselves had a presence, that he had realized, too. The words had the quality in them that he had first noticed the previous spring in Morgantown in the conversation in which Mary had warned him that Kris was young and unformed and would maybe need to strike out on her own. It was the quality of being substantial and powerful in thought, while at the same time being feminine, and of being feminine without being provocative or flirtatious. Of course, many women had these qualities, he had observed to himself; but Mary was the first woman of this kind that he had been intimate enough with to feel such qualities directed at him.

He had written to Mary two nights before: “You were right about Kris’s need for independence and that it might lead her away from me. You were right about my difficulty with that and how I would need to struggle with my feelings about it. I started out wanting and resolving to do everything right, for both her and me, but I fell short in many respects, I know. I was jealous of her closeness to the guys in the band. I was

struggling with it, trying to be above it, but eventually I reacted as might have been expected from my scant experience with women.

"I know, too, that I often bring out the wrong feelings in Kris. I try to explain things, with my barrage of words, and she gets defensive about that because she's not so verbal. In the past I have made her feel inferior because of that—not wanting to, of course, but nonetheless I have. Now her response to it is to run away from it. She wants to be on her own ground. She has told me so in so may ways. I don't blame her for it. I wish I could change the dynamic, in that respect."

He repeated these words in his mind as he headed down the street past the single garage door of the Sleep In and past the brick corner of the hotel where a sheet of plywood, four feet high, blocked the narrow alley between the hotel and the stucco, story-and-a-half-high, exterior front wall of the building that served as the WMIF main office.

As he passed the office, he looked in through the odd front window of the office. It was about two feet high and six feet long, without any vertical sashes, and about five feet above the level of the sidewalk. The interior of the office, a single large room with no partitions, was unlit. The office had no regular hours, proceeding by the same general lack of supervision as the foundation overall. The youthful director, Sandy Hawn, was there when he happened to be, simple as that. He had no job functions, really, except to manage the uncomplicated budget and oversee the activities of the three conscientious objectors and one student intern who, at present, comprised the foundation staff, and were all as irregular in hours as he was himself. No one really knew where anyone else was at any particular moment, and no one seemed to care. Whatever needed to be communicated was done so either when everyone just happened by the office at the same time, usually in early evening, or else at parties, which came about on the spur of the moment without any formal planning. The one truly official WMIF meeting that Steward had attended with Kris, on first arriving in Winslow several months before, had been specifically arranged for his and her benefit, Steward had learned since moving to Gallup and becoming more familiar with the WMIF operation.

The foundation had done a great deal of legitimate good, Steward knew, through its direct monetary transfers to Indian families and Indian support institutions on the reservation, but, on the level of its young volunteers, it continued in this relaxed and disorganized mode of operation.

Steward continued down the street past the displays of Indian jade jewelry and pounded silver in the Indian curios shops on the corner and around the corner to his car, the same that he and Kris had driven from West Virginia, where it was parked there on the street beside a used car

lot with blue and yellow triangular banner hung in long lines between the street and the single building at its center. Then, in the boat like sedan, he headed up the street to the corner and turned down a street that ran parallel to the highway, one block south of it, past the three-and- four-story brick downtown buildings of Gallup, which included the usual small town offerings,—a bank, a dime store, a movie house, an insurance agency, and a real estate office, and so on,—but with a mix of more Indian curios stores, Hispanic stores (from some of which came Spanish music), raunchy-looking bars, and alleys where apparently drunk Indians sat with cheap wine in brown paper bags or slept in nooks and doorways providing shelter from the wind.

Steward turned there, in the middle of the downtown area, toward the north side of town. He crossed the highway and railroad tracks, and drove up over a low hill to a shallow hollow occupied by a single-story, lime-green building surrounded by a parking lot. The lime green building looked like a school, and, in fact, it had been a junior high school before being taken over by the local War on Poverty program. This was the site of the sheltered workshop where Steward worked.

Steward continued into the parking lot, parked, exited the car, and walked into the front door of the building. The building was quiet inside. The workshop was the only activity during daytime hours and it involved just five people in a side room that had once been a metal shop.

Entering that room, Steward saw, amidst the usual clutter of simple machines: the director, a cheerful Hispanic, formerly a shop teacher, as usual pacing around; an Indian man in a wheel chair who did not even look in his direction as he came in; a middle-aged women, with a crutch at her side, who smiled and nodded; and a short-haired Indian man of 19 who greeted him an impish grin.

“Mr. Steward, Mr. Steward, como estas today?” the director said.

“Bueno,” Steward answered. “I’m doing fine.”

“We got a new job today! Mucho duro, man!”

“Is that a fact?”

“Just come in from Sure-Built, down there in Alba-kerk. Put together these little do-hickies here. One-two-three, like this. Then you squinch ‘em together with this little screw.”

“What are they for?”

“Now that I can’t say.”

Steward continued into the room, took off his coat, and went over to his own desk where he had some accounting tasks he had been given. In addition to these tasks, he put things in order, now and then, whenever he felt inclined, and swept up the shop when it appeared to need cleaning. He also, on occasion, drove down into town to pick up supplies. The job had been made to give him something to do, he was fully aware. He had

been “hired” at once because he was not being paid.

Inside the accounting book, he kept track of supplies such as the “do-hickies” that had been received in 20 boxes each containing the parts of 1000 assemblies for which the people in the room would be paid a penny each. They were a quiet group, hardly saying anything to one another at all, except for the impish one, who Steward had learned had the unusual problem that he swore frequently and nonsensically, though not at the shop, where he had been warned.

The afternoon hours passed slowly as Steward sat at his desk, moved around some equipment in one corner, and even at one point put some of the do-hickies together himself.

At the end of the day, on the request of the director, he drove the impish one home,—his name was Ralphie Laughing.

“Well, how many of those things you get done today?” he asked as he drove to Ralphie’s house, which was just two blocks away from the workshop. “You make yourself some bucks?”

Maybe he could do some kind of therapy with Ralphie, he thought. He needed to look on his job with the workshop in a more active way.

“I don’t asshole give a fucking goddam,” the young man replied with a smile, looking eager to field the next question.

“You didn’t count them, huh?”

“Son of a bitch asshole no,” Ralphie said as he exited the car, grinning.

“You know, Ralphie, did you ever stop to think, people get a poor impression of you when you talk like that?” Steward ventured. “How come you talk like that?”

“Cuz I god damn want to,” Ralphie answered.

After a pause, he added, “Jesus Christ asshole.”

Steward pondered that a moment.

“Well, you have a fucking good day,” he said.

That brought another grin as Steward drove away, considering the irrelevance and inanity of his current activities. With only eight months left of his alternative service, he could simply go through the paces, he thought, but he still hoped to find some more substantial work during his remaining time in Gallup. His situation was such that he could do almost any activity, being paid by the foundation, so long as the activity could be loosely construed as of benefit to Indians. He had been asking around for possible jobs.

Back in his own section of town, Steward parked his car by the used car lot, and passed the WMIF office again to see the entire crew inside, sitting on desktops and chairs. He went inside.

Sandy Hawn, the youthful, preppy-looking director, was at his desk with his hands behind his head in a typical pose suggesting a lack of any

definite business. Larry Dickens, the lean, long-headed psychologist with the neat little mustache, stood beside him, grinning with his chin raised up, as he often did when he discovered something "weird." Gerry Klein, the water engineer, was the very picture of the hip scientist with his brown hair just long enough to pass as a hippie and just short enough to pass as a legitimate engineer. Next to him was the always unkempt and unshaven new student intern, Brad Engel.

"Late for the meeting again," Sandy Hawn said.

"I must have not heard," Steward replied.

"Hey, Stewless," said the water engineer, Gerry Klein, "we've been thinking about a camping trip, devising our big plans here, just the guys, and not the director here. You want to come along?"

"When would that be?"

"We were thinking over Thanksgiving."

"Yes, actually, I would."

"Might do a little illegal substance," Larry said.

"I wouldn't be in on that."

"You wouldn't mind, though?"

"No. Where's this trip going to be to?"

"That is still being planned."

Steward headed away later, glad for the prospect of a little trip away from Gallup, and glad to have been invited by his co-workers. He knew that he had not been fully accepted by them, and he thought of this as he walked home. What did they have against him anyway? He turned down offers for dope, was one big reason, he thought to himself, and he had just done that again. Though he had been around dope, he had never used dope at all. Because of this, he knew, he was regarded as square. He was aware of some other reasons, also. He refused to use hip words. He refused to act jaded. He insisted on being serious about intellectual matters. He talked about ideals. For these reasons, he knew, he was, if not actually disliked, kept at some distance. But he was determined to hold his own ground and be accepted or rejected on his own grounds without being something that he didn't think was really him.

As it was Friday, one of the two weekly nights of the Sleep In, he had just a few hours to relax before heading to work.

In the kitchen, he encountered Brad the student intern, who lived in a room at the corner of the hall without windows to the street though it was adjacent to the kitchen. The psychologist Larry had moved out to his own apartment. The unshaven intern, dressed in a plaid shirt with his big belly hanging over his belt, was frying tortillas in a pan.

"How's it going, Brad?" said Steward. "Big plans for the evening?"

"Enchiladas, doobie, very loud sound."

"Why don't you come down to the sleep in?"

"Far fucking out. Drunk Indians and barf."

"Oh, it's not so bad."

Steward spent the rest of the night standing in the concrete-walled garage as Indians, in small groups, usually, stumbled through the door and found their way to the Army cots lined up along the side.

Late in the night, a wobbly Indian, familiar with the set-up, came woozily down the ramp and headed directly to a back room where he vomited on the floor. Steward used a hose to wash the mess down the floor drain, and then returned to the room with the cots, where the silent occupants hardly noted his presence among them.

[Chapter 264 notes}

265. Steward and his co-workers spend Thanksgiving Day in Monument Valley

A few days before Thanksgiving, Tom Steward heard from the single other occupant of the Henry Hotel, the student intern Brad Engel, that the camping trip was a go and the site proposed was Monument Valley, up near the Four Corners area where the boundaries of the four states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado met at a cross.

"Gerry says he's got sleeping bags for you and I," Engel informed. "And he's got a couple tents."

"Oh, great, Engel, you mean I get to share a tent with you?"

"Guess it's your sad fate, man."

"Just my luck, Engel," said Steward, "you'll be in the back seat with me, too."

As it turned out, though, on the day before Thanksgiving, when the group headed out of Gallup, straight north on Highway 666, Engel rode in the front seat of Gerry's Volkswagen bus, next to Gerry himself, who did all the driving. In back of the bus with Steward was the skinny-headed, bespectacled, and mustachioed psychologist, Larry Dickens. In contrast to Engel, who was sprawled out with a bag of potato chips in his hands, the psychologist sat forward with his thin hands folded, listening intently to anything said to him. Often, in response, he nodded and smiled with his lips drawn back from his clenched teeth and his chin raised up about thirty degrees above normal.

"Weird, man," was his favorite expression.

Actually, Dickens turned out to be quite an interesting person on the one-to-one basis that Steward and he were compelled into by having to share the back of the bus for the several hours of the drive. Dickens explained how (as he had briefly told Steward before) he had wound up living in the woods of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He had gone through a marital breakup, he said, and then, at a point of near despair, had gone off to take up a solitary existence. For a whole year, he had lived in a tent, moving around in a canoe in summer and in snowshoes in winter, eating fish that he caught as his main food, at night reading Sigurd Olson by campfire or flashlight, and with no contact with people except with his brother who had brought him supplies once a month. He had been a hermit, in other words, but not for any religious reason he would own up to, just to experience nature.

"And to stop analyzing," the psychologist said. "My mind was so goddam cluttered up with self-analysis. I wanted to stop thinking. Except for ol' Sigurd, of course."

"Did you succeed at that?" Steward asked.

"No," Dickens replied with his chin-lifted-up smile.

"Well, I heard once about the logical positivists," Steward said in his

formal manner, “you know, Wittgenstein and those guys, they tried to not say anything except what they could say exactly, and they had to give up on that, eventually, because they found out if they did this totally, there was nothing to say.”

“There was nothing they could say?”

“Nothing but the barest science, or so I read.”

“Weird, man.”

“You never got into that stuff, I guess.”

“Oh, I did, in a way, actually. I looked at the *Tractatus* one time. Now there is something that is written in the most simple words you can imagine and yet it is impossible to understand.”

“I don’t understand it, either,” Steward said.

The trip north brought a sense of the grimness and poverty of the Navajo reservation that Steward had not gotten on his previous experience of it on the trip to the concert at Chinle. These were not the Indians of the movies, they were more like poor cowboys. They lived in the humblest, plainest imaginable ranch style houses,—simple, box-shaped buildings set on concrete platforms with no basements, no garages, and no porches except for now and then a little roof overhanging a concrete pad that lifted a person one step upward at the front door. The houses were white or pastel colors. They had no awnings or ornaments of any kind. On some houses, a TV antenna was flimsily secured at the apex of the roof. The Indians wore cowboy clothes, also,—blue jeans as tight as could be, leather cowboy boots with spurs, cowboy hats with the brims turned down over their foreheads in the style of the six-shooter heroes in Western movies. They rode around in pickup trucks with as many as four adults crammed in the cab and kids seated on the adults’ laps and sometimes grandma and grandpa riding in back.

Here and there amidst the drab houses was a drab store and now and then a drab school with identical windows in a row on the front side. In one community was an A-frame church with a cross made of two poles and a sign that said “Jesus Saves.”

At a sign marking the exact “four corners” of the four states, the group stopped at a little restaurant that could have been a greasy spoon anywhere in America except the five people at another table were Indians who seemed to resent their presence. The dark-haired waitress, an Indian, also, responded to light remarks with a stare.

As the group had coke, burgers, and fries, Larry Dickens told how it was he had gone from the purity of being a latter day Thoreau to the life of a graduate student.

“It wasn’t like I reached some tremendous insight,” he said. “Exact opposite of that. I realized I never would reach such an insight. I never would find a life that was totally right. So what I had to do was to find

the life where I could pure and simple survive and, in a so to speak half ass manner, you know, kind of actually like what I was doing. It was a complete compromise, in other words. Guys, you are looking at a compromised person."

"Well, we've all gone that route, man," Gerry replied.

Later, upon reaching Monument Valley, with the single tall pillar of the Big Indian butte to their northeast, silhouetted against the sunset sky between the slablike, long table of the Sentinal Mesa and the closed hand and thumb of the West Mitten butte, the group pitched their two tents and built a campfire near the bus to make for an easy walk from the fire to the beer cooler. They watched as the sky darkened, revealing the three bright stars on the sword belt of the constellation Orion, the Hunter, and the cloudlike cluster of Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, just up and to the right of the Hunter's bow. All of these constellations, Steward knew from having used the sky map his hitching buddy Bill O'Rourke had left with him in Los Angeles before O'Rourke's departure for Vietnam.

"Well, here's the plan," Gerry said as he drew on the joint. "Soon as everyone's up and ready tomorrow, we drive out and find us some serene place, and that's where we pop the acid. That'll give us eight hours or so of sunlight. By evening we'll be coming down."

"Sounds perfect," Larry said.

"Tommie, you're still welcome. We got enough for you."

"No, thanks, Ger. I think I'll pass."

Steward passed the joint along, also, without drawing on it, when it came around to him, while continuing to think about the comment Larry Dickens had made about being completely compromised after all the searching of his previous year. His thoughts drifted back to the similar scene by the Cheat River in West Virginia where he and Kris had shared a different campfire with Matt and Mary Brandt. He recalled that he and Kris and the Brandt's had talked at that time about how the "social change" they had all told themselves they were working for, coming out of college, had led to the collective expectation of "cultural change."

He recalled how Mary had explained the collectiveness in terms of the "spirit of the times," the "zeitgeist," and he recalled how Kristine had explained cultural change as "not to change them, not to change that" but to "change us, change this, right here." That was one of those cases, he thought, where Kris, while younger and often seeming less thoughtful than the rest, had suddenly come up with a crystallization that amazed everyone around her. Steward recalled, also, how Mary had talked at that same campfire about the "vast amount of exploration involved, to come up with a life that makes sense." Just the day before, he had received a letter from Mary in which she had described again how she and Matt were still looking for a life that made sense. They had ruled out

Kentucky, she had written. They were thinking of going ahead with buying a farm with their "family" from Woodstock. These people, Steward reflected, had not given up on the idea of finding a "life that made sense," a life that was not a compromise, and he had not given up on it, either.

Much to the contrary, he still felt such a great yearning to break though somehow to such a life like that, a life that made sense, he acknowledged to himself as he lay in the tent later, with the bearlike Brad Engel bundled up in a sleeping bag beside him, making a little clicking sound in his nostrils every time he breathed. The letter he had received from Barbi Carpenter at about the same time as the Brandt's visit, also came to his mind. He recalled the expectation that Barbi had expressed in her letter, also, the expectation of his own generation that the collective searching would lead to a new more honest, more expressive kind of existence.

Barbie, the great love of his life in college, the first girl he had really fallen in love with, where was she at the moment, Steward wondered, how was she faring in Vietnam? He had not heard from her in months. He had no idea that she had just gotten married to his old rowing and hitching friend, Bill O'Rourke.

Next morning the group packed up the two tents and drove eastward down a winding dirt road from the East Mitten toward the West Mitten and then about a half mile southeast to a low area between the East Mitten and a giant tree stump of a rock called Merrick Butte. There they found an elevation of the red ground that provided a view extending about six miles to the northwest between the two mittens and Sentinel Mesa to another mesa that presented a long, low profile on the horizon beside a solitary needle of rock. The needle was "The Eagle," the map informed, the long, low mesa was called the Eagle Mesa.

Just below the elevation where they had parked was a shallow canyon through which wended a stream, identified on the map as West Gypsum Creek. The dry land all around was dotted with silvery gray clumps of sage and dark green swirls of tumbleweed that swayed in one place or rolled in the wind.

On the way in, the group saw a few of the traditional Navajo mud and log hogans, of such a matching color to the ground overall that they were hard to see, but, aside from these domelike dwellings, there was no sign of other people at all. By one hogan, some horses stood inside a corral. The scene was quiet except for the sound of wind.

Standing by the bus, Gerry Klein, Larry Dickens, and Bart Engel then popped in their tiny pills of acid and waited for the effect.

Gerry was the first one to speak. "Hey, Larry, look at the sun," he cried, pointing to where it was rising above the mesa just to the east.

"What color is it for you?"

"Green," the psychologist replied with a delighted grin, his chin raised up and teeth clenched.

"Me, too."

"Weird, man!"

Steward could see that the day would continue to develop like this, with him out of the main line of conversation,—and by his own choice, he knew, in not taking the acid.

"I'm going take a little hike," he said.

No one responded. Gerry and Larry were standing together with their hands in their pockets smiling at the sky. Brad Engel, the student intern, had settled in against some large rocks that provided armchair support. He looked more disturbed about the effect of the drug than did the older men, but not so disturbed as to forget his coke and potato chips, which he had near at hand on a rock beside him.

Steward headed across the reddish-brown land, following the creek to the northeast toward the Eagle Mesa on the distant horizon. For a half mile, with no object in mind, he continued in that direction, then, seeing a trail leading from the creek toward the East Mitten, he turned to follow it. The trail ahead was bright with sunlight. The sage plants all around filled the air with the pungent smell he had grown to love on his walks in Winslow. He hiked along in great spirits, glad to have left the scene of the acid behind.

Reaching the butte, Steward saw that the base of it was essentially a high hill, about 400 feet high, from which the "mitt" form of the butte rose up like a giant sculpture. To proceed further at that point would require an ascent up a sheer rock wall that rose hundreds of feet above the base.

For two hours Steward hiked slowly up the zigzag path on the base of the butte, stopping to rest at various places providing successively more commanding views of the valley below.

He climbed as far as he could until the rock face of the closed hand side of the mitt was within reach of his hand. He sat down there with his back against the rock looking off in a northwest direction toward the single pillar of rock called the Big Indian that he and the others had identified the night before.

Steward estimated that the farthest rim of land visible before him was about 20 miles away. Prominent in that direction again was Eagle Mesa, the long, flat table he had noticed before. The mesa was about a thousand feet high, he noted on the map, and it was almost a mile wide and about six miles away, to the north northwest, and to the left of the single pillar of the Big Indian. Over to the right of it was another butte called Castle Rock composed of parallel, vertical forms that brought to mind the tall,

thin forms of the high-hatted priests carved on some of the often depicted monuments of ancient Assyria. Beyond that was the mausoleum form of Brigham's Tomb. Within the expanse between these massive carvings of rock were swells and crevices of red and brown land and lesser rock forms that evoked images of solitary couriers or sentinels, and here again was no sign of other people and no sound so loud as to rise above the indeterminate hum of the wind and wisping dust.

With nothing to do for several hours, while he waited for the rest of the group to complete their acid experience, Steward settled back into a sheltered nook in the rock face of the butte. The sun had risen to the middle of the sky, at this point. It was warm on his face and body as he sat high on the butte alone, looking off, at the other buttes all around him floating in the valley floor below where the still air had begun to waver as it rose toward the cooler air in the sky.

Steward thought again, as he had months before, of the butte above his previous home of Winslow, Arizona, that the open space all around had the features of a sea. It was a sea that washed away personal borders, he reflected to himself, and the resulting sense of oneness brought down to earth his concerns of hours before about finding a "life that made sense." Here in this valley there was just one life, he thought. It made neither sense nor nonsense. It was simply life as it existed at the moment, and had existed for centuries.

An hour had passed,—or maybe two hours,—when Steward heard a tinkling sound, as of a small bell ringing in the distance. He traced the sound to a canyon with juniper trees about a mile straight out from where he sat. There was a flock of sheep there, advancing toward him, with a boy and a dog running behind. The dog did not bark as it raced to the flank of the flock of sheep to turn them back in to the trail. The boy did not yell though he whistled one time. The tinkling sound, Steward saw, came from a string of bells tied to one sheep. Slowly the group made its way to the valley floor just below Steward, then it continued past toward a hogan below the East Mitten. Again the valley was silent.

Here was another sense of the Indian world, Steward thought, to add to the drunken scene in Gallup and the poor cowboys in the ranch houses. This was the world of quiet unity with nature that the Indians had been so praised for, and that they still apparently managed to maintain in vast open places like this where the noisier society of whites had not yet taken hold.

[Chapter 265 notes]

266. Brandt's, traveling, hear Buster had heart attack, rush to Minnesota

Unknown to Tom Steward, on the morning after Steward had returned to Gallup from Monument Valley, at about 7 o'clock when Steward was still in bed, Matthew Brandt, Steward's old friend and former rowing teammate and doubles partner, was sitting less than a hundred feet away, one level below Steward's room in the Henry Hotel, at the same table in the corner cafe where Steward had sat himself with his wife Kris on the morning after the Kent State shootings.

This cafe, which, in other circumstances, might have quickly faded out of Matthew's memory, soon acquired a significance that would cause it to remain with him the rest of his life. This occurred when his wife Mary returned from a pay phone near the door, where she had just placed what she had expected would be a routine call to her parents back home in Minnesota.

"Matthew, your dad had a heart attack," she said. "My mom said your family has been trying to get a hold of you."

"Is he okay?"

"She doesn't know for sure. Last she heard he was in critical care down in St. Joe's."

Matthew called home then at once and he learned that his father was still in critical care.

"How did it happen?" he asked his mother.

"He was outside working. We found him on the ground."

"What did the doctor say?"

"He said it doesn't look good. A lot of damage was done."

"How much damage?"

"Said he may die."

"We're coming right up there."

"Pray for him, Matt."

"I will."

"Pray for me, too."

Matthew's mother broke down in tears at that. Matthew spent a few moments trying to console her and then went back to the table to find that Mary had already paid and was standing ready to go.

"We'll take turns driving," she said. "We should just drive non-stop."

"Yes, of course."

"Figure it will take about 15 hours."

"Sure, let's go."

Matthew and Mary, before hearing this news regarding Matt's father, had been on their way back to Washington D.C. from San Diego, California, where they had spent several days visiting with friends who had recently moved there. They were both done with their course work

for their masters, by this time, and in the midst of writing their theses, which had allowed them enough leeway in schedule to take off two weeks over the Thanksgiving break for the unplanned days of the open road they had both been yearning for. That sense of freedom had come to an end with the news of the Buster Brandt's condition.

From Gallup, the Brandt's continued east to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and then further east to Amarillo and Oklahoma City, where they turned to the north and continued on to Wichita, Kansas. By early afternoon, they could see the skyline of Kansas City in the distance.

The drive from Kansas City through northwestern Missouri brought farm scenes familiar to Matthew from his boyhood. The area had not yet received a cover of snow. He noticed fields where all of the work of the harvest was completed, with the crops removed and the soil already disc-plowed with deep furrows to catch the snowfall of the coming winter and trap in the melt water for the coming spring. He saw other fields where the corn crop had been harvested and the corn stalks allowed to remain, providing forage for cattle that had been let loose to pick and choose among the stalks.

"Humble fruit of humble labor," he thought to himself. He did not know why the words had come into his mind. He had heard that expression somewhere, sometime, maybe as a little kid, he reflected. The words came and went, leaving behind not more words, but images of people working on the farm, including his father and his grandfather, who had died when Matthew was nine years old.

Mary broke the silence near the border of Missouri and Iowa when Matt was contemplating these images.

"I meant to ask you, is your dad talking?" she said.

Matthew adjusted himself in his seat to bring himself back to the present scene. They were nearing a town with a single stop sign beside a sprawling plant of some kind with a water tower on one corner of the building and a parking lot filled with cars.

"No, I guess he's pretty heavy on the meds."

"Has he come to at all?"

"My mom said he woke and looked around and asked where he was, and she told him straight out that he had had a heart attack."

"And what did he say?"

"She said he asked how bad was it, and she told him pretty bad, and the best thing he could do was rest."

In the slow progress of conversation in such a circumstance, where there is much time to contemplate and not much distraction, another town loomed in the distance and then passed, with the usual scene of baseball field, water tower, and cluster of brick commercial buildings, before Mary spoke again.

"And when your mother said that, that it was pretty bad, did your father have any response to that?" she said.

"Not that I know of," Matt replied. "Guess he just took her advice and got some rest."

The snow was coming down harder by the time Matt and Mary reached Des Moines, Iowa. They headed up the straight corridor of Interstate 35 in a tunnel of snowflakes that reflected back the lights of the Brandt's VW bus as the short day came to a dull close under low clouds that hid the light of the setting sun. By early evening, with the snow having subsided, they were approaching the divide in the highway between Minneapolis and St. Paul. Taking the St. Paul route, they continued over the Mississippi River where for a moment the familiar buildings and bridges of downtown St. Paul could be seen in the distance.

In downtown St. Paul, Matt and Mary exited the freeway at Wacouta Street and drove six blocks to the tall copper cross of the five-story brown brick Saint Joseph hospital located at 10th and St. Peter. They parked in the new parking ramp, from which the State Capitol could be seen, and headed through a long hall to the hospital proper.

They already knew the room number, 423-E. Reaching it, they found Matthew's mother, sister, and brother seated in the room around a bed in which the senior Brandt was sleeping.

"How's he doing?" Matthew said at once. "He seems to be resting well."

"What do they say about him?"

"They say he's not out of the woods yet. There's been a lot of damage."

Only then did the greetings occur more formally as the members of the Brandt family exchanged hugs and greeted and hugged Mary.

"I don't understand how this could have happened," Matthew said as they all settled down in various places in the room. "He seemed to be doing fine just last summer."

"The doctor said there was some kind of structural problem no one was aware of, a damaged valve or something."

"How could they have not known about that?"

"I don't know. He said it was probably from rheumatic fever when dad was a kid. He said sometimes things like that don't get put down, or they get lost in the files. Dad never mentioned himself. He was probably not even aware of it."

"That's too bad. He maybe could have done something for it."

"I was thinking that myself."

The nurse assigned to Buster Brandt came and went several times. The evening meal was delivered and went untouched. Conversation rose and fell with topics passing by of the Brandt' family doings in Minnesota

and of Matt and Mary's just completed trip out West.

Matthew's mother, brother, and sister left for the evening soon after being told by the family doctor that not much else was expected for the rest of the evening. Mary, after consulting with Matthew, left with them.

Matthew stayed behind, not expecting to have a chance to speak with his father. He sat quietly beside the bed while the ward in which he was sitting grew increasingly quiet as evening activities were completed and patients fell asleep.

"Matthew, Matthew, my dear son, I'm so glad you could make it."

"Rushed here soon as we heard."

"You drove from D.C.?"

"No, we were out West, actually..."

"Oh, yes, San Diego."

"Yes."

"You have a good time?"

"Oh, yes. It's beautiful."

"On the ocean there.

"Yes."

"I never saw the Pacific ocean."

"Is that right?"

"Saw the Atlantic, a little too much of it, going over for the war. But I never saw the Pacific."

Matthew took that in in silence. "Dad, I'm so sorry to see you in a state like this," he said.

"Well, so am I, of course."

"You know, Matt, when you were a little boy, I once thought to myself the Lord gave me a diamond and if somehow I turned it into a lump of coal, meaning you, I would be held forever accountable for that. But when I look at you now, or the many times I think about you, I realize what a diamond you still are, what a diamond of manhood you've become."

"Well, thank you, Dad."

"I don't mean to take all the credit. I know you done a little bit of it yourself."

"Well, Dad, you are the one of the greatest causes of whatever good I have managed to acquire. I want you to know that," Matthew said. "I want you to know I appreciate what you've done for me."

"Thank you, Matt."

They were silent again, looking out toward the window where a single bare branch of a tree swayed in the wind.

"You know, you've been a great help to me over the years, Matt. You were always such a hard worker," Buster Brandt said. "Such a hard physical worker. Even as a boy, you were like that. Never had to ask you

to work or bear down on you to work. It was just natural for you. I think, really, you are the hardest physical worker I've ever known."

"We've had some great projects."

"Oh, yea... That goddam barn roof."

"That was a doozy alright."

"You were quite the monkey up there, scraping off them old shingles."

"Got to like it after I got the hang of it."

"What a relief that was to see that old crap sliding off."

"Yes, it was."

"That roof is still holding up good."

"The plywood was a good idea."

"Best damn barn in the county, in my opinion. Of course, I've got no reason to be biased."

Buster Brandt fell asleep again soon after this while Matt remained at his father's side.

Seeing a sudden gleam on a wall-hanging above his father's head, Matthew rose and went to the window, which looked south toward the main section of downtown St. Paul. He saw that some of the higher windows there that faced east had a similar gleam,—the reflection of a rising sun, he suspected, from the eastern horizon that could not be seen.

Matthew donned his coat, kissed his father on the brow, and went down to the street and through six blocks of quiet buildings to a granite fence there, from which he looked down to the Mississippi River, where the red-roof and tan stucco façade of the Minnesota Boat Club could be seen, and the long wooden ramp leading down to the floating dock in the water. Ice had encroached from the banks of the river on each side, but within the ice shores was a channel of open, lead-colored water.

An image came to his mind of pulling his oar in the midst of his teammates, with Jim Morris in front of him, Tom Steward behind, and Bill O'Rourke in front of the crew, knocking out the cadence on the gunnels of the boat. But Matthew did not dwell long on this recollection. He turned from the river to return to the hospital with his father's words of several hours repeating in his mind.

Matt returned to the ward to see carts outside his father's room. Arriving at the door, he saw his father surrounded by doctors, with one doctor applying pressure to his father's chest.

In a few minutes, the outcome was clear. Buster Brandt had suffered another attack that had brought him to the brink of death. This time the doctor could not bring him back.

267. Buster Brandt's death brings reflection and a reunion with Ellen

When Matthew Brandt arrived home later that same day, the day of his father's death, he could hardly bear to look around at the barn and other places on the family farm where he had worked on so many boyhood tasks with his father.

He sat listening as his mother Caroline, his sister Karen, and his wife Mary, still in a state of disbelief over his father's death, talked about the details of the wake, funeral, and burial.

"I think we just need to make three phone calls," he said, "one to Godbout's, one to St. Phillips, and one to Resurrection." Those were the names of the funeral parlor, the Catholic parish to which the family had belonged for many years, and the cemetery, where all the burials for St. Phillips occurred.

The plan was so simple that they set about at once to complete it and soon the events were scheduled over the course of the next few days, ending with a funeral on Saturday morning, four days away. There was a final call to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, to provide information for the obituary, and then everyone sat for a while and visited as if nothing had happened.

Over the next several days, the events and ceremonies following on the senior Brandt's death brought a repeated distillation of the facts of his life: born into a farm family, working his whole life on the same farm passed down to him by his father, he himself the father of two sons and a daughter; World War Two veteran serving in the 3rd Army from 1942 to 1945 in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, under General George Patton, winner of the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star (Matt had not known this until told in the eulogy); for 20 years an agricultural extension agent with Dakota County, a job he had maintained while also raising crops and sheep on the family farm; devout member of the Catholic Church, active in the local Democratic Party (Matt had not known this, also).

There was time, also, at the surrounding events, to reacquaint with the members of Mary's family, the Kass's. Among these was Mary's younger sister Ellen, by coincidence at home on a visit for a brief visit from Las Vegas, where she had continued to live in the year and five months since her husband Jim Morris had gone down in Laos. Mary's mother, Catherine Kass, somewhat of a look alike to Ellen, with the same chestnut-colored hair, was close at the side of Matthew's mother. Mary's father, Edward Kass, like Buster Brandt, a veteran of World War Two, having served in the 101st Airborne during the D-Day Invasion and during the subsequent push into the Netherlands and Germany, sat or stood quietly in the background as if a contemplative mood.

Ellen was the focus of the conversation after the funeral as Mary and

her parents and the Brandt's sat together at a table in the basement of Saint Phillip's church, surrounded by friends and fellow parishioners who had just returned with them from the burial. She said that almost every week she called the Fairchild Base to inquire on Jim's status but she could hardly find anyone to reply to her inquiries.

"It's gotten to a point where they treat me as an annoyance," she said, "and I suppose I am."

"Well, what do they tell you?"

"They told me after Jimmy went down that they didn't know if he was alive or dead and that was the last official thing they told me."

"Well, that is hard to believe, that they don't attend more to the families of people they sent off to war," Catherine Kass said.

"What can they say?" said Edward. "They don't know. You want them to make up something."

"Well, some people have found out things," Ellen threw in. "I've talked to other wives. I don't know where they get their information, but they say there's been sightings."

"In Laos?"

"Yes, in the area where Jimmy went down. There's a town there with caves that they keep the POWs in."

"And people have seen Americans?"

"Oh, yes. In one report, there were three. Americans, definitely. Pilots."

"Is that right? In that same area?" asked Caroline Brandt. "Yes."

"Well, if you ask me, it's a shame," said Catherine Kass. "They've got a whole war there, in Laos, with American boys dying, and you never even hear about it. It's like it doesn't exist."

"Yes," said Ellen. "What are they dying for then? If it's a war that's not important enough to even mention."

No one challenged that sentiment, and, for a moment, the beautiful Ellen Morris,—with her lovely chestnut hair falling over her forehead, as it had when her downed pilot husband had first noticed it and admired it,—was left to her own thoughts, her presence among the others fading as the light in her pupils dulled and the eyelids lowered over the large orbs of her eyes.

Ellen's efforts to find her husband's status and location had, in fact, exacted more from her than she cared to divulge, even to her family. She had written letters to all of the people she had heard of who had any connection with the sightings. She had gone to visit the other wives she had mentioned, to question them in detail about what they had heard.

From these other wives, also, she had received warnings about the effect that the captivity and abuse would have on her husband, even if he did return. He would not be the same man, she had been told. He would

be a psychological cripple. She could not believe that her dear Jim could have undergone such a diminishment from the noble man she had married, but, if he had, she was prepared to accept it and nurse him back to the state he had been in before the ordeal.

Another mental strain for Ellen,—and also undisclosed, except in the one letter she had sent to Mary at the time of Matt's first experiment with grass,—was the abortion she had obtained, (acting on her husband's request, on their vacation together in Bangkok, not to have a child until he returned safely from combat, so as not to possibly repeat, in the new generation, his experience as a boy of growing up without a father). Ellen had obtained the abortion only after a great inner struggle, and she found herself continually having to defend that decision in her mind. She was afraid that she had made a mistake in snuffing out that precious part of herself and Jim. Alone at night, she felt an emptiness inside where the fetus had been.

Ellen Kass Morris, in her physical appearance, had continued in the subtle transformation that had been apparent at the Minnesota Boat Club almost two years before when she had attended the New Year's party just before her trip to Bangkok, six months prior to Jim Morris's capture. She evidenced still the perfect fullness of form, the perfect facial tone and brilliance of green eyes, with the chestnut hair falling down, but the eyes appeared to have sunken deeper into her skull with shadows forming around them. The shadows, though beautiful,—as was everything about her,—suggested anxiety and strain.

Matt and Mary both separately noticed this, and as they rode home from the funeral to the Brandt farm, with new snow falling on the familiar scene of the High Bridge and Mississippi River and distant view of the tan stucco boat club, below the Wabasha Street Bridge, they talked about how Ellen had been transformed ever so gradually from the happy have fun girl of several years before into the brooding though never complaining woman of the present day.

"Does she ever go out anymore, do you think?" Matthew asked.

"No, I don't think so."

"What does she do then?"

"She still works at the club. That's it, I think. She doesn't seem to enjoy it. She just works and goes home."

"It must be so terrible for her to keep waiting, not knowing." "Well, I never would have thought of it as a quality of my sister, but she has shown herself to have all the loyalty of a wife of the old stories, you know, like the wives of the fishermen gone to sea."

"Yes, she has."

At home that evening, Matthew, for the first time since returning home, walked out into the yard into the places where he had worked as a

boy with his father.

Seeing a foot trail through the snow to the open wagon doors of the barn, he went down the hill to the barn and inside it, where square bales of hay were piled about eight bales high in the haymow under the vaulting interior of the gambrel roof.

Seeing that the window board on the window that faced the pasture was closed, he went at once across the barn, through the strewn hay on the floor, and threw the window board open to the scene of the maple woods on his left, the pasture directly in front of him, and the apple orchard on his right, all covered in snow.

At once he noticed a change in the view that could not be seen from above the hill by the house. Over to the left of the view, where the next town road cross along behind the woods from right to left, he saw an area that had been cleared for construction of a long, low building with a blue and white commercial sign and semi trailers parked around it. A warehouse, he realized at once. The sight of it bothered him a great deal. It was an eyesore, he thought, a gross intrusion into the world of his boyhood, the world that had been so important to his father.

"What can you do, though? What can you do?" he said aloud. "Things are going to change. You can't stop change."

Even so, Matthew felt a deep sorrow at seeing the new structure on the horizon where the farmhouse and buildings of a family he had known as a boy had been cleared away.

He noticed next that the corn in the field below the window had not been harvested. It stood there, as dry as old paper, with snow visible in the narrow spaces between the rows of corn. His father had been too worn down to finish the harvest, he concluded.

"If I had known that, I would have offered to come home and help him," he thought. "Now it will have to wait till spring."

Other landmarks of the scene had not changed, Matthew noted, as he took a seat on the hay bales, looking out. The maple woods on the left of the scene, with here and there the golden brown leaves of an oak among them, were as he remembered them.

Matt thought of the many conversations he had had with his father, sitting on hay bales in the barn, often with beers in hand after a day of shared work. He realized there had been a thread throughout his father's pronouncements of sympathy with common people and distrust of solutions that his father had regarded as too extreme such as the recent talk of "revolution."

"Common sense," Matthew said aloud. "Common decency. That was the heart of it."

He thought of how he had not been aware of his father's activity in the local Democratic party. His mother had told him just the day before

that his father had been a supporter of Eugene McCarthy, the senator from Minnesota one of the peace candidates in the last election, the one who had upset Lyndon Baines Johnson, the sitting president at that time, in the New Hampshire Democratic Primary. He had not known that his father had had such sympathies. He thought of how his father had expressed sympathy with the Kentucky landowners who had wound up having their land strip- mined after having signed it over years before for the extraction of coal that they had assumed would be underground. He thought of how his father, during that same conversation in the barn, had expressed support for populist movements of the past like the Grange.

It occurred to Matthew, in considering all of this, that his father had not been so far in his political sympathies, really, from himself and his friends. He had assumed his father had been part of the past somehow and he and his friends a part of the future. Perhaps he had not seen to the depth of the commonality before his eyes.

He headed up the hill to the house and, finding it quiet, returned to the barn with a six-pack of beer. With a bottle in hand, he watched the sunset colors fade in the sky over the pasture.

A memory came to his mind of the evening, a year and a half before, when he had brought home the joint that he had gotten from the former stroke oar, war veteran, Dennis Nolan, and had smoked it sitting on a bale of hay, determined to use the effect of the grass to break through to an understanding of his heritage. He recalled the “landscape of sound” that he had heard that evening,—composed, as he recalled, of layers that spread out in the space around him: the frogs at the pond, the wind in the yard and fields, the buzz of electricity in the power wires, the wail of a train on the track that ran alongside the Minnesota River. He recalled how the landscape of sound had widened to include the other elements of his life, with Mary at the center and with the family house, as a dream image, a part of it, too. The alley view from Darren Houghten’s apartment in D.C. and the hillside cabin in Kentucky, where he and Mary had lived just after getting married, had been added to that, as he remembered. He recalled his realization that the barn was the center of what his family was. Above him, in the middle of the roof, below the ridge beam, was the hay trolley where he had seen the pigeon on that same evening of the landscape of sound. The pigeon was not there.

Matthew got up from the hay bales and went down the wooden stairs to the barn cellar to look at the one-inch-diameter washers and nuts that he and his father and brother had fastened on the cellar wall to the 50-foot-long rods extended between the wall and the concrete footings on the outside of the barn to hold the barn plumb.

He thought of the photo that still sat on the fireplace mantel in the house showing him as a boy of four carrying the large tool box that his

father had bought for him.

He thought, also, of the compliments his father had given him on the evening of his father's death: that he had been the "hardest physical worker" his father had ever known and a boy diamond from God that had fulfilled its promise in becoming a man diamond.

In all of these things, there was much to ponder in a past that had faded somewhat with the death of his father and a future that he felt had to carry some of the past with it, he knew not how.

268. Steward tries writing Kris but Mary is more substantial and loyal

In December 1970, which was a cold month that year in Gallup, New Mexico, Tom Steward made a formal decision that he would do everything in his power to understand why his marriage with his estranged wife Kris had fallen apart and reconcile with her if possible. Also, he decided that he would continue the thought process, begun the previous summer, of trying to understand the cultural turmoil he felt himself part of, and he would try to improve his job situation so as to spend his remaining months in Gallup as substantially as possible. In addition, he decided to look into moving from the hotel to some other situation more in the community, in a house or apartment.

Steward's life in the hotel had become increasingly lonely as the weeks had gone by. The only other resident, the student intern Brad Engel, had departed soon after the camping trip at Monument Valley. Steward was aware, however, that, on the other side of his loneliness, was a feeling of possibility due to his undefined future (free of the contingencies of his former married state). He felt a great interest in his Gallup life with its sociological and psychological complications, owing to the clash of cultures, and with the (for him) unexplored territory of the Navajo Reservation extending to the north of him, and the vast red and brown country extending all around. He expected that his new openness and exploration would point to a new direction in his life.

Early December brought an offer from Steward's parents to buy him a round-trip ticket to fly home to Minnesota for Christmas. He accepted at once, glad for the prospect of reuniting with his family and gaining a different perspective on the changes in his life.

From his hotel window, early in this period, Steward could see the snow drifting up the open swath of land, across the street from the hotel, where the new interstate freeway was destined to be placed at some still undefined future time. He could also see, now and then, the procession of his peers from east to west, or west to east, as they passed in VW buses or miscellaneous vans painted in the unmistakable psychedelic colors of the counterculture or marked with the encircled bird-claw peace signs of the movement against the war, which was still being prosecuted, Steward knew, as the war entered its eighth year.

At Steward sat at his desk, especially at night, images came to his mind of Kristine as she had been at various moments and milestones in his and her relationship and marriage. He saw her as he had first seen her, in her business suit and high heels at the beach in Santa Barbara, and as he had seen her waiting for the bus in Santa Barbara, a week after that, in her stylish hippie outfit. He saw her in her white peasant's dress at the fireside wedding and in her mentally defeated, plain appearance in West

Virginia after she had gotten her eye infected trying to summer blonde her hair with the well water at the old farm in Masontown where he and Kris had lived such a solitary life.

How could matters have gone so quickly from a state of such intense love between him and her, and the state it had fallen to in Winslow, with her having sex with another man? Surely, he had made some great mistakes, he admitted to himself. Had the marriage been doomed from the start, though, by the differences between him and Kris? Some people, her grandparents, especially, had claimed from the very start that the marriage would fail.

How would the situation have to change if he and Kris were to get back together? He felt a great need to analyze what had happened, and the journal struck him as the best way to do it.

One day, determined to apply himself to this in earnest, he sat down at the desk, and wrote the following slowly, in careful hand, drawing his words out one by one.

His exact words were as follows:

"Some considerations concerning Kris and me:

"(1.) Basic for me: I have a tremendous need to be loved. I must be relatively sure that our relationship has some permanence, and that Kris will not change her mind overnight.

"(2.) For both of us: Isolation as a way toward becoming closer doesn't work. It intensifies whatever is our peculiar problem with miscommunication. We must be around a group of people we care about.

"(3.) A basic problem: Why do I make Kris defensive? Why do I give her a feeling of inferiority? Something is wrong here in basic interpersonal chemistry.

"(4.) Where ever we go: Must be certain that Kris has an area of activity separate from me in which she feels comfortable and productive. A great part of the problem all along has been oversharing of work-situation along with my greater experience in the area we've been involved in. Did this have a part in making Kris feel a lack of personal worth?

"(5.) For me: Learn at last to appreciate the differences in male vs. female psychic process and method of communication and deciding. Is this realization condescending? Not in the least. I should realize by now how often my analytical method has failed to find something which was very obvious to Kris' sense of judging on basis of quality-content.

"(6.) A question: Does Kris understand what went on in her mind that caused (made necessary) her decision to separate? Has she really thought this through? Can I help her think it through? (It seems that this is always done by me with an air of condescension rather than as equal to equal helping activity.)"

Close upon these entries in his journal regarding differences between male and female "psychic process and deciding," however, Steward received another long, thoughtful letter from Mary Brandt that seemed to invalidate much of what he had been defining in his own mind. Here, in Mary's letter, he found an analytical process much like his own, with the interesting complication of seeming always also somehow feminine, too.

Steward also noted that Mary Brandt had begun to speak to him more as a friend of her own, rather than just a friend of her husband, and she had begun to confide in him about her own concerns and interests, which he found interesting as an indication of what intellectual women of his own age were thinking. He had never gotten a sense of this through Kris, he acknowledged to himself, despite the many good things he had gotten from Kris. He had never really known such a woman as Mary, who had such a strong, independent intellectual process.

Steward was also aware of a male to female interaction between him and Mary, though, in her lack of flirtation or coyness, there was never a sense of anything that he felt would make him disloyal to his old friend Matt, Mary's husband. He felt complimented by her trust in him, and glad that he could reciprocate without the ambiguity of romance.

Steward soon learned, also, however, that even this indestructible pillar in his life since college, the marriage of Matt and Mary, was in a process of transition under apparently similar cultural pressures that affected him and Kris.

"I have been in a process of redefinition, also," Mary wrote at one point. "Matthew and I have been in it, together,—maybe he reluctantly at some times. I hope this is not something you disapprove of, Tom. Maybe you will find it odd. But the whole concept of marriage, in my new way of thinking, is subject to reevaluation. If you will forgive me for a rigid, ideological word, I think marriage is bourgeoisie. By this I mean its whole original purpose in society was to uphold a middle-class social structure, with women locked to their husbands, to prevent the scary development of 'independent women.' I told Matthew I don't want to think of myself as 'married' anymore. I want to think of myself as a single person who has made a love commitment to him. His response to this was, 'Mary, I think you are going totally bonkers.' But to me, Tom, this is a tremendously important concept."

Steward, as he read this, thought to himself that Mary was indeed going bonkers. He was sure, from what he knew of his old doubles partner that Matt would not care in the least whether he was formally defined as married or single, and would regard the whole discussion as crazy unless it resulted in some actual change in his and Mary's day-to-day living situation. He himself, Steward, didn't understand why the distinction was so important, either. He had never imagined life with

women would become so complicated, though at the same time he was complimented again that Mary took the time to explain such things to him.

In a subsequent paragraph of this same letter, Steward encountered a further revelation that he read over many times.

"Tom, I want to 'feel' in this independent, single way with you, too, as a woman to a man. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying I want you to come running and screw me. I have a one-to-one sexual relationship with Matthew, a vow to him, and I want to maintain it. But I want to allow my energy as a woman to flow out to other men, also, and specifically to you, in this intellectual manner, to bring out the full strength of the interaction."

Mary also wrote in detail about the other aspects of her life, at the present. She was still involved with the women's cooperative that she had started in Kentucky, the Mountain Women's Cooperative, now called the Mountain & Potomac Women's Cooperative, was still selling their products at a store in Georgetown, and was planning a meeting that would bring some of the Potomac members of the coop in Georgetown with some of the Mountain members in Kentucky. Hattie Beecher, Fletcher Bourne's neighbor, had agreed to attend.

Mary had also signed on for a second stint with the Venceremos Brigade in Cuba, she wrote, on a two-month project starting in May of the coming year. She would be planting trees instead of chopping cane. She was hoping to include the products of Cuban women in the cooperative showing, maybe through a third country, if this was not possible through the United States, because of the embargo. She had written to her doctor friend from her first trip, Juanita Tancredo, about this possibility, and Dr. Tancredo had replied with interest, and was making arrangements to meet when Mary returned to Cuba.

"Most importantly, though," Mary wrote, "our little group here is getting closer every day to a decision to buy the farm in Concord, New Hampshire that we looked at last fall. This will be with the people you met in D.C. Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, Jane Larue, Dennis Kelly from Kentucky, and Matt and me, of course, Gail and Jane's children. There are also four others that may join in. This will be a true commune, Tom, a true collective enterprise, to take charge of our lives. This is the result of our many talks with one another about the options 'in the system' versus the options in what I would call 'exploration with alternative modes.' But you know me and my big words. Forgive me for getting so intense about it."

There was so much here to think about, Steward thought to himself, and much of it he found it disturbing. Why he wasn't sure.

Soon after this, also, he received a long hoped for letter from his

estranged wife. The difference between this letter and Mary's letter was striking. The handwriting was girlish. The thoughts and vocabulary were more emotional and less complex.

Kris wrote:

"Dear Tom ('Dearest Tom' I am tempted to say), I miss you very much now with Christmas approaching. Yesterday I saw a report on TV about a snow storm somewhere, and I was thinking about how we could see the snow swirling around from our window in the trailer in Masontown. I was thinking about how we used to cuddle. I miss that, Tom. I miss your arms around me.

"You maybe are thinking, why would that be because didn't you go running right into the arms of David? Well, I want you to know, I did not. I am living the life of a single person, and almost of a high school girl again, back here with Don and Audrey. I have my old room. And sometimes I wish I could just hide here and not have to face the cruel world. But then I remind myself, I'm a grown up now, I have to go out.

"I do have plans. Tom, for what I should do. I will be the ongoing manager of the boys' band, as soon as we get things going again in spring. Not a groupie, mind you! Right now, though, they are just working on getting some new songs together.

"Meanwhile, for me, well, I've been around to see some old friends. I've done some secretarial work for Don. Typing his screenplays. He is so talented! I am so in awe!

"Then, of course, I have the business of deciding how to become a stronger, more independent person in my life, going forward. And I know you have many similar concerns for your own life, also. But I don't mean to imply you have as far to go as me. I know you're way ahead in this department and I admire you for it.

"Don and Audrey send their love, by the way. They miss you. Lyn and Sandra send their love, too. We all love you. Write me sometime again. I love your letters.

"Your wife (I still am, you know),

"Kristine Steward."

Steward went out with this letter in his pocket. He walked through downtown Gallup, past the menagerie of storefronts of Indian and Mexican and standard commercial offerings, and then back to the hotel, feeling confounded, by the contrasting sentiments that he received in her letters of missing him and wanting to be with him while also wanting to be apart from him and independent in her own life.

It was much like what Mary was saying, though, Steward thought as he ascended the long steps to the second floor of the hotel. Kris was on a more juvenile, less verbal level, but that was to be expected, of course, because Kris was younger and less verbal by nature. Even so, despite

these differences of age and style, these two women in his life were, without a doubt, expressing the same conflict of wanting to be apart and connected at the same time.

269. At Minnesota Christmas, Steward finds subtle changes from the past

While Tom Steward flew home to Minnesota on Wednesday, December 23, 1970, watching the country below becoming increasingly covered with snow, as the plane continued northward, he thought back to the Christmas of the previous year when he, his wife Kristine, his brother Art, and Art's wife Nancy had traveled through a snowstorm from Fort Knox, Kentucky, to the Twin Cities. Much had changed in that year, he noted. Kris was no longer beside him. Art was in Vietnam. Art and Nancy had a baby boy he had not yet seen.

Not only his present had changed, but his future, too, Steward also observed. The previous year, he had assumed a certain future course based on the assumption he would remain with Kris. Now he had no idea where his future would lead. He had started to think about going to graduate school after his time in Gallup was over. In what area of study, though, he had no idea. He was aware, also, that he felt a pull lately to "throw his life to the wind," as he had heard someone say, to join the physical and life- style searching of so many of his peers.

Just what would that mean? Steward asked himself, as an arc of the plane brought a view of a frozen river far below, over which a train was passing on a diagonal bridge. It would mean heading off with a backpack maybe, he answered in his mind. Hitch-hiking around, visiting people like Matt and Mary Brandt, living with them maybe, or working on a farm such as they were planning to start. Getting jobs here and there, doing carpentry, things like that. It was a vague ambition, he knew, but it struck him as an adventure in "looking for America," as the restless characters in *Easy Rider* had done.

Later, Steward felt the plane descending and looked out to see below him a grid of lights of buildings and moving traffic. He found his thoughts drifting then to the upcoming reunion with his family,—in particular, with his father, who would meet him at the airport.

A memory came to him of his father, the previous year, dressed up like a pilgrim to read his "proclamation" regarding Nancy's pregnancy. Odd how his father did such things, he thought. There was the insistence there to be the "center of the family." The other side of that, though, Steward thought, was his father's true concern for his children.

Where would the current Christmas place his father in his chronic swings of mood, Steward wondered. He expected his father would be "up" for the family occasion, as always, but there would be other subtle signs that would indicate whether the subsequent direction, from that up mood, would be further up, or level, or down. Lately the downturns had been more frequent, he noted, with the down moods longer in duration when they occurred.

He did not have to wait long, upon arriving at the airport, for his first assessment. When he came up the ramp from the plane to the lobby, he saw his father at the rail, dressed in a Hamburg hat with a green feather and a open brown coat revealing a yellow vest.

The yellow vest was the first indication, Steward thought. He knew his father used the color yellow, just like this, so obviously displayed, to ward off a sense of winter darkness.

"So you made it okay?" the father said.

"Yes, I did."

"Glad to see ya, guy!"

"Thanks a lot."

"Bet you can't wait to see the new addition!"

By that, his father meant the baby, Steward knew.

"Oh, ya," he said, as his father took his bag.

"He's a cute little bugger."

"I bet."

From the terminal, father and son continued out into the brisk cold of the Minnesota night and then through the stark shadows of the parking ramp to the corridor of tall street lights with yellow bulbs that led out of the airport. On the new freeway entered just beyond that, the hum of tires provided an undertone to talk of home events that Steward had lost touch with during his months away.

Amidst this news was news of the doctor son, now Army captain, Art. He had been transferred from a town called Chu Lai, Joe Steward said, "on the coast somewhere" to a new duty, "expedition or something, up in the mountains somewhere."

"With the 101st Airborne," the father said.

Steward settled for a moment on the words "Chu Lai" when his father said them, feeling they were familiar from somewhere. Then he remembered that his old rowing team-mate and hitch-hiking buddy Bill O'Rourke had been stationed at Chu Lai, also. As he recalled, O'Rourke had also mentioned the 101st Airborne.

"Sorry, Krissy isn't with us this year," Joe Steward said.

"So am I."

"I think she'll be coming back to you, Tom."

"I don't know."

"Just watch and see."

So the conversation continued, in fragments, little forays looking for a deeper discussion, with nothing taking hold, while familiar scenes of the hometown cityscape passed by within the panorama of the car window: the freeway bridge over the Mississippi River (turning point, as Steward recalled, for the six mile row from the Minnesota Boat Club downstream); the dual towers of the Schmidt brewery (he had seen them

every day on the long bus ride from the East Side neighborhood where he had grown up to the high school he had attended in the west end of the city in Highland Park); the bridges and intertwining's of the intersecting freeways as they arced around the white dome of the state capitol and the brick buildings of downtown St. Paul; then the first view of the family home from the hill that inclined down toward the snowed-over lake rimmed with street lights, where dreamlike houses with Christmas decorations floated in the darkness before the backdrop that Thomas also remembered well, the distant hill with three radio towers with blinking red lights.

It all seemed much the same, but over the next few days, Thomas noticed changes. His fair-haired, gracious sister, Karen, soon to turn 21, had become a young, handsome woman. His kid brother, Nate, 14, was still the family comedian, but he had begun to show a more serious side, also. Then came "the newest addition," as Joe Steward had called him, Art and Nancy's new son, just turned four months old, who regarded Thomas with curious, intelligent eyes when presented for examination.

"You can hold him, if you want to," Nancy said.

"Naw, that's okay," Steward replied.

"He won't break, you know."

"I'll just look."

"Bet you're glad to finally see him."

"Oh, ya."

The truth of the matter, Steward admitted to himself, was he had been so wrapped up in his personal changes and questionings that, until the trip home, he had not thought much about the pregnancy or about the arrival of this baby,—and he had forgotten not just about this, he reflected, but about this whole world he had grown up in.

He thought more about this over the next several days, through the events of the Christmas Eve meal, midnight mass, and exchange of presents on Christmas morning, as he watched the members of his family interacting with one another with such indisputable regard and affection. How distant from this world, he thought, was his plain, small room in Gallup, and the concerns he had been sorting out in his journal. He thought of the letters he had recently received from his estranged wife Kris and from his old friend and new confidante, Mary Brandt, with all of their questioning of social values and social roles. Here, in this world he had grown up in, there was no such questioning, he thought, nor did the social values and roles in this world appear to be in need of questioning. They were those that had been carried down through generations to provide this comforting setting of sparkling tree and seasonal stories and prayers that were repeated with everyone's approval and consent.

In exploring this further in his mind, however, Steward realized that, although he did not reject these old values, yet he felt disaffected from this world in which he had grown up,—and this was in the sense he felt that he could not go forward within this world himself. There was a lack of something, he thought; he could not say where it was.

Later, after the Christmas meal, as Thomas sat in the living room, looking out to the lake, he had an interchange with his father that gave him an insight into just where the lack was. This was when the drift of the conversation turned to Matt Brandt, whom his father knew from rowing events he had attended.

"Let's see," his father said, "Matt's in grad school, right?"

"Yes, just finishing."

"In Washington, D.C."

"Yes, that's true."

"And he's married to that girl Mary."

"Yes, that's true."

"With the dark hair."

"Yes."

"How long have they been married now?"

"Almost three years, I think."

"Must be about ready for their own little bugger."

"I suppose so. Yes."

That was the point at which Steward realized the lack, and he was aware of it exactly as that, even as he gave this answer that he knew had glossed over the details of Matt and Mary's "redefinition" of their relationship and their attempt to find an "alternative" life style. These were things, he realized, that he could not tell his father about, or, maybe he could, but he was aware of the subtle disapproval his reply would provoke. That was the lack: that this world of his childhood, while it did so many positive things, clamped down on and choked out any different course of action from those that had come before.

This same clamping down and choking out was what had enabled the Vietnam war to happen, was it not? he noted to himself. This clamping down and choking out had given rise to the movement against the war and everything that had grown out from that.

His father could not be blamed for this, he went on in his mind. His father had the best of intentions, as always, and in communication of this familial kind, his father blundered through sometimes with unintentional results, as at times he, the son, did, also. No, Joseph Steward could not be blamed, but the situation could be blamed for how it impeded anything new from emerging from the past.

Next day Steward went looking for his father again and found him in the basement bedroom (previously his and Arthur's room) that his father

had converted into an office, complete with his wall plaques and trophies from his many distinctions as an insurance salesman and leader in civic organizations.

Laid out on the desk were photographs that young Steward in a quick glance noted were all of what appeared to be the same street corner, from various perspectives.

"So what is this?" he said.

"Oh, you recognize it, Tom," his father replied. "This is Payne and Case. I told you about it before. Grandpa Art had a bar here."

"Oh, yes."

"This building here, where the flower shop is, is the exact same place. Same interior almost. Without the bar and tables. I just about lived there when I was a kid."

"Yes, I remember you told me that."

"And this corner here, by this old bank has been there since I was a kid, and still is, this is where I used to come over and sing with the Salvation Army band. They used to sing on this corner all the time, and you know how I like to sing."

"Yes."

"Looking back on it now, I guess they were there on account of Grandpa's bar. They were the Baptist types, you know, real strict about dancing and liquor. I don't know if they knew I was the bar owner's kid, and I don't think they cared all that much. You know, this was a case of they did their thing, as you kids say, and we did ours. Nobody wanted to really call anybody down."

"You're going to write an article on this?"

"Well, I've been thinking of that, and laying these pictures out, and I've been down to the li-berry, you know, but I don't know I just can't sit down and do it."

"It takes an effort of will."

"I know that, Tom. But I don't have any will."

"You do have will, Dad. And you have talent. You should apply it."

"I know that, Tom. But I can't make myself go," Joe Steward ended up, and then he suddenly took hold of his son's hand, as in a knuckles up handshake, to start out with, but it ended up in a clasp of hands that, for the son, lasted too long.

"Well, Dad, I think I'm going to go upstairs," Thomas said.

"Going to sit for a while?"

"Yes, I think I will."

"I'll be up in a little while."

"Okay, see you then."

Tom Steward proceeded upstairs and through the kitchen and family room to the living room with the windows overlooking the lake. The

room was dark except for the lighted Christmas tree in the far corner. He sat down on the couch and looked across the lake toward the hill on the far side of the lake with the blinking red lights. He watched as the white headlights of a car flared up the other side of the lake and then moved along on the road that bordered the shore,—the white lights in front of the car and red lights behind it could now be seen,—proceeding past the street lamps and hillside houses with Christmas lights that bordered the lake all around.

From this perspective, the frozen lake was a quiet, open space over which drifted swirls of snow pulled up by the wind. There were no lights on the lake. It appeared cold and unwelcoming.

An image came to his mind of the view from the East Mitten butte in Monument Valley he had seen a month before, with the mile-long plateau of Indian Butte in the distance and the boy and dog with the flock of sheep heading toward him below, led by the sheep with the tinkling bell. From this came another image of waves crashing in by a beach alcove in Goleta, California, where he had sat and talked with Kristine DeSolt on the day when she had told him she was making arrangements to see him as much as possible in L.A. He recalled that he and Kris had gone to this beach on the evening before they had returned to his basement apartment in Santa Barbara and made love together the first time.

A door opening told him his father was coming up from the basement. His father came in and plopped down on the sofa next to him.

"Beautiful sight," his father said.

"Yes, it is."

"If you don't have to go out in it."

"Yes. That, too."

"Remember that one time, Tom, you got off on the bus across the lake and tried to walk across on the ice?"

"Yes, I do."

"Just about got frostbite."

"Yes, I remember well."

"It's nice to have you back home, Tom."

"Nice for me, too."

That was all that was said between father and son and then they sat a long time in the silence looking out to the familiar scene.

No more than this was needed, for the time being, young Steward thought. In the future sometime, he would maybe have a different role, but for now he needed to fulfill the internal logic, or whatever it was, that had taken him to Gallup alone.

270. Changes in old friends lead Steward to make changes, too

In his last two days in Minnesota, in the first week of January in 1971, Thomas Steward called around to talk to some of his old friends and acquaintances from college. He did this on the spur of the moment to get a sense of what these people from his past had done compared to what he had done himself in the years since college.

Steward called to inquire about one former rowing teammate who had quit the team his last year to concentrate on his studies in pre-medicine. He wound up talking not to him but to his wife. Steward knew her from regattas she had attended, enough to be on a first name basis. She spoke to him with dishes clinking as she talked and a baby googling in the background.

"Jay is in his third year of med school," she told him. "We're already thinking about where to go for residency."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes! Maybe Portland, we're hoping."

"Wow, that's really fine."

"You must be moving along yourself," she said.

"Oh, yes."

He told her about how he was doing alternative service, living in Gallup, New Mexico, and so on. He glossed over the details, not wanting to admit he was newly divorced and didn't really have work of any significant kind at the time being. When she asked about his future plans, he said he didn't know for sure.

"Well, I'm sorry to be doing dishes when I'm talking. There's so much to get done."

"Oh, that's okay," he said.

He had felt slighted by that, though, he thought later. She hadn't even stopped from her chores to talk to him.

Steward also called another guy that he had attended classes with at the University of Minnesota.

"Hey, Stewie!" the former classmate said. "Don't tell me you're married now with two kids!"

"No, I am not," Steward replied. He went through the same report about how he was a conscientious objector, living in Gallup. As before, he omitted the details.

"Well, I just finished grad school last spring. In social work," said the former classmate. "Now I'm a case worker in Minneapolis."

"Is that right? You like it?"

"I like some elements of it, I guess you could say. I just came to the conclusion, though, the time for hanging off on things was over. For me, I mean... I know a lot of people are still in that. Sounds like you are, for

the time being."

"Yes," Steward answered.

He felt confused and drained of energy by this brief interchange. He felt as if this world of his past was drawing further and further away. People were building their lives and leaving him behind.

Steward also called the house of Dennis Nyberg, the former stroke oar of the crew. (This was the same individual that Matthew Brandt had happened on at the Minnesota Boat Club in July 1971, the one that he had gotten two joints from on the night he had gotten stoned in the barn trying to understand his heritage.)

Nyberg's mother answered. Steward knew her from the regattas, also, and he had been once to Nyberg's house.

"Tom Steward, I remember you," Mrs. Nyberg said. "Glad to hear you again."

"Glad to hear you."

"Well, I have some sad news for you, Stewie. Dennis is not with us anymore. He's died a few months ago."

"I'm very sorry to hear that."

"You know, Tom, he came back from that war, he was so mixed up. He tried to get his life together but he just couldn't."

Details followed from that. Nyberg had killed himself by sitting in a running car in the closed garage when the rest of the family was away to the family lake cottage.

"Well, I'm very sorry," Steward said again.

"He liked you, Tom. You guys had some good times together, with the rowing. Thank you for that."

Steward also read a newspaper article about a local youth who had been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross after being killed in a battle in South Vietnam. The name of the soldier, Kenneth H. Langerquist, drew his attention, seeming familiar from somewhere, then Steward noticed that down further in the article the deceased soldier was described as the son of a local draft board official, Harold Langerquist. Steward recalled that Langerquist was the official who had presided over his interview with his local board two years before. The elder Langerquist was further described as a retired colonel who had served in World War Two in the Third Army under Gen. George S. Patton.

So this man, Harold Langerquist, who had been so gracious regarding his plea to be a CO had lost his own son, Steward thought.

Last contact to occur with old friends and acquaintances, at home in Minnesota before Steward left, was through a letter. Steward took the envelope from his mother when she brought it in from the road, and his attention focused at once on the return address name in the upper left corner of the front side: "Barbara Carpenter O'Rourke."

He did not open and read the letter, however, until after his plane (boarded later that same morning) rose from the tarmac in the Minneapolis- St. Paul airport and settled into quiet flight in the sky.

The letter went like this:

"Dear Tom,

"I'm sure you noticed the name. Yes, it's true. Bill and I are married, though we're not living together. Yet. That will happen on some happy day not too far in the future now when he and I will leave Vietnam together and return to the States. I think that will be to around there somewhere. We've talked about the Lake Pepin area..."

So the letter went on.

The new Mrs. O'Rourke also mentioned in one paragraph that O'Rourke would soon be reporting to new duty in an operation that was so top-secret no one would say what it actually was. Steward recalled his father, on the way in from the airport, making a similar comment about the assignment Art had been sent to. Maybe Art and Bill were headed to the same operation and would run into one another, they were both in the medical corps, Steward thought, though he imagined the chances of that were slim with so many soldiers involved in each operation.

He settled back into his chair with the letter in his hand, looking down to the brief views of the landscape far below that opened up now and then between the clouds.

He felt such a strong sense of something, Steward thought, though what it was that he felt he could not say. It was a combination of things all hitting him at once, he thought. The breakup of his marriage. After six weeks, almost, it was just sinking in. He thought of Kris and felt a great longing to have her beside him, accepting him, liking him, again. The diminution of his life, of his work. Yes, it had been diminished, he thought. He had come a long way down from the work he had done in North Carolina, from the sense of service he had gotten from that, and the true service he had at times actually done. The drifting away of his old world in Minnesota from his new world in Gallup. The grim, lonely confines of his room in the Henry Hotel. Oh, yes, he liked the austerity sometimes. He felt that the contemplation it forced him into was somehow what was meant to be. But it was nonetheless a grim, confined world. Arthur had a baby. Barbie and Bill O'Rourke were married. Everyone was settling into some kind of life.

A momentary thought of Dennis Nyberg came to Steward, also, as the plane droned along,—Nyberg holding the broom backwards to indicate how he, Steward, would help the Viet Cong by being such a bad soldier, if he was sent. But, of course, he had not been sent. That seemed so long ago, when that locker room horse play had taken place. Now Nyberg was dead by his own hand and the war went on, so continuously present now

for so long that it was hardly paid attention to anymore although people were still dying in it, like Langerquist's son.

And what about Jim Morris? Jimbo had gone done somewhere, he was maybe still alive, but nobody talked about him anymore. Ellen was still living in Las Vegas, waiting for him to come back. Nobody talked about that, either.

Back in Gallup, after the short connection flight from Albuquerque, Steward retrieved his car, drove through town to the Henry Hotel, ascended the dimly lit stairway, and walked down the deserted hallway to his room. He felt relieved to be back in his own domain, meager as it was, but there was no doubt he could not just go on as he had been, he told himself. He needed to find a better job and a different place to live.

Next morning, as Steward walked past the foundation office, he saw that Sandy Hawn, the director happened to be present, which was seldom the case in the early hours. He went in and got directly to the subject of wanting to find some more substantial work.

The neatly dressed director sat at his desk, looking congenial and unhurried as Steward talked. Indeed, he had nothing to do. His job obligations took him only about an hour a day.

"Well, you know, just so happens I heard about something yesterday you might be interested in," he said.

"And what is that?"

"Indian hospital up on the hill there south of town has this psych ward. It's an experimental program of some kind. I was introduced to the main doctor there at a meeting I attended yesterday. He and I just started to talk. You'd like him, I think. He's a Harvard graduate. Sandy-haired. Soft-spoken. Looks like a poet."

"You think they could use someone like me?"

"Yes, I do, Stew, from the way he was talking. Said they have a 'milieu' program where patients are allowed to just wander around and mix with the staff, and they have a combination of Indian staff and college grad, alternate kind of people like you."

"The foundation would pay me?"

"Sure, Stewie. Anything of community service, you know. Far as your pay and stuff, it would just be the same."

Steward did go up there that same day. He walked right in to the nurse's station and announced who he was, what his connection was with the foundation, and how he wanted to volunteer.

"Well, you know that might be a possibility," the male nurse at the station said. "We've got several people we call 'therapy aides.' You help the doctors when they ask. Rest of the time, to put it bluntly, you just kind of hang around, trying to connect with people. You talk. You listen. You attend our daily meetings and maybe some meetings on individual

patients you're close to."

Steward looked around as he listened. From the nurse's station, the floor opened up into a large common room with chairs all around, lined up on the walls, and a whole wall of big windows overlooking the main part of the town of Gallup and the red mesa country beyond. Steward could see the highway and railroad train there, at the edge of town, with the roof of the Henry Hotel off to one side.

He was impressed by how well he was treated from the start. He was led on a tour of the floor, which consisted mainly of normal hospital rooms, and everyone he was introduced to gave him a friendly welcome and said they hoped he would wind up on the ward.

Last of all, he talked to the ward director, the sandy-haired, soft-spoken doctor that Sandy Hawn had referred to.

"Is there an application or something I should fill out?"

"No, you don't need to do that. You will not be our employee, to start out with, and we know you are a CO and working at the foundation, that says a lot."

"When would I start?"

"Tomorrow if you'd like to, but we would ask for you to keep a regular schedule once you start. We would arrange for some people here to give you an orientation to mental illness and our approach here and to the whole Indian culture."

"I would like that."

"How about 7 to 4?"

"Sounds great to me."

"As you'll soon find out, a lot of our meetings here are conducted in Navajo. Most of the people are Navajo. We have a young Navajo, social worker, who speaks the language and leads the meetings. There'll be one tomorrow if you'd like to attend."

"I would like that."

"Alright."

"What should I wear?"

"Just regular clothes. On the neat side."

Next morning Steward was seated in the common room along with about 30 Indians, two doctors, a social worker, five Indian therapy aides, one white therapy aide, about his own age, and the translator, whose name was Eddie Yazzie.

It was a long meeting, begun in silence, and with long intervals of silence between issues brought up for discussion. When one of the Indian patients had a concern, Yazzie listened to the concern, as told in Navajo, then he conveyed the concern to the professional staff. Meanwhile, the sunlight was spreading slowly from right to left along the windows that faced north toward the town and the vast open country of the reservation.

"Betsy says she would like to go home for one week," Eddie Yazzie informed the group. "Her sister is sick and she wants to help with the children."

"Would she promise to take her medicine?" one of the doctors asked. "Please tell her, it's very important that she takes her medicine."

"She says, yes, she will. She knows she needs the medicine," Eddie replied after relaying the question in Navajo and listening to the Navajo response.

Steward liked the quiet setting of the ward. He liked the respect for the Indian culture and language. He liked how the patients were able to roam freely around and speak to anyone about their problems. He liked how intellectual topics were discussed seriously and earnestly by the staff members.

"So you're the new paleface," Eddie Yazzie said as Steward went out at the end of the day.

He was a broad-faced, bespectacled, gentle-looking young man with high cheekbones and slanting eyes that made him look more Chinese than Indian. He had a serious demeanor but broke now and then into laughter as he delivered his comments, which often had a sarcastic edge.

"Yes, I guess I am," Steward replied.

"Well, no need to worry. We don't bring our bows and arrows."

Steward proceeded on the second part of his resolution, to find a different place to live, less isolated than the hotel. He asked around at the foundation office and Gerry Klein, the water engineer asked Steward if he was interested in renting a room in his house.

"Yes, I would be interested," he said.

He had been in Klein's house before, but he had never seen the room being offered. He went over that same day to look at the room. It was in the back of the house with a window that looked out over the flat roof of a car dealership to a used car lot with blue and yellow triangular flags strung along wires. The room had a single bed and a desk and chair. It was smaller than the room in the hotel, but Steward liked having access to the kitchen, and he liked being in a house, though the house was an odd little place, smack dab on the corner (about a block from the hotel) with a bare dirt front yard just big enough for Klein to park his VW bus in.

"Well, what do you think?" Klein asked.

"I'll take it," Steward replied.

He moved his belongings from the hotel in a cardboard box that he packed in ten minutes. Then he looked out his new window at the blue and yellow flags, thinking he had made progress in getting a better work situation and a normal place to live.

271. O'Rourke heads for Khe Sanh, meets his CO Art Steward

On Thursday, January 28, 1971, Spec. 5 Bill O'Rourke received orders to report at once to the still undisclosed military operation for which he had volunteered six weeks before. His specific orders were to meet with a group from the 326th Medical Battalion to be ferried with them by chopper to a staging area near Quang Tri at Dong Ha.

No one O'Rourke talked to had any specific information about what the operation would involve. But, as he looked out from the chopper as it approached the Dong Ha depot, the former coxswain observed that whatever it was, it was going to be conducted on a grand scale. The staging area was about two miles square, and packed with equipment and soldiers moving about in a constant drizzle on the muddy, tire-rutted ground.

Later that day, the former coxswain attended a meeting conducted in an equipment hanger rigged with a public address system.

"This will proceed in three phases," said the officer in charge of the meeting. "In the first phase, tomorrow, airmobile units of our 101st Airborne and mechanized units of the 5th Infantry will launch an attack toward the A Shau Valley, while the 14th Combat Engineers will proceed up Route 9 toward the base area. As you know, Route 9 is all chopped up from our own bombs. The engineers will construct bridges and culverts. In the second phase, day after tomorrow, our vehicles and choppers assembled here,—with you aboard, gentlemen,—will follow. In this third phase, we will build in and fortify in the base area as we await further orders. Gentlemen, this is the largest operation of this war, and the first involving the full participation of our Vietnamese counterparts. Any questions?"

Someone raised a hand.

"Yes, Kastener," the officer said.

"Where we going, sir?"

"Well, let me put it this way, Bruce. You'll find out when we get there," the officer replied.

That brought laughter.

"Well, look, I don't mean to be mysterious," the officer said, "but it's for your benefit, and the benefit of everyone in our units going out, to hold this one close to our chest."

Two days later, however, when O'Rourke was waiting to be boarded on a Huey chopper, someone said he had heard that the base of operations was at Khe Sanh. That news brought an exchange of significant looks. Everyone knew Khe Sanh had been the site of the three-months-long battle two years before in which hundreds of American soldiers had died. The battle had ended in a victory, in terms of

numbers killed, but the site had been abandoned afterwards.

O'Rourke, when he heard this news about Khe Sanh, was draped in an olive drab poncho, as were the men around him. For most of the first two days, it had rained or drizzled constantly with such a low cloud cover in the morning that the choppers couldn't fly. This would continue, he heard, due to the seasonal pattern of the northeast monsoons. People would have to wait around each day until the clouds rose to the 1000 foot ceiling that was the minimum accepted for flight.

O'Rourke also heard that CH-54 Sea Cranes, the largest helicopters in the Army, had been used to build the bridges on Route 9.

"We're talking about eleven-ton steel beams, 30 feet long," the pilot on O'Rourke's chopper told him as they waited to take off.

"Must be a bear to handle," O'Rourke replied.

"You got that right," the pilot said, "and I heard the enemy has got tanks in this area, which by the way is not far from Lang Vei."

"What's the significance of that?"

"Lang Vei is the only place where they used tanks so far, I've heard, and they beat us with them, caught us off guard."

From where he sat in the chopper, O'Rourke could see, in front of him, 20 or so Huey choppers positioned for takeoff in two lines. Behind him, the lines extended out of sight. Along a side road, below, was a line of trucks with open, canvas-covered beds from which helmeted men looked out. Everyone was staying in the vehicles to keep dry.

"What is the temp here anyhow?" a gunner asked.

"They were saying 42," the pilot answered.

"What's the weather report?"

"'More of the same.'"

O'Rourke felt proud of being part of such a great force when the command came around to proceed. All of the choppers started their rotors at the same time with a mighty roar like the race cars at the start of the Indy. The trucks rolled out in a long line, the men gesturing with V-signs to the officers directing traffic on the road, as O'Rourke had seen in old clips of World War Two.

In pairs, the Hueys lifted off as Cobra gunships settled in on either side. Ahead of him, O'Rourke could see hundreds of trucks and choppers moving forward into what appeared to be a long tunnel formed by the muddy ground, the low, leaden sky, and the cloud-shrouded, densely wooded hills on either side.

Next to O'Rourke was his platoon leader from the Ripcord days, Kevin Klein, by this time a first lieutenant. Klein was much the same upbeat young man O'Rourke remembered from then, except that memories of that battle had imprinted a new seriousness onto the boyish eyes and brow.

"Well, LT, what do you make of all this?" O'Rourke asked.

"What I've been thinking, doc, is where we're heading is basically the intersection of this highway, which is the main highway to the coast, with the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Then you got all these ARVN troops coming in. They can go places where we cannot."

"Like maybe, Laos."

"That's my guess."

If the ARVN would be conducting the main part of the battle, there would not be as much American land involvement and related medical need as at Ripcord, O'Rourke thought, and, if he was kept as a troop-assigned medic, there would not be the same level of danger as he had experienced at Ripcord. He could not help but feel some relief at that, he admitted to himself, but he was also aware of another dynamic, building in him since Ripcord and receiving the Silver Star, and this dynamic was wanting to be a full member of the Army team in accepting the full danger of the Army and the full killing mission, also.

A flurry of birds off to one side of the chopper sent his mind in a different direction. He recalled the gulls following the wake of the ferry in Hong Kong on the day when he had proposed to Barbara Carpenter and she had accepted. Now she was his wife, hard as that was to imagine. He wanted to be worthy of her, he thought, and make it back to her safely. He would be as careful as he could while also being brave.

The entire trip, from takeoff to time of arrival, took less than a half hour. Hamlets along the way, seen from a few hundred feet above them, seemed eerily quiet. People outside of buildings or in fields looked up with curiosity but without any sign of encouragement.

"You can bet they're not so unaware as they seem, doc," the lieutenant said. "You can bet they're talking this very moment in Hanoi about when they'll send out units against us." Khe Sanh was a far different kind of base from Ripcord, O'Rourke learned soon later, when someone pointed out it was just ahead. It was not on a high elevation, as had been the case on the mountain tops of Ripcord. Rather, it was on a low open hill at the base of higher hills covered with trees. The hill was so low that it looked at first like a flat field. In area, it appeared to be about a mile and half long and a mile or so wide. A single dirt road led from Route 9, on the south side of the base, into the main part, ending at a T-intersection. From this intersection, the two sides of the T curved around through bunkers and tents lined with sand bags. An airfield on the northern side of the base had a single runway, about a mile long.

The base was a hub of activity, O'Rourke observed, as the chopper hovered, waiting to land. Hundreds of men were digging in with shovels or cleaning out stray boards, sheets of metal, or other junk left behind by the prior inhabitants of the base. From the air, the bunkers looked like

square holes bordered with sandbags. Over some of them, roofs of timbers, sandbags, and tarps were partly constructed. Amidst the bunkers were tents of the meeting room size, with their guys wire secured to metal pegs in the narrow paths between the bunkers and tents. Above one tent was a blue flag with an elongated red diamond and the motto, "We Will." That was the flag of the 5th Infantry Division, as O'Rourke knew. Over on one side of the base, in an area set off as a large parking lot, with trucks, track vehicles, and choppers segregated by types, the former coxswain saw what he assumed were their tanks. They were M48A3s, the most common kind in Vietnam. About 30 of the tanks were parked in neat rows with the 90mm cannons on their turrets pointed north.

In the eastern sky, a giant CH-54 chopper was approaching the base with a boom swing loaded with ammo. Other choppers of a smaller size were hovering, taking off, or landing. Four D7 bulldozers and an M48 tank with a plow were scraping out a new landing strip next to the old one, which was pocked with bomb holes.

The place was a muddy mess, O'Rourke discovered when he jumped from the chopper onto the brown muck carved up by the crisscrossing tracks and tires of bulldozers and trucks. Rolls of barbed wire marked off functional areas and continued around the outside of the base. Discarded wood boxes, muddied timbers, and scraps of metal were piled up amidst the tents and bunkers next to piles of tin ration cans.

Seeing a sergeant with a clipboard, O'Rourke asked around for the location of the base clinic and headed over the knoll to the tent for his parent unit, the 326th Medical Battalion. As had been the case at Ripcord, the 326th was in effect part of the 101st Airborne, though technically it was under the 67th Medical Group.

"Hey, how you doing, Bill? Looks you're with 2nd Platoon Charlie," one of the corpsmen said as O'Rourke approached.

That was Klein's platoon. O'Rourke was glad about that, and he was glad to have a field assignment at once without the suspense of waiting. Charlie was one of the five companies of the 2nd Battalion of the 506th Infantry, the Currahees, the battalion he had been in before. He liked the command and felt comfortable in it.

"Who's all here?" he said.

"Just about everyone except the CO."

"Who is that?"

"Now that I don't know. New guy, I heard. Coming out from your old stomping grounds, Chu Lai."

O'Rourke was curious who that would be. The medical CO was not an important person in terms of giving direct commands, but he was the one who would make any further assignments and, as a doctor, he was the last resource for any medical emergency that was beyond the

expertise of the corpsmen.

O'Rourke spent the rest of the day back with his medical platoon outfit digging out a bunker that would be rotated into by whomever of the outfit was not out in the field.

At a meeting that evening for the Currahees 2d Brigade, attended by about 400 men bundled up in coats and ponchos, O'Rourke heard details regarding the operation that was about to begin.

The main business of the operation, the colonel in charge of the meeting explained, would be for ARVN units assembled in Vietnam near the Laotian border, at Lang Vei, to move west on Route 9 into Laos toward NVA Base Station 604, near the town of Tchepone, which, as he showed on a map, was 22 miles into Laos. Airmobile elements of the 101st Airborne would be involved in infantry insertion, airborne command and control, and medevac of wounded. The U.S. Air Force would assist with carpet bombing and fighter bomber interdiction. Before the incursion, a feint assault into the A Shau Valley, in the area of NVA Base Station 611, southeast of the Laotian salient, would hold the enemy down in that area.

"Gentlemen, our offensive has already begun," the colonel went on. "Two days ago, Bravo Company of our own 506th air assaulted into the upper A Shau 15 miles southeast of here, south of the Da Krong River by Route 548, in the area of the Dewey Canyon operation conducted by the 9th and 3rd Marines two years ago. So far we have met no resistance.

"You should also know, gentlemen, our presence in this base at this time is due to the efforts of the units sharing this base with us, the 5th Infantry 1st Brigade. Three battalions were heliborne into this area two days ago. Other units left Vandergrift along two axes parallel to Route 9, on the north and south of us, and wound up here. In addition, units of the 5th Infantry have been inserted into Tiger FSB, five miles southwest of here, and the 7th Combat Engineers are at this moment building a direct road from the Rock Pile to here.

"Gentlemen, to put this in a more exact timeframe, our own part in all this will begin this Tuesday, day after tomorrow, February 2. On that day, selected units of 101AB will air insert into the A Shau to join the forces already there in the feint I mentioned against Base Station 611. That will occupy us the rest of this week. The ARVN elements will begin their assault into Laos this coming Monday, February 8. For those who care, the name of our operation, in Vietnam, is Dewey Canyon II. The ARVN operation, in Laos, involving the ARVN 1st Infantry, is Lam Son 719."

"Good to know that," someone said.

"Glad to be of assistance... Now why is Tchepone so important? Base Station 604 is the center for the three largest depots on the Ho Chi Minh

Trail. These depots are where supplies that come down the Trail are stored and organized for distribution to enemy troops in South Vietnam.

"Gentlemen, we are talking about hundreds of vehicles, thousands of weapons, thousands of tons of ammo, rice, and medical supplies, and maybe hundreds of enemy documents. If we secure these depots, the enemy will be set back for a considerable time."

The colonel went to provide details on the ARVN invasion. He showed on the map that Route 9 followed along the Xepon River, a westward flowing tributary of the Mekong, used by the NVA to float to Tchepone items ported down walk trails from North Vietnam. Parallel with Route 9, just south of the river, was an escarpment with steep cliffs. ARVN troops inserted along the escarpment would set up fire bases to defend the troops advancing on the road below. ARVN rangers inserted north of Route 9, on flatter terrain, would prevent the southward advance of NVA units.

"The main NVA command in this area is Transportation Group 559, the colonel said. "It is reported to have about 33,000 troops. In addition, in this general area of the Royal Lao Military Region III, there are reported to be about 5000 troops in other NVA commands and about 5000 troops of the Pathet Lao. Tanks have been sighted, and not in formation as they were in February 1968 when 12 PT-76 tanks assaulted the Lang Vei camp at a cost of 250 American lives. These tanks are traveling alone, on any foot trails big enough for them to move."

Next morning, O'Rourke went to Charlie Med to attend a meeting and from a distance saw the CO being introduced to a group of men. The CO was faced away, preventing a full view, but O'Rourke identified him at once as the officer he had seen from the same point of view in Chu Lai, refusing the request of an intelligence officer to withhold treatment from a wounded NVA soldier as a means to exhort information.

Coming closer, as the captain turned toward him, O'Rourke thought at first that he was seeing his old rowing teammate and hitchhiking buddy Tom Steward, transported somehow to Vietnam and placed in uniform before him. Then he quickly surmised, based on the family resemblance, that the officer before him was Art Steward, Tom's brother, whom he had met just once before, in Santa Barbara, when he and Tom had hitched up there together from L.A. in their days with the Farmworkers.

The CO made the connection, too, after a moment of scrutiny, when O'Rourke drew closer.

"Hey, aren't you Tom's friend, Rorkie?" he said.

"Yes, I am, sir," replied the former coxswain with a grin.

"Well, ain't that something?"

"Small world!"

That was all that was said as the new CO's attention was diverted by a officer with a clipboard who drew him off in a different direction for the time being.

[Chapter 271-273 notes]

272. No action in Dewey Canyon, but O'Rourke hears from Barb

After being introduced all around, Capt. Art Steward gave a little speech to the 30 or so corpsmen under his command as they sat within the large tent that would serve as their base clinic.

"Well, first let me say, most of you guys know more about this than I do," Tom Steward's older brother began. "I'm not a military man, I'm a doctor, as you know. Second thing is, I don't know long we'll be here. Last I heard, we may be here several months. But, that said, while we are here, as you probably also know,—but again this is new to me,—you will be rotating out, so at any given time some of you will be out there, where it's presumably more dangerous, and some of you will be here, where it's presumably safer. I just want you to know I'm aware of the danger part of that, and I intend to do my best to be fair."

The consensus of the corpsmen after this speech and based on their general interaction with the new CO was that Captain Steward was a straight shooter who could be depended on to follow through on whatever he said.

To this, O'Rourke added his own assessment based on having seen Art refuse to withhold treatment from the wounded NVA soldier at Chu Lai. What impressed him about that was that Art Steward had done it in such an unpretentious manner, not offering any kind of high-sounding reason. He wondered if the captain had wound up with combat duty as a direct result of having stood his ground against a senior officer.

Later that day, O'Rourke and his fellow soldiers of Charlie Company learned that they would be one of the "selected units" heliported the next morning into the upper A-Shau Valley to participate in the feint assault on NVA Base Station 611 that had already been explained.

The officer briefing the soldiers going in was the same colonel who had given the overview of operations the day before.

"As I told you yesterday," he said, "Bravo Company is already in the A Shau, at the Pepper Landing Zone near Route 548, which, as many of you know, is the continuation into Vietnam from Lao Route 922 and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We will land in the established landing zone and proceed up 548 toward 922 to give the impression that we are maybe positioning for a border crossing."

"Word came down this morning, by the way, that, despite all our efforts at secrecy, there are already reports in the press of a buildup of ARVN troops at the border, with the expectation being that they will move into Laos. And everyone already knows about us, too, apparently. There was an article about the 5th Infantry, Americal, and us being in Khe Sanh. I guess we're kind of hard to ignore. We now have about 9000 troops in this area, in this base and some of the fire support bases

southeast of Lang Vei. ARVN troop numbers are about 20,000.

"Meanwhile, there seems to be a major ferment going on across the whole region. ARVN troops have been building up in the Mekong Delta and another attack against the Fish Hook and the Parrot's Beak in Cambodia is in the works, I heard, same areas we attacked this last April. Up in the Laotian panhandle, there are reports of activity, also, with the NVA and their Pathet Lao allies moving east across the Plain of Jars. Our B52s have been carpet bombing up there to drive them back."

At a second meeting that day, Captain Art Steward announced that corpsmen assigned to field support of platoons would be pulled back after the ARVNs began their incursion into Laos on the following Monday, February 8.

"What I've been told," said Captain Steward, "and I heard this just today, is, if we may need more men on the medivacs, so some of you will be assigned to that. I heard, also, this will be a major change from the past because on each chopper there will be just two Americans, the pilot and one of you. There will also be a translator on each chopper."

That night, many of the men were nervous, anticipating the action of the next day. The base had become a small city of about 5000 soldiers living like gophers in underground holes. With no incoming fire, however, and no sign of any hostile activity, the men were milling around. Music blared from the open-sided mess tents of the various units. The chopping sound of helicopters above and all sides of the base had ceased as the cloud cover had sunk so low that chopper flight was impossible.

The rain, wind, and cold had never ceased, however, and neither had construction of the new air field, which continued all hours of day and throughout the night, with the cranking and groaning of the bulldozers creating a constant background of noise as the engineers laid aluminum sheets on the newly leveled earth.

Lights flickered from the large tents between the bunkers, giving the scene the look of a Civil War night camp. The airfield was an eerie scene as the odd shapes of the heavy equipment moved around in the erratic light provided by burning 55-gallon drums of fuel. On the dark side of the airfield, a group of soldiers, with muffled laughter, was hauling off a sheet of aluminum. The sheets had been turning up all over the base as the roofs of bunkers.

O'Rourke headed to a side area next to the mess tent for the 101st Airborne where soldiers under a canvas tarp were breaking out their C-rations and heating the cans over broken off lumps of the common issue plastic explosive C-4. After heating his own meal O'Rourke proceeded to the opening of the mess hall tent, stepping over the guy wires there, and went to the beer chest just inside to claim his two cans of beer for the

day, allotted on the honors system. Then he headed into the assemblage of men seated at tables on the wood pallet floors, returning the friendly hellos of those who looked in his direction. He was by this time known and highly regarded by everyone in the unit. Seeing his friend Lieutenant Klein at a back table, in the light of one of the lanterns hung from the posts of the big tent, O'Rourke sat down next to him, opened his can of chicken and noodles, tore open his flat pack of crackers, and snapped open his first beer.

"Well, LT, what do you make of this one?" he said. "Think we're in for a rough go tomorrow?"

Klein, seated in a relaxed pose, with one leg tugged up on the seat and his hayseed shock of brown hair hanging down over his tanned forehead, shook his head in response to that.

"I don't know, doc. It's hard to say. I heard we'll be moving along the road, in the open area there, and lately that is a place where the enemy will not engage. In any case, I would think they would be holding back and watching, for the time being."

"I got you there, LT," the former coxswain replied. "We've got 20,000 ARVNs sitting on the border of Laos. They've got to be wondering which way we're going to move."

Next day, as O'Rourke looked out from one of the 20 Charlie Company choppers as they flew southward through the narrow valley of the Krong Da River toward the A Shau Valley, he saw a type of terrain familiar from his time at FSB Ripcord. Below him were steep, rugged slopes, with peaks that appeared to be, as at Ripcord, thousands of feet above the valley floor, with a forest canopy so dense it was impossible to see into. The chopper followed the valley for about ten miles. Then, when the valley bent west (which was on his right as O'Rourke looked down), the chopper continued straight ahead over a ridge with a summit off to the left, likewise so thick with trees that only the crowns could be seen.

Beyond that was another valley, apparently an eastward bend of the same river, the Rao Krong Da, where the walls and roofs of a village nestled into the base of the mountain.

That valley, too, was quickly gone from view as the chopper closed upon a further ridge, revealing a long, narrow valley extending from north to south, in line with the current direction of flight, and with a dirt road running in the same direction beside a river (called the Rao Lao, O'Rourke knew) about the same width as the road.

Landing Zone Pepper came into view. It was an oblong, bomb-cleared area, extending for about a half mile along the river, its defoliated bare ground a contrast to the green foliage of the jungle all around. Tents and bunkers, lined with sandbags, gave the area the appearance of a

village of mud buildings. Soldiers in uniform, the current occupants, Bravo Company of O'Rourke's division, the 506th Infantry, looked up at the approaching choppers. The landing zone had radio towers supported by guy wires, and trucks and bulldozers, apparently dropped in.

"See that peak, kind off, over there on the right, doc, on the other side of the valley?" said a gunner seated next to O'Rourke, pointing out the open door of the chopper, as the chopper flew from the ridge toward the long, narrow valley. "That's Hamburger Hill."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yea. Imagine you heard about it."

"Yes, I did."

O'Rourke thought back to the presentation on the A Shau Valley he had heard from his intelligence officer friend, Orin Brown, a few months before in Phu Bai. He recalled that Brown had said that about 60 soldiers had died there. He recalled Brown talking about the physical features of the valley, also, how its narrow width of only a couple hundred years, in some places, had led to the strategy of 'crimp points' interdiction, using squeeze areas to prevent the passage of supplies, and how that feature had allowed the allies to bottle up the valley, though foot paths, Brown had said, were used to bypass the road and thereby transport some of the supplies that would have previously gone through by truck.

That evening, there was a Charlie Company meeting within one of the large tents to present the action planned for the next day. As soon as the cloud cover permitted choppers to fly, Bravo and Charlie would move out on foot in two columns along Route 548, accompanied by Cobra gunships, in the direction of the Laotian border, which was about eight miles away.

"Gentlemen," the company commander said, "the purpose here is the same as already explained, to keep Charlie guessing. You are not to engage unless fired on. We don't expect any enemy action, but we'll be ready for it if we run into any problem."

The sun had just risen above the high ridges on the eastern side of the valley when the two columns headed out the next day, following Route 548 in a northwesterly direction. The slopes on the northeast were still shrouded in shadows while the area of sunlight advanced down the western slopes toward the valley floor.

O'Rourke, traveling in the right column, with platoon Klein in view in front of him, strode along with his medpack on his pack, breathing in the crisp air and feeling the relaxing stretch of the muscles in his calves and thighs. He found himself transported back to the morning in Indiana when he and Tom Steward had hiked along beside the shadow-edged cornfields after their rooftop talk the night before. Not so much was changed from then, he thought, except he had his gun slung over his

shoulder, the M-21 he had never fired.

He recalled telling Tom Steward, in that rooftop talk, how he would finish school and then go in the Army as a medic if the war was still on. He recalled the exact words (he had repeated them in his mind many times): “I’m at peace with that, Stew, and I’m at peace with the whole concept of not shooting a gun. I guess that’s my compromise, that’s how I handle being in between, by going over there and not shooting a gun.”

There was no exchange of gunfire, however. The soldiers continued to the border with no sign of NVA activity of any kind.

After spending two nights at the borders, camped on the side of the river, they returned to the landing zone by chopper to find cold beer and mail awaiting them.

“Damn! Whoever thought a hellhole like this could seem like heaven?” O’Rourke remarked to Klein with a beer in hand.

“You get any mail?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Is it from her?”

“Yes, it is.”

He had received two letters, in fact, both of them with her return address in a feminine hand: 1st Lt. Barbara Carpenter O’Rourke, R.N., 3d Surgical Hospital, Binh Thuy, Vietnam. He noted the “O’Rourke” part of that with pride.

The first letter included a photo of Barbie asleep in her green fatigues on a hospital pallet.

“Worked all night. Too tired to go home. So I just conked out in the clinic in an unused room,” she had written on the back of the photo. “Some of the people here thought this was funny.”

Another photo showed a smiling Barb seated on a pile of sandbags with a little black dog. “This little guy kept hanging around the clinic and he followed me home one day after I kept giving him food so I guess he’s now mine. His name is ‘Kaoz.’”

In this photo, he observed to himself, he saw the girlish quality and kindness that he loved in her so much.

In both of these two letters, too, which the former coxswain read over many times, there were many sweet remarks about what a romantic time he and she had had in Hong Kong, how everything seemed so right, and how wonderful it had been to at last make love.

“Bill, I got a confession,” she wrote, “I downright lust for you a lot. But I guess that’s alright cuz—I can hardly believe it!—I’m your wife.”

She talked about their mutual Lake Pepin dream, also, and how she often remembered a particular house she had once seen, located on the top of the terraced hillside there.

“It must have just a spectacular view! And guess what, honey? I

heard there are eagles in this area, too! They fly around the bluffs and hunt for fish in the water. I've never seen one!"

O'Rourke's bride also had news about the recent military action in the Mekong delta area of the Fish Hook and Parrot's Beak that O'Rourke had heard about several days before in the briefing for his own current mission. The action had resulted in numerous casualties being flown into her hospital, Barbara said.

"And I've been meaning to tell you," she wrote, "this young man I was caring for who asked me where I was from and when I told him Minnesota he told me he knew two people from Minnesota. 'Don't suppose you know them,' he said. 'Their names are Matt and Mary Brandt.' And I said,

'That's pretty unbelievable. Matt and Mary are old friends of mine from college. My husband and Matt were on a rowing team together.'

"Sadly, Bill, the reason this young man was in the hospital is he was in an explosion that took his right hand. His name is Bumper Bourne, (that's a nickname he told me). He said Matt worked for a while for his father, Fletcher Bourne, and even lived for a while at their house. Nice kid, kind of shy, as you might expect for someone who grew up as he told me in a house up by itself in the mountains in Kentucky.

"This kid will have a life, at least," Barbara wrote, "and for him the war is over, but he's just one more kid who will return from the war to a life very different from what he knew when he went over."

Next day word came around that the ARVNs had begun their invasion into Laos. They had gone in six miles on the first day and on the second had gone another mile despite bad weather. The next evening, however, the word was that the situation had changed dramatically. The ARVNs on the road were under attack. Medivacs were ferrying out the wounded, taking them back to Khe Sanh, or to Phu Bai in the worst cases.

"Looks like we're going back to Khe Sanh, also," the Charlie CO told them. "Tomorrow morning."

[Chapter 271-273 notes]

273. O'Rourke shares beer and conversation in a bunker with Art

Spec. 5 Bill O'Rourke happened upon his commanding officer, Capt. Arthur Steward, in the bunker one evening soon after this.

Since the knowledge had been mutually established that the captain was the brother of O'Rourke's old rowing teammate and hitchhiking buddy, Tom Steward, a familiarity had developed between O'Rourke and Art Steward without ever carrying over into a full-fledged conversation.

"Well, sir, what do you hear from your brother?" O'Rourke asked to start that conversation.

"What do I hear from him?' the captain answered, at once turning an inviting gaze in O'Rourke's direction. "Not a lot, Bill. He's in New Mexico, of all places, working for the Indian Health Service, of all things, in a psych ward, if you can believe that. A looney bin for Indians. I don't know how he gets in these situations."

"Does he like it?"

"Now that's a good one. He seems to. I've never been able to figure out what he looks for in these things, really."

"Too bad about his marriage."

"Yea, it is too bad, sir. I think he took it hard."

"Did you know her?"

"Kristine? Yes. A little bit, at least. Tom and she came down to Kentucky, when Nancy and I were there, in Fort Knox."

"What did you think of her?"

"You knew her, too?"

"Yes, I did, briefly."

"Well, what did you think of her?"

"Nice girl. A little unstable."

"Exactly. For a better word, flaky."

"Your brother, though, you know, he's not exactly versed in the ways of the world."

"Ain't that the truth!"

They sat in silence briefly, a comfortable silence, both of them having decided that they liked the other person.

"You know, I got one confession to make," Art Steward said. "Tom and Kris, like I say, came down one time to Fort Knox when Nancy and I were there. And I was never too comfortable about it, because, truth to tell, I was always worried Kris would bring marihuana in with her and smoke it on the sly. I was worried big time about that. That would not have gone down too good, an officer in possession of grass."

"I can see how that might have been a matter of concern," the former coxswain answered.

"I'm not trying to put a value judgment, a moral judgment, on the

dope," the doctor clarified. "I know a lot of people indulge. The way I see it, it's not much different than getting drunk. And here I am with a bottle."

O'Rourke laughed at that. "I think maybe, though, you got Krissie wrong," he said. "Really, from what I know of her, she's a pretty clean-living type."

"I never did see her smoke anything," the captain agreed.

"To me, she just seems like a very emotional type, you know. With extremely strong sympathies. They affect how she looks, hippie clothes and so on. And the sympathies, you couldn't even call them political. They're really more to people she has faith in. Like her brother. Like your brother. For a while, she just thought the world of Tom."

"Yea, I know that. I wonder what happened."

"I think she just needed to grow, from what I gather, from what Tom has told me."

"Yea, she's awful young."

"And she didn't realize the extent to which her self-image would be threatened, not having a real job for so long, and not being able to keep looking pretty. These are just things I gathered from Tom."

"Yea, that was something I noticed, too. She always wanted to look like a movie star. She always wanted to be dressed up, kind of in a sexy way, you know. I can't imagine that went over big in the coal mines, or wherever they were working."

"No, I don't think it did," O'Rourke replied. "Guy like Tom, you know, he's got some great qualities, but there's a guy who would have to build a house out of sticks if he was put in the traditional role. I mean, he just has no concept..."

"Yea, ain't that the truth."

That brought a shared laugh and nodding of heads, then again they were silent, two Minnesota boys who had somehow wound up in a jungle in a bunker together.

"Well, what do you make of this operation, Spec. 5?" the doctor asked. "This, what do they call it, Lam Son 719?"

"What do I make of it, sir?" O'Rourke replied, growing more serious. "To tell you the truth, it's pretty close to what I was looking for when I signed up."

"And how is that?"

"Being a medic in combat."

"Lot of people would say, combat is not exactly their cup of tea, " the doctor remarked, "and that includes a lot of soldiers."

"I know that, yes."

"So where's the appeal?"

"The appeal is in being of service, I guess. The appeal is in doing

something for my country."

"And why the medic part?"

"The appeal of the medic part, when I started, sir, was in not having to kill anyone."

"You're a conscientious objector, then? I mean, I know you aren't formally, but in your own mind?"

"Well, I guess you could say, there are some elements of it in my attitudes, but I went through it all carefully, in my mind, and I could not in conscience come to that kind of position. As far as I could take it, is just what I did."

The captain took a swig of beer, regarding the red-bearded soldier with a look of amusement. "Now why is it that suddenly I make a stronger connection between you and my brother?" he said.

"I know what you're getting to, the idealism," O'Rourke answered. "I'm afraid I don't measure up to Tom in that sphere."

"Well, I don't know about that, O'Rourke. Maybe you do."

"How's that?"

"Well, here you are in a war you could have avoided. Here you are in combat situation you could have avoided. I don't think you're driven by curiosity. You don't seem out to prove you're brave. So, what left? Kind of narrows it down. You might just be the most idealistic person I ever met, Tom included."

"You're not here by choice yourself?"

"Spec 5 O'Rourke, I'm sorry to have to inform you your commanding officer is here because he was drafted."

"You don't believe in the war, Captain?"

"I believe in our society. I believe in our system and our laws. And one of the laws is the draft, the so-called 'doctor draft' for me. I was 'invited' into the Army and now here I am."

"You don't see a need for the war?"

"You may find it hard to believe, O'Rourke, but the awful truth is I never really thought it through. Even being here, to tell you the truth, I don't understand all the politics."

Having finished his beer, Art Steward went to the frig for another beer, pausing for a moment as a sound of mortars rose up in the distance. The sound subsided, to be followed again with the same parklike, sunlit jungle calm. He brought a beer across for Bill O'Rourke, also. O'Rourke accepted it with a nod of thanks.

"Well, I've thought about this war," the red-beaded former coxswain ventured. "I've thought about it a great deal."

"And where did that take you?" the captain asked.

"Where did it take me?" O'Rourke replied. "It took me to the odd position I find myself in philosophically, where, to tell you the truth, I'm

sorry now I'm a medic, I wish I was just a regular soldier."

"Now, that is extreme."

"Well, I'm completely serious. sir."

"That I don't doubt."

"The way I look at it, now, being here, Captain, for these however many months, I don't like the puristic attitude that I'm better somehow, I'm too good to kill."

"Well, you do carry a gun."

"Yes, that's true, but I never use it."

"Tell me something, Bill, you were a coxswain on the rowing team, weren't you? I think Tom told me that."

"Yes, I was."

"The guy with the bullhorn?"

"Yes, sir."

"You got that leadership quality."

"Thanks."

"The other men see it. They look up to you. They listen."

"Thank you very much."

"Well, I got a solution for you, O'Rourke," Art Steward said, leaning back on a sandbag with a bottle of beer in his hand,

"Oh, yea, what's that?"

"Be a soldier in spirit. Accept it in spirit, I mean, that you are not outside of combat, you are part of combat, as part of the team. That's all it takes, and you won't do one thing different, except for that. Do it in your mind, but tell the others, too."

The comment might have been taken as a joke, but it was offered in earnestness, apparently, and O'Rourke took it as such, plucking on his beard as he mulled it over.

"You know, actually, that's not a bad idea," he said.

"It does something for you, maybe, and it's letting on to them that you got the devil in you just as much in they do, you can be as bad, or as necessary, as they are, if you have to. But, at the same time, look, these guys need to know they're as good as you, they need to know they can care about life as much as you do."

"Thanks."

"I'm serious, O'Rourke."

"I know you are," said O'Rourke softly, "and I appreciate that, doc, how serious you are about it. But, you know what this means to me, too. What this means is, say, I was in some goddam situation, cornered in the jungle or something, I would aim that gun. I would try to kill with that gun."

"Well, the reality, Bill, you wouldn't be spared because you're a medic anyhow. Probably, I would do the same thing in that situation. I've

got a rifle. I've never used it, either."

"Still, it's a matter of spirit, or philosophy, or something, doc, like you say."

"Well, I hope it never comes to that."

"So do I."

"You're a good man, O'Rourke."

"Thank you, sir. So are you."

[Chapter 271-273 notes]

274. News arrives of Bumper's injury as Brandt's redefine their marriage

Matthew and Mary Brandt heard about Bumper Bourne's war injury and his loss of his right hand in a letter they received from their old friend of the boat club days, Barbara Carpenter. This same letter brought the news that Barbara had gotten married to another old friend of those days, Bill O'Rourke. The result was a mix of emotions that Matt and Mary sorted out as they sat at their table by the tall windows on R. Street NW in Washington, D.C.

"Barbie says the plans are for Bumper to be sent to Walter Reed for rehabilitation," Mary said.

Walter Reed was the military hospital in nearby Bethesda, Maryland, where many of the war wounded from the Vietnam War went on their return to the United States.

"That means Fletcher will be coming, too, I imagine," said Matt.

"I should write him a letter."

"Better, just call him."

"You think we should?"

"Yes, I do."

Matthew and Mary called Bourne that same evening and found him, indeed, in the process of packing for a trip to D.C. where he had already made plans to stay in a motel in Bethesda just blocks from Walter Reed.

"Well, we would sure be delighted if you and Bumper could stop by if you ever make it into the city," Mary said. "Is Bumper able to move around."

"Yes, as I understand," Fletcher replied.

"Well, we sure would be delighted to see you," Mary repeated.

"Well, how about this Saturday? Bumper has therapy on the weekdays, and we were thinking of driving over that way."

Arrangements soon followed for the Bourne's to stop by for supper and talk.

Somewhat lost in this news about Bumper was the other news about O'Rourke and Carpenter's wedding. It was news such as Matt and Mary would have not so long before accepted with enthusiastic approval, but which on this occasion they responded to on a more muted level.

The reason for their muted response was the change that Mary had described to Tom Steward, in her recent letters, as a "redefinition" of her and Matt's marriage. Matt and Mary had gone over the details of that, at Mary's insistence, to the limits of what they both knew Matthew could tolerate, so this new marriage of two old friend was one that they left pass without much comment on either side. Both Matthew and Mary in their private thoughts, however, felt happy for their old friends, and they both knew that to some extent that this was the way the other felt, though

the situation had nonetheless become such that they were reluctant to broach the subject, fearing it might lead to an angry exchange about their own relationship.

There had been such flashes of anger between the Brandt's, enough to scare them both, but also time of good feeling during which Mary in her gentle, considerate manner had attempted to explain to Matthew how she had come to realize that marriage was an outmoded institution. Even so, they could continue to live together and make love together, she had said she had come to see, not because of any legality or religious pronouncement, but simply because they were friends and lovers.

Matt had considered that, and he had not been able to see a whit of difference between the past arrangement and the present, in terms of his and Mary's day to day lives. He understood that, for Mary, this meant that she was less his wife and that she had the freedom to sleep with someone else, if she chose to (though she did not contemplate doing that, she had emphasized). Under Mary's encouragement, he had considered what his and Mary's marriage was for him, also, and what he wanted from it, and he had realized from this that what he wanted was simply marriage as it had always been, including children.

He had made no mention of this to Mary, however. In general, there was little about the marriage or regarding her ideas that he felt inclined to remark on. The marriage was just one of many things that he had felt disturbed about since his father's death. He had just graduated from the Whitney Pratt School with a masters in audio visual communication, but he felt no desire to proceed into a career. He still sometimes felt interest and pride in photography, but a growing sense of disquietude had crept into that area of his life, too.

His attitude about grass had been affected, also. More and more, he regarded his use as a negative aspect of his life. His conflict about use had grown more intense. He often felt anxious when stoned. He seldom got an effect anymore of sweet mystery of life. His frequent sensation when stoned of everything being weighted down and off hue had become more heightened. Yet he craved grass whenever he was without it.

Mary had no such conflicts. She was of a single mind. Her life was still an intellectual journey, with the focus lately on the subjects she had been forcing on Matthew.

The validity of marriage had been the central topic among her women friends in connection with a book they had been reading, *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer. Mary had considered this book carefully, taking from it the one idea that in order to act wholly independently women had to free themselves from the constraints of contracts such as marriage that had in the past been used to hold women in a dependent position with respect to men. Other ideas, however, that she had

encountered in the book, she could not accept. Greer wrote that men harbored a hidden hatred of woman, for example. Mary had not observed this in the men in her life, and certainly not in Matthew. Greer wrote that free sex was the expression of a free women. Mary had no desire for sex with any man other than Matt. She was satisfied with her sexual relations with him, and regarded herself as fortunate in comparison to many women she talked to who never seemed satisfied with their male companions.

Mary had left behind her previous role model, Simone Weil. She no longer felt attracted to the philosophy of decreation and self-renunciation that, as she saw it, had led Weil to her ineffectual self-starvation. Mary wanted something more positive, a philosophy of power, she had written in her journal. She wanted an assumption of real world obligation more on a political than on a spiritual level.

Her desire for real political involvement had led Mary to a further decision, also, a finalization of something she had been thinking about all along, and this was to go ahead with what had up to this point been only a tentative decision: to return to Cuba the coming spring for her second stint with the Venceremos Brigade. She would be planting trees this time, she told Matthew, not chopping cane.

This, too, Matthew found annoying. Another tentative plan was also in the works and apparently near to a buy-in on all sides, the communal farm that the Brandt's had been talking about with their fellow "family" partners, Darren Houghten, Dennis Kelly from Kentucky, Jane Larue, Gail Martin, and the women's four children, plus perhaps also four others from Whitney Pratt who had been talking to the central group about it. The only matter left to be firmed up, with respect to the farm, was whether the widow who owned the farm would agree to sell it.

Matt and Mary talked about this on the Sunday morning after they received the letter from Barbie O'Rourke as they sat by the side of the creek in Rocky Park frying eggs over a campfire.

"Mary, have you ever thought, there are places on that farm in New Hampshire that could use trees as much as Cuba?" Matthew remarked as he roamed along the edge of the creek, where the some long shoots of spring grass had emerged. "What's wrong with the soil of New Hampshire?"

"Nothing wrong at all," she answered softly, as she looked off at the water tumbling over the rocks in the creek, just beyond the Romanesque arch of the Boulder Bridge. "For me, it's just a matter of solidarity. Showing them we care about their struggle. People can't work alone."

The Brandt's had risen early, inspired by the sunlight pouring into their bedroom. They had had entered the park at Hayden Creek and had hiked past the quarry to the Pierce Mill and north along Rock Creek into

the widening area of the park where the trails called to mind the trails of the Blue Ridge Mountains where they had gone on so many hikes together.

Matthew had no reply to Mary's comments about solidarity. He was in no mood for confrontation.

"Well, trees or not," he said, "if the farm goes through, I'm looking forward to it."

"Yes, won't it be wonderful our own land?"

"Not ours by ourselves, exactly."

"But all of us together, our larger family."

Matthew pondered that, feeling regret that group had grown lately from the original five to a group of ten in response to the decision of the widow selling the farm to ask for more money. After discussing their options, the original five had agreed to bring in the four other members as a way of avoiding a loan.

The widow, Elma Cranston, had not yet agreed to sell. Her decision was expected at any time.

Soon later, they left their breakfast site and headed north along the Valley Trail as far as Riley Creek, then, at a slow pace, looped back to the south along the creek, past Boulder Bridge again and as far as the Zoological Gardens.

Mary, as she walked, was much occupied with the new ideas she had lately forced on Matthew. She was sorry for that, she admitted to herself. She often felt still like the Midwestern, Catholic girl she had been when growing up. She still wanted to remain that in many respects, she thought, emotionally, at least. But then there was what, in her own thoughts, she had described as the "inescapable pull of obligation and logic" drawing her on to her new attitudes.

Inescapable pull of obligation and logic: she had repeated that expression many times in her mind, and she had written it down in her journal with a box around it.

Just beyond the zoo, they exited the park to Connecticut Avenue again and walked along Connecticut toward home. But, at T. Street, which, as they knew, led to U. Street and the familiar route across town to Whitney Pratt, they came to a halt.

"What say we rouse up Houghten?" Matthew said. "Maybe he's heard some news about the farm."

By this time, it was late afternoon. The three miles further walk across U. Street to Shaw and then on to Howard brought them to the alley that Houghten's windows faced out to.

As they drew near, they saw Houghten, with his Prince Hal jaggedly cut brown hair and scruffy brown beard, looking out at them. He greeted them with a wide wave and met them at the door.

"She's going to sell!" Houghten announced at once, as he stood with his crutch, watching them enter the door.

"Is that right?"

"Yes!"

"So it's a done deal then?"

"Yes, it is, my fellow farmers!"

"Hallelujah!"

"We should call Gail and Jane, have a party!" Houghten exclaimed. "I've got some beer! We can make some spaghetti!"

There was no thought on any side of calling the other four members of the farm enterprise, who were still looked at by these original people as outside of the core family.

"Let's do it then!"

"Alright."

Within ten minutes, it was all arranged, and the big-boned, earthy Gail Martin, dressed in jeans and a plaid shirt, and the petite redhead, Jane Larue, dressed in a trim skirt and white blouse with a tie, arrived in the alley together in Jane's van.

"One negative I should mention," Houghten announced after they had all sat down with their plates of spaghetti and beer. "She wants another ten thousand. She didn't insist on it, you know, but she said she thought it was right, she had talked to some people."

"I don't think we should contest her on that," Jane remarked in her soft voice. "She must know, you know..." The sentence trailed off.

"Well, if there was ever a question about the other four," Darren threw in.

"Yes, this resolves it," said Mary. "We will need their money. There's no doubt about it."

To this the entire group agreed.

Darren got up at once and made a long distance call to Canterbury, New Hampshire, to accept the deal.

"She said she can be out by the first of April," he said, hobbling back into the room. "She would like to have it all done by then. She's made some other arrangements, a house in town."

"Do you realize, that's just six weeks away!" said Mary.

"What about the children, though?" said Jane. "They will still be in school. We can't yank them out at the end of the year."

"Oh, no," said Gail.

"Well, how about this?" Matthew ventured, his first contribution to the verbal exchange since Darren had first announced that the farm would be for sale for sure. "Dennis, Darren, Mary, and I go up in April, get the house ready, build some yurts up on the hillside, then, as soon as the kids get out of school in May, Jane and Gail come up with the kids.

We'll have the house all ready. By then, Dennis and I can move up on the hillside. Darren can live in one of the guesthouses. The women and kids can live in the house."

No one made any comment when Matthew so plainly presented that he and Mary would stay in separate places, and he and she had not discussed this arrangement directly, but Matthew knew without asking that this is what Mary would prefer for her new independence.

"I was thinking of the little shed by the maple works there," said Mary. "I'd like to live there."

"I'll help you fix it up," Matthew replied.

"What about the other four?" Gail asked. "They would live in the guest houses then?"

"Well, there's two more of them, besides Darren's," said Matthew. "Mark and Alison can live in one of then." (They were a married couple.) "Larry and Kurt can share the other one, for the time being."

"The house could still be for everyone to meet and have meals together," said Jane.

"Yes, of course."

Just like that, everything was put into a form, and the idea that seemed for so many months to just be a quixotic speculation became a looming reality.

Matthew settled back into the couch, feeling satisfied that he had provided a framework for the incremental arrival of people at the farm, but he was aware that, as with so much in his life lately, he did not feel quite at ease with what was happening. It occurred to him that he would have preferred for just him and Mary to move to the farm. Then there would be need of a complex schedule. He knew he had specifically mentioned "the other four" in the park, but he would not have minded leaving out these three in the room, also, true friends or not.

He listened as the others discussed the upcoming, throwing in the occasional buzz words of the Movement, the once exciting words that had become so worn with use, as he saw it. It struck him as an irony that just at the time when he was growing increasingly weary of the whole business of the Movement, he was being pulled into it all the more intricately through this venture of a communal farm.

He looked out to the alley window and the tree branches framed by it that had seemed so astounding the first time he had gotten stoned. The menagerie of diverse objects in Houghten's apartment had seemed strange to him then; now he felt a great comfort in them, having spent so many hours on this same couch with his director of seminars friend. If only he could get stoned, he thought. He felt a great need to reassess his life, as he had done back in Minnesota a year and half before, the night he had gotten stoned in the barn.

This was not the right time, though, he knew. Mary would object or he would feel her disapproval without a word exchanged about it. For the time being, he would have to settle for the beer. He went to the kitchen to get himself another, thinking the time would come for the moment of reassessment he yearned for.

275. Brandt's get a visit from Fletcher Bourne and amputee Bumper

Matthew Brandt, seated at the table by the window in his and Mary's apartment, watched as the pickup truck slowed on the street below and then moved to the curb and stopped in front of the Queen Anne row houses on the other side of the street. There was a momentary pause, and then both doors opened at the same time, and the familiar figures emerged of Fletcher Bourne and his son Bumper.

"They're here!" Matthew called to his wife (he still thought of her as such despite her recent redefinition of herself as single).

She came at once to the window to look out with him to the street, eager to determine the extent of Bumper's injury, beyond the right hand. The forearm was completely missing, also, with his uniform sleeve tied back at the elbow.

Aside from this obvious negative change, Bumper's physical changes appeared to be wholly on the positive side. He looked larger, more manly, more self-possessed and intelligent, as he crossed the street, scanning the scene all around with keen eyes. By contrast, Fletcher looked smaller and more worn. His limp was more severe. Either the father had shrunk or the son had grown, for the difference in height between them was markedly greater than had been the case two years before, when the Brandt's had last seen Bumper before his entry in the Army.

Matthew was at the door on top of the steps when the street level door opened at the bottom of the long, straight stairwell.

"Welcome to D.C.," he said.

"Well, thank you, old friend!" Fletcher replied. "Looks like we didn't get lost, as expected."

Bumper said nothing but looked up toward Matthew with a smile and a wave of his left hand.

"Oh, my! It's the 'Mountain Man!'" he remarked as he drew closer to Matthew's long, wild hair and full beard.

"Got tired of shaving."

"So I can see!"

Mary was behind Matthew, smiling over his shoulder, with her thick, dark hair pulled straight back from her intelligent brow. She was dressed in jeans and a dark blue sweater with a hand-embroidered design of green leaves and red berries across the shoulders and upper sleeves.

It was Mary's favorite sweater, a present from her sister Ellen. She had worn it to give the occasion a special ambience, and because of the Vietnam connection of Bumper and the still missing pilot husband of Ellen, Maj. James Morris.

"Just like old times!" Mary said in her strong, cheerful voice, going

forward to give Fletcher a hug after Matthew.

"Yes, it is, Mary," Fletcher replied, as he settled into her arms.

"So nice of you all to invite us over."

"Bumper, you're a man!" Mary said next.

"Yes, I have grown," Bumper replied. Despite his size and look of new maturity, he had maintained his "aw shucks" manner. "Make this ol' guy here look kindly small," he ended, with a nod toward his father.

"Yes, you do," said Mary.

"But no smaller in intellect, mind you," Fletcher retorted. "And I don't mind if I look small, if that is the price of having this one right here back with us at last."

"Well, thank you, dad."

"I mean it."

For a moment, the four of them stood awkwardly in the main room of the apartment, where Matt and Mary had set out two chairs (from the table by the window) across from the couch and coffee table to form a circle for conversation.

"We do have some wine, if you'd like some," Matthew ventured.

"Oh, I could go for that," Bumper replied.

"Guess I might partake a little myself," Fletcher said. "Just to be sociable, mind you now."

"Well, please have a seat. We're just so glad to see you both again," Mary said in her pleasant manner, going to the refrigerator to take out the wine.

There was lasagna in the oven, filling the room with the aroma of tomatoes and cheese. The kitchen table was set with a floral center. A large bowl with salad sat on a counter on one side.

"This does put me in mind of some times from the past," Bumper said as he took a glass of wine.

"Yes, it does," said Fletcher. "I remember, Matthew, how we three, you, Bumper, and I, used to sit in the living room by the old black stove on a winter evening. Those were some good moments."

"Yes, they were."

Indeed, the Bourne's brought such a strong sense of Kentucky with them somehow that Matt and Mary both separately felt as if transported back to those times.

"I remember sleeping on the couch there," Mary laughed.

"I did insist on that, as I recall," Fletcher said with a smile, "trying to be the righteous chaperone."

"Yes, you did."

"You didn't do any sneaking now, did you, Matthew?" Bumper said.

"No, I did not."

They all laughed.

Fletcher was more dressed up than was his usual style. He had on a white dress shirt with a red and blue striped tie, a brown corduroy sports coat, and tan cotton slacks such as factory worker might have worn. His thighs were so thin that the pants legs draped around them. His lean face, with its jaundiced coloration and alert blue eyes, hollowed in under the bony ridge of the forehead, gave an impression of skin drawn tightly over the skull. He set forward with the glass of wine in both hands.

"So now tell us, Bumper," said Mary, ever the solicitous counselor, "you just arrived at Walter Reed, has that been okay?"

She had determined not to avoid the subject of Bumper's lack of his right arm, but rather to engage the subject directly.

"It's a mite better than Vietnam."

"What are they doing for you? Will they try some kind of artificial arm, a prosthetic of some kind?"

"Yes, that is the main thing going on. They got a number of different contraptions."

"And you get to choose?"

"Yes, try them on, you know. Decide based on that. And then practice using it, that's the next part."

"They replace the whole arm, too?"

"Yes, they say you can learn how to use it so well, you hardly miss the arm."

"And Bumper told me, they've got some people there as examples of accommodation in that respect," Fletcher added.

"Oh, yes. Being a mechanic, though, as I used to want to be, that is not in the picture, though," Bumper remarked.

Mary, at this point, rose from her chair to go to the refrigerator for the bottle of wine. She filled everyone's glasses.

"What are your plans then?" she asked as she sat down, looking at Bumper with her trademark frown of the dark straight eyebrows. "How long will you be at Walter Reed?"

"I expect about three months, for rehabilitation," Bumper replied. "Then, when I'm all set up with the new contraption arm, and know how to use it, 'spect I'll go back to ol' Kentucky, maybe go to trade school or something. 'Spect I can find something I can do."

"Well, certainly, Bumper, and you get the GI bill, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do."

"Maybe you could wind up on the newspaper with your father, as a writer or something."

"Oh, I would love that," Fletcher said at once. "I've been telling Bumper that. But, you know, he thinks he can do better than follow in my footsteps. I don't blame him for that."

"I've never been much for the words. I've never been much good at

school," Bumper said.

"That has more to do with stubbornness than your native talent," Fletcher asserted.

Mary left it at that, though in her own mind, she thought she would do what she could to dispel any lack of confidence Bumper had about words, maybe by arranging for her and Matt to meet with him now and then during Bumper's time at Walter Reed.

Supper followed and the conversation continued on a warm, relaxed basis, dispelling the strain that had occurred in Matthew and Mary's last meal with Fletcher, on their trip to Kentucky the previous year. This time there was no talk of the rightness of the war to cause a division.

Memories of the shared good times grew stronger as they talked.

Bumper told the story of how he had been sent down toward the area where the troops were assembling for the assault into Cambodia just after Christmas. His job, he said, was to repair vehicles that had broken down on the roadside to get them into working order to move back to the main depot for more extensive repair, if needed. So he often went out by himself in a pickup to do that.

"I drove over a mine, apparently," he said. "I remember a blast. Next thing I knew, I was in the hospital in Binh Thuy, and when I went to wipe my mouth with my hand, I realized my hand was gone."

"That must have been a shock," said Mary.

"Oh, yes. I realized right there my life would be different than I'd been thinking before."

"And that's where you met Barbie Carpenter,—I mean, Barbie O'Rourke?" Mary asked.

"Yes, Barbie was the first one I talked to, and she was so good and kind. Gave me hope I could work something out. Now that is an angel of mercy, let me tell you! Heart of gold!"

The Bourne's lingered after supper for more wine and talk and left with more hugs about 10:00 P.M. This was after Mary had arranged to go and visit Bumper as she had determined to do.

"Well, that was nice," Mary said.

"Let's stack the dishes and go for a walk," Matthew replied. "Nice evening, looks like."

"I would love that."

They headed out, down the long stairs and into the street along the row houses to the lights and traffic of DuPont Circle, then down Connecticut Avenue toward the needle of the Washington Monument, which could be seen above the commercial and residential buildings in the distance, amidst the familiar forms of other national landmarks.

Seeing that, Matt remembered the photography project he had worked on so long and diligently, trying to capture the contrast of the powerful

and the poor in Washington D.C. He wasn't sure he had managed to do that well, he thought to himself, though he had received a lot of compliments for his work. Again, the sense of things being not quite right that he had felt so strongly lately, and especially since his father's death, came up in him; and, again, he thought to himself that he needed so much to take a day to get stoned and reassess his life as he had done in the barn on the evening he had gotten the joint from Dennie Nyberg. (He wasn't aware of what Tom Steward had learned in Minnesota at Christmas, that Nyberg had killed himself several months before.)

"You know, when I was with the Bourne's, I just felt so strongly I was in Kentucky again," Mary said as they walked along. "Did you get that same feeling?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you ever think, Matthew, what a glorious, happy time that was for both of us? A magical time!"

"Yes."

"I love you so much, Matthew! I want you to know that,—I mean, with everything I've been putting on you. I love you as much as I ever did! I'm so glad for what you've been in my life!"

"I love you, too, Mary," Matthew replied in his simple manner. "You've been important to me, too."

After walking about a mile down Connecticut, they turned and headed back toward the apartment, and at this point, Mary reached for Matthew's hand and held it as they walked.

She laughed. "Matthew, how long has it been since we did this, held hands like this?"

"I don't know. Quite a while."

At home later, when they went to bed, Mary went to the bathroom and came out wearing the pink camisole outfit she had used to wear when they were newlyweds.

They nestled in the dark, listening to the traffic outside. A wind had come up, causing the branches to sway outside the window that looked out to the back yard.

"You know what I've been thinking?" Matt said. "Cabin on the hillside."

"That this feels like that?" she said. "Yes," he answered.

"Remember when we used to sleep outside?"

"Yes, I do."

"We were so alone then, weren't we, Matthew? But it was so special, so precious! So delicious, really!"

"Yes."

276. Brandt has a bad experience on grass and decides to give it up

An invitation for Mary Brandt to spend two days with women friends provided Matthew Brandt with an opportunity for the day of reassessment that he had been yearning for, although his usual source of grass, Darren Houghten, was out of town at this time, four days after the visit from Fletcher and Bumper Bourne.

Brandt was surprised by the level of frustration he felt at being so near and yet so far from a stoned state of mind. He felt restless and anxious as he tried to convince himself that he didn't really care whether he found a way to get stoned while at the same time he considered how to get some grass.

He knew where a source of grass was, and of probably better stuff than Houghten would have had, had he been asked. The source was five miles away in Georgetown, at the apartment of his former fellow VISTA volunteer, Bruce Harris.

After saying goodbye to Mary on a Wednesday morning (February 17, 1971), and watching from the table by the window while she rode off with her friends, Brandt descended the steps and went out,—for just a walk, he told himself, but he headed west across S. Street toward the Potomac River and the Georgetown campus.

It was a beautiful morning with the glittering water of Rock Creek tumbling over rocks below the S. Street Bridge, but Brandt did not pause to look off. Neither did he, in Georgetown, look with much interest at the Colonial-era houses on the quaint, brick streets. He went directly to the stylish brick row house where he had visited Harris once before and rang the bell, getting an immediate response.

Harris was his usual neat self, his blond hair trimmed short and combed back. He was wearing a sport coat over a white dress shirt, open at the collar, with tan dress pants perfectly ironed and a matching leather belt and polished shoes.

"I'd like to put this off as a social visit," Brandt said, "but the truth is my reason for being here is to score some grass."

"Hey, alright, Bomb Dog! Want to smoke one together?"

"No, I don't. I'm sorry. I want to go somewhere myself."

"They still call you that?"

"Sometimes."

"Hey, I know the feeling!" Harris replied. "Well, you can have a coffee together, can't you, man? It's not that bad, I hope!"

"Sure, alright."

Harris set his bag of grass on the coffee table and then took his time making coffee while Brandt looked around, trying to not betray how much he wanted to just grab the grass and leave. Books and albums lined

the walls amidst posters such as Harris had had in his cabin in Kentucky, the same cabin Matt and Mary had later lived in. The poster of Che Guevara was on the wall still, as was the one with the three black athletes on a winners' stand at the 1968 Olympics raising their fists.

"Back in Kentucky, we were all so serious," Harris said. "Weren't we, Bomb Dog?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"You know what I've learned since then? The whole thing, all of the protests, and so on, none of it was ever done with any real expectation of causing an actual effect, in terms of social change."

"What was the point of it then?" Brandt replied.

"It was political theater, man! It caused a change in sensibility, maybe, good old audience reaction!"

Brandt left with three joints in his pocket and an idea forming in his mind for how to spend the day. He would go to Whitney Pratt School, to the attic photography workshop, for which he still had his key. He would find the area unoccupied, on a Sunday afternoon. On the way, at the store on the corner by the community center, he would buy a six-pack of beer. Then he would spend the afternoon in the workshop getting stoned and reassessing his life as he wished to.

A splendid prospect, but as he walked, the undercurrent of doubt and dissatisfaction continued that he had felt lately in the wake of his father's death: his growing sense of irrelevance and emptiness regarding his work, and the confusion, anxiety,—and, at times, pain,—that he felt regarding Mary's "redefinition" of their marriage.

His route took him east across K. St. to 18th St. and then up Rhode Island past Logan Circle. He recalled his first encounter with the Shaw neighborhood and its storefronts battered from the race riots of 1967 and 1968. Such scars of confrontation were not in evidence anymore, he noted, though the contrast was striking between the idyllic Georgetown world of Bruce Harris and this world where two black men were completing a drug sale in open view on the corner.

He thought about what Harris had said about political protest being a form of theater only. "Well, a hell of a lot of people went through a hell of a lot of trouble for nothing then," he said out loud.

He recalled that, during the Moratorium march the previous fall, he had seen the unmistakable figure of Harris, with his neat blond hair and impeccable dress, in the midst of a group of protestors in the area of the Justice building, maybe in the lead of them. So that had been theater, too, he thought to himself.

At the community center near Whitney Pratt, Brandt passed a quite different scene than he had just encountered in Georgetown. This scene coincidentally featured the same image of the three athletes raising their

fists at the 1968 Olympics. They were depicted on a mural on the side of the community center facing the A.M.E. church, amidst images of the black militant group, the Black Panthers, in their black berets, passing out bags of food, on one side of the mural, and, on the other side, standing in formation as a casket draped in the orange, green, and brown African colors passed by them.

Standing in front of the mural was a black man (an actual person) dressed in an African robe of the type recently often seen in black neighborhoods. The man did not have the defiant visage of the figures behind him, however; he had a markedly gentle appearance as he spoke to the young people gathered around him.

"For myself, I have just come to the completion that Stokely is right," the man was saying. "We tried to build a base here in America. It just cannot happen. Some of us must go back where we came from to build a base among our own people."

"What should we do then, Samuel, we all that stay here?" the young woman to whom the man was speaking replied.

"Continue in the struggle, sister. Keep your eyes on the prize," the man replied. "There's a job here, too."

That was all Brandt heard as he passed by, but, in glancing at the man as he passed, he realized that he knew him from somewhere. He couldn't remember from where.

In the store, as Brandt made his purchase, however, he recalled who the man was; he was the friend of Mary who had spoken at the play he and Mary had attended on the West Bank of the University of Minnesota in their early days of dating, before their marriage.. The name came back, also, Samuel Copening.

As he passed the group outside again, Brandt found that Copening had also made the recognition.

"Matthew, right?" he said.

"Yes, and you're Samuel. How you doing?"

"Oh, alright, I guess you heard I'm leaving."

"For Africa or something?"

"For Kenya, yes."

They stood for a moment, looking at one another without speaking.

"You look like a wild man, Brandt," Copening remarked with a smile. "How's Mary anyhow? You still know her?"

"More than know her. She's my wife."

"Well, ain't that something? Congratulations, man!"

"Thank you."

"That's a good woman you got there."

"Just got her Masters."

"Is that right? Well, ain't that something now? Well, you tell her ol'

her ol' Sammy says hello."

"I will."

Brandt took a final look at Copening, dressed in his African robe, with the mural of black power behind him, and headed across the parking lot toward the red brick exterior of the former Masonic temple that was the main building of the Whitney Pratt School.

His personal involvement in the Movement, since that meeting with Copening on the West Bank four years before, telescoped in his mind. How urgent the Movement had been for people like Copening, Matthew thought, while for others like Harris it had been acting. And how many words there had been, some said in earnest, as his own Mary would say them, other words said in the same superficial way, as acting. He thought to himself that he had grown so weary of rhetoric like that,—weary of words as he had been for a long time but growing ever more weary.

At that, the undercurrent of dissatisfaction came up in him again, the growing sense of emptiness in everything he was part of and the sense he had had lately of so many of the moorings that he had held to in the past fading away: the family farm, his relationship with Mary, the boat club and community of oarsmen.

In the attic workshop at Whitney Pratt, he looked out the window at the familiar scene of the basketball backboard and Marlboro man billboard above it, recalling how he had made so much of the accidental frame of the window and the subtle effects viewed through it that had amounted to the "cross light on silvery, corrugated tin" of the Walker Evan's photos. He recalled "the mode of strangeness, the mode of waking up and seeing," that he had heard of on his first day at school from the president, Tyler Moy. He still held to such concepts, Brandt thought, but the excitement of insight connected with them had faded away, also.

He went to a back closet where each student had a storage drawer. From his own drawer, he took out the stack of his photos from his thesis project. Then he set the photos, his three joints, and the six-pack of beer on the worktable and sat down.

Halfway through the second joint, Brandt felt an effect, but it was not what he expected. He felt cut off from everything around him as though an envelope of self-focus had closed him in.

He stared at the name on his bottle of beer, noting how the initial letter was curled up at the end and how this same effect of curled up ends of letters was continued across the full word.

Where was he anyhow? He was in the attic workshop in Whitney Pratt. He went to the window to look out, but his attention was drawn to the fine pattern of the screen behind the window where black dust was arranged in a random pattern on the crisscrossed wires.

"What is this shit anyhow?" he said, looking at the joint, which he still held in his hand. "I don't like this shit at all."

He went over to the workbench again, set the joint down in front of him, and took a sip of beer as his mind bore down on something, he didn't even know what. Noticing his photos before him, he turned his attention completely to them, feeling boxed in again, with the other details of the room far away from his consciousness.

He picked up the first photo, his picture of black children in the Lincoln monument, with the words of the Gettysburg Address above them. He saw there the quality of plainness he had striven to achieve. For a long time again, he was immersed in the image before he broke off again to realize where he was.

He then looked to the next photo. It was a picture of three black girls playing skip rope in front of a tenement on a street in the U. Shaw neighborhood with the Capitol and other national landmarks visible above the flat rooftops of the buildings further down the street.

For a while the scene seemed so real that Brandt felt like he could go right into it, but then something happened that brought his connection with the image to an abrupt stop. There was a rectangular area of gray there, on the photo, the shape of a building in the background, and, as Brandt looked at it, it became merely, profoundly that, and only that, a rectangular shape. The image was flat, he acknowledged to himself. It was not reality. The image was shapes.

Brandt tried to connect with the image again, to transform it back into what it had been, in its illusion of three-dimensionality, but he could not. The image was flat, he thought again.

For some reason, he could not fathom exactly why, he found this realization extremely distressing. It seemed to invalidate everything he had done. It seemed to indicate that his work had not been with reality but with merely shapes on paper.

He looked at the image again, and thought to himself that he could not bear the unreality, he could not bear the flatness. The flatness had the inescapable heaviness that he sometimes felt when being stoned, the heaviness that made the whole world seem so ugly and mundane.

He jumped up from the table and flushed the remainder of the grass down a nearby toilet. Then he put his other things away and went down the steps to the door that went outside. He went out into the brisk air, glad for the sunlight on his face and the solid ground underfoot.

Feeling the heaviness still around him, he broke into a run and ran for two miles until he reached the National Mall by the White House, then he slowed into a walk and continued across the wide lawn toward the obelisk of the Washington Monument.

How wonderful to be back in three-dimensional reality, he thought,

how wonderful to move through real space. He had not broken through to it yet completely, he still felt the shroud of self-focus around him, but he was breaking through it. At the Washington Monument, he stopped at a wall and ran his hand over the concrete.

Seeing a bare-limbed tree in the distance, he crossed toward it to experience the distance closing between him and the tree. He ran his hand over the bark. There was no way, in words or an image, he thought, to capture the bark as it was in the ability of its roughness to be felt by hand and discerned from various directions of light. There were no lines in the bark as in a drawing, no flat shapes as in a photo. The image opened out at each moment into something new to the eye.

He continued to the Jefferson Monument and another familiar sight, the Potomac River flowing under the Arlington Bridge with the sun in the western sky above the Virginia hills on the other shore.

He would never again be able to look at a river scene like this, Brandt thought, without recalling the boat club scene of his college days with its memories and friendships. For just a moment, that scene came back strongly and with it a feeling of being in a race in the midst of his teammates, Tom Steward, Jim Morris, and Dennie Nyberg among them, with Bill O'Rourke, in his red stocking cap, calling for a power ten as the boat neared the last marker by Harriet Island.

The thought of Nyberg reminded Brandt, in turn, of the evening he had gotten two joints from Nyberg at the boat club. (He was not aware of what Steward had recently learned, that Nyberg had killed himself soon after that.) His thoughts continued to that same evening of the encounter at the boat club. He recalled how he had returned home with the joints in his pocket and how he had then gotten stoned in the barn, trying to understand his family farm heritage. From that, his thoughts went on to a further scene; he stood on the barn roof, clearing away the old shingles with a flat shovel as his father cheered him on. He felt sad thinking of how the farm scene of his boyhood could no longer be rescued from the commercial uses of nearby land that were taking away its charm. His father's words came back to him: "You know, Matt, when you were a little boy, I once thought to myself the Lord gave me a diamond and if I turned it into a lump of coal, meaning you, I would be held accountable."

At this, another insight came to him that brought his whole mental process once more to a halt. Just as he had lost touch with reality in his photographs, he thought, he had lost touch with the physical contact with the real materials of the world, the soil, wood, and animals of his youth that could be touched by hand and worked with and formed within three-dimensional space. He had become that lump of coal despite all his father had done.

"I've drifted so far from what I should be," he said out loud.

Brandt turned from the river at that, and in that moment decided he would never use grass again. He would return again to the concrete life he had known as a child. He would fight his way back to being the better person he had been years before.

277. Morris realizes that Ban Hatbay is within his "inner home"

For Maj. James Morris, looking out toward the village of Ban Hatbay in Laos at the same time as Matt Brandt was looking out toward the sunlit water of the Potomac River in Washington D.C., the scene before him (Laos being exactly 12 hours behind on the international time line) was hidden in the murkiness of night, with a full moon at about two o'clock overhead and a gleam of moonlight on the thin thread of the river that passed from right to left below him.

Morris, like Brandt, had rowing memories associated with this river scene, though it lacked the grandness of the scene in St. Paul, Minnesota, that he remembered from his college days. His memories were of a world he had begun to believe he would never see again. Certainly, he would never see it again, he thought, as the healthy young man who had stood on the porch of the Red Garter on the evening he had met Ellen Kass. Morris had been acutely aware of this ever since seeing his reflected image in the store window during the time of his continual movement during the past rainy season.

Morris had memories associated with the moon component of the scene before him, also, the memories he had often thought of before: the speech at his F-105 graduation in which Gen. Lawrence Moynihan had talked about the challenge of landing on the moon; the sight of the crescent moon in the sky above Takhli on the night of the matching of that challenge in the Apollo 11 landing; the memories, on that same night of the Apollo landing, of his old friend, Tom Pitt, who had so represented the pilot ideal that Moynihan had held up for emulation. Morris was aware that these moon-related memories had become even more distant.

Morris was acutely aware, also, as he had noted many times, of how the "inner home" of people, places, and beliefs that he had held to so stubbornly in the worst days of his torture and confinement had become ever more invaded and occupied by his experience as a prisoner, starting with the lectures of Maj. Xuan Than and continuing through his present encounter with the village below him in the moonlight. Indeed, the people, places, and beliefs of his past were hardly present anymore, Morris had observed. Ban Hatbay was in his inner home now: the soldiers in their green fatigues interacting with the people, the monks in their orange robes accepting presents from the children, Mayral and Soutsada in their festive dress bringing him a plate of food during the feast at the start of the dry season. Here in this village, life was still real, life made sense. Ban Hatbay was his new reality.

The downed pilot had thought a great deal about this as he had gone on in his life as a captive,—for the most part in Ban Hatbay, though he had on several occasions been moved to other places again before

returning again to Ban Hatbay,—and throughout all of the time of his movements the sound of bombings that he had first heard during the rainy season had continued in the distance. From another prisoner, just captured, that he had talked to briefly, Morris had heard that the bombings were the result of new Allied pushes into Cambodia and Laos, resulting in an acceleration of the displacements of troops and civilians throughout the Plain of Jars that he had heard about before. As with other stories Morris had heard, he was not sure how much credence to impart to this one, though he gathered from the rising sound that the bombings was drawing closer to his present location.

If the bombing was drawing closer, Morris had thought, then maybe it would come to Ban Hatbay a second time. In the aftermath of an attack, he would maybe find a way to escape. Even so, he did not wish for such an attack to occur if it would mean destruction to the scene before him or injury to the people of the village who had come to mean so much to him. He especially did not wish for any harm to come to Mayral and Soutsada, with whom he had formed a kinship in his mind, though he was aware that his regard for them was not reciprocated on the same level in their regard for him.

They did, nonetheless, have some regard. Morris had thought about this a great deal, also. There was the incident where Mayral and Soutsada together had brought him a plate of food during the festival at the start of the dry season. That had shown they were aware of his solitary presence on the hill above their house. (Many in the village hardly gave a thought to his presence, Morris thought, as people back home seldom gave a thought to the thousands of people in federal prisons.) Morris realized (as he had realized at once when the act was first done), that the gift of food might have been explained as an attempt on their part to gain providential favor in conjunction with the giving of gifts to the orange-robed monks; but on another occasion, a hot, humid day, the boy had brought Morris a drink of some kind of fruit juice. How wonderful that had tasted, Morris had often thought! Surely that act had shown an ongoing awareness of his existence and, more than that, sympathy even. It had shown that these two people, at least, this beautiful, graceful woman with dark hair and dark eyes and this young boy with the bright, hopeful face, regarded him as a human being and not as an enemy.

Morris thought of this once more as he looked out to the roofs of the houses below him, silver in the moonlight. There were no lights in the windows of the houses, no communal lights of any kind. The town was wholly under the influence of sleep, as it was every night from the late hours until dawn. Also, as was the case every night, Morris was alone in the domain of his thoughts.

Dawn came, as it always did lately, in the current dry season, with the

first light of the sun glittering on the rice ponds on the other side of the river in the flat, verdant land extending far to the south from the hilltop enclosure where Morris stood. There, where there were no mountains on the east, the long, horizontal rays of the sun illumined the neat rows of rice seedlings, vibrant green in the golden expanse of gleaming water, while still, to Morris's immediate east, the mountainside of the wat was still dark, with the sky above progressing through the colors of sunrise. Then, as the day grew brighter, with the sun appearing at last above the ridge of the mountains on the east, Morris watched the village below him coming to life, with first the sound of voices from amidst the houses on stilts, then lights of lanterns appearing in isolated windows, then the smoke of the stoves arising from horizontal vents in the straw thatched roofs, then the smell of cooking rice. Finally people emerged, climbing down the ladders from the doors of the houses to the shared land between the houses where boars within stake enclosures grunted for food. On the shore of the river, a man in a triangular-shaped straw hat readied his gear for one of the flat boats along the bank there, pushed himself away from the shore with a long pole, and disappeared around a bend of the river hidden within fog-shrouded trees.

A young woman was there, also, by one of the houses on the bank of the river, hanging clothes on a line suspended between the stilts of her house. Near her, a girl was throwing grain to three brown chickens that were running loose in the yard.

Soon the usual events came into view as groups of women, some hand in hand, walked in their bright cotton clothes through the dappled light and shade of the village houses and trees to the wood plank bridge just below where Morris stood. He knew that as they did each morning the women would continue past the military depot, where the red and blue flag of the Pathet Lao flew on the other side of the bridge, to the dirt road that wound between to the buildings there to the rice paddies just beyond the building where already others were gathering to begin the work of the day, planting rice seedlings. Several of the paddies were already planted; two remained on the far side of the fields by a dike bordered by trees. Soon the women were advancing abreast across the water of the unplanted paddy, stooping to plant rows of seedlings.

The usual events, and Morris had come to feel comfort in them; but, on this particular morning, he saw something different that attracted his interest. First the thin, dark-haired Soutsada, in boy scout like green uniform and red neck kerchief emerged from the house on stilts just below where Morris stood. Then, as usual, Soutsada skipped and ran cheerfully along to he joined with another boy, about his same age, seven years old or so in appearance. Then those boys, as usual, met other boys lower down the hill in the center of the village. But they did not go as

they usually did to the cave openings on the side of the mountain by the wat where the apparent bomb shelter for the village had been constructed. Instead, they headed to Y in the road by the bridge that spanned the river between the thatch-roofed houses on stilts of the village and the buildings with solid roofs on the opposite bank where the red and blue flag of the Pathet Lao flew next to two green military tricks that were parked there and boxes stacked in the road awaiting assignment to the buildings.

Meanwhile, Morris noted, a soldier with binoculars was watching, as usual, from the observation deck perched on the highest red roof of the wat, facing southeast in the direction toward where Morris had previously noted the Ho Chi Minh Trail was located, the direction from which attack planes would be likely to come for a second attack on Ban Hatbay, if such an attack ever happened. There was no sign of any threat at present, he noted, no sound of bombs thundering in the distance.

The boys were in their typical spirited form as they arrived at the wood bridge, Morris observed. One of them knocked on the door of the first building, by the flag, and a soldier emerged, smiling, and stood with his hands on his hips joking with them. Then the soldier led the boys into the second building, where the trucks were parked, and the group emerged soon later carrying paint cans and brushes.

“Looks like they’re going to paint the old bridge,” Morris observed out loud. “Good bunch of kids, you gotta give ‘em that.”

For a long time, Morris had not spoken to his father as he had done in the old days in this way. The fact that he had not done so occurred to him as he spoke these words out loud. With that, a sense of the past life bound up in that old habit of his boyhood overwhelmed and confused him before it passed and was gone, leaving him standing in the same spot, looking down at the peaceful scene below him.

The downed pilot watched the progress of the project with as much interest as if he had been beside the boys with his own can of paint and brush. He noticed that they went about their work with extreme diligence, considering their young age. They swept the surface clean before applying the paint, and in some cases cleaned out the troughs in the grain of the wood with dry brushes. He took the diligence as indicative of the pride and obligation they felt as members of whatever organization it was that entitled them to wear the green uniforms.

Soutsada, Morris especially took note of as the boy went about his tasks with what appeared to be extra zeal. He observed how Soutsada leaned his face down nearly to the surface of the wood, with his dark hair hanging over his forehead, to examine the crevices in the wood to make sure they were free of debris. Soutsada, crawling along on his bare knees, was the only one to display any concern for the dirt trapped between the

long planks. On the bank of the river, where there were some small trees and tall grass, still littered with colored paper from a recent festival, he found a stick, about arm's length, that he drug along in the opening between the planks to scrape up the dirt. He then brushed the dirt away with a dry paint brush.

The soldier, who had stood before with his hands on his hips joking with the boys, came out at one point to check their progress, smiling and joking again and pointing to Soutsada. He went into the building and came out with a long screwdriver that he handed to Soutsada with a pat on his head. Soutsada grinned and held up the screwdriver like a sword and all the boys laughed. Soon, though, Soutsada was back at the task, moving along on his knees as he cleared out the crevices.

At midday, a party of graceful women, dressed in the long pleated skirts of the Lao Theung people, arrived at the bridge with cloths bags stung over their shoulders. Met at once by the boys, they handed out rice cakes and fruit and sat with the boys on the still dry part of the bridge, in the dappled sun and shade of a tree that hung over the bank of the river there, until the meal was ended.

Among the women was Soutsada's mother, Mayral, Morris observed. He had not seen her emerging from the house on stilts just down the hill from his enclosure. She was dressed in a long blue dress that reached down to her ankles with her thin arms bare and her long dark hair pulled behind her head and secure with a blue ribbon. The boy sat close to her as he ate while she leaned over him talking softly.

By late afternoon, when the buildings on the far side of the bridge projected long shadows behind them, down the bank of the river there where it curved around from its east west course to a north south course beside the rice paddies, still gleaming with light, the boys had nearly finished their job. The humble bridge, which lacked even a railing, had the new look of the fresh brown paint the boys had applied.

All of the boys left then, after vigorous nods of approval and more joking comments by the soldier who had been monitoring their progress all day. Several other soldiers, all of them young men, came outside to look with more nods of approval.

The boys left soon after that, except for Soutsada. He remained, on his own accord apparently, to pick up the strewn pieces of colored paper that the wind had blown along the bank by the bridge. The same soldier, the monitor, came out again, nodding and smiling.

The soldier said something, not understandable to Morris, though the tone and a hand gesture in the direction of the building suggested a communication something like, "Hey, why don't you come in for a minute? I got something to show you."

Soutsada followed the man into the building and came out minutes

later with what looked like a toy of some kind in his hand. He waved goodbye to the man and skipped through the village, looking delighted to have whatever he had been given.

Then a remarkable thing occurred, from Morris's perspective. The boy came up the hill to his house, just below where Morris stood, but he did not stop at the house. Instead, after shouting in the door to his mother, he continued up the hill directly toward Morris.

Now Morris saw the object in the boy's hand was a toy plane made of wood. It was a fighter plane, not carved but an authentic model complete with wing and tail flaps.

Morris was astounded to see Soutsada approaching him so clearly not by chance but out of a formed purpose to do so, and the boy had told his mother of his purpose, Morris had noted, and she had approved.

The guard on duty said something. The boy stopped and replied. The guard shrugged his shoulder. The boy came on. In a moment, he stood in front of Morris with his bright eyes gleaming from the small, shining face. He lifted the toy plane and smiled.

Morris was so taken by the gesture that he hardly knew what to do. "Beautiful! Beautiful!" he said, not expecting the boy to understand, but feeling he needed to say words, whether understood or not. "Wow, that is something! It looks almost real!"

"Almost real!" he repeated.

The boy held the plane up with one hand and moved the flaps on the wing as he made the plane turn. Morris pointed to the right wing, tilted his flat hand up like a flap, and moved his hand to indicate that, in response to the upward movement of the right flap, the plane was rolling to the left. Soutsada then handed the plane to Morris, and Morris illustrated the basic movements of left and right roll and downward and upward due to the movement of the tail flap.

As he did so, Soutsada watched intently, smiling.

A call from the house below the hill then drew the boy's attention. It was Mayral, leaning out of the door into the late afternoon sunlight, with a gesture indicating that the boy should return home. Seeing Morris looking, she raised her hand in a single wave.

All of that night, as he struggled to stay warm in his dug-in ledge in the limestone back wall of his cell, Morris dwelled on this marvelous encounter. He had not been aware that Soutsada knew he was a pilot. The boy knew he was someone who flew planes; he knew planes flown by enemies of his people had done harm to his village; but he did not regard Morris as such an enemy, apparently; he regarded him as simply an expert on flying, and maybe even as someone he liked, a friend.

And the mother, Morris thought, how she had waved at him! Like a neighbor, like a friend!

278. Morris sees Ban Hatbay bombed; tries to help Soutsada; flees

Maj. James Morris awoke the next morning, on Saturday, February 20, 1971, just long enough to look toward the barred circular opening of his cave and see there, on a single cloud that hung in the sky, a pink glow of dawn. He did not get up and go over to the bars, as he often did, to watch the dawn light turning through many subtle gradations more golden on the thatched roofs of the houses and tranquil water of the rice ponds. But, without getting up, Morris was aware, behind his closed eyes, of the growing light. In his mind's eye, he could see the scene as it would look when the first rays of sunlight reflected from the tin roofs of the army buildings on the other side of the bridge.

On this particular morning, Morris heard a familiar sound far away in the distance, also. It was a sound of airplanes such as he had heard many times in his forced movements back and forth across the Plain of Jars and surrounding mountains. The sound was of military planes, he suspected, judging by the range of them and a multi-layered effect that he knew to be the overlaying sound waves from multiple engines. For a long time, Morris listened sleepily, then he realized that the sound was growing steadily louder suggesting that the planes were flying in the direction of his location. That was certainly the case, he noted, as the recognition brought him to an alert posture in the crevice of rock where he was sleeping in the limestone back wall of his enclosure.

At the same time, the bells on the wat started ringing in the rapid clang used to warn of a possible attack, and alarmed voices rose from the houses below the hill,—voices of adults shouting to one another and giving urgent commands to children.

Turning then, Morris saw a sudden light much different than the light of dawn. It was a light with an abruptly peaking luminance like lightning and accompanied with a sound that he remembered well from his experience in combat, the sound of a nearby explosion.

Instinctively, Morris recoiled and hid his head in his arms as the light and sound of the first explosion were followed by a multiplicity of the same effects while the bells still clanged and the voices changed to screams and wails.

The explosions were from bombs, Morris knew. The village was under attack from American planes. He could not see the village from where he was still lying, but he had a sense of the explosions being distributed spatially throughout the valley below and then around him on the side of the hill where his enclosure was located.

One explosion occurred so near to him and directly overhead that a section of the roof of the cave collapsed, but, looking, he saw that a tunnel remained leading to the opening where the staccato light of the

explosions continued.

Within a few minutes, it was over. The bells had stopped ringing and the voices were silent.

Morris went at once through the tunnel of fallen limestone to the opening from which he was used to looking down on the village from behind the bamboo bars that had held him in. The bars were no longer there. They had fallen to the ground below a section of the roof that had caved in on top of them.

In a daze, he walked out of the cave onto the narrow ridge of flat land that for months had seemed beyond his reach.

The attention of the downed pilot was not on his momentary freedom, however, or on any attempt to determine a route of escape. His attention was on the location just below him on the hill where Mayral and Soutsada had lived in their house on stilts. The house was no longer there. What remained was a pile of charred wood, shattered from the impact of the bombs. The only remnant of the house still standing were four splintered stilts, attached to one of which, still, was the ladder that had been used to climb into the house.

Beyond the tangled boards and smoke of this first house that Morris looked at were more flattened, smoking houses, some still in flames, with human bodies sprawled over the boards or on the ground. The entire village had been destroyed except for isolated sections that appeared like islands in a sea of refuse. One such section was over on the eastern edge of the village, about a half mile away, on other side of the gorge that divided the village into two parts. The red-roofed wat, just above that section, on the mountainside, had been heavily damaged, as were the openings to the cave shelters that the village had prepared for just such a calamity but had not enough time to use. Another undamaged section was by the river, where several flat boats with their long poles stuck in the water beside them had not been harmed. Clothes still hung on a line there beside the houses along the bank, but the houses had been flattened. A section of the newly painted bridge had also escaped damage though the military storage buildings on the other side of the river were completely destroyed with the flag that had flown beside them no longer in view.

“They’re all gone,” Morris said to himself aloud. “The entire village is gone.”

Hardly believing that he was capable of doing so, the downed pilot made his way down the steep, rocky hill, feeling unsteady on legs that he had not used in this manner for many months. He went directly to Mayral and Soutsada’s house and looked around amidst the rubble, thinking that maybe they were still alive and in need of help.

Turning over a board there, he saw a bare foot extending from a

section of wall that had collapsed on the ground. Below it he found the body of Mayral. She was lying on her side with one hand above her head and the other on her breast. Her face appeared utterly beautiful in the sculpture like stillness of death.

"There's nothing I can do for her," he said aloud.

For a long time, Morris looked among the boards but he could find no sign of Soutsada. Then, a sound of distant voice drew his attention to the cave openings on the mountainside beside the wat. There were soldiers there in green uniforms,—not an entire contingent or organized group of any kind; they appeared to be just a half dozen or so individual soldiers trying to determine what to do.

Morris thought then of the several boats on the river below and the clothes hanging on the line. He continued down the hill through the smoldering wreckage of the houses, seeing no sign of life though he saw other dead bodies,—men, women, and children sprawled out in family groups together.

By the river, Morris stopped at a green open boat about ten feet long. It consisted of two parts, each like a flattened canoe, and strapped side by side. The stern and bow of the individual canoes were square, not pointed, and the interior of the boat was squared off crudely within each canoe. On one end of the canoe nearest where Morris stood was a boxlike compartment just large enough for a person to sit in. The compartment had a canvas roof for protection from the weather.

"I should take this," Morris said. "I should take some of the clothes on the line."

With that idea formed, still feeling in a daze, he went over to the clothesline and found there some of the loose black cotton pants that the men in the village wore and a similar black tunic. Lying on the bank just beyond the clothes was a pointed straw hat of the type that both men and women wore in the fields while working.

He changed into the black clothes in the shadow of a single wall of a building there that remained standing. On the mountainside above the gorge, the group of uniformed men had increased in number to about a dozen and one of the men was standing in front of them as if laying out a plan of action.

Just then, though, Morris heard a whimpering noise that sounded like the voice of a child. Over by the section of the bridge that had not been damaged, he saw a small, bare leg moving. The leg was red, either from a burn or from blood, Morris suspected.

Without hesitation, he went over to the bridge and looked under it to confirm what he suspected, that a wounded child had crawled there. At first glance, he observed that the child, a small boy, was wounded beyond any possible hope of survival. An entire leg had been ripped off

up to and even including a portion of the pelvis, with the flesh there folded back revealing the bones and the intestines above it, tumbled out into the dirt and caked with sand. side away from where Morris knelt above him.

The boy was squirming in pain with his head twisted up and to the side away from where Morris knelt above him.

Morris leaned over to determine whether the boy was conscious and whether there was anything at all he could do. He saw then, when the boy turned toward him, that it was Soutsada.

There was a moment of recognition in the small dark eyes, then a look of hopelessness.

"Soutsada, I'm so sorry," Morris said.

It was the first time he had called him by name.

The boy made no direct reply and he did not look back toward Morris a second time. He continued to squirm, flailing around from side to side on his ruptured hip with his hand on his chest.

"Must have come down here to look at the bridge," Morris thought. "Must have come down at the first light of dawn."

Morris acknowledged to himself that he already knew what he would have to do. He would have to kill the boy some way fast and unsuspected to spare him from hours of excruciating pain followed by an inevitable death.

Was death really inevitable, he asked himself. Surely there was no way the boy could live. His intestines were ripped open. There was no longer even a sound canal for passage of food. The entire section of his hip above the leg socket was missing, with the clothes ripped away from his crotch. Where his sexual organs should have been, there was nothing but an outfolding of skin, like a shredded pouch.

Morris rose from the boy and looked around. Over by the military buildings beyond the bridge, he saw a dead soldier with a pistol holster containing a gun.

Morris walked over to the soldier, bent over him to secure the pistol, and, on checking it, determined that it was loaded.

He returned to the bridge where he could see the one leg of the boy sticking out from the newly painted timbers above him, in the narrow area there where the bridge rested on the bank.

This time the leg was not moving. Leaning over the boy, Morris saw that the boy was dead. He waited a few minutes to be sure that there was no signs of life.

He bowed his head with his hand on the boy's head.

"Lord, grant him rest," he said.

Looking toward the mountainside again, he saw that the soldiers had left the opening of the cave shelters and were moving down the path that

zigzagged down the steep slope. Some monks had come out of the wat and were following them down.

None of them looked toward the place on the bank where Morris knelt in his black clothes and pointed hat. He observed that foliage that hung over the bank of the river, as far as the eye could see, would hide the green boat from view if he pushed off.

He had only to keep the boat on course with the pole as the current carried him downstream. He glanced back once at the remains of the village that had become so central in his life before a bend of the river took it out of view. He no longer had the pistol he had intended to use to kill the boy. After a moment of reflection, he had left it behind.

279. O'Rourke takes part in a chaotic medivac drop in Laos

Since returning to Khe Sanh from Dewey Canyon on February 9, 1971, Spec. 5 Bill O'Rourke had worked in the clinic at Khe Sanh, attending to wounded soldiers being airlifted by helicopter from battlefields in Laos, where mechanized units of the 1st Infantry Division of the "Army of the Republic of Vietnam" (ARVN), supported by aviation units of his own 101st Airborne Division, were advancing along Route 9 toward the town of Tcephone, about 20 miles west of the border.

Through interactions with medics serving on the choppers that were ferrying out the wounded, the former coxswain had followed the progress of the operation with keen interest and lately alarm. The medics described a deteriorating situation, with the soldiers in the field facing ever more frequent and intense attacks, especially in the fire support bases set up in parallel lines, north and south of Route 9, to form a buffer for the main invasion force moving toward Tcephone.

A crucial turning point toward the worst, O'Rourke had gathered, had occurred in the third week of February. The task force on Route 9 had bogged down in rain and mud at a location about two thirds of the way to Tchephone, at the town of Ban Dong. Because of the wet conditions, the platoon of bulldozers assigned to the task force had been unable to move ahead to repair the damaged road. The task force was being hit by fire from the densely forested hillsides to the south of the road despite the six fire support bases the ARVN had set up there on the bluff that overlooked Route 9 and the brushy low ground of the Tcephone River. In the north, attacks had also increased against the four fire support bases there, called Ranger North, Ranger South, 30, and 31.

From these fire bases in both north and south, O'Rourke had heard, ARVN ranger and airborne battalions were conducting an essential part of the operation, sweeping to find and destroy caches of weapons and supplies of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) known to be in this depot area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail called Area 611.

The former-coxswain-turned-medical-corpsman heard more about this on the afternoon of Saturday, February 20, in a field at Khe Sanh, where he sat unhelmeted in the sunlight, looking as a Viking warrior might have, centuries before, with his red hair and beard having been restored, by the lack of haircut and shaving opportunities, to the wild appearance of his days of yelling orders to rowing crews. O'Rourke had learned on this same afternoon from his CO, Art Steward,—brother of his old friend of those rowing days, Tom Steward,—that he would be transferred at once from his current clinic duty to medivac duty as a result of the greater number of causalities in the worsening situation.

The reviewing officer emphasized that the cache finding part of the operation had been a success despite the intensified hostile action.

"Gentlemen, to be specific," he said, "and forgive me for being so, but keep in mind, each item listed is something real that could, and most likely would have, inflicted damage on someone on our side, here are the items," and he proceeded to list them.

"On 11 February," he said, "one mile southeast of Landing Zone Don, which is about six miles south of Lao Bao, two 12.7-mm machine guns, four AK-47 assault rifles, one chicom radio. On 12 February 12, two miles south of Don, 60 individual weapons, 400 82-mm mortar rounds, plus, later that same day, stores of food and military clothing.

"On 13 February, four miles north-northeast of LZ Grass, thirty 75-mm recoilless rifles, fifty 55 gallon drums of gasoline,—and how about this, gentlemen?—three brand new Russian tanks."

"Woo-hoo!" someone said.

"On 13 February, also, in that same area southeast of Don, one—get this!—East German machine gun, seven RPSs, one B40, one B41, two SKSs, gasoline (doesn't say here how much), four generators, and a huge quantity of food and kitchen utensils. Guess they didn't have time to finish their meal!"

So the litany went on, with a similar sublist of items for each day up until the present.

The reviewing officer also brought out a large map on a stand to show the present disposition of forces in the invasion area. In general, the map showed four parallel horizontal lines of about the same length, the thickest line, second from the top, representing the 20 mile stretch of road from Tcephone, Laos, indicated by a circle on the left end of the line, to Lao Bao, Vietnam, indicated by a circle on the right end of the line. Just above that line, to the north on the map index, were the fire support bases established in that area (they were not spread out evenly but clustered more on the eastern side). To the south, represented by the third horizontal line, was the Xepon River, which ran alongside Route 9. Further south, represented by the bottom line, were the fire support bases set up on the bluff above the river. They were distributed like beads on a necklace, for every mile or so, about a mile south of the road.

All of these elements, the reviewing officer said, were in Corps I of the ARVN army under Lt. Gen. Hoang Xuam Lam.

On the road were units of the ARVN 1st Infantry, he said, including the 1st Armored Brigade, the 1st and 8th Airborne Battalions, the 101st Combat Engineers, and a platoon of bulldozers. The fire support bases on the far north of the operation area, Ranger North and South, positioned over Route 1032, one of the main feeds from North Vietnam into Route 9, where NVA armored units might be expected to arrive, if they did show up on the scene, were under the control of the ARVN 21st and 39th Ranger Battalions. The two fire support bases just below them, FSBs 30

and 31, also positioned above Route 1032, were under the control of the ARVN 2nd and 3rd Airborne Battalions. The FSBs located on top the bluff south of the Xepon River (from east to west, Delta, Brown, Sophia East, Lolo, Liz, and Sophia West) were under the control of the ARVN 3rd Infantry Battalion of the 1st Infantry Division and the ARVN 3rd Infantry of the 4th Infantry Division.

"About 20,000 ARVN troops are involved in this operation," he said, "in addition to about 15,000 of our own forces. As for enemy numbers, they are going up all the time. We just learned yesterday, from a captured NVA soldier, that the 88th regiment of the NVA 308th Infantry Division is now present in the area north of Ranger North, along with the 36th and 102d regiments, which were already known to be there. We learned also, just in the past few days, the 64th regiment of the NVA 324th Infantry Division is present on the south of our operation area, in addition to the 803rd and 812th, already known to be there.

"And I can tell you, gentlemen, as many of you know firsthand, our air cavalry units in this operation have faced the most extensive, most powerful firepower experienced by any American forces thus far in this war, with the enemy employing 23mm, 37mm, and 57mm anti-aircraft weapons and .51 caliber machine guns arranged to provide mutually supporting anti- aircraft fire."

In a question and answer period after this map presentation, the reviewing officer responded to several expressions of curiosity as to why, (as had been widely reported in the American press, and passed along to the soldiers by members of the press located at Khe Sanh), Nguyen Van Thieu, the South Vietnamese president had just the day before made a personal visit to the commanding general Hoang Xuam Lam at the I Corp Forward Control Point at Dong Ha.

"Well, what I heard about that," the reviewer said, "is Thieu, and a lot of people, I guess, feel the progress has been slow along Route 9 with this attempt to anchor each step of the way with a fire base up on the ridge there above the river."

"And what was the result of that?" someone asked.

"Well, I'm not privy to those plans, but if it were me, and I think this is pretty obvious, there maybe needs to be a change of plans to an airborne assault on Tchephone, to get to the heart of the matter, so to speak, before the enemy gets too many of his forces massed up all around us. Once we clear these places out, get all the caches cleared out such as I've listed today, there's no reason, really, to hang around. Give him a good sock on the nose and run for the trees."

In the next few days, O'Rourke, newly assigned to the 101st Assault Helicopter "Commancheros" Battalion, had his first experience of medivac duty as more stories came in of increased confrontations with

NVA and Pathet Lao forces on the periphery of the operation area. The touchdown was in the area of FSB 30 where a sweep patrol had gotten pinned down for just a few minutes before an air strike had been called in. Even so, in that minute, one of the soldiers, a young man of just 19, had taken a hit in the shoulder, not a life threatening wound, assuming treatment would be forthcoming in the usual less than a half hour window of the medivacs.

That proved to be the case in this incident only as O'Rourke with his Vietnamese-speaking crew, except for the single translator assigned to him, followed the narrow corridor through the trees of Route 9, passing Lao Bao, ten miles west of Khe Sanh and then swept north along the similar narrow corridor of Route 1032 for just a mile or so and swept west again above the trees toward where a circle of smoke about a hundred yards in diameter could be seen in the distance. That was Landing Zone Helmet, ringed deliberately by smoke, to prevent a view inward.

The helicopter swept down into the smoke ring. With blades never pausing, it balanced on the grassy ground just long enough for the wounded soldier, on a stretcher, to be placed within the open door. Then it lifted off, chopping the air with its blade, blowing back the branches of trees all around. O'Rourke, with the wounded man placed before him, searched for and found a vein, plunged his needle in, and watched the plasma flow down the tube into the soldier's good arm.

By the time O'Rourke looked up, the scene was fading behind as the soldiers waved A-OK, an image that stayed in his mind as the helicopter returned to Khe Sanh, following along the same narrow corridors through the trees that had led to the battle site.

Being on a medivac was a far different experience from patrol, the former coxswain thought later as he sat in the canteen, sipping a beer: a moment of danger followed by the purpose of the trip, a wounded man placed in his care. In this case, the wounded man would survive. There would be occasions soon, he knew, where the wounded man would not.

The next day, O'Rourke had just such an occasion. Faced with blood oozing from a severed limb, he was unable to check it. The soldier in his care shuttered and died. This man had been impressed into service during a pacification campaign in his village; he had left behind a wife and two children; O'Rourke learned from the translator beside him.

During the next few days, between February 21 and 23, O'Rourke went on medivac missions more than a half dozen times while stories came around that the situation was worsening, especially in the north where NVA forces were pressing on the Ranger North and Ranger South fire bases. Along with these stories, there were more rumors that an airborne assault was in the making against Tchephone.

On February 24, when O'Rourke was given a day of rest, he heard that Ranger North, where the ARVN Rangers were stationed, was under a major attack. The ARVN colonel in charge had called for a rapid retreat of all personnel a mile back from the base to all the American B52s to carpet bomb the whole area.

O'Rourke's friend, 1st Lieutenant Kevin "LT" Klein of the 506th Currahees had an explanation for that. "The NVA has been doing what they call 'hugging,' doc," he said, "staying so close to our own bases that the B52s can't strike."

The tactic of pulling back had worked, O'Rourke later heard, though the rangers had not returned to Ranger North area. The rangers had been redeployed to fortify FSB 30 and FSB 31.

That same day of the B52 bombing on Ranger North, O'Rourke went out in another Commanchero Huey H-1, a mission that took him to the very area he had just heard about. In his brief interaction there, as he waited for a stretcher to be scrambled across to the open door of the chopper, the former coxswain had observed a look of desperation and almost panic in the faces of the young soldiers. Beyond the ring of smoke into which the chopper had descended, he could hear gunfire and explosions.

Next day, February 25, the word came around that FSB 31 was under a massive assault.

"This is a full scale attack, I've heard even with tanks, on the order of World War II," 1st Lt. Klein told O'Rourke with a sober nod. "This is serious business, doc. This is a calamity. I don't know anyone could pitch it any way else."

"You're going have to go out," O'Rourke's CO Art Steward informed him still later. "I know it's your day of rest. I'm real sorry to have to do this to you, Bill. A couple of choppers have gone down. Two of our own got killed."

"Who was that, sir?"

"Walsh and Paradise."

"Oh, my God."

"Yea, what can you say?"

"I'm so sorry to hear that."

"Be careful out there, Bill."

"I will, Captain, I will."

O'Rourke reported his assigned helicopter to find the ground crew with paint brushes in hand applying grease to the skids.

"What's the reason for this?" he asked at once.

The pilot, a fellow Commanchero, was already on the scene. "People are trying to hang on," he said. "We just can't allow it. It throws the steering off. Maybe even will keep us down."

The chopper this time descended into a bedlam of panicked activity where units under active, heavy fire, with shells exploding all around, were returning the fire with everything they had.

As O'Rourke reached from the door of the chopper to help pull the stretcher in, a duo of American fighter planes dove toward the scene at an astounding speed and leveled off just above the ground, laying a line of exploding rockets along the perimeter of the base from which the NVA fire was coming. The NVA fire did not cease, however; it continued from another side of the base, and O'Rourke saw green-uniformed men thronging into the area that had just been bombed.

O'Rourke assessed at once that the Vietnamese soldier placed before him would lose his right leg but would live. He was only a boy, surely not even 18, O'Rourke thought to himself, as he instructed the translator to tell the boy he would be okay.

The chopper lifted off, tilting to the side, with several men, as predicted, trying to hang on the skids. A spray of bullets penetrated to the inside of the craft on one side, narrowly missing the gunner at the rear door.

One young soldier, unnoticed until it was too late, managed to hold on until the chopper had lifted about 50 feet off the ground. O'Rourke saw him and called out to the pilot just as the soldier lost hold and plummeted down out of sight.

That evening, after several more frenzied missions of a like nature, O'Rourke learned that all of the men in FSB 31 had been lifted out at last, though hundreds of men had lost their lives. More than a dozen helicopters had been downed.

Lying in his bunk, scenes of the day whirled in O'Rourke's mind. He kept seeing the last look of the young soldier before he had lost hold of the skid.

O'Rourke thought back to his conversation with Art Steward about wanting to take up a gun to accept the full obligation of being a soldier. It seemed foolishly academic that he had even brought up such a personal concern of philosophical purity with respect to the war.

He thought of Barbara, his darling new wife. There was a chance in this confusion, if it continued, he thought, that he would lose his life, also. How disappointed she would be if their mutual dream of the future did not come to be.

[Chapter 279-281 notes]

280. O'Rourke is on hand as escapee Morris reaches Allied lines

Spec. 5 Bill O'Rourke heard a few days later, on Monday, March 1, 1971, that the rumored air assault on Tcephone had been officially moved into the planning phase and would take place at any time.

"Word is, doc, they'll first be moving into Hope, northwest of the town," 1st Lieutenant Kevin Klein told O'Rourke. "That will protect them from that direction, which is where the main ARVN units have been sighted. Then, from Hope, they'll move into Tcephone."

"Hope," as the two men both knew, was at the present time merely a location selected as a potential site of a fire support base. It was a name on the map, not yet occupied.

That same day the word also came around that units of the ARVN 1st Infantry Battalion had been airlifted from Sophia West, the furthest west fire support base on the bluff south of the Xepon River, to the new LZ Hope, on the other side of the river about 5 miles away. The move had met some resistance, enough for medivacs to be called in, but the base was being quickly and successfully established.

Except for this action, it was a quiet day. O'Rourke and his fellow medics had a day of rest, with everyone alert for an end to the respite at any moment.

At this same time, however, a story of extreme interest came around on the base, passing from man to man. An American pilot, missing in action in Laos, never heard from, and rumored to be one of the POWs held in the notorious caves of Sam Neua, had been picked up by the ARVN forces near the Xepon River.

"Where did he come from, LT?" O'Rourke asked Klein.

"He escaped in the bombing on the Plain of Jars," Klein said after inquiring of an intelligence officer he knew. "He made his way down the Mekong River, going with the current, and he managed somehow to come up current on the Xepon river, from where it joins the Mekong, about 100 miles from Tcephone. Stowed away or something."

"Amazing!"

"Yes."

Later that day, when the chopper bearing the escaped POW returned to Khe Sanh, hundreds of soldiers gathered near the airfield. Ready to deliver an official greeting were the base commander, his adjutant, and a color guard consisting of three soldiers with flags and two with rifles at shoulder arms. The flags were the American flag and the flags of the 5th Infantry and 101st Airborne.

"This guy is a major," Klein informed. "Macho pilot. F-105. 98 missions before he went down."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

"How long was he missing?"

"Almost two years, I heard."

All were rapt with attention as the chopper landed. The man who emerged did not look like a macho pilot, however. He was an emaciated, stooped figure with gray hair and a look of bewilderment at the situation before him.

O'Rourke, as he watched the thin figure being saluted by the base CO, thought to himself that the bewildered look on the man's face was a look of battle shock such as he had observed several times.

"Who is this guy anyway, sir?" he asked Klein. "Anyone get his name?"

"Name is Morris. James Morris," Klein said. "He's from your own country, doc, by the way. Minnesota, I heard."

Before the "Minnesota" part of that answer reached his ears, the former coxswain was already formulating in his mind the astonishing fact that this debilitated person before him was his old friend of the rowing days, Jim Morris.

"LT, you're not going to believe this. I know this guy," he said. "I mean, I personally know him. This guy is an old friend."

O'Rourke didn't wait to hear Klein's answer. He was already moving toward the gaunt figure positioned before the hundreds of soldiers on the field. The band had started to play some kind of military tune and O'Rourke, as he passed along, overheard various expressions of amazement at the ravaged condition of the returned POW.

"That poor guy did not get the best of treatment. That's pretty obvious," he heard one man said.

"How old this dude anyhow?"

"He is not old, brother. This man is young."

"Major James Morris, on behalf of the United States Armed Forces, on behalf of the men of the 101st Airborne and the 5th Infantry gathered on this field, I want to welcome you back among your friends," the colonel said to a roar of applause from the soldiers. "We want to thank you, Major Morris, for your great service to our country and for the sacrifice you have given throughout your ordeal."

During this presentation, Morris stood at attention with the same glazed expression.

O'Rourke in the meanwhile had made his way through the crowd to a position about a hundred feet from where Morris stood. When the crowd broke up, soon later, he went forward toward his old teammate.

Jim Morris saw the soldier coming toward him with some obvious purpose, but he did not recognize O'Rourke until the former coxswain removed his cap, revealing the trademark red hair.

"Rorkie?" he said.

"God damn yes, Jimbo."

"Guess we've met our sad fate."

It was an attempt at the old interaction of joking around that had been common fare at the boat club years before, when Morris and O'Rourke had been fellow team members, Morris knew. Even as he said this, though, Morris realized that he could not sustain such an air of levity anymore. Those days were gone.

"Yes, I guess we have, sir," O'Rourke replied, thinking the comment was an odd one for Morris to make in the circumstances. Why was the fate "sad" at the moment? To the contrary, it could have been seen as a happy fate since it had brought Morris his freedom.

Morris did not feel a like curiosity regarding his former teammate. The scene of airfield and friendly faces around him seemed beyond a full comprehension. He had with him still the memory of the dead bodies at Ban Hatbay and the final moments of the boy, Soutsada. On his journey down the small river he had started on and then on the Mekong, as Morris had looked out from his inconspicuous boat, where he stayed within the small cabin, disguised by his Laotian clothes, he had seen many similar scenes of destruction and death in villages he had passed on his journey.

As for O'Rourke, seeing Morris at close range, he was astounded at his former teammate's physical appearance. Morris seemed in every respect diminished. He had aged the equivalent of ten years, surely. He had lost so much weight that his musculature was gone. His bearing suggested a lack of confidence and self-respect. He never lost the look of battle shock that O'Rourke had already observed.

"Specialist O'Rourke, you seem to know this guy," said the officer still on hand to assist Morris in making immediate arrangements.

"Yes, I do, sir, we were team mates together back in college."

"Well, how about this then, you think you could take him down to the clinic? They're going to give him a quick check and a place to stay overnight."

"Sure, sir. I'll be glad to."

"Major Morris," said the officer, turning to him. "Plans are for you to be transferred to Phu Bai tomorrow."

"Okay, thank you."

"Usually in situations like this, sir, there will be an evaluation there, and some interviews with intelligence, and so on, then you'll be going back to the good ol' States."

"When will that be, do you think?" Morris asked.

"Maybe in a week, ten days, two weeks at most."

"Okay, thanks."

O'Rourke through this interaction watched his old friend closely and observed that Morris was capable of a normal interaction, though the pass on what he observed regarding the symptoms of shock to the medical staff treating Morris. But surely they would notice it, he thought; the condition was so obvious.

As the former team mates walked to the clinic, however, Morris seemed to shake himself free of the bewildered mental state O'Rourke had observed. He looked at O'Rourke with a sudden smile that suggested what he had been in the past, except the smile lingered too long, until it began to seem a little crazy.

"So what do you hear of the old gang?" Morris inquired.

O'Rourke relayed what he knew of the people that he believed Morris would have an interest in. Matt and Mary Brandt were still in D.C., he said. He told the details of that, to the extent that he knew them based on his letters from Mary. Steward was still doing his alternative service, though he had recently separated from his wife, he relayed.

"Oh, that's too bad," Morris said. "Don't I remember he just got married, out in California?"

"Yes, it's been a while, I though."

"Seems like it was right about the same time as the moon landing, Apollo, right around when I went down," Morris said.

"Yes, I think it was. I was there, you know. I was best man at the wedding."

"I didn't know that."

"Yes, it was in July of 1969," said O'Rourke, "right before I came over to Vietnam."

"How long ago was that anyhow?" Morris asked.

"I would say, right about 20 months."

At the clinic, O'Rourke and Morris found Captain Art Steward ready to conduct an examination.

Here again, there was an attempt at a light mood all around, as jokes went back and forth about the common Minnesota origin, the doctor's younger brother, and so on. But, as on the airfield a few minutes before, the mood could not be kept going.

Morris, as he sat in the clinic being examined, pondered in his mind where the 20 months had gone that O'Rourke had given him a number for. Some of that time, not more than a week or two, had been taken up in his initial hiding on the mountaintop above the valley where he had gone down, near the bulldozer lot on Laotian Route 4 that he and his comrades had bombed, and in his subsequent effort at escape down the Nam Ou river and his capture there on the riverbank by the Pathet Lao. Then there had been the month or so in the dug out cell, wherever that had been, that he had stayed in before being moved across the Nam Ou to the strange

facility on the side of the hill where he had met Elwood Erland and the Air America pilot Bryan Zastrowski, both of whom (he noted in his mind) had died.

Thinking of Erland, Morris remembered his promise to visit Erland's son upon his return to the United States. He would honor that promise, Morris thought to himself.

But how long had he been in that place, Morris asked himself in his mind, feeling an urgent need to place his experience in time.

Four months, maybe, just four months, he answered himself, though the stay there seemed, in looking back at it, to have been a much longer time. Then there had been his second attempt at escape, followed by his capture and his transfer to Sam Neua. His life there in the caves, in solitary confinement, subject to frequent torture, struck him as more like a nightmare, undemarcated by normal time, than like the events such as people kept track of with calendars. How long had he lived that cave existence, Morris asked himself. About eight months, he figured. Then there had been the sessions with Xuan Than. How many months had that involved? Not more than a month or two.

What had happened to Xuan Than? Had he gone back to battle, Morris wondered. But he brought himself back to his month counting again.

Then the journey across the mountains from Sam Neua to Ban Hatbay, Morris continued in his mind, the journey on which Zastrowski had tried to escape and had been killed, and on which the priest from Iowa,—Morris could not recall his name,—had been shot in the face for defending Zastrowski. How long had he been in Ban Hatbay off and on, in that time he had been moved around in the mountains? Maybe six months...

Morris tried to go again through the months he had assigned to the various components of his life as a captive, to count them again to make sure they added up to 20, but his mind returned his last mental stop, Ban Hatbay. An image of the destroyed village and the dying Soutsada came up in him again.

Morris shook his head in an attempt to return to the tent in which he sat under the stretched canvas illumined by sunlight outside. It was such a violent shake of the head that Art Steward noticed.

"Are you okay, sir?" he asked.

"Yea, sure, doc, I'm fine."

"Bet you're eager to get back home."

"Oh, yea."

"Well, listen, major. Our plan for the next few hours is for you to stay right here hooked up to some tubes. We want to put as much into you as we can to get your body back to normal."

"Alright. Thanks."

O'Rourke came by later to take Morris up to the canteen. There some of the soldiers came up to Morris to shake his hand, while others made a point of not gawking at his emaciated form.

"I imagine Ellen is going to be ecstatic to see you," the former coxswain said, struggling to make conversation. "She must have been so worried about you."

"Oh, yea."

"You must be so anxious to see her."

"Yes, I am."

Morris thought to himself, though, he was not anxious to see Ellen. He had gotten a look at himself in a mirror in the clinic and had been as disturbed by what he saw as he had been months before at his image in the storefront window in the village where he had been pulled out to push the truck out of the mud. He didn't want to return to Ellen in such a state. He would be a burden, not the hero she had fallen in love with.

"I'm not the same man she knew," Morris said out loud, addressing these words not so much to O'Rourke as, in the way he had become used to, to himself or his dead father, he knew not which.

He wondered, though, whether any kind of intervention could restore Morris to his former self. Surely, it would not happen overnight. It would require months of rehabilitation, he imagined. He did not try to pursue the topic further of Morris's upcoming reunion with his wife.

"Jimbo, looks like I'm going to have to say goodbye," O'Rourke said later at the clinic when he and Morris arrived there. "Looks like I'll be going out tomorrow. They want me ready at break of dawn."

"I've been glad to see you again," Morris responded in a monotone voice that seemed lacking in engagement with the situation at hand.

"I've been glad to see you, too," O'Rourke replied.

"Take care of yourself, Bill."

"I intend to," said the former coxswain, placing his hand on his old friend's shoulder. "Enjoy your freedom."

"I intend to," Morris replied.

O'Rourke walked away, mulling over this interaction. Morris's words, "I intend to," being a reflection of the exact same words he had said himself, seemed indicative of the mental exhaustion he detected in Morris. There was a grasping at anything to fulfill the minimal needs of the conversation.

Morris's reaction to O'Rourke's remark "Enjoy your freedom" struck the former coxswain as odd, also. The words seemed to lack the inner ascendancy of spirit that might have been expected for a man restored after months of captivity to normal life.

[Chapter 279-281 notes]

281. O'Rourke goes down, shoots an enemy soldier, and is shot

Spec. 5 Bill O'Rourke learned the next morning he had been assigned to a new assault helicopter battalion (AHB). His new unit, he was told, had been brought in to provide a rest for his old unit, the AHB 101 "Comancheros," who had borne the most dangerous duty throughout the six weeks of Lam Son 719. The replacement crews were new to Vietnam; they had no combat experience and didn't know the terrain.

Just why an experienced outfit was being replaced with an initiated outfit at such a crucial point in the engagement was a mystery to O'Rourke and everyone he had talked to. Stories were coming back that the insertion into FSB Hope, begun the previous day, was meeting resistance. ARVN soldiers were being evacuated from Hope even as others were being airlifted a hop further to Tcephone.

"Now, whether these ARVN guys are going to be able to hold on to Tcephone is highly doubtful, doc, in my opinion," 1st Lt. Kevin Klein remarked as O'Rourke readied his gear to go out.

"And why is that, LT?" said O'Rourke.

"Because this whole area around the trail is obviously of extreme importance to the enemy, doc. If the ARVN gets to Tcephone, they're going to hit them from all sides."

"All the ARVNs gotta do, though, is hold on long enough to clear out the caches," someone else said. "That's the objective here. No one wants to occupy Laos."

Word came around soon later that there were NVA infantry regiments north of Hope and some mechanized units including the tank regiment that a few days before had overrun the ranger bases above Route 1032.

FSB hope was under heavy fire, the AHB 167 commander reported soon later. There were wounded men needing to be medivac'ed out.

Art Steward, the medical company CO, was soon on the scene, also, clipboard in hand, as a dozen or so corpsmen, talking to one another in quiet voices, waited to be assigned to the choppers.

"O'Rourke," Art Steward said. "You're with 222."

"Alright, Captain. I'm ready," O'Rourke replied.

"Sorry to have to send you out in this."

"Glad to go out, sir. It's my job."

"Take care of yourself, Bill."

"Ay ay, sir. I will."

O'Rourke was soon in the air seated beside the Vietnamese soldier who provided translation when needed. He could sense some puzzlement on the part of the inexperienced American crew as the new pilot hovered the craft, about a half mile from Khe Sanh, to wait for the helicopter just behind him to take the lead. Soon after, O'Rourke observed that the

helicopters were following Route 9, the usual route to the border.

At the border town of Lao Bao, where the ARVN backup units were located, the chopper landed briefly to pick up three ARVN gunners. The final crew of three Americans and four Vietnamese crossed the border into Laos and continued westward above Route 9, flying in parallel with the brushy basin of the Xepon River and the bluffs just south of it.

"Just where are we going?" O'Rourke asked his translator.

He had learned that the translators, being in a position to talk freely with both the American and ARVN soldiers, often had a good hold of the current strategic situation.

"I heard, right north of Hope," the translator replied. 'Above five kilometers."

"Five kilometers?"

"Yes."

That was exactly where the NVA infantry and tank units had been sighted, O'Rourke noted. He and his crewmates were headed into the thick of it then. He braced himself for that.

From his location in the helicopter about ten feet behind the pilot, O'Rourke could hear constant, urgent chatter on the radio as the crews exchanged information with one another and with the spot planes guiding them in.

"Mayday, Mayday," he heard someone say. "We're going down. Can't hold it."

A moment later came the subsequent call: "We're on the ground here. 213N 25. 213N 25. Taking hits all around."

Other exchanges between several parties conveyed the impression that fighter planes had been called in to sweep the area around the downed helicopter. A rescue mission was underway to lift the men out. Two men were wounded, O'Rourke gathered.

The flight in of the chopper, low over the trees, brought fleeing views of various aspects of the ongoing operations. Just inside of Laos, over Route 9, O'Rourke saw the sunlit, waving brown grass of the lowlands along the Xepon River, beside which a caravan of green military vehicles moved on the dirt highway. ARVN soldiers looked up toward him. One of the soldiers waved. Then came an open area of scattered single trees followed by the dense sealike crowns of a triple canopy forest.

The former coxswain's thoughts, during the brief flight, tumbled along on a substratum of anxiety at the prospect of the danger ahead, mere fragments, never settling into thought long enough or stable enough to be converted into words. He saw the soldiers and road below and thought of the long walk in the dark he had made with a fellow soldier carrying the wounded man who had died on the flight back to Ripcord. Just pieces of the experience came back in: the unsteadiness of walking

in the dark, a moment of crouching to listen to a suspect sound, the boy's face before dying. He saw birds flying up from the canopy below and thought of the birds flying behind the ferry on Victoria Bay in Hong Kong. He thought of Barbie's face as she had looked at him then. He thought of that same face, same eyes, on the evening in Chicago after the demonstration where he had met her by chance at the clinic where she had been working as volunteer.

Then, suddenly, the helicopter in which O'Rourke was sitting arced higher in a maneuver to provide a view of the full range of the terrain below and the location on that terrain to which the flight was directed; and, from this vantage point provided by the higher altitude, he saw for his first time in Vietnam, an actual battle in process, as might have been seen in World War Two. He could see, on a hilltop about a mile directly in front of him, a group of about 20 tanks positioned here and there in the undulations of the landscape, with their gun turrets positioned all in the same direction, just off to his left, immediately below him, and with the guns all emitting smoke as they fired; and he could see, along a road off to one side of that, soldiers moving in a formation beside mechanized vehicles, not tanks but with tracks like tanks, and guns also emitting smoke as they fired.

Seeing that configuration first, O'Rourke followed the line of fire to the spot toward which the fire of both the NVA tanks and the NVA units on the road appeared to be directed. There, in the cleared out moonscape of the fire base, he saw ARVN units dug into bunkers covered with timbers amidst the usual mess of discarded wooden crates and tunnel-like ditches between bunkers and tents. It was a chaotic scene with 155mm guns firing from within circles of sandbags and soldiers, in groups of two or three, firing mortars and recoilless rifles back in the direction from which the incoming fire was coming. A helicopter was lifting from the site, and the general mood suggested was not organization and efficiency of effort but rather panic and chaos.

Over to one side of the base, O'Rourke observed, in an dugout area protected on the side from which the enemy fire was originating by the limestone wall of a cliff, was the medivac landing area, already ringed by smoke in anticipation of the pickup.

"222, clear to land," someone on the radio said.

"Roger, dropping," came back the reply.

"Man has a line started. Bleeding bad from left leg. We're trying to stop it.

"Roger."

The pilot then yelled back. "Doc, you get that?"

"Yes, I did," O'Rourke answered.

He was already laying out the equipment he thought would be

needed. The clamp and tourniquet were the main things. The important task would be to stop the bleeding, he noted to himself. No need to doubt his ability to do it. He had done it many times.

The helicopter dove in so abruptly there was a sensation of falling. Fast upon that came a sensation of the descent being checked as the craft pulled back to touch down.

The trees all around bent as in a windstorm in the rush of air from the rotating blades. Two soldiers bearing the wounded man on a stretcher, with a third soldier beside holding up the tube, ran toward the open door, heads lowered to minimize the exposure of their face and eyes to the spewing dust.

O'Rourke, from the moment when the wounded man was placed before him, focused on the details of the medical problem before him. He looked at once for the source of the blood oozing from the left leg, and found on the outer side of the thigh the slippery tube of a damaged artery sliding in and out of the ripped strands of pink flesh. He grasped the artery firmly with his left hand, applied a clamp with his right hand, and confirmed that the outward flow of blood had stopped.

With that, assessing that all was in order and the wounded man would live, O'Rourke settled back on his haunches and turned his attention to the scene passing below.

It was not the usual scene of the lowlands beside the Xepon River and narrow corridor of Route 9, he noticed at once. There was a line of bluffs on the left, not on the right, where they should have been on the flight back in. The helicopter was passing near the highlands, O'Rourke concluded with alarm, where the two ranger bases over Route 1032, FSBs 30 and 31, had been deserted a couple of weeks before.

O'Rourke was about to alert the pilot of the incorrect course when the sound of gunfire erupted from the nearby bluffs.

The pilot tried to turn the helicopter sharply down to the right, away from the cliffs, but a spray of bullets along the fuselage on the left side, catching a gunner positioned on that side. He fell back with a bright red circle on his forehead.

A second barrage of bullets missed the fuselage but could be heard hitting against the helicopter blades just above O'Rourke's head. There was a throbbing, arrhythmic vibration, as with a wheel out of round as the helicopter banked left and plummeted toward the ground.

There was a sudden impact, not from the ground side as might have been expected, but from the left side, followed by a moment of physical suspension as if the helicopter was hanging in mid-air. O'Rourke saw pine trees close by on one side of him, protruding from a wall of rock. Then the helicopter rolled to the right and flipped over on what appeared to be a steep slope, scraping and banging on rocks. There was an initial

slow roll and two more, faster each time.

O'Rourke tried to hold his position with the wounded man still in front of him, but he and his charge were thrown to the ceiling of the fuselage on the first roll, then to the floor again, then twice more up and down and toward the rear of the craft where other crewmen had also landed in a tangle of torn bodies.

The wounded man in his charge had been torn from his tube, O'Rourke saw. The clamp had sprung off and blood was spraying against the metal wall of the fuselage. A man with a gash on the side of his head had no vital signs. Another body in the heap at the rear of the fuselage was the soldier who has been shot in the head. O'Rourke had seen two others falling out of the doors as the helicopter had rolled down the hill.

The fuselage had landed on one side with the door above like a hole in the ceiling. O'Rourke lifted out the man with the bleeding leg, then climbed out and looked around. The helicopter was a crumpled wreck. The pilot was dead in the front, O'Rourke saw, but the copilot was still alive. O'Rourke pulled him out and saw that he was dazed with one leg obviously broken and the jagged bone protruding from the flesh.

O'Rourke found the radio controls on the bent-in control panel and tried to use it but the radio was dead. He found his medical pack lying on the ground next to one of the battered body of one of the soldiers who had fallen out in the fall. By the fallen man, there was a rifle, also. O'Rourke took it up and slung over his shoulder.

"This time I may need to use it," he said out loud.

He considered in his mind whether he should remain with the wreck or go off some distance from it. Any rescue team searching for the downed crew would look for the craft, surely, but so would any NVA soldiers who may have witnessed the crash.

He could go off by himself and maybe make it back alone on foot to Khe Sanh or to Lao Bao where the ARVN troops were located. But that would mean leaving behind the two crew members who were still alive.

"My place is with these men," he decided.

Having gone through this entire thought process within five minutes of the crash, O'Rourke set to assisting the two wounded men as best as he could with the supplies available. He forced the copilot's broken leg back into a straight position and set up a tube for pain medication. With a new clamp secure, he set the clamp again on the second man's bleeding leg and managed to stop the flow of blood.

"He can't possibly last long," he thought to himself. "He needs a transfusion."

Having completed these tasks, O'Rourke set up a defensive perimeter with pieces of metal from the ripped apart craft, then he sat down within it, his wounded comrades on either side. Hearing the sound of chopper,

he skimmed the sky and saw it several miles south of his own position.

"They're thinking we went down by the regular route," he thought.

Then, as he listened, he heard another sound that set him acutely at alert. It was the sound of human voices, not American but Asian, he thought, Vietnamese. Were they ARVN or NVA? How far away were they? The questions shot through his mind.

Soon O'Rourke received an answer to his questions in the form of a sudden barrage of fire directed against his position. Out in the trees, he could see moving figures amidst the long shadows of late afternoon. There had been no call for surrender. They intended to fight it out.

Taking up the rifle, he fired once toward the figures and saw one of the men fall.

He had killed a man, the former coxswain thought. Even in the midst of the danger, the fact impressed him as it settled in. He had meant to be a full soldier and he had become just that.

As O'Rourke considered this, another shot rang out and he fell back himself. He was aware that he had been struck in the right side but he was aware only of a dull pain as from being punched. He examined himself and found a gaping open wound just below his rib cage with blood oozing out. His entrails were maybe damaged beyond repair.

He felt so strangely calm that the notion occurred to him that he was in a condition of shock and not reacting with appropriate alarm. He reminded himself that he needed to do for himself what he had done for others so many times; he needed to find the source of the blood and clamp off the damaged vessel. He searched for it with his fingers and at last found something long and tubelike that he clamped off. But the flow of blood continued.

He listened for the sound of helicopters again and once more heard it far to the south of him in the open country by the river.

Again he tried to find the source of the bleeding and clamp it off before he fell back. The pain had appeared, throbbing in the area of the wound where before he had felt just the dull thud of the initial blow.

"I may not make it through this," he said out loud.

He heard the voices again on the hillside below him. This time they were closer in the thick trees. For a moment, the face and eyes of his wife returned to this mind, as O'Rourke had seen them many times. If he did die, he thought, he would disappoint her dreams.

He made another try at finding and securing the damaged vessel and fell back again, utterly tired.

"I'm not giving up," he said, closing his eyes. "I just need to rest a minute, then I'll try again."

[Chapter 279-281 notes]

282. Morris fights "dullness" as he is processed by Orin Brown

Maj. James Morris, unaware of his former team mate Bill O'Rourke's death a few hours before, boarded a helicopter in Khe Sanh on Wednesday, March 3, 1971, and, with a cheerful hello to the pilot, sat down in the co-pilot seat and looked out. Morris did not feel cheerful, however, nor did he feel sad. He felt the same dullness that he had felt since escaping five weeks before on the morning he had witnessed the destruction of the Lao Theung village of Ban Hatbay, Laos.

The helicopter lifted with a rhythmic whacking of air, dust whirled up from the landing pad, the trees bent to the side, and then, as in a dream, (as Morris saw it,) the rounds of the lush landscape passed quietly below. Dense foliage for a moment, then isolated trees behind which long shadows stretched back in a crooked line on the uneven ground. Then came a blue stream, trickling down over rocks from a steep hillside, and last a shimmering horizon of sun touched water. That was the South China Sea, Morris knew. He had felt a thrill three years before when he had first seen it. He did not feel a thrill on this morning, however. He felt the same dullness.

"Sir, if you don't mind my saying, I can't imagine how you must feel, what a great relief it must be to have your freedom again after all you went through," the pilot said as they neared the coastal town of Phu Bai, same as where O'Rourke had had his convalescence after being wounded at Ripcord.

Up to this moment, the pilot and Morris had exchanged some small talk but nothing directly personal as was this last comment.

"Oh, yes, it is a relief," Morris replied flatly.

"The story I heard is you were in the caves in Sam Neua."

"Yes, that's true."

"If you don't mind my saying, sir, I don't know how you endured that, the darkness, the torture. How does a person do that?"

"I didn't have any choice."

"Well, in my opinion, you're a hero, sir. I would just like to tell you. I know a lot of people think the same thing."

The concepts of "heroism" and of himself being regarded as a hero struck Morris as as strange as the sight of the rooftops of Phu Bai and expanse of water within his view at the moment.

"Well, thank you. I appreciate that," Morris replied.

He watched as the helicopter descended over a grid composed of dirt roads with corrugated metal roofs amidst the green of trees and brown of bare earth lots. On one side of the grid was a field on which hundreds of men were lined up in formation behind a line of superior officers, as in waiting for review, with a military band off to one side.

When the helicopter headed directly for that line, Morris realized that the troops in formation were waiting for him. The troops snapped to attention as the craft settled down.

Morris exited to find an erect, lean three-general coming forward toward him. The general stopped and saluted before Morris had a chance to lift his own hand in a salute.

This general was Jake Landers, the commander of the 101st Airborne who had arranged for Bill O'Rourke to be transferred from Chu Lai to Phu Bai, prior to the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord. He was a familiar figure to many, but Morris had never met him.

Behind Gen. Landers was another individual, however, that Morris did recognize, a compact officer with build of a college wrestler. It was Orin Brown, the intelligence officer and common friend to Morris's former teammates, Tom Steward and Bill O'Rourke. Morris recognized him from their previous meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, when Morris and Brown had gone together for an evening in Pat Pong.

Morris noted something else in the instant when he and Brown first made eye contact with one another. He saw the slight pulling back of the face and blinking of eyes by which someone shocked at another's appearance attempts to not betray it. Morris had seen the same reaction on meeting Bill O'Rourke the day before.

"Major James Morris, it is my honor and privilege to welcome you to Phu Bai," Gen. Landers said, speaking to Morris in a public address system that amplified his remarks to the men in the field. "On behalf of these soldiers, and on behalf of all of the men and women in American uniform, I want to thank you for your service to our country."

Morris looked mechanical in how he reacted to this greeting and stood stiffly saluting during the playing of the national anthem.

"I just want to thank you all very much," he said when invited to make a statement himself. "I'm glad to be back."

Orin Brown came forward after the brief ceremony was over and the troops had been given leave to fall out.

"Maj. Morris, so great to see you again," he said.

"Glad to see you, also," Morris replied.

"Been a long time."

"Yes, it has."

"Jim,—can I call you that...

"Of course."

"I am here in a dual role, as an old friend,—and I hope you will accept me as that,—and as an intelligence officer to debrief you and help you to make arrangements."

"Yes, of course."

Orin Brown proceeded in the arrangements, as he said. He first led

Morris to a spacious seaside room in the Phu Bai medical complex, a room normally reserved for visiting doctors, he explained. Then he laid out a crisp, new uniform, pointed out the private bathroom, and watched as Morris stood looking at the accommodations.

"We're doing our best for you," he said. "Yes, I can see," Morris responded.

"How about this, major, you take some time to clean and rest and this evening, that is morning back in the States, we'll arrange for some calls for you back home, to your mother and wife."

"My mother is still alive?"

"Yes, though pretty sick I've heard."

"Ellen knows I've been found?"

"Yes, she does, and she's being briefed already about what to expect, how to help you."

Morris sat down on the side of the bed.

"Well, thank you," he said.

"Tomorrow, Jim, you will begin on several days of debriefing and evaluation to make sure everything is alright with you before we bring you back home."

"What's involved in that?"

"Medical evaluations, and you get to see me in my official role."

"How's that?"

"This is what I do all the time, officially, talk to people who've had contact with the enemy, to learn from you what you know, for the sake of our men who are still there."

"Yes, of course, thank you."

That evening, with a drink and a meal before him, courtesy of the staff, Morris sat in his room listening on the phone as he waited to be connected for his call to his mother.

"Jimmy, I can hardly believe it's you," his mother said.

"How have you been?" he asked.

"I'm fine, just fine, now that I'm talking to you."

"Medically?" he said.

"Oh, medically, Jim, I'm not doing so well. We can talk more about it when you get home. Are they taking good care of you?"

"Yes."

Morris then waited to be hooked up for his call to his wife, Ellen, and soon he heard the voice that he had not expected to ever hear again, a voice he hardly remembered. The voice sounded small and girlish, and far away like a phone voice in an old movie.

"Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my Lord! I've hoped and prayed for this moment! I've thought

so much about you."

"I've thought about you, also."

As had been the case in his conversation with his mother, tidbits of this and that followed, while Morris strained to keep his focus on the exchange of information, unable to shake himself from the dullness he had felt since being picked up on the Xepon River two days before.

Next day Morris reported for his first session with Orin Brown and he found there a sun filled room with tea and cookies set out on the table and flowers on the window sill before a backdrop of waves rolling in onto a white beach under a placid sky. Morris noted the similarity in setting with the sunlit room where he had experienced in his talks with the NVA officer, Maj. Xuan Than.

"Help yourself," Brown said, sweeping his hand toward the tea and cookies, as Morris sat down.

"No, thank you," he said.

Orin Brown, the congenial, history-buff student of the war effort, revealed a different side of his personality in this official setting. He was in general more serious than he had ever shown himself to be before and, on certain points he apparently regarded as more important, he was pugnacious to the point of being rude.

Brown asked first if it was true, as rumored, that Morris had been kept in the caves in Sam Neua, to which Morris answered simply "yes." He asked how Morris knew that, and Morris said because he had heard the name, because other prisoners he had talked to knew it by the same name, and because its location corresponded with his map sense of where Sam Neua would be located based on terrain observed in his travels.

"Now did you ever get a sense of who was running that camp?" Brown asked. "Was it the Pathet Lao?"

"Yes, at first."

"And then what?"

"The NVA took it over."

"And is it true the men there were tortured?"

"Yes."

"In just what respect?"

"The usual way."

Brown was clearly not satisfied with this final answer. "Major," he said, "I would like to read you a list of torture techniques to which you may have been subjected, and I would like you to answer yes or no for yourself first and then when you heard of it for others."

"Alright," Morris replied.

The list then began, with "long periods of darkness," followed by "coldness," "lack of food," "insults," "painful positions," "being hit," and "being hit while blindfolded," to all of which Morris responded yes.

“Electrical shocks” was the only item to which he answered no.

“And, Morris, before you answer this next, let me assure you this is just between you and me, for intelligence purposes, solely, and never will be used against you,” Brown said, leaning forward intimately, “did you ever feel that under these abuses, you gave the enemy information he was asking you for?”

“No,” Morris replied.

“Not ever in any respect?”

“No.”

“Well, Jim, Maj. Morris, that is nothing short of heroic, in my opinion.”

“Thank you.”

Indeed, Brown seemed quite satisfied, except when he asked Morris whether he had ever heard any information regarding the rationale or disposition of the enemy, to which Morris answered, yes.

“And when was that?” Brown said with heightened interest.

Morris then explained the circumstances under which he had been brought before an officer,—whom he referred to simply as a “Vietnamese officer”—for presentations on the history of Vietnam and the various wars Vietnam had fought in.

“And by any chance did you learn this officer’s name?” Orin asked with keen interest.

“Xuan Than.”

“Major Xuan Than?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

“Dedicated soldier, I heard,” Brown remarked, though his face did not convey any respect on account of the dedication he referred to. “He died in Chu Lai.”

“Died in Chu Lai, how?”

Morris was now the one to lean forward with his keen interest as this fact was revealed to him.

“In the clinic there. He was brought in wounded.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“You’re sorry, you say,” the intelligence officer replied with a curious look. “Now why is that?”

“I got to know him through the presentations, and I came to regard him as a good man.”

“He was reported to be in charge of all of the NVA POWs, did you know?”

“No, I did not. But I sensed that.”

“Sensed it, you say. Now how was that?”

“He made statements indicating he had some control over what was being done in the camps.”

"What kind of statements? Could you please be more specific?" the compactly built former college wrestler inquired, leaning toward Morris with his buzz cut head. "Please forgive, sir, if for the sake of my own obligations I bear down a little too much."

Morris sighed. He felt tired and not at all inclined to accept the mental return to Sam Neua that answering the questions required. Still, out a sense of duty, he continued.

"He said he had heard I was tortured. He said he was sorry it had happened, it wouldn't happen any more in NVA camps."

"And of course you knew, Jim, this was a ploy, this was an attempt to loll you into lowering your resistance so you would be more receptive to the Communist propaganda?"

"I suppose so, yes."

"You suppose so? You doubted it?"

"He didn't seem like he was trying to feed me propaganda," Morris said. "He was more like a professor in a class."

"Or so he wished you to believe."

Morris made no reply, but in his mind he compared the comfortable officer before him with the upright officer he remembered from Sam Neua.

He recalled Orin Brown seated in the bar in Pat Pong, eating his hamburger and fries as he watched the sex market of the scene from a safe distance of a voyeur. Brown had watched the war in the same way, he thought, from an air conditioned office. By contrast, Xuan Than had dedicated his life to the military struggle of Vietnam.

When the interview was over, Brown became his bonhomie self again, assuming the friend part of the dual role he announced earlier. "Jimmy, let's do one for the old days," he said. "I know a great place here in town."

Morris reluctantly assented, and later stood at his door, crisp in his new uniform, though still a sight of obvious malnourishment with his thin, gray hair and skinny form.

"We'll take a cab in," Brown announced. "Come on, Jimmy. This whole night's on me."

The two men exited the cab in downtown Phu Bai on a corner with a newsstand selling American newspapers. Morris paused there to look at the headlines and noticed a secondary headline on one side of the front page: "Caller's Jury is Shown a Picture of Women's and Babies' Bodies." He leaned over to look more closely.

Brown with a deft motion whisked him away. "Come on, Jimmy, let's forget all the trouble of the world for one evening! I think you deserve it, man!"

[Chapter 282 notes]

283. Morris reunites with Ellen but everything feels distant and unreal

Next came the reunion with his dear wife Ellen that Maj. Jim Morris of the United States Air Force had longed for and dreamed of in many days past only to dread and wish to avoid in his present physical and emotional state, which he was reminded of each time he looked in the mirror and each time he attempted to rest in his thoughts amidst the troubled memories of the horrors he had seen in his last days of captivity.

On the landing tarmac in Las Vegas, gray-headed and gaunt in his crisp blue uniform, Morris saw his wife approaching him, beautiful in face and form, and perfect in dress and coiffure, as she had always been. He watched at once to observe the initial reaction in her eyes, and saw there the momentary blinking and bracing back that he had seen in Bill O'Rourke and Orin Brown, the gesture he took to mean his appearance was so marked in contrast to what he had been before that the reaction to the first sight of it had to be checked and disguised.

To see Ellen react to him in this way gave Morris a grievous sorrow such as he had not felt since the time he had driven away from her house, after his and her trip together out west, four years before, feeling he had acted in such a way that his and her future had not been secured, the time when he had thought of driving back to set things right with her and had not done so.

Still he stood erectly as she closed the short distance between them and pressed against him, bringing a sensation of bodily warmth and cleanness and a scent of perfume.

"Jimmy, I can't believe it's you," she said softly. "I missed you so much."

"I'm so glad to see you, also," he replied.

Even as he uttered these words, however, Morris was alarmed at how the feeling of dullness continued inside of him and how everything around him continued to feel distant and unreal.

From the tarmac, greeted by a group of well-wishers, fellow airmen and their families, who had gathered at the airport to welcome him back (none of whom he knew, however), Morris and his elegant, chestnut-haired wife proceeded to the car that Ellen had waiting; and then, as in days past, Morris took the keys, started the engine, and followed along the side of the airfield to a road that ran through the base to the highway, and, from there, as Morris knew, to the neighborhood where he and Ellen had lived before he had gone overseas.

"We still live in the same apartment, Jimmy," Ellen said, with her hand on his arm. "You know the way, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"It's so wonderful to have you back."

The highway brought a familiar view of the western slope of Spring Mountain where the Morris's had often walked together in the earlier days of their marriage. It was a splendid sight in the late afternoon sunlight, resplendent with the sudden bloom of flowers from a recent rain, but

Morris had to struggle to focus on the scene and accept it as something real that he had experienced before.

With his pretty wife beside him, he struggled in the same way. He felt distracted but by what he didn't know.

"Tonight, Jimmy, I was thinking we can have a quiet evening together, just getting to know one another again. Would you like that?"

"Yes."

"Then, tomorrow, or maybe soon, we can go back to one of our old places, like Tarantino's or something?"

"I'd like that," he said. "We'll have a wonderful time!"

It was an interaction such as many they had had in the past, but missing from it, and noticed by them both, was the vibrant voice of male optimism and hope for the future that had been so much a part of their past relationship.

On a quiet street soon later, Morris saw another familiar sight: a white house with an open front porch and two side-by-side doors. Opening the leftmost door, with his wife beside him, Morris climbed the straight stairway to the door there, with the square window with the lace curtain, that he had opened in the old days to find Ellen waiting to begin one of their outings together.

Inside the door, the apartment was immaculately clean with flowers placed all around in artful vases amidst the colorful wall hangings that Ellen had added in the past few days. The wood floor was newly polished and the dining room table was set with Ellen's best chinaware and with white candles waiting to be lit.

Carefully set out on the coffee table, Morris noted at once, were untouched issues of the *New York Times*, about a half dozen of them, in daily order.

Ellen watched him as he looked at them. "I started buying them the day I heard you were found," she said.

"Thank you. That's so thoughtful of you."

"Well, I have to admit, I did certain things to make it as nice for you as I can that other people helped me think of. Some people from the base came by to give me advice."

"Advice on what?"

"Advice on how to help you readjust. They said that maybe, at first, you would find it hard."

Morris had no reply.

"I maybe shouldn't tell you that," she said. "But I don't want to start our new life together by holding things back from you. I want to tell you everything, Jim. There's so much I've kept inside. And I want you to feel free to talk to me."

"Of course."

"How about this? You sit down and relax while I heat up the meal. Just take off your shoes and kick back. I'll bring you a drink. Do you still like Rusty Nails?"

"Yes, I do."

"Scotch and Drambuie, I remember."

"Yes."

"And two filberts."

"Yes."

Morris did as she said, and settled into the comfortable couch with the drink before him that she soon brought with a soft kiss on his cheek. He did feel better, he felt relaxed, really relaxed, for the first time since he had been picked up on the Xepon River.

What a wonder, he thought, to be here in his old apartment with his wife again, with the *New York Times* in front of him.

Morris looked to the top newspaper on the coffee table. It was from that very day, Monday, March 15. In the top center of the front page was a picture of five men standing side by side, three in uniform, two in suits and ties. They were not Americans; they had something to do with a "Turkish Crisis." A side headline gave results of an election in Germany ("Brandt's Party Wins Berlin Vote But Margin Slips"). There was an article about events in Pakistan ("Leader in Dacca Acts to Take Over"), and another saying "French Opposition Parties Lead in Municipal Elections." There were articles about the Alaska pipeline and a "parliamentary challenge" for Golda Meir, the prime minister of Israel.

Nothing at all about the war that he had just returned from, Morris thought; but then he saw an article at the bottom left of the page with a headline spanning four columns: "Kennedy Puts Vietnam Civilian Deaths at 25,000 in 1970."

In addition to that number, 150,000 were wounded, Morris read. "By this yardstick alone," Senator Edward M. Kennedy was quoted as saying, "we can see that the war in Indochina is not 'winding down' for the peoples of the area."

"Staff members of Kennedy's Subcommittee on Refugees say the death rate was probably reduced by half in South Vietnam in 1970 as a result of the diversion of American bombing raids into Cambodia and Laos," the article went on. "The staff said that the intensification of air raids in Cambodia and Laos has increased civilian casualties in those countries. They estimated that civilian casualties in Laos, a country with

a population of about three million, were now exceeding 30,000 a year, including more than 10,000 dead."

"Jimmy, you can sit down at the table now," Ellen called in. "And I hope you're hungry. It's going to be a four-course meal. Would you like another drink? Or would you like some wine? I'm going to have some."

"Wine will be fine."

She brought in two bowls with salad, lit the candles on the table, and put out the other lights. Then she came in with a bottle of wine and two glasses, and sat down across from him.

"Just like old times," she said with a happy smile.

For the first time since meeting her by the plane, he smiled back at her.

"Yes, it is," he said.

It was as in the old times, briefly, and for Ellen, as Morris saw her, such seemed to be the case, judging by how she chattered on, but he could not break himself entirely from his feeling of dullness and distance, and he felt weary at the whole interaction.

He asked just enough questions in the candlelight to keep her going, and he forced a smile now and then, while he began to wish that the supper would be over.

"Well, I'm talking all about myself," she said. "I hardly know what to ask you, Jim. Can I ask you how you went down?"

With a conscious effort to speak about something he didn't want to speak about, he told her how his plane has been hit as he approached a cliff and how he had ejected over the top of the cliff and ran through the trees to escape the pursuing soldiers. He told her how he had holed up in the little cave he had found on top of another cliff and how he had made his way to the Nam Ou River and had eventually been caught miles down the river where he had drifted in his craft made of an old log.

"My God, Jimmy, you could write a book!" she said.

There was something missing, though, in the way he related his experiences. There was the lack again of a spirit of enthusiasm. There was a lack of the old self-confidence. He knew it even as he spoke and he could tell by her facial expression of concern that she was beginning to realize it, also.

"Ellen, I'm sorry if I'm not the old me," Morris said toward the end of the long meal.

She took both his hands and leaned forward into the candlelight, her eyes welling with tears. "Jimmy, honey, don't you worry! Everything will be fine!" she said softly. "I just know it will be fine! We'll have the old Jimmy back! And the old life!"

As she cleared the dishes after the meal, he settled back onto the couch in the lamp light, eager to return to the newspapers that she had set

out for him.

Without being asked, Ellen brought him another drink. He looked at once for the headline he had seen in the newspaper box in Phu Bai, the one that the intelligence officer, Orin Brown, had whisked him away from.

He found it in the newspaper for May 8, exactly one week before: "Calley's Jury is Shown a Picture of Women's and Babies' Bodies."

"The Government prosecutor in the trial of First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. held a photograph of corpses of women, children and babies before members of the jury today and asked if they really expected Lieutenant Calley to admit that these were 'enemies' he killed at Mylai."

A few paragraphs later, Morris noted, the article described the charges against Calley more specifically, "that Calley (had) deliberately murdered 102 unresisting Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of Mylai on March 16, 1968."

Ellen came into the living room quietly at this point and leaned over to kiss her husband on the cheek.

"Jimmy, it's been a wonderful day, and it has meant so much to me, I'm just all wrung out. I think I'll go to bed now, if you don't mind, and tomorrow we can start again and work things out. The people that came by, they gave me a list of things to give to you, medical appointments and so on. One of them is for a counselor, a social worker or something."

"They told me about this, also," he said.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll try."

"And maybe sometime tomorrow, we can call your mother, too. I know she's been having a rough time."

"What is her status exactly?"

"She's on the way out, Jim."

"How much time do they give her?"

"It was six months a month ago, and I've heard from her, and others have told me, she may be not last that long."

He took that in silently, resolving that sometime soon he would go to visit her, as soon as he made the other accommodations that his wife had just mentioned. Maybe on the same trip, he could go to see Ellwood Erland's son, as he had promised his former fellow prisoner he would do just before Erland was killed.

With his wife gone to bed, Morris settled into the newspapers again, looking for the picture the prosecutor in the Calley case had shown to the jury. He found it in the Sunday edition for the previous day. The picture showed dead bodies of women and children, about 20 of them, a few of them just infants, entwined in one another along a dirt road in the midst of green fields.

Morris realized as he studied the picture that it was either the same incident that Maj. Xuan Than had told him about or something very close. He searched for the unit name of the soldiers that had committed the atrocity and found they were a unit of the Americal division, the division Than had mentioned.

Soon later, Morris found another item of immense interest to him, a full page transcript of the prosecution and defense summations in the trial, which had just been delivered several days before.

A comment by the defense attorney, George Latimer, drew Morris's full attention. The comment went as follows:

"I believe most of the men have a feeling, that are in the infantry, that there is a certain refined distinction which should not be made, but somehow is made, and that distinction is, that it's all right for the air force to bomb cities, it's all right for artillery to tear down buildings and wreck the lives of every inhabitant; but, somehow or other, it's wrong for an infantryman, when he is told to destroy and level a village, to use his mechanical weapons,—and, after all, you are mechanized,—to use his weapons for the same purposes. Oh, surely it can be contended that some of the people like to contend, with their refinements, that the infantryman has a better opportunity to see what he is doing. Well, again, here comes the mental processes to work. Here comes your artillery, your mortars coming in on the village, and you go in with your guns a blazing, M-16s or automatic. You don't shoot them by looking through a peep sight, or you didn't. They are used for mass killing, and the philosophy of our war and the philosophy that is taught everybody is fire support and mow them down."

Morris read this once slowly, then sat with his drink in hand. "I should go in to Ellen now," he said quietly, out loud. "I should go in to her. She's waiting."

He did not stir from the couch, however. He settled in and threw back his head with his eyes closed, thinking of the scene of dead bodies that he had seen himself, so similar to Mylai, in the village of Ban Hatbay before his escape. He thought of Mayral and Soutsada, and the decision he had made to kill the boy only to find the boy already dead. He thought of other similar scenes he had seen as he had traveled down the river through the Plain of Jars. Then came the other strange images that he had carried with him for so long: the killed pig at Puerto Vallarta, the wounded soldier at Khe Sanh, the women and children looking up toward him from the houses he had inadvertently bombed. He felt the feeling again of being slung around in his cockpit and the sense of being in an inner home that had collapsed upon him from all sides.

[Chapter 283 notes]

284. Steward senses the collective search is turning toward inner consciousness

For three months, since moving from the Henry Hotel in Gallup, New Mexico, Tom Steward had divided his life between the little house that he had moved to, just around the corner from the hotel on Strong Street, and the Indian hospital on the hill where he now worked a regular schedule as a psychotherapy aide.

In the house on Strong Street, Steward spent most of his time, when he was not sleeping, sitting alone at a table in the living room where he read, wrote in his journal, and listened to music. The living room had a single window. It was a small, dark room. In the hospital, by contrast, where Steward worked every weekday in the psych ward on the fourth floor, the setting was spacious and sunny. Tall windows in the "community room" provided a panoramic view of the buildings of Gallup strung out along the parallel lines of the main street highway, the two railroad tracks that ran through town, and the bare dirt swath of the still unfinished interstate freeway. Beyond them was the Mexican neighborhood, on the low, domelike hill on the other side of the tracks, and, in the distance, the rugged, craggy expanse of the Navajo reservation.

In the psych ward, for the first time since college, Steward had found himself daily in a community of intelligent, articulate people. The ward had two psychiatrists, a psychologist, a social worker, two nurses, and eight therapy aides. All of the aides were Indians except for Steward and one other young white man. Under the "milieu" concept of the ward, professional and unprofessional staff interacted freely with the patients amidst much discussion of therapeutic methods and ideas. Even the lowest staff were encouraged to counsel patients.

Another part of the ward concept was an emphasis on Indian culture, ideas, and community. Each day began with a meeting in the community room with everyone seated in chairs along the walls of the room while the area of the sunlight extended gradually from east to west across the mesa country visible from the tall windows. Eddie Yazzie, the Navajo social worker whom Steward had met his first day in the ward, led the meetings, switching back and forth between English and Navajo. Often the meetings began with a period of silence that extended until an idea came forth for group discussion. The quietness, too, as Eddie had explained to Steward, was part of the Indian culture.

Steward, in his time in the ward, had by degrees become acquainted with his fellow workers, and he had learned that they were, in general, an interesting bunch of people.

Most interesting of all, and closest to being a friend, was Eddie Yazzie, the unofficial meeting leader. Yazzie was the son of a Navajo

medicine man, commonly called a “singer.” He was also regarded as an up- and-coming Indian leader, perhaps a future tribal council member, or even chairman, Steward had heard. Yazzie’s family lived in a hogan in a settlement called Rock Springs 20 miles north of Gallup, and Yazzie drove every day from that traditional setting to the modern setting of the Indian hospital.

Another interesting person to Steward was the only other white aide on the ward, a dark-haired, mustachioed college drop-out named Lou Landers about Steward’s age. He looked like an old-fashioned labor leader and spoke at meetings in a deep, authoritative voice although by his own account he had no education of any kind in psychology.

Landers was from Gloucester, Massachusetts. How he had wound up in Gallup, New Mexico, working on this ward was not clear, though like others in the ward he seemed to have been drawn to the cross-cultural experience that the ward presented through its mix of professional and Indian staff and its readiness to welcome non-traditional healing modes and concepts of mental health.

Other workers on the ward had similar unconventional biographies or backgrounds. There was a young male nurse, for example, also from the East Coast, who talked of collecting Indian artifacts. By his own report, he spent many weekends with his new wife out on the reservation hiking and climbing the rock cliffs of the buttes. From the other side of the cultural divide, there was a young Navajo aide, graduate of Midwestern college, who seemed completely Anglicized in speech, dress, and manner, and who yet spoke of collecting peyote buttons and crushing them to prepare them for consumption at religious ceremonies of the Native American Church, of which he was a member.

Through others working on the ward, there was a connection to the more general counterculture that Steward still felt himself part of and the mutations of which had watched with such interest since college. There was a young nurse, for example, married to a VISTA volunteer who, as she related it, worked in Gallup with a youth group of some kind. She and he lived in a little town called Thoreau (which she pronounced “Thuh-roo”) 15 miles east of Gallup where the highway passed over the Continental Divide. Two former VISTA volunteers lived at the same house, she said, in a school bus they had converted into a camper. They had been all around the country and settled back in Gallup for the time being.

Landers was also a countercultural type of sorts, Steward thought, a vegetarian who lived in the poor Hispanic neighborhood on the low hill that could be seen from the ward windows.

An interesting bunch, surely, from Steward’s perspective, with many potential connections to his past activities, but Steward had not managed

to extend any of the relationships outside of the ward. Almost all of his evenings he spent alone in the living room of the house on Strong Street, a time of day when his housemates, Gerry and Meredith Nelson, were seldom at home. For the most part this had been a lonely existence, and he had told himself he needed to break out of it, but the self-absorption and study had a strong appeal for him, too.

As for the central focus of this self-absorption and study, it had not changed since the day Steward had left Winslow and moved to Gallup to live in the Henry Hotel. The focus was still his estranged wife Kristine and all the circumstances surrounding the failure of his marriage, what the dynamic had been that had caused it, what he had done to contribute to that dynamic, and might have done to avert it, what the future could hold that he might share with Kristine, if he and she got back together (which still at times seemed possible), or what the future might be without her, if that would be his ultimate situation,—how he could proceed in the future building from and not rejecting the ideals and ideas that, as his main experience since college, had been a main part of his married life, also, the life he had shared with her.

Steward still often recalled the last statement she had made at the train depot on the day she had left Winslow, “I just want to be a person, too.”

In his serious, thoughtful manner, Steward had continued to ponder regarding what had he done to cause that feeling in his former companion, and he had continued to put down his reflections in his journal in his stiff, careful hand. He didn’t feel that, truth be told, he had suppressed her so much in her attempt to be a person. But somehow in the dynamic of their respective personalities and of his intellectual ponderousness versus her youth and inability to articulate her needs, he had unwittingly done that. He had been over the fact many times, and he had even read *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, taking notes and examining each facet of his past married life in an attempt to better understand the dynamic that had caused his marriage to fail.

Steward had physically seen his estranged wife only once in the six months since his and her breakup, on a weekend in Santa Barbara, mutually arranged. It had been like a second honeymoon at times with passionate sex and romantic walks along the beach. But it had ended with the same determination, on her part, to hold out in her independent life until she had proven to herself that she could make it alone.

In Kris’s life, as Steward had learned of it through her letters and phone calls, there had been many changes in living situation. She had lived at Don and Audrey Andrew’s house, in her old bedroom, until early February, and then had moved up to San Francisco where her mother had an apartment on Russian Hill. From there, after a stay of only two weeks,

she had moved back to L.A. again, this time to a house the Thunder Mountain band had just moved into on a hilltop in Sunland. From there, she had moved to the apartment that she presently shared with an old girlfriend from high school.

In Kris's emotional and physical states, as Steward had learned of them, there had been many changes, also. She seemed to be always in the midst of some crisis. She often wrote that she was depressed or sick. On one occasion, she had called to say that she had been told she might have cancer of the uterus. That had not turned out to be true, but then she had gotten a stomach sickness of some kind. On the phone she sometimes broke into tears or mentioned that she was out of money, but she refused any financial assistance.

For his part, Steward had ridden many of the up's and down's with her while never diverting from his own basic situation of daytime work on the ward and evening reading and study. He told himself often, and wrote to her, that he would be willing to resume the marriage at any time. He felt that he was still in love with her. At the same time, he often felt angry at her for having deserted him. He felt jealous of her continued involvement with the band, whom she was still working with as manager. He had dreams where he went to see her and she locked him out of the room while she made love to someone else.

Meanwhile, however, the fundamental need had continued of having to make a decision about his future after Gallup. His two-year obligation as a conscientious objector would be fulfilled in just five months. Then what would he do? It was to some extent simply a decision about whether he and Kris should try to live together again, but it was also a decision about what he could possibly do himself if he did live with her.

In his journal, Steward had tried to set down the options he saw for himself after he left Gallup. In general, he saw some kind of graduate school as the main option on one side, with traveling and joining in the social experiments of the time on the other side. The graduate school options were mainly in clinical psychology or medical school, both of which he felt he could be admitted to based on his past performance in school. The options in traveling and social experimentation were either simply to hitch around, looking, or to go out to New England to live with Matt and Mary Brandt for a while on their new communal farm.

Although Steward wrote down his thoughts about these two possible directions of professional study versus experimentation in a calm manner in his journal, he felt a great conflict about them. He felt like he was being torn in these two directions at the same time.

The Brandt's had not yet moved to the farm, Steward had learned in his letters from Mary, but they had completed the purchase of the farm and were in the process of moving. Mary had several times offered for

Steward to visit the farm and stay for as long as he wanted, and Steward assumed that the offer Mary extended had Matthew's approval, also, since she usually spoke for both of them.

From Mary, also, Steward had continued to obtain a broader view of the cultural changes taking place across the country. Mary still at times spoke of the "spirit of the times,"—the "zeitgeist,"—that seemed to be affecting so many people of the generation that had come to age during the still continuing war.

Steward had started sending off letters of inquiry to programs in clinical psychology that he found of interest. To prepare for the graduate record test in psychology, which he understood he would need to take for admission, he was studying a history of psychology using a textbook that the doctor on the ward had lent him.

To this history of psychology, Steward had added readings of his own choice, many suggested by interactions he had had in the ward. In his three months on Strong Street, he had read the *Essays* of Carl Jung and *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud. He had also read several books by Erik Erikson including *Childhood and Society*, *Gandhi's Truth*, and *Young Man Luther*, and books in the related area of the alternative philosophy including *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Estenada and *Through an Eastern Window* by Jack Huber.

The ideas he found in these books that he felt so compelled to investigate further,—and the related ideas, many having to do with Zen Buddhism and other Asian philosophies, that he encountered at work,—were more evidence of the zeitgeist that Mary Brandt had written about, Steward had come to believe. For, after beginning with the notion that these ideas were part of his own personal inquiry only, he had lately heard them mentioned all around. He sensed that not just for himself, but for much of American society, and especially for the sub-society of his generational peers, the mysterious reality of collective consciousness was moving in another great shift toward more individualized psychological, experiential examination. It was a shift similar to the shift from the "social change" emphasis of the early Movement to the "cultural change" emphasis of the latter Movement, Steward reflected, the shift he had discussed with Kristine and the Brandt's at the fireside in Morgantown. Or maybe the new emphasis on psychological, experiential examination that he was experiencing at the moment was not a change so much as just another facet of cultural change; it was cultural change brought down to an intensely personal level.

But another side of the zeitgeist, Steward thought, was the exploration of his peers that he also felt drawn to. He needed only to walk one block down to the Henry Hotel on Main Street to see evidence of that, —minibuses painted in psychedelic colors and other similar

vehicles identifiable as part of a general drifting of people his age in both directions along the highway, or longhairs hiking past with backpacks, sticking out their thumbs now and then as they looked for rides.

He felt in himself, also, the conflict that was tearing him apart had an added dimension of needing to break out in general,—break out in every conceivable direction, he hardly knew what the stirring was that he felt so strongly. There seemed to be so much waiting to be learned and experienced, so many friendships waiting to be realized, so many thoughts waiting to be expressed, but he felt contained and held back by his quiet personality.

"I'm continually involved in absorbing knowledge," he wrote, "but so terribly hesitant to lose myself in giving, reluctant to put out myself in words, music, emotion, or any creative activity. How do I overcome this hesitancy? This is a central and tremendously important obstacle for me right now."

Steward realized, also, that, to a great extent, the dynamic of his self-repression was related to his unresolved situation with his estranged wife. He felt that for the time being, though, he had no choice except to look for her letters and respond to them as honestly and caringly as possible, despite the other side of his ambivalence that he had also recognized, of his anger toward her.

Lately, she had written about possibly meeting a second time, in Santa Barbara again. He was waiting to hear from her on that, feeling that the meeting would lead to a breakthrough for him one way or another, either toward her and their mutual past or away from her toward the present elements of his life.

285. Steward visits Kristine in California; realizes there's no going back

On Thursday, March 24, 1971, Tom Steward received the letter from his estranged wife, Kristine, that he had been waiting for, finalizing the agreement that he and she would meet a second time in Santa Barbara. As a result of this letter, eight days later, early on the morning of Friday, April 2, Steward stood at the train station in Gallup, just down the block from his former residence, the Henry Hotel, watching the track for the arrival of the western-bound train.

As he waited for the train to arrive, Steward took out the letter from a side pocket of his orange backpack and read it once more, stopping at a paragraph that he had read many times.

"Tom, you probably don't even know how much I miss you at times," the paragraph went. "I know I don't communicate very well about it. But I do still love you and sometimes I just want so much to talk to you the way we used to. But I don't mean to mislead you. I guess the basic things, the basic needs, haven't changed."

Each time he read this paragraph, Steward imagined himself saying back to Kristine: "I love you, too." He had said this to her many times in his journal, as if addressing her directly. He had said it in his letters and on the phone. But he was aware, also, as he read these words written by his estranged wife, that often her statements of loving him had been punctuated with periods of non-communication. She had often promised to write and had not, and she often restated her need to be alone.

This whole idea of her loving him and missing him was, therefore, not so much a comfort for Steward, as a matter for continuing confusion and mental distress.

Soon he saw the head light of the train on the horizon, near where the dark gray lines of the tracks converged with the lighter gray lines of the main street highway. The sun was rising there, a red sphere in a pale blue sky above the angular silhouette of the low, flat roofs of the gas stations, motels, and restaurants that bordered the highway in that direction.

With his backpack slung over his left shoulder, Steward followed the approach of the train until he heard the rumbling and whining that he had come to love in his six months in Gallup.

"Heading for the beach, huh?" the conductor said when he took the ticket.

"Yes, for the weekend," Steward replied.

"Well, you have a good time, son."

"Thank you."

Steward headed at once for the observation car, where he planned to spend the entire trip. He would be in Santa Barbara by six that evening, according to the schedule, early enough for the long talk that he expected

would happen once he got there.

Despite some apprehension about that, he was excited about the trip itself. With interest he watched as the train rolled out from the station, following along the main street highway past the brick cityscape that had once seemed so alien to him but had become his home.

On the hill south of town he saw a familiar sight, a modern, four-story building, the largest building in Gallup. That was the Indian Health Service hospital, where he had been working as an aide in the psych ward. He could even see the tall windows of the community room in the center of the fourth floor where the daily morning meeting was held. Focusing on that, Steward reflected on the self-concept he had recently entertained of becoming a psychologist or psychiatrist, and the studies in psychology he was doing to prepare for the psychology board. He had potential to pursue such a future, Steward thought, though the highway stretching to the west, with the engine of the train moving toward it, in his view from the dome, reminded him of the wanderlust he felt, also, and of the power that he had felt it might have to pull him from any activity that would keep him anchored in one place.

As the train rolled past the west end of town, Steward noticed the road across the railroad track where he and Bill and O'Rourke had helped the Indian family push their truck out of the mud on his first trip west several years before.

That association brought Steward a pang of nostalgia for the old days with his former rowing teammate and hitchhiking partner Bill O'Rourke (whose death in Vietnam he was still not aware of). The pang of nostalgia was greater, however, for the days spent with Kristine as a view of a low butte just west of Gallup brought to mind a memory of an evening when he and Kristine had passed that butte on the way back to Winslow from a day in Gallup. He recalled that she had said: "Tom, we've gotten to feel at home here. Who'd have thought it would happen?"

Beyond that butte, as the train moved west, each landmark with its past associations deepened the feeling of nostalgia and brought out the continuing puzzlement Steward retained for how something so good as his marriage had been (as he saw it) could have deteriorated into such an irreparable division.

Sixty miles out from Gallup, at the town of St. Joseph, Steward recalled that he and Kris had stopped by a "cowboy museum" there to look at the collection of cowboy hats, saddles, and spurs. An hour later, when the train stopped at Winslow, he exited at the courtyard where he and Kris had had their last goodbye, and thought again of the last words she had said to him there: "I just want to be a person, too."

It occurred to Steward, as he traveled on, that he had spent the major

part of the past half year engrossed in the complications of his failed marriage. He had done his best, he thought, in the difficult role of supporting her emotionally in being independent from him. He was glad that he had done that. But the focus on the emotional difficulties of his own attempted supportive role, he reflected, had left him more and more disconnected from life around him,—in particular, from the potential friendships that he had not sought to develop beyond his interaction at work. With that, he thought again of the breakthrough that lately he had felt was so imminent, the stirring of change within him that he felt was gaining strength.

Flagstaff came next, with its memories of the band's concert there when Steward had waited around for his wife. Thinking of that, he recalled how humiliated he had felt by being ignored by her in front of her brother and his friends. Then came the descent into the desert and the desiccate span of the Mojave desert where the bearded, wild-eyed hitchhiker who had told the tales of longhairs at war with one another in the communes of Taos. Thinking of that, Steward recalled how Kris had moved closer to him on the seat when the hitchhiker was talking and of how he had felt then the responsibility of trying to protect her.

Then came L.A. where, in the vast sprawl of buildings, Steward saw no one building connected with his own past, exactly, though the sense was there of the eclectic, accidental menagerie of lifestyles and lives that he had seen nowhere else, and in the midst of which he had come upon the Don and Audrey Andrews', pool-centered world of thatch-fenced, ivy-leaved yard and sunny, coastal hills from which he had taken a young wife, as well as the other world of Tujunga Canyon eternal hipness in which, as he would soon learn, her parents had raised her with expectations of a life transacted in continual sunshine and unburdened with the boringness and boredom of ordinary people.

She was there waiting when the train drew near to the missionesque Santa Barbara station. He saw her at once, in a group of about 20 people, with her unmistakable, big-curled blonde hair. She was wearing a single-color navy blue silk dress with tufted shoulders and sleeves cut at mid-biceps, knee-length, and sleekly fitted on her breasts and hips. The look was simple and tasteful, and yet classic and sexy-looking, as she somehow managed to be in any outfit. She looked athletic and ready for hiking or running in her pump shoes, which were of the same navy blue color as the dress.

She smiled at him as he came down the steps from the train and hugged and kissed him warmly at once as she would have done in the best days of their marriage.

"Welcome to California!" she said. "I'm so glad to see you."

"I'm glad to see you."

"I've got a motel room. It's on the beach, kind of. I was thinking we can stop by with your things."

"Yes, I'd like that."

"Let's just have a nice time, Tom. I still care about you, and I know you care about me. So let's just have a nice time."

"Okay, Kris. Let's do that."

"We can have the big talks later."

"Sure. It's a deal."

"I've got Don and Audrey's car."

"Okay, let's go."

On that note, the visit started with a pleasant ride along the beach that had been so much a part of their early relationship. The motel was near the children's zoo where Steward had worked. The windows looked out to the ocean about a hundred yards away, on the other side of a side street bordered with palms.

"Well, do I get a hug?" Kris said when they had entered the room and close the door.

After that initial embrace, the estranged couple were locked in one another's arms for the next two hours. They made love as passionately as they had in the most romantic days of their past.

The walk along the beach later was romantic, too, and Steward began to think that this meeting might be the beginning of a new attempt on his and her part to live together. But, amidst all their talk about situations and friends of common interest, there was no talk at all about that, not even in the motel later where they spent the night cuddled together.

Then, the next morning, Kris said: "Tom, I've been thinking I want to be honest with you. You mean too much to me, you've been too nice to me, for me not to do that."

"And you haven't so far?"

"I've been only partly honest, Tom, out of a desire not to hurt you. That is really the true really. I have so many people prevailing on me, so many people asking me to decide one way or another."

"Like who?"

"Like David, for example. He has never given up on the idea of him and me living together."

"Have you ever done that?"

"Yes, Tom, briefly."

"When was that?"

"About two months after you and I split up, after I had just moved out of Don and Audrey's, when I got back from San Francisco."

Steward said nothing more in response to this but his reaction was such that it was obvious that it was a matter for him to accept nonchalantly.

"I'm sorry I've held back," she said softly.

"Who else is pressing on you?"

"I've had another affair, too, Tom. This producer I met, a divorcee, very handsome, you know, but 45. He was showing me what a nice life we could have if I came to live with him in Malibu."

"You stayed with him, too?"

"He invited me for a weekend. And I decided to do that. And it was a lovely weekend, I must confess."

Steward shook his head. He suddenly had a whole different sense of the situation. These experiments on her part accounted for the lapses in her communication with him.

But she had not been dishonest, he thought. He was aware of that, also. She had never promised to remain loyal to him sexually now that he and she had parted.

"I'm sorry if it bothers you," she said.

"No, that's okay, Kris. I know you have to try to figure out your life. I've known that all along."

"But it hurts you, doesn't it?"

"I don't know anymore what hurts me. It disturbs me, I guess. It makes me think I'm one among many. I don't understand why you even want to see me. I don't understand why you continue to say you love me."

She sighed. "Because the truth is, Tom, as the situation now stands, none comes close to what you've been. No one cares me about me like you do. And I don't really love anyone as much as I love you. I do love you. I know I keep saying it. Do you want me to stop saying it?"

"I want you to say how you really feel."

"Okay, well, there you have it then. I do love you. I do need you still at times. I cannot live with you or be exclusive with you. I trust you. I'm sorry."

"I love you, too," he said simply. "I guess I always have, Kris, from the day I sat beside you in the bus."

Steward could see in this at once that the role remaining for him was much as Mary Brandt, a year before, in Morgantown, West Virginia, had predicted might be in store for him. The role was to love Kristine while letting her go. The role was to love her no less for it, and to love her without bitterness over being left behind himself. The role was to love her while helping her let go of him.

Maybe in a lonelier setting such as the house back in Gallup, this insight about his having to help her let go of himself might have caused him distress, Steward thought, but at this moment, with the sunlit ocean extending as far as he could see under the vaulted sky, he felt relief in it, a liberation; and he realized that this person beside him was to him what

she had described him as being to her, a person whose love he could count on, for the time being, at least. Of course, the friendship would fade over time. There would be no way to stop that with them living in separate places, leading separate lives, meeting new people, and eventually, he assumed, falling in love with some other person.

She apparently also felt a similar kind of liberation combined with affection for him. He could tell it in her voice and gait, and in the way she walked beside him as naturally as he and she had walked together on the same beach two years before.

She talked again of her hope of becoming independent and successful as a music manager. He talked of his dreams of becoming a psychologist or a psychiatrist and of the conflict he felt between tying himself down in such an academic life and heading out to the highway.

"Well, you've always been a restless one," she remarked softly. "That's a lovely thing about you."

Later, traveling back to New Mexico on the train, Steward had a sense that he was entering a new phase in his life. The opening he had yearned for would now surely happen, he thought, though he was aware, also, that the path ahead was still far from defined.

286. Steward determines to break out of his self-imposed isolation

Tom Steward emerged from the train in Gallup with his mind in a whirl as he repeated once more and sought to clarify the same thoughts he had been thinking of in Santa Barbara, and on the train, and, as he was well aware, for the past several months. Surely, the era was over of Kris and him living together as a married couple, being together day and night, he voiced to himself again as he walked along Main Street with his orange backpack slung over his left shoulder. The future loomed ahead. He would need to face it,—initially, at least,—alone. He would need to break out of his isolation. Why could he not? There were potential friends all around, people on the ward who were already friends, kind of, why couldn't they be real friends? As for the future, the conflict he would face there, the decision he would have to make, he thought,—as again he had told himself many times,—was already in view. It would be a conflict between moving on a traditional path toward a profession such as a psychologist, as he had been thinking of doing, or moving on a non-conventional path toward the social and physical exploration of his peers, the looking for America of *Easy Rider*. For the time being, he could still study for the psychology graduate record, he could still take the test in May, as planned... So his mind went on.

Next day he was walking through the downtown section of Gallup when he saw a ten-speed yellow bike outside a shop with a "4 SALE" sign on it. The bike looked just like the one his brother Art had given him in Santa Barbara, the one he had rode down the coast highway when he had moved from Santa Barbara back to L.A. to be closer to his then-fiancée, Kristine. He bought the bike for ten dollars and rode it home.

He started riding the bike back and forth to work at the hospital on the hill south of Gallup. He still had the old boat of a car that he and Kris had bought in West Virginia and driven across country, but he left it parked on the street and seldom used it anymore.

Each morning, as he moved through the dappled sun and shade pattern on the pavement of the streets that led to the hospital, Steward recalled the similar patterns on the streets of Santa Barbara leading down the long slope from the mission to his work site of that time, the children's zoo, and he felt again the wonderful sense of freedom, of life opening up to infinite possibilities, that he had felt in those days before he was married, two years before.

He soon found himself, also, breaking out to the friendships he had exhorted himself to pursue. How it all happened, he didn't know. It just all of a sudden did.

First person he befriended was Eddie Yazzie, the social worker on the ward, the one who spoke English and Navajo fluently and who therefore

led the daily meetings.

Steward was walking through downtown Gallup on a Saturday morning when Yazzie came past in his Ford pickup and stopped at curbside to chat with Steward through the open window.

"Hey, man, I'm just going out to Rock Spring, where I live. Want to come along for a ride," Yazzie ventured in his odd vernacular, which was hip collegiate in vocabulary and yet retained a Navajo accent, reminding that Navajo not English was his first language. "I'll be coming right back in to town here. I just got to pick up some things."

"Sure," said Steward. "I'd like to."

Steward thus found himself transported into the midst of the Indian culture that he had made contact with obliquely from many perspectives in the past ten months, going all the way back to the Indian boarding school in Winslow, but had never experienced firsthand.

The Navajo part of Eddie Yazzie's bicultural world was just ten miles north of Gallup, where a rutted, narrow dirt road led down from the main paved road into a flat basin surrounded by low cliffs of red rocks dotted by scrubs. There, in a grove of aspens at the far end of the ridge of low cliffs, was an eight-sided, round-domed mud and log structure that Steward recognized as an old-fashioned hogan. Further into the woods was a single-floor ranch style house with no porch or external buildings.

"I live in the house," Eddie explained. "My grandma and mother live in the hogan. The hogan is what they prefer. It's cooler in summer. And warmer in winter, too. It's really a very comfortable dwelling."

In the ward, where Yazzie and Steward interacted during the work day, Yazzie had often been confrontational or sarcastic in his remarks, referring to Steward and other people of European descent as "beleganas" (the Navajo word for whites). But, on this particular day, he seemed eager to lay the foundation for a friendship. He was soft-spoken and thoughtful as he showed Steward around.

The hogan was more pleasant and commodious on the inside than its primitive appearance on the outside suggested. The dirt floor was swept clean. A large rug of the type woven by local women, hung from the roof timbers, separated off an area on one side to serve as a bedroom. The hogan had electric lights, as well as a TV, a refrigerator, and a washing machine. There was running water, too, at a single sink on one side.

"The water gravity feeds from a barrel up on the side of the hill," Yazzie explained. "Every couple of weeks or so we bring in a new one, and take out the old one to refill it."

Yazzie's mother was not present. The grandmother smiled and nodded when her grandson introduced her and translated what he had said into Navajo for her.

"Please to meet you," she said in English.

Yazzie's house, on the interior had just a couch and a TV in the main room and no wall hangings of any kind. There were books scattered here and there. They appeared to be text books from his college classes.

"I don't spend much time here. I just sleep here. I spend most of my time in the hogan when I'm here."

Later Yazzie and Steward went for a walk up through the basin toward the northern boundary of the ring of cliffs. Yazzie talked about pressure he felt to be a leader.

"People just expect it of me," he said.

"I've noticed that," Steward replied. "Everyone has respect for you. When you talk, they listen."

"Well, I'm the only one on the staff who speaks Navajo," Yazzie answered with a smile.

"Yes, but it's more than that."

"It sounds like it's such an honor, I know," Yazzie went on. "But there's some young people here, people I knew in college, they want me to be more angry, more assertive, you know. I guess they're what you bellaganas would call radicals."

"And you feel this pressure then?"

"Oh, yes. Because, odd as it might seem, all the demonstrations and marches you bellaganas have been doing have had an effect out here, also, especially among these young Navajos. But there are certain people, you know, who think I should stay as I am, that I'm meant to be a tribal leader, maybe even chairman, so I should conduct myself with dignity, without going to extremes."

"They want you to be more conservative."

"Yes."

"You're torn between the two sides."

"Yes."

"Well, I can understand how it must be a burden on you," Steward said."

Yazzie talked more about his family and background, also. His father had been a "singer,"—"kind of a medicine man," as he explained it. So there had been that connection for him with the old Navajo culture from his boyhood. He had attended many ceremonies as a boy, he said, and had heard many of the old stories. "Like see those pinyon trees on the side of the ridge there," he said, "how most of them are in a little clump, then they kind of scatter out, and there's one or two way out there by themselves?"

"Yes."

"Well, the story is they will die from 'chi-en-nah,'" Yazzie said. "'Chi-en-nah'" is loneliness. They die because they're separated from their people. We have many little stories of this kind."

Steward thought about that as he continued in his efforts to bring an end to his own loneliness in Gallup, and he took his journal out of the drawer where he had buried it under his clothes, to write down this story before he buried the journal under the clothes again.

Next person Steward visited was Louis Landers, the dark, push broom mustached fellow aide who looked like a labor leader that had jumped out of an old photo of the Sacco and Vanzetti era.

Landers and Steward had talked one day about Lander's vegetarian diet, and Landers had then offered to show Steward his store of beans, grains, and nuts.

For this visit, Steward rode on his bike down Strong Street past his former home, the Henry Hotel, and from there across the main street highway, across the railroad tracks, through the bulldozed swath of bare dirt where the freeway was to be built, and up a low hill to the Mexican neighborhood where Landers lived.

This was a different scene, indeed, from the neat yards on the other side of the tracks. The setting was more rural. There were wooden fences around many of the yards with chickens and even some pigs running in the yards and many little children shouting to one another in a mix of English and Spanish.

Here, in Lander's big, clean house, with its polished wood floors and kitchen cabinets painted in a purple gloss, Steward came upon another cultural hybrid that he found as perplexing as Eddie Yazzie with his blend of Navajo and bellagana culture. Landers was from the East Coast, but not from the Brahmin class, or even the middle class. His father was a chauffeur, a fact that Landers explained he was ashamed of, since his father had been, in effect, a servant, not an independent man. Landers had attended a year of college, but he had felt out of place. He had hitched west by himself and had wound up in Gallup. He had applied for a job in a psych ward after seeing an ad in the paper, and the job had suited his native philosophical frame of mind. But he had no ambitions to be a psychologist or any kind of professional.

"I like what I'm doing. I make enough to get by. I like Gallup," he said. "I don't see any advantage to getting a degree."

Landry was not a conventional person, surely, and yet neither was he an activist or hippie or any of the familiar types of the time. He had been carried along by the same winds somehow, while keeping to his own unique sense of what he should be. That was the only way Steward could explain it to himself.

Steward also accepted an invitation from the ward nurse, Catherine Brown, the one who, as Steward had learned, lived with her husband, Brian, a former VISTA volunteer, 20 miles east of Gallup, in the little town of Thoreau, situated exactly on the Continental Divide.

He headed out right after work, at 3:30 P.M., pumping hard on his yellow bike as he traveled along the frontage road next to the highway up the long hill to the higher elevation of Thoreau, which, at 6500 feet, was 1500 feet higher than Gallup. He was glad for the exercise, in the spring sun, and glad for the expansive view of the surrounding high mesa country with its vast open spans, distant buttes, and craggy canyons, demarked by late afternoon shadows.

Thoughts moved through his mind, presenting the familiar juxtaposition of his dream of moving through graduate school to a professional life, on the one hand, and the attraction, on the other, of openness such as this that he felt pulling him toward the restless odyssey of his generational peers. He could feel the pull as he rode, hardly knowing where it pulled to or for what reason.

Thoreau (pronounced Tha-roo, as Steward recalled) turned out to be not even a town, as might have been ordinarily thought of, with a cluster of buildings, but simply a bridge, at the highest elevation, passing over the new freeway, with a service station on the south side of the freeway, a cement block building with two pumps and a red and blue "Standard" sign, and with, on the north side, a two-story, box-frame house and a warehouse building with no sign.

The single house was the Brown's house, obviously, since it was the only house in sight and also a blue and green school bus with a peace sign was parked in the yard. That was the school bus, Steward recalled, that the former fellow VISTA volunteers of the Brian Brown had driven around the country in before coming to a halt of indefinite duration in this unlikely location.

Pulling up in the front yard on his bike, Steward was immediately enthusiastically greeted by the usually more underplaying Catherine Brown who came out to welcome him and show him in.

"All the way from Gallup on a bike! You must be in pretty good shape, Tom!"

"Kind of, I guess, I ride it a lot," Steward replied in his diffident manner.

Indoors, Steward soon met the others where they were reclined on a couch and the floor, listening to music, a familiar female voice. Brian was clean-shaven with short hair, but with wire rim glasses suggesting he was the intellectual type, much like his wife, who dressed plainly and wore wire-rimmed glasses. Trisha, wife of the bus couple, was a petite blonde, extremely quiet in manner. Terry, the husband, was heavyset and brooding in appearance, with dark shaggy hair.

The singer was Joan Baez, Steward noticed, intimate of Bob Dylan, darling of the Movement, and married to David Harris, an imprisoned draft resistor, but she was not singing a protest song of that earlier era.

The album, lying on the coffee table, was titled *One Day at a Time*, and the song she was singing had the same message: "Yesterday's gone, tomorrow is blind. I live one day at a time."

Steward watched his new acquaintances as they interacted with one another in their soft voices. These were again people, Steward observed, that seemed related in lifestyle and attitude to people and ideas he had known in the preceding years, much on the order of his estranged wife's brother's band, but they were not radical confrontive mode of the past or flamboyant like the band. They were a newer type still. He hardly knew what to make of it. "The times were a changin," he thought; he could almost feel the change happening.

A pleasant evening followed. Spaghetti and wine, but no grass. More soft, hopeful music. Gentle-voiced conversation about possibilities for the future, and not in general but in how these four people would fashion their lives. Trisha and Terry were looking for land. Catherine would keep working as a nurse while Brian learned to a be a welder. The building on the other side of the road was a welding shop that did piece work and he had been offered a job.

Steward attempted to join the conversation, feeling suddenly out of sync with the others in talking about his present plan to study for the grad record and enter into a grad school clinical psychology program.

"Well, I guess I can see that, in a way," the brooding welder to be Terry said as he sipped on a cup of wine. "I know you got to make your own decisions. I just think for myself you know what does that accomplish when people are in psych wards because life is general is so fucked up in this country and then to help with that you become part of what is wrong, with the competition, and so you just perpetuate the problem that makes people crazy. This is what we grew up with. This is what caused the war. Why not make a break with it? Why not lead a sane life?"

Steward didn't know what to say in response to this. He realized he couldn't defend his ambitions. Later, as he looked around, he noticed a book with a ornate blue mandala on the cover and the title *Remember, Be Here Now*. He opened it and came upon a statement of two sentence length: "The goal is not to become something. The goal is to become nothing."

Early the next morning, Steward headed back to Gallup on his yellow bike, coasting down the long hill as the sunlight transfigured the rock formations of the mesa country all around him. To be nothing, he thought, would be to simply live day by day, as the song suggested. But to become nothing would also require having no ambition at all. It made sense on the level of existential pureness, maybe, but as an approach to the real world of occupations and requirements it made no sense at all.

This was another case of his peers throwing to the wind everything held to before, Steward observed to himself. Eddie Yazzie and Lou Landers, and the four he had visited the previous evening, were rejecting the traditions they had grown up because of this willingness to discard the past; and he himself was caught up in it, also, bringing the conflict between tradition and experimentation that he had lately felt.

[Chapter 286 notes]

287. Morris attends a therapy session with social worker Gary Hansard

Jim Morris walked into the room to which he had been directed and found awaiting him there a man in a tan uniform shirt and black tie with the tie slid down slightly and the top button of the shirt open. The man was middle-aged (just of what age it was impossible to determine within a decade on either side of 50). He had a bored, impassive face, and watched Morris approach with eyes of a blue color that seemed diluted as if rendered in water color.

Morris did not know, but this man was the same social worker that Tom Steward had talked to during his orientation at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington, the man who had been partly responsible for Steward's decision to quit the Air Force ROTC program that he had been enrolled in at that time (in summer of 1967).

"'Major James Morris,' I believe your rank and name are," the man said as he rose and extended his hand. "I am Maj. Gary Hansard, or Dr. Hansard, if you prefer. Can I get you anything? I have coffee or tea."

"No, I'm fine," Morris replied.

"Then have a seat, sir. Make yourself comfortable."

Thank you."

"Now, Major Morris, I understand you have been directed, asked, to participate in this therapy by your commanding officer. Is that correct?" the impassive social worker inquired, settling into a large leather chair with a yellow legal pad on his lap and a pen in his right hand.

"Yes, that's true."

"And, for yourself, would you be inclined to do this?"

"I don't think so."

"You're doing it because you were requested?"

"Yes."

"And do you feel trapped or angry about being here?"

"No."

"You're okay with being here?"

"Yes."

Gary Hansard stopped at that juncture to take a sip of coffee. He looked uncomfortable as he sat, as if his pants were too tight around the waist. There was nothing in his face to suggest any true interest in the questions he was asking or any genuine regard for Morris.

"How do you feel being back in the States?" he asked, drawing or writing something on the yellow pad.

Morris looked at the page to which the pad was open, which to him appeared upside down. At the top was his name, written as "Maj Jm Morris." Below that was a single scrawled word that he could not read.

"I can't really say," Morris answered after a pause. "I guess I don't

know."

"Do you like it back here?"

"I guess it's alright. I don't know."

"Well, Major Morris, let's try to look into this a little bit. You had some rough times over there, as I understand from the referral from your commanding officer. You flew almost a hundred missions. You were shot down. You were a prisoner of war. You escaped. That's quite a story, Major."

"I suppose so. Yes."

"You must have seen some people die."

Morris didn't answer. He thought at once of his buddy Tom Pitt and the boy Soutsada.

"Is that correct?" the social worker persisted.

"Yes, correct."

"Well, it must be a great relief to you to be away from all that, to have made it out of captivity, to have left all of that behind."

Again, Morris didn't answer.

"Is that correct?"

"You would think so. Yes."

"Do you feel that sense of relief, sir?"

"Maybe to some extent."

"But not beyond that. It's not a great sense of relief?"

"No, it is not."

"And how is that, sir?"

The weary pilot struggled to express himself, feeling himself to be mentally immersed in something that fogged him in as in a haze.

"Well, let me ask you this, sir," Hansard continued, "is there anything you do feel?"

"I feel a bad feeling like I felt over there," Morris replied. "And I know the reason for the feeling is no longer here, but I still feel the bad feeling."

"And why do you think that is?"

"I don't know. Seems like I brought back the bad places," Morris said. "Apparently."

"You brought back the bad places, how?"

"I brought back the feeling of them."

"And how is that. Can you try to explain?"

"What I mean, doc, I go out riding around here, to different places around here, like I used to know..."

"Different from what?"

"Different from the bad places over there."

"From overseas? Vietnam?"

"Yes. From Thailand, Laos."

"You were in Thailand and Laos mostly?"

"Yes."

"And you know these places you see now are different from that, you were saying. Please go on."

"I know they're different. They look different. They are different. But they don't feel different."

"They feel the same as the places overseas?"

"Yes."

"The bad places."

"Yes, the feeling I have about them is bad."

Hansard stopped and wrote down something in his yellow legal pad.

He rearranged himself on the seat, tugged at his belt as if in discomfort, and looked back at Morris with his diluted eyes.

"And what does the badness consist of?" he said.

"The badness is feeling how I did in war, in combat, killing people sometimes, seeing people I killed or people who got killed, feeling how I did when I was by myself."

"In the POW camp?"

"Yes. In the cave."

"You were imprisoned in a cave?"

"Yes."

"That was in Sam Neua, Major?"

"Yes."

"I've heard about those conditions. I've heard they were extremely harsh, extremely difficult."

Having not been asked a direct question, in this last interaction, Morris said nothing in reply. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and rubbed his eyes with his fingers.

"And how about your wife?" the doctor asked.

"How about her, what?"

"How do you feel about her?"

"I feel about her that she's a good woman," Morris said, struggling with his thoughts. "But somehow I can't make her seem real to me. I feel separate from her."

"I saw her in the waiting room with you, I think. That woman with you, is that your wife?"

"Yes." Morris replied. Ellen had accompanied him to the waiting room, but had left to walk the short distance home by herself, so as to allow him to have time by himself after seeing the doctor.

"She's a beautiful woman."

"Yes, she is."

"You don't look at her and see she's beautiful?"

"Yes, I do see it, doctor. But I don't feel like it's real."

"What do you feel?"

"I feel the bad places. Everywhere I am."

"Even with her?"

"Yes, even with her."

The doctor got up and went to his window and stood there with his stomach hanging out above his belt. He had the look of a man who lacked physical discipline, a man who had gotten used to the lack of it, though apparently not entirely judging by his tugging at his waistline.

"Maj. Morris, for now what I would suggest to you, is when you are home and feel this bad feeling, try to relax completely, try to visualize what you were before you went over there, and then tell yourself in plain words, 'I'm back now to what I was before the war. That bad part of me is gone. That bad feeling is gone. This is my reality now, this place here, my wife. I have a future here. The bad things are gone."

"Yes, doctor, I'll try."

"And I'm going to request our physician here to prescribe some medicine for you, major, that will help you to relax. You can get that downstairs on your way out. It is just a formality for me to get his approval."

"Thank you. Yes."

Morris went out, glad to be away from the social worker. He had already decided he would not go back. If the bad feeling could go away, as Hansard had said, that it would go away, Morris thought. If the medicine would help, then it would help. There was no reason to go back to talk any more about it.

His mind, as he drove home, was in a whirl caused by the resurgence of memories of his war experience brought about by the therapy session. He pushed them away though he knew they would return.

He was passing near the trailhead of the walking trail where he had often gone with Ellen, just after his and her marriage. Looking up toward it, he could see that the ridge was covered with the new growth of spring, verdant green with some flowers yet retaining also the rich browns and reds of the desert landscape that made the ridge seem like an outswelling of the sculpted rocks and crags of the desert that stretched all around. A beautiful landscape, surely, he thought to himself, but he did not really feel the beauty as he had once felt it in the early days with Ellen. He just felt the war feeling that he had described in his therapy session. War feeling, that's what it was, he hadn't been aware of it as that, exactly, until he had sought a way to describe it.

Looking back over the session, he thought to himself that he hadn't expressed the crucial issue between him and Ellen that he felt more than the war even, and this was that Ellen no longer looked up to him and admired him as she once had. Of course, she loved him. She had made

that clear by repeating it over and over again, though up until the present time, strangely, the love had never taken the form of sexual interaction as it had in the former days. She had sought to make that happen, he knew, he had not allowed it to happen.

"It's my fault," he said out loud.

An image of his wife rose up in his mind at that, and he thought of how she had come into the bedroom just the night before in white lingerie with red hearts. He had pretended to be asleep. He could not continue at that for long. Why was he holding himself back? He hardly had a sense of himself as a sexual creature anymore. He had not even touched himself for a long time, he knew not how long.

Ellen was waiting for him in a chair by the window when he came it, with her lovely chestnut hair splendid in the sunlight, her shapely form softly rounded beneath the fresh, perfumed clothes that she always wore. On this occasion, she wore a white blouse with a light blue skirt and a blue linen scarf.

He could see how beautiful she was, he told himself. For a moment he remembered how desirous of her he had been in the past, before he had gone overseas, and how eagerly she had pulled him in, how she had reacted like a coiled spring to his every touch, as if the pleasure of it was almost too much a bear.

"How did it go?" she said, rising when she saw him.

"It went fine."

"Did it help you?"

"Maybe."

"Well, see you're making progress."

"I suppose so," he said.

Inside he felt that he had made no progress at all, or perhaps had slipped some, in his mental recovery, in bringing back the war again more strongly into his thoughts. It was there in a general way all the times, but he had managed to keep the particulars at a distance.

"Well, we should celebrate then! Remember that place we used to go to, out by the reservoir?"

"On the cliffside there, by Lake Mead."

"How about we celebrate? Could you go for it, Jimmy?"

"I suppose so. Yes."

"We can go this evening," she said.

"What should we do now then."

"Oh, I don't know. Just rest."

As he spoke, he felt the contrast between the youth and energy of his voice and the age and lack of vigor in his own voice. He roused himself up immediately, however, and went to the bathroom to take a shower and dress. Coming out, he saw she was waiting on the bed.

“Jimmy, let’s make love,” she said. “I want so much to make love to you. I dreamed about it when you were gone.”

“And the me you saw, was it as I am now?” he said.

“Oh, no, Jim. But you know what, I look at your gray hair and your thin body,—and it’s already not so thin as it was, you know,—and I think what a hero you were for all you bore.”

“I didn’t have a choice,” he said.

“You still endured it.”

He came over and lay down beside her and took her into his arm as he once had done, conscious all the time of his pelvic region to sense if an erection was beginning. He met her lips and tried to kiss her as he had once done, but he could not believe, as he kissed her, that she wanted to kiss him back.

“Ellen, I’m sorry,” he said.

“No need to be sorry, hon,” she replied. “Let me just hold you. I know you hurt so much.”

It was such a tender gesture on her part, he knew, but he felt the humiliation of being held like a child instead of holding her to protect her as he had in the past.

[Chapter 287 notes}

288. Morris confronts impotence and a growing sense of war guilt

Following this first sexual failure, understood and forgiven though it was by his wife, in her tenderness toward him, Jim Morris commenced a period marked by a succession of small failures of a similar kind, each bringing a new level of humiliation and a new level of powerlessness at preventing the demise of the position of pride and competence that he had previously enjoyed in his marriage.

Ellen, in an almost angelic manner, with a sweet voice and beatific countenance, sought to reassure him that she did not regard his problems as indicating weakness of any kind. In Morris's mind, however, that was the greatest humiliation: to have to accept,—and not only to accept but to need,—her reassurance. He could see the love in her eyes, surely, but not the look of being truly attracted to him physically and truly trusting in his self-confidence that he had once seen in her eyes and wanted so much to see there again.

Soon upon this, also, Morris learned about the abortion that Ellen had obtained two years before, after returning from his and her vacation in Bangkok, Thailand.

Ellen did not disclose the abortion with a show of spitefulness or with a hint of criticism of any kind, but rather as an illustration of the extent to which she was willing,—and had been willing,—to allow her love of him to overpower her own wishes.

"I wanted that baby, Jimmy," she said softly. "I wanted that baby so much! But you told me how important it was to you to not have the possibility of leaving behind another baby without a father, as you were. So I went against my own inclinations."

"Well, it was meant to be, I suppose," the major replied.

This was a new trend for him, to respond in this fatalistic manner, and he was aware that the effect on his wife was to confuse and discourage her. Even so, he could not prevent himself from bringing this dispirited attitude into his conversations with her, which, with each passing day, were becoming more flat and desultory.

With himself, in his inner dialogues, Morris was no less gloomy. He had settled on the notion that he bore some guilt for the horrors of the war. He criticized himself in his thoughts for every conceivable reason, real and imaginary, connected with his conduct in the war; and he thought often of the *New York Times* picture of the Mylai slaughter, the similar pictures shown to him by Maj. Xuan Than, and the image that remained in his mind of the dead bodies he had walked amidst on the morning of his escape from the village of Ban Hatbay.

Morris tried at times to defend himself, as before a jury; but he had found that he had an inner prosecutor as well as a defender, and that the

prosecutor was more passionate and persuasive in presenting the case. The case was not for outright guilt, Morris knew. The case was for guilt through complicity, guilt for having allowed himself to be a cog in the machinery of destruction.

None of this inner dialogue, however, did Morris share with Ellen. He never talked about the war, and he never talked with her in any detail regarding the abortion of the fetus that he felt surely, without factual basis, would have been his son. He did, indeed, regard it as fate, or as poetic justice of some kind, that he had lost his son through his own petition while participating in the war.

"How many sons have I killed?" he remarked at times to himself out loud. "I didn't see them, but I killed them."

It pained him grievously to feel himself descending thus into his private world of recriminations while his lovely, hopeful wife went about in a great effort to shore up their collective life against these forces that clearly she did not understand.

Ellen had made arrangements for him, Morris had become aware, in increments, from the time he and she had been reunited. Using her easy access on the base, where she was well liked, she had talked to people, starting with spouses of persons in positions of authority, and going from them to the persons of authority themselves, from whom she had obtained ideas of various kinds for her husband's rehabilitation and for his reestablishment as a working officer again.

She had written to her sister, Mary Brandt:

"I couldn't care less about this as far as my own status goes, or as far as advancing in any way to better financial state, or a different base, or anything like that. I only care about this because I can see that it's so very important to Jimmy to feel competent and normal again. I just think if he gets a little ray of hope, he will try again.

"I used to feel I had so much influence over him, Mary, I would say something and I could see what a difference it made in what he did. Now I just feel so powerless, I feel like I'm such a bad wife."

Mary wrote back at once:

"You are a good wife. In your beauty, you're a treasure. Then, in your actions, Ellen, I know I've never told you this, but you're just as sweet as can be. You're like the honey of the Bible.

"As to the practical matter, what can you do to help your husband, you have to accept, Ellen, Jim is under a great burden, coming from the experiences he has had. From what you've told about him, I see him as someone who is trying to break out of a haze almost. I think for him the air of the war, the fog of the war, as they say, has still not cleared. Maybe all you can do is wait."

Ellen came up with three ideas for her husband as the result of her

inquiries on his behalf. The first idea was for him to try therapy again with a new doctor. She presented this idea to him herself. The other two ideas, opportunities to be an assistant training instructor, she passed on to her husband's commanding officer, who was among the many from whom she had gained a sympathetic ear. He promised to present the ideas to Morris at the appropriate time.

Morris refused at once the idea of trying therapy again. He said he had gained nothing from the first experience.

"The man had no understanding of war," he said. "I doubt that any of them would, really."

"But why is that necessary, Jim?" Ellen countered. "A problem is a problem. They're just helping you to figure out the problem, as you see it. They're helping you to sort out your thoughts."

"I don't want their help," he said with a final tone. "I'll sort out my thoughts for myself."

The other two ideas Ellen had come up Morris did consider since they came to him by way of his commander.

"This will be a good thing for you, Jim," the commander said. "It'll get you thinking, at least, on what you can do."

"Yes, sir. I'll try," Morris replied.

"I don't mean to put pressure on you," the commander went on. "Any time you need, Jim, you take it. We all owe a great debt to you for what you went through. You're entitled to as much rest as you need."

"Thank you."

"I just think it might help you to get a direction again, to feel yourself on the move."

"Thank you."

Both of these appointments Morris looked forward to with misgiving, however. Though he never mentioned it to anyone, he felt that he had not returned to a normal state of mind. He still felt the feeling of the war, wherever he went, whatever he did. His feeling of guilt for the war had increased with each mention of it he saw on the television news and with each item he read in the newspaper about the war.

The first training opportunity was with a program to prepare newly trained pilots for being held as captives, if the situation ever happened to them. From the explanation given Morris, he understood it as a program similar to the one he had participated in himself before going overseas, the one during which he had realized for the first time that he was in love with the then Ellen Kass.

The meeting, in a building overlooking an airfield familiar to Morris from his F-105 training three years before, went smoothly at first. as Morris, thin and gray in his blue uniform, listened to the instructor, who, at the rank of captain, was one rank below him. When the instructor

began making statements indicating the deal was arranged, however, Morris began backing off.

"I'm afraid I can't go ahead with this, Captain. I'm sorry," he said suddenly, breaking the flow of the interaction.

"And why is that, sir?" the instructor inquired.

"I don't see really what I would have to offer. I'm not an instructor. I've never been trained."

"What do you have to offer?" the instructor said, straightening up. "Sir, if I might..."

"Yes, of course."

"What you went through, sir, is a scary prospect for anyone to contemplate, and you did it, that's a thing of great value for these men to see and hear about, how you can go through a thing like this, and come out like you did, how you can conquer this kind of experience."

"Did I, though?" Morris remarked, and the slate blue eyes, once noted for their keenness, looked so weary at this moment that the inner confusion could not be ignored.

"Well, of course, you did," the other replied, but a raising of the eyelids suggested an altered assessment.

"I merely endured it, sir," Morris said. "I don't know what I can say about it, or want to say about it, beyond that."

"Well, you think about it. We'll both think about whether we could make this work."

"I will, sir."

Morris understood, as he walked away, that he would not be offered the position, though that conclusion had not been said on either side. He felt relieved to have been spared the duty of, in any fashion, going back into the world from which he felt he had not yet fully escaped.

Next prospect for which his name had been put forth, by those seeking his rehabilitation, was as an assistant teacher of fighter jet combat techniques, the presumption being, again without being said, that he was not in a condition to take the entire class into hand himself, that the most that could be expected of him was to stand by and give tips or anecdotal accounts, if asked for.

"Morris, you did nearly a hundred missions, I see," said the officer that Morris reported to, as told. In this case, the man was a full colonel, so the deference (of addressing the other as "sir" and so on) went in the opposite direction.

"Yes, sir," Morris replied, simply.

"Went down on number 98."

"Yes, sir."

"Bet that burned your ass pretty good, getting that close and being deprived of it."

"Yes, sir, it did."

"Then you had two years, I heard, in captivity. Deprived of your well deserved return to home. Or delayed in it pretty bad."

"Yes, sir."

"That was me, I'd 'a been burned pretty bad about that one, too."

"Yes, sir."

The officer sat down on the edge of his desk, clasped his hands in front of him, and looked at Morris squarely.

"Well, a man like you, Morris, you've got something a fair piece of them do not. You've been there. You're the real thing."

"Thank you."

Morris walked away from this second appointment, also, feeling that nothing would materialize on account of it. Privately, he had decided, in his own mind, that he could never again participate in the machinations of war, either in his own actions or in preparing other men to engage in the actions. He had begun to look beyond the Air Force to the other world of ordinary people, though he could see nothing there, also, that he felt he could do or wanted to do.

"Well, did you tell them you think you could do it, you think you could work yourself up to it?" Ellen said when Morris reported to his wife the result of the second meeting.

"No, I didn't. I'm sorry," Morris replied.

"What's going to happen to you, Jimmy? What's going to happen to us? You seem to have lost all your spirit!"

Ellen was agitated as she said this, Morris observed. Always before she had been positive about everything he did. As he looked at her, he felt his head swimming, he felt he could hardly stand.

"Ellen, if I have, I'm sorry," he said.

"I know it's been hard for you, Jimmy. But you got to start bucking yourself up. You got to fight your way back."

"Yes. I know."

"Can you do that for me, Jim? Can you do it for what we can still be together?"

"I hope so. I'll try."

"Look at me, Jim! It's me, Ellie! I love you!"

"Yes, I know you do. And I'm glad."

"Do you love me, too?"

"Yes, I do."

"I know it's been hard for you," she repeated. "I know it's hard now. And it's hard for me, too. We got to fight through this together, to get our life back."

"I know."

Several times they went through this, in several days' times, and it

seemed to Morris that his devoted wife was winding him through it like a pump being primed, trying to work up enough pressure to bring out the life in him with the strong flow it had previously had. But each time she did this and he responded in what he sensed she regarded as an inadequate manner, he felt more defeated and more unable to rally his spirits in reply to her exhortations.

289. Morris visits his dying mother then visits Ellwood Erland's son

In mid-April of 1971, James Morris went on a trip by himself, first by plane to Minnesota to see his mother, and then by rental car to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to visit the 14-year-old son of Ellwood Erland, his fellow prisoner of war in Laos, thereby fulfilling the promise Morris had made to Erland just before Erland's death.

Morris and his wife Ellen had discussed whether she would accompany him on this trip, in one of their troubled discussions at this time, as he and she struggled to return their marriage to the state it had been in prior to his assignment overseas. They had settled on the mutual decision that getting away for a while would maybe help Morris to obtain a fresh perspective on his problems in making the transition from soldier and captive to a man with no mission or constraints.

Morris understood, though, as he departed, that Ellen needed the time away from him as much as he did from her, because clearly, day by day, her strength and patience were being exhausted. Lately, she and he had had angry interchanges for the first time in the entire history of their four-year relationship.

Morris considered this as he recognized the blue line below him as the Platte River and the gray line running next to it as a new interstate freeway. Then came a city that he identified as Omaha, Nebraska, a wider blue line that he identified as the Missouri River, and a city on the east side of it that he knew was Council Bluffs, Iowa, where he had once had a romantic meal with his wife when she had still been Ellen Kass. She was still the real focus of his thoughts, as central to his existence as she had already been then, he acknowledged to himself.

Morris acknowledged to himself, also, at this time, that his relationship with Ellen was undergoing a rapid deterioration. Ellen, the love of his life, how could he allow this deterioration to happen? Was there not something he could do to prevent it?

"What is wrong with me?" he said out loud at one point, and several passengers looked at him and studied him carefully.

Later, the stewardess stopped by. Apparently someone had alerted her that something was amiss.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Yes, of course," he replied.

Morris had learned that he was capable, in this manner, of masking his inner turmoil. More and more, in interactions with others, he relied on this shell while images and memories of the war continued inside of his mind. He was aware, also, of the connection between this shell of normalcy and the "inner home" he had clung to in Sam Neua,—aware that the inner home had somehow been turned inside out.

Morris no longer deliberately thought of the inner home, however. He had banished it from his mind. He had accepted that any hope he had for a good future life with Ellen would depend on his ability to separate from the past. Even so, in his own estimation, he had made little progress. It seemed that, in trying to expel the memories and images of the war, he had shattered them into pieces that still continued inside of him, adding to the feeling of the war that he could not get rid of, either.

In Minneapolis, Morris left the airport in a rental car and drove across the West Seventh Street bridge to St. Paul, where he followed the river boulevard toward the St. Paul downtown.

From a bend near the concrete span of the new freeway bridge, he saw the turn-around point that he and his rowing team mates had rowed to in practice sessions, the place where the coxswain, Bill O'Rourke, had often delivered an exhortation before bringing the crew back down the river to the boathouse.

Bill O'Rourke, Morris thought, where was he now? He didn't know yet that O'Rourke had died in Vietnam. Where were the other people from that period? He went through them in his mind, coming to the general conclusion that they had somehow found their way to a normal life whereas he himself had not. As for the old scene around him, everything seemed unreal and distant. He realized, indeed, that he felt the same dullness as he had felt on the helicopter ride from Khe Sanh to Phu Bai, a few days after being found and picked up in Laos during the Lam Son 719 operation. Much had changed since then in his physical surroundings, he noted, but the dullness had not changed.

"I just can't connect," he said out loud.

He did not turn at the base of the High Bridge, however, to ascend to the neighborhood on top of the bluffs on the other side of the bridge, where he knew there would be an obvious place for connection, amidst the landmarks once so dear to him, the landmarks that his mother had revealed to him, for the first time at age 25, had been dear to his father, also. He recalled how, on the evening of that revelation, on the slope above the bridge, he had noticed the effect of his mother's sickness in the veins visible in the taut skin of her face.

He recalled how she had refused to answer his question about how many months in total she had actually physically lived with his father before his death.

There were more familiar sights as Morris continued along the river past the bluff supporting the downtown buildings of St. Paul. The familiar railroad tracks were there, alongside the road. Above him, just ahead, was the Wabasha Street Bridge. There, on its island, on the other side of the river, was the familiar stucco exterior of the boat club, with the ramp leading down to the long dock on which Morris had stood

launching or docking a shell after practice and races.

From these landmarks, too, the former combat pilot and prisoner of war felt disconnected, he observed to himself. He tried to engender within himself the old feelings, but he could not.

The hospital came next, after a turn under a railroad bridge and a one mile drive through the quaint buildings of the St. Paul downtown. He parked there, at the three-story building occupying an entire city block, and went in.

His mother, Jane Morris, was sitting in a chair, dressed in a blue robe with slippers on her feet, when he looked into the room.

"Figured you'd be here sometime today, so I thought I'd try to make a good appearance," she said with a smile.

"It's been a long time, Mom," he said, coming forward to hug her.

"I can't tell you, Jim, how I've hoped and prayed for you since you went down," his mother said.

There was much to talk about, over the next few hours, as Morris took note of his mother's condition. He had observed at once that her hair was gray, not dyed brown as it had been the last time he had seen her. She looked older, thinner, and weaker. Morris had talked with the oncologist before coming in the room. From him, he had hears for himself what Ellen had told him, that his mother had a life expectancy of at most a year. That dire prospect never came up in his conversation with her at the moment, however. Even so, those facts were assumed to be known and acknowledged by him and his mother in their tangential remarks.

"I'm sorry to see you like this," he said in the remark that came closest to a direct exchange on the subject.

"You know, Jim, in a situation like this you have a lot of time to prepare your mind," she replied. "Everyone dies but not with such sure progress, such known progress."

"Still I'm sorry to see it," he said.

Later she returned again to the subject as if she had been waiting for the right moment to do so. "I think at times about how your dad died when he was only 26," she said. "I've lived many years since then, and I'm so grateful for the years I had as your mother when you were little. You were such a precious child."

"Thank you."

"That's why it hurts me so much to see you as you are."

"And how is that?"

"I can see in your eyes, Jim, that something is gone. They've taken it from you. Your spirit. Your hope. And now I'm hoping and praying that you will get it back."

He realized that the topic of his own rehabilitation and adjustment

since returning from the war was what she had been aiming to get to, but it struck him as a futile enterprise on her part. “I’m not sure I can get it back,” he responded. “Whatever I had is gone. Whatever I connected to before, I just can’t anymore.”

“But, Jimmy, Jimmy,” she replied softly. “You have to break through for yourself and Ellen!”

He sighed. “Well, I intend to try.”

“Jim, you can’t just try,” she persisted. “You have to resolve that absolutely you will do it. Connect with yourself, Jim, with the noble man who went to war to do good for his country! I can see that in your face, and I can see your dad in your face, too.”

The plea left Morris more confounded than resolved, however. Even as his mother spoke, he felt the dullness and the feeling of the war all around him.

He left that evening without stopping by the old house. He headed directly south down I-35 toward the intersection with I-80, which went west across southern Minnesota to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the home of Ellwood Erland’s estranged wife and son Dylan.

Despite the six hours spent with his mother, Morris reflected as he drove, many issues had not been raised. His mother had not asked him how come he and Ellen had remained in Las Vegas, why they had not returned to St. Paul to live in the Morris family house, which was available for use with his mother not using it. He had not said to his mother what he might have said regarding Las Vegas, he noted to himself, that all his hopes were there for a future in the Air Force, hopes he was well aware he had unable to proceed toward. He had not said that in Las Vegas, in the air base there, was the one place he could do nothing,—fail,—without being noticed. He had not said that he did not want to return to Minnesota because living so close to home would reveal the troubles he and Ellen were having in their marriage.

Morris thought about that, also,—the trouble that he and Ellen were having,—as he drove through the newly planted fields. The season was different, but the setting was similar to the one he and Ellen had experienced together on their drive back to Las Vegas from Minnesota after attending Matt and Mary Brandt’s wedding, on the trip across country that had ended at the marriage chapel just outside of Las Vegas where Morris and Ellen had gotten married.

At Sioux Falls, Morris wearily exited the freeway and signed in at the first motel he found there, next to an airport where all through the night, intermittently, he heard the sound of plane engines. Next morning, he drove one mile south to the little eight-square-block downtown of brick buildings, beside a bend of the Sioux River. Crossing a river there to a hill south of the town, from which the falls for which the town was

named could be seen to the northwest, he found the two-story, box-frame house, somewhat shabby in appearance, to which he had been directed in a phone call the previous night.

"I appreciate that you're allowing me to talk to the boy," Morris said when Anita Erland came to the door.

She was not the glamorous type Morris had expected to see from the one story he had heard about her, from his fellow prisoner, that she had had an affair, years before, that had ended the marriage. She was thin and looked worn down. The "other father" that POW Erland had told Morris about was apparently no longer around. Anita Erland lived alone with her son, Morris observed, and barely managed to eke out an existence, judging by the look of the rooms.

"Al and I had a lot of differences," she said, "but I think I owe him this much at least."

"Is there anything I can tell you about the circumstances where I knew him, anything you want to know?" Morris asked.

"How did he die?"

"He couldn't pee," Morris replied. "It got worse and worse until it was clear he would die without medical treatment. The soldiers noticed it and killed him. They just didn't want to be bothered."

"I'm sorry to hear he had to go that way."

"He never complained about it. He was only concerned that I would deliver this message to his son."

"Was Ellwood tortured, too?"

"Not when I was with him. But he said he had been, in the place he had been prior to meeting me."

"Sorry to hear that, too."

"There's one matter I have to clear with you."

What's that?"

"Ellwood told me to tell his son he tried to keep in touch with him and you prevented it."

Mrs. Erland considered before answering. "Well, that's true," she said softly. "And, looking back now, I see it wasn't right. You can tell Dylan that. I told him myself already."

"Okay. Thanks."

In a room to which he was directed, with sports pennants and a pair of antler horns on the wall, Morris found Ellwood Erland's long-haired 14- year-old son sitting quietly on his bed with his legs crossed and looking toward the door expectantly. A folding chair was already in place beside the bed for Morris to sit down on.

"Dylan, I'm Major James Morris of the United States Air Force," Morris said.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," the boy answered.

"The reason I'm here is at your father's request," Morris began, and he proceeded to describe the circumstances again along the lines he had just told the mother.

"Your father realized he was going to be killed," Morris said. "He called me over and told me there was a favor he wanted to ask me for, and that was for me to tell you he was a good soldier, that he tried to keep in touch with you, he loved you very much."

The boy listened without speaking. A single tear appeared in the corner of one eye. "He was a good soldier, but what good was that?" he said. "He went his whole life without knowing my mother and me. He could have maybe fixed things if he had hung around."

"I don't know about that," Morris said. "I just can tell you he was a good soldier and he asked me to tell you he loved you."

"You can see your good soldiers now on the TV," the boy said. "Just the other night. 'Vietnam Veterans Against the War.' Marching in D.C. They had some of them on. They were saying, the war was a lie, people died for a mistake."

"I don't know about that, either," Morris answered. He rose from the chair, feeling large in the small room. A slanting roof brought the ceiling down to less than shoulder height on one side, along the wall by the bed where the boy was sitting.

"I appreciate you came all this way to talk to me," the boy said, rising also and extending his hand.

"It was the least I could do for your dad, least I can do for you. If he fell short, Dylan, I hope you'll forgive him."

Back on the highway, Morris drove west through country such as he and Ellen had traveled through together three years before, beleaguered by memories of the war, as the odd, tortured images that had long been with him passed through his mind: the killed pig at Puerto Penasco, the soldier at Khe Sanh with blood running down his neck, the panicked looks of the women and children in his collateral fire mishap. At times, he felt himself being slung around again in the cockpit of his plane. Outside the car window, the small towns and prairie vistas passing by remained unreal and distant. The dullness and feeling of the war stayed around him.

"They were saying, the war was a lie, people died for a mistake," he heard Dylan Erland saying.

Fragments came back to the returned pilot, also, of recent talks with his wife marked by a general tone of stress and disappointment on both sides.

At a rest stop above the Missouri River, Morris walked out to look at the river below, winding past the town of Chambers. Beyond the river, the openness of the West stretched out to the horizon. Once he had felt so

inspired by such a view, he thought. Once he had shared that feeling with Ellen. “Ellen, the love of my life!” he said to himself again. He was losing her, surely. What could he do?

[Chapter 289 notes]

290. Woodstock Family (and Kelly) move to their collective, Cranston Farm

Monday, April 24, 1971, was a momentous day for the five friends in Washington D.C. who had long since come to regard themselves as a family, a "Woodstock family," as they sometimes called it. It was the day of their common move from their households in D.C. to the farm in Canterbury, New Hampshire, that they had bought together.

The five of them,—Matthew and Mary Brandt, Darren Houghten, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue,—stood beside their four vehicles in the alley behind Houghten's apartment as Houghten brought out his final cardboard box of belongings. Playing nearby were the women's children: Dylan Larue, just turned 10 years old; his sister, Mandy, 7; Angela Martin, 8; and her brother Matthew, 4, also called "Little Matt" or "Little Dog" since he was jokingly referred to as a little version of the older Matt, who still had the nickname "Bomb Dog" or "Big Dog" from the dog cadre days in Kentucky. Dennis Kelly, from those days, also, the sixth adult member of the group, was driving up directly from Kentucky to New Hampshire, and would meet them at the farm. The four other members, invited in for financial reasons at the last moment, would move to the farm at the end of the school year, in early June.

The addition of these last four, who were not intimate with anyone in the core group, or, for that matter, with one another, had reduced the intensity of conviction expressed in group meetings, though the core group had continued to profess to one another that they really were a family and that "Cranston Farm" (as they called it, after the current owner) would be their shared home for the rest of their lives. They still held their weekly family suppers started just after the Woodstock concert.

Darren and Matthew headed the caravan in Darren's yellow Volkswagen minibus. Gail came next in her similar but older VW minibus which, except for its slipping clutch plate, was in good condition. For the time being, the four children were all riding together with her. Last came Mary in the Brandt's' newly bought 1958 Ford pickup truck. With her was Jane, who had no vehicle of her own.

The severance with D.C. was not yet complete for everyone. Jane and Gail would hold on to their D.C. apartments for another couple of months, until the farm worked out as planned. Matt and Mary, Darren, and Dennis, however, were leaving not a trace behind of their old existence. Most of their belongings had been moved in the preceding weeks. Gladys Cranston had allowed use of the outbuildings for storing items.

"I've been thinking about that little green tractor," Brandt said as they crossed the Keys bridge and merged with the traffic on the new Beltway freeway. "I'm so glad that came with the deal."

The tractor was a two-cylinder, 44-horse-power John Deere 70 the Cranston's had bought new in 1955 for $2800. Mrs. Cranston claimed it had never been left out a single night without being covered. It had a dual- wheel front end and a rear three-point hitch for implements such as the planter Houghten had mentioned (which was in good shape and stored in the shed). The tractor had a power-take-off that could be attached to a drive belt for a radial saw. The group had agreed to work together to clear the maple woods of any fallen trees that would be in the way when gathering sap. The plan was to saw up and stack the wood for heating the boiler when the sap was boiled down. The farm's reputation for maple sugar was one reason why the group had found the farm so attractive to buy.

"And not only the tractor but the planter, too!" Houghten remarked in his crisp, British-like accent (which, by this time, everyone knew was not his natural accent, from his family in Concord, and yet he persisted in it). "Seeds galore! Oh, won't you be the happy one!"

"I'm serious about this, Darren," Brandt replied.

"Oh, don't we all know! The working farm! Well, Matthew, I can only tell you again, you will have my full support as a beast of burden."

Of this, Brandt had no doubt. After more than two years of being close friends with Houghten, Brandt knew that the bearded director of seminars was good for his word. He also knew that Houghten would oblige to the extent he was able because Houghten didn't like having people around him in disagreement with one another and would try to establish harmony amidst his collaborators in any enterprise.

Just at the last group supper, in fact, Houghten had played such a role in prompting the group into a discussion about what each one expected from the farm. Much like a marriage counselor, Brandt had thought, trying to prepare the participant for any possible sources of discord. Brandt had once been through such a kind of counseling himself, involuntarily, before his own marriage.

The discussion initiated by Houghten had not turned up much beyond what everyone knew, however. Matthew himself had said what he had already stated a number of times, that he wanted the farm to a genuine farm with a genuine farm-based income. Houghten had talked about combining the honest work of the farm (which, again, he had asserted he fully intended to do,) with forms of artistic expression he had been thinking about,—poetry, art, and so on. He still hoped to build a loft eventually in an apex of the barn. Jane and Gail had talked about the appeal of raising their kids away from the city, in a more peaceful setting. Mary had talked about how she wanted to grow beyond her intellectual basis to a more physical life where she worked with her hands and made real contact with soil and living things, the kind of contact she had

experienced in Cuba.

Despite all the expressions of personal hopes and grandiose ideals, Matthew was not feeling good about the venture, however, certainly not as good as he had hoped to feel considering that everyone else was in high spirits about it.

Much of his unease about the project, he knew, related to Mary. The reason she was riding in another vehicle at the moment was because Mary's talk about Cuba, expressed before the group, had led to a private argument later between Mary and him.

As the van headed out of D.C., the words of that argument resounded in his mind. She apparently didn't realize, he had said, that she would be leaving the farm at a time, in early June, when the most important work of setting up and organizing the activities and work of the farm would be being established. She apparently didn't understand, he had said, that, by her own definition of the farm as a "cooperative alternative to less human" forms of work, her involvement on a farm that she would partly own herself, in her own country, was of more importance,—so far as her ideals, as she stated them, were concerned,—than what she could do in Cuba, a foreign country, planting trees (as her Venceremos group was planning to do). Trees, he had said, would be of far less significance in the economy of Cuba than developing true cooperatives would be in the economy of America.

Matthew recalled, also, Mary's response and his own. She had merely repeated, in her calm, reasonable voice, what she had told him before: that she thought it was important to support the Cuban revolution, if only symbolically, and important to foster international solidarity between workers; otherwise, work would become a smaller and smaller circle without a sense of participating in the work of others. As usual, she had held her position with complete equanimity, while he had lost his temper and had gone stomping off, feeling that he had lost both in the verbal exchange and in personal control.

He was losing control, he acknowledged to himself, or always on the verge of it, feeling lately torn in competing directions and not wholly satisfied with any. He had not smoked grass again since giving it up. He had no sense that he would ever take it up again. He had thrown it off with some of the phony, self-indulgent aspects of those in his and Mary's circle of acquaintances that he had come to despise with their fancy words (such as Mary sometimes threw around, also) and self-importance (he could not accuse her of that, however). Yes, the grass was a thing of the past. He thought of that with satisfaction. But lately he had begun to drink a lot. Just beer. But he drank whenever he felt at the boiling point, and lately that had been quite often.

As for Mary, Matthew thought, as the van approached the New Jersey

cities east of New York City, the whole thing was a mess,—his and her so-called "relationship"—where once it had been so simple. He still loved her. There could be no doubt about that. He still liked being around he. No doubt about that, either. And lately he found her amusing in her seriousness as she set about becoming the more physical person that she felt she would have to be on the farm. On the few preparatory trips the group had made recently to set the farm in order, with Mrs. Cranston's permission, Mary had shown herself to be afraid of the dank places in the outbuildings. She didn't like bugs and things that crawled around. He had not joked about it, as he once would have. She was too sensitive about male versus female differences to appreciate that kind of humor.

Yes, she could be amusing, Matthew thought, he still loved her, but the whole thing was still a mess. Half the time he was angry with her. She seldom got angry in return but he could tell she was displeased with him. Lately, also, he had found himself more aware of Gail Martin and he could sense Gail felt an attraction back. That was all he need to start up some romantic complication at the farm. He had cautioned himself not to do that. But what did Mary expect anyhow, leaving him alone with Gail in a situation where he would be brushing shoulders with Gail in the course of a normal day's activities?

So Matthew's thoughts went on as he looked out at the flat-roofed, immense factories and warehouses of the New Jersey seaboard, with their long rows of parked cars of workers. Looking off toward that, he recalled a discussion on a previous trip with this same group, all at that time in the same vehicle, about how important it was for them all to break from such a corporately organized life ("the world of the Organization Man," Houghten had called it) to a new, more humane organization of labor in which people worked on something they owned themselves.

Later, when the George Washington Bridge, spanning the Hudson River between New York and Connecticut, brought the by-this-time-familiar, but still majestic, view of the Manhattan skyline, followed by the farms and about moving back from the present and all of its problems into the past,-- "in order," as Matthew recalled Dennis had said on that same occasion, "to catch the past at a point before American society overall turned in a wrong direction." To that, as Matthew recalled, Houghten has responded, "and not to reject the present but to realign it with the ideals of the American past..."

Fine words, Matthew thought to himself. If only he could believe in them as wholeheartedly as the others in this group seemed to do. He was aware, however, that the doubts that had lately entered into his thoughts about the whole enterprise had not been abated. If anything, the doubts grew stronger each time he heard the fine words repeated. There had been such fine words all along, he observed, from Mary and the others,

and now he was being carried along into this "communal farm" in the same way that he was being carried along in his and Mary's relationship, not satisfied but unable to change it to what he would have preferred.

Matthew thought of his parents and grandparents on the farm back in Minnesota. Had they not worked together? Had they not worked in a circle small enough to know of their neighbors' efforts and to come to their aid when needed? Maybe that kind of spirit was his friends were talking about when they expressed the idea of going back to the American past to connect with what had been good in it and carry it into the present. But why not simply go back to what the past had been? Go back to the family farm, go back to simple work. Thus far, the whole business had been talk, talk, talk. Maybe he was just getting old, he thought. He had been amidst the fine talk and experiments too long.

The physical work of the farm would maybe save him, Matthew thought as he looked out to the open fields around him. He worried, though, about the "other four" that would join the farm in six weeks. Would they join into the work of the farm smoothly? The final arrangements involving them had been conducted too quickly, he feared. He had not sensed that they were serious about the work of the farm.

At the turnoff from I-93 to the riverside brick downtown buildings of Concord, six hours later, the transition seemed complete. Just across the bridge, on the east side of the Merrimac River, the countryside began. Then, within a half hour, they were in the village center of Canterbury, the nearest village to the farm. The paved road ended soon after that and the road ascended slightly toward an apple tree on one side of a pasture. That was the first sight of the land the group had just bought. The road curved after that and the main buildings came into view.

First to meet the eye were the plank-walled buildings composing the sugar works, with their sap tanks behind them and the wood piled neatly in front of them that was used to fuel the stoves for boiling out the syrup. Then came a view of the three stalls of the slant roofed open shed, just up the road from the sugar works, then the dark blue barn and the light blue farmhouse on the other side of the road. The house had an open front porch all the way across its ground floor, two side by side windows on the second floor above the porch, and a smaller attic window in the apex of the A-frame roof.

In the lower area of the pasture below the house was the flock of black-faced, white-wooled sheep that had come with the farm, amidst which were them several new lambs. Mrs. Cranston had warned that the flock had not been cared for well since her husband's death (as the sheep had been his responsibility wholly), but the lambs, she said would "pretty much come of their own accord."

"Well, she was right about the lambs," Matthew remarked as the

caravan drew near. He was by this time traveling in the pickup with Mary. Jane Larue and her children had transferred to Houghten's van. He and Mary had reconciled at the last filling station.

"Oh, that's so neat! The kids will love it!" Mary replied.

From behind the Cranston's old flatbed truck, parked near the same area of the pasture, a lean figure appeared with a characteristic forward tilt of his head suggesting someone lost in thought. It was Dennis Kelly, dressed neatly in blue jeans and a tan work shirt.

"Beat ya, I guess," said the former Mountain Volunteer turned shoe factory shop steward, and then he stood waiting in his clumsy, persistent manner, seeming lost for words, as the five adults and four children piled from the vehicles.

"Well, enjoy it, Dennis," said Brandt, "because it may be a while before it happens again."

"You kids better come look at these lambs. They're still in need of names," Kelly returned, ignoring the mock challenge.

The kids were already on their way over, with the largest one, Dylan, pushing back the others to get the first position.

"Guess it's a good omen" said Mary.

"A new birth, a new beginning for us all," Kelly added.

Fortunately, there were four lambs, one for each child to name, so there was no argument on that score.

"I want this little one," said Dylan's little sister, Mandy. "Can I have this little one?"

"He's not going to be just yours!" said Dylan.

"Well, I get to name him!"

"What you gonna name him then?"

"Flower."

"Haw! Flower's no name for a sheep!"

"It could be," Jane Larue, the petite, red-headed mother threw in in her soft, soft voice. "I like Flower, really."

The two children of the other mother, Gail, had stood by this whole time quietly, in their polite manner, waiting to be told which lamb would be theirs to name.

Before the group had even ventured into the house, the lambs were all named. Dylan's was Bruiser (the only ram). The others were Daisy (named by Angela) and Doughnut (named by little Matthew).

Damn good omen, Dennis repeated as they all went in for their first meal together in the house, and Matthew voiced agreement with that, but he was glad to get off by himself after supper for a look at the tractor in the shed. He stood there, beer in hand, as he and his father and brother had done in old times, looking out from the shed to the fields.

[Chapter 290 notes]

291. New Cranston Farm owners work and scheme in happy accord

The next morning at 7 o'clock sharp, the adult members of the group gathered in the dining room again, at the large plain wood table, to plan out their first day of work together.

"Witness, Mathew!" Darren Houghten pronounced with mock solemnity. "Let the cry go to the heavens! I am here!"

The bearded director of seminars had managed to get his clothes on, but he did not look like a person used to rising early in the morning and he had only to come 30 feet to join in the meeting, as he was the only person whose bedroom was on the first floor of the farmhouse. Matthew Brandt and Dennis Kelly were living up in a stand of pines on the side of the hill, in their sturdy, eight-sided canvas yurt, which Matthew had set up for them both the week before. Mary Brandt and Gail Martin were on the second floor, in the two bedrooms side by side that had windows facing out from the front of the house toward the barn. Jane Larue, by her own wish, was in the small, partially completed room in the attic. The four children were all on the second floor (and still asleep at the time being), with the two non-sister girls in one room and the two non-brother boys in another room. Both of these rooms had windows facing the tall oak tree in the backyard and the unoccupied guest house behind it.

Brandt headed out to the kitchen, which was in the back, behind the dining room, and returned with a cup of coffee and a roll for Houghten.

"Darren, my beast of burden, the least I can do."

"So you know then how dearly it hurts me to be up at this hour."

"Yes, Darren, I can see the pain in your face. Wait until you start on the garden, though. I hope it won't break you."

"Perhaps you underestimate my capacity, my friend."

"Yes, perhaps."

The most pressing task for the farm as a collective enterprise, the group decided, was to begin boiling down the maple sap currently stored in three 100-gallon tanks in the two "sugarworks" buildings located on the other side of the road from the house.

"How about if we work on the syrup this morning?" Mary proposed. "Everyone except Matthew. Then, Matte, you can plow up the garden, and we can all go over there after lunch. It will split up our day, and tomorrow we can divide ourselves up according to who likes to do what."

"I know already I'd like to go back to bed," Darren said.

"That is not an option."

"Mary, Mary, I can see the slave driver coming out in you! I hope you have a quality of mercy, also."

With the schedule for the day ahead agreed upon, the group headed

across the dirt road after breakfast, chatting pleasantly and joking. It was a beautiful, crisp morning with the sun shining through the branches of the backyard oak tree above the roof of the house.

The Cranston farm was set up for the old method of collecting sap from buckets hung from hollow metal tubes. The group had arranged for Mrs. Cranston to hire someone to do that, as it had to be done in early spring when temperatures dropped below freezing at night and rose above freezing in the day. The person who had been hired to collect the sap was an older single man who lived just up the road. He went by the "Stumphand" Moore because he was missing all of his fingers on one hand from a boyhood accident with an ax.

Moore, a laconic New Englander of the solitary type, had been by a few times to check on the progress of the farm. He had a sugar works of his own and a spare ten-acre field that he had offered to rent, which Matthew had expressed interest in at once.

Together the group went into the boiling room of the sugarworks and listened as Mary explained what she had learned from Mrs. Cranston.

"This is a fairly straightforward process," Mary said. "You got the tanks, where the sap is. You got these big cookie pans,—'evaporator pans,' they call them. And, see if they have these spouts on one end to drain out the syrup into jars when it's done. Then, of course, you got these big old stoves."

"They're wood stoves?" Jane Larue asked in almost a whisper. "Yes, wood stoves."

"There's a whole pile of wood outside there, half a cord or so," said Matt, who had come along for the introduction. "Tomorrow, maybe, we can hook up the saw to the tractor, and saw some more."

"That ol' John Deere will rip through it pretty fast," Dennis Kelly threw in with an appreciative nod.

"Well, not to be sexist, but I think you big guys can handle the wood part, for the time being."

"I going to do some of the wood, too," said Mary. "You guys aren't going to have all the fun."

"How much sap is this going to make, you think?" Gail asked with a nod toward the tanks.

"Would you believe it, about six gallons," Mary replied.

"Six gallons from 300 gallons!"

"Yes, it boils down something like 50 to 1."

"Well, six gallons of syrup, that's what, six times four times two, 48 pints," said Dennis. "And the pints are getting something like ten bucks each."

"Well, there you go, 480 dollars!" Gail chimed.

"Yes, and there's a lot more sap, potentially. A lot of the trees are not

being tapped," Mary ventured.

"We could make maybe a thousand dollars," said Gail.

"Yes, you would think so," said Dennis.

"We could maybe make other things, too, crafts and things, and sell them in a syrup shop," added the red-haired Jane softly.

"There you go, Janie! The woman is thinking!" Darren exclaimed.

The petite redhead, with her gentle voice and unassertive manner was always in the back of the others somewhat, both in her actual physical position, by her own selection, and in the conversation, seemingly, as her comments were seldom more than an echolike assent. Only when something was of extreme importance to her did she move to the center of the group, and then only to the extent required. She did this most in matters affecting her children. At times, she did it with respect to Darren Houghten, whom she pushed off from her, again both physically and in attitude, when he pressed too close (as she saw it), which he was inclined to do.

This dynamic between Darren and Jane, which the group had observed for as long as they had been together, was so familiar that it was hardly noticed anymore. Even Darren accepted it as the normal state of affairs, though everyone knew that he was in love with Jane and hoped to become more important to her.

In a lighthearted mood, the group fired up the big black stove, set an evaporator pan on top of it, and poured into the long pan one bucket of watery colorless sap drawn from a nearby tank. The roar of an engine came across from the three-stall open shed where the long-haired, bearded Matthew, looking like an Amish farmer intent on the day's task, was hitching a plow to the three-point hitch on the back of the shiny green tractor.

The four children soon emerged from the house in a burst of energy and clamor of voices. They were not arguing, everyone was relieved to observe. For the time being, at least, they were acting like well-behaved school children on their way out to recess together.

By lunch the group had filled two pint jars with syrup. On the jars they placed the "Canterbury Farm" labels, which, with the permission on Mrs. Cranston, they planned to use.

"Stumphand" Moore passed by in his truck at this time and, seeing them all inside the sugar shed, he stopped and looked in.

"Well, not so much, but it's a start," Gail remarked in her unfailingly cheerful, hearty voice.

"Oh, you'll get better at it," said Moore, standing stolidly with his hands in his overall pockets.

The group had learned that a comment of this length was the most that ever came out of him and, as usual, he did not stay long after seeing

that everything was coming along as expected.

At Mary's invitation, the group then went up to the nearby building that she was converting into a cabin for her own use. The plan agreed on by all was that Mary would move into this cabin when she returned from her upcoming trip to Cuba, freeing the bedroom that she currently occupied in the house. One of the children would then move it, probably Dylan, who at 12 was seven years older than his current roommate, little Matthew.

Dylan was a constant problem. He disobeyed his mother and would not listen at all to the other adults. For the time being, at the request of his mother, he had been appointed to oversee care of the lambs and given instruction that he was to pass on to the other children. The object was, of course, to forestall any inclination he might have to become a further problem due to lack of duties and position. Even so, as the adults worked, Dylan could now and then be heard through the open door, yelling at the younger children as he gave them orders.

Mary had already started cleaning out the rectangular inside of her future cabin, which was as plain as could be with four walls made of pine planks. It had a door and window on one of the long sides, facing toward the road and the house, two windows on the other long side, across from the door, and one window on each of the short sides. All of the windows were of the exact same size.

A long work bench on of the short sides would serve as a desk, Mary explained. She would shorten the legs to bring the surface lower. Her bed would be on the wall across from the desk by the window there. She would have chairs and a coffee table in the middle of the room and bookshelves on the wall by her desk. A wood stove would be her source of heat. She would eat her meals in the house.

It was not hard for the group to imagine the interior of the cabin as Mary would make it. It would be an austere setting, as might serve for a monk, but she would have feminine improvements here and there: flowery curtains and ornaments made of dried plants.

No one begrudged Mary for the separate quarters. She was liked by everyone in the group for her integrity in pursuing a life based on her philosophical beliefs.

"We'll have to fix up the lighting better, Mary," Matthew ventured when he came in as the group stood in the cabin. "We can put in a little fuse box. Hey, Dennis?"

"Sure."

Upon returning to the house, the group went around together to look at the other rooms and make a list of needed items. Gail at the moment had only a mattress on the floor in her room on the second floor. They would look for a second hand bed and someone would go over in the

flatbed truck to carry it back. The kids were in need of laundry baskets. For the time being, they were all in bunks, though Dylan was complaining that he was too old to sleep on a bunk.

Every room in the house had the quaint look of the old farm house, with their carved window wells and door frames, but Jane's attic room was the quaintest of all. It was set into the bare rafters on the east side of the house, only about seven feet tall at the center beam, and with plywood walls coming down from the rafters on either side. A single window facing the oak tree in the back yard provided a bird's eye view of the gray roof of the long low guest house behind the house. Visible between a cleft in the branches of the oak tree was the 20-acre field that formed the east border of the Cranston farm. For furniture, she had a small desk and a single bed set against the north wall, with large pillows propped up to allow the bed to also serve as a couch. On the other wall was a large print of a Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Candles were set about and colored beads hung on strings from the ceiling. On a shelf were her books on the occult, magic, fairy tales, and para-psychic phenomena.

She showed the room to the others with her usual self-deprecation, looking like a fairy tale creature herself with her red hair awry from the windy walk across from the sugar works to the house.

"I think in fall it will be beautiful here in the evening," she said in almost a whisper. "With leaves falling down and the fields all brown. The corn, you know..."

The words would have been poetic, except for the rise of the voice at the end from her lack of confidence. She seemed often like this, giving an impression of having much more inside of her than her diffidence would allow her to express. She had some vaguely defined artistic ambitions, also, that she revealed in detail to no one.

Houghten had told her once, in front of the group, that she was "a case of 'diffidence faltered' a la Pound." She had replied in her soft voice, "Yes, I know, but I still have my words inside."

At lunch, soon later, there was more talk of assignment of tasks, as a result of which Gail took first charge of the meals, which she wanted to do) and Jane took first charge of the sugar works, mentioning again her idea for a shop. That left the sheep and garden, which Mary asked for; the general farmwork, assigned to Matthew and Dennis; and the paperwork and finances, assigned to Darren.

"We will share in everything, though," Gail pointed out. "This is just so someone is figuring out the details and arranging help from the others."

The common work began again after a break of about an hour, with everyone reporting outside to the garden that Matthew had plowed just a

few hours before. Mary had already made a pen sketch of the garden in her notebook with pictures of tomatoes, corn, peppers, cabbage, potatoes, and so on, for the various parts and with a scarecrow on one side below the heading, “CRANSTON FARM GARDEN” printed in her neat block letters.

To everyone’s amusement, Houghten showed up on the scene in new big coveralls that he had just bought.

“So where’s the straw hat?” Matthew asked.

“Next trip to town, I plan to address that, my friend,” Darren replied.

Houghten proved to be more than show. All afternoon, he continued up and down the rows, steadying himself with his crutch as he bent bending over to press the seeds into the ground at the precise depth indicated on the back of the seed packs.

That evening at supper, Gail pronounced what the whole group was thinking. “Well, I think this day showed how we can work together. For my part, I even had fun.”

“And I did, too,” Darren replied, “though now my nice new overalls are dirty.”

That evening Matthew and Dennis, harking back to the old days in Kentucky, wound up in the shed together, drinking beers. They had downed a couple each when Darren Houghten hobbled out of the house.

“Goddam it, Houghten,” called Matthew, “get your ass over here!” “I’m being impressed into service, you mean?” Darren laughed, as he spun on his good leg in their direction.

“Goddam right! You gonna live on this farm, you better learn to chug a beer!” Matthew insisted.

“I’m afraid, in my day, Matthew, I’ve already chugged a few, as you know, and a few too many.—Or maybe not quite ‘chugged,’ but indulged. Along with my other vices.”

“Yea, but have you indulged in a shed?” said Dennis.

“No, this is the first, I concede.”

Later, on an impulse, Matthew led his Dennis and Darren over to the barn where they turned on the rafter lights and stood with their beers looking up toward the hay window in the apex of the west wall.

“Darren, I figure if we put the sheep on the east wall and keep the hay more on the west side, that can be a good place up there for the loft you were talking about before.”

“You mean, much as you despise the whole business, you’re going to help me?”

“I don’t despise it, Darren. I like that part of you.”

“I do, too,” Dennis threw in.

“We can look around tomorrow for some wood. I saw some boards up in the rafters in the shed.”

The bearded director of seminars was so moved by this gesture of friendship and acceptance that tears came to his eyes. He looked to the side, as if examining a bale of hay, so as not to be discovered in his show of emotion.

292. Mary takes charge of the sheep and assesses flock health

With the tasks at the farm having been assigned, Mary Brandt took charge of the ten sheep and four lambs and began to assess what needed to be done, a task she resolved to complete before the departure date for her second Venceremos trip to Cuba, on May 15.

As part of her assessment, she soon noticed that one of the sheep was coughing. Taking that as an indication that the health of the flock was in jeopardy, she defined flock health as her first objective.

"What do you do if a sheep has a cold?" she asked Stumphand Moore when the good neighbor stopped by coincidentally a few days after she noticed the condition.

"Which sheep is that?" asked Moore.

"One of the rams, the one the kids call Berry."

"Show him to me," said Moore.

Berry presented in the barnyard with front legs widely planted as if to maintain his balance. On seeing them, he bowed his head, ready to charge. Looking at them from that posture with dull, sullen eyes, he coughed with a rattling sound like a human with a bad chest cold.

"That ain't a cold," said Moore. "The ram's got worms."

"Worms?"

"Yes."

"You mean, like real worms?"

"Yes, ma'am. Inside."

Mary contemplated that for a moment with her hands in her jeans and her dark hair blowing in wisps across her forehead, above the trademark Kass family straight eyebrows.

"Ick!" she said, wrinkling up her nose.

Moore laughed at that. "Mary," he said, "if you're squeamish now, you ain't meant to be a farmer."

Mary accepted that as a just admonishment, nodding humbly in the manner of a good student, as in fact she had always been in school. She did not like the idea of being squeamish.

"What do you do about the worms?" she asked.

"You give him a pill."

"What kind of pill?"

"Big ol' pill like a horse pill. You can get it at the farm store there in town. You need a tube, too, plastic tube you use to cram it down."

"He won't take it by himself?"

"He does now, we'll put him in the circus."

Later Mary saw the ram cough up what appeared to be phlegm. She went over to look at the discharge on the concrete area behind the barn. There were white worms in the midst of the snotlike fluid, wriggling around.

"Ick!" she exclaimed again.

She went to look for grain and uncovered a barrel to find the grain rotting and covered with black bugs. She slammed the cover down on the barrel and went over to the pump to wash her hands.

"Berry the ram has worms," she told Matthew when he returned from plowing the 20 acre field south of the house. The other members of the group, including children, had all gone to the movies in Concord.

"Yea, I was aware of that," Matthew replied. "I noticed it last night when I set out the grain."

"How come you didn't mention it?"

"Didn't think to."

She wondered to herself how he could not have thought to mention a situation as horrible as worms. Apparently, he had a more matter of fact attitude about it.

"I don't know what's worse," she remarked, "worms or bugs."

"Where are the bugs?"

"In that wood barrel by the grain."

"I've been meaning to burn that," he said. "I'll do it tonight."

"I went to town and got some worm pills."

"Gonna shove 'em down his throat, huh?"

"Precisely."

"Let me know when you do that. I'd like to watch."

She went over to the fireplace where she had beans cooking, as a pioneer woman might have, in a kettle hung from a hook above the fire. The old house had quite a fireplace, with ovenlike cavities above the hearth for baking bread. There were extensions of the brickwork, in an octopus manner, into various rooms to provide a kind of central heating network using the heat from the fireplace.

"Stumphand said I'm squeamish," she said.

"He did, huh?" Matthew replied with a smile.

"Said a farmer can't be squeamish."

"He's got that right, all right."

"Well, I plan to work on that," she said.

"If we've got to kill ol' Berry then," he replied softly, "you can do the honors. I don't care much to do it myself."

"Why would we kill him?"

"Because if it's at a latter stage, Mary, as it looks like it is, the worms are dug in. The pills won't be enough to kill them. And Berry the Ram, he'll just keep getting weaker until he dies... If that's the case, we can't just let it go."

"Stumphand didn't say that."

"He was thinking it, though. He didn't want to make you feel bad."

"How do you kill a sheep?"

"I don't know. There's no good way I know of. My dad used a sledge hammer."

"A sledge hammer!"

"Yes."

"That's beastly, Matthew!"

"Beastly for the beast."

"That's not amusing."

"Works better than an axe. Instant anesthesia."

"It still has to be frightful."

"Well, I don't think that's so, Mary. When I was a kid, I hit a sheep with a pail one time, and one thing I observed, that sheep could not make the connection between the hit on his head and the pail in my hand. He knew something hit him, he could see the pail, but he could not understand the chain of events."

"He understood the pain."

Matthew thought about that as he watched the fire.

"I might be inclined to call that into dispute, also," he answered in a delicate manner, not wanting to bring up any bad feelings, after all their recent discussions about the state of their relationship. "My own opinion is, if there's any pain involved, it never makes it inside his head. You could hit ol' Berry ten times on the head, all the while he would just stand there looking. Sheep are dumb animals, Mary. They've been inbred so much. All the smart got bred out."

He paused, then added, "in my humble opinion."

"Well, when it comes to hitting, I'll leave that to you."

"Sure. I guess it's too late anyhow to become a gentleman. I gave up on that a long time ago."

Mary, undeterred, made note of the problem in her notebook labeled "Canterbury Sheep," in which she had pen sketches of each flock member and a neat block-letter chart of shots and other requirements she had heard of such as shearing and clipping hooves.

Next morning, she was out in the barnyard, trying to corral the ram for his prescribed pill. Berry proved to be an unwilling patient, however. When Mary approached him with a crook, he backed off about ten feet away. When she took a step closer, he bolted unsteadily to the far side of the barn yard.

"Berry, I have a pill for you, and you're going to take it!" she said, galoshing across in her rubber boots toward the little junk yard of baling wire, tractor parts, and rotting boards where the ram stood in his wide-planted stance, his breath rattling.

When she was about ten feet away again, he bolted across to the other side of the barn yard where she had just been.

"So you're going to be like that!" she said.

Throwing down the crook, she pursued the ram for a half dozen or so laps around the barn yard, getting gradually closer. At last he stopped, panting, glaring with his dull eyes. He coughed his rattling cough and baahed.

She straddled his back, holding him tightly between her knees, and pulled up his snout toward her. Taking the dispenser from under her belt, she stuck it in his mouth, plugged in the pill, and shoved in the ejector shaft to cram the pill down. Then she held his mouth closed until she saw him swallow.

"Looks like you got that skill down," said a voice from the barn yard fence.

It was Dennis Kelly, standing there in his awkward but persistent manner, his face serious as always behind the wire rim glasses. He was neatly dressed in his customary blue jeans and denim work shirt, as if he had just reported for the morning shift at the shoe factory. He and Mary, with their unfailing work ethic, both started their days early, at the break of dawn.

Kelly, only a generation removed from his family's dairy farm in Wisconsin, needed no explanation of what was going on. "You going to worm them all?" he asked.

"Yes, once I get a system going."

"Matt and I can help you with that. You set up fences into a "V" shape and rout them in. They get down to the narrow part of the V and they're in a nice single file."

"Well, I'll be glad for the help," she said.

Inwardly, though, she revolted at the prospect of being dependent on the men for their know-how. She wanted to establish that she was competent on her own and could function as an equal partner.

She did accept Kelly's help, however, in building a fence of the type he had described. While he and Matthew laid out the design in the barn yard, she took the tractor, with a hay wagon hitched up behind, to get some posts from the shed.

"Back it in! Back it in!" Matt shouted.

She took that as a challenge. She had been practicing driving the tractor on her own in the evenings, as Matthew knew. Stumphand Moore was also on hand. Apparently, he had come by to chat with Matt and Dennis.

She was off course the first time in, trying to manage the separate brakes on the big wheels. She backed in the wagon far to the side, pulled forward for another try, and on the second try jack-knifed.

The three men stood watching with deadpan expressions as she came in for an ill-started third try that quickly went awry. No one dared to venture a smile or an attempt at coaching, either.

To that humiliation was soon added the further sting of Berry's declining state of health. Within another week, the ram was so wobbly he could hardly stand at the grain trough. The ewes no longer showed him any respect; they butted him to the side to get to the best grain while he gamely maintained his upright position.

Next day came the grim sight of the long-bearded Matthew, in his coveralls, with a sledge hammer in his right hand, tromping across the barn yard to the calving barn where the sheep liked to stand when they weren't eating grass.

Berry was there in the shade of a scrawny, dying maple tree from which the sheep had been eating bark. He was off by himself in the weeds where the ewes had butted him, with his hoofs planted at an angle of 45 degrees almost from his skinny, worm-ridden frame. He followed with short, unsteady steps when Matthew collared him with the crook and dragged him around the back of the calving barn out of view.

Three solid whacks told the progress of that and soon Matt appeared on the side of the shed dragging Berry by the hind legs. The sight of the dead ram sent all the ewes baaing in the high-pitched tone they used for distress. They kept on baahing, standing at the fence, as Matthew dug a hole next to the chicken coop and threw Berry in.

293. Matt finds a follower of tradition in namesake “Little Matt”

With all in order on the 120 acres of the Cranston farm, Matthew Brandt obtained the approval of the others to take a morning off to go and see “Stumphand” Moore regarding the 10-acre field that Moore had offered to rent. To do so, he left the house just after breakfast, which everyone usually ate together, except for the children occasionally and now and then Darren Houghten, who sometimes slept through breakfast. Darren had continued to join in the work heartily, though, and, as the one assigned to the paperwork of the farm, he had the bills and legal papers in a format in which he could quickly and clearly present any matters that required group discussion.

Yes, all was order, Matthew thought as he went out, and not just in the physical aspects of the venture,—the land and buildings, including the house,—but in the people part of the farm, also, in particular as he was involved himself. He had managed to get along with Mary despite his inability to dissuade her of her plans to leave for Cuba the following week. He had not lost his temper. He had not gone stomping off. He had continued to be her lover, sleeping with her in the new circumstances of her separate bedroom in the house. He had managed to be nice and yet appropriately distant from Gail Martin (though recently she had asked him to help her fix her van). He had gotten along famously with Darren Houghten, carrying through on his promise to help Darren build a study loft in the barn. With Jane, he had also been nice, though she acted scared of him. Yes, all was in order...

Thinking of that, Matthew breathed a sigh of relief as he entered the familiar refuge of the shed with its smell of iron, oil, and dirt, a smell he remembered from his boyhood. The John Deere 70 tractor was there under its protective tarp. He had come to love it already as he worked the fields. The tools were all there, lined up neatly in order above the work bench: the pruning shears and hedge clippers on the left side, and, from left to right: hammers, pliers, hand-adjustable wrenches, socket wrenches, drills, saws, levels, and, miscellaneous objects including chisels, rasp, and two old gimlets he had found hanging on the wall.

Brandt, with his long dark scraggly hair and beard, which, although he was only 27, were already grizzled, and which he never trimmed, had a calm, studied expression, as might have been seen in a medieval etching of a craftsman,—a wood carver or smith of some kind,—as he stood at the work bench among his tools. There was no discord here, no complications of relations with other people, just the straightforward application of the tools in honest labor such as the men in his family, going back to his great grandfather,—or so he had heard,—had done.

Another sight soon brought him a moment of further lightness, also,

as he crossed to his truck. It was Gail's boy, "little Matt," crossing the yard toward him with his man's size tool box, which in length was half again as tall as he was.

"Going to need help today?" the boy asked.

"Maybe later," Matthew replied at the truck's door.

Matthew and the boy had grown close, and the boy often followed him around. Because of the name similarity, it had been assumed from the start that the two Matt's had a special relationship. And, seemingly, following from that, the special relationship had developed. The boy was proud to called "Little Matt" and "Little Dog."

"Where you going," the boy asked.

"Over to see Stumphand."

"How come?"

"He owns a field we might rent."

"How come?"

"To grow oats in for the sheep."

"The sheep like oats?"

"Yes, they do."

"Can I come?"

"Go ask your mom."

The boy at once dashed across the yard, leaving his tool box by the truck, and soon the big-boned, hardy Gail Martin, dressed in blue jeans, a red flannel shirt, and construction boots, emerged at the door, looking happy as always.

"How long you gonna be?" she called in her pleasant voice.

"Not long, maybe an hour or two."

"Okay, then. Be careful."

"I intend to, Gail."

"Don't let him stand by an open window."

"Okay, I won't."

"He's like a little puppy, you know."

"Yes, I've noticed."

"I'm not a puppy," said the boy.

"Might take a detour into town first," Matthew called. "Stumphand needs some 30 penny nails. Figure I might do him a little favor, get on his good side."

"Okay, well, be careful," Gail returned. "Matthew, you be a good boy now. Do what Big Matt says."

"Yes, Mom, I will."

With the boy beside him, Brandt drove out of the shed onto the dirt road, around the bend past the apple tree in the pasture, and then past an old empty farmhouse and dilapidated outbuildings known as "Lampsher's Farm." The adjoining land, 120 acres, including a fine stand

of maple trees along the road, was not currently used.

As usual, the boy was full of questions.

"Big Matthew," he said with his head tilted backward as he looked intently at the big, bearded man beside him, "if you could fly up in the sky in an airplane, could you walk on the clouds?"

"No, I don't think so, Little Matt," Brandt patiently replied. He was used to the questions, as lately the boy produced them in a constant stream, with the questions seeming to have no bearing on one another and no hint at all as to where they came from.

"How come?"

"Cuz the clouds are just wispy, you know. They're not solid. You would fall right through."

That reply brought a brief interval of silence as Brandt considered what he needed to buy at the hardware store in town in addition to the 30 penny nails for Stumphand Moore. He was gathering supplies for the barn loft that he had promised Darren he would help with.

"Matthew?" the boy ventured.

"What?" Brandt replied.

"How long would it take a cheetah to get to town?"

"Now that I don't know, Little Dog," Brandt replied in a soft voice. "They're really fast, though. I know that."

"They're the fastest, right?"

"Yes, as far as I know."

"How long do you think?"

"A couple minutes, maybe."

"That's pretty fast, huh?"

"Yes, it is."

The Canterbury center consisted of only four buildings,—the town hall, the hardware store, the farm store, and the building that housed the volunteer fire department,—but there was enough there different from the farm to keep the boy interested as he tagged along with Brandt to locate and pay for the needed supplies.

The next question came as Brandt and the boy headed out again, by a different road, that provided a shorter route to Stumphand Moore's place north of the Cranston farm.

"Is there such a thing as a mommy long-legs?" the boy asked.

"I don't think so. No," Brandt replied.

"How come?"

"Cuz 'daddy long-legs' is just a name for a kind of bug. The daddy bug and the mommy bug are both called daddy long-legs."

"That's pretty funny, huh?"

"Yes, it is."

"Who called it that?"

"Just somebody who thought of it. I bet you could name a bug pretty good yourself."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Like look it here. See this tiny little green bug on the windshield?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, what do you think we should call it?"

"Green baby."

"The green baby bug. That's the best name I ever heard."

"You really like it?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to kill Green Baby!" shouted the boy, raising his hand.

"Oh, no!" Brandt replied with a frown.

"How come?"

"Cuz he's got a life, too. Let Green Baby live."

"Okay, we'll let him live."

"Maybe one day Green Baby will have a family, and he'll have all kinds of a little green babies."

"You think so?"

"Maybe, yeah."

At Stumphand Moore's Brandt and the boy followed the half-mile long dirt driveway as it wound between pine trees until the farmhouse came into view. It was not a picturesque New England farmhouse. It was a plain white house composed of two parts forming a T shape and the ridge poles at the junction of the two parts were caving in giving the roofline the look of saddle, sloped up at each end and down in the middle. The house was in need of paint, and Moore had no qualms about keeping his machinery in a shed, apparently, as he had a tractor and implements, some of them rusted, scattered around the yard. At the edge of the area of mowed grass, the weeds had grown as tall as the fence posts. Sheep, chickens, pigs, and ducks shared that same area. A sheep on one side was standing on his hind legs to eat leaves from an apple tree.

"This place used to be nicer, when I was a boy," Moore said as Brandt and little Matt drew near. "I've let it run down."

"Looks fine to me," said Brandt.

"Well, the farm does what it has to, I guess."

"Brought you some nails," said Brandt, holding out the bag.

"Did you now? Thank ye."

"Figured I'd save you a trip."

"Much obliged."

They stood together, looking with no particular focus of attention, into the barnyard.

"Well, I guess you came to look at that field," Moore said.

"Yes, I did."

Following Moore's lead, they walked around past the house and down a grassy lane between some newly plowed fields to a field that was grown over with weeds.

"This is the one here," Moore said. "And I'm going to be straight with you, Matthew, you going to plow here, y' can see there's some mighty big rocks."

"Yes, I see that."

"What's wrong with the rocks?" piped up little Matt.

"They bend up the plow sometimes," Matthew answered, again looking at the boy with the utmost patience as he picked him up. "Got to dig up the rocks before you plow."

"Who can do that?" the boy asked.

"Well," Stumphand replied, "we was thinking you could do it, little Matt. Here I thought that was why you come by. Big Matt here was telling me, you got some big tools in your tool box."

"Haw!" said the boy.

"How come not?" said Moore.

"Cuz I'm too little."

"Well, maybe by summer, Mattie, you'll be bigger and we can put you out there."

"I can help," the boy said.

"I bet you can, son," answered Moore with a whimsical smile. "I bet you can."

Brandt and the boy left soon later, following the long driveway out again and then following along the main dirt road past another farmhouse and around a bend until the blue Cranston barn came into view.

"We're home," said the boy.

"Yes, we are."

"What are we going to do now?"

"I was thinking, you'd go see your mother. See if you can help her with anything."

"Matthew?"

"What?"

"Will you give me a tool?"

The boy had gotten into the habit of asking for tools and Brandt had complied, placing the boy on the workbench to choose one, as his own father had done with him as a boy.

"Well, you did put in a good day," said Matthew, sweeping him onto the workbench.

"I didn't do nothing."

"Oh, yes, you did. You helped me drive the truck. You helped me

find the nails."

"Haw!"

"Yes, you did, little Matt. I appreciated having you along. You helped me have a good time."

"What tool can I have?"

"Which one do you want?"

The boy pointed to a pliers first and watched the big, bearded man for a reaction.

Brandt nodded his head. "I guess that's okay."

The boy kept looking, however, and down the row a little he saw a shiny vice grip. He pointed to that.

Brandt frowned. "Well, I don't know, Matt. I just bought that. I think I'm going to need it."

"I need it, too."

"You do, huh? What do you need it for?"

"To grab things and turn them."

"That's pretty good, little Matt. You must have been watching, all right. You need it, huh?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, you take it then, and take good care of it, and don't lose it, because I might have to come and borrow it from you sometime."

"Okay."

Brandt stood and watched then as the boy lugged his big tool box across the yard, stopped at the door to turn and wave back at him, and went in.

Gail soon came to the door, also, with her hands on her wide hips and her flaxen hair, freshly washed and combed, gleaming in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Thank you, Matthew!" she shouted out. "Little Matt had a great day, I can tell."

"Glad to take him anytime," Matthew called back. "He's a smart little kid."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Brandt and the boy's mother were still on the slightly formal basis that the exchange of courtesies suggested, but with each interaction their manner of interaction had become more familiar.

294. Steward meets new nurse Joan Shannon, old friend Doug Thomasek

In mid-May of this same year, 1971, a pretty nurse showed up in the ward in the Indian Hospital one morning when Tom Steward was working. She stood at the nurses' station for a while talking to Dr. Jack Trent and the charge nurse. Later that day, word came around that this nurse worked on another floor and had asked to be reassigned to the psych ward.

The pretty nurse's name was Joan Shannon, the informant said. She was 23 years old, a year out of college. She was engaged to a young man about the same age who was presently serving in Vietnam. She had come out West from a Catholic college in Boston in response to a Public Health Service recruiting effort on her campus.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Lou Landers asked the next day a couple of hours after the nurse had been brought around to be introduced to him and Steward along with the rest of the staff.

"She seems nice," said Steward.

"Nice ass."

"Yes, that too."

Steward wouldn't have admitted it out loud, but those had been his exact thoughts. Every time he looked at Joan Shannon, when she was turned away, his eyes went inadvertently right to her behind. "Nice ass" was an understatement. She had a spectacular ass. There was no other way to say it. She had the most spectacular ass he had ever seen. At the same time, she had an almost boyish figure with small breasts and long legs and arms. Her face was wholesome and girlish. She had brown hair and brown eyes. She wore her hair in double pigtails, one on each side of her head. She smiled and laughed easily, often with self-conscious statements of unsureness about something she had just said or about her appearance.

Joan Shannon began working on the ward the next day. She soon grew to be a sweetheart for just about everyone from the Indian patients and staff to the non-Indian doctors and paraprofessionals such as Steward himself. She was nice to everyone. She didn't seem to want to show herself better than anybody else. Yet there was no doubt that she did in fact have an unmatchably fresh, girl-next-door appearance,—and then there was the irresistible view of the spectacular ass swinging up the hall as she moved with a light, often skipping, gait to answer someone's call. It didn't matter whose call. She treated every call as important, whether from a doctor or a screwed up patient.

As was the case with the others, Joan Shannon soon turned her fresh face toward Steward, too.

"You're a conscientious objector, I hear," she said.

"Yes, with your fiancé in the war," he replied, "I don't suppose you think too kindly on that."

"Oh, no. I appreciate what George is doing. But I can understand the arguments on the other side."

Though he realized that the new nurse offered that same regard to everyone, Steward looked forward to seeing her approaching with pigtails bobbing in a long hall. He was aware of the power she had in being like the unconsciously sexual Catholic girls of his boyhood. With her innocent face and well-meaning eyes, she reminded him of girls he had watched with wonder in the eighth grade. One in particular often came to mind, a girl named Patricia Black who had sat for months in the school seat in front of him, exuding a magnetism he had been acutely aware of but had not recognized as sexual at that time.

Steward understood, also, as his thoughts drifted inadvertently to this new person on the ward, that Joan Shannon struck to the heart of the conflict he had been feeling, since coming to Gallup, of whether to pursue a conventional professional life when he left in several months, or a more explorative life like many of his generational peers. Joan was a woman such as, if she were your wife, would somehow make the professional life make sense, he noted to himself, especially in a setting such as graduate school in clinical psychology, which he was still thinking of trying. A person like her would bring freshness and spontaneity where there might otherwise be academic dryness.

For months, as Steward had struggled with his increasing distance from his estranged wife, Kristine, and as he had tried to figure out how to fit into the new world of professional helpers that he had encountered in his work on the psych ward, he had continued in his self-study at home, reviewing the entire history of psychology to prepare for the psychology graduate record exam, which he had registered to take in Albuquerque in just two weeks, on May 18. He had done this, partially believing that he would actually proceed into graduate school while at the same time aware of the great conflict continuing inside him between that course of action and the alternative course of just heading out to the highway to join his peers. He had never been able to articulate to anyone, however, just what this would involve except hitching around.

In any case, the pert girl from Boston, without a doubt, had him in a spin, he admitted to himself. He wanted to act toward her appropriately, he told himself. He wanted to talk to her and know her, and maybe even become her friend, without being overwhelmed by sex.

Then one day she was coming down the hall, pushing her med cart as she passed out meds, and, seeing him in the community room by himself, she plopped down beside him.

"Mind if I sit by you a while?" she asked.

"No, of course not," he said.

"I'm always so glad to see you. You're always so friendly. You're so quiet and nice."

"Well, thank you."

"You really are, Tom. I'm just glad you're around. I guess you're a person like I knew back home."

She talked about how she had just gotten a new apartment by herself and had been putting curtains in it and painting the walls, and hanging up pictures. Steward wondered, hearing that, if he should offer to help. Then she said she had written her boyfriend to tell him about the apartment and had sent him some photos of it, which Steward took as a gentle reminder that she was just being friendly.

As Joan Shannon was becoming friendlier, though, she was becoming harder for Steward to put out of mind, and the chances for mild physical contact with her were increasing. On a staff training trip down to the university in Albuquerque, she wound up next to him, lying alongside him on the floor, in a room full of reclining people, as the instructor taught a method of total relaxation.

Then, on the way back, she sat in the back of the ward station wagon with Steward and several others, chattering about various psychological theories while Steward found it difficult to wrench his attention from her sparkling, sympathetic eyes.

Eddie Yazzie, Steward's Navajo friend, took note of that, as he had been in the back of the station wagon, also.

"She's engaged, Eddie," Steward reminded.

"I'm glad to hear that you have so much self control."

"It's not a matter of self-control, Eddie," Steward replied. "I think she would be shocked if I came on to her."

"I guess you'll never know if you don't try."

Then, about this same time, another odd thing happened. Steward was walking along past the faux ornate brick facades and storefront shops of downtown Gallup, with their displays of Indian pounded silver and jade jewelry, Indian rugs and trinkets, and leather belts and fittings, when he saw a lean figure approaching him, decked out in tight blue jeans, cowboy boots, and a tan cowboy hat with the brim pulled down over his forehead like the buckaroo lead in a western movie. It was Douglas Thomasek, Steward's old VISTA buddy from North Carolina, looking like he had grown up on the mesa and had spent half his life on a horse herding cattle. "Doug, I can't believe it, you just passing through?"

"Passing through, hell. I live here, man," Thomasek answered with a grin. "Now I ain't gonna believe it if you live here, too."

"Yes, I do, in fact."

"For how long?"

"Since this past December."

"You got to be kidding. Stacey and I moved here last fall."

"So you're still with Stacey then?"

"Hell, yes. She's waiting for me right down at the joint down on the corner there. Come and say hello."

The two men joined in together walking as naturally as if they had been sauntering down the street in North Carolina.

"So the little girl must be with you too," Steward said.

"Oh, yes, Julie. She's six years old. And we got a little boy, Josh. He's three. And got one in the oven. too."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. Due in November."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

The "joint" Thomasek had referred to turned out to be a bar and grill consisting of a single room big enough for six tables and an open area about as big again as the area occupied by the tables.

There sat the young lady Steward recalled from North Carolina, the one Thomasek had claimed to be avoiding getting hitched to. She was just as petite and pretty as she had been the previous time Steward had seen her, with the same curly, dark brown hair, cut a little longer, at her shoulders, and the same sparkling blue eyes.

"Tommy, ain't this something? Who would have thought?" she said. "How are you anyhow?"

"I'm just fine," Steward replied.

"Would you believe it, he lives in Gallup," Thomasek announced. "He's been here since last fall."

"Oh, isn't that something? It's so nice to run into an old friend. We've made a few new ones, you know. But we miss the old ones, too."

Thomasek went immediately up to the bar, joked in his friendly way with the bartender, and came back with beers for himself and Steward and a coke for his wife, who was not drinking because of her pregnancy.

"So this is your hangout," Steward said.

"We have been known to stop in on occasion. Keep ol' Dan here in employment," Thomasek responded, laughing, with a nod at the bartender.

"And I like the dancing," the bartender said. "There's dancing here?" said Steward.

"He means Stacey and me," Thomasek remarked. "Me and Stacey, we've been known to dance up a storm."

"And that's an understatement," the bartender replied.

In response to that, Thomasek sprang up from the table, crossed the room with long, lanky strides to the juke box and popped in a quarter. He

came back with his hand extended for his wife, pulled her up from her chair at the table, and joined her in a dance that took up the entire room, with Thomasek swinging his cowboy hat around and his pregnant wife bounding and twirling with her dark hair flying. It was the most unrestrained, joyous dancing Steward had ever seen.

"That was quite a show," he said when the couple came back to the table after the music ended.

"You can have a turn. I'll borrow you Stacey," Thomasek said.

"No, that's all right," said Steward.

"He doesn't want to dance with some old pregnant lady," Stacey returned.

"No, that's not the reason, Stacey. You look the romantic part, let me tell you."

"You ain't got your own partner, Tommie?" Stacey asked.

"Well, I did."

"Oh oh."

"Sounds like we need another round," said Thomasek.

Steward got up at once. "This round's on me."

The conversation turned then to Steward's story. He told about his marriage (which Thomasek had never heard of), and how he and his wife had gone from California to West Virginia, and then back to California, winding up at last in Winslow, Arizona, where they had split.

"From Winslow," he said, "I came over here, on account of this foundation I was working for... I'll spare you the details."

Thomasek then took a turn at telling his own tale. After leaving North Carolina, he and Stacey had lived for a couple of years in Colorado, he said, in Steamboat Springs, on the west side of the Rockies, where he had worked in a ski resort, tending trails, then they had come down to St. Joseph, Arizona, where he had gone to school.

"What kind of school was that?" Steward asked. "Blacksmith school."

"You're kidding? There's work in that?"

"All kinds of work, all over the reservation," Thomasek said with a grin, tilting back the tan cowboy hat as he sipped on his beer. "Lot of horses. I've got a portable forge I haul around in my truck. Set up in a jiffy and I'm ready to shoe horses."

"So that's what you do?"

"Damn right, Stewball. I've been shoeing horses all around. All over the reservation. All over this whole state. Down as far as Tucson even and Santa Cruz. It's been a damn good life."

Steward left a while later after receiving an invitation to come out for supper sometime at Thomasek's spread. They had 20 acres of mesa country,—"rocks and sage, mostly," Doug said,—on the edge of town in

a kind of canyon, as he described it, where they had a house, a blacksmith shed, and a half dozen or so horses.

At the house on Strong Street, where he still lived in a back room, Steward continued down the street to his car, which had been parked there for weeks without being used. He drove out through the east end of town, past the motels, restaurants, and bars, and kept on driving to a little settlement called Red Rock where, after first arriving in Gallup, he had worked as a volunteer supervisor for a grade school "gym night." There was nothing there to see, really, Steward thought, just red cliffs in sunset colors. He turned in toward the school, and then changed directions and headed back toward the light-dotted silhouette of Gallup on the western horizon.

He felt strangely disturbed, he didn't know why, by his chance meeting with Thomasek.

Other people came to this country, Steward thought, to experience the vastness and openness in passing, like the hippies he often saw on the main street highway in their psychedelic-colored vans, or for a brief stay only, like the doctors and nurses who worked for the Health Service. But Thomasek had dug in. Thomasek had come to stay. And he had found a unique niche. He had not wound up as anything expected or normal. He was not an academician, or a professional helper, or a corporation "yes" man. At the same time, Thomasek was not a drop out. He was a craftsman providing an important and necessary service for the people of the area, so many of whom had horses.

"Blacksmith, of all things," Steward muttered.

Back in Gallup, with night coming on, he started to think of Joan Shannon again. He drove up and down the downtown streets, thinking he would maybe see her out for a walk or shopping. With no success at that, he drove around some neighborhoods, looking for her green Volkswagen "bug" outside of some apartment building. He stopped at a phone booth to see if she was listed in the phone book, but there was no one at all in Gallup with the last name "Shannon."

"I've got to watch it," he cautioned himself. "Joan is engaged. She is not a possible romance."

295. Steward and Joan discuss “looking for America” vs. “median way”

The next day Tom Steward repeated his cautions about Joan Shannon as he interacted with her at work. As he was leaving the hospital at the end of his shift, however, he saw her leaving from another door. She waved and smiled. The effect of that on his mood reminded him again of the power she was starting to have on him.

To his surprise, as he drove out of the parking lot, with her in her VW bug just in front of him, she stopped at the exit to the street, popped out of her car, and came running back. He rolled down the window and looked toward her fresh face and blue eyes as she leaned toward him with her flaxen pigtails bobbing.

“Want to stop by at my place for coffee or something?” she said. “I can show you how I fixed up my apartment.”

“Sure,” he said. “I’d like to.”

“Why don’t you just follow me then?

“Okay, I will.”

Steward followed the green VW bug as Joan drove eastward from the hospital, in the general direction of where he lived himself, though not on his own usual route through the Gallup downtown but through a quiet residential area of adobe houses where he seldom ventured. When she pulled into the driveway at the building where she lived, however, he saw it was on the same street that he lived on himself, just a few blocks further up on the gradual hill from the main street highway. He could not see the highway itself, but he could see the upper floors of his former residence, the Henry Hotel, and some of the rural-looking houses in the Mexican neighborhood on the dome-shaped hill just beyond the highway.

He had imagined that her apartment would be in a typical apartment building, but it was a single-story building by itself, and, judging by the looks of it converted from something else like a storage shed or shop. It had plain, flat-paneled exterior, painted gray, a flat roof, with a concrete parking surface, just big enough for one car to be parked off the street. Beyond that was a garage door and the door to the apartment. The building had two matching windows facing the street and two more windows facing the driveway.

“Well, Tom, welcome to my home!” she chimed. “You’re my very first visitor!”

Steward’s first impression, on entering the apartment, was that he was within a feminine space such as he had not been in for several months. There was a cheerful kitchen with a white table set with flowers, off to his left, and, in front of him, an inviting living room with a couch covered with an Indian blanket and colorful posters on the wall.

“I was thinking,” she said, “would you like to stay for supper?”

"Sure, if it's not a bother," he replied.

"Nothing special. Lots of leftovers I can get together."

"Sure."

"I got some wine. Would you like some?"

"Sure."

He sat back and looked around. It was such a different world from his drab room with his view of the flat roof of the car dealership and the wires strung with the yellow and blue pendants.

"Joanie, one thing you probably don't know," he said. "I'm married. My wife and I have been separated since last fall."

He had resolved on the way over that he would say this at once since he wasn't sure how she would feel about it, even though, as far as he could determine, it was irrelevant anyhow, if he and she were just friends.

"Oh, I know."

"How did you know?"

"I'm a normal woman, Tom. I've got all kinds of little investigators."

"Why would you care?"

She laughed at that. "You got me there."

Now, that was a really perplexing answer, Steward thought, since it seemed to hint that she had some kind of interest in him that would lead her to investigate about his potential as a romance.

She opened the oven and looked in.

"And you know I'm engaged," she said with smile. "And I mean really engaged. As in, can't do a heck of a lot of things I might otherwise be inclined to do."

"Yes, I do know that," Steward said, nodding as if understanding the implications of that answer fully, but the "otherwise inclined" part of the answer remained in his mind.

"And I know you're separated, and your wife is in California, and her brother is in a rock band, right, and you and your wife, I heard her name is Kristine, were out in West Virginia or something, working in a poverty program, and, apart from that, you've been all around."

"You do know," he said, truly impressed. "Your investigators are pretty good."

"Well, if it weren't for things like this, believe me, our breaks at work would be utterly boring."

Steward merely nodded as he took in this aspect of the feminine world that he did not quite understand.

"Tom, if you don't mind, I'm just going to run in and change out of my uniform," she said. "Nothing daring, don't worry! I just feel so much like a nurse when I'm dressed like this."

"Sure."

He himself didn't wear any kind of uniform at work. He just wore his usual blue jeans and polo shirt.

Joan went into the third room, on the other side of the living room where Steward was sitting, and soon she emerged in blue pedal pushers and a white blouse with tufted sleeves. The outfit was not daring, as she had said, but the pedal pushers displayed her firm calves and shapely thighs and hips.

When she walked toward the kitchen, Steward took a good look at the feature Lou Landers had noted on her first day in the ward. She was utter perfection in this regard.

They sat down soon at the table, where she had set out lasagna in a flat bowl as the centerpiece, plus other bowls with corn and salad, quite a dramatic change for Steward after his months of cooking his own bland food, which lately had been brown rice and vegetables.

"So what's after Gallup?" she said.

"Well, let's just say I have this huge conflict," he replied in his quiet, diffident manner.

"And what is that?"

"On the one hand, there's the 'professional life,' I would call it. Graduate school in psychology. I've been studying for the boards. I take the test next month."

"In Albuquerque?"

"Yes."

"The professional life... And, hopefully, a relationship,... a marriage eventually, with some beautiful professional woman."

She smiled.

"I can't think of any examples," he said.

"Haw!"

She poured him some more wine and poured a little into her own glass, also.

"And on the other hand?" she said.

"On the other hand... I got this other ambition, I don't know how to say it, let's just say 'looking for America'."

"You don't know where America is?"

"You know, Joan, looking for the essence, looking for what it really is."

"Oh, now I get the drift. As in Jack Kerouac. As in *Easy Rider*."

"Precisely, yes."

"I was an English major you know, with a minor in film."

"So I don't have to explain it then."

"Saving up for your Harley?"

He laughed. "No, this is an explorer that would go on foot with a backpack."

She smiled at that, a quite endearing, lingering smile, first directly at him and then in the direction of the counter, as she swished her wine around in her glass as in contemplation. “Well, that’s interesting,” she said. “Just where would you go?”

He shrugged, looking to catch a glance from her eyes again before he went on.

“Well, the way I understand it, Joan, it almost doesn’t matter where you go, you’ve just got to go. Out on the highway, to see what’s there. Not to the expected places, but to the unexpected places, the places you wouldn’t even notice otherwise. Out to see what people are doing. Out to do what people are doing.”

“Now you’re sounding like a hippy.”

“I suppose so. Yes.”

“And what’s holding you back then?”

“Well, I got to finish my CO assignment.”

“When are you done with that? “she inquired.

“August.”

“That’s not so far away.”

“But then there’s the professional alternative, like I said—”

“The other hand—”

“And the loneliness part, the fear of being lonely.”

“Yes, I do sense that in you, too,” she remarked softly.

“Because I start thinking, wow, if I go that route, there’s no coming back.”

“Is there, though? I wouldn’t think so, Tom. And did you ever think of this? Maybe you could find some beautiful woman, professional or not, who would explore with you, or appreciate your need to explore, at least, and be willing to wait for you until you come back. Or maybe you could find a way to live a professional life and explore while you were doing it, and find some beautiful, professional woman who would want to explore with you. Haven’t you explored in Gallup while working here?”

“Yes.”

“That’s one thing I’ve learned, you know,” she remarked. “There’s always a median way. I mean, like coming out her, for me, it’s a median way. I could have stayed back in Boston, waiting for George to come back, or I could have broken up with George and gone off on an adventure by myself. But I got engaged with George, as you know, and I went on the adventure, too. Not quite as bold an adventure, maybe, as a lot of other people have been doing, but for me it’s still an adventure, it’s still pushing past the borders I was living inside of before.”

Steward mulled that over as he drove away from Joan’s apartment later that same evening. “A median way.” Where exactly did that mean?

It meant you hedged your bets, he thought, it meant you kept your feet in two camps so as to be able to step off toward one or another without having to rearrange your whole life. And what was this median way between? It was between the conventional life, the professional life, on the one side, and the explorative life on the other. It was a way to "explore" without doing it with the totality and intensity of the drop outs, for example, that he had recently met in Thoreau, the ones who had gone off in a converted school bus with no particular destination except to find there way to "something that made sense."

Arriving at home, he found two letters awaiting him. One letter, in her familiar block letters, was from Mary Brandt. The other was from his doctor brother, Art, with the return address not in Vietnam but back in the States, in Fort Knox. Steward had known that his brother was near the end of his tour of duty. This was the first indication Steward had had that the tour of duty had actually ended.

Steward opened Mary's letter first and sat down in the living room to read it at the same table where for months he had been meticulously studying his history of psychology.

"Tom, I'm writing you this from St. John, Nova Scotia," Mary began. "I'm staying here overnight in a seaman's hotel by the docks. Tomorrow morning I leave for Cuba."

Here was no median way, Steward thought. Here was the totality of a person trying to break drastically from the social restraints and patterns of the past.

With her typical seriousness, Mary related first how she and Matt had continued to move toward a "more open relationship" while being "still lovers and still in love."

She then talked about the farm, where she and the Woodstock group had moved, and how she hoped that the farm would be a "true alternate to an alienated life of working for someone else in a situation you don't believe in."

Mary wrote, also, in more detail, about her current trip to Cuba and how she had gone through her past notes about Cuba in preparation for the trip because she had come to have, as she put it, "some misgivings" about the new state, "in the area of civil liberties," but Mary didn't elaborate on what her misgivings were about.

In the close of her letter, Mary extended an invitation for Steward to visit the farm. "You could live with us for a while and join in the physical work and I know you would like that. It might help you to clear out your mind and get your bearings."

The letter from Art brought the news that Art had already been processed out of the Army. Nancy had met him in Fort Knox, and he and she would be driving from there to the Twin Cities. The grandparents,

who all lived in St. Paul, were taking care of the baby.

"From Minnesota, Nancy and I are going out to Oakland, in the Bay Area (by San Francisco). I've been accepted for an internship in internal medicine at Oakland County Hospital."

Art also extended an invitation for Steward to visit him and Nancy in Oakland after leaving Gallup. "I was thinking the hippie scene in San Francisco might be of interest to you," he wrote.

"By the time, sometime I'll tell you more about Bill O'Rourke and Vietnam. You know, Bill was in my medical company at the time when he died. I imagine that was hard on you, Tom. Sorry you had to lose such a good friend. He was quite a fellow, and he had just been married to a great girl, a nurse. She was also from Minnesota. Don't imagine you know here, though. Her name before the marriage was Barb Carpenter."

Though the former coxswain had died in combat months before, this was the first time Steward heard of his death. He had also not known that O'Rourke, his old hitching buddy and coworker at the Farmworkers, had married his former sweetheart, Barbara Carpenter.

Steward didn't feel any grief at first over O'Rourke's death. He felt stunned and empty inside. It seemed like an era had ended with his old friend's death.

296. Steward completes his GRE, then goes with Eddie to a squaw dance

Several days later on Friday, May 17, 1971, Tom Steward drove down from Gallup to Albuquerque to take the psychology graduate record test for which he had been preparing himself through self study for the past six months. The test was being administered the next morning in an auditorium at the University of New Mexico. To be rested for the test and already on hand with no chance of complication, Steward had decided to drive down early and stay overnight at a motel.

To Steward's perception, the taking of this test was an event of symbolic importance in his life. Looking back over his months spent in evening study, he felt that he had disciplined himself well. He had gone through the entire 1000-page history of psychology textbook that a doctor on the ward had given him, taking careful notes on each section from Wundt and the phenomenologists through Skinner and the behaviorists. What he had learned, he wondered? That there were many ways to explain the same underlying behavior? The experience of the study, he reflected, had been such as might have created a cynic. What was the purpose of it all when there was so much disagreement about causes of behavior and nothing could be proven to an undeniable extent? In any case, thought Steward, he had completed the study, he felt he would do well on the test, and there was a good chance that the test would lead to graduate school and, on the other side of graduate school, to a professional life. Even as Steward thought this, however, he was aware that he wasn't sure he wanted a professional life. He felt again the continuing conflict between such a life and the explorative life of many of his peers that he had described to Joan Shannon just a few days before.

Thinking of that, Steward settled for a moment on an image of Joan as she had looked in her snug pedal pushers and white blouse, and as she had looked as she had gazed at him so sympathetically with her fresh face and bright eyes from the other side of the kitchen table set with flowers in her apartment. But the vistas of the vast mesa country east of Gallup, as Steward continued toward Albuquerque, soon brought another image of the red-haired, red-bearded O'Rourke seated beside him as they rode through the same country on their first trip together.

Steward's thoughts drifted back to the rainy day when he and the irreverent former coxswain had driven into Gallup for their first view of its odd menagerie of Indian, Western, and Hispanic shops, streets crammed with pickup trucks holding Indian families, drunk Indians lying in alleys, and Mexicans selling burritos carried in pails. He thought of how O'Rourke in his typical good-hearted fashion had jumped to the aid of the Indians whose truck had gotten stuck in the mud, and of how the same Indian family had come by later and had given O'Rourke and him

and their flat tire a ride into town. A memory came to Steward, too, of O'Rourke sitting on his bed in the garage in L.A., where he and O'Rourke had lived together four months, and he recalled how carefully O'Rourke had packed his backpack, explaining that that was a skill that might come in handy in Vietnam. Steward also thought of O'Rourke on the rooftop in Indiana where O'Rourke with his red beard wet with bean juice had ate their supper of hot dogs and beans with such gusto. He thought of how he and O'Rourke had climbed up on the higher roof, in the center of that first roof, and of how the former coxswain had then explained his reasons for wanting to become a medical corpsman and go to Vietnam.

What a long odyssey that had been, Steward reflected, taking Bill O'Rourke from the Minnesota Boat Club to Vietnam, to die there in combat. That had been no "median way." That had been a journey marked by a unity of belief and action that had led O'Rourke to reason from the war being worth the life of some of his countrymen to the war being worth his own life, if required.

In Albuquerque, Steward exited the freeway and followed the signs to University Avenue, which curved around to the south toward the clean, new Hispanic-style buildings of the spacious university campus. There, on Las Lomas Road, he found Dane Smith Hall, where the test was to be given the next morning. He circled around through the campus and headed east on Lomas Boulevard, the main street leading out of the campus, looking for a motel in the neighborhood he found there of apartment buildings and store front businesses catering to students. About a mile from campus, near a grassy area, about two blocks square, dubbed "Bataan Park," he found a plain, one-story motel and booked a room.

Inside his room, Steward found the usual bed, dresser, desk, and TV. On the bed he threw his backpack (which he had brought since he had no other luggage), and on the desk he placed the main other items he had brought, his psychology history book and the notebook in which he had written down his meticulous notes during his six months of study. Soon, however, the room started to remind Steward of similar motel rooms where he had stayed with Kristine in the best days of his and her marriage, and he began to feel sad about how the marriage had fallen apart and how he was about to take this important test without the moral support from Kristine that he had had before.

Disturbed, he went out, heading toward the little park that he had noticed on his way to the motel. It was a lovely time of day, with sunset colors on the grass and tall palm trees swaying in the gentle breeze. Steward soon discovered, however, that individuals of student age were passing through the park, calling out names like "purple haze." They

were selling acid, he concluded after a moment of puzzlement. Despite the splendid colors of the scene, there was a grim dimension in the several people he observed (among others not so intense) who seemed anxious to make a connection.

Was this the "counterculture," Steward thought, to which he had given so much time and attention? It seemed more like a devolution than like an evolution in culture that would lead to a better society.

He stopped at a Chinese restaurant for take out food and went back to his room. He turned on the TV, placed the sound on mute, and sat on the bed, with his back against the headboard, to review his notes as he had pre-determined to do a final time. For months, he had not seen a TV. There was no TV in the house he shared in Gallup. He had ignored the news. The war was still going on, he noted from the images appearing on the screen. The United States and North Vietnam were still in peace talks. There was some kind of trial of soldiers accused of abuses of civilians. Briefly, an image flashed on the screen of dead bodies strewn along a dirt road in what appeared to be a village in Vietnam.

It was the same image of the massacre at Mylai that lately had had such a dramatic effect on Steward's former rowing team mate James Morris, but Steward took cognizance of it only briefly as a confirmation of what he already believed regarding the immorality of the war.

Early the next morning, Steward went for his usual run and showered and then headed over to take the test. Amidst hundreds of others, seated at individual desks in long rows, he proceeded through the questions with fierce concentration. Then, with the collection of the test booklets, his months-long project of preparation reached its end.

Steward headed out of the building to his car and drove toward the freeway to return to Gallup. His situation, living in the house on Strong Street, working in the Indian hospital as a non-professional, seemed all the more out-of-the-ordinary as a result of his experience of the past 24 hours. Had he done well on the test? Would he be accepted to grad school? Could he fit again into a campus scene such as he had just re-encountered? He had forgotten how impersonal the campus scene was, he thought. He had forgotten how the campus, with its bulletin boards advertising academic programs, made learning seem more like a completion of procedures than like acquiring real knowledge.

Soon, however, Steward found himself in the midst of the vast, open country of the high mesa again, with a wide canyon, dotted with piñon and juniper trees, stretching out before him in the sunlight, and a ridge of mountains in the distance covered with spruce and firs. He saw people his own age passing along the freeway, conducting the same restless searching that he felt so drawn to join himself. His mood changed to optimistic at the sight, and even the test just concluded appeared in a

brighter light in his mind. There was no reason that it had to lead to loneliness or mere procedural knowledge, he reasoned. Maybe, through the median way Joan Shannon had talked about, he could have both the exploration and the knowledge,—true knowledge, he could make it so.

With that, Steward began to dwell again on his recent evening with the flaxen-haired nurse, and the idea occurred to him that he could stop at her apartment to report on the test. But then he warned himself again not to allow her to become so important that her unavailability as a romance would do him in.

While going back and forth about this in his mind, Steward stopped at a filling station just outside of Gallup, and there he found standing at another pump his Navajo friend, Eddie Yazzie, dressed in cowboy boots, jeans, a collegiate-looking sweater, and a cowboy hat. Around his neck Eddie had a ornamental clasp made of pounded silver and blue turquoise stones such as Indian men often wore in Gallup.

"So you're back from your test," Eddie said.

"Yes, I am, thank God," Steward replied.

"Did you ace it?"

"I did okay, I think."

"I've been looking around for you, actually," Eddie said. "I'm on my way to a cultural event of the kind that I think you would find of some interest, considering all the weird things you find of interest."

"What is that?"

"Squaw dance, out the highway, little place called Toslos."

"They really still have such things?"

"Sure we have all kinds of things you wouldn't know about, being a belegana, man."

""You don't think it would be resented, me not being a Navajo?"

"Sure, it will be resented. You with forked tongue. You walk down the street, you're resented."

"Can you follow me home so I can leave off my car?"

"Sure enough, amigo."

"Should we get some beers?"

"Got that covered already."

Eddie got to his usual joking and needling as soon as they rode out of Gallup in the pickup truck, each with a beer in hand. It was a standard of their friendship, Steward had accepted. There was no way of avoiding it, at least, for the time being.

"So what's all this I've been hearing about Joan Shannon," Eddie said with his mischievous grin. "Getting a little close there, aren't you? Thought you said she's engaged."

"How did you know I went over to see her?" Steward asked, thinking that Eddie had somehow heard, or that maybe Joan herself had

mentioned it since she had no secrets at work.

"I didn't know," Eddie replied. "It's even worse than I thought then."

"What's worse?"

"Your... what do you belganas call it? ... your crush."

"What do Navajos call it?"

"We call it a crush, too."

"What makes you think I've got a crush?"

"It's obvious, man."

Eddie continued in this way as they rode along, joking and raising his eyebrows in his oddly effeminate and yet Macho Western style (another convolution of his eclectic range), switching between his various personas of Indian, college boy, and psychologist, and ending up on the persona of "leader of the people" that Steward sensed was the real Eddie when trust was established.

"Now this squaw dance, Tommie, let me tell you the story of it," Eddie explained, his Asiatic features growing serious. "Back in the old times, we used to have this three-day 'festival' kind of, I don't know what you would call it, 'celebration,' maybe..."

"And that was the squaw dance?"

"No, it was much more involved that that. 'Ceremony of the battle' we called it. Our young men would dance out this story of a famous battle we won. And, then, as part of this, two women would be freed who had been held as captives, and they would dance out and pick two young men to join them. The squaw dance is just this part. It's like a mixer. You know, a mixer, right? Sock hop or whatever."

Their route to the dance took them for miles along a dark two-lane highway through the reservation where only a solitary light here and there revealed human habitation. Then the road turned and ahead was the freeway, discernible by the moving lights of cars and trucks passing by. In a low area just off to the near side, the couples of the moment were shuffling around in a big oval about the size of a basketball court.

The music was a traditional chant in a high octave sung to a drum beat at a rate of about four beats per second. The words went, "Yah-nah hah-oh-oh-oh, hey-ya hey-ey," and then repeated.

On the far side of the dancers from the highway, dozen of pickups were parked in irregular rows. In an open spot there was a little trailer on wheels that looked like a hot dog stand. The young people were milling around it, laughing and shouting to one another.

For the most part, they were dressed in jeans, cowboy hats, and western shirts, but some of the women were wearing the traditional pleated dark blue velvet skirts with lighter blue velveteen blouses, concho belts, knee-high moccasins, and turquoise jewelry. Here and there were men who were also wearing the traditional blue velveteen shirts

with wide cloth headbands of the type seen in old pictures of Geronimo.

Amidst all the participants not a single white face could be seen, but no one paid much attention to Steward when he walked out with Eddie Yazzie. A number of people shouted to Eddie and waved.

"Maybe if you stand out there, someone will ask you to dance," Eddie said.

"No, that's alright," Steward replied.

Later, as Steward and Eddie Yazzie drove away, Yazzie returned to "leader of the people" persona he showed on the way out. "When I was a boy I used to go with my father to singings," he said. "Sometimes they were way out in remote locations, you know, with the big country all around. That's when I got a real sense of what my father was passing down to me, the tradition of singing, when it was so quiet all around and there was just the chanting. You could really feel then like you were connecting with something. The great spirit, maybe."

"You want to take over for your father as singer?"

"Whatever is the modern version, yea."

Steward realized then how important it had been to Eddie that he had attended this event with him.

As the pickup returned along the dark road, however, Steward began to think again of the flaxen-haired, fresh-faced new nurse on the ward. He thought about how complex the interaction and cultural implications were for the interface of men and women in any society. The Navajo squaw dance implied that the interface had to reach back to the old culture to bring it forward into the new generation.

Steward thought to himself, too, that though he had not joined into the dance in the bar in Gallup that Doug Thomasek had invited him to join in with Stacey, he had nonetheless been involved in an elaborate dance with Joan Shannon. The initial meetings, the conversations in the hall and in the community room of the ward, the lying down side by side in the deep relaxation exercise in Albuquerque, faintly touching shoulders,—all of that had been part of the dance, just as following Joan's car in his own car had been, and sitting across from her at the table in her apartment. And with all of that had come the cultural implications, the talk of a "median way," and the hope of being able to explore while being more settled down.

Steward hardly knew what to make of it, but there was no doubt, he thought, that it was an exquisite element of human existence, this subtle dance between the male and female of the species, expediting unions that would bring forward the best traditions.

297. Mary hears of Cuban suppression as she travels to Cuba

On Sunday, May 23, 1971, in Bangor, Maine, Mary Brandt noticed a headline in the *New York Times* that at once drew her full attention. The headline said: "Western Intellectuals Berate Castro." Below the headline were side by side pictures of Jean-Paul Sartre, Susan Songtag, and Alberto Moravia.

Cuba was much on Mary's mind at the moment. She was on her way up to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to board a ship to Havana for her second stint with the Venceremos Brigade.

She bought a copy of the paper and sat down at a table in a coffee shop, watching up the street for Matthew Brandt. He was taking her up to drop her off. He would then return to Cranston farm, where Matt and Mary had lived by this time for more than six weeks. He had gone for a walk along the waterfront.

"Sixty European and American intellectuals have written to Premier Fidel Castro," the article said, "to express their disillusionment with him over Cuba's treatment of the poet Heberto Padilla.

"The letter which was distributed here last night recalled that the signatories had defended the Cuban revolution from the very first as a 'model of socialism.'"

Inside the paper, in a separate article, Mary found the complete text of the letter, which went as follows:

"We hold that it is our duty to inform you of our shame and anger.

"The deplorable text of the confession signed by Heberto Padilla can only have been obtained by means of that amount to the negation of revolutionary legality and justice.

"The contents of this confession, with its absurd accusations and delirious assertions, as well as the pitiable parody of self-criticism to which Heberto Padilla and Comrades Belkis Cusa, Diaz Martinez, Cesar Lopez and Pablo Armando Fernandez submitted to the seat of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, recall the most sordid moments of the era of Stalinism, with its pre-fabricated verdicts and its witch-hunts.

"It is with the same vehemence that from the very first days was ours in defending the Cuban revolution, which seemed to us exemplary in its respect for the human being and in its struggle for liberation, that we exhort you to spare Cuba dogmatic obscurantism, cultural xenophobia, and the repressive system imposed by Stalinism of the socialist countries and of which events similar to those now occurring in Cuba were flagrant manifestations.

"The contempt for human dignity implied in the act of forcing a man into ludicrously accusing himself of the worst treasons and indignities does not alert us because it concerns a writer but because any Cuban

comrade—peasant, worker, technician or intellectual—can also become the victim of similar violence and humiliations.

"We would want the Cuban revolution to return to what made us consider it as a model in the realm of socialism."

Mary was just vaguely familiar with the Cuban poet mentioned in the letter, Heberto Padilla. She had never read anything Padilla had written. Also, owing to the disconnect from her usual sources of news about Cuba that had ensued as a result of moving from D.C. to the rural setting in New Hampshire, she had not heard about Padilla's arrest and the other events surrounding the case.

From another article in the same paper, Mary ascertained what the basic facts were regarding Padilla. He had lived in the United States in the 1950s, during the years of the Batista dictatorship. He had returned to Cuba after the Revolution, supposedly because he was so enthused about the new state, and his poems had gained notice for not conforming to the literary dictums that some thought were appropriate for "socialist art." He had received an award the past year from a Cuban society that was also not regarded as socialist enough. He had been arrested on March 24 and released on April 24 after submitting his public "apology for counter-revolutionary crimes."

Mary was still reading the newspaper, seated at a table in a coffee shop, when she saw the long-haired, bearded Matthew approaching along the sidewalk in the quaint seaside scene of shops, trees, and flowers. For a moment, seeing that, a memory of the street where he and she had sat far away,—in both time and place, it seemed,—in Berea, Kentucky, came back to her. At times, she felt a nostalgia for those days when his and her love for one another had been so simple and intense. At times she wished she could be to him as she had been then, the totality of what he wanted from a woman.

Mary had thought a great deal lately about this personal aspect of her life, as the time for her departure for Cuba had grown near. She had not allowed herself to express her love for Matthew to the extent she had in the past, not wanting to place an unfair claim on him. She was aware, also, that lately she had felt jealous of Gail Martin on the farm, and that she felt an old-fashioned concern about leaving Matt behind in a situation where he would be around another woman.

"Find something there of interest?" Matthew said when he drew near, pointing the newspaper.

"Oh, the usual, you know," she replied.

Mary had decided, before even seeing Matthew on the sidewalk, that she would not share with him the news about the developments in Cuba. He would not care. He would shrug them off and say why even go there if they were preventing people from publishing poems. She didn't want

to explain her complex thoughts on the issue.

Though she had not been aware, before this particular morning, of the "Padilla affair," as the articles were calling it, Mary had been aware of the struggle going on in Cuba over freedom of expression. She had first taken note of it the year before in her conversation with Xavier Cortez, the Cuban cadre whose good looks had unnerved her at that time. She had realized at that time that there were those in Cuba who held to a "party line" of permissible ideas. At the same time, she had noted that were also libertarian elements in Cuba that she could support. She had resolved that she would do all she could on a personal level, in Cuba, to argue when she could for the importance of free speech. This Padilla affair, however, with the claims of the "Western intellectuals" that the methods employed by the Cuban government had been "Stalinist," had taken the struggle over free speech in Cuba to a new level, Mary thought, where it might be argued that Cuban government had become so suppressive that it should not be supported at all.

What then should intellectuals do with respect to Cuba? Should they just walk away? Mary asked herself as she sat in the coffee shop with the newspaper in front of her.

To do that, she answered in her mind, would be to add to the effect of the American embargo in isolating and alienating the Cuban people. The retrenchment in Cuba, with respect to free speech, she reminded herself, was partly a reflection of the siege mentality that had resulted from that effort to, in effect, starve the Cuban people into compliance. That, too, was a form of suppression, Mary believed. It was an attempt to deprive the Cuban people of a level playing field for seeing if their new government could be successful in improving their material well-being. In so far as intellectual supporters of Cuba were concerned, it still made sense to oppose this punitive economic stress on Cuba through the donation of physical labor, as the Venceremos brigades had been doing.

That conclusion briefly entered Mary's mind as she and Matthew left the coffee shop in Bangor, but her thoughts soon diverted to the more immediate concern of making her day with Matthew as pleasant as possible leading up to her absence from his day-to-day life for the six weeks she would be in Cuba.

The day soon shaped up as that as she and Matt drove up Highway 2, along the rocky coast of northeast Maine in a balmy day of breaking waves and tussled clouds, talking about the events of the past month, with the move to the farm that had brought such drastic changes.

The first month at the farm had been a good time, Mary and Matthew agreed. Disagreements had been resolved through calm discussion. Everyone had helped in the common work. The garden had been planted and kept free of weeds. The crop fields had been plowed, raked, and

planted. The sheep had been dewormed and their hooves clipped. Darren had gotten all the paperwork in order.

As a crown on the spirit of cooperation that everyone had attested to in the first month at the farm, Darren, Matt, and Dennis had built the study loft in the west apex of the barn that Darren had requested. They had constructed a seat with a safety harness and a self-locking pulley system that Darren could use to raise himself up to the loft and lower himself back down.

Mary and Matthew had a laugh about that as they recalled how Darren had lifted himself up for the first time, with everyone watching, and then had waved to everyone below from his chair in the loft where he had a desk and an electric light.

"You know, for the first time, I saw Darren as like a big kid," Matt said. "He looked like a kid at Christmas."

"Yes, the loft and the attention, too," Mary replied. "Sometimes I think he's a really lonely guy, inside." "Well, that I don't know."

In the midst of these positive exchanges about the farm, however, Mary had thought in her own mind of some more negative developments that she regarded as ominous and had never spoken to Matthew about. One was his intensity about the work of the farm, wanting the farm to be an efficient farm in a traditional sense. That was fine in itself; the problem was when he bore down on others, which he had begun to do. Matthew was drinking in the evenings, also, often as he worked in the shed, his favorite retreat from any interpersonal conflict. That, Mary thought, was another ominous sign. Then Mary often saw Matthew joking with the always light-spirited Gail Martin. That was to be expected, of course; Gail was a good person and Mary enjoyed talking to her, too. But Mary sometimes saw a special male-female interaction there had made her feel jealous. Jealousy was a feeling she didn't like to feel and didn't approve of. She had written about that in her journal, and had even talked with Gail about it, since, in addition to being competitors in this one respect, she and Gail were also best friends.

That was just another factor, though, that gave the present day for Mary, her last with Matthew for the near future, an added dimension of the old romance, rekindling in her again the recalled feeling from the earlier days of their relationship that she had recalled in the coffee shop in her memories of Berea, Kentucky.

"I love you, Matthew," she said to him when they hugged goodbye at the pier in Halifax.

"I love you, too," he replied.

They were the same words to one another that he and she had said at many departures in the past, and she was keenly aware, in the exchange of the words, that they lacked the depth of feeling of the past, just as the

hug that followed was not as long in duration, and not as relaxed in body contact, as his and her hugs had often been at times like this when a heightened feeling might have been expected.

On the ship later, however, as Mary watched the buildings of the Maritime port fading from her view and then walked around on the ship to mix with the other volunteers, her mind shifted quickly to Cuba in the course of dialogs she at once heard about the statement in the *New York Times*, which everyone seemed to have either read or heard about.

One fellow volunteer presented a spirited apology for the actions of the Cuban government.

"To me, this whole thing seems like an overreaction," he said. "To begin with, as I understand, Padilla was not thrown into a dungeon, he was not tortured, he was simply placed under house arrest. Then apparently there was a legitimate concern that he's been visited by CIA agents, Cuban plants, that he was being pumped for information and encouraged to embarrass the government. After the Bay of Pigs, you can't blame people for being a little uptight.

"As far as the statement, maybe he was just persuaded. Why not? He believed in the Revolution enough to come back after Castro took power. It's not such a leap to believe that Padilla just got convinced he went astray, as he claims in his statement."

After listening to this presentation, Mary was somewhat persuaded, but later she encountered a translation of Padilla's poems (from his collection "Out of the Game") and found the poems to be, in general, innocuous as political protest.

For example, one poem read as follows:

The poet! Kick him out! He has no business here. He doesn't play the game. He never gets excited

Or speaks out clearly.

He never even sees the miracles ...

This poem, like others she read, was so oblique in its criticism of the new Cuban state that in a cultural dialogue such as existed in America it would hardly have been noticed as provocation, Mary observed. The main criticism in the poems seemed to be that poets (and intellectuals and artists) were not taken seriously in Cuba,—they were regarded as irrelevant to the Revolution. The poems expressed a wounded feeling of being ignored more than a criticism of the government.

The most confrontive poem she encountered (Poetica) had lines such as the following:

Tell your truth.

Tell, at least, your truth.

And then let anything happen,

Let them rip your beloved page,

Let them knock your door down with stones...

Again this was a mild statement, Mary thought, as far as the Cuban government went. There was no criticism of specific policies.

Mary also found and read a copy of Padilla's public apology, which in part went as follows:

"Among both Cubans and foreigners I accused the revolution unjustly of the worst things. Among both Cubans and foreigners I discredited every one of the initiatives of the Revolution, striving to look like an intellectual who was an expert in problems I had no information neither knew anything about; and following this course I committed grave faults against the true intellectual's moral code, and what I worse, against the Revolution itself.

"I have been tremendously ungrateful, unjust with Fidel, and the deep repentance I feel for having acted that way motivates me to make amends for my cowardly and counterrevolutionary virulence."

It could not genuine, Mary thought. It was so overwritten. No poet of Padilla's caliber would write with such a lack of restraint. Padilla had been supplied the words and had just read them.

From the other side, Mary thought, if the statement then expressed indirectly the mentality of those who had supplied Padilla with the text of the apology, the wording and mood were of interest in evidencing a similar sentiment as evident in the poems themselves,—a sentiment of being not fully appreciated for contributions to Cuban society.

"Tremendously ungrateful, unjust with Fidel:" The use of the first name implied a great deal. This feud between Padilla and his accusers was like a squabble between two members of the same family, both offended at not being understood by the other member.

The whole interchange showed the smallness and insularity of Cuban society, Mary observed. It showed again, also, in the unproven accusations of American CIA involvement, the sense of being under siege that members of Cuban society felt as the combined result of the Bay of Pigs episode and the economic embargo. It showed how sensitive Cubans were to one another and to the meaning of their revolution.

All the more reason, Mary concluded, to stand fast with the Cuban people in their hour of need, all the more reason to enter the dialogue, to the extent she could as a guest, to be another witness to the importance of free speech.

[Chapter 297 notes]

298. Mary observes and confronts to investigate free speech in Cuba

Due to what she had just recently learned about the Padilla affair, Mary Brandt, as she debarked in Havana, Cuba, on Saturday, May 28, 1971, had a more complicated attitude toward the Cuban revolution than she had had on her previous trip. She was newly aware of the delicacy of dialogue that might be expected, should she engage in it, in this insular society kept in a condition of duress by the economic embargo imposed on it by its gigantic neighbor to the north. She wanted to participate in this dialogue as fully as she would be able to, as a guest of Cuba, while mindful of the hypersensitive atmosphere she had noticed in response to Padilla's poems and arrest. At the same time as not wanting to create an unnecessary stir, however, Mary also wanted to be alert to any evidence of the suppression of free speech that some were claiming existed, and she wanted to observe the daily interactions around her to determine whether the ordinary people of Cuba were still as supportive of the revolution as they had seemed to be on her first stay.

Though vigilant in this manner, Mary saw no signs, in her first few days in Cuba, of any suppression of free speech or any obvious change in the level of support for the government.

The uniformed young woman with dark hair and dark eyes who greeted Mary and her fellow Americans on the dock, as they came ashore in Havana, beamed with pride when she talked about the tree planting that was being done all over Cuba.

"You will see many places," she said, "we will point them out to you, where there are seedlings all over the mountainsides. That is the work of your Venceremos brigades."

Indeed, Mary did see such seedlings on a hillside above the little town of San Jose de las Lajas, about 20 miles southeast of Havana, as she and her fellow volunteers traveled to their worksite. The seedlings were knee-high, at most, tiny pine trees, with needle-leafed fronds that from far below looked like the plumes of green flowers.

Soon a vista opened to the south toward the rolling countryside of the central island with the Golfo de Batabano in the distance. They were headed alongside that gulf, Mary had been told, along the same route she had followed on her first trip to Cuba, and within ten miles of the town of Recita, where she had worked in the fields on that first trip, but this time she and her fellow volunteers would continue southeast another 40 miles to the Trinidad Mountains, where they would be planting trees.

In a town called Jardin del Tagoya, the volunteers detoured from the highway to visit an "escuela en el campo" (school in the country) for a demonstration of how the state efforts in education were progressing. The same young woman who had greeted the group at the dock, and who was

traveling with them on the bus, explained the concept as the bus traveled up the narrow dirt road to the school.

"Every student in Cuba spends two months a year in a rural school," she said. "This is so our students in the cities can understand the people of the country, to increase our solidarity with one another."

The bus moved through a corridor of palm trees beside a field of coffee plants and gray houses made of wood and palm-tree leaves. A sign by the roadside said "El Camino Hacia Arriba de Subdesarrollo es la Educación." Mary knew that meant, in English, "The Path Upward from Underdevelopment is Education."

The school consisted of four newly-built prefabricated buildings, including two brown school buildings, a boys' dormitory, painted red, and a girls' dormitory, painted yellow. Soon students could be seen, looking to be in their early teens. The boys were dressed in beige slacks and white shirts open at the collar. The girls were dressed in brown skirts and beige blouses. None of the boys here had long hair, as might have been seen in a school in the United States. Their hair was all neatly trimmed. The girls' hair was neatly coifed in pony tails or curled.

They were well-behaved, alert children, and tan from their outdoor work, Mary observed when she and her fellow volunteers visited a sunny classroom in which the students sat in rows of double desks.

The teacher was 22 years old, she said, and had not yet finished college. "Since Revolution, everyone go school, everyone must go school," she explained in English. "We have many new students, many new schools, but not many teachers, so everyone help."

The students had classes in the morning, she said. In the afternoon they went out to work in the fields. Each Saturday at noon, they went home to their families in Havana (traveling by bus) and on Sunday evening they came back again.

Mary was impressed with the new schools and with what she had heard about how educational opportunities were being extended to all the children of Cuba. She was impressed with the healthiness and good behavior of the children and the obvious idealism of the young staff. How could she have entertained such negative ideas about Cuba, she wondered. There could be no doubt that this government was dedicated to the well-being of the people and was effective in addressing their needs.

That experience was a plus on the side of the Revolution versus its critics, Mary thought, and two days later, in a square bordered with palm tree and flowers, with the mountainside in the distance, above a church with red tile roof, she learned more that added to her overall positive impression.

The place was a town called Taranuya. The speaker was the

handsome, mustachioed cadre, Xavier Cortez, the one who had given her some special attention on her previous trip. He was the organizer of this particular project, he explained, and so he had the responsibility to start the project with a lesson in history.

He spoke without a microphone by an ornate fountain with a statue of a soldier mounted on a horse. Below the statue was a placard with the words, "La patria es ara no pedestal."

"This soldier here is a national hero," Cortez said, pointing to the statue. "Some of you know him. His name is Jose Marti. The words mean

'The motherland is an altar not a pedestal.' He meant, of course, Cuba is sacred like an altar, not just a pedestal for getting rich, as Spain and then America were trying to do with Cuba.

"But this man, Jose Marti, he said many other good things, also. He said, 'The world is bleeding non-stop due to the crimes committed against nature.' That is what we are going to talk about today.

"There was big crime again nature in this country, Cuba. This crime was against our beautiful trees. Going back a hundred years, until 1959, the year of our great revolution, the total forest covering this island was reduced from 54 to 14 percent. During this period, an average of 360,000 acres of forests were lost to greed each year.

"Who were these people who were cutting down the forest? They were our own people many times, I am ashamed to say, and my own family was among them. These rich people of this country cut down these lovely trees to make their mansions and what they could not use for themselves, they sold to get rich."

Here were more facts to further lessen the doubts that had entered Mary's mind in response to the article she had read in the *New York Times*, the open letter of the "Western intellectuals" to Castro. As she worked on the mountainside, however, with the countryside folding down below her to the sea, Mary realized she had not addressed the issue of free speech in Cuba to the extent she had determined she would do. She decided that the best way to do that would be to visit her friend from her previous stay in Cuba, Juanita Tancredo, the doctor in Recita who had been so full of questions about what Mary thought of the Cuban system.

She asked Xavier Cortez if she could have permission to make the trip. She had never in the whole time of the project said a single word to Cortez, beyond polite greetings, though he looked directly into her eyes whenever she passed near him.

"You don't need permission," he said. "You are a free person, Mary. Cuba is a free country. I can take you in the jeep."

"Thank you, Xavier," she responded. "But I want to go by myself."

"Then just take the local bus then. Just go down to the street and wait.

It costs three dolares, I think."

"I can just go?"

"Yes, of course. There is a schedule on the post in the town square by the statue."

Mary mailed a note to Dr. Tancredo, announcing she would be coming to Recita and would stop at the clinic to say hello. She did not wish to presume any more because she had sent a long letter to the doctor a few months after leaving Cuba, and had received only a brief response.

On Saturday, she left in early morning on the local bus and looked out at the view of forested mountainsides opening to the verdant fields of sugar cane and coffee plants and the glimmering expanse of the Caribbean Sea on the western horizon.

Soon the village of Recita came into view, with its adobe buildings clustered around the central church and bell tower, next to which were the broad roof and side-by-side smoke stacks of the sugar mill that Mary had visited with Dr. Tancredo on her previous trip.

The elegant dark-haired doctor was waiting at the bus stop.

"You didn't need to come and greet me, Juanita!" Mary said at once. "You must have a busy schedule!"

"I wanted to greet you," the doctor replied with a smile. "You are a special friend. I appreciated your thoughtful letter."

"I shouldn't burden people with my thoughts."

"I appreciate your thoughts," the doctor said, leaning forward to give a hug.

Despite the difference of country and culture, the two women were much alike in appearance,—same age and height, both attractive with dark hair, both with statuesque figures, both with determined eyes. The most obvious difference was traditional femininity. Mary had shoulder-length uncurled hair, and she wore her customary blue jeans and a plain white blouse. The doctor, despite her professional status, adhered to the traditional Cuban female style of curled hair, mid-back in length (though pulled straight back from her forehead, in a curled pony tail). She wore a pretty pale yellow dress, tied at the waist, with a pleated skirt reaching just below her knees and white pump shoes.

"I would like to show you around," Dr. Tancredo said. "We have made some great improvements to our clinic. And we have a children's nursery in the hacienda at the edge of town, and a home there for pregnant unmarried girls. Then, I was thinking, I know a little place here where we could go for lunch. My treat, Mary."

"Oh, you don't need to do that."

"I want to."

Thus the day was set. First they visited the clinic where the walls were freshly painted and new furniture had been installed. The clinic had

a new x-ray machine and a new baby wellness clinic.

"This is in connection with the home for pregnant girls I told you about," the doctor said. After the babies are born, we help the girls get work in the sugar mill and we can monitor the new babies here."

The pregnant girls lived three to a room. They seemed happy and unstigmatized. The children's daycare on another building of the hacienda was also a happy site.

"In Cuba, daycare is free," the doctor explained. "We believe these are all our children and we work together to take care of them."

Finally, as the two women ate lunch together after a pleasant morning together, Mary asked her questions about the Padilla affair, feeling confident that the doctor would answer her in a thorough and thoughtful manner.

"I sense this is important to you, Mary," the doctor said. "And I want to tell you what I think. First, you must know, I never heard of this affair, as you call it, until now. I don't read the newspapers here. I'm not a political person, really, and I'm not really artistic."

"Yes, I could understand that," Mary replied.

The doctor frowned as she pondered the issue at hand, stirring her coffee and milk with a spoon.

"Second, I can tell you, Mary," she said softly, "I myself have never seen anyone in Cuba stopped for saying anything, I have never seen anyone afraid to speak freely, just as you and I are speaking. But, how can I tell you? I'm afraid I will disappoint you... Let me start with this. Did you know, Cuba has a law, every person must work? Except for students in school?"

"No, I didn't know."

"What I am trying to impress on you is, in America, many people our same age, are not students and they do not work. I saw this myself when I was studying in St. Louis."

"Yes."

"We do not have that here, Mary, people "out on a lark," as you Americans say. We don't have people out on the highway traveling around. We here are in a battle. A battle to survive. Everyone must work, but also everyone receives. Our free clinic. Our free daycare."

"Yes."

"That is why, this poet you tell about, Mary, in his coffee house, brooding on his feelings, this kind of person is really very, very hard for me to sympathize with."

Mary merely nodded with her dark eyebrows lowered in the trademark Kass family frown.

"Because he is doing this, brooding on himself, when there is work for everyone to do. This is selfish, Mary, to take this romantic attitude.

We in Cuba are past the coffee house days. We have made our changes. Now we must secure them, make them solid, for the good of everyone."

"But are you saying, people should be forbidden from saying what they think, if they do not support the revolution?" Mary asked.

The doctor frowned. "Well, not exactly. But you don't know all the facts, either, do you? You know what this newspaper says. And maybe this poet just needed to be persuaded to be a good citizen."

There was no use in pressing the point further, Mary decided. She changed the subject to end the conversation on a pleasant note. But she felt she had failed in being an advocate for free speech as she had resolved to do. Arriving back at the camp, she saw Xavier Cortez by the tool shed counting seedlings for the next day's planting. He looked keenly in her direction.

"So did you have a good day?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose."

"Why just suppose?"

On an impulse she told him about the issue she had brought up with Dr. Tancredo and the disappointing result.

"And do you think the same way?" she asked.

"Yes, I do. I am sorry to make you feel bad, if it does. You have to understand," he continued, "Cuba may seem to you just a beautiful place, the green mountains, the sea, but there are many among us still who want to undo the Revolution, just as there are many foreign enemies and expatriates who seek the same."

"And you believe that Hebert Padilla was under their influence?"

"Yes, to some degree. But this is a very big subject, Mary, and I must go. I would like to have this talk with you, though, sometime. I would like to very much. Would you like to do that?"

"Sometime, perhaps."

"Well, maybe sometime then. I hope so very much."

Mary watched the handsome cadre drive off in his jeep, well aware that his invitation to a talk about free speech had the overtones of an invitation to a date, also. She did feel an interest in both the talk and the date, she admitted to herself, though it seemed as if any initiative involving a man other than Matthew increased her feelings toward Matthew, also, reinforcing her growing nostalgia for the best of her past times with him.

Mary had not received a letter from Matthew during her entire time in Cuba, though she had learned in a second letter from Dennis Kelly that Matthew was becoming increasingly annoyed by the four new people, who had not joined wholeheartedly in the work and made a lot of noise late into the evening listening to music and smoking grass.

[Chapter 298 notes]

299. Steward and Joan talk about stars in a moonlit field

In the weeks that had passed since Tom Steward had attended the squaw dance with Eddie Yazzie, he had been constantly aware of Joan Shannon, while needing to constantly remind himself, also, that she was not an available female; she was engaged, she was in love with another man.

Steward was cognizant, also, however, of the complex of reactions Joan evoked in him. There was, first, the "spectacular ass," which he could not ignore, much as he tried to mold her mentally into "just a friend." Then there was the argument Joan had presented for a "median way." And what was that, really, he has asked himself. It was a way to compromise between a life "thrown to the wind" such as so many of his peers were pursuing, and a more conventional life, a life directed to the more secure path, with surer outcome, of going to graduate school; a way of taming his intellectual energy to operate within such school-defined bounds versus a life directed to the less secure path, with a less sure outcome, of going out to "look for America," as he had tried to explain to Joan,—the path of exploration.

Joan presented a way to be hip without being a hippy. She presented a way to explore without the complete abandonment of the most extreme protestors against the "same old thing." She presented a way of modulation rather than rebellion.

Then there were the clear blue eyes, the fresh, wholesome face, the girlish smile,—the smile, as he had observed to himself before, of the Catholic girls that he had watched from a distance in grade school at the age when sex was just starting to be felt and not yet fully recognized on either side. She acted like a girl attracted to him who was not aware of the attraction.

Joan Shannon also offered, Steward knew, a lightness of mentality in contrast to the intellectual grimness of the Kierkegaardian mentality of "existential nakedness" that he felt compelled at times to inflict on himself. The vista of the future that she pointed to was open and sunny. It was full of good feelings and joyous times.

For the time being, though, Steward's main strategy regarding Joan Shannon was merely to avoid her outside of work, though he was always glad to see her whenever he happened upon her.

An accidental encounter of this kind happened about a month after the squaw dance. On a Friday evening, with nothing ahead of him except an evening in the little house on Strong Street or driving around by himself in his car, Steward donned his running shorts and running shoes at about an hour before sundown, as he often did. But first he stopped at a gas station for gas and there he ran into Joan Shannon who was in the store buying a few items.

She was her usual friendly self,—as she was not just to him, as he knew, but to just about everyone,—and she was a lovely sight, fresh-faced and bright-eyed, and dressed in a blue halter and cut-off jeans with her hair not in the standard double pigtails but arranged in big flaxen curls. And that made her seem a little self-conscious. She touched her hair at once when she said hello to him, crinkling her nose.

"Trying to change my look a little bit," she explained. "I don't have any big thing going or anything. I just get tired of looking the same way. I even bore myself in the mirror."

"You look really pretty," Steward said.

"Thank you."

She waited for him to pay for his gas, and then walked with him out of the store into the enchanted lighting of the late afternoon sun on the red rock formations on the other side of the road.

"Looks like you're going for a run," she said.

"Yea, I always procrastinate to the last minute," he said.

"Where do you run to?"

"I was going out to the high school, out by the highway there, on the outside of the town."

"How come you go there?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I like to run on a track. Reminds me of the old days, I guess."

They stood together for a moment outside of the filling station where a clean-shaven, neatly clipped young man with a wife waiting and three children in the back seats of a vacation-packed van, stood at the gas pump in the splendid golden light of the late day.

"I was thinking," said Joan. "I'd kind of like to go running, too. You think I could come along?"

"Sure, Joannie. If you'd like to. I didn't know you were a runner."

"Well, I was on the cross country team. But I'm not very good," she said. "How about if you pick me up at my place in a half hour?"

"Okay. It might be dark by the time we get there, but there are lights on the side of the school. I run there all the time late at night by myself."

Steward could not hide from himself his eager anticipation of the few hours ahead with Joan. It was maybe going against his self-cautions, but there would be nothing improper in it.

He pulled up to the curb at her apartment and saw her face at the kitchen window. She came running out at once, dressed in white socks and running shoes, blue running shorts with white stripes, and a hooded blue sweatshirt with the hood draped down.

The sun was near the western horizon, above the low profile of the Gallup downtown area, as they headed out of town in the opposite direction toward the high school, which was just a few blocks from the

highway in the area of motels and restaurants on the eastern end of town. Though formally the situation was just as it had been described between them, two friends going running together, and nothing more, there could be no doubt that there was another atmosphere in the car, of a young man and woman, both lonely, and both glad for the prospect of the evening ahead in one another's company.

At the high school, Steward and Joan drove in past the dark school to the football field, which was in a back area with open country on one side and bleachers on the other. They parked beside the track and walked out to the field. The high school and all the facilities including the track were brand new.

Steward plopped down on the field to stretch with Joan beside him, doing the same exercise of reaching out to grab one foot with the other foot tucked in.

"I usually run four miles,—16 laps," he said.

"Oh, wow! Well, I won't go that far! Maybe a couple of miles. I'll just wait for you."

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all! I really love this. It's so nice to get out."

The sun had set by this time. On the east side of the field, above the bleachers, the reddish-orange sphere a full moon was rising. It was a clear, balmy night. The air had a scent of sage and juniper, wafting in from the open area on the other side of the field, where the vast mesa opened outward from the northeast edge of town.

They began running together on the firm, new cinders, stride by stride, bringing for them both a quite different, more animal male and female feeling, than they had previously felt sitting and talking side by side. Joan was really quite small, Steward realized. In height, she was just up to his shoulders. She ran lightly, hardly making a sound except for the input and output of her breath, which had the steady rhythm, in cadence with her footfalls, of a practiced runner.

"This is so wonderful," she said. "It's such a beautiful scene. Did you ever think, we're so lucky to be living out here, in this beautiful, wide open country? I would never have imagined it, back in Boston."

After a mile, she dropped back and continued around the track at a slower pace as Steward lapped her without speaking. Then she went off into the center of the field by herself and sat down on the grass, waiting.

"Go for it!" she called out as Steward upped his pace into a full-strided run for his last lap.

He came over and sat down beside her.

"Well, I have to say, this has been really pleasant," he said.

She smiled. "For me, too,"

"Reminds me of the some of the unlikely places I'd wind up when I

was hitching around," he said. "I stayed on a rooftop by a field like this one time, little utility building or something."

"What was the logic of that?"

"Get up out of sight so nobody comes across you in the middle of the night."

"Little paranoid, I guess."

"Maybe, yes. I had a hitching friend, guy named Bill O'Rourke, who taught me to do that, complete with a horror story of a guy that got his balls chopped off by some sinister characters."

"Oh, my!"

Steward determined at once in his mind not to mention O'Rourke's death since Joan's fiancé was still in Vietnam.

"What else would you do when you were hitching?"

"Well, when I was alone, one other kind of crazy thing, is I'd look at the stars, really study them, you know, like a shepherd of old."

"How would you do that?"

"Well, this same guy I mentioned, Bill O'Rourke," Steward replied, "he gave me a present one time, a sky map. I still have it at home. I would study that."

"Study it how?"

"The constellations. Like a boy scout, you know."

"Okay, Mr. Steward," she said, lying back to look up at the sky. "Tell me something I don't know... And don't be getting any ideas, by the way, just 'cause I laid back."

He laid back beside her, looking up. The sky was perfectly clear, a dazzling array such as people seldom look at in modern times, with the hazy white cloud of the Milky Way visible along a north-south axis and the moon risen about thirty degrees above the eastern horizon.

"Well, let's start with this. How many constellations do you think there are," Steward said.

"I have no idea. A couple hundred, maybe?"

"There are 88 constellations, Joanie. Just 88. So the significance of this is you can actually learn them all. It's a do-able task."

"If you want to," she said. "But, anyhow, I take it that you did."

"Yes, I did. See, first thing I learned," Steward said, "and this made a big impression on me, Joannie, the sky can actually be divided up into sections based on the constellations. So it's a way of reference. Like see the moon now?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, look up there, a little to the right of it, that big blue star."

"Okay."

"Well, that there is Rigel,' Steward said. "And Rigel is part of the constellation Virgo. So you can say, 'the moon is in Virgo.' It's a way of

reference."

"Now you're being sly," she said.

"Being sly how?"

"I know what Virgo means, Tom. It's not that hard to figure out. 'Virgo' as in 'virgin.'"

He laughed. "Well, the moon is in Virgo, Joannie. I'm not making it up. It's not my fault it's in Virgo."

"Okay. Apology accepted."

"And it's not my fault you're a virgin, either."

"Here comes the sly again."

Steward raised up his hands behind his head and sat up, as in a sit-up position. He leaned on one arm to look down at her girlish face. She was smiling.

"Who told you I was a virgin anyhow?" she said.

"You did."

"I don't think I did, Tom," she said, sitting up, to look directly in his eyes with mock sternness, though her voice was pleasant, not angry. "And I don't think you should make assumptions."

"You said, and I quote, 'I am saving myself for George. I want him to be my first experience.'"

"So I guess I did tell you."

"You and George ever go looking at stars?"

"Not that exactly, but let's say we had plenty of star struck moments."

"I can imagine."

"Yes, you can. I won't stop you from that."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Joan, I like this whole arrangement because I can get all romantic about you and I don't have to worry about it because I know it's not going anywhere."

"Oh, this is new, romantic."

"Don't be a faker, Joanie."

"Okay, I admit it. I feel romantic, too. What do you expect, you bring me out in this dark field with the moon in Virgo?"

"Well, I was not aware."

He popped up from the grass and reached for her hand. "Care for a coffee at Denny's or something?"

"That sounds grand."

The hand placed in her hand to pull her up, which it did, remained in her hand as they headed off across the field and she made no effort to pull it out.

"So you figure there's no way you could tear me away," she said, "no way you could beguile me with those hazel eyes?"

"I wouldn't want to, Joan, and you wouldn't want me to."

“Yes, I know.”
“We can be romantic ‘just friends’.”
“Okay, it’s a deal.”

300. Steward gets a lesson in self-reliance at Thomasek's "spread"

After his moonlight run with Joan Shannon, Tom Steward warned himself again that he was getting pulled in over his head, falling in love with a woman who had plainly told him numerous times that she could not be his sweetheart. But, after he had managed on several consecutive evenings to avoid walking up the hill for the two blocks to Joan's apartment, where he knew she would welcome him at any time, Steward received a phone call from Joan in which she invited him on a camping trip.

"This is the deal, Tom," she said, "and I know you're the only one I could possibly ask, this old friend of mine from school is out here with her boyfriend, and they want me to go camping with them. It would be kind of awkward, you know, but I was thinking you could come along, as sort of my boyfriend, you know. They know about George, but I told them I have friends here I go out with just on a casual basis."

"Where would we sleep?"

"I have a little tent. You and I can sleep in it together. I don't know, you think you could do that without going crazy? I can't have sex, you know. We could cuddle, though, if you want to."

"When would this be?"

"This weekend."

Steward knew from the moment that Joan broached this subject, that there was no way he would refuse. Just the thought of lying beside her all night was an irresistible prospect.

"Alright," he said.

"You're a darling, Tom."

"Thank you."

So that would happen on Saturday, but it was only Tuesday, Steward thought as he hung up the phone. He would have to forget Joan until then. With an open evening before him, and one that seemed more lonely after talking to her, he got in his car and drove out of town with no particular idea which way to head.

Some horses in a corral just outside of town soon gave him a direction, however. "Doug Thomasek," he said to himself. That was something to do. He would go visit his old VISTA friend from North Carolina, or at least look around for his place. Thomasek had explained in general terms the way to his "spread,"— on the evening when he and Stacey had had beers with Steward in the bar in Gallup.

Driving out of town to the west on the main street highway (the old Highway 61), Steward located the first landmark Thomasek had mentioned, a low bluff about a quarter mile long extending in an east-to-west direction parallel with the highway and railroad tracks, and of a

peculiar rosy-hued red clay color. About a half-mile beyond that, he located another point of reference that Thomasek had mentioned, the place where the wide swath of bulldozed land intended for the new freeway crossed from the south side of the highway, where it ran along the bluff at this location, to the north side, where it ran for the next ten or so miles. At that crossing point, per Thomasek, a two-lane road veered off to the northwest.

Steward followed the road across the tracks and continued through a gulley bordered with cottonwoods and upward in a wide arc from northwest to northeast alongside a mesa with a steep, high bluff on its south side and, on its west side, just across from him, a slope covered with straw- colored grass and juniper trees of a dull green color.

Next he watched for a second two-lane paved road crossing the road he was on at an angle from southeast to northwest. He found the road and turned onto it, as Thomasek had said to do, looking for a dirt road going off to the right beside a pile of red rocks. He found the dirt road and bumped along over a rolling field of dry grass, tumbleweed, and sage past a hamlet of four houses and then toward a further house, about a quarter mile in the distance, with a windmill and one outbuilding below a low brown bluff about 50 feet high.

That was Thomasek's, he was pretty sure. It was a two-story house, as Thomasek had said, with a small, man-made pond, next to the windmill, as Thomasek had also indicated, beside which were two chestnut horses in pen bordered with unfinished poles. The sturdy, garage-sized shed on the other side of the house appeared to be the forge Thomasek had described. It had an outdoor furnace like a brick table with a brick fireplace built on top of it on the back side. Under the lean-to roof, all around, hung hammers, pincers, pliers, a bellows, wrought iron gates, pots and pans, cooking utensils, and horseshoes, all black in color.

As a final confirmation that the place was the Thomasek's, next to the shed was the red Ford pickup that they had driven off in the evening Steward had seen them in Gallup.

When Steward came near the house, the lean, lanky Thomasek, with his tan cowboy hat perched on his head, emerged from the door dressed in blue jeans, a light blue Western shirt, and cowboy boots. He stood with his hands on his hips, grinning.

"Goddam if it ain't Mr. Tom Steward," he said.

"Yes, it is," Steward replied, looking around.

From where he stood, Steward could see back to the railroad tracks and Route 61 highway about two miles to the south. Part of the two-lane, paved road that he had just driven on was visible in a flat area next to the butte about a mile away.

"When I said, stop by," Thomasek said. "I didn't mean for you to

take me serious, you know."

"I can leave if you want."

"Just joshing you, man. Delighted to have you."

A slender girl of about nine with straight dark hair came out of the house next, followed by a towheaded boy of about four.

"Julie, you remember this guy from when you were a little girl in North Carolina?" Thomasek said.

"Yes, kind of."

"Just kind of, huh?" Steward laughed.

"You had the long white car."

"Hey, very good, Julie! Yes, I did!"

"Sharp little one, ain't she?"

"Yes, she is!"

Thomasek's pretty, dark-haired wife came out next, dressed in baggy pants and a green maternity blouse with a white breastplate printed with blue and white flowers.

"Well, if it ain't Tommie," she said. "You're just in time for supper. Nothing special, though."

"I don't want to just barge in, Stacey."

"You ain't barging. We're pleased to have you. We don't get much company up here by ourselves."

They stood in the dry, warm air, looking out to the sunset gold and orange colors and dark shadows on the jagged rock formations and buttes in the vast country to the south. A mile-long train of boxcars, coal hoppers, and shiny tank cars glinting in the sunlight, was being pulled along by three diesels on the track beside the highway.

Soon Steward and the Thomasek's were seated at a large rectangular wooden table in a large, wooden-floored dining room with high ceilings and a stone fireplace on one side and two high windows facing south toward the sunset scene, with colors now faded to pink, that had been visible from the front door a few moments earlier.

"Well, how far along are you now, Stacey?" Steward asked, as the group passed around a meal of meatloaf, boiled potatoes, baked squash, corn, and sliced bread.

"Eight months," she replied with a smile.

"Oh, yes, we are at the ready," Doug Thomasek said. "Got the room all set up upstairs."

"You're going to have the baby here?"

"Oh, yes. Got a mid-wife arranged," Thomasek said.

"Joey here was born at home, too," said Stacey. "In Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Weren't you, Jody?"

"Yes, I was. And I didn't even know it."

"No, you did not."

That brought a laugh all around.

Doug Thomasek had taken his self-reliant cowboy theme to the limit, Steward thought, with his ranch house, horses, blacksmithing occupation, and now a return to pioneer medicine. Thomasek was interesting in how he had taken some of the basic ideas the hippies had promoted, like working with your hands and returning to the land, and had put them into practice in his daily life, much more so than a lot of the hippies had done. But he did not regard himself as a hippie. He had come upon such ideas on his own, denying any influence from the counterculture.

Talk turned eventually to Steward's own life and his future plans, and then Steward felt ashamed in having to explain that he still had not the slightest idea what he would do when he left Gallup. He talked about the idea of "looking for America," same as he had talked about with Joan Shannon, and, as with Joan, he had trouble explaining just what he meant by that concept.

"The ol' ramblin' man," Thomasek said to sum it up.

"You don't need to worry, Stew," said Stacey. "Everything will fall into place at the right time."

Finally came the inevitable inquiry into Steward's romantic status, and he told them then of his complicated friendship with Joan Shannon, how he and she had become "close friends but not lovers,"—a disclosure that brought an attentive look to Stacey's sympathetic eyes while the self-styled cowboy beside her listened with an expression of lingering amusement like someone anticipating the punch line of a joke.

That topic came up later again when the two men went outside to the shed to look at the forge and have a few beers while Thomasek illustrated how he heated and pounded out iron.

"I kind of suspect you might have a little bit of a thing for this Joan lady you were telling us about," Thomasek said with a grin as he alternated between the bellows and his second bottle of beer.

"Yea, I guess it must be obvious," Steward said. He was also on his second beer.

With darkness covering the mesa below, the fire in the furnace had the quality of a campside fire built under the protection of the bluff in the background.

With his friend's encouragement, Steward brought out more details about how he had met Joan, how he and she had gotten together a few times, usually at her invitation, and how she had once sat on his lap, though with no intimacies happening beyond that, and had gone with him on a moonlight run. In response to more questions, he described her physical attributes, starting with her girlish face and pigtails and ending with the physical feature that had first drawn notice.

On hearing this last, Doug Thomasek threw back his head in his tan

cowboy hat, and laughed so heartily that it took him about ten seconds to respond. “So drill her little ass,” he finally said.

“I don’t know if it’s that simple,” Steward replied.

“You know, Stewie, I look at you, I remember you riding in the pickup in North Carolina when I was talking about this cleft in the hills and how it reminded me of a twat, and you didn’t even know what that was, as I recall.”

“I didn’t know the word, maybe,” Steward said.

“You did not know what it was. And you have not changed.”

“I’ve been married, Doug, remember?” Steward said. “I’m no longer uninitiated, as I was then. Sorry to blow your theory.”

“Stew, you’ve been married, and no doubt she was quite a looker, as you said in the bar, but you still the goddam naiveté.”

“I don’t know.”

“You ever think maybe that was the reason your wife left you, you were a little too naive, you know?”

Steward didn’t like to contemplate that. He had always felt that he had been a sexual success with his former wife and she had always told him she liked how he made love.

“I don’t think that was the case,” he said.

“These women, you know, they like to pretend they’re so high-minded, you know, but they like a little bit of the devil now and then. It drives them wild.”

“Whatever that is.”

“I’ll leave it to your imagination.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Thomasek rearranged the brim of his cowboy hat, took a swig of the beer, and bent his face toward Steward with a crazy grin. “Know what I think, Stewball?” he said.

“No, what do you think?”

“I think, part of you is afraid, you know, you get that dong in there good and deep and you won’t be able to get it out. You’re telling me all these dreams you got,—to hit the highway and join in this great exploration, finding America, or whatever you said,—and you’re thinking I get my dong in there, I won’t be able to do that.”

Steward shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“I’m thinking, Stewie, put the damn dong in there, and pull it out, get your pack on your back, and hit the road like you want to.”

“You don’t seem to have followed that advice yourself.”

“I don’t want to hit the road. That’s your trip, man. In any case, I got a hunch that babe will still be around when you get back.”

“She’s engaged, Doug. She’s very much in love.”

“Sure she is, Tom. If she was so engaged, she wouldn’t be flitting

around and sitting on your lap, let me tell you."

Steward left it at that, and he was glad when Thomasek went on to other subjects while drawing a bar of glowing red metal from the forge to pound out on the anvil.

"I think back to North Carolina quite a bit, Stew," Thomasek said, "me and you together, those long rides in the pickup. Remember that time we drove all the way over the mountains to Tennessee, looking for that ghost town?"

"That was quite a trip."

"Remember that guy, come across the hill with that gun, and when he got to us, didn't say a damn thing, just let a big fart."

"Guess he was trying to tell us something."

So they went on, late into the evening, as Thomasek demonstrated how he pounded the bar on an anvil to bend it around into a curled shape for a wrought iron fence. By that time, the two former volunteers had gone through one six pack and Thomasek had gone in the house to get a second, in which there were just two beers left.

Steward left soon later, feeling the effect of the evening on his state of mind. He was newly impressed with how Thomasek had found such a unique niche and such a level of familial intimacy by living out his philosophy of individuality.

While his old friend had accomplished all that, Steward noted, he himself had accomplished hardly anything,—a series of projects in North Carolina, West Virginia, and Arizona that, though well-intended, had been, in the end, of dubious value; a marriage started in hopefulness and love and ended as a mistake for both parties. What had he done, really, Steward asked himself. He had just been a "participant observer," as he had once heard said. He hadn't done anything solid.

Steward thought about Joan, also. Could it be she really wanted him to come on sexually, was expecting him to, and would consent if he made an overture? Was he really afraid that if she did accept him he would get pulled in somehow and lose his freedom to explore?

Back in Gallup, he drove past her apartment and saw a light on in her kitchen. Maybe she had gotten up because she had been unable to sleep from loneliness, he thought.

Ten minutes later he drove past again. The light was still on, but he didn't stop to knock on the door. Instead, he continued down the hill to his own house, parked his car at the curb, and went in to spend the rest of the night by himself.

301. Steward spends the night alone in a tent with Joan

Tom Steward headed out with Joan Shannon to the agreed upon camping trip the following Saturday, feeling enthused about the camping itself and the agreed upon place of Canyon de Chelley on the Navajo Reservation, but his main thoughts were on Joan and what would happen between him and her in the small enclosure of her tent.

Steward soon learned, however, that he would not spend the early part of the trip with Joan herself, but instead with the boyfriend of Joan's friend from college. This was because Joan's friend was not coming back to Gallup after the camping trip, but would be heading north to Colorado, so the group would be traveling up in two vehicles and Joan would be riding with her friend to catch up on old times.

Even so, though not riding with Joan, Steward was in an expansive mood as the caravan of two cars passed through Gallup. Joan had given him a bright smile as he and she had separated. He felt sure the trip would go well. As always for him, also, the contact with the physical world, in the movement of the car on the road, was a balm for his spirits. A bright sun was rising in the east into the blue sky above the motels and restaurants in that direction. Just beyond the last buildings of the little town, he knew, the vast, majestic country lay ahead.

Steward's assigned fellow traveler, whose name was Chad Eisfeld, proved to be a pleasant companion. He was a research assistant with a masters in molecular biology, and he was interested in all matters pertaining to the reservation and Indian history.

"I did manage to get a map of the reservation," he said to Steward as they rode along. "I suppose you don't even need one."

"Oh, no," Steward replied. "It's quite a big place."

"And I have a map of Canyon de Chelley. It's bigger than I thought. Eight miles long at its longest."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

At Rock Springs, where Steward's friend Eddie Yazzie lived, Steward pointed out Yazzie's place about a mile from the road in a grove of cedar trees by a bluff. "Friend I was telling you about lives in that little house," he said. "His mother and grandmother live in the hogan."

"Is that so?" Eisfeld said. "Still today!"

"Oh, yes. Lot of people still do. And the hogan is fairly modern. Running water, electricity, refrigerator, stove."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

The two hour drive from Gallup up Route 7 to Canyon de Chelley went quickly as they passed along the interesting sites of the Navajo capitol building at Window Rock, the wind-carved circular hole in the

bluff that gave the town its name, and the historical buildings of Fort Defiance a few miles further north.

Then, on a narrow, dirt road, a considerable distance off the paved road, came the campground where they would spend the night, identified on the map as Spider Rock Outlook.

The campground was a flat, rocky area, bordered on three sides by a vast expanse of rolling dry land dotted with pinyons and junipers and on the fourth side by an irregular opening in the rock that looked from a distance like the shoreline of a lake.

The two couples, as soon as they had stopped in the campsite, went for a walk together to look out at the canyon.

Joan came across to Steward then, smiling, flaxen pigtails bobbing, blue eyes sparkling, the very picture of healthy femininity, and glowing, as if lit from within, with the innocent sexuality so characteristic of her. She took his right hand in her left hand, squeezed it as she beamed up at him, and tripped along beside him toward the overlook, swinging his arm in an exaggerated arc like a child playing.

"You have a good ride up?" Steward asked as they separated a little from the other couple.

"Oh, yes! Girl talk, you know... Wish I could have been with you, though, I have to admit!"

As they reached the overlook, she swung his arm over her head onto her shoulder, and placed her left arm around his waist.

From where they stood, the "shoreline" visible from where they had parked the cars was revealed to be the walls of the canyon, which opened below like a gigantic hole in the ground with the high cliffs all around it forming an irregular shape that extended for miles to the north. The walls at the top were sheer cliffs, about 500 feet high, with slopes that looked like pulverized rock angling steeply from the base of the walls to the canyon floor. Spider Rock, the wind-carved, double column of rock for which the campsite was named, was directly in front of them, anchored in a steep slope about 500 feet below. It looked like an ancient sculpture of two elongated figures of different heights standing side by side, like a man and woman together.

In the center of the canyon was a narrow, winding river bordered by trees. Beside the river, here and there, were small fields, irregular in shape, planted in crops. There were also green areas where sheep grazed, though the predominant colors were brown and clay red.

With a plan soon agreed on to set up a camp and then go for a ride down to the canyon floor, the two couples pitched their tents and gathered wood for a camp fire. The campsite was unimproved except for a concrete building with toilets. There were no other people in sight.

On the floor of the canyon was a different world. The cliffs above

created a feeling of isolation. It was a benevolent world at the present time, with sunlight falling on the glittering water of the river in the center of the canyon floor.

About four miles to the north of where they had entered the canyon, the group got out of their cars again to look at the "white house ruins," the cliff dwellings of the ancient Anasazi people, which could be seen about 500 feet above. Joan got the idea then of climbing up the slope for a better view of the ruins, taking Steward with her, while the other couple waited at the car.

Steward followed Joan's feminine form up the slope toward the ruins carved high above her on the cliff. She was totally focused, he knew, on the mystery of the origin and disappearance of the ancient people who had built the cliff dwellings, while he was focused as intently on her pelvis swinging from side to side in front of him with the teasing motion of its natural design. There was something in the air, also, that followed as she walked. Did she emit a scent like a female animal in heat? Whatever it was, it made his balls ache. It made his head swim.

Steward thought about that later, at the campfire, as Joan snuggled against him and the sky grew dark above the "shores" of the rocks faintly visible in the distance, from which the canyon gaped downward. The stars appeared in an astounding array such as is seldom seen except in places far removed from the lights of any city. Soon a three-quarter moon rose amidst the countless stars, as the conversation turned to the inevitable topics at such times, touching on the vastness of the universe and smallness and fragility of human life.

Then, at last came the words he had been waiting for from Chad. "Well, it's been great. Guess it's about time to turn in."

In the small enclosure of Joan's tent, he slipped off his pants and outer shirt and in his underpants and T-shirt slid into his sleeping back while she did the same beside him, never looking in his direction, though he glanced long enough at her himself to register an image of her bare legs and her buttocks in her yellow panties.

She snuggled into his arms, as she had promised to do, though still within her sleeping bag and securing his hands firmly in both of hers to prevent him from moving them around.

"Well, now I need to say a very difficult thing," she said.

"And what is that?"

"Good night."

At that she gave him a little peck on his lips and removed herself from his arms toward the other side of the tent. Then, for a long time, again, they lay in this new configuration while, though awake himself, Steward assumed she had fallen asleep.

"Are you asleep, Tom?" she suddenly said, turning toward him.

"No," he answered.

"Neither am I."

"Kind of hard, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I've never done this before."

"Never done what?"

"Laid in the dark with a man like this."

"You're pretty covered up there, Joanie."

"All for the better. I'm horny."

"I thought you were so engaged."

"I am so engaged. I can be horny, can't I?"

"Yes, you sure can."

"You're a good guy to be horny with. I know I can trust you."

"Well, let's hope so."

"You're really special, Tom, you know," she sighed. "And it just does a number on me that you're so big and strong, you really are, you know, and the penis, you know... It does a number on me, too."

"Joanie, you can move your little hand over here, or whatever you want to move over."

She laughed. "I don't want to tell George I couldn't wait."

"You could lie."

"Oh, Tom!"

"It's okay, Joanie. We can just be friends."

"It's so wonderful. It's so intimate. Can I just cuddle with you without driving you crazy?"

"Sure, Joanie. It's nice for me, too."

"What a fantastic world we live in! Could you believe those cliff dwellings?"

"They were amazing alright."

"People lived in them, hundreds of years ago!"

"They were smart to build down in that canyon," Steward said. "No one could see them from the mesa above. And if you did look down, you wouldn't see them unless you really looked for them. They were smart people. Smarter than we know."

"Just think of all the delicious moments under the stars! Looking out from the cliffs! The sun coming up in the morning! Lying together like this! It makes the world seem so charged with beauty. I think some poet said that. I don't mean to copy. I don't have my own words, I guess."

"I like your words, Joanie."

"Do you really?"

"Yes."

"What else do you like about me?"

"Well, to tell you the absolute truth, I like your ass."

"That is provocative!" she said.

"Well, you asked me."

"You don't mince your words, do you?"

"I guess not."

"What's so to like?"

"I don't know. Like you say, some things are beyond words. I don't mean to come on, if you don't want me to, I just dream about it."

"Dream about what?"

"How you would look bare-assed."

At that Joan rearranged herself in her sleeping bag and allowed the bag to slip down on her hips with the yellow panties removed. There was the magnificent ass in full view in the diffuse moonlight filtering through the canvas roof of the tent.

After an inner struggle, Steward began a process to get his hand closer, starting with a backrub and ending at her lower back. But when his hand proceeded to the flat area between the two rounds of flesh, she reached for the hand and took it firmly.

"Just hold me," she said. "It's hard for me too."

Steward did that then for about an hour, or maybe even two, as Joan talked softly in the silver light; and, all this while, the ass remained in view, exuding a strange force that seemed to grow in intensity as he looked but restrained from touching her.

Joan Shannon had much to talk about in words brought forth in hushed tones or in a whisper, presumably so as not to be overheard by the couple in the other tent. Her girlish voice was as suffused with innocence as was her moist, clean face with its downy rim of flaxen hair.

"Hold my hand, will you?" she said the next morning as he and she rode back to Gallup in her Volkswagen bug.

"Sure, Joanie. Glad to," he replied.

In his entire 27 years, Steward thought, he had been involved with just two partners (if Barbara Carpenter could be included), compared to Joan's zero, yet he was infinitely more jaded than Joan would be for some time, or maybe ever. She apparently thought that the mere fact that she had lain beside him with her ass in view had made him and her the next thing to lovers.

Her behavior struck him as an exercise of primitive feminine power. She was not vain about it, or maybe not even conscious of it, and yet she knew that all she had had to do to wield that power was to bring him to a point of "so close and yet so far," as he had once heard said.

Even as he thought this, though, Steward realized that the moment of the glorious ass had come and gone; and, in fact, Joan left in a few days for a hastily arranged trip out East to meet up for a few days with George, her soldier fiancé. She came back with the news that she and he

had moved their marriage date up to June, just a month away.

"I'm just plain horny, Tom. How can I say it? I really want to get fucked!" she told Steward with a look as if to say it was quite a triumph for a Catholic girl to speak in this frank manner. "So I figure I better do this quick if I'm going to do it right."

He knew that by that she meant she wanted to still be a virgin on the day of her marriage.

"Hey, that's okay, Joannie," he said. "Maybe my whole purpose then was to just get you on the right direction."

"Oh, Tom! You've been much more than that! I treasure the times we spent together! All our talks!"

Joanie and he had, indeed, had some good talks, Steward observed to himself, upon hearing this. And had he really ever thought that there had been a chance of settling in with her or of getting engaged and married? Not really. Had he really wanted her to be unfaithful to her fiancé? Not really. The whole thing had just been a delicious game. Or maybe a dance, like he had thought that evening with Eddie Yazzie after the squaw dance,—a subtle, elaborate dance.

That night he went for a walk alone on Main Street, across from his former residence, the Henry Hotel, where the continual traffic streamed past that he had watched from his second floor window. He stood and listened as a train came past on the track beside the highway, the immense coal hoppers bending the rails and clunking and whining with metallic sounds as they lumbered past in the shadows, creating a staccato flickering of light.

What had the ass been anyway, Steward wondered. He had a distinct memory of the ass almost glowing in the dark as he moved his hand towards it only to have his hand pushed aside. The ass struck him as a vision almost that he had seen that night in the tent.

Yet, thought Steward, the truth of the situation was, he had walked away. How relieved he was not to have been pulled by emotion and desire into another involvement! He listened for the dissonant sound of the metal on the tracks—how he had come to love it! He stood on the main street highway, with traffic passing east and west, glad for his freedom to follow that highway wherever it led.

[Chapter 301 notes]

302. Mary accepts Cortez's invitation to spend a day together talking

As Mary Brandt planted trees on a mountain slope in Cuba, in late June of 1971, high above the lush, green valleys and sparkling bays of the beautiful island, she thought now and then of the handsome cadre, Xavier Cortez, and of his offer, weeks before, to have a long talk with her about the "very big subject" (as he had put it) of free speech in Cuba. He came by at times in his role as administrator of the volunteer projects, and, whenever he did, he made a point of meeting her eyes and exchanging a few words, but he had never again mentioned his offer for a talk. Maybe, she thought, he had forgotten it.

Mary had remained aware of the offer, however, because the issue of free speech in Cuba was so important to her and because she had put Cuba forward to others as a model of a cooperative society.

Mary had also remained aware, of course, of the romantic overtones of the soldier's attentions, which had piqued her interest more than her desire, as she had not yet ventured toward the new freedom of association that she and her erstwhile husband Matthew Brandt, at her own insistence, had agreed on.

The offer for a talk finally came one morning when Mary was walking alone, a little later than usual, from the dormitory where she stayed, in the village below the mountain, to the little store in the village plaza where the horse-drawn wagon stopped that took the volunteers up to the work site.

As she neared an intersection in the road, she saw a military jeep approaching and recognized at once the dark hair, dark mustache, and exuberant, handsome face of Xavier Cortez.

"Well, fancy meeting you, Mary Brandt!" he exclaimed as he pulled up beside her. "I think it must be pre-ordained because I was just now thinking about what you and I talked about!"

"And what exactly was that?" Mary inquired, without the least sign of coquettishness, as the trademark Kass family straight eyebrows lowered in her trademark frown.

Unaware as she was, as always, of her physical appearance, she had no idea of what an alluring spectacle she was, with her dark, thick hair shining with health and her serious, thoughtful face, tanned by her work outdoors in the sun, seeming somehow to assert its exquisite femininity despite her efforts to keep herself plain.

"Mary, as I recall, we, you and I, we were talking about freedom of speech in Cuba," Cortez answered with a smile, as if to acknowledge that he knew he was being tested, "and I was saying, there are many among us still who want to undo the Revolution, and many foreign enemies and many expatriates who want to do the same. I was so sorry to have to

leave it at that. I know I have seen you on the mountain, but it was not the right time, with the others, and my duties. But I want so very much for you to understand! I know you have a good heart, Mary. And such a keen mind! I have heard you talk!"

"I do remember that talk," Mary replied, as she noticed the wagon she was waiting for in the distance. He had indeed remembered the crux of what he and she had discussed before. "I have thought of it, too, many times. But I'm late for work, Xavier, and here comes my ride."

"Well, how about this? Let me take you up to the work site. We can talk a little, at least."

"Well, okay, thanks."

Mary stepped up into the jeep then and, as she did, felt the flip-flop in her womb again that she had felt on first meeting Cortez on her prior trip.

Together they sped down the shade-dappled street under a canopy of palms, around a bend past the last adobe house in the peaceful town, and up a winding road commanding a view of the same beautiful countryside that she often looked at from the mountainside. Immediately below the bend of the road that they were on at the moment, the green slope of the mountain rolled down to a strip of sand where waves crashed in from an expanse of gleaming water that extended to the horizon under a blue sky.

"Well, let's start with this!" Cortez exclaimed as they drove along in the bright sunlight, "we often hear, in America there is a free press. Why is it, then, Mary, the whole story, the true story, is so seldom heard about Cuba in American papers or TV? I know. I was a student in America for four years and I came back."

"What do you mean, 'you came back'?" Mary said.

"Well, just that! See, this is something you do not know about me, Mary. My family fled from Cuba when I was 13. I was not sure myself if I wanted to leave. But I did leave, to stay with my family. In a boat. My father arranged it somehow. And, then, four years later, I came back alone. In another boat, from Key Largo."

"Well, that's quite astounding!" Mary remarked.

"Leaving was hard, but it was not so hard to come back!" Cortez laughed. "I was glad to know, Mary, when I came back, that I would spend my life in this land I love, working to make it better for my people!"

There could be no doubt of the depth and sincerity of this man's love for his own land, Mary reflected. Neither did there appear to be any selfish ambition spurring him to follow the party line. His motive was truly service for his country, so far she could tell.

"Well, Xavier, this is why it bothers me so much when you dismiss democratic rights like free speech so easily," she said, "because I truly do believe, and I trust that you do care about this, that you are unknowingly

taking your country down a path that will have dire consequences somewhere in a future that you cannot see."

"Oh, see how you wound me!" he said. "Easily? You say 'easily'? And now we are already here. How can I even begin to reply?"

"Perhaps someday you will," Mary said as he drove the jeep into a dirt parking lot beside a sheet metal shed where the Venceremos workers, about a dozen of them, could be seen on the slope above, apparently unaware of the occupants of the jeep below them.

"And then on this 'someday' you will really listen, Mary. You want to listen, truly?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Well, let the trees go for a day then! Come with me instead. I will show you for myself what I am talking about! Because this issue I mention, of the newspapers and television not telling the whole truth, is the key to the understanding of free speech in Cuba that I want to tell you about."

Mary Brandt considered for a moment, knowing she did welcome the prospect of spending the day with Xavier Cortex. She welcomed it for the intellectual stimulation and for the chance to express her view, to be a proselyte of democracy as she had defined as her goal before Xavier had even come into the picture (or back into the picture, she thought). And why not admit it? She welcomed the experience of spending a lovely day in an exotic, foreign, beautiful place with a handsome man. Why should she not? Merely to travel in his company was not being in any way disloyal to Matthew, and anyway she and Matthew had already agreed to no longer hold one another to such bounds, though she was quite aware that she did not really want to test her new freedom in practice.

"Oh, alright," she said.

"So you will accompany me then?"

"Yes, I will."

"Spendido! Splendido! Please excuse me, Mary, but I must use my own language for such a marvelous thing!"

She smiled at that. "And just why is it so splendid, I would like to know, you love so much to talk?"

"Oh, no, Mary, I cannot pretend that I am not aware of what a lovely woman you are! Yes, of course, I am aware. And, as a man, Mary, which I am, I am just glad for the company in this bright Cuban sun of such a woman as you are, so beautiful, and intelligent, too!"

"Well, please, let us just leave it at that, or I will change my mind about this ride!"

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry if I have said too much." "I do appreciate the nice compliments."

"You're welcome."

Again they drove off, through the next little town, with its red tile roofs, and on to another hillside that provided a more inland view over a valley of verdant crops but with the gleaming sea still present in the distance, where two fishing boats could be seen rocking in the swell of water just offshore. In that direction, also, was another village of red tiled houses where three dark-haired, lean-limbed, brown-skinned boys on bicycles (little versions of Xavier, Mary observed, with the same kind of male exuberance and drive) were doing dare devil stunts from a makeshift ramp of a propped up board.

"Now I must ask you, Mary," Xavier said with another joyous smile, "where do you come from yourself, where did this love of democracy come from, this concern for freedom?"

"Well, I don't think I'm special in that regard," Mary answered. "Many of the Venceremos, you've met them yourself, they believe in this very much, and this is why they're here."

"But I sense in you it is especially intense."

"That I don't know, but I do think it is important for my country and important for your country. Because, Xavier, what good is it in the end if, after you and your compatriots have gone through many struggles to free your country, to obtain justice, you allow Cuba to sink back again into the same kind of repression that existed before? This is the concern, Xavier, this is why so many people in my country, not your enemies, but your friends, are concerned about freedom in Cuba."

She knew after saying this that she had not gotten the words exactly right, but the point had still been made, she thought, as she looked toward Xavier's strong, thoughtful face and, beyond it, to the dazzling beauty of the sunlit, lush hills, broken here and there by quaint little towns, with the glittering water in the distance.

The expression that she observed on his face was in no sense a confrontive expression, she noted, as might have been the case for someone trying to win an argument. It was a troubled expression suggesting that he was sorry to have to raise an objection to what she said.

"Mary, Mary, you must be aware," he said in his fluent English but with each word carrying a Spanish quality nonetheless, "what I would seek to impress on you, respectfully, is this. When many people in your country talk about 'freedom of speech,' for Cuba, what they are really talking about is freedom of certain powerful interests to, in effect, buy our newspapers and airwaves,—buy our radio, buy TV."

"And what it their purpose in this effort?" he continued, glancing across to her with a look that lingered in the direct meeting of eyes. "It is to disseminate lies. Yes, it is, Mary. Please believe me. It is to disseminate lies. It is to trick the common people, the *trabajadores*, the

campanseros, into giving up something *muy muy importante* that they are too simple still to understand. And this is economic justice, and, with it, economic freedom..."

"*Muy muy importante!*" he repeated with an expression that brought both of his hands off the steering wheel for a moment, with the hands uplifted.

"You see, what happens, Mary," he continued, "what these interests do, they bring out someone, a handsome man, he talks of freedom, family values, he says he believes in religion and God, and he is a good person often who maybe doesn't even know he is being used... but the purpose of these interests, in supporting this person, is they know that once this person is elected they can depend on him to vote for policies that will have the gradual effect, over time, of taking away the land from the people or of using the labor of the people without a just recompense... The goal of these interests is to turn Cuba back to the way it was before the Revolution when certain people, my own people among them, by the way, had a very good life, while the rest of the people lived in a life of poverty and ignorance, without education, without health care. And don't think our own expatriates are not among them, these Cuban people in Miami, for example, people who were once rich in Cuba and would not share.

"That is why they left this country, not out of love of freedom, oh never believe that! They left, these Cubans, because they were living here on top of a pyramid of abuse that allowed them to take for themselves to excess while the rest of the people lived in poverty.

"We cannot go back to that! We cannot allow the Revolution to be reversed through the use of money! And yes, we must protect the common people from such ideas until they are educated in the history of our country, until they know what is at stake and what they will lose if they go back..."

"But how long will that take?" Mary said.

"How long will it take? How long will it take?" he answered with a upraised hand. "Let me ask you this, Mary? How long did it take your Yankee businessmen to acquire control of 80 percent of my country? How long did it take the landowners, the *patrones*, to make thousands of people into slaves? Mary, for these changes to occur, it took a hundred years. To leave them behind may take a hundred more."

"But, at the end, Xavier, will the people have freedom?"

"Yes, they will have freedom and they will know how to use it."

"Well, Xavier, you say that, but in your voice and in your eyes what I read is you would like to keep them from full freedom until the Revolution has complete control of everything."

"Mary, what we control is for the people. The Revolution is the

people, *la gente de Cuba*."

"Easy to say," Mary replied. "Couldn't anyone say this, though? Stalin could have said this. Hitler could have said it."

As if in rebuttal of that, as they passed through a village, some people in the street, common working people, when they saw Cortez, stopped to wave with obvious good will as the jeep passed by.

"Mary, look around! I want you to see! Look at these people!"

Cortez said. "These are people, just ten years ago they were told, by work master and church master alike, their proper role in life was simply to humbly follow orders. Orders from the plantation owner. Orders from the agents of the Church who many of them were also well-meaning sons of the upper classes such as I.

"'The meek shall inherit the earth,' you have heard it," Cortez went on. "Jesus said this, of course, but he lived among the poor, he shared in the life of the poor, he did not speak down to them from a mansion, as these plantation owners and agents of the Church have spoken down to them for generations!"

"You don't have to convince me about Cuba, aside for the question of democratic participation," Mary replied.

"No, I do have to convince you," Xavier persisted. "Because, yes, you see we are struggling so hard, and you sympathize with us for that. But I just ask you to look around, look around today!"

Mary did look around all that day, and wherever she looked she saw vibrant people living a good life in the bright sun and interacting freely with one another.

She saw new utility poles, as Cortez pointed out to her, carrying wires that extended into the poorer neighborhoods of the towns. She saw schools, also, in new government buildings such as those she had seen at the *escuela en los campos* on her trip in a month before, and she observed that there were schools of new construction in almost every town. She saw clinics on street corners, also new like the facility she had seen firsthand in her visit to Juanita Tancredo. From that experience, she was aware that medical care was available to everyone regardless of social status or economic situation.

Most importantly, Mary observed to herself, she saw people sharing the beautiful land, not holding it for the enrichment and pleasure of the few while the many, the common people, lived in poverty,—as had been the case, she knew, before the Revolution.

As a result, by the end of the day, when Cortez returned her to the town where he had picked her up, Mary was newly appreciative of the idea that he had presented, that this genuine sharing of the country needed to occur first while people were being taught, as children in schools, and as adults through general education, how to cooperate and

share, and while the money interests Cortez described, that sought to exploit the organs of the press, radio, and television, were kept at bay to prevent them from their campaigns of misinformation intended to facilitate the theft of resources that belonged to the whole people.

[Chapter 302 notes]

303. Mary becomes disenchanted with Cortez and Cuba's cultural blandness

After her long day with Xavier Cortez, Mary Brandt had been almost convinced of the argument he had presented, that free speech needed to be constrained in Cuba in order to prevent big money interests from undoing the Revolution through a campaign of misinformation. As the time drew near for her return to the United States, however, Mary felt more and more uneasy about having accepted this argument, to the extent that she had, and more and more dissatisfied with her inability to identify what she felt so uneasy about.

In addition, though Mary had initially felt good about her personal interaction with Xavier Cortez, on that same day, she began feeling uneasy about that, as well, as a reconstruction of what had happened between her and him formed in her mind. She had not compromised herself in any manner. She had not even flirted with him or touched him in any way. But she had allowed him to ask questions about her marital status, and had explained to him that she and Matthew had agreed to allow open relationships with the other sex, on both sides,—in effect, giving the impression that she was fair game. She felt that she should have said simply that she had no interest in any kind of relationship, with him or any man, other than Matthew, except for friendship alone.

The thought of being disloyal to Matthew made her feel sad, though she no longer regarded herself as bound to loyalty to him, or him to her, through mutual consent. She was gaining freedom, she knew, but the special intimacy was being lost that she had had with Matthew since she and he had made their first commitment to one another, more than four years before, on the evening of the Memorial Day Regatta.

Mary found, also, that her memories of Matthew became more frequent and poignant after she left the mountain work site above the Caribbean Sea and traveled with the other volunteers by bus to Havana, where, as an official thank you for their six weeks of service, she and the others were given a three-night stay, each with a private room, in the palatial Hotel Deauville, on the Avenida Maceo Malecon, across from the beach on the northwest edge of the city on the Atlantic Ocean.

On her first day there, Mary walked by herself along the beach to the point of the land where the Havana Bay opened into the ocean. Seated there, at the Castillo de San Rafael, she had a panoramic view—from the ocean, on her left, to a military fortress, across from her, to the wider opening of water, on her right, where the colonial-style buildings of Havana could be seen. And each item of interest she noticed was something she wished she could tell Matthew about.

A conversation with Matthew was not in store for her, though. On this particular evening, a thousand miles away from him, she answered a

knock at her door and found standing there the handsome cadre, Xavier Cortez, attired in a dress uniform with his black hair pomaded.

"Mary, I will be direct," he said. "I am here with two purposes. The first is intellectual, political, because I thought of some points I failed to make to you, in our discussion, and, for the sake of logic, so to speak, I hope you will permit me to complete the argument... And the second purpose, well, it is personal, romantic. I am here as a man to invite you for an evening with me, such as a man and woman would have together in our beautiful city of Havana."

"Well, about the first purpose, there is no doubt," she replied. "As for the second, I'm not sure what to say. I only have one dress with me, Xavier. I would feel awkward, really."

"Whatever you have, I'm sure it will be perfect," he answered. "If it is not formal enough, we can go to some place less formal."

Mary remained at the door without responding, thinking that this was a situation where she should exercise her new freedom. And why not? There would nothing untoward in simply going out for an evening with an attractive, intelligent man.

"Could you come back in say, a half hour?" she said

"Whatever you wish."

By the time Cortez returned, Mary was waiting dressed in the "one dress" she had referred to. It was a dark blue cotton dress, knee-length, with tufted shoulders, simple in style like everything she wore. She walked out in it, frowning.

"Mary, you look like a queen," he said.

"Thank you," she said. "Where will we go?"

"Mary, from here is just six blocks or so to the Prado de Marti. You maybe have not heard of it. It is the main boulevard of the ciudad central where the capitol is, and the national theater and museums, and many little restaurants. You will love it, I'm sure."

They went out across the spacious, flowered lawn of the hotel under tall palm trees into a balmy evening, and down a narrow street where the three-and four-story buildings, each with balconies on each floor, fronted directly on the sidewalk. It was a street unlike few in the United States, a street with no cars.

"Have you been to Havana often?" she asked her companion.

"Yes, my family came here often because my father was a legislator. We would come here from the country to stay at one of these grand hotels. As I told you, we were rich. But my father was frustrated as a legislator, in those days of Batista. There was no freedom then, let me tell you. But my father did not like it when the Revolution came, either. My family lost its estate, but managed to get away to the United States,—where I was, as I told you, until I returned by myself."

Soon they arrived at the Prada, a wide boulevard divided into two one-way streets separated by a lane with benches, palm trees, flowers, and monuments. It was sunset, and in the waning, magical light, they found a little restaurant and a candle-lit table.

"So now for the intellectual something I said I wanted to tell you, to continue our discussion of free speech in Cuba, and, as I recall, you and I had a previous interchange, also, last year about consolidation of the co-ops into larger state-run farms..." Cortez began.

Mary was impressed that Cortez had remembered this interaction that had occurred between her and him the previous year. As she recalled, she had challenged the idea of consolidation on the grounds that it would lead to less local control of the co-ops and maybe set into motion events that would necessitate another revolution, and he, in response, had said that that made no sense because, according to the Hegelian dialectic, there could be only one revolution, and Cuba had already had it.

"Well, what I wanted to tell you, Mary, is this: Comments such as yours made a difference because such comments have led many of us, myself included, to work harder at making the state-run farms more democratic, and we have succeeded at that in many places. There are, also, many other places where our people talk freely about how to organize their work. In the clinics, in the fields, this happens every day, this talking of things that really matter in their lives."

"Well, that is a kind of democracy I have tried hard to set up in America, also," Mary answered sincerely. "It is the democracy I have tried to set up in my women's cooperative, the one I told you about, and it is what we are trying to set up on our farm in New Hampshire, a situation where we control our own means of livelihood."

"And that is a socialist ideal, Mary, a socialist ideal!" Cortez exclaimed. "It is what we have fought for in this country, a society where people can really control their own means of livelihood, as you say! This is the economic justice I was trying to explain to you on our wonderful day together."

"Well, thank you."

"You are welcome very, very much!"

So that was the intellectual part Cortez had mentioned in the hotel room, Mary thought. As for the romantic part, was that the candlelit meal? Or did Cortez have further intentions?

Back at the hotel, the answer to that soon became clear as Cortez, invited in for a glass of wine, which he ordered and paid for, for both himself and Mary, showed a different side.

"And now, Mary, I wish to be direct with you, as you deserve," he said, "being as you are, a modern, independent woman, beholden to no one, and because you have been such a wonderful part of my life this

summer, as we greeted one another, and talked, especially on our long, beautiful day together, I propose to you that we, you and I, take this night for the beautiful moment it can be, in our brave, new world."

Mary observed immediately that this man before her now was not the Cuban revolutionary she had known thus far but the traditional Cuban macho man that, as she recalled, Juanita Tancredo had warned her about at her and Tancredo's lunch together the year before.

"And I must answer you directly, Xavier Cortex. Handsome as you are, appealing as you are, much as I like you," Mary answered, "I must say no. And it is not easy for me to do."

"Mary, will you permit me?" the handsome cadre replied softly. "Yes."

"You said yourself you are no longer bound by your old vows, with Matthew."

"Yes, that is true."

"You said yourself you like me very much."

"Yes, I do."

"Or, more than that, you desire me! As I do you!"

"Yes."

"Then why hold ourselves back from this moment?"

Mary frowned. "I have no reason, Xavier. I just have what I feel. And what I feel is, my vow to Matthew is no longer binding, but he is the only man I have ever loved, and that is still dear to me."

The handsome face of Xavier Cortez at this moment told the whole story. The glow of impulse left, the dark eyes retreated into the rosy flesh. From that moment, he was working his way to the door. He left with a warm hug but she knew she would never hear from him again.

Cortez had acted honorably, Mary observed to herself the next day as she walked again to the Prado again, yet she felt soiled. "How much of the whole intellectual discussion was just his part of his elaborate approach?" she wondered.

Cuba, as she continued through the neighborhoods of the Capital, with no particular destination, appeared to her suddenly in such a more revealing light than she had known it up to this time.

There was the dearth of goods, for example. On one street, Mary saw that dearth in the form of a line of people extending down an entire block to the single door of a corner shop. In the open door, Mary saw a woman in a white uniform, handing out unpackaged bread to each person who handed her a small blue book.

Further down the street, she came upon a sign painted on the white plaster exterior of a building beside a depiction of a Cuban flag.

She read, translating in her mind as she went along:

"Revolucion es: (*revolution is:*) el sentido del momento historico, (*a*

sense of the historic moment,) es cambia todo que deba ser cambiado, (it is a total change of what ought to be changed,) es igualdad y libertad plena, (it is complete equality and liberty,) es ser tratado y tratar a los demas como seres humanos, (*it is to be treated, and to treat others, as human,*)... Revolucion es unidad, (*Revolution is unity*,) es indepencia, (*it is independence*,) es luchar por nuestros suenos de justicia para Cuba y el mundo, (*it is to fight for our dreams of justice for Cuba and the world,*) que es la base de nuestro patriotismo, nuestro socialismo, y nuestro internacionalismo. (*which is the basis of our patriotism, our socialism, and our internationalism.*)"

So idealistic, Mary thought, and as the expression of what so many Cubans felt about the Revolution, this passage (attributed, at the bottom of the sign, to Fidel Castro), seemed authentic. Everywhere she looked she saw Cuban flags. In stores and in the living rooms of houses visible from the sidewalk, she saw portraits of Castro.

The undeniable idealism of the Revolution was not enough to bolster her feelings at the moment, however. Emotionally, she felt drained, as if Cortez, in retrospect, had become the personification of Cuba, generating the same kind of reservations on a personal level that she had felt on an intellectual level regarding the issue of free speech.

Despite the unity of mind Mary had felt with Cortez with respect to local control of places of work, she still felt uneasy about the issue of free speech overall and she was still unable to identify what she felt so uneasy about.

Coming to the city center, however, where flags and multi-colored banners flew beside monumental buildings, Mary felt her spirits rising. On the opposite side of the square was a bookstore with a coffee house beside it. A sign there said books in English were also sold.

It was a place such as back home she would have gone to in a time of mental fatigue to find a new intellectual direction. But inside she found cleaned out areas on shelves with political books. All books that pertained to Cuba, judging by titles, were supportive of the government. On a shelf where newspapers would have logically been, there was only the government newspaper, *Grandma*. In a section with newly published works of fiction, there were novels about upper class people who had taken up lives in support of the revolution.

Mary went outside, feeling disturbed. Two blocks down, she found a second bookstore and went in. The selections had been pruned in a similar way, in excess of what might have been accepted as "necessary to prevent moneyed interests from spreading misinformation." A third bookstore later displayed a similar offering. Surely this was the result of suppression of free speech on the wider scale of the simple dialogue that occurred in conversation and books.

Could it be that Cortez had been aware of this further dimension of suppression of free speech in Cuba, Mary asked herself, and had not had the honesty to bring it into his and her talk a few before?

Mary thought back to her first meeting with Cortez, during her first stay in Cuba, the one in which he had made his comment about the Revolution having completed the final phase of the Hegelian dialectic. As she recalled, Cortez had come over to her later to clarify that now that the Revolution had been achieved, the goal of democratic control had to be balanced against the goal of securing the Revolution, which in turn required meeting the material needs of the people. Consolidation of the co-ops made that second goal more reachable, Cortez had said, because consolidation, while less democratic, made possible a wider use of mechanization in agricultural tasks.

Couldn't the same argument of needing to secure the Revolution be applied to this free speech issue, Mary thought, by making the claim that since the Revolution, as the final synthesis in the Hegelian dialectic, had completed the dialogue regarding social organization, there could not be,—and for the sake of avoiding national disunity, should not be,—any further dialogue in Cuba regarding social organization?

To give Cortez the benefit of the doubt, Mary thought, he had maybe not followed through to the free speech issue from his ideological views on economic consolidation; but some zealots had done so, apparently, and the result was acceptance of censorship as a necessary evil to obtain the more important good of securing the Revolution. In deference to this goal, critical dialogue in Cuba was being suppressed, discussion of political and social ideas was being discouraged, or, worse, forbidden.

That was what she had being feeling uneasy about without being able to identify the reason for her uneasiness, Mary thought. In her movement around Cuba and in her interactions with Cuban people, she had intuitively sensed the lack of critical dialog without a conscious recognition, and certainly she had seen the same lack in Havana, in the blandness of the books offered for sale. How different this was from the earnest clash of political and social ideas she had grown accustomed to in her countercultural activities back home in the States.

"I could never live in a country like this, without critical dialog," she admitted to herself.

Mary reached this conclusion quietly without feeling any ill will toward Cuba or anyone in it, and while resolving, at the same time, that she would keep helping the Cuban people in any way she could, especially so long as the government of her own country kept trying to starve Cuba out of existence, but she was keenly aware that the infatuation she had felt with Cuba was gone.

[Chapter 303 notes]

304. At Georgetown meeting, Mary finds Hattie suspects her Cuban ties

As Mary Brandt returned from Cuba, on Wednesday, July 7, 1971, on her way to Georgetown to attend her three-day conference of the Friend of the Earth Co-op (successor to the Mountain Women's Co-op), she thought back to an ambition that she had once defined for herself in her journal, of bringing together into a single supportive network the women she had come to know in her "three worlds" of activity: Cuba, her women's cooperative, and the Cranston farm.

"I don't suppose such a network will ever happen," she wrote to herself in her neatly printed block letters. "Whatever I had in Cuba, I lost hold of it somehow. Even with Juanita Tancredo, when she talked about there being no room in Cuba for people who just want to explore freely, as the hippies have done here, I felt so disaffected when she said that. It seemed so grim. Or maybe just so unAmerican.

"Maybe, as I started to realize in Havana, that's where my new focus should fall, on an effort more specifically American. There is such a need for that still. We have our mountain women, our real mountain women, in Kentucky still, thanks to Hattie Beecher. And we have our women in Georgetown, and the Twin Cities, and now in New England. And the Canadian women in Halifax are surely a part of it, too. I should build on this, trying to strengthen our efforts to support one another."

After writing this, Mary reminded herself that she would still send the Cuban doctor the medical supplies she had offered to make arrangements for. But, in the next moment, she resolutely set her personal resources on consolidating the components of her three worlds that still gave promise of a network such as she had envisioned.

Three days later, in Georgetown, however, Mary began to see that, even in the two remaining of her three worlds of activity, there might be problems. Her concern focused on a person whom she had felt would always be part of her network of people, her old friend, Hattie Beecher, co- founder with Mary of the original co-op.

Mary got a hint of the problem when she failed to see Hattie in any of the informal groupings of women in the Georgetown hotel where the 39 attendants (including ten from the Georgetown store, seven from Halifax, Canada, ten from Minnesota, four from Vermont, and three from Kentucky) were staying together.

Mary ignored the problem initially as she moved hurriedly about in her role as hostess of the event, greeting the women, visiting the campus building where the meetings were to be held, and making final preparations for the meeting to begin the next day. But, as she did, she became increasingly aware of Hattie's absence.

Troubled by that, Mary stopped at Hattie's room and knocked, but

Hattie was either not there or was not responding. Then, as Mary hurried to her first meeting, for which she was facilitator, she saw Hattie coming in her direction in a hall.

Hattie, in her ankle-length, full-skirted blue dress, stood out in several definite contrasts from the others around her. She looked shorter, squatter, and more stolid-looking. Her clothes were so unstylish that she appeared outlandish, almost. Most strikingly, though, she lacked the look of professionalism that most of the other women had.

"Mary Brandt, is that you?" Hattie said. "I'uz wonderin' when I'd see you."

"Well, here I am," Mary replied. "How are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine. You know me."

"I'm sorry to say, I'm rushing to a meeting," Mary said, "and I'm in charge. Would you like to come with?"

"Oh, no, you go do ever what you need to do. I'll come along later in my old slow way."

"Did you get a program, Hattie? We've got four areas, basically. One: running of the stores. Two: foods we make like jams. Three: crafts. Four: books like our cookbooks. Each day there's one meeting in each area every morning and another meeting in each area in the afternoon. You just go wherever you're inclined to at the moment."

"Yes, Mary, I think I understand," Hattie said. "And I appreciate you stoppin' to explain it. This is kind of like school, I guess. I was never much good at that."

"Oh, I don't believe that, Hattie. You're as smart as a whip."

"Thank you kindly for that."

"I'm looking forward to talking more with you."

"Don't you fuss about it now," Hattie said. "We'll get our chance at yakking."

"Yes, I expect we will."

It was a meeting in passing such as Mary had had many times with Hattie in Kentucky, but she began to see some disturbing features in it. Hattie had not seemed as warm in greeting as in the past. She had seemed more anxious to get away. \

And, though Hattie had worn her usual contrary expression, there had been something in her bearing Mary had never seen before, a look of self-doubt and unassurance.

Later that day, Mary was coming down a hall in the motel, and she saw, in the lobby at the end of the hall, Hattie standing with a group of women, but in the back of the group, as someone does who has a feeling of not belonging. Hattie glanced toward her and diverted her eyes to prevent a meeting of eyes as she backed out of view. When Mary reached the lobby, Hattie was no longer there.

That evening, Mary stopped again at Hattie's room and knocked on the door. She heard movement inside, but Hattie did not answer.

"Well, this is strange," Mary observed to herself.

Next day, Mary saw Hattie in passing several times, and the brief and increasingly strained interactions confirmed for her that Hattie was avoiding a longer meeting.

Mary was mulling this over when she glanced out to the parking lot behind the motel and noticed a slight, sinewy figure standing by a pickup truck, looking around. It was Fletcher Bourne. Mary went out to him at once.

"Fletcher," she said. "Is that you?"

"None but the same, I'm afraid. How are you, Mary?"

"Well, I'm just fine."

"What brings you down here?"

"Well, I got a call from Hattie Beecher last night, long distance, I'm the one brought her down here, you know, and she asked me to come down and pick her up, wants to go home early."

"Oh, I didn't know! That's too bad!"

They stood awkwardly, both feeling the connection of their mutual past and the distance placed on it by intervening time.

"WI can point out to you the way to Hattie's room," Mary ventured.

"That would be so kind of you. I'd be much obliged."

They headed across the parking lot, the newspaperman limping and dipping his shoulder on each step.

"I've been by Hattie's room a couple of times myself," Mary said. "She doesn't answer my knock. I think it's on purpose."

"Is that so?"

"You got any idea what wrong?"

The newspaperman frowned. "Well, Mary, I think you will recall the demonstration you and I were both at, years back, at Simers Branch, with the TV people there, and the sheriff, ol' J.D. Meyers, had his deputies going down that line taking down names. And later, after the cameras were gone, those people in the line, the ones on welfare, got notices of this and that,—technicalities,—people like Lois Roan?"

"Yes, I do recall that."

"Well, that kind of thing is what's got Hattie worried now. Some of the people she's with heard from back home that there's a story going around this convention is Communist."

"Well, that's absurd."

"I don't know, though, is it, Mary? You were just in Cuba, isn't that true? And aren't there Communists down there?"

"I would call them socialists."

"Well, that may be, Mary, but some don't make that distinction. And

whoever it is that's spreading stories around, is doing it for a purpose, to scare people off."

"I just feel bad about how Hattie looked at me today, like I had misled her or deceived her in some say."

"I don't think she thinks that, from what I know of her, but I think she is showing a strain of the wariness that these mountain people learned generations ago and have passed on down."

"Yes, and that's good, that they're on guard like that, I think, if there are people in the background plotting, like you say."

"Another thing, Mary, maybe this is something you weren't aware of, but for Hattie, there is a social aspect to this conference, too, a big social aspect. You take a woman like her, grand old woman in her own element, and you take her out of that element..."

"Yes, I have seen that and I'm so sorry I didn't anticipate."

"Well, all in all, Mary, you've been good for Hattie, you've given her life a purpose these past years, and I think, after she studies on it for a while, she will still have that purpose, after she gets back to her little house and her garden."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"I've been meaning to ask you about Bumper." Mary said. "How's he been faring now that he's back at home?"

"Well, he's been doing a lot of thinking, and remember how we were talking in your apartment about me wanting him to join the newspaper, if I could somehow convince him?"

"Yes," said Mary, taking care not to show the extent of her interest in this particular subject. Without informing Fletcher, she had pursued the private campaign with Bumper she had first thought of that evening, visiting him twice, before she had left for Cuba, to encourage him to join forces with his father. She had even bought Bumper a typewriter so he could learn to type with one hand.

"Well, he surprised me just recently, said he decided to do that," Fletcher said.

"On your own paper, the *Miner-Mountaineer*? Well, that's wonderful!" Mary replied.

Near the door, Mary and Fletcher paused and stood together without the feeling of strangeness and strain of a few minutes before.

"I just want you to know, Fletcher, I believe in democracy and freedom, same as you and Bumper," Mary said.

"I know you do, Mary, and I think Hattie will remember all you've done in that direction if I give her a little nudge."

"Maybe, if Hattie is still down there tomorrow, I'll try to take her out to supper or something."

"Well, good luck at that," Fletcher said with a laugh.

That evening Mary knocked on Hattie's door a third time, and this time Hattie answered. "Fletcher said you 'uz comin' by to ask me out to supper," she said at once.

"Yes, I was hoping you would come," Mary replied. "I was very sorry to hear you're leaving tomorrow."

"Well, all I got is these ol' clothes," Hattie said, ignoring the topic of her early departure. She was dressed again in her full pleated skirt with her gray hair pinned straight back in the same way.

They headed off together across the same parking lot that Mary had walked across earlier that same day with Fletcher Bourne.

Mary had thought ahead about the evening. She had decided she would take Hattie to an undressy restaurant where Hattie would be comfortable, and she had decided she would directly address the concerns Hattie had about Cuba. Most importantly, she would try to rescue the friendship with Hattie she had always valued so highly.

The restaurant Mary selected was just down the street on a corner with the Georgetown campus in sight.

At the door Hattie looked warily in.

"Does this look okay?" Mary asked.

"Oh, I don't know," the old woman replied. "It jes seems like a place where I don't belong."

"Hattie, how come? Look around. They're just people."

"Yes, I know, they're just people and I'm just people, too. But I am old-fashion' people and these people are from modern times. They see somethin' like me, they look like they'uz lookin' at some ol' car, some ol' Model T. It's how I dress and how I talk. I look like such an ol' fashion', galoompy ol' thing."

Mary sighed. "Well, I don't think that's true. You look nice, and you act nice, and I like how you talk."

"Oh, all right."

Their entry drew some curious glances. But the eyes were quickly averted. Mary went to a far corner, beyond the other patrons, where there would be privacy for talk.

"How is this, Hattie?" she asked.

"This is very nice, young Mary. I 'preciate how you're tryin' to treat me so kindly."

Mary proceeded at once to her stay in Cuba. She explained what she had told Fletcher, that she had just been planting trees and she believed in democracy and freedom.

"Oh, I know you do," Hattie answered, "and Fletcher told me that. But people back home are talkin', as you hear'd, I 'spect."

"I did, Hattie, and I hope you won't let that defeat our co-op."

"Well, what I decide on doin', that's me," Hattie replied.

"You think they will scare your people off, though?"

"No, Mary, I do not. We's a-gwine to go on, druther they like it or druther they don't."

Mary sensed after that that maybe she had pushed too hard on Hattie to get a firm resolve. She pulled herself back from the serious subjects, and told Hattie about the farm in New Hampshire,—not the co-op part but the farm part,—and Hattie talked about how she had lived alone in own little house in Crabtree for more than 30 years since her son had gone to the Korean War to never return.

Hattie talked, too, in her quaint vernacular about a little dog, a toy terrier, that had given her companionship for a while. "Tell you the truth now, that dog was a worrisome creature," she said. "Jes' like a li'l baby, cryin' all the time. Still I'uz glad to have that li'l dog n' sorry to see 'im go."

After the meal was over, the two women from different worlds walked back across the parking lot and stopped at Hattie's door.

"I won't be able to say goodbye to you tomorrow," Mary said. "I've got another meeting to lead."

"Oh, I understand."

"You're a good friend, Hattie and I value you very much as a partner in this co-op. I hope you will continue in both."

"Oh, yes, I expect I will."

"Thank you. That means a lot to me."

"Ever when y' get a notion, now, Mary, you come on down for a visit in ol' Crabtree, Kentuck'."

"Okay, I will."

Mary looked then directly at Hattie and was surprised to see that Hattie diverted her eyes. It was the same gesture of distrust Mary had observed earlier that same day, when Hattie had diverted her eyes and then had removed herself from the lobby instead of waiting for Mary to greet her.

So the evening had not been as much as a re-meeting of souls as she had thought it had been, Mary concluded. On some level, Hattie had indeed felt pushed in a direction she wasn't sure she wanted to go.

Mary paused on the way back to her own room and looked out a window toward the rowhouses on the other side of the street, but her mind drifted to the little garden in Hattie Beecher's backyard and then to Hattie's old-fashioned kitchen with the cast iron black stove.

"I have this feeling now I will never see Hattie again," Mary said to herself, "and that Kentucky connection I wanted to hold on to so much, I have a feeling it's fading, also."

So another of her worlds had been lost despite all of her efforts, Mary

admitted to herself. The only world left was women like herself who had gone to college and who had then become radicals in the Movement, either in the United States or Canada.

[Chapter 304 notes]

305. Mary and Gail resolve to remain "sisters" despite sharing Matt

Although Mary Brandt had thought a great deal about her erstwhile husband Matthew during her week in Washington D.C. for her general meeting of her Friends of the Earth women's co-operative, and although she longed to see Matthew,—and desired him, she admitted to herself,—yet she agreed to stay in D.C. for another three days after the general meeting, in order to help the six women of the Georgetown local co-op in taking inventory and planning for the coming year.

"I don't want to just go running home," Mary explained to her old friend from her women's group, the Georgetown professor, Joy Kasberg, in whose Queen Anne townhouse, on a quaint, brick-paved street in Georgetown, Mary was staying for this second week. "What I feel is an emotion. I don't want my life anymore to be ruled by emotions. The way I see it, emotions are the enemy of independence. At least, for me they are. At least, they are for most women."

Dear to Mary and trustworthy as a confidante as Joy Kasberg was, however, Mary did not reveal to her her further, gnawing concern, that perhaps she would return to the farm to find Matthew involved with Gail Martin. Another member of the "original six," Dennis Kelly, had hinted that such a relationship might be happening, in a letter Mary had received just a few days before. Dennis had not provided details, in the midst of his other news about Matt's growing annoyance with the "other four" who had moved to the farm after Mary had left.

One evening at this time, Mary and Joy went for a ride in Joy's car through Northwest D.C. to Dupont Circle and then past the townhouse on R. Street where Mary and Matthew had lived prior to moving to the farm.

Looking out the car window at the familiar double windows on the second floor, where she and Matthew had sat so often having morning coffee together, Mary observed that new curtains hung there. The ambiance of the old place was gone. Her and Matthew's life there together seemed to be fading into the past.

Mary felt sad at that.

"Many times we started at that table," she said to her companion, "and wound up in the bedroom. We were so absorbed in one another, you know. I hate to let it go."

"Well, maybe you will have a resurgence of that," Joy reflected. "It doesn't have to peak and fade. Sometimes there are multiple peaks. I've heard that, at least."

Mary thought about Gail again as she and Joy turned from R. Street and headed down Connecticut Avenue toward the National Mall. Again, she made a decision not to confide, and she realized from that how ashamed she was about having a rival for Matthew after having been so

admired among her women friends for how loyal Matthew had been in his relationship with her. That thought led in turn to a memory of an intimate interaction with Matthew, into which intruded an imagined scene of Matthew with Gail, and that in turn led to feelings of jealousy and anger toward Gail that Mary had not known she was capable of.

Later that evening, Mary cautioned herself against these negative feelings, and reminded herself that she herself had brought this problem on. She was the one who had promoted her and Matthew's new independence. Now, if he had acted upon it, how could she blame him? And, if Gail had responded in her loneliness, how could she blame Gail?

"Independence isn't easy," she wrote in her journal that evening. "Independence means not placing claims on other people, and not being a slave to possessiveness."

Two days later, Mary traveled to the farm, taking an offer for a ride from Joy Kasberg, who had relatives in Bar Harbor, Maine, that she had decided to visit.

The Georgetown professor remained at the farm for just the initial greeting when Matthew, Gail, Darren, Jane, and the four children of the two women came out of the house to meet Mary at the car. In that first meeting, based on a brief, significant look she received from Gail, Mary understood that Matthew and Gail had indeed been involved, to some extent, at least, and so, in addition to being welcomed as a member of their self- defined "family," she encountered strained comments from everyone as they tried to act normally without immediately revealing the complication that everyone knew had to be soon brought into the open.

Kasberg, also, apparently realized that something was amiss, and, in fact, she had already shown signs of suspecting something on the trip up, though she had said nothing about it.

"Mary, if you ever need a place to stay, to get away for a while, or whatever, I want you to absolutely know you've got a home with me for as long as you need it," she said when she left.

Mary, acting as if everything was exactly as before, picked up her duffel bag, like a soldier home from foreign duty, and trudged with it up toward the middle building of the maple works that, prior to leaving for Cuba, she had begun to set up for herself as a private cabin.

Matthew followed behind her silently with her second bag.

"So has it been a good summer?" she said.

He replied at once. "No, it has not. The farm has been shit with these slackers that came up. Never work. Noise every night. It was a big mistake, Mary. We should have never invited them in."

"I got a wind of that from Dennis."

Mary opened the door to discover that the interior of the cabin had been greatly improved since she had left. There was a new bed with a

royal blue spread and new blue curtains on the two windows. On one side of the single room was the desk she had had in D.C., which up to this time had not been unpackaged, and there was new, small table with a blue and white table cloth, two chairs beside it, in the open corner to the left of the door, and an easy chair in the remaining small space between the bed and another corner. There was also three new lamps, one on the wall above the head of the bed and another on the desk.

"Oh, my! It's beautiful! Matthew, you did this?"

"I've been working on it. Wanted to surprise you."

"Oh, I am surprised! Oh, thank you so much."

At that time, Mary turned to hug Matthew, and the feeling of her body against his was astounding in effect after her two months with no intimate contact. It was a feeling that she had not felt, she realized, since his and her first night together, when, after so long waiting to remain a virgin until her marriage, she and he had finally had sex together.

The hug lasted a long time and then they both drew back from it, embarrassed, and stood side by side without speaking.

"Matthew, I know about Gail," she said.

"It's just something that happened," he replied.

"I don't blame you, Matthew. And I don't blame Gail. As far as I'm concerned, neither of you did anything wrong."

Mary and Matthew didn't speak anymore about the situation at this time. They returned to the house to find the whole group, including the four new people, gathered around the front porch in the lovely light of the late afternoon.

The new people were a couple named George and Alison Payton and two single men, both 23 years of age, named Larry Holmgren and Kurt Granvolt. The Payton's were reserved in manner and their neat, stylish clothes made clear that they did not regard themselves as hippies or farmers, but as students participating in a social experiment, which is exactly what they were, Mary had learned in one of her letters from Dennis. They were from well-to-do families, Dennis had also written, and often spent the weekends at the homes of their families, which were both in Quincy, Massachusetts, just below the New Hampshire state line. Holmgren and Granvolt were, on the other extreme, self-defined as hippies, which to them, Dennis had written, meant long hair and loud music, constant use of grass, and contempt of seriousness, cleanliness, and work.

The issue of the moment, Mary soon learned, was whether to go out to the large garden next to the house to pick green beans, which were just coming in, and, in the interchange about the matter, she quickly perceived the dynamic of the group.

Dennis Kelly, in his serious, earnest way, made the proposition of

work into a friendly invitation, but Larry Holmgren, who was reclining on a chair with a beer in his hand, pooh pooh the suggestion at once.

"You can do that, Dennis. You're such a good boy," he said. "Your mother will be proud of you."

Kelly just shrugged.

"You can get beans for ten cents a can in town," Holmgren added.

"Oh, but they're not fresh like this," the red-haired Jane remarked in a voice so soft she could hardly be heard.

"I, for one, would miss it!" Darren threw in as he picked up his crutch. "All the little vegetables in the darling light!"

Mary, Matt, Gail, Darren, Jane, and Dennis proceeded to the garden together, with the four children tagging along. George and Alison, in their neat clothes, followed after.

Gail came up to Mary and hugged her from the side while they were walking around the side of the house.

"I'm so glad to have you back," she said.

"I hope I'm not an intrusion," Mary replied.

"You could never be an intrusion," Gail said in Mary's ear. "Did you have a good stay in Cuba?"

"Oh, yes."

"Planting trees, I heard."

"Yes, high on a mountain, with a view of the sea."

"It must have been beautiful."

"Yes."

"And so healthy."

The garden was overgrown with weeds between the rows. It did not at all correspond to the pen sketch Mary had made of it in her journal before leaving for Cuba.

Still the bean plants were bending under the weight of their yield and soon the six friends from Woodstock had gathered a whole pile of them into a wicker basket. George and Alison, looking bored, had gathered a token few into a plastic pail.

The group then went back around to the front of the house where Holmgren and Granvolt could be seen in the living room passing a joint between them as they listened to music.

"A little hard to take," Matthew said as he and Mary walked back to her cabin.

Gail Martin had gone into the house to put her two children to bed in their upstairs bedroom.

"Yes, what can be done?"

"I don't know."

When Matthew continued as far as her door, and paused there, Mary looked at him with a quizzical expression.

"Could I stop by for a while?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose," she answered.

Once behind the closed door, they were soon in an embrace again of a like nature to what they had experienced earlier in the day. For all of her resolutions to herself, Mary felt herself being taken in. She made no comment about it at all until an hour so later when they were lying in the darkness side by side in her bed.

"What will Gail say?" Mary said.

"She told me already, not to hold back from whatever I feel like I should do."

"And this is what you feel you should do?"

"It's what I did."

"I don't want to hurt her."

First thing the next morning, Mary went looking for Gail, and found her in the house in the dining room by the fireplace, setting out oatmeal for the children.

"Gail, I feel like we need to talk," Mary said at once.

"Yes, I do, too. Maybe after I come back from town. I take the kids in to a summer camp."

"Yes, that's fine."

"Care to ride along?"

"No, I'll wait until you come back."

"Care for some oatmeal?"

"Yes, actually, I would."

"Well, Mary, you sit yourself down. Care for some coffee?"

"Actually, yes."

"One java coming up."

Mary had a delightful breakfast with the children and Gail. Darren and Jane were still asleep, in their respective bedrooms, apparently, or maybe together, their status with respect to one another was a mystery to everyone. The elegant Payton's and the self-defined hippies Holmgren and Granvolt had retired to their guest houses behind the house. Matthew and Dennis had gone out to work in the fields together.

Later, the mood was more serious as Mary watched for Gail's van to appear at the bend of the road by the apple tree in the pasture. Seeing it, she went to the house to greet her.

"Care to walk up to the top of the hill?" Gail ventured.

"I'd love to," Mary replied.

They headed up a path through the maple woods, which were entirely within the area of the farm, and paused at the top of the hill, which was just at the north edge of the farm, where it bordered with the 160 acres owned by Stumphand Moore.

"The first thing I want to say, Gail, you are my dear friend," Mary

began when she and Gail had sat down on a fallen tree, looking off to the roofs of the barn and maple works below them. “I don’t want to lose your friendship, and I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Well, then I will say to you, Mary, you are my dear friend, also,” Gail answered without the slightest hint of falling off from her habitual cheerful manner, despite the seriousness of the topic. “I don’t want to hurt you, either. I don’t want to lose your friendship.”

They both laughed.

“Well,” said Mary. “We are agreed on that.”

Mary then turned to Gail with her trademark straight-eyebrow frown, and pursed her lips as she did often when she paused before selecting a word in her carefully enunciated statements. “Next thing, and I don’t mean this as in any way a rebuke to you or a claim of possession, I love Matthew very much, and I imagine I will keep loving him whether or not he is my lover.”

Gail nodded at that and reached over to take Mary’s hand.

“And I love him, too, and I so very much don’t want to hurt you by it. I just don’t know how to just stop. All summer, Mary,—I don’t want to hurt you by saying this,—but this thing between me and him, it started slow, you know, and then before I knew it I was all drawn in, and it got so passionate. I’ve never known anything like it. And, often in the midst of it, I would think about you and try to get myself to stop it. But I just didn’t do that, I didn’t stop.”

Mary had not known until this moment how intense and frequent the sexual interaction had been between Gail and Matthew. She found it hard to listen. But all the while she kept holding Gail’s hand.

“Well, first of all,” she said, “I’m the one who insisted Matthew and I should be independent, so I’m to blame for this to a certain extent. And I don’t blame you for loving Matthew. I know how worthy he is of that. And I don’t blame him for loving you. I know what a good person you are. So, you know, I’m thinking I should just butt out... But Gail, I don’t think I can promise that. I don’t think I’ll turn him down.”

“And Mary, neither will I. I just know I won’t.”

“Well, Gail, how about this?” Mary said. “Let’s you and me make a pact. We will remain good friends. We will work very hard to understand and help one another. And we will both be true to our own feelings and will expect the other one to do so, also.”

“Agreed.”

“Gail, if I ever feel jealous, I’m going to come to my good friend about it. I’m going to come to you.”

“Sisters forever.”

“Amen.”

[Chapter 305 notes]

306. Jim and Ellen fly home to Minnesota for Jane's funeral

On Sunday morning, July 18, 1971, James Morris received word, by long distance phone, that his mother, Jane Morris, had died. She had been faring poorly in general, but no one had expected her to die at the moment because she had recently rallied and had even been released from the hospital (as had occurred a few times before, however). She had been living alone in the family house on the West Side of St. Paul.

Upon receiving this news, Morris and his wife Ellen flew home to Minnesota to make arrangements for the funeral, moving temporarily into the Kass family house in Ellen's old room from childhood. The Kass house was located on the other side of the Mississippi River, about six miles northwest of the Morris house.

At the Kass house, there were quiet conversations involving Ellen, her parents, and Morris. Ellen's father, Edward, the World War II veteran of D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge, had taken a particular interest in his soldier son-in-law. Morris, however, had avoided any situations where he and his father-in-law would be left alone. There was no other family to contact except some relatives in Oregon, on Morris's mother's side, who had made arrangements to attend the funeral.

Then came the funeral, in St. Patrick's Catholic Church on the West Side of St. Paul, where his mother had lived most of her adult life since her husband's (Morris's father's) death, in the house on the bluffs where Morris had grown up. This, too, was a quiet occasion, with no one offering a eulogy for Jane Morris except the parish priest, who said he had known her all of his life and had admired how she had provided for her son without the help of a partner.

"Hers was a service without self-congratulations, and without self-indulgence," the priest said. "She displayed a sense of duty without ever talking about duty, and I think, also, she continued to love her husband, in these many years, as deeply as she had before his death in the war. There was something mysterious about it."

Morris stood, with his lovely wife at his side, looking toward his mother's casket, with the three tall candles on each side of it,—on top of which flickered the six points of flame,—and he reflected that his mother's love for his father had, indeed, been mysterious.

"Well, if there is an afterlife," he said to himself, "she will be with you now."

Morris said that,—"you,"—speaking to his father, as he often did, and not out loud in the sense of producing audible sound, but forming the words in his mind, as if speaking them out loud, as he listened to the words of the liturgy familiar from his childhood. He had attended this same church as a child, had been a student at the attached elementary school, and, as a server, had served at funeral masses.

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvet saeclum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sybylla...

He recalled going with his mother to the scene by the High Bridge that he and she had loved, the scene, looking out to the Mississippi River and St. Paul skyline, on the other side of the river, that only at age 26 he had learned from his mother that his father had loved, too,—on the afternoon before the evening when his mother had presented him with the cigar box containing his father's wartime letters.

Conscious of his dear Ellen beside him, Morris recalled, also, how his mother, on several occasions when he had expressed an unsureness about how to proceed with Ellen, had advised him to trust in his love for her.

Morris thought, also, of his last visit with his mother, six weeks before, when his mother had encouraged him to regain the good life that he and Ellen had had before the war.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi civis,
Gere curam mei finis...

Since that last talk with his mother and the moment at the overlook in South Dakota, above the Missouri River, when Morris had realized that he was losing Ellen, he had reminded himself many times that he needed to "break out," as his mother had advised, and he had carried through on that impulse to the extent of asking around for new duty on the base, avoiding any that had to do with war or flying. He had even received a few offers for unchallenging duties, which, in his present state he preferred. He had not taken the matter any further, however, and he knew Ellen was paying close attention to how he proceeded. He could sense her growing anxiety, and, at times, frustration and annoyance, at his failure to move more decisively.

As for the sexual life between him and Ellen that had once been so passionate on both sides, he had not managed to regain that, either. He and she never talked about it. They lived as brother and sister, without the intimate gestures and physical touches that had once been so frequent between them. He could feel that physical distance as she stood next to him but a ways apart, as she always did anymore.

Each time Morris became aware of this physical distance, it pained him to be reminded of the extent to which he had allowed the former ardor of their spousal affection to fade off as it had. It pained him that Ellen no longer waited for his touch as she had done in the days, before he had left for the war, when he had returned from training each day and ascended the long stairs to their apartment to find her, made pretty just for him and coming across the room to be enclosed in his arms.

Later, after the casket had been lowered into the ground and dirt

thrown on top of it, Morris remained briefly with Ellen and her parents, and then, with Ellen returning home with them, drove by himself in a car that he and Ellen had rented to the family house on the West Side of St. Paul, just two blocks from the High Bridge, where his mother had died alone less than a week before.

Going into the front door there, he found cardboard boxes piled up neatly in the living room, as his mother had told him, in a recent letter, that she planned to do, preparing the house for him to either take over for himself or sell off to someone else.

She had made arrangements with a real estate agent, and she had provided all the documents required for a sale, in case he decided to move in that direction.

There, he found that, as his mother always had, she had been saving her daily copies of the *New York Times* for him, or maybe the subscription had simply kept on and she had not stopped it and so she had stacked them up as they arrived. In any case, there they were, the newspapers for the entire month of June, stacked in neat chronological order on a counter in the kitchen.

Taking up the first paper chronologically, which was for Sunday, June 13, 1971,—more than a month in the past, but Morris had been out of touch with his usual newspapers all of this time,—he focused at once on a three-column headline on the front page: "Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement."

As was the case with anything having to do with the war he had left behind, the former pilot and prisoner of war felt immediately that this was a matter of the utmost importance.

He read:

"A massive study of how the United States went to war in Indochina, conducted by the Pentagon three years ago, demonstrates that four administrations progressively developed a sense of commitment to a non-Communist Vietnam, a readiness to fight the North to protect the South, and an ultimate frustration with this effort—to a much greater extent than their public statements acknowledged at the time.

"The 3000-page analysis, to which 4,000 pages of official documents are appended, was commissioned by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and covers the American involvement in Southeast Asia from World War II to mid-1968—the start of the peace talks in Paris after President Lyndon B. Johnson had set a limit on further military commitments and revealed his intention to retire."

Morris thought to himself that he had a distinct memory associated with this event, the start of the Paris Peace Talks. He recalled reading of start of the talks in the Times in early May of 1968 on the first day of their final two-week section of F105 combat training, a month after

Johnson had announced the suspension of bombing operations north of the 20th Parallel, bringing an end to the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign that had gone on for the previous year. People had actually thought then that maybe the war was coming to an end, Morris recalled. Marty Sardo, speaking for everyone, had commented that things were cooking down just when they were cooking up, as he remembered. But the war had not wound down. It had merely switched to other areas, in particular, the area below the Demilitarized Zone, in South Vietnam.

Morris recalled the presence in the stag bar that same day of a hundred missions man, Col. Thomas Byers, who had talked about how the NVs were bringing down supplies heavier than ever to take advantage of the restrictions in bombing. As many as 20,000 troops had come down in just the past two months, Morris recalled Byers saying, and that was a good indication that the war was heating up not cooling down.

How odd, Morris thought, that he and the others had so wanted the war to continue and intensify at that time, for no other reason but to be able to experience combat.

"Well, I got my fair share of that," Morris said aloud.

Returning to the Times article again, Morris read further, finding a long list of conclusions of the report:

"The four succeeding administrations" (these were those of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, Morris clarified in his mind, starting in the late 1940's, in his boyhood) "built up the American political, military and psychological stakes in Indochina, often more deeply than they realized at the time, with large-scale military equipment to the French in 1950; with acts of sabotage and terror warfare against North Vietnam beginning in 1954;" (that was the year of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, the battle that Xuan Than had described, Morris thought, the battle in which Than's father had died) "with moves that encouraged and abetted the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam in 1963; with plans, pledges and threats of further action that sprang to life in the Tonkin Gulf clashes in August, 1964;" (the so-called "Tonkin Resolution" of the U.S. Congress had followed that, as Morris recalled. He recalled, also, having argued to Matt Brandt, in the locker room in the Minnesota Boat Club, in spring of 1967, that the "Tonkin Resolution" had amounted to an act of war) "with the careful preparation of public opinion for the years of open warfare to follow;" (he himself had been one of those so prepared, Morris thought, in the Air Force ROTC at the University of Minnesota) "and with the calculation of 1965, as the planes and troops were openly committed to sustaining combat, that neither accommodation inside South Vietnam nor early negotiations with North Vietnam would achieve the desired result."

Feeling profoundly disturbed without knowing precisely why, Morris

skimmed through the remainder of the article, noting that the article was presented as the lead story in a series of individual articles that would follow in the next days and weeks regarding particulars revealed in the Pentagon Papers. He did not look any further into those articles, at the moment, but he took the stack of newspapers with him, forming an intention in his mind to read the rest of the articles thoroughly when he returned to Las Vegas.

Returning to the Kass home, Morris found Ellen gone with her mother shopping, leaving just the father at home. Morris realized then that the one-to-one talk would happen that he had been avoiding.

"Jimmy, my boy, it's great to see you recuperating a little bit," Edward Kass said.

"Thank you," Morris answered simply.

"You've gained a little weight back, haven't you?"

"Yes, a little bit."

"How much."

"About ten pounds."

"Still lean and mean, though."

"Yes."

That had been an attempt at humor, Morris knew, but he did not feel any levity on account of it. He was sorry he had not been able to respond in a like spirit. He understood that his father-in-law meant to counsel him, and he didn't want to be counseled.

The elder Kass considered a moment after that.

"Jim, you've been through so much, I know. I just want you to know, I respect your great sacrifice."

"Thank you."

"Still not easy coming back, I suppose."

"No."

"You know, Jim, I knew a guy when I was in France, in World War II, just prior to the Bulge, in the lead up there before we got penned in, before Patton and the 3rd Army came to rescue, he was in a group of three soldiers in a foxhole and the other two, his best friends, took a hit pretty bad. Both of them were mutilated and still alive, I won't go into the details, I'm sure you've seen plenty similar scenes..."

"Yes."

"Well, this guy had problems on account of what he had seen. He couldn't shake it off. He got sent home because of it. And later, after the war, I looked him up, and I was surprised to see him still in it, still trying to shake it off."

"What happened to him then?"

"Well, that's the point I wanted to make, I guess. This guy did shake it off, eventually. He got back into life somehow. And he wrote me and

told me the best thing he ever did was to pick himself up, leave the hospital he was in, and go back to an ordinary job. That daily routine was what helped him shake it off."

Morris had no response.

"I talked to him a few years later," the senior Kass went on. "He said the war had been horrible, he expected there was no way it could have been anything else, but he was glad, at least, he had helped bring down Hitler and the Nazis."

Morris was glad when Ellen came in the door, at this time, bringing the talk to an end, but he thought later about what Ed Kass had said about how the recovered man had claimed to have been glad to have helped bring down the Nazis. That was the difference between this World War II casualty of battle shock and himself, Morris thought. This man, in the end, had believed in the war he had fought in.

307. Morris reels from the Pentagon Papers and Ellen's accusations

Major James Morris returned with his wife Ellen to Las Vegas several days later, mulling over what Ellen's father had said about the importance of getting back in a routine, and feeling newly determined to do so, while aware, also, of a feeling of increasing instability related to the haze of war that never left him and the indictment of war guilt that never lifted from his shoulders,—a dynamic that he knew had intensified due to his brief encounter with the Pentagon Papers in the *New York Times* in the old family house on the West Side. Conscious though he was of the deleterious effect of this encounter, however, Morris was eager to ensconce himself somewhere soon in order to search through the entire stack of newspapers for more information on the Pentagon Papers.

First, though, Morris told himself, he had to set up the routine. In a burst of energy, he stopped by to inquire further into a job, within the Air Force, that he knew he was being considered for. He walked away with the job secured. It was a mundane job in troop deployment, a paper-shuffling job, but it would provide a routine while enabling Morris to have minimal contact with other Air Force personnel.

Morris did not tell Ellen before he went to try for the job, but he told her at once, when he got back home, that he had applied for the job and had secured it. The result on her face was a dramatic change from the tense expression that had become habitual to a look of youthful joy that he had not seen for a long time.

"Oh, Jimmy, isn't this wonderful?" she said, and her body, pressing against him, had a sexual intimacy he had not felt in a long time. "I just knew you would rally yourself! I told my parents you would!"

Morris felt clumsy and old as he stood with his wife in his arms, not being able to produce the appropriate facial expression and tone of voice to join into her mood of jubilation.

"I'm very glad you're happy about it," he said.

"Oh, yes I am! Yes, I am! You know what we should do, Jim? We should go out and celebrate!"

At her insistence, they dressed for an evening out and returned to a restaurant where they had been before, in better times, and Morris felt he had pulled that off, to a certain extent, at least, after the candlelit dinner was over. But, back at home, he remained in the living room reading though he knew she was waiting for him to come to bed. He couldn't force himself to go in to her to confront the unreality of another interface, the impossibility of pulling himself back to the state of mind, with respect to her, that he had been in before the war.

Next day, Morris reported to the location he had been assigned to and entered there into a bland office such as the Air Force has so many of,

but which before this day he had never thought of being his own proper domain as the man of action he had thought himself to be. He tried to feel at ease in this new environment, as he looked through the pieces of paper on which names were typed of airmen he was assigned to arrange into units (where and whom they would report to, how they would be supplied with the necessary information, and so on). But he could not prevent himself from thinking that he was assigning these men to do duty such as he had done himself. Wherever they were being sent, they were being sent there to do either the direct business or the indirect support of the war he himself had engaged in and found in the end to be so wanting.

Indeed, the war was in his new office, Morris found, as much as it has been in every other place he had been in since returning from Laos. It was there as in a shadow into which he knew he would have to throw light, eventually, though he had no heart for it at the moment.

The office was also a place such as he had been looking for, Morris soon realized, where, during his many lulls in activity, he would have the time and privacy to read through the *New York Times* articles that he had brought back from Minnesota.

Morris did not bring the articles with him the entire first week of his job, however, while, each evening after work, he returned home to the satisfaction and encouragement of his wife. On the first day of the second week, he brought the articles with him and placed them in a drawer of his desk. For the entire week, again, the articles remained unlooked at. Then, on the first day of the third week, he opened the drawer and began looking through the articles.

The first article he paused on,—in the paper for June 15, on page 20,—had a title that drew his interest because it referred to the airwar: "McCone Memo to Top Officials on Effectiveness of Air War."

The memo had been sent on April 2, 1965, upon completion of the first 12 weeks of the Rolling Thunder bombing of North Vietnam, Morris noted. The sender of the memo, John McCone, had at that time been Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The memo had gone to the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, the National Security Adviser, McGeorge Bundy, and the United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, Gen. Maxwell Taylor.

Morris read several paragraphs in this memo slowly:

"I have reported that the strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying material," McCone stated. "If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.

"I have now had a change to examine the 12-week program referred to by General Wheeler, and it is my personal opinion that this program is not sufficiently severe and [words unintelligible] the North Vietnamese

to [words unintelligible] policy.

"On the other hand, we must look with care to our position under a program of slowly ascending tempo of air strikes. With the passage of each day and each week, we can expect increasing pressure to stop the bombing. This will come from various elements of the American public, the press, the United Nations and world opinion... Time will run against us in this operation and I think the North Vietnamese are counting on this.

"Therefore I think what we are doing is starting on a path which involves ground force operations, which, in all probability have limited effectiveness against guerillas, although admittedly will restrain some VC advances. However, we can expect requirements for an ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chances of victory. I support and agree with this decision, but I must point out that in my judgment, forcing submission of the VC can only be brought about by a decision in Hanoi. Since the contemplated actions against the North are modest in scale, they will not impose unacceptable damage on it, nor will they threaten the DRV's vital interests. Hence, they will not present them with a situation with which they cannot live, though such actions will cause the DVR pain and inconvenience."

The conclusion of the memo stated the point quite clearly:

"Therefore, it is my judgment that if we are to change the mission of the ground forces, we must also change the ground rules of the strikes against North Vietnam. We must hit them harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage. Instead of avoiding the MIG's, we must go in and take them out. A bridge here and there will not do the job. We must strike their airfields, their petroleum resources, power stations and their military compounds."

Whereas others might have found this information of minor interest, Morris saw in it a great significance that touched on his entire experience as a combat pilot. The warning here that, in order to have any realistic hope of winning the war, the airwar against the North had to be prosecuted more severely (on the level of the World War II air assaults, as Morris understood), had not been heeded. This the former pilot noted with great emphasis in his own mind. The full-out airwar had not been conducted owing to the very influences the memo had mentioned: the press, the United Nations, world opinion, and the American public (including, Morris knew, many members of his own generation).

In another article, "Vietnam Archive Tells How Johnson Secretly Opened Way to Ground Combat," by Neil Sheehan, Morris read that, in April 1965, at about the same time as the McCone memo, President Johnson, warned his only options were to increase the airwar, withdraw unilaterally from Vietnam, or commit ground forces, had made a secret

decision to order a shift from defense to offense on the part of American troops; he had also ordered that the shift should be as imperceptible as possible to the American public so as not to cause a public outcry.

Morris also discovered that, as early as July 1, 1965,—before he himself or any of his fellow pilots had even entered the field of battle,—Under Secretary of State George W. Ball, "long known as the lone dissenter on Vietnam," in a memo to President Johnson, had warned that the Vietnam war could not be won. The best action, Ball had advised, would be for the United States to "cut its losses and leave" as a "wiser and more mature nation."

Returning then to the original lead article for the whole series on the Pentagon Papers that he had read in Minnesota, Morris read once more: "The Pentagon study... suggests that the predominant American interest was at first containment of Communism and later the defense of the power, influence, and prestige of the United States, in both stages irrespective of conditions in Vietnam."

He recalled the words of Dylan Erland, whose own father had been a war fatality: "You can see your good soldiers on TV. They were saying the war was a lie, people died for a mistake."

Even as he thought these thoughts, however, the returned prisoner of war felt muddled in his mind. It was part of his general condition, part of the dullness he had brought back from the war, part of his inability to get any distance from the war, that he felt muddled like this, Morris told himself. Had he not heard, even at the start of his combat training, at Nellis, that this was a war unlike any previous war in American history (except for maybe the Korean conflict) in being questioned and opposed by a great segment of the American public? Gen. Moynihan, is his comments,—so stirring at the time,—had warned that this was so, Morris reminded himself. President Johnson, in bringing the bombing of North Vietnam to a halt, in spring of 1968, had, in effect, admitted as much, also. Overseas, comments by the arrogant, articulate intelligence officer, Col. Estes Collard, regarding the "great irony of Laos," had provided a further warning. Still, Morris told himself, he had continued to believe that the war had made sense, at least, as a means to buttress South Vietnam against a take over from the North. Apparently, though, even that limited "victory" had not really been believed in, in the last several years of the war.

That was what he had learned from these articles, Morris told himself, as he struggled to break through the muddle of his mind and the dullness brought back from the war: even that limited "victory" had not really been believed in, at the end; "the war was a lie, people died for a mistake."

The crux of the matter, Morris concluded, was that the war had been

prosecuted without belief that it would eventually be won, for the entire period that he and his fellow pilots had been in action along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in Laos.

"They never expected to do anything except win for a while in the court of world opinion," Morris said to himself. "What did guys like Tom Pitt give their lives for then?"

The article that had the most effect on Morris, however, was a letter to the editor (attributed to Louis F. Lombardi) in the Times of June 16, which went as follows:

"If the 'Pentagon study' of the Vietnam war is to be believed—and sadly I think there is more to believe than disbelieve—it is evident that the American people have been lied to and distrusted by their own leaders and representatives.

"In the study we have many famous Americans presented to us as planning for the bombing and accepting the resulting killing of human beings in an almost too casual manner. Such a manner of life, of decision- making in an almost amoral manner, does little to differentiate the American policymaker from any of history's other tyrants."

Turning back to the papers, Morris came upon an article describing the reaction to the printing of the articles of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, the M.I.T. professor suspected of leaking the information to the press. The article said that Ellsberg had refused to either confirm or deny that he had leaked the articles but had "described the papers as 'the U.S. equivalent of the Nuremberg war-crimes documents.'"

Morris paused at that. "The U.S. equivalent of the Nuremberg war-crimes documents," he said out loud.

He felt sick inside. He got from his desk, where his documents were arranged in haphazard fashion, and walked over to the window to look out at the drab view of unadorned military buildings and parking lots, above which flew here and there an American flag.

Morris thought to himself that he was in an unstable state, he had never fully recovered from the experience of war, his own experience of the damage of war had been greater than that of many others who had been in the war,—therefore, he said to himself, his response to these articles was an over-reaction, was it not?

Yet, how could he continue, he asked himself, as he had been doing in his new job, as a participant, even if obliquely so, in the business of war, the very business he had been engaged in so destructively, counter to his own intentions, while intending from the start to do nothing but good? How could he continue? And where else in the world of human dealings could he fit in, shell as he had become, unable to emerge from the feeling of the war that he always carried with him?

Morris arranged the documents on his desk, pertaining to his job, into

a neat pile, placed the *New York Times* articles in his satchel, and walked out of the office, though it was just midday, encountering a junior officer in the anteroom to the office.

"I left the work on my desk," Morris said, "I won't be back."

"I can look into, sir, if you need someone to take over temporarily, with what needs to be sent out today."

"Just let it be known I won't be back."

Finding Ellen at home, surprised by his early arrival, Morris said at once: "I quit the job, Ellen. I just can't do it."

"What do you mean you can't do it?" she replied with alarm. "Is it that hard?"

"It's not hard at all. I just don't believe in it," Morris replied, settling down into the sofa where he often sat reading his newspapers, with a look on his face and in his entire posture of utter defeat and detachment.

The effect on Ellen, of seeing her husband sitting in this way, was as dramatic on her facial expression and mood in a negative direction as had been his first news of the job in a positive direction.

She was agitated, clearly, and trying to hold back on what she felt like saying, as she paced back and forth in the same apartment that less than three years before had been such a haven of comfort and passion for them both.

"What will become of us, Jimmy?" she lamented. "What will become of us? Can't you see I'm trying so hard, I've been trying so hard, too?"

"Yes, I know it," he said.

She waited for him to say more, and, when he did not, she went on. "Jimmy, did you ever think, you owe me something, too?" she said. "I know I owe you love. I know you're my husband, and I'm glad you are, but you owe me to try, at least, did you ever think of that?"

"Yes, I have thought of it," he replied, but he continued to sit in the sofa, in the same posture as when he read his newspapers, a dejected posture with his head slumped.

His simple answer brought a more agitated look to her face.

"You know what, Jimmy?" she said. "I waited a long time for you. Lot of lonely nights. Don't think I never got offers, Jimmy! I turned a lot of guys down! Turned down some one-nighters and some guys with rings. And some of them were rich guys, Jimmy. I never gave any of them a good look, even, because I waiting for you, I was waiting to have my old Jimmy back."

Morris said nothing.

She walked off to the side of the room and looked out the window with tears in her eyes. "And you know what happened, Jimmy? That day came around finally, and you came back, and where was the old Jimmy, the old Jimmy full of life and hope and confidence that I was waiting for?

That Jimmy did not come back."

Upon hearing these words, Morris had a sensation of falling back in his mind like a person who has been dealt a mortal blow, and yet his sense of this blow was not as a cut causing pain, but as a blunt hit upon flesh too numb to feel pain.

"What happened to the old Jimmy?" Ellen continued, as tears flowed more freely. "I want you back as what you were. I want us back as what we were the day when you bought the ring in Vegas, the way we were when we went to Mexico together."

Morris watched his lovely wife at the window as her face displayed a succession of emotions, telling himself to react to her emotions, but he felt distant from them.

"You were once such an up guy, Jim," Ellen went on after waiting for some response, "and now you're down all the time. Seems like you want to be down, Jimmy. Do you want to be down?"

"No, I do not," he answered but he did not move.

"This Jimmy I see now, this you I see sitting there," she said. "I don't want this person, Jim. You're just going to bring me down, too, and then we will both be down together."

She crossed to him and pressed against him. "Hold me, Jimmy! Hold me like you used to! We can't let this happen!"

Morris did hold her, but he was already deciding inside he would not remain with her much longer. There was nothing he could do anymore, he was telling himself inside. He would let her go so she could have a happy life with someone else.

[Chapter 307 notes]

308. Stumphand tells Matthew: "Sometimes it just takes a strong hand"

For the month since his erstwhile wife Mary had returned from Cuba, Matthew Brandt had alternated sexually between her and Gail Martin, while feeling in general that his world was falling apart, not only with respect to his love life, but with respect to the Cranston Farm in general, where he had begun to feel like an outcast because of his ever-worsening, sour relations with the "other four" who had been invited into the enterprise, for purely financial reasons, at the last minute, and who, since their arrival at the farm, had changed its complexion from "working farm" to "hippie trippy circus," as Matthew called it.

Going back and forth between the two women, despite how doing so might have seemed, on first blush, like every man's dream, had begun to wear Matthew thin.

"This is going to split me apart," he told Dennis one night in their yurt as they lay side by side talking as they often did.

"So stop it then," Dennis responded.

"I've been trying to."

"Well, let them duke it out then."

"They're not going to duke it out, Den. That is the goddam craziest thing. They're not even mad at each other."

"I guess it's what they call free love."

"How did we ever come down to this, Den?"

"You got me, man. I don't know."

"Lately, let me tell you, it's not so free, either. You know who they're mad at? They're both mad at me."

"I have never observed that, Matt."

"Well, take my word for it. It's coming down."

The conversation drifted off at this point, and Dennis fell asleep, but Matthew kept thinking about what he had said. Before this moment, he had never fully understood that the women were getting more and more angry at him and that this increasing anger on their parts was indeed part of the strange dynamic that was happening.

Despite everything that was "coming down" (as Matthew had said), he had never in any formal manner tried to sort out what to do. In a state of puzzlement, he had gone back and forth between the two women solely on the basis of his felt need for them both and his desire to remain in intimate contact with both of them.

As to what he exactly he gained from both women, Matthew had never tried to sort this out, either. He knew that Mary brought a connection to his past, and that part of that was the unshakeable faith Mary had had for so long that he was more than just the physicality that so many people saw as his essential quality. He still thought of Mary as

his wife. He had never fully accepted her notion of him and her being newly independent. He was aware, though, that he had exercised the new independence in becoming involved with Gail. Even so, with Gail, Matthew had not acted with any preconceived intention. He had simply stumbled into an affair with her. He was aware that Mary and Gail were opposites in many respects. But, again, he had never articulated in his mind just how they were different, except to vaguely identify that Gail was light in spirit, in contrast to Mary's constant "heaviness," and that Gail was a mother with a child, and, in this, brought a connection to the traditional family of his childhood, whereas Mary was moving away from that so determinedly.

Matthew was keenly aware of that, also,—that he had moved away from the farm family values of his childhood,—and often his sense of this took the form of a poignant disappointment in himself and his life. Coupled with this, as a backdrop or background force pulling against him, was the nostalgia he felt as he moved about the farm amidst settings that elicited memories of working on the farm as a boy with other members of his family, in particular, his father.

Matthew recalled again what his father had said about how his father had regarded him, as a boy, as a diamond his father had been entrusted with, to not allow to become a piece of coal. Had he become such a piece of coal? Had he left behind the good things he had been given to carry forward into his own life?

Matthew never talked about these things with Dennis, despite the many intimate conversations he and Dennis had. He never talked about them to Mary or Gail, as part of the weird turn of affairs by which in gaining access to both Mary and Gail he had become more distant from both of them. He never talked about them to Darren Houghten, who had in effect gone over to the other side, as Matthew saw it, the side of the four others, the "slackers," as he called them. His only refuge, with respect to the farm tradition of his boyhood, had been the boy Little Matt whom he had continued to try to bring along in the farm tradition.

Matthew thought of this as he went down the hill through the maple trees on the morning after his talk with Dennis about the growing anger of the women. Through the leaves, he could see the sun rising above the woods on the east edge of the farm, reminding him of sun rises of his boyhood above the woods of the eastern border of his family's farm.

How was it, he asked himself, that he had drifted so far from that? Had he not, in moving to this farm, attempted to move closer? Somehow the whole endeavor had gone awry. The answer to these questions came at once to his mind, the same answer he had reached over and over again in his mind in an almost obsessive manner in the past month.

The answer was that the four people brought in at the last minute,

with their music and grass, and endless philosophical and political discussions, combined with distain for physical work, had ruined the whole experiment. They had stolen the heart of it, corrupted the original purpose of it, and now they were present to stay.

What could be done?

This question, too, of what could be done, Brandt had asked himself many times, and many times he had responded that he did not know, but had to do something.

He emerged from the woods at the bottom of the hill to see Dennis Kelly in his neat blue jeans and denim work shirt, standing in the shed staring with a look of concern at the back of the tractor.

"What's the problem?" Brandt said at once. "Rake is broke clear through."

The rig in question was the one they had planned to use to rake the hay they had cut the previous day. If the hay was left to lay in the field too long and got wet on the ground it would spoil.

"Now what are we going to do?"

They stood in the shed together for a while contemplating before Kelly spoke again. "I was thinking, how about ol' Stumphand? He's done with his own raking. I just saw him in town yesterday."

They decided that Matthew would drive up to Stumphand's farm right after breakfast, while Dennis, by his own wish, would help with weeding the garden.

In the house, they found Gail Martin and Jane Larue in the kitchen, at the rear of the house, cooking eggs. Soon Mary Brandt also appeared, and set to work with Matt and Dennis setting the table up in the dining room by the big fireplace.

The odd division that the farm had fallen into was quite obvious from this morning scene, which lately had been repeated every day.

In the living room was the usual mess left by the first group, presently asleep down in the guest houses. They stayed up late every night and as a result rose late every morning. The coffee table was strewn with beer bottles. Here and there were the little stubs of marijuana joints that everyone called "roaches." There was also an empty cracker box with the wax paper inside pulled outside of it and crumbs left strewn around it, and stray popcorn kernels with unpopped seeds and salt lying around that, some of them stuck in a sticky shellac where spilled soda pop had dried on the wood surface of the table.

In the dining room, at the long wooden table, was the second group in the increasing division of the farm. They were the ones who rose early every day to work in a manner that the others derided as "compulsive." This second group was the original five, self-styled "Woodstock family" that had started on such a high note only a few months before. Darren

Houghten, the sixth person, was not usually with them in the morning, however, since he often sat with the others in the evening to listen to music and smoke grass. He had become a kind of diplomat between the two groups, sought out first whenever either side had a problem with respect to the other.

On this particular morning, the topic was the second crop of hay, which Matthew and Dennis had piled up neatly in the hay mow of the barn. In total there were about 500 bales harvested from the 60 acres, south and east of the house, that had been plowed and replanted in the spring with a mix of timothy, alfalfa, and rye.

The first crop had been sold to farms in Massachusetts, but Dennis said he thought he could get a better price elsewhere.

"I was thinking I could drive down to Klaerten, around the Concord River there," he proposed. "There are a lot of dairy farms around there, I've heard."

"You would be the perfect person for that," Gail remarked, "with your background."

"I was thinking I'd be able to relate, at least."

Three of the children came down the stairs about halfway through the meal, lured by the aroma of the cooking food. Included were Gail's two children and Jane's little girl. Jane's largest child, her rebellious ten-year-old son, had remained in bed.

Matthew and Dennis left right after breakfast, explaining the rake problem and their intention to loan a rake from Stumphand Moore.

"Little Matt would like to go with you, if he can," Gail said to Matthew as he went out. "Would it be okay with you?"

"Of course," Matthew replied.

The five-year-old ran forward at once, smiling, and Matthew spun to go out, looking like a big, wooly animal with his wild hair and untrimmed beard. He tousled the boy's hair and guided the boy through the door with a gentle hand on his upper back.

"Just remember, please, about the open window," the mother shouted after them.

"Gotcha," Brandt replied with a wave of the hand. "I'll watch him real close."

"Do I need my tool box?" the boy asked as they crossed the little front yard to cross the dirt road to the four-stall shed where the pickup truck was parked between the flat bed truck and the tractor.

"No, not right now," Matthew replied softly, leaning down to look into the boy's face. "Later, though, when we put on the rake, you can give us a hand."

"Gotcha," said the boy.

"You still got that tool I gave you, the one you use to grab things and

turn them?"

"The vice gwip? Yes."

"Hey, pretty good, Matthew. Where'd you learn the name?"

"Dennis told me."

From the farm to Stumphand's, it was a short ride up the dirt road to Moore's place,—first past the Cranston house and the row of guest houses, then through a stand of maples and around a curve to the "Y" in the road there, then up the left side of the "Y" to the top of the hill, where Stumphand's mailbox appeared. After that came the bumpy ride to the barnyard with its assortment of implements, some old and in disrepair and some still in use, beyond which was the two-story boxframe white house with the saddle-shaped caved-in roof.

Moore was out in the yard at the moment cussing at a barn cleaner as he clobbered it with a sledge hammer to pound loose a conveyor tooth jammed with manure. He used the barn cleaner to clean out the barn each day after milking his ten dairy cows.

"As if the shit ain't bad enough alone," he said as Matthew and the boy came up.

"Can I give you a hand?"

"How about you pry this cripple back with this crowbar while I give him another whack?"

With four hands applied to it, the chain sprung loose and began clunking along dropping manure in the wagon behind Moore's old tractor, which was parked just outside the barn.

"Came by to ask you about loaning your rake," Brandt said.

"Right out in the yard there," said Moore. "I think it's still hooked up. Come on in for a minute. There's a wrench in the house."

With this invitation came Matt's first entry into Moore's T-shaped house. The main door, at the bottom of the T, led into a "mudroom" strewn with boots, outerwear, and other items thrown around in complete disorder. A hall led into a plain kitchen with a cracked linoleum floor, strewn with chunks of dirt, strands of straw, and other evidence of the owner's routine passage, back and forth, between the barn and the kitchen. The one-room "living room" visible from the kitchen had a wood floor, a tattered sofa and padded chair, and an old TV with a rabbit ears antenna.

"You got quite a commotion going on down there," Moore remarked with a smile as he secured the wrench from the kitchen table where it sat between a loaf of bread and a knife smeared with peanut butter.

"You've been hearing it?"

"Me, not so much. Been hearing of it, though."

"Hearing of it from who?"

"People in town."

This news disturbed Matthew a great deal. Indeed, he was surprised at the anger and contempt he felt at the mere thought of these people who sat around smoking grass and carefully selecting words as they went on and on about music, politics, and art. Once he had regarded himself as being part of the whole scene of music and drugs, but lately he had come to hate it, and, to hate the very smell of grass because of its association with the self-indulgence and intellectual convolutions of these people who regarded themselves as too good or too smart to do humble labor.

He looked out a window to check on little Matt, who had stopped to play with some kittens in the backyard, and the sight of the boy in the morning light reminded him of how he himself as a young boy, on similar bright mornings, had learned of the workings of the farm from his father. Instead of proceeding through Cranston farm toward recovering his farm heritage, he was losing it, he told himself again.

"Well, I don't like it myself," Matthew said, "but what I could do about it I don't know."

"Guess my thought about that is sometime it takes a strong hand," Moore replied as the two men returned to the yard to find the boy there with a kitten in his arms.

"You can have that kitten if you want it, son," the New Englander said to little Matthew when the men came out into the yard.

"Can I, Matthew?" the boy said to his namesake.

"You can bring it home and see if it's alright with your ma," Matthew replied. He knew Gail would say yes.

Matthew, as he drove back to the farm, with the boy and the kitten beside him, mulled over what the laconic Yankee farmer had said: "Sometime it takes a strong hand."

Is that what was happening, he asked himself. Was he losing the farm, losing his past, losing his heritage, because of not applying enough strength in response to these other people who were, in effect, gaining control of the farm by forfeit?

309. Shut out, Matthew listens as Dennis describes "the ultimate development"

After the music coming from the house had stopped and the slamming of doors and shouting of good night's indicated that the four people who lived in the guest cottages had gone to bed, Matthew Brandt exited from the yurt on the hill above the house, where he had begun the evening with Dennis Kelly. Brandt didn't have to say where he was headed. Kelly knew Brandt was on his way to visit either Mary or Gail.

Brandt, his long hair and untrimmed beard in disarray, as was often the case with him lately, went first to the shed. There he found his stock of beer in the wood box under the tool bench. With hardly a pause, he guzzled down four bottles. Then he headed out from the shed to the maple works cabin where he had helped to set Mary up for her monk-like existence with her reading lamp and books. Coming close to the cabin, he observed that she was done with her usual reading and writing. The cabin was completely dark.

He pounded on the door, listened, and heard her shuffling across the wood floor in her stockings.

"Matthew," she said simply when she opened the door.

She was dressed in a T-shirt, knee-length gray stockings, and full hipped panties, with some wisps of dark pubic hair sticking out where the neatly tucked crotch of the panties met her bare thighs. Clothes as plain as her dress always was, but, as always, also, no attempt at plainness could mute her exquisite femininity.

In her voice was neither welcome nor rejection, and no indication of desire or of being glad to see him.

"Just thought I'd stop by," Matthew said.

"It's late, you know. I was sleeping."

"Care for a little company?"

"You can stop by for a while."

He was hoping that she meant by that long enough to have sex. But she went across to her bed and pulled her covers up to her neck. "There's a chair right there," she said. "Can you see it?"

"Yes," he answered as he sat down in the chair, from which, in the darkness, he could hear her regular breathing.

"I'm all puckered out," she said. "I was working all day in the garden."

"What were you working at?"

"Pulling up weeds."

Matthew could see that nothing much further would pass between him and Mary, but, not wanting to be abrupt in departure, he held his place beside her, about three feet from her bed.

In the dark then, as he sat, he had a strange revisitation of his sense

from some time past of a golden aura around Mary's head. It was not an aura exactly. There was no light associated with it this time. But he could sense that it was there, separate from her body and related to her spirit somehow,—if that kind of notion could be believed, he thought, as the idea resonated in his mind.

His head was buzzing, not from grass, which he no longer used, but from the beers he had just consumed. By slamming down the beers, he had learned, he could recapture the feeling of "strangeness" that he had forsworn on his day of giving up grass, but still often craved.

"Matthew, where did you just come from?" Mary asked.

"The shed."

"What were you doing there?"

"Drinking beers."

"Why don't you go over to the house sometime and talk to those people? Darren would really like that, I know."

Mary's words, as they came across through the dark, combined into the careful groupings so peculiar to her, and delivered in her determined cadence as distinct entities, with never a syllable or consonant dropped, seemed to Brandt as if they carried the golden aura, too, or the golden spirit. Whatever it was, he could feel it in the dark.

"Now, if Darren was the only one there, I could see that," Brandt replied, "but the whole group together is a little too hippy trippy for my taste, if you know what I mean."

"That seems so odd when you say that," Mary opined, "because you're kind of a hippy yourself."

"I am not a hippy."

"What are you then, Matthew?"

"That I don't know."

"You look like a hippy with the long hair and beard."

"Well, maybe I should cut it all off."

She laughed. "Maybe you should, Matthew. You were a buzz head when I met you, as I recall. No facial hair, no hair on top of your head. It was a symbol of your dedication, as I recall."

"Yes, it was."

"Those were the days, huh?"

"Yes, they were."

"Matthew, I'm really, really tired. It was sweet of you to stop by, but now I'm going to ask you to go."

"Okay," he said, getting up.

"If you want to talk, stop by tomorrow morning."

"Okay, I will."

"Talk," he repeated to himself scornfully as he headed out. Talk was not what he had had in mind, and Mary had known that very well. That

was her idea of a little joke.

At the path that led up the hill, Matthew turned not up the hill but toward the house, by this time completely still. Quietly, he proceeded across the front room, where beer bottles and "roaches" were strewn on the coffee table, past the old fireplace, and up the stairs to Gail Martin's room, where, in response to his soft knock, the door opened.

"Matthew," she whispered, putting her finger over her mouth to remind him the four children were asleep in adjoining rooms.

She, too, was wearing a T-shirt and panties, and, standing sturdily on her big-boned legs, she had the look he had often thought of, of a big dance hall girl in a Klondike saloon or some similar setting. The tone in her voice was much like he had just heard in Mary's voice, however. No welcome, no rejection, no desire, no gladness to see him.

"It's so late," she said."

"Care for a little company?"

"I guess so, for a little while."

Brandt entered the room and sat heavily down on the bed beside her, his breath smelling of beer, as he noted the marked difference between the maternal world of Gail and the austere setting of Mary's monastic world from which he had just departed. He thought to himself that he was very tired and wanted just to rest here in this maternal world.

"Matthew, did you just come from Mary?" Gail said.

He did not respond.

"You did, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you ever think, maybe I could do this, too?" she said in a teasing voice. "Make the rounds."

"Who did you have in mind?"

"Well, I've been noticing Dennis is pretty cute. And so is Larry, in the guest house."

"Is that the case?"

"They look well hung."

Matthew lay back on the bed with his hands behind his head, feeling the warmth of her body beside him. "You know what I think?" he said.

"What?" she replied.

"We're all going to wind up goddam crazy."

She laughed heartily.

"Is that what's happening to you, poor Matthew?"

"Yes, I could say that in some fashion, if I could find the self-possession to put a sentence together."

"Maybe little Mr. Penis, little Cock-a-Rootie, is taking you down the wrong path."

"What can I say? You and Mary are good fucks."

"You know what I think, Matthew?"

"What?"

"I think there is a reason they call you 'Big Dog' and you should put your big tail between your legs and slunk on out."

"You serious?"

"Yes. Next time you want to see me, arrange it in advance."

Cast adrift from his second point of refuge, Matthew passed through quiet house again, crossed the front porch, and looked with relief at the great dome of the sky dotted with stars.

Proceeding across the dirt road, around the side of the open shed, he headed up the familiar path through the trees to the yurt. Dennis Kelly welcomed him warmly and broke out two beers from the cooler they kept stocked with ice and drinks.

"No action tonight, I guess," Kelly said.

He was aware of Brandt's predicament of having begun the month with two relationships going strong, only to have found himself, in less than two weeks, on the outside looking in, with both women pissed.

"No," Brandt replied. "Not from lack of effort, however."

"Oh-oh. Mary or Gail?"

"Both of them."

"Oh!"

They lay in silence for a while, as they often had, ready to say whatever came to mind, which often developed into a long discussion.

"Gail told me she's been sizing you up. Said you're pretty cute."

"She said that, really?"

"In a joking manner."

Kelly laughed.

"Said you look well hung."

Kelly laughed again, more emphatically. "Well, you don't need to worry about me, Matthew," he said. "I'm the ol' Catholic boy, you know. I'm holding out."

"Holding out for what?"

"What do you think? For sex."

There was silence from Brandt's side as Brandt brought this fact into his cognizance. "Please, please, please," he said, "do not tell me you're a virgin."

"Well, I am, Matthew," Kelly replied in the darkness. "As they say in the movies, the right girl has just not come along."

"Oh my God, Sad Dog, you are pathetic."

"Each to his own, I guess."

Pathetic as it might have been, Dennis Kelly, the Wisconsinite son of a dairy farmer, turned Mountain Volunteer, turned shop steward in a shoe factory, soon further displayed that he was not in the mood for even talk

about women, as he sat in the corner of the yurt in his easy chair constructed of a pad on the floor, a sheet of plywood behind it, and padding tacked on that. He had a beer in one hand.

His mustachioed, ever serious face was vaguely distinguishable in the moonlight filtering through the canvas roof.

"You know what I was thinking about?" he said.

"No," Brandt replied.

"I was thinking about that night, after the strip mine meeting, when you and I stopped by to see ol' Birl in Edinburg."

Brandt laughed. "That was some fare he put out,—beer, brandy, and saltine crackers."

"Oh, yes. The man could do it right. And them coke fires a-burnin', and them trains a-rumblin' past."

Brandt, having completed his beer in several large gulps, secured another bottle and reached to clink it with Kelly.

"Here's to ol' Birl," he said.

"Amen to that," Kelly replied.

They sat in the dark, both comfortably silent, until Dennis Kelly spoke again in his thoughtful voice with its dreamy quality that Brandt had first heard four years before, in the bar in Lexington, Kentucky, where he and Dennis had had their first long talk.

"You know what else I've been thinking?" Kelly said.

"No, Sad Dog, digame, por favor."

"Well, let me put it to you this way, Big Dog,—you know what I think was the ultimate development in this whole business, in this whole counterculture battle?"

Brandt considered. "Please don't say when Dylan went electric."

Kelly laughed. "Well, that was significant, in all seriousness, in much the same way... And you're right it's in music. We're on the same track."

"So what was it then?"

"When the rock bands, the elitist, white suburban kid rock bands started tying in with the country stuff, the Old West... And with the working class experience, that was part of it, too."

They were both silent for a moment as Brandt waited, knowing that Kelly would soon continue and that Kelly was fully confident that Brandt had an interest in what he would say.

"'Cuz suddenly," said Kelly, "you see these guys singing and you realize these are like they used to call that band with Roy Rogers, these are the sons of the pioneers, or the grandsons, going back to the roots, and out as wide as they could go, to bring in everyone, to bring it down to the absolute American. That was the ultimate development. Everything else pales beside it." He took a swig of beer. "Let's face it, man. All this politics has been a crock of shit."

In response, Brandt threw back his hairy head and laughed softly in the darkness. “Dennis Kelly, Mr. Politico,” he replied in his flat voice, “what are you saying?”

“I’m saying what I’m saying. I’m in a mood.”

“So you want to renounce it then?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Big Dog. I don’t want to renounce it, really. But what I regret, what I deeply fuckin’ regret, is this whole trip took us away from being American, you know what I’m saying? Somehow we became politicos. We got dressed up in costumes... Even me, with my mustache and my ‘30’s radical wire rims, you know... To the extent of where ordinary Americans did not regard us as one of them. That was the wrong path, man. I started feeling that way way back in Kentucky.”

“And you expressed some similar sentiment, as I recall.”

“I didn’t see the full extent, though, Matthew, the full extent to which it typified everything we did, as I’m starting to now.”

“Yes, I’ve felt that, too,” Brandt replied, “and Mary just tonight was commenting on the pre-hair days. But now, look at me, Den, I am the wild and wooly one.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Well, I’d like to throw the costumes away,” Dennis Kelly went on in his never-relenting serious tone. “I’d like to go back. I want to blend in. Sometimes lately I want it so much, Matt, I just can’t tell you. I fuckin’ love America. It’s been my great love.”

Kelly fell asleep after that, while Brandt kept thinking about the “pre-hair days” and what Kelly had said about how all of the politics had been a crock of shit and how their whole generation, the rebellious part of it, at least, had gone down the wrong path in looking unAmerican. Gail had said a related thing, Brandt reflected, about how he had been led down the wrong path by sexual desire. A joke, no doubt, but the joke had stung. Then there was Stumphand Moore with his cryptic advice that sometime what was needed was a strong hand. With that, a memory came to Brandt of the incident on his and Mary’s date on the West Bank of the U of M, when he had come to the aid of Jim Morris in Morris’s brawl with the big guy with the peace sign on his forehead who had made fun of Morris’s Air Force uniform. Brandt recalled how he had hit the guy with a single blow that had sent him reeling back.

“That was the best goddam thing I ever did,” Brandt pronounced to himself. “That was an honest thing. What ever happened to that honesty? What ever happened to my strength?”

310. Matt barges into the house and destroys the sound equipment

During the two weeks after his late night talk in the yurt with his old friend Dennis Kelly, Matthew Brandt became increasingly separated from Mary Brandt and Gail Martin, and increasingly angry at the "slackers," as he called them, who gathered in the living room of the house every evening to listen to music and smoke grass.

Darren Houghten, Brandt's old friend of the relinquished world of the Washington D.C. alley apartment, with its astounding, grass-informed view of the branches and street light swaying in the wind,—he was often with the slackers, too. But Brandt harbored no hostility toward Houghten. He merely felt the loss. He felt betrayed. The alley world he had engaged with through Houghten, with its potpourri of intellectual notions, had faded like so much else Brandt had previously relied on.

Brandt felt like an outcast on his own land as he continued in his well-worn paths from the yurt down the hill to the shed and then out to the fields to work amidst the memories that such working brought of the honest labor of his youth. The smell of marijuana and throbbing of rock music that came from the house,—not too far in the past a part of his own world, as gotten from Houghten,—Brandt had come to despise these things, as they existed in his new life, more and more each day as he understood more and more,—or felt that he did,—that these were the things that were bringing down the farm, defeating its original purpose of being a working farm, and preventing him from reestablishing a connection with his family farm past, as he had hoped he would be able to do through the farm, while making him the pariah he had felt himself becoming, lacking the strength he had once had.

As for the people who congregated in the house each evening, Brandt had come to despise them with a corresponding intensity. He despised Larry Holmgren and Kurt Granvolt because they were stupid and fake profound, and he despised Mark Payton because he was intelligent and actually profound. He hated how Payton spewed out words with a look of self-satisfaction on his long, English, horse like face, with its neatly-trimmed rim of mousy brown hair and its neat, little mustache of the same color. As for Alison Payton, Mark's wife, Brandt had nothing but contempt for the big cow eyes she made when her husband talked, and for the herring-bone sweaters and full, pleated skirts she wore with her knee-length black or blue socks and her flat, brown Earth shoes. As he passed the farmhouse, he often heard her saying, as her husband talked, "Oh, wow. Yea, isn't that true? Oh, yea. Wow, wow."

That much Brandt could have endured, however, but something else he heard at this time set him into a state of imminent confrontation. This was an interaction he heard between the two single men, Holmgren and

Granvolt, as they walked from the guest house to the house, passing near the spot where Brandt was kneeling in the garden, picking tomatoes, hidden from their view by the stalks of sweet corn between him and the house.

"Well, have you seen ol' Big Dog slinking around lately?" said one of the men,—Brandt identified him as Larry Holmgren.

"No, not lately."

"That's what they call him, you know."

"Yea, I heard."

"He's way beyond the Big Dog image, with all that goddam hair," Holmgren continued. "They ought to call him Neanderthal Man."

The other laughed, but did not reply.

"You know what I heard, he's been screwing two women."

"That I didn't know."

"Yea, Mary and Gail," Holmgren said.

"Well, I guess I can't blame him for that," Kurt Granvolt replied.

"No lie, man. Two women."

"No wonder he's been slinking around."

Brandt finished filling a basket with tomatoes, and went around the house to the front porch to drop it off, contemplating whether to go into the house to confront Holmgren. If he did that, he thought, he would have to explain that he had been kneeling unseen in the garden. The humiliation in that was enough to deter him for the moment. But he resolved that he would straighten the matter out sometime soon.

Going across the road, Brandt saw Darren Houghten turning his van into the shed with Jane Larue beside him. The bearded director of seminars and his petite, pretty companion came out, looking like a shaggy-haired Prince Hal and a Celtic princess of Renaissance times,—a red-haired Mary, Queen of the Scots, only missing a garland of flowers.

"This goddam music is going to have to stop," Brandt said at once as Houghten limped toward him on his single crutch.

"Hello, Matthew," Jane whispered in her soft voice.

"I'm so sorry you have to deal with it if you find it disturbing, Matthew," Houghten said, settling at once into his diplomat mode, as he had been much called upon to do lately.

"It's going to have to goddam stop," Brandt said again. "If you can't accomplish that, Darren, believe me, I can."

"Matthew, the way I see it, this is a matter for group discussion sometime soon, and it is incumbent upon all of us, in this situation, to try to understand one another's needs and in a peaceful, consensual manner, to work out our differences."

"Incumbent," repeated Matthew with scorn as he stalked off toward the path up the hill to his yurt.

Coming around the shed, though, he discovered his erstwhile wife, Mary, with her dark black hair pinned straight back, crossing toward him in her determined, earnest manner.

"Darren is right, Matthew," she said.

"What ever happened to our dream of the farm?" Brandt replied.

"We still have it. I still have it."

"You led me into this, Mary," Brandt went on. "I expected you would stand by me on these issues."

"I do stand by you."

"You used to, Mary. You don't anymore."

Mary sighed at that, as Matthew continued onto the path and up into the maple trees, until the branches screened out the house below, but he had only gone a hundred feet or so when he heard the music start in the house, louder than usual. It was Friday evening.

Up at the yurt, Matthew went in to get himself a beer and sat in the darkness, with his agitation increasing with each sip. Dennis Kelly was gone for the evening down to Portsmouth to spend an evening with an old college friend and the friend's new wife.

Five beers later, Matthew fell asleep, but he was awakened by the sounds of a car pulling into the house followed by shouted greetings. He bounded up at once and went out through the darkness to a spot he knew of from which the house below could be seen through the trees. Several people were standing outside by the car. Brandt could see the red head of Jane Larue among them. They went across the front porch and into the door of the house, from which came more shouts of greeting.

"So now we are having guests," Brandt said out loud.

He went back into the yurt and looked at the time. It was ten after midnight. He sat down and gulped down another beer. Now it was clear what he had to do, he thought. He had to take matters into his own hands, as he had told Houghten he would do. He had to apply the strength that he had left behind, the strength that Stumphand Moore had said was the only way sometimes to put things in order.

Brandt leapt up at this thought, and bounded down the hill along the familiar path. With no diminishment of speed, he continued across the road toward the sound booming from the house and with a mighty push barged through the front door.

Those inside looked up, startled at the suddenness and force of the intrusion, as Brandt charged in with his long hair and untrimmed beard in wild disarray like a latter day John Brown. Houghten was there, with Jane Larue beside him, regarding Brandt with a look of alarm. Mark and Alison Payton were there, also, and Larry Holmgren and Kurt Granvolt, plus two young women and a young man Brandt had not seen before, all seated in a semi-circle around a coffee table, where books and grass were

strewn before them.

Without a greeting, Brandt bounded across the room, never pausing from the moment of entry, straight to the large speaker, about four feet tall, in the corner of the room.

He lifted the speaker up from where it stood and crossed the room with it, jerking out the wires trailing behind it. With speaker in hand, he pushed outside, and, without the slightest pause, threw the speaker against the trunk of the single tree in the front yard. It made a cracking sound, but it was still in one piece, so he lifted it up again and threw it a second time, swinging his whole body into the throw. This time it crushed into several pieces.

"Goddam, man! What the hell is wrong with you?" Holmgren yelled. "Are you insane? This is my music, man! This is my life!"

"This is what I think of your music," Brandt said. "As for your life, go live it somewhere else."

"Classy, man," said Holmgren. "You're a real class act. Who made you in charge here?"

"Me."

"If I had a gun, I'd shoot you."

"This goddam music is going stop," Brandt said with finality.

He shoved through the door into the house a second time and tore out the second speaker. Everyone was standing by this time, but no one ventured to get in his way.

With the wires trailing behind him (these ones were longer), Brandt proceeded outside with the speaker until the wires reached their outer reach. He yanked the speaker loose, and smashed it into the tree where the first speaker was still lying on the ground.

Seeing Brandt approaching the house again, with his hair and beard flying, the people inside closed and locked the front door. With a mighty push of both hands, however, he knocked the door off its hinges, as the several just inside scrambled to get out of his way.

"If you're so damn rambunctious," Holmgren said, "Why don't you go fuck one of your whores? You goddam animal!"

Brandt wheeled when he heard that and in a single motion struck out with a straight punch directly to Holmgren's face. The impact of the punch into Holmgren's nose caused blood to spurt out as Holmgren flew back from the punch onto the dining room table by the fireplace.

"Matthew, Matthew," Houghten said, raising both hands and standing in front of him. "Get in control of yourself, please. What on God's earth are you doing?"

But Matthew pushed through the upraised hands, grabbed the turn table, and threw it against the wall. He then grabbed the bag of grass off the table, threw it on the floor, poured a glass of beer on top of it, and

ground the grass and beer into the floor with the heel of his boot.

Coming out of the house, Matthew saw that Mary had come out of her cabin and Dennis Kelly had returned from Portsmouth. They looked at him with astonishment as he came storming past.

"Alison, we should leave," Brandt heard Mark Payton saying to his wife as he headed up the path.

"Yes, of course," she answered.

Soon later, there was the sound of a car leaving. Brandt assumed it was the Payton's'. Then came the sounds, in quick succession, of two more vehicles leaving.

Up by the yurt, Brandt paced back and forth alone. Dennis Kelly had not come up the hill. People were talking below the hill in urgent voices. Brandt thought maybe someone had called the police. He waited, but heard no sirens. The voices continued for about a half hour, becoming gradually more subdued, and then the house was silent.

Next morning, he heard cars again, and going to his spot on the hill to look out, he saw Holmgren and Granvolt getting out. They had left for the night and had come back, he concluded. Maybe they had come back to claim their right to remain. But they did not remain for long and before leaving they drove down to the guest houses and brought out cardboard boxes with their belongings.

After those two had left again, Brandt went down the hill and into the house to find a much different, quieter scene with Mary, Gail, Jane, and the four children at the table and Houghten and Kelly seated in the living room. Once again, he could be in the house as if it was part his house, too.

"Well, Matthew, you drove them all off," Houghten said. "I hope you're satisfied."

"Actually, I am."

"That was inexcusable," Houghten said. "How are we ever going to start in again? How can we recover from this as a community, when trust has been so thoroughly destroyed?"

"Maybe we can't," Brandt said.

He went to the kitchen, cut four slices from a home baked loaf of bread on the kitchen counter, placed cheese and lunchmeat between the slices, and crossed the room with everyone watching.

"Where are you going?" said Mary.

"Out to rake up hay."

"I'll give a hand," Kelly said.

"Fine with me," Brandt answered.

"We're going to have to talk this over," said Houghten. "This is not over, Matthew."

"Sure, that's fine."

"I mean it."

Brandt could see, though, that he had indeed driven the other four off and that talking would not bring them back. He could also see that everyone was alarmed by what he had done, and yet to an extent they seemed to accept and to have anticipated what he had done. He could see that especially in the eyes of the three women. He even fancied he saw some respect and admiration in the way they looked at him.

With Kelly behind him, he went across to the shed and started up the John Deere. The hay wagon was already hitched up to it.

"I'll meet you at the field," Kelly said.

"Jump in the back."

"Naw, that's okay, I'll walk."

Brandt headed out again. He didn't feel bad at all about what he had done. He felt triumphant. He had struck the clean blow at last, a blow such as he had not struck since the pre-hair days when he come to the rescue of Jim Morris on the West Bank of the U. of M.

311. With Ellen left behind, Morris visits Steward, not knowing why

It was on the surface not an odd scene,—on Sunday, August 1, 1971,—when Jim Morris, a young man of 29, knocked on the door of his old rowing team-mate, Tom Steward, also a young man, being at this time just turned 27. Below the surface, however, the scene was odder. Morris, formerly Maj. James Morris of the United States Air Force, formerly such a handsome man in his sky blue uniform, with such an upright, proud bearing, and married to a woman many called the most lovely they had ever seen, stood on this morning in faded jeans, looking small, bowed, and physically spent, with his hands in his pockets, his weary eyes surveying the Gallup downtown landscape of shabby two- and three-story buildings, billboards, and shops.

Morris hardly knew why he had come, not having seen Steward in more than two years. It was just the coincidence of a letter from Steward on the day of his departure, the convenient address. That was the reason, he told himself, nothing more. He had come to this, he thought to himself, desperate for just a word of kindness from someone he remembered as being too polite, too formal, too intellectual, but kind, someone who could maybe bring back the old days before everything had started on such a rapid descent.

Morris remembered also the communications that he and Steward had exchanged in the previous two years: three letters before the major's crash and capture, and one letter after his release, in addition to the last letter, which Morris had with him, strewn among the objects in his car. These communications had established an easier relationship in writing than Morris and Steward had ever had in person.

"Jim Morris!" Steward said, upon opening the door. "You got to be kidding me, man! Where did you come from?"

Steward had not seen Morris since before Morris had gone overseas, more than two years before. He was amazed at the extent to which Morris had declined.

"Just passing through," Morris said. "Thought I'd stop by to see my own pen pal. Got your address from your letter."

"Well, gee, I don't know hardly what to offer you, Jim. Would you care for some coffee or tea?"

"Sounds great. Thanks."

"Got the tea habit lately."

"Sure, that's fine. I don't want to impose."

"Hey, you could never be an imposition, Jim. Come on in."

Morris followed his former teammate through the single door of the little house, aware at once of the contrast between the dark interior of the house and the bright day that the door swinging shut had left behind.

Three steps beyond the door took him to the center of the living room, to the side of the oblong table. Visible beyond the open door to the kitchen was the flat roof of the car dealership on the other side of the backyard. Green and yellow banners flapped there in the wind before a backdrop of brick buildings. The whole scene struck Morris as strange. Why would anyone live in such a little, dark house?

From Steward's side, there was some puzzlement, also. He had quickly surmised that Morris was not only greatly changed from what he had previously been but also in what appeared to be a troubled or distracted state of mind.

"What do you do here exactly?" Morris called from the living room as Steward prepared two cups of tea.

"I work at the Indian Health Services hospital, as a therapist, kind of. In mental health."

"That's in town here?"

"Yes."

"Sounds challenging."

"Yes, it is."

The conversation was strained, both men were aware, as they each sought to create a tone of easy familiarity.

Coming back into the dark, little living room, with the two cups of tea in hand, Steward found his former teammate sitting at the far end of the oblong table in the light of the one window.

Morris had his hands clasped under his chin and his distressed eyes were directed toward the view that the window presented of the back wall of the Henry Hotel with its alley access utility door, water pipes, power wires, and wrought iron fire escape. Hearing Steward approach, he lowered his clasped hands to the table and hunched forward over them as if for a desk task of some kind.

For the first time he smiled.

"You make quite the maid there, Stewball," he said.

"All the better to serve."

The joke and response seemed strained, also, as neither man felt it was humorous in any part.

"Well, Jim, what brings you out this way?" Steward inquired as he sat down.

"My mother died a while back. I'm on my way to Minnesota to finish up with selling the old house."

"On the West Side there?"

"Yes."

"Sorry to hear about your mom."

"Well, it was a long time in coming. She had cancer, you know."

"Yes, I recall that."

"Came a little early, but not a surprise."

"So you came down here from Las Vegas."

"Yes, took the round about route a little bit."

"Ellen's not with you?"

"No."

"Sorry to hear that."

"We were hoping she could come along. But she couldn't get the time off. She works at a club on the Strip."

That was a blatant falsehood, Morris admitted to himself. If he had intended to be forthright with Steward, and he wasn't sure that he had, it would be harder than he had expected it would.

As for Ellen,—Morris went on in his mind,—probably he'd never see her again. He had no reason for declaring so, he knew, but he counted it to the phenomenon he had lately experienced, of being unable to hold back such negative ideas as they rushed through his head.

Lately he had begun to think often of how he had failed. Where this idea had come from, he didn't know. He had heard someone somewhere mention that many people returned from the war had failed, and he had applied the idea at once to himself with a feeling of great anger.

"You probably think this is some weird house," said Steward.

"No, Stewie. Hey, it's alright."

"I don't get paid much."

"Well, this country is a little different from Minnesota," Morris said. "Don't suppose there's a boat club around here, Stewmeat."

He said the "Stewmeat" part of that with an inflection meant to evoke the old days, but the words, as they came out, sounded mechanical and devoid of mirth.

"No," said Steward. "There is some nice country, though."

"Yea, so I heard. I saw some of it driving in."

"Well, maybe we could go for a little outing, little walk or something, if you've got time."

"Hey, time, I've got," Morris said.

He was aware, as he spoke with his old teammate, that the wise guy vocal inflection was there that he had often spoke to Steward with in the past, but some other part of that was missing. "What's missing?" he asked himself. "The real me inside," he answered.

Thinking of that, Morris realized what he had hoped to gain from Steward, without ever articulating it in his mind: a connection with the past that would put that voice and person back together again.

"How about this?" Steward said. "Let's finish the tea and head out. There's a river runs along the highway east of town here a few miles then curves to the north by some hills. Maybe we can go have a look at it. For old time's sake. For the old days by the river."

"Sounds great," Morris returned.

Morris was glad to leave the strange, little house behind, when he and his former teammate went out to the bright, hot day again; but, as he looked off to the east, to the low, flat buildings and billboards visible from the steps of the house, he felt the same dullness that he had felt since leaving Vietnam.

The dullness continued unabated for Morris as he drove out of town with Steward beside him, giving directions. They passed the low buildings and billboard that Morris had seen from the house, and, leaving the last filling station and motel behind, continued out toward jagged rock formations in the distance.

Next to the highway and adjacent cross-country train tracks, on the left (northern) side, was a ravine with a low bluff, on its north side, at the bottom of which was a meandering stream bordered by a thin green strip of low plants. At the top of the bluff was a wide swath of bulldozed land intended for the new freeway.

"That's the river there," Steward said. "Little Puerco, they call it. I guess it isn't much."

"No, it's fine," Morris replied.

About a mile further east, the cleared land for the freeway curved from the north side of the highway to the south side, crossing the little river in a landscaped area where a newly-constructed trestle bridge was already in place for the new freeway.

"Figured we could park here by the bridge," Steward ventured. "This is where the river curves north."

"Sure," said Morris.

They parked the car (Morris had driven his) a short distance from the highway in the bulldozed area by the bridge and walked under it along the stream to the other side where the view to the north disclosed a line of low, dry hills on one side, to the left. On the other side, to the right, was flat land characterized by the red coloration and rocky aridity that marked the whole area around Gallup, dotted with the scrubby sage and tumble weeds that were everywhere in sight.

"Well, what do you think?" said Steward.

"Hey, it's great. I like it," Morris replied.

The former pilot did not actually think that it was great, however, as he had just said. He was thinking he had made a mistake by stopping to see Steward. The fault was not in anything Steward had done, he noted to himself. The fault was in his own state of mind, in the feeling of war that he could not leave behind.

His mind moved through memories brought about by the association of walking along beside moving water.

First came a memory of the river he had watched for so long from his

hilltop enclosure in the village of Ban Hatbay, Laos. He was beside the river, the water running beside him, with the destroyed houses of the bombed village behind him. He saw the boy, Soutsada, as he had discovered him, under the bridge, beside the moving water, with his midsection too blown apart to repair. He remembered how the boy's eyes had pleaded for him to do something. He remembered taking a gun from the body of a dead soldier nearby, and returning with the gun to find the boy dead.

The memory came and went quickly, as Morris forced each piece of it out of his mind, only to have another piece rush in.

Morris was at a completely different river next, in his thoughts.

This river was in Wyoming, the day before he and Ellen had gotten married, when he and she had gone for a hike in the vast country just drenched with rain. He recalled Ellen sitting on a rock beside the moving water of that river, swollen by the rainfall, as he had realized for the first time how in another era she could have been a pretty pioneer rancher, how she had transformed herself out of love for him into this new outdoorsy girl to show him she could be whatever he needed.

That lovely face and form, however, he pushed out of his mind, too. He could hardly bear to behold her image, to the extent he could visualize it. It reminded him of how he had allowed himself to fade away from her. Had he allowed it? He thought of how, on the day he had quit his job, she had told him that she had waited to welcome back the old Jimmy, full of life and adventure, only to realize, when he did return, that the old Jimmy had not come back.

"I'm fading away!" he said to himself.

Adding to the effect was the strange place to which he and Steward had proceeded in their walk, a step-like carve-out in a sandstone ridge, composed of a wall above eight feet high, above which was a table of about the same width, and beyond which was another wall and table, all of these flat surfaces so smooth and cleanly cut, they looked like someone had shaped them with a giant flat spade.

This step shape continued for a quarter mile or so to an area where murky water oozed out of fissures in the rock. There the immense steps broke apart into angular formations and smashed rock with the debris collecting into gravel piles below the lower wall.

Here Morris and Steward stopped at a place above a wider pooling of the river, where stood a rectangular shape, about the size of a two-story building, and from which a rock surface sloped down, at about a 45-degree angle, to a flat extension of rock that stuck out like a dock into the slowing moving water.

Steward smiled at that.

"Hey, Jimmy," he said. "This remind you of anything? Building

above, incline down, dock on the water."

"You're thinking of the boat club?"

"Yes."

"Yea, I could see it."

They went down and stood on the dock like extension of rock, looking off into the river, which at this point was about 30 feet wide.

"Seems like you and I stood on the dock like this the night you wouldn't go out for a beer," Morris said.

Steward laughed. "Jim, you never did forget that, did you? Seems like you've mentioned that several times."

"Yea, I did forget it," Morris returned. "Just kidding you a little about it."

"I always felt bad about that," Steward remarked. "I should have gone out for the damn beer."

"Yes, you should have."

They stood quietly looking off.

"You were always such a damn serious guy," Morris said.

"Yea, I suppose I was."

"Well, I won't hold it against you, Stewball."

"Thanks for that."

More interchanges followed in this vein, getting close at times to the old feeling of comradery, as the former teammates tried to direct the conversation in that direction. But again, as with Morris's attempt, a few hours earlier, at recovering the old levity, the attempt, in the end, fell flat. Both men realized it without acknowledging out loud that something was gone that had been there before.

Morris acknowledged it in his mind, however, as he and his former pen pal of the war returned along the river and rode back into Gallup for a handshake and farewell.

Yes, something was gone, Morris reflected, as he drove alone out of town later on the darkening highway. Something else had slipped from his grasp. He did not know what it was. He felt too sad about it to give it a name. But he knew it was gone. Just another instance of how he continued to fail, he pronounced to himself. He could not stop the thought from repeating again and again in his mind.

312. At Scott's Bluff, Morris struggles to regain the old ideal

Jim Morris drove from Gallup, New Mexico, with a second destination in mind that he felt compelled to visit,—Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, where he and Ellen had stopped on their first trip together out West.

His course toward this destination, as it appeared to his mind, was as relentless and beyond comprehension as had been his course to Steward's house in Gallup. He didn't know why he felt compelled to re-visit Scotts Bluff or what he hoped to gain from it.

From eight miles out, Morris saw it, in mid-afternoon the next day, as he emerged from the Wildcat Hills, in western Nebraska, on the two-lane Highway 71. He could not see the western part of the bluff due to another formation, the so-called South Bluff, between him and there (at about 11 o'clock from his point of view), but he could see the eastern extension of Scotts Bluff, with the full light falling on its rim of cliffs. Over to his right, he could see the line of cottonwood trees bordering the flat basin of the river, called the North Platte, that the wagon trains had followed through western Nebraska.

Despite his fatigue, owing to his non-stop drive from Gallup, after leaving Tom Steward, Morris paid no heed to the motel signs in the town of Gerson, on the south side of the bluff. Without a pause, he drove straight through the town to a T intersection there and turned left onto Highway 92 toward Mitchel Pass, the opening between South Bluff and Scotts Bluff that the wagon trains had passed through. Ahead of him, then, he could see the pointed promontory of Eagle Rock, on the southeastern salient of Scotts Bluff, where he remembered the visitors' center was and the start of the trail he had hiked up on his previous visit.

At the visitors' center, an American flag on a pole flapped in the breeze above the tile roofs of the Spanish-style adobe building. Morris exited from his car there to survey the scene. In a single sweep, his eyes took in the bluffs on both side of the pass and the meadow between where the wagon trains had come through. About a quarter mile away, on the footpath marking the historic Trail, was a restored covered wagon.

It was the very wagon, as Morris recalled, that, on that previous visit with Ellen, he had asked her to go look at with him, and that she had demurred from looking at,—in that time, (how long ago it seemed!) before she had begun to accommodate to his wishes. An image came to his mind of how she had appeared that morning. He could not bear to think of that. He forced it from his mind.

He headed out at once along the path he recalled, ascending toward the place where on his previous visit he had seen the two planes high in the sky that he had identified as fighter planes. He recalled the place was on the summit road, back a ways from two lookout points called the

South and North Outlooks.

He had wondered when seeing those planes if he would be brave in combat, Morris thought as he walked, but he had not considered how he would be affected by inflicting damage on others.

Soon the ascent grew steep and he had to pause often to catch his breath, but, as the view opened below him, he felt a sense of hope and expansiveness such as he had not felt in a long time.

At the South Outlook, he noticed that the fields below had irrigation ditches between them. The fields were of alternate crops, each a different color: yellow-green and russet gold.

There was a glittering pond beside the fields, he observed, and a white farmhouse of the old prairie box style. In the yard next to it was a long line of tall flowers with orange blossoms. Now here came a woman in a blue dress, moving happily and lithely, with three children behind her. She picked up the smallest child and pointed to the flowers.

Had he gone so far adrift, Morris asked himself, from what he had been before, that he could not regain the simple experience of being a human being in this radiant life of other human beings?

Later he paused at the North Outlook to view the deeply fissured rock, known as the "badlands," that the wagon trains had avoided by coming around the bluff. From here he could see the North Platte River and the town of Scottsbluff on the other side of the river, with its tidy houses and landscaped lots. So much had changed, he thought, since the days his forbears had passed this same bluff.

Coming back to the southwest on the summit road, Morris reached the place where he has stopped before. There, in the waving grass below, was the restored wagon again, beside the foot path that followed the historic trail on the flat land between the bluff he was standing on and the long ridge of South Bluff, about two miles away, which extended to the west at about a 60 degree angle. And there, to the northwest, was the continuance of the North Platte River, with which the Trail had converged, marked by the band of trees beside it, which stretched to the west horizon. "It's still there," Morris said out loud.

The former pilot scanned the sky, almost expecting he would see two planes moving high overhead, as he had on his previous visit, but he saw only a blue sky swirled with cirrus clouds.

He felt no diminution of mood, however. He proceeded along the path and, spying a park bus picking up hikers on the paved road that circled the south side of the bluff, he waved to the driver and paid for a ride back down to the visitors' center.

There, in Mitchel Pass again, with the restored wagon in the distance, Morris paused at the exact spot of grass where had found Ellen waiting in the grass after coming down from his hike on his previous visit. With that

memory came a flood of emotion again.

Not resisting it this time, Morris allowed an image of his dear Ellen, as she had appeared then, to enter wholly into his conscious mind. The image that formed was of Ellen turning toward him with her bright smile, so full of joy of life.

He could go back to the car right now, Morris thought. He could drive west to re-unite with her instead of driving east to Minnesota. He could attend to the family house and belongings some other time.

Forgetting about the covered wagon in the distance, he turned back toward the car. But, in doing so, he looked toward the visitors' center and saw the American flag flapping in the wind above it.

With that, something vast and heavy settled upon him again.

It was the feeling of the war, he thought, the sense of war guilt that weighed on him, the memories of what he had done under the service of that flag. He did not blame the flag. He did not blame America. Still it was true that the flag brought back these feelings.

Proceeding beyond his parked car, Morris headed for the visitors' center with the same sense of inevitability that he had surrendered to after leaving Steward's house in Gallup.

His intention was simply to get a drink of water. But, inside, he continued to the displays, where he went directly up to an old black and white photo of a family seated at the front of two covered wagons.

The father of this group was sitting on the ground in front of one of the wagons, reclining on the handle. He was lean and serious in facial expression with a boy of about three or four years of age seated on his lap. The boy was the only one in the group who had any semblance of a smile, and his smile was restrained. The mother, seated on the seat of the other wagon, had a serious expression, also. She was dressed austerely in an ankle-length full-pleated skirt and a checkered blouse with hair pinned tightly back. Next to her were three teen-aged girls as grim in expression as their parents. The woman and girls all had their arms folded. A second boy, about eight years old, seated on the ground next to the father, was leaning forward with a troubled expression.

Had someone in this family died on the Trail, Morris wondered, or had some misfortune befallen them? What had been the reason for their shared mood of severity and concern?

Morris turned away from this image, not knowing why he had dwelled so long upon it, or where he would go next, once he returned to his car outside the building, but a small, solitary display, on a glass-encased bulletin board, caught his attention. The display had a title spelled out in separate cut-out letters: "Not All Have Praise."

Morris went across to it at once. Within the case were three pages of typed text, a historical map of the Oregon Trail leading to the "Oregon

Territory," on the West coast, and a poster-size, printed reproduction of a mural-like painting.

"There are always dissenting opinions," a disclaimer said on a separate sheet of paper below the title. "This one appeared in a college newspaper in modern-day Oregon."

Below that on another sheet of paper was a cutout of the actual article, which went as follows:

"We often hear of the saga of the Oregon Trail,—and the story of it is worthy of being called a saga, considering the brave acts that were involved,—but we seldom hear of the cultural and commercial interests that promoted the Oregon Trail from behind the scenes.

"The cultural interests had a common theme: the 'Manifest Destiny,' as it was called. This was the idea that the American people had a God-given mission to 'establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man,' as proclaimed the supposed originator of the idea, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan, in 1843.

"The idea of the Manifest Destiny had an implicit imperial message as well. This message was that any people or culture discovered in the way should be swept aside. The British, for example. They were the swept aside by the Oregon Treaty of 1846, which established American sovereignty in the land area between the Columbia River and the northern boundary of the present state of Washington. It was no coincidence that the Trail's 'Great Migration of 1843,' promoted by American newspapers, brought 1000 American settlers to the Columbia basin, just ahead of this treaty, to displace the British fur traders already there. Further south, where Mexico and Mexican culture were problems, U.S. troops seized California in 1846. Political control came through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the Mexican-American War.

"Native Americans were in the way, too. The Cayuse, inhabitants of the Cascade Mountains, were defeated in 1855. The Yakama, in Washington, were defeated in the Yakama Wars, 1855-1858. The Nisqually and Payallup, in the Puget Sound area, west of the Cascades, during these same years, after being defeated in the War of Puget Sound, 1856-1858, were forced into reservations and the Nisqually chief, Leschi, was convicted of murdering an American soldier and hung. The Poulouse, the Spokane, and the Coeur d'Alene, further north in Washington, were defeated in other wars too numerous to name, while further east, on the Plains, where the wagon trains were pushing through, the Sand Creek Massacre, the Colorado War, the Great Sioux War, and finally, Red Cloud's War, completed the ethical cleansing of the western surge.

"Yes, put in another way, the Manifest Destiny was a war, or a series of wars, and, as in any war, foot soldiers were needed to establish a

presence on the ground in the disputed territory. The soldiers in this war were the 'true believers' who risked their lives and fortunes to traverse the Oregon Trail for the sake of their idealized goal of 'freedom,' while the promoters of the cultural push remained at their comfortable desks back East.

"As for those who, also from behind the scenes, promoted the Trail for commercial reasons, these were the so-called 'tycoons' who wanted to build a transcontinental railroad, in these same years, and who needed a Western market, meaning people out West, to convince others of the wealthy class back East to invest in this scheme. Asa Whitney was a good example of that. He promoted a railroad track from Chicago to California. It would be paid for by sale of land to settlers along the route, he told everyone, with some profit, of course, for those who brought it to pass. Speeches, pamphlets, and proposals to Congress were his means of persuasion.

"Here, too, the 'true believers' of the Oregon Trail were the good soldiers of his campaign, bringing Oregon to a population of 90,000 by 1870, when the railroad was completed.

"The Oregon Trail a great saga? No doubt about that. But the Oregon Trail as a successful promotion, and the Oregon Trail travelers as unwary participants, duped by that promotion, is something we have not heard much about in the century since, in which the heroic, mythical aspects of the Trail have been emphasized while the crasser cultural and commercial aspects have been set aside."

Next Morris turned to the reproduced painting next to the article in the glass enclosure. It was labeled: "American Progress, by John Gast, 1872." This painting showed a gigantic feminine figure in flowing clothes,—"Columbia," she was called in the description below the picture.—She held a school book in one hand as she strode across a Western landscape, strewing behind her telegraph wires, railroad tracks, towns and farms, and other features of modern civilization, while wild animals and American Indians on horseback fled.

The case made in the article was an overstatement, Morris realized. This display was an exception in a roomful of displays celebrating people like those he had just seen in the photo. But, as he left the building, he could not expel the article from his thoughts, in particular, the comments that the common people of the Oregon Trail had been tricked into a myth deliberately manufactured by people who had only cared about cultural purity and material gain.

"The Oregon Trail was a lie like the war," Morris said to himself. "Of course, it was there, the settlers went west, but there was a false build-up to draw people in."

He repeated in his mind the appellation of "true believers" applied in

the article to the Oregon settlers. He recalled that he had heard that same appellation in Bangkok,—in the sex district of Pat Pong,—applied by the intelligence officer, Orin Brown, to soldiers on both sides of the war who had believed in it enough to give up their lives, while others like Brown himself had avoided any risk.

Morris emerged from the visitors center to find a red sun low in the sky above the rugged country his father's people had passed through. Not knowing where he was headed, he drove into Scottsbluff, the town on the other side of the river, and stopped at a motel just across from the bluff where he had just been.

It was a weird place with old pieces of furniture lined up along the cramped halls, as if bought in a rummage sale and being stored there for eventual use in the rooms. His own room showed evidence of that. On one wall was an antique desk with a fold up writing surface and an attached round bookcase with a curved glass door. The walls had photos of historic main street scenes in a past era in the same town.

He had never before understood, the former pilot noted, as he tried to fall asleep, the extent to which the bold pioneers of the Oregon Trail, like the brave soldiers of Vietnam, had taken part unwittingly in a larger scheme that could have only succeeded through the workings of injustice and criminal violence.

In the case of the Oregon settlers, he observed, they had occupied land that had been stolen from others. The names of the Indian people he had read about passed through his mind: the Nisqually, the Payallup, the Yakama, the Coeur d'Alene; he could not remember them all. They had been primitive people, most likely, simple villagers like the Lao Theung villagers he had lived with in Laos.

Later, in the middle of the night, he awoke with a feeling he was back in his cave in Sam Neua. He regained his bearings, but the feeling of being in the cave continued. With that came the feeling that he was in his inner home again, with the walls and roof collapsing upon him. The images that had been with him for so long came back to him, also: the killed pig at Puerto Penasco, the wounded soldier at Khe Sanh, the women and children looking at him from the flaming village he had mistakenly bombed, the leveled houses of Ban Hatbay.

Soon followed the recital of the ways he had failed. He had failed in the war, bringing destruction on people who had not deserved it. He had failed with Ellen, getting her to fall in love with someone he could not be. He had failed to find a life for him and her to share.

What had he become, he asked himself. And Ellen was gone!

"The war took everything," the former pilot said out loud. "It took my heart."

[Chapter 312 notes]

313. Morris returns to the family house for the last time

From Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, Jim Morris headed east, determined to dispatch his familial duty of finalizing the sale of the family house and disposing properly of mementos and possessions left behind by his mother. Meanwhile, the inner mantra of his failures continued: his failure in the war (as he saw it), his failure with Ellen, his failure to find a life he believed in, a life worth living.

"What is left of me, Dad?" he said, speaking to his father, as he did by habit, without really believing that his father was listening or capable of listening. "Nothing is left of me. I've been chipped away to nothing."

That notion (arising out of nowhere, seemingly) settled in, in his mind, and wore on him as the long miles brought successive scenes. Places of business, bridges, isolated buildings, little towns, loomed far in the distance, then came near, then passed; a nameless retreat, falling back into the emptiness of the prairie behind him.

How had he been chipped away? Why had he been chipped away? That was the theme of the long miles. His mind, in attending to it, traced back from his present problems with Ellen to their first meeting at the boat club—the evening when she, a brash 19, eager for experience, had saluted him and called him "Captain."

How beautiful she had been! What had gone wrong? Was there no going back? Questions like those verbalized in his mind, and he was aware, in trying to answer them, that it was a hopeless cause. He could not order his thoughts to build a case on his own behalf. He could not prevent himself from quashing any hope as soon as it arose.

Upon arriving in Minnesota, he met with a real estate agent as his first task, on the afternoon that he drove in. His mother had completed most of the arrangements herself. His part in it was merely to review and approve the arrangements and to sign the necessary papers as her heir. She had extended him the option of taking possession of the house himself. He had turned that down, not wanting to be left with the sad memories it contained.

His mother had also arranged for disposition of much of her other property that she had regarded as of no interest to him. Wall hangings, pots and dishes, utensils, and furniture (except for some pieces from his own room) had been given to neighbors or sold (with proceeds assigned to him). She had even arranged in advance for the house to be cleaned after her death.

The only items remaining, therefore, other than those from his own room, were items that his mother had regarded as having family value for sentimental or historical purposes. These items filled 11 cardboard boxes stacked neatly in the corner of the newly cleaned and polished floor in the living room.

Among them was the shoebox of his father's letters that his mother had provided to him four years before, on the summer evening after he had questioned his mother about his father as he and his mother had stood by the High Bridge. Odd, he thought, what he most retained from that occasion was the shrill chirp of the crickets high in the trees on the bluff by the bridge. He remembered also how defensive his mother had become in refusing to add up the number of days that she and his father had actually lived together as a couple before his father's death in the war.

His mother had also left a few other items, he discovered, in a box on top of the others and left open to call attention to its contents. The items were a bottle of scotch, a cocktail glass, a bottle of Drambuie, and some filberts wrapped in a napkin. He laughed at that and shook his head. Scotch, Drambuie, and filberts, the components of a Rusty Nail, which his mother had known to be his favorite drink.

"Joke from the grave," he remarked to himself.

It was a light moment in an otherwise meditative, somber day. He mixed himself a strong drink at once and sat on a box with the drink held in both hands, his mind set in thought. With all the arrangements with the realtor made, there was no reason to linger. All he had to do was carry the boxes to the car. But he could not muster the energy to get up from where he sat.

He had placed the shoebox with his father's letters on a box next to him but he could not bear to read them. "My father, my dad, what was he anyhow?" he asked himself. "I never knew the man." That thought brought tears to his eyes. What good were the tears? They were no good at all. His mother had once, when he was a boy in kindergarten, wiped away his tears when he had come home from getting beat up in a fight after school. He had resolved after that incident that he would not cry again. His father would not have cried, he had told himself. Since then, there had been no tears at all. No tears on losing his comrades at arms in war. No tears on seeing Tom Pitt's plane go up in flames. No tears for Pitt's widow, Souphana. No tears on parting from Ellen, though she had cried herself...

That thought gave him great sorrow. Reflectively, mechanically, he assembled the components of another drink and sipped on it, hardly aware of it, his mind feeling already heavy and dull from the effect of the first drink. How could he have turned away when she was sobbing like that? There had been a day, so long ago, before the war, when he would have been unable to turn away from her pain. But what good could he be for her pain anymore? Could he go back to her as he was, a wreck of a man? What vision, what hope could he offer her? She had cried, yes, but she was better off without him, he said to himself. With her beauty, she

would find another man. She would find a man who had something to believe in, who had some future to work toward, a man who had not been involved in such horrible matters as he had been himself.

Morris finished the drink abruptly and jumped up from the box. How long had he been sitting on the box? It seemed as if a long time had gone by. The light outside was already the sideways light of a fading day. Why did he tell himself such things, that he had no hope, no vision, that he was no good to her? He was putting himself down, as she had said, he was taking pleasure in putting himself down, in being down. To what purpose? What was he doing? Was there no way to stop it?

"Like a plane in a spin," he observed to himself. "Like a plane going down."

In an effort to shake the mood, he left the house as abruptly as he had jumped from the box. Exiting through the front door, he crossed the tiny front yard in the sundown light of the summer evening. Two young boys were standing there on the sidewalk, under the old basswood, peering into the front yard warily. The boys looked to be about five or six years old. With their tussled hair catching the soft, horizontal light, they were a lovely sight.

"Could I help you with something?" Morris asked, looking into the eyes of the taller of the two boys, who appeared to be about a year older than the other.

"Trying' to get our ball back," the boy replied, saying "our" like "ow" without the "r" sound.

"Where is the ball?"

"Ovah' deh' in dat bush."

"I'll get it for you."

He retrieved the ball and met the boy's eyes again as he placed it in his hand.

Continuing on his aimless walk, Morris headed automatically in the direction of the his old path above the bluff where he had often gone in childhood. Another image had meanwhile entered his mind, an image of the face of the village boy, Soutsada, he had met while in captivity in Laos. Soutsada's eyes had had the same innocence as the boys who had looked for their ball in the yard. He had been just as wary at first in talking to a strange man.

Morris recalled how Soutsada had showed him his toy plane, making engine and diving noises. He recalled how Mayral, the boy's mother, had held the boy's shoulders when talking to Morris, as if to protect the boy from him. He recalled how Soutsada had looked up at him with his face and arm badly burned and how Soutsada had suffered before dying.

He had not killed the boy, but he would have killed him, Jim Morris thought, if the suffering had continued any longer. He had not killed the

boy, but he had been part of the general killing that had taken the lives of many children like Soutsada.

He had killed the villagers inadvertently, also, in his "collateral damage" accident. Sure, he had felt sorry about it afterwards, but what good was that?

"I was part of the killing," he said out loud. "It doesn't matter what my attitude was."

He found as he walked through the old neighborhood that the face of the older boy, the one whose eyes he had met, lingered in his mind. He had a sense that he had seen the boy before. Suddenly it occurred to him that the resemblance he was trying to figure out was to himself as a boy. The boy reminded him of pictures he had seen of himself at that age. Would his own son, if not aborted, have looked like that? He was sure that the fetus that had been aborted would have turned out to be a boy.

That thought gave him again a feeling of almost unendurable sorrow, that his son that could have been, the fetus that could have grown into a beautiful child such as he had just seen, had been aborted. Ellen was not to blame. She had done as he had asked, out of respect for him. Even so, the child had been lost. His boy had not been meant to be.

At the trees above the river, he went down his old path just far enough to see the High Bridge and the St. Paul skyline with the green dome of the Cathedral and the white dome further in the distance of the state capitol. What good was the river? What good was the scene? His father had loved it. It was just a river, a bridge, a bunch of buildings on the side of the hill. What good was his father? He had never even known him. What good was his family? It had been an odd family from the start, without a father, with the mother never forgetting the father, a life conducted in sorrow, a life built on a loss that had never been let go.

"Was that how it was?" he asked himself. His mother's face came to his mind at that, and he felt a terrible sadness and self-disappointment once more at having thought the thoughts he had, as if she had been there to listen to them and had been wounded by what he had thought. He saw his father's face as he had seen it in his mother's pictures, the face that had never really looked at him, the face that had never gotten old. His father, too, looked as if overcome with sadness, as if reaching out to him to help him, to hold him, as his father had never had been able to do in real life.

"I guess I'm kind of like the last of the Mohicans," the pilot son remarked to himself. "Last of the Morrises. My son, that could have been, is dead, and what good am I any more, as far as that's concerned, as far as having a child?"

Returning to the house, he came up through a route familiar from his boyhood, through the alley to the back door which the same key as used

for the front door also opened. He unlocked the door and went in to the tiny back "mudroom" where items like trash to be brought outside and other items such as chore clothes and dirty boots had been kept. There was a canister there containing matches used to burn trash.

Seeing that, Morris went at once into the living room, straight to the shoebox with his father's letters. He brought the shoebox out to the trash can and sorted out the letters into a pile. A single match was all that was needed to set the letters on fire. He watched the tiny flame as it moved along the edges of the outer letters and then exploded with heat gathering all of the letters into a single spire. Within a few moments, the letters were engulfed in fire.

Returning to the house after that, Morris stood in the dark kitchen where he had sat so often with his mother. He looked out the back window, from which he had so often looked as a boy, and saw the afterglow of the ashes from the letters as they flared up in the gusting wind.

The gas stove was still connected, he noticed, turning on a burner. It came on with the hiss of gas under pressure escaping through the opened valve. He watched the flame below the burner pop on when the heat from the pilot light reached the gas. It was a sight such as he had seen outside, he thought, a little version of the fire that had brought an end to his parents' romance—of what was it anyhow? 30 years past.

For a long time he watched the flame before he turned off the gas and lifted the top plate of the stove to snuff out the pilot light. When he turned on the gas again, it came hissing on as before but without the burst of flame.

"Nothing is left of me," he said as he settled in beside the boxes in the corner. "I've been chipped away to nothing. I'm sorry, Dad. Please forgive me for what I became."

314. Mary flies home to console Ellen as Ellen blames herself

News of the death of Maj. James Morris came to Matt and Mary Brandt by way of a phone call, on Friday, August 6, 1971, from Morris's widow, Mary's sister, Ellen Morris, who was still in Las Vegas.

The effect on Ellen was obvious at once in the fear and confusion in her voice. "Mary, I'm going to fly up today," she said. "Do you think you'll be coming?"

"Of course," Mary replied at once.

"I would really appreciate your help."

"I'll make arrangements right away."

"Mary, it's my fault. I drove him away."

"We'll talk when we meet."

Mary arrived at the Twin Cities airport ahead of Ellen, rented a car, and was waiting at the ramp from the plane when Ellen with suitcase in hand came walking from the plane.

Ellen was dressed in a conservative, dark pants suit with no pretty tie, such as was her custom, and without earings or jewelry except for her wedding ring. Her glorious chestnut hair was combed straight down and tied behind her head without a ribbon and with no attempt at arranging it in an attractive manner.

Her sister looked thin and anxious, Mary noticed. Ellen had long lines, more like depressions than wrinkles, on either side of her mouth, straight down her cheeks. In her figure throughout, she looked drawn, as though her strength had been sucked out from inside.

"Ellen, I'm so glad to see you," Mary said.

"You're so kind to come so quickly."

"It's the least I could do."

"I'm so very, very tired."

"And you need to rest."

"If only I could... But I would never rest again if it could bring Jimmy back. I knew Jim was in a difficult time, but I never thought he would come to do this. Mary, I never thought it!"

"I know."

The ride was quiet from the airport across the West 7th Bridge to the Highland area of St. Paul and then across Cretin Avenue past Mary's alma mater, the College of St. Catherine, with its brick and wrought iron fence and its pond on the hillside among the trees, to the Kass family house, a mile further than that.

"We will need to make some kind of funeral arrangement," Ellen said at one point, breaking the silence. "I don't even know where to begin."

"We'll all help you, Ellen," Mary replied softly.

"You won't need to worry about that."

"And I'll need to go see the body. Jimmy's body without life in it!

Oh, Mary, I dread it so much!"

"I'll go with you, Ellen. We'll get through it together."

"I want to do it right away, as soon as we get home."

Edward Kass, the World War Two veteran of combat, who had tried to counsel his son-in-law just a month before regarding the importance of a schedule to snap out of the feeling of war, was at the door with a grave expression as his two daughters approached the house. Just behind him was the mother, Elaine, looking as affected from the death as the daughter that approached her.

Next came the sight of the corpse that Ellen so dreaded. She was startled to see that her husband's eyes were open, staring straight ahead. In his rigid face, she noted the lack of the characteristic inclination of the jaw, suggesting self-confidence and dedication to his soldierly ideal, that had been his most striking feature when he and she had first met more than four years before. He wore an expression of utter defeat and self-devaluation.

Ellen went right to her bedroom after that, leaving the door ajar, and she could be seen inside sleeping from that afternoon and through the entire next day.

When Mary implored her sister to come down for supper that evening, Ellen opened her eyes and shook her head.

"Tomorrow, I'll do what I need to," she said.

"It might make you feel better."

"No, tomorrow, Mary."

"Okay."

"Mary, I was thinking, I would like to go on a ride together, down to the old places. The boat club, the river, the High Bridge, you know. I know in a way it will hurt, but I was thinking it would be kind of like a memorial to Jim."

"I'd be glad to, Ellen.

"Okay.

"Ellen, just so you know, we made all the arrangements. You don't need to worry about it."

"When will the funeral be."

"Tuesday."

"What is this?"

"Sunday."

"Okay."

According to their agreed upon plan, the two sisters went on their "memorial ride" for Jim Morris the next day, leaving in mid morning on a warm August day with a clear blue sky, swirled with cirrus cloud such as the former pilot would have loved.

From the Kass house, the two sisters headed down the long Montreal

Avenue hill past the Highland Park pool, where they had taken swimming lessons together as children, then down West 7th Street to downtown and along Kellogg Boulevard, above the bluffs, where the boat club could be seen on Navy Island (as it was called then), in the straight stretch of the Mississippi River constituting the final quarter mile of the race course for regattas.

With the boat club as object, they turned onto the Wabasha Street Bridge and followed the ramp downward to the familiar street on the other side that bent around the ramp to the smaller bridge that crossed to the boat club.

As they crossed the bridge, the old scene came into view, with the river coursing by behind the two-story stucco façade of the boat club and a train rumbling past on the other side of the river on the track that ran along below the bluff that supported the downtown buildings of St. Paul. Through the open windows of the car, the pungent smell of the river wafted in, evoking memories of evenings spent beside the river, at regattas or at the events often held after regattas in the Red Garter bar on the second story of the building, above the boat club.

Finding the club door open, Mary and Ellen went inside where they encountered a young man of college age working by himself in the shop, varnishing a shell.

"You're welcome to look around," he said, when he learned the two sisters were wives of former members.

"Is the Red Garter open?" Ellen asked.

"Yes, in fact, it is at the moment. Some guys are working up there, painting or something. They went to lunch a few minutes ago. I don't think they lock it."

Hearing that, the two sisters went up the exterior steps to the Red Garter and then through the open main room of the bar from which at once they proceeded to the veranda where they had stood watching the river on so many boat club occasions in the past.

Ellen, withdrawn into her own thoughts, recalled the occasion when she had first paired off with Jim Morris, at the Memorial Day Regatta, in May, 1967, on the evening that she had started out with Tom Steward. She remembered, also, the winter evening when she had looked out over the icy water of this same river prior to her departure, in January, 1969, to meet her husband in Bangkok, Thailand.

The whole complex of that, and the attendant feelings, was such that Ellen could convey no verbal summary of her feelings to her sister standing beside her. She observed to herself that she had done the right thing, surely, in taking up with Jim Morris; she had no doubt about that; but what a tragedy it had turned out to be! She thought of her various efforts to stem the tide of what had turned out in the end to be an

irrepressible flood.

"Well, Ellen, we had some good times here," said Mary, "and some good arguments, as I remember."

"Yes, we did."

Mary had also gone along in an unseparated, unarticulated series of memories regarding her own past with Matthew as she stood looking out to the river, and she, too, had gained nothing from it that she could summarize or convey.

In the end, after ten minutes standing together in this place where they had been so many times before, the two sisters said nothing more about the days past.

From the boat club, soon later, Mary and Ellen drove up a winding road to the street that inclined up towards the High Bridge beside the hillside above which Jim Morris and his mother had often walked. Ellen did not know much about that, but she knew that the hillside had been special to her husband, and so she looked off to the girders of the High Bridge and the tall chimneys of the power plant on the other side of the bridge, trying to connect with whatever in it he had found so important.

At the Kass house, the sisters went into the house, using a key they had brought along, and they stood silently for a moment in the kitchen where his body had been found.

"You know, Mary, I didn't tell you," Ellen said, "I almost left Las Vegas and came up here after Jimmy left. I was really struggling with it. But I was thinking he just needed a little time alone, and I did, too, and when he came back we could maybe work things out."

Mary merely nodded.

"If I had done that," said Ellen. "He might be still alive."

With that, Ellen pronounced that her memorial ride for her husband was over, but the two sisters rode all into the lovely evening, crossing the High Bridge and then following along the river road in St. Paul past their own neighborhood again and on toward Minneapolis.

At the Franklin Avenue bridge, at Mary's suggestion, they crossed to the West Bank of the campus.

Mary stopped at a parking lot in the midst of the stores, coffee shops, and bars of the student neighborhood adjacent to the campus.

"Remember I told you about that fight Jimmy got in, where Matt came to help him out?"

"Yes, I do."

"This is where it happened, here."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

Mary looked at this scene, recalling how valiant Matthew had seemed to her then in how he had inserted himself into the fight and had struck

the mighty blow that had sent Jimmy's aggressor reeling back. She had thought to herself recently, since the altercation on the farm, that she saw the continuity between the two acts. She had admitted to herself, also, that she admired Matthew again for what he had done, and was glad that he had restored the farm to being just a farm as had been the original intention. She had mentioned this to no one.

There would still be a final meeting of all who had formed the collective together, to settle the legal matters. That was already planned for the following Thursday evening, August 11, when she and Matthew returned from the funeral. He was flying in the next day.

"Jimmy was quite a scrapper in those days," Ellen said. "I was so sorry to see that taken out of him."

"I know."

"Care for a drink, Mary?"

"Yes."

They parked in the very parking lot of which they were speaking, and went to a bar kiddy corner from it, and sat at a window looking out to the scene.

"I ask myself, did I try enough?" Ellen said. "I did try so hard to break through. But I said some mean things, Mary—I said some terrible things!"

"You did your best, Ellen, and now it's over. If Jimmy was still here, if he could have his healthy mind and spirit back again that he had before the war, he would want you to go on."

"Yes, I know."

"I hope he's somewhere, Mary, and can see that I'm going to do that. I hope he knows somehow that I still love him and loved him before he went away."

"I'm sure he can, Ellen," Mary said.

She did not think so, really, but she said this for her sister's sake, counting her own honesty in this matter of less importance than her sister's well-being.

"If only he would have come back to me, Mary, and told me again how desperate he was!"

"He just wasn't able, in his state. We didn't know that then. You didn't know the whole story, and neither did I."

"Yes, that's so true," Ellen said. "And you know what, Mary, after he left, I thought of that, how I needed to understand him more, and I went through his things, I suppose I was invading his privacy a little, but I just felt such a need to understand. I had the best intentions."

"I know."

"And you know what, I came across all of these newspaper articles he had been reading about the war. He had the papers folded so you could

see what he had been reading. Stories about how our soldiers had massacred people in Vietnam, and that trial they were having, the village where all the people got gunned down... And looking at that, for the first time I got a sense of what was on his mind."

"And what do you think that was."

"I think he was torn up with what the war had been, about all the people that had gotten killed, and how he had taken part in it. It was just a huge burden on him."

"Yes."

"Mary, have you ever thought about this," Ellen remarked softly, her lovely chestnut hair a tumble of disarray on her thin shoulders, "this terrible war, what it took from us? Not just me, I lost my darling Jim, but there were so many more!"

Mary just nodded sadly.

"We made them die for a war we didn't want to win!" Ellen went on with more fervor. "Someone told me this lately, an old friend of Jim's that I ran into after Jimmy left. I didn't know about everything. I should have learned more about it. I should have looked into it."

"You did your best, Ellen."

"We made them die for a war we didn't want to win," Ellen said again. "We made them die for a war we should have never even started, a war that was a mistake from the start. We should have looked into it more and done more to stop it. I should have myself. I was trying to be loyal to Jimmy, but I should have looked into it."

Mary was quiet again, thinking of all of the marches against the war that she and her friends had taken part in, and wondering what good they had done. She was aware that her dear sister was projecting from the present into the past, and placing herself there on the side of those who had opposed the war, though the reality was that Ellen had done nothing at all to oppose the war, and would have done nothing had her husband not come back in the state that had led to his demise and death. "It was all of our fault!" said Ellen again.

"Yes, it was," Mary replied, and she felt, at the moment, that, even despite that obvious difference in involvement between herself and her sister, yet Ellen was right that the protests had remained too much on the level of theatrics at a time when not just she and Ellen but the whole of their generation,—in particular, those in it who had stood up against the war,—should have done so in some more urgent manner, whatever that would have been.

315. Farm group meets to discuss paying off people who left

Following the funeral for Jim Morris, which they had both attended, Matthew and Mary Brandt returned together to Canterbury, New Hampshire, to confront another pressing matter: the already agreed-upon meeting of all members of the Cranston Farm collective to discuss the necessary actions in completing the dissolution that everyone regarded as the irreversible outcome of Matthew's outburst eight days before.

By this time, it was clear that the four members of the collective who had left the farm that night would not be returning. Mark and Alison Payton had moved in for the rest of the summer with Alison's parents in Burlington, Vermont. Larry Holmgren and Kurt Granvolt had moved back to their apartments in D.C., which they had never closed out.

With the exodus of these four who had not been part of the original group, the personal make-up of the farm had reverted to what it had been prior to Mary's trip to Cuba the previous spring. Matt Brandt and Dennis Kelly were still in their yurt on the hill above the shed. Mary was still in her monk-like cabin by the maple works. Darren Houghten, Jane Larue, Gail Martin, and the children (Dylan and Mandy Larue, and Angela and "little Matt" Martin) were still in the house.

The morale of the original group had not returned to the high level of the early days of the farm, however. There was a shared belief that the original idea of the farm had been put to the test and had failed. There were no more earnest talks about the meaning and future of the farm. In addition, the financial complication loomed ahead that, of the $62,000 paid for the farm, $24,000 had come from the four people who had left. They would have to be repaid.

For Matt, Mary, Gail, and Jane, there was reason to suspect, also, that two among them, Dennis and Darren, might not remain.

Following the night of Matthew's outburst, Dennis had left again to visit his friends in Portsmouth. He had only returned about the same time that Matt and Mary had returned from Minnesota, just two days before the scheduled meeting. He no longer talked about farming tasks that needed to be completed, though he had continued in completing tasks he had already agreed to. With Gail's help, he had picked all of the sweet corn in the garden. He had been in the kitchen, cutting the corn off the cobs, boiling it on the stove, and canning it in Mason jars, something he was quite familiar with from his farm boyhood in Wisconsin. This work had kept him from working side by side with Matt, as he had often done in the past, leaving Matt to work alone,—wherever that was, lately Matt had not announced his plans, either.

As for the bearded former director of seminars, Darren Houghten, from his side, there had been a general diminishment of verbal expression, also, though everyone was aware that his private verbal

interactions with the petite, pretty redhead, Jane Larue, had increased in both number and intensity, and that his decision regarding whether to remain on the farm would depend to a great extent on whether he was able to arrive at some understanding with her.

Here, as with the farm overall, the prospects were rather grim and, for the others, who had witnessed the drama of this relationship as it had developed over the past year, since Woodstock, it was a matter of mutual sadness. Everyone knew that Darren was hopelessly in love with Jane and that she did not reciprocate this feeling. It was a situation that had been complicated by her acceptance of him as a friend, by his readiness to assist her and her children, and by their physical proximity due to both living on the farm. Then, there was the further complication that they had, at one point, had a sexual relationship that had continued sporadically for a couple of months.

Houghten often still spoke of himself and Jane as being a couple, though she just as often protested in her quiet voice to this presumption on his part. It was obvious that she cared about him in a sisterly way and did not wish to hurt him, while wanting to keep herself free to look for another man. Now and then, she revealed a dreamy romanticism about men,—fairy tale notions of castles and knights that seemed consistent with her classical Celtic features and her interest in the occult and in mystical, magical themes. She had pictures of such things in her little room in the attic, amidst her candles, wind chimes, and hanging beads, prints of pre-Raphaelite paintings of delicate maidens with flaming red hair and expectant faces much like her own.

Jane Larue had not voiced an opinion about the current status of the farm to those who remained, but it was generally known, as mother of two children, that she had been relieved to see the others leave and the house return to a more normal schedule and level of noise. Her son Dylan, by this time, ten years old, had been a constant problem for her and a constant annoyance to the others, defiantly refusing to do anything the others had asked, a defiance that had extended to her whenever she had made any request of him in front of the others. Instead of being affected positively by the natural setting of the farm, as she had hoped, he had settled into a pattern of becoming increasingly troubled and anxious.

Jane's daughter, Mandy, though by this time, eight years old, and constantly needled by her brother, had begun to wet her bed. Despite her romantic dreams, Jane seemed too trodden down in her real day to day life to wish for any more, so far as her children were concerned, than just a situation where she could raise them in peace and quiet. The expulsion of the four that Matthew had called the "slackers" had brought that improvement, if nothing else, from her perspective.

Gail also seemed relieved at the new situation, for the sake of her

children. She seemed, like Mary, to harbor an unspoken admiration for the force Matthew had displayed in setting the situation right. As a result of this dynamic, also, the love triangle involving her, Mary, and Matt had intensified in sexual energy, while normalizing to the point of being accepted almost as a continuing state of bigamy.

No one believed, however, that the status quo within the remaining group could continue for long. There would need to be some resolution, and sometime soon, not just with respect to Matthew, Mary, and Gail, but with respect to whether Dennis would stay or leave, and with respect to whether Darren and Jane would become a more official couple or would separate, meaning, everyone assumed, that Darren would leave.

First, though, the impending meeting of the entire collective of ten people had to be attended to.

On the appointed evening, just after supper, the group still on the farm (six in number, not counting the four children) waited for the others to arrive, gathering not inside the house, but, as it was a balmy summer evening, across from the house by the hay wagon, in the grassy area leading up to the wagon doors of the barn.

The setting and mood were oddly tribalistic, considering that the six people waiting were all sophisticated in their understanding of the world and had all been to college. They gathered together in the fragrant silence of the evening, punctuated by the chirping of insects, not feeling entirely in harmony or at peace with one another, but yet as a definite group bound by their common living situation and fortunes, waiting for this other group, their former cohabiters, who were now coming like adversaries to press their own interests against them.

The first sign of the former cohabiters was a motor sound from beyond the apple tree in the pasture. It was the steady, purring sound of an expensive, well-tuned motor. A black sedan, soon recognizable as an Oldsmobile 88, brand new and polished, then came into view. Inside of it were Mark and Alison Payton, dressed plainly in their “country style” clothes, but fashionably also. Presumably they had driven from Burlington, Vermont, where Alison’s well-to-do parents lived.

The six by the hay wagon watched as the black car pulled up at the shed. Then Mark emerged from the driver side door and went around the car to open the door for his wife. He and she stubbornly persisted in these old style gallantries.

Turning together, they came across the dirt road, Mark in his usual collegiate sweater and pressed slacks, Alison in one of her full, pleated skirts. She was wearing knee-high blue socks and earth shoes and walked, as usual, slightly behind her husband.

“Mark, hello, my man!” said Darren. “Welcome back.

“Glad to see you all.”

"We're glad to see you, too."

Next to arrive, and not so classy in engine sound or appearance, were the scruffy friends, Larry Holmgren and Kurt Granvolt, in Granvolt's old pick-up with peace signs on the window.

They both had beards covering a portion of their faces with stubble grown up on the other portion. As they came out of the truck, one on each side at about the same time, and turned around toward the group, they gave the impression of being drunk or stoned and, in addition, ill-spirited and angry. They had apparently driven up all the way from D.C. in one sitting and they had a look of that, also, as if stale from the road and sick of the whole business.

"Kurt and Larry! Nice to see you again," Darren chimed once more in his gentle voice, imbued with his customary diplomatic niceness, but his greeting drew no verbal response just sullen nods.

They all then stood in their two distinct groups, on either side of the hay wagon, as all eyes turned toward the Prince Hal figure of Darren Houghten. With his ever pleasant and obliging demeanor, and his middle position in the group socially, he was assumed to be the one who would attempt to take a middle ground.

"Well, you are all my friends," Darren began.—Indeed, he was the only one in the group who could say this to all of the others.—"And I can just say, for myself, I'm so sorry we have to meet in this way about such a division between us."

No one seconded that notion. Everyone except Matthew just stood in a fixed position and stared. Matthew was moving around restlessly, about ten feet behind the others in his group, by the high wagon doors of the barn which were slid out to each side.

"You say you're sorry," returned the seedy-looking Kurt Granvolt. "Seems like that ought to be coming from someone else."

"If you mean me, you're not going to hear it," Matthew replied.

No one stirred at that, or said anything in response, but there was a general stiffening of facial expressions.

"Well, let's get right to the heart of this," the well-dressed Mark Payton threw in. "This is a business meeting. We're not going to resolve any personal issues."

"Alright," Houghten said. "Does anyone object?"

"We all know the farm is over as what it was," Gail Martin said. "I don't anyone thinks we can go back to that."

"And that's a crying shame," Granvolt said. "I'd liked living here. A lot of us did, that left. It wasn't right how it came down."

"We're not going to decide on that, either," said Mark. "Let's get to the business."

"Well, I agree with that," Mary Brandt said. "I just want to say before

we start in, and I say this to Kurt, in particular, I'm sorry, Kurt, and I'm sorry, all of you who left. I'm sorry it came to this and I'm sorry for how you were inconvenienced in this whole thing."

"Well, okay, Mary, thanks for that," said Mark Payton.

"Yes, thank you," said Mark's wife, Alison.

"Now as to the business part," said Houghten. "Mark, can you lay it out as you see it?"

"It's not too complex," Mark replied. "We each put in six thousand to start out with, and people have put in for other expenses that went to things that have remained on the farm, like certain equipment. Hand tools, for example. I bought four shovels. We need to list these things out, agree on the list, and everyone needs to be paid. That's the first part."

"Things that were busted need to be paid for," Granvolt said. "Like my sound system."

"I think we're all agreed on that," Mary replied. "We will accept whatever price you put on that."

"So we are all agreed on the first 'part,' as you put it" said Darren, turning to Mark Payton. "Now what is the second part?"

"Well, the first part is not quite done," said Mark.

"What's the rest of it?"

"The list has to be signed by everyone who owes."

"What's the second part?"

"The second part is a schedule."

"A schedule of payments?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can assure you, we will pay you promptly, as soon as we can arrange it, to the best of our ability," Mary said.

"With due respect, and no offense intended, Mary, best of ability is not good enough," Mark replied. "We want a definite schedule, and signed."

Mary nodded slowly.

"Or I can assure you, Mary, and you others," Mark went on in his supercilious voice, "and I say this is an unequivocal manner, this is what we require or we're going to get legal."

Mary sighed. "You won't need to get 'legal,' as you say, Mark. Write it down and I will arrange it."

"Agreed."

"We can do that right here, right now," Gail threw in. "List out the money owed and schedule the payments."

"Okay."

"Give us a day to talk it over and sign it," said Mary. "We'll make it official so you can use it if we don't comply."

"Agreed."

Darren set out on the bed of the wagon a pad and pen he had brought out from the house. In the magical light of the fading day, with the sun setting above the woods beyond the pasture, he listed out the expenses owed by the group that had remained on the farm to those who had left the farm, as everyone gathered round, for the first time in a single group. Only Matthew, who was still by the wagon doors of the barn, did not take an active part. But now and then Mary asked him for agreement on some point, to all of which he nodded assent.

The task was soon done. The list had less than two dozen items. The schedule was to pay the full amount owed in six monthly payments beginning the first of the coming month, September.

Mary had already decided in her mind, however, without saying so out loud, that the best approach would be for her and Matthew together to obtain a loan for the entire amount, with the present equity of the farm as collateral. She and Matt would then pay the full amount at once. The others remaining on the farm could make some arrangement with her and Matt. If Darren and Dennis wound up leaving the farm, also, that would be a further amount owed to figure in, she thought, though she was hoping that they would stay.

"Well, anyone care for a beer now that this is all done?" Darren asked finally.

"Naw, I don't think so," said Mark Payton, to which denial his wife joined at once, followed in quick order by Kurt Granvolt and then by Larry Holmgren, who had not said a word throughout the entire meeting except to state the amount owed on his own contributions.

"Well, then I guess it's good night," Darren said.

"Yes, good night to all of you," Mark replied.

The others did not even say a farewell. They simply got in their vehicles and left as twilight settled on the peaceful farm setting where the original group remained.

316. Darren and then Dennis announce their plans and depart

For several days after the meeting, there was a mood of suspense at the farm as the four who were staying for certain, including Matt and Mary Brandt, Gail Martin, and Jane Larue, waited for some indication of whether the other two of the group that they had once (but no longer) called the Woodstock Family,—Dennis Kelly and Darren Houghten,—would be remaining on the farm.

There was no official agreement among the six of them that such a decision would soon be made, but everyone expected that this would soon be the case because Kelly and Houghten had never given any indication from the other side, of intending to stay. The lack of any positive statement in this regard had caused the expectation that some negative statement might soon come in its stead.

Darren had continued living in the house, while saying little in reference to farm matters and avoiding Matthew. Kelly had gone down to Portsmouth again but with a promise that he would soon return.

As for Matthew, he had just begun to understand, in reaction to the increasing distance of Darren and Dennis, that he was in imminent danger of losing his two best friends of the previous four years. After thinking this over, he had decided, from what he knew of Dennis, that Dennis would surely leave the farm, because Dennis would never accept continuing in a situation that no longer fully expressed his convictions and beliefs. Darren was a different matter because of Jane. Darren would maybe seek to be persuaded that the farm could still have the cultural side that he had wanted it to have. Matthew didn't like the prospect of that. He didn't want the farm to revert to what it been.

A new factor, money. had come into the picture for Matthew, also, with his acceptance of Mary's idea that he and she would loan a lump sum to pay off everything owed on the farm to those who had left. If Darren and Dennis left, too, the amount to be repaid would be about 12 thousand dollars more, and there would be two less people to repay it. Matthew had recently felt anxious than he had anticipated regarding the prospect of taking on so much debt. He had resolved he would not let the issue of money enter into his dealings with Darren and Dennis.

With all of this remaining to resolved, Brandt went off each day to do his chores as if nothing had changed, drinking alone in the shed every evening, making love whenever he could to whichever woman, Mary or Gail, would accept him, while waiting to see what would happen with respect to Darren and Dennis. It was an upside-down world, he thought, but at least it was free of the noise, pretentious words, and effete discussions that he had come to despise.

The bearded former director of seminars, Darren Houghten, was the

first to step forward. He came limping out from the house as Brandt stood by the tool bench in the shed with a beer in his hand.

"Fancy finding you here," Darren said.

"Yea, thought I'd try something different," Brandt replied.

"Matthew, my old friend, we need to talk."

"Yes, I know... Care for a beer?"

"Yes, I would, actually."

Matthew reached for a beer, pried off the cap with a church key, and reached it over to Houghten, who accepted it with a bow, and lifted it up for Matthew to clink his own beer against it.

"One more time we imbibe together, my old friend," said Houghten, "as we used to do with our alley view so often."

"Yes."

"And, as we did, I recall, my old friend, just three months ago, in this very building, in this very spot, you, Dennis, and I, on that first evening, when our hopes were so high."

"Yes."

"You did build the loft, you and Dennis, as you promised, I will grant you that, Matthew. And I have spent many a good hour there, with my pen, paper, and books."

"I'm glad for that, Darren."

"Thank you very much."

Houghten lifted his bottle again, and Brandt obliged by raising his own glass for another clink.

"Matthew, Matthew, what went wrong?" Houghten continued, turning to Brandt with a pained expression in his sad, pensive eyes. "We were off to such a good start with our meetings and our ideals."

"Yes, we were, Dennis, and I'm sorry if you've lost that."

Houghten looked surprised by this sudden apology such as Matthew had refused to give to everyone at the meeting in the barnyard.

"Matthew, I'm so relieved to hear you say that."

"I'm not sorry I didn't apologize the other night. But I apologize to you because you've been a good friend."

"Well, again, thank you so much."

"I know you just got caught up in the general mess."

"Yes, I got caught up in something, surely."

For a moment the two men stood in silence in the shed. It was a peaceful summer evening such as many Brandt had experienced in the shed back home in Minnesota with his father and brother.

"Something happened in you, I know," Houghten continued. "I don't know what it was, but I forgive you."

"Well, okay, Darren, and the forgiveness is wonderful, I guess, as they say. But listen, man, I just want you to know, I'm not sorry for what

I did. I'm glad to have this farm as it is now."

"This farm!' Houghten answered. "You mean, the sheep and chickens, Matthew? Surely you knew what it was for the rest of us, surely you know what it still might be!"

"All's I'm saying, Darren, is I don't know what you have in mind here with your little talk, but as far as I go, this farm, or at least no farm I'm on, is going back to being a hippie-dippie circus."

"You actually think, Matthew, I had some ulterior motive, coming out here now, to talk? I have just come out as a brother to speak of our common enterprise."

"'Brother,' 'Enterprise,' sure. Whatever words you want to use, I guess that's you, that's alright. That's your bag or whatever. But my bag is this, this shed, this tractor."

"Yes, I know."

"Sorry, Darren. It's how it's going to be on any farm I'm on."

"Well, I'll leave you to your bag for the moment."

"Thank you. Fine."

After Houghten left, Brandt stayed in the shed by himself for two more beers before heading up the path to spend the night by himself.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, with Kelly still not back from Portsmouth, Houghten announced that he would be leaving the farm as soon as he could get his things together.

"I don't mean it as personal," he said, looking around the table. "But, what's here for me anymore? I'm an intellectual, not a farmer."

All of the remaining group on the farm were seated there, except for Dennis Kelly, who was still in Portsmouth. Besides Darren, the group included Matthew, Mary, Jane, Gail, and the four children: little Matthew, Angela, Mandy, and Dylan. The children wore sad expressions and watched intently as he spoke.

"You could be, maybe," Mary said.

"I could be, Mary. I could be if I wanted to. I could be if I were you," Houghten replied. "That's your thing, remember, to be the pesano. To be the farmer proletariat."

"Why you comin' with that?" Mary replied, sounding wounded. "I was trying to patch things up."

Houghten shook his head, trying to gather his composure. "I know that, Mary. You always do. I mean it, sincerely. The thing is, you could live here as a farmer, with me as an intellectual, live here and let me live her. But Matthew could not."

Everyone looked for a reply from Matthew, but he kept his eyes on the table. He had decided he would not encourage Darren to remain if Darren couched the arrangement in such terms of there being a cultured aspect of the farm. He had decided that if he allowed that to happen the

next thing is Darren would want to bring in new like-minded people, and then the farm would be back to where it had been.

"Isn't that right?" Darren said, addressing him directly.

"I don't know." Matthew answered. "Did you ever hear of the concept of 'up the road'?"

"No, what is that?"

"Up the road, as in you live up the road, or I do. That's what people do when they can't live in the same house. They live up the road."

"Well, maybe someday that will happen. But for now, I've decided to go. I must go. Just to my mother's place in Concord. From there, I don't know. We can all remain friends, up the road, down the road, however it may be."

"We would like that," said Mary. "For you to be on the road somewhere. Actually or figuratively."

"Yes, we would," Gail also said as all of the others except Matthew assented with nods.

"You are our dear friend."

"Well, thank you for that," Darren said. "I suppose then it is time for the cardboard boxes."

He rose, turned at once to the side, as if to hide some emotion visible on his face, and then proceeded through the door there, just a few steps from the table, that led to the stairway leading up to his room. The three women, without voicing an intention, soon followed; everyone knew that, due to Darrren's condition, he would not be able to carry out his boxes alone.

After the boxes were loaded in his van, Houghten walked with Jane to the garden. In response to something he said, she could be heard saying in her soft voice: "I'm sorry, Darren. I'm not your wife."

Coming back with a weary, sad face, Darren extended his hand to Matthew.

"Well, I hope this is not a final good-bye," he said.

"Nothing is final," Matthew said.

It was a response such as many he had given in his life, sounding more harsh than Matthew intended. He realized the undesirable effect, but he let it go without trying to change it.

"I do appreciate the good times," Houghten said.

"I do, too," Matthew replied.

Houghten hobbled around to his van after this with the entire crew of Matt, Mary, Gail, Jane, and the four children watching. All had sad faces but Jane looked saddest of all.

Later that afternoon, Matthew encountered Dennis Kelly up on the hill. Kelly had returned from the coast and was setting out his things outside the tent.

There was no need to ask what he was doing.

Despite Matthew's show of nonchalance about Houghten, he felt grieved about it. Now, to see Kelly on the way out, also...

"So you're heading out, too," he said.

"Yes, I'm sorry, Matthew," Kelly replied. "What came down, I thought a lot about it. It wasn't right."

"I know it wasn't," Matthew said.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that, Matt. I'm glad you've gotten an insight into it. Really. I'm not being facetious. You're a good person, Matthew. You've been my goddam best friend. But where we are now, we can't go back. There was something I believed in here and it's gone. I need something to believe in."

"Yes, I know."

"It's just the way I'm built."

On Mary's insistence, Dennis stayed for supper, the understanding being that he would leave in the morning with no further farewells. Mary cooked a hearty meal of roast beef, potatoes, and steamed vegetables from the garden, with a bottle of red wine brought out from the cabinet where it was saved for special occasions.

Seated at the table was the same group as had been there the same morning, except for Kelly being now present and Houghten absent. The wine went around the table among the adults a couple of times, but nothing could shake the sad mood.

"Where will you be going?" Mary asked Kelly.

"Back to Kentucky."

"Back to Kensington?"

"Yes, or there around. You know me, I'm an old country yokel at heart."

That brought a smile to the adults, and the four children laughed, glad for a break in the mood.

"What's a yokel?" Angela, Gail's seven-year-old asked.

"It's a sad dog who lives in the country," Matthew replied.

That brought another laugh as Angie wrinkled her nose and shrugged her shoulders, not understanding.

"A yokel is a person who's kind of simple, likes to live in simple ways, and hasn't seen much else," Jane Larue explained in her soft voice, in almost a whisper, not wanting to let the girl's question go without a clear answer.

"Back to the shoe factory?" Mary asked.

"Yes, maybe that for a while. And, maybe, I was thinking, I'll try to buy some land."

"You expect to see Darla?"

"Darla Roan?"

"Yes, who else?"

"Maybe I will," Dennis said.

"That girl has been pretty loyal, Dennis. She must write you once a week, at least, doesn't she?"

"Yes, she does. I've just thought, all along, she's too young."

"How old is she now?"

"She's 19."

"That's not too young, Dennis," Mary said.

"No, it's not too young," said Gail.

"She's a full-fledged woman. And you're just 27," said Jane.

"I never really figured out what she's after, with me."

That brought a laugh, as Matthew raised his eyebrows.

"Well, what do you think it is?" Jane asked softly.

"Maybe a big brother, little sister kind of thing. She asks me for advice on things. I give her advice, best I can."

"Once a week is not big brother little sister," remarked Gail with her bright smile, having an effect all around.

"I would concur," said Jane.

"Dennis, we the women of Cranston Farm, here assembled, drawing upon our collective wisdom and experience, declare this to be a budding romance," Mary declared.

"Yes, we do," replied the others, laughing.

"You know," Kelly answered, unfailingly serious as always. "There's something,—I don't know how to say it,—there's just something great in being an ordinary person, an ordinary citizen. Not an intellectual, you know, not creating any kind of revolution. Or just creating a small revolution. By participating. I wish I could say it."

"You said it very well," said Mary.

Matthew, as he listened to this remark of his old friend, recalled Kelly expressing a similar opinion as far back as Kentucky when Kelly had explained why he had decided to quit his government job and go to work in a shoe factory; and he recalled Kelly, as recently as few weeks before, in the yurt, waxing so eloquently on his idea of giving up "costumes" and "becoming American again."

"I just want to be an ordinary person," Kelly went on. "I want to be an ordinary good person like my parents were and my grandparents."

"You are a good person," Gail said.

"Thank you. Thank you very much. But you know what I mean. I mean, not presuming."

"We've all presumed," said Mary.

"Yes, we have."

Dennis slept in the house on this final night, and next morning at break of dawn, Matthew heard the door close as Kelly left the house.

There was a roar of the motor as Dennis started up his truck, then an idling noise, with a couple of backfire booms, then a winding up of the engine through first and second gears as the truck rounded the bend by the apple tree. Another winding up of the gears followed that and the engine sound grew steadily fainter until the noise of the truck faded off into the morning silence.

317. Steward leaves Gallup with his backpack to "look for America"

With no idea of the death, just ten days before, of Jim Morris, his former rowing teammate and pen pal of Morris's war years, and with no idea of the changes that had just occurred in New Hampshire, on the collective farm where his friends Matthew and Mary Brandt lived, Tom Steward left for his planned trip to California on the morning of Tuesday, August 14, 1971. With his orange backpack on his back, strapped to his waist, he crossed the main street highway in Gallup, just down the street from his former residence, the Henry Hotel, with a feeling of relief and joy at the prospect of the two weeks ahead of the open road.

Steward observed to himself that his two-year stint of alternative service was just about over, his marriage with Kristine DeSolt was over, his "romantic friendship" with Joan Shannon was over (as an active element of his life), his foray into psychology was over,—so much in his past was over. As for his future, unsure as it was at the time being, there was one thing it would surely bring, for a while at least: freedom. Freedom, the open road, the feeling of not knowing what would happen in the next hours or days!

Gone for the moment was his concern about why he had not been able to hold on to Kris. Gone was his concern about being unaccomplished at his present age of 27. Gone was the dreariness of his little room in the house on Strong Street, the hours spent in the dark living room, writing in his journal. Gone was the conflict he had experienced during his entire time in Gallup about whether to go to graduate school or allow himself time to look and experiment like so many of his generational peers. He had made his decision.

"Looking for America," he said out loud.

Yes, he would look, Steward thought, and not just for the two weeks of this trip to California. After he got back to Gallup, he would take off again, he knew not for where. He would keep looking. He would try to take it all in. And if something promising came up, then he would stop looking for a while, he would try it out.

Like maybe living on the Brandt's' farm in New Hampshire. That was still a big option in his mind.

Hearing a train whistle in the distance, he waited on the sidewalk across the tracks from the Amtrak station to watch the two diesels and the long line of boxcars behind them as they rumbled past with a clacking of wheels and a whining and shrieking of metallic sounds.

Familiar sounds such as he had heard on his lonely walks during his first weeks in Gallup, Steward thought, looking back to the Henry Hotel, to the second floor window from which he had observed the endless passing of his generational peers back and forth along the highway. At

last, he would be part of the wandering himself.

For how long had he been unfree, Steward asked himself as he headed west along the main street highway, watching the train fade off in the distance, for how long had he been subject to the draft, to worries about situating with respect to it, to statements and interviews about it, to alternative service entered into because of it? Since the day that he had received the letter from the draft board, he answered. And when had that happened anyhow? April of 1967. The present year was 1971. That was more than four years.

Four years! And now he was free!

And something else, Steward noted, this was the first time that he had hit the road alone. He had done it with Bill O'Rourke, relying on his old friend's cautions. Now he would have to fend for himself.

Steward felt a passing sadness at that, recalling the times on the road he had shared with the red-bearded former coxswain in the days when the war that had taken O'Rourke's life had still been just an abstract subject of talk for them both.

There would be some loneliness on the road, also, Steward admitted to himself, without his old rowing teammate beside him. The road traveled alone would be a more intense experience, turned over in thought without the escape valve of conversation. He recalled the story his Navajo friend Eddie Yazzie had told him about the lone pinyon trees that get separated from the rest and die from "chi-en-nah." Maybe he would suffer that same kind of loneliness himself, being on the road alone, he thought, but he would accept the loneliness, for the time being, at least, as the other side of his new freedom.

Reaching Second Street, he turned to the north across the railroad tracks and the swath of land cleared for the new interstate and turned to the left just beyond that past a railroad yard with a roundhouse and the lumber store and sand and gravel store beside the tracks to the two-lane highway (identified as "608") that curved to the right again and out of town toward the Navajo reservation.

A green sign there listed the mileage to points of interest ahead: Yah-ta-hay 35, Ship Rock 94, Cortez 106. Cortez was in Colorado, not far from the four corner area of New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, he knew. He would be there by late afternoon if the day went well.

Lean, athletic, and clean in appearance, despite his facial hair of a light brown color in the area around his mouth and chin, Steward hiked with long strides up the road past the community center building where he had worked for several weeks in the sheltered workshop during his first month in Gallup, at the time when he had been also working in the "sleep in" in the basement garage of the Henry Hotel, while struggling with his new estrangement from Kris.

"Those days are gone, too," he said to himself.

In a yard fenced in, in the Mexican style, with a paintworn plank fence, only shoulder height, three brown-skinned children were trying to tie a cowboy hat on a dog already decked up in a red kerchief. An old man seated nearby with a cane on his lap raised the cane in a salutation as Steward passed.

"Buen viaje," he said.

"Gracias," Steward answered.

He passed several more houses within the patchwork of plank fences, and then, on the outside of town, a final outpost consisting of a trailer, a little barn, and a corral with one horse.

Ahead of him now was an expanse of rugged open country, in color a visual blend of the grays, reds, and browns of rocks and bare soil and the disparate green and yellow hues of the sparsely but widely distributed low plants that thrived in the arid terrain: sagebrush trees and shrubs with gnarled stems and silvery-green, wedge-shaped leaves (he could smell the pungent fragrance as he walked), grass rings with yellow edges and bare dirt centers, spindly creosote bushes with spidery stems and fronds of small dark green leaves.

It was a spacious, sunny vista with a great dome of blue sky high overhead, Steward noted as he looked around.

To his left, slightly behind him, in a southwest direction, several miles in the distance, he could see the gray thread of the two-lane Highway 61 with a truck moving along below the distinctive rose-colored bluff he had noticed on the evening when he had driven out to Doug Thomasek's "spread" (as the former VISTA volunteer turned blacksmith had called it).

The land between Steward and the distant highway was mostly flat, but broken here and there by hills of rubble-like rock and washes where cottonwoods flickered in the sunlight.

To his right, not far from the road, the land rose steeply to a long, spiny ridge, with here and there a solitary pinyon poised in the crag of a cliff.

In front of him, the same ridge inclined toward the road and about ten miles ahead crossed to the other side of it. There was a notch there in the ridge where the road passed through.

That was the distant point toward which Steward headed with hearty strides, not even sticking out his thumb for a ride. But he had not gone far when a red pickup truck stopped in front of him. In the cab were two Indian couples side by side. One of the women turned and smiled. Steward recognized her as one of the clerks in the ward he had worked in for the past ten months. She gestured for him to get in the open bed of the truck beside some bags of feed.

"We go Ship Rock," the young man next to her called out the window. "Okay for you?"

"Yes, that's great!" Steward yelled back.

From the bed of the pickup, Steward looked back at the skyline of Gallup. It was three or four stories high at its highest, and strung out along the highway for several miles. The silhouette of buildings grew more distant until it was just a line on the south horizon. Here and there were other clusters of buildings, but for the most part the scene was one of arid flat land, rock hills, and buttes, some showing the pink and gray lines of ancient layers of sediment bared by the wind.

Soon after that, the truck passed through the ridge of hills that Steward had noticed earlier in Gallup. Beyond there, the country opened up further to the east and he could see, he figured, 20 or 30 miles in that direction across a table of flat land with widely separate outgrowth of rocks and clusters of scraggly trees. Off to his left was the same ridge of low hills that reached all the way back to Gallup.

The truck reached a Y-intersection and took the branch to the left past a small Indian town of ranch style houses with bare dirt yards, in the midst of which was a cement block school. "Yahtahey," a sign there said. Next came another stretch of open country, in the midst of which, now and then, he could see a road, consisting of little more than tire tracks, heading out toward some gully or natural sculpture of rock or clump of trees.

The pickup truck slowed down in the midst of this, and Steward saw that he and his fellow travelers had stopped in a parking lot by an unadorned adobe building with a single gas pump and a painted sign that said, "Sheep Springs Trading Post." The building had a single door and just two windows on the parking lot side.

In the parking lot were two groups of Navajos, the men dressed in cowboy hats, western shirts, boot cut blue jeans, and cowboy boots, the women either in similar Western clothes or in traditional pleated skirts and velveteen blouses.

The young woman who had originally offered Steward the ride, came around to Steward, smiling, as the three who were riding with her headed inside the building. She had black hair and black eyes, and was herself dressed in jeans, a western shirt with embroidered cuffs, and cowboys boots, and she was carrying a Western style purse.

"We stop just a little," she said.

"Okay," Steward replied.

He jumped out of the truck, and nodded and said hello to the

Indians in the parking lot, a gesture they did not return. The young woman said something in Navajo, however, to which they replied with a few words and a pointing of noses down the road in the direction of

Gallup.

"They waiting for ride," the young woman said to Steward.

"Oh," he replied.

"You go on big trip?" she asked.

"Yes, kind of. California," Steward answered.

"California, wow," she remarked. "Where you go there?"

"San Francisco."

"Far out. You go see hippies?"

"Maybe. Yea."

"Hippies, wow."

She then excused herself to join her friends in the trading post while Steward remained by the truck and looked around.

Just off to the south, he saw, in the direction he and his fellow travelers had just come from, was a solitary butte with two humps. Beyond that were more of the rubble-like rock hills with clusters of pinyon pines and more tire track roads etched into bare soil through the omnipresent sagebrush and tufts of grass. On the east, far in the distance, he could see a landform that appeared to a line of distant mountains.

If this was the America he was looking for, Steward reflected, it continued in the quality he had noted as far back as his first trip across country with O'Rourke, and that was simply that it was beyond generalities of any kind. This land before him, in its bleakness, was most likely not far removed in appearance, he thought, from how it had looked in the days when Indians had lived on it with no inkling that their life would ever be disturbed by the likes of himself. Here were descendants of those Indian people, standing close to him, while not acknowledging his presence in any way; and yet here, also, was this Indian girl in jeans and cowboy boots, with her purse slung over her shoulder, switching back and forth between Navajo and his own language, English; and she had even gotten good enough at it to try out a couple of hip words.

What a great and complex saga the American story had been, Steward thought later as he looked off from the truck to the mountains, which had drawn close enough to see the dense forests on the lower slopes. So many disparate types had taken part in that saga. Like Kit Carson, for example. There was an example he had heard about. A boy apprenticed to work in a saddle shop in St. Louis who had run away at the age of 15 to pursue his own adventure of the West and had become eventually a great explorer and scout, but a scourge to the Indian peoples, also.

An hour later, by another butte, larger and more impressive, like a two-peaked piece of a mountain set by itself in the midst of a desert, Steward said goodbye to the Navajos who had given him a ride and set off by himself in the bright afternoon sunlight.

Steward soon had another ride, with a local high school teacher who

chatted pleasantly as they drove across the state line into Colorado, to the base of the line of mountains that had been drawing nearer all day. Another ride brought him 80 miles further into Utah, to the town of Monticello.

Here a range of snow-covered mountains rose up steeply on one side of Steward, to the northwest, with snow-covered peaks above the tree line. On his other side, to the west, the country was open,—cowboy country with shortgrass and trees. In the distance there, he could see a brown expanse with statue-like outgrowths of rock of the kind he had seen in Monument Valley on his trip there the previous year with his co-workers from Gallup.

He had another ride soon with clean-cut young people who identified themselves as Mormons. In their speech, he detected inflections reminding him of his Air Force camp roommate, Orin Brown. They told him a story of how the Mormon apostles Erastus Snow and Brigham Young, Jr. had passed through the area in 1880 and had later sent out an expedition looking for places to settle, with sources of water, in the nearby mountains, which they called "the Blue Mountains."

Conflicts with local ranchers had also developed, the young Mormons said. Gunshots had been fired, threats had been made, but in the end the disputes had been settled in court.

The day progressed with rides that took Steward through mountains forested with cedars, fir, pine, and aspens already turning autumn yellow, then through majestic stark country with pillars and arches of rock, then through a narrow canyon with high mountains on both sides that opened at last to a rugged valley where the sun was lowing over peaks about three miles to the west.

He had gone 400 miles in a single day, Steward noted as he walked past a road sign indicating that a historical site, a ghost town called Tucker, was two miles ahead. On his right side was a wall of rock hundreds of feet high. On his left the land sloped down to a creek (called "Soldier Creek" on the map). The creek ran parallel to the road. Next to it was a fenced in pasture. In the pasture were two horses by a shed where a dirt road ended.

Steward checked the road to make sure no vehicle was approaching, then headed down the embankment into some cottonwood trees that bordered the creek where it formed a small pool.

By the pool Steward set out his sleeping bag and took from his pack a loaf of bread and a jar of peanut butter. He spread the peanut butter onto a piece of bread and sat eating it as he looked out at the scene around him. The horses he had noticed earlier were on the other of the pasture, about a quarter mile away.

"Now this is the life," he said to himself.

Saying that, however, Steward recalled how his old buddy of the open road, Bill O'Rourke, had used to say that, and he felt a little sad that the former coxswain was not with him.

[Chapter 317 notes]

318. Steward senses a dimension of history on his "unfolding path"

Early the next morning, Tom Steward opened his eyes to a pattern of red and purple clouds above the long dark cliff that bordered the highway on top of the hill. The two horses he had noticed the previous evening were watching him from a fence about 30 feet away.

"You don't need to worry about me. I won't hurt you," he said as he rose and shook out his sleeping bag.

Throwing his pack onto his back, he hiked up the steep slope in the dark grass still shaded by the cliff above. At the highway, he took a long look back at the aspen trees and pooled water in the cozy ravine where he had spent the night. Beyond the ravine, far to the west, the highest peak on a ridge of mountains caught the first golden light of the rising sun, which was not yet visible in the eastern sky.

By the time the sun appeared in a notch in the cliffs, Steward was already two miles up the highway, coming around a bend of the highway to the "ghost town" of Tucker, as shown on his map. He discovered that the town had been replaced by a roadside rest.

"The small town of Tucker, once situated here, was a loading point and construction camp on the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad," read the inscription on a plaque there that Steward found. "Tucker had a boarding house, a company store, a saloon, and a shelter for the spare engines used to help push trains over nearby Soldier Summit."

Steward sat for a moment in the quiet park, contemplating how life must have been in such a secluded little settlement almost a century before. He located the old roadbed of the railroad on an earthen bridge between two slopes above him.

Within another hour, already on his second ride of the morning, he was in the vicinity of Salt Lake City, where he noted the Biblical name as the highway passed over the Jordan River. Then he saw the Great Salt Lake for the first time, stretching to the north horizon, with waves lapping on the shore and pools of shimmering light in the distance.

After that came the Bonneville salt flats where his driver, a shoe salesman, told Steward the salt flats were used for testing experimental cars ("rigged up with rockets," the salesman said).

Next came miles of mountains gray as slate where another driver, a mining engineer, told Steward that the ancient rock hid gold, silver, and copper worth millions of dollars. The highway followed the same southwest-flowing river, the engineer told him, that the 19th Century gold seekers had followed to the Mother Lode country in California. Others of the seekers had preferred to pan for gold alone in the streams of the 12 mountain ranges of Nevada, he said.

All of this, Steward took in as part of the unfolding message of his

trip. In the Biblical names of the Mormons, he saw an example of the zealous Americans, from New England to Salt Lake, who had sought religious freedom. Hearing of the jet cars rigged with rockets, he contemplated the technological drive that, through cotton gin, telegraph, railroad, and airplane, had brought America so many societal changes. Mulling over the gold diggers who had traveled west across Nevada, he considered how the hope of "making it big" had informed the American dream. He thought of the other prospectors who had remained alone, living the ambition of rugged individuality that had typified the fur trader, the scout, and other solitary types of American legend.

By the end of the second day of his trip, Steward had reached Reno, Nevada, but he did not pause to gawk at the casinos. Instead, he rode with his engineer driver on two-lane Highway 431 another 30 miles to Incline Village on Lake Reno. Here, too, he did not pause at the log chalets, but set out at once, hiking along the lakeshore boulevard to a point of land that jutted to the south at the exact state line of California. There he climbed up a steep path through the woods and set down his sleeping bag for the night.

Seated by a rock overlook soon later, he watched the sun setting over the mountains on the west side of the lake, noting to himself that he was back in California again, his first return since his trip to Santa Barbara a half year before to confer with his former wife.

He recalled how the Navajo woman—on his first ride of the day before—had asked him if he was going to look for hippies when he got to San Francisco. That was something he should surely do, he decided, part of the assessment of his time and place in it that he felt so compelled to perform. He had heard people talking about how San Francisco was where "it all began," (meaning, as he understood it, the "whole hippie phenomenon,") in the "summer of the flower children," four years before. Indirectly, he had been part of that himself, he reflected. The hippie phenomenon had had a major influence on his entire generation. Surely, his quest for America would rightly include going to places like the hippie neighborhood of Haight Ashbury that he had heard about.

Thinking of San Francisco, Steward thought also of his brother Art, whom he would be staying with in the Bay Area. He had not seen his brother since before Art had gone to Vietnam as a doctor in the medical corps. He was eager to hear what Art would say about the war and about their mutual friend Bill O'Rourke (who he knew had been in Art's company). He expected to find the usual contrast between Art's life and his own. Art and Nancy had a new baby he had seen only once, the previous Christmas.

By noon the next day Steward had reached Oakland, where his brother lived. On discovering that the county hospital his brother worked

at was only a mile away, he walked there to greet his brother in person.

"Goddam Tom," Art said when he showed up in the lobby with his white coat and stethoscope. "Always the unexpected."

"Figured I'd just stop by."

"How's the hobo?"

"I'm fine."

A ride together in Art's VW bug brought the two brothers to a two-story building with a car port and a side yard. From there they walked up to Art and Nancy's apartment on the second floor. Nancy was on hand to greet them, trim and neat as always. In her arms was the dark-haired baby Luke who peered at the visitor with keen interest.

Standing here, in his brother's apartment with its stacks of books and official mail on the coffee table and kitchen table, Tom Steward could not prevent himself from a comparison. Here was the brother he had shared a bedroom with all the time growing up, standing before him with his wife and baby, with a television and sound system in the living room and a new car just outside. By contrast, what had he to show for his five years in college and four years as a volunteer? He had no wife (any longer), no child, no profession, and 50 dollars in cash. His entire belongings were contained in the pack he had carried into the room.

The inevitable questions came later when Art, Nancy, Tom, and the baby in a high chair sat at a table in a bouillabaisse restaurant, looking out at the bridge over the canal between Alameda and Oakland.

"So how long are you going to keep up this hitching around?" the older brother asked with the peculiar cast of his face that he got when he was in a challenging mood.

"I don't know," Tom answered. "I guess as long as it seems right."

"What makes it right? What's the criterion?"

"I don't know, I just feel there's an unfolding," Tom said, casting about in his mind for some of the notions he had picked up in Gallup, in the psych ward and from his friends the former VISTA volunteers who lived out in Thoreau on the Continental Divide.

"Unfolding of what?"

"Unfolding of meaning, unfolding of a path. I just feel I have a path and I should follow it. That it will lead where it's supposed to lead, and I'll know when I get there. But you don't believe in such things, do you?"

Art took a swig of beer. "What's there to believe in, Tom?" he returned. "It's a bunch of hooey."

"Well, see, there you go. I should have known better than to confide."

"I like the confiding."

Nancy laughed. "Don't you mind him, Tom. He secretly admires you. He told me you got some nerve, going out by yourself on the highway."

"Yes, that's true," said Art.

"Well, thanks for that."

The war did not come up until later when Art and Tom drove across the bay and through San Francisco to see the Golden Gate Bridge, all in unrelenting fog.

From a concrete dock on the far side of the bridge, below the pier, they could see the red lights of Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill blinking in wisps of gray clouds.

"I have to say one thing about ol' Rorkie," Art remarked. "There was a guy, could have taken the easy way out, but he had this attitude if he believed in the war then he should be willing to do what anyone was being required to do in combat, take up a gun."

"Did he do that before he died?"

"That I don't know."

The doctor brother said then something that had a deep effect on his younger brother. He said, "Tom, I know you have some of the same kind of purity of heart and I met people over there, soldiers, who believed in those notions enough to lay down their lives. I learned from that not to discount anything that heartfelt. I feel the same with you, Tom. I know you're guileless."

Next day, with Art helping to make arrangements and Nancy providing the actual ride, Tom Steward made it over to the city again. Nancy let him off on Broadway and Columbus, in the midst of the Strip, because that was where the freeway ended up that she had entered the city on.

"Well, I don't mean to drop you off in the midst of all the sin and vice here!" she said.

"Naw, that's okay. This is fine."

"I'm going to turn right around before I get lost!"

Steward had no map and no plan for the day ahead except to at some point visit Haight-Ashbury. He could see that the street of nightclubs on which he stood extended only a few blocks to where it entered a tunnel under a hill packed with buildings. Down to one side of him were tall buildings that he assumed composed the San Francisco downtown. A sign on the corner pointed right to North Beach and Fisherman's Wharf.

Steward headed in that direction. He knew North Beach was where the Beats, like Ginsberg and Kerouac, had lived. On a narrow street, he saw a sign in a coffee house window for a poetry reading. Inside a bearded man was scribbling in a notebook with a cup of coffee beside him.

Turning from that, Steward found himself on a street with Chinese signs. A man was selling live fish that he speared from a glass tank in the back of a pickup truck. Next came the tunnel entry Steward had noticed

before. He walked up the sloping street beside it, across the cable car tracks on the next street, and up a stairway of concrete steps.

A steep climb brought him to the top of the hill, where he looked back down, over the trees and buildings of the area through which he had just walked, to the tunnel portal below, from which traffic streamed out between the signs of the Strip toward the ramp that led to the elevated Bayshore Freeway. Following the horizontal span of the freeway with his eyes, he saw an ocean ship large as a city block gliding under the double-decker East Bay Bridge. On his left was the neighborhood with a double-towered church in its center. Perhaps that was North Beach, from which he had just come, he thought, straining to apply his vague map knowledge of the city to the scene before him. There was a hill there. Perhaps it was Telegraph Hill. On his right was Chinatown with its boldly-colored displays of Chinese ideograms leading down to the tall buildings of the downtown area.

He had never known a city could be so beautiful, Steward mused as he headed out through a neighborhood of quaintly painted buildings. No wonder the early hippies had come here for an alternative life.

By the hotel on Nob Hill, a tall, bearded cab driver, dressed in an Army jacket, met Steward's eyes when he came by.

"Could you tell me where Haight Ashbury is?" Steward asked.

"Looking for the hippies, huh?"

"Yes, I am."

"The Haight is about four miles from here," said the cabbie. "See that big church there, on the other side of the park?

"Yes, I do."

"Head in that direction along the cable car tracks there, and, when the tracks come to an end, just keep on going out California Street till you get to Masonic, then go left there and across Masonic another mile or so. You'll get to a skinny little park there. That's the Golden Gate Park Panhandle, they call it. The Haight is just beyond that, up a little hill."

Steward set off, as instructed, past the church, and down a hill along the cable car tracks past restaurants and shops. He began at a walk and within a few blocks, had broken to a loping run. Feeling strangely exhilarated, he broke into a full run. Charging up the hill just past where the cable cars tracks ended, he overtook a city bus, to the amusement of two teenage boys watching from the back window. Three times, as they watched, he fell behind the bus and then caught up with it again at the next stop, as they laughed and cheered him on.

The Panhandle , when he reached it, wet with sweat, showed no hint of the "flower child" atmosphere that he had expected. The brown grass in the block-wide park was littered with paper, bottles, and cans.

Haight Street itself, two blocks further, presented the same look of

desultory neglect. The only trees on hand were miniature, by Midwestern standards, with leathery leaves. The storefronts along the sidewalk looked in need of business. On a side street, gloomy Victorian houses fronted the sidewalk with no yards.

At a store on Haight and Ashbury, with tie-dyed shirts hanging in the window, Steward saw a poster for a community art fair depicting a long-haired Renaissance-type maiden dancing with a lute.

Seated on the sidewalk nearby, Steward noted, also, was just such a girl of the modern version, a teenager with flower-embroidered jeans and long hair. She glanced at him with an expression of distress.

"Could I help you in some way?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "Leave me alone."

Down a block further, he came upon a storefront community center reminding him of the storefront in Kingwood, West Virginia, where he had worked with his former wife. When he entered, a young, mustachioed man came across from a back room.

"You don't look like the usual tourist," he said.

"No, I guess I'm not."

"Came to see Haight Ashbury?"

"Yes."

"The flower children, I imagine."

"Kind of, yes."

"Well, sorry to say, man, the best of that scene is gone. What we have around here now is mostly a drug scene. The drugs have gotten hard. The scene has gotten hard. People got desperate. People got stranded, especially young people. Teenage kids."

Later, Steward came upon the main area of Golden Gate Park and kept on. He passed a wooded hill, an open square with museums on either side, a Japanese garden, a pasture with buffaloes, an outdoor track, and a little lake, ending at a wide street with a quaint, little tavern at the edge of the park and a wide, sandy beach across from it, where silhouetted people strolled along the wet sand as the waves crashed in from the gleaming water swelling to a low sun on the horizon.

Steward entered the tavern and sat with a beer, looking around. The place had a historical function of some kind, he noted. It had maybe been built as a WPA project, he conjectured. The walls were painted with murals depicting San Francisco life in an earlier era: a woman and girl buying a lobster on Fisherman's Wharf; stylish young women in ankle-length skirts and wide-brimmed hats pointing to an offshore whale; well-dressed men and women around a jockey and two horses at a horse race. The murals evoked a sense of life passing by that had been increasing in him in the past few days as a result of the historical sites he had seen.

Outside later, Steward ran into the bearded, friendly cabbie he had

gotten directions from on Nob Hill. The cabbie said he had just dropped off a passenger and could give Steward a free ride downtown.

"You found the Haight?" the cabbie inquired as they rode along.

"Yes, I did. It looked depressed."

"Ha! If that was the flower of our renaissance, it wilted."

"You think it's all over?" Steward asked.

"Over?" the cabbie replied with a thoughtful nod. "Naw, I would not say 'over.' I would say, 'transmuted.'"

Steward considered that later as he waited to be picked up by his brother. The America he was trying to find was in a process of continual change. He had seen that on the road, had he not? In the little railroad town in Utah. In the Mormon names around Salt Lake. In the river in Nevada the prospectors had followed. Now he was seeing it here in San Francisco, where the era he was part of himself was fading. Fading but transmuting, what would it become?

[Chapter 318 notes]

319. In Sunland, Steward finds Kristine troubled and sick but determined

As Tom Steward headed out from San Francisco several days later, on Wednesday, August 18, 1971, traveling down the California coastal highway, his thoughts turned to his expected upcoming meeting in Sunland with his former wife, Kristine. He was aware of the befuddling complex of memories, emotions, and past and present resolutions she evoked within him. Despite his months of self-examination about his marriage, he did not have a clear idea of what he had done wrong. He had no clear idea, either, of whether she really wanted to see him again, though she had told him (months before) that she wanted to see him whenever he came by. He had sent her another letter before leaving Gallup.

Other people were also on Steward's mind, as he set out on a new solitary leg of his journey. He felt sad about leaving his brother behind after such a short visit. He was glad for the compliment Art had given him about being guileless. He was also concerned regarding his father. He had heard from Art the evening before that his father was in a downturn in his mood cycle, one of his worst ever, and close to a point of incapacitation, Art had said. Steward's mind drifted briefly too to his old hitching buddy Bill O'Rourke who was no longer with him and to his old friends Matt and Mary Brandt whom more and more he anticipated he would visit in New England later in his journey.

It was early morning. Steward had begun hitching at dawn in Santa Cruz thanks to a ride from Art. His first ride had taken him from Santa Cruz to Monterrey and ten miles further, past the Carmel River State Beach and Point Lobos, where he had gotten his first view of the rugged, beautiful coastline extending south from China Cove.

Ahead of him, the highway bent around a vertical ridge of rock. The ocean, spreading out to the western horizon, glittered with sunlight all across the apparent seas within the sea created by the complex flow of the vast body of water in its surface currents of blue and green streams, upon which moved the shadows of far-flung, isolated clouds. A horizontal line of clouds, far in the west, sectioned off a pale blue band of sky along the arc of the horizon.

His past world with Kris had seemed so important at times, Steward thought; yet, in face of beauty like this, what did it matter anymore? He was in no hurry to see her, as had been the case so often in the days of their courtship in similar California scenes. For the time being, he would forget it. He just wanted to continue in his glorious freedom of the moment on the path of discovery unfolding before him.

He was glad for the grand view. He was glad for the sun above his head, so balmfully shining. He was glad for the road beneath his feet and

the bends of it extending ever southward with another grand view on every turn. He was glad for the stretch in the back of his legs as he walked, and for the strength of his body as he hiked with his pack.

There was no need to stick out his thumb for a ride, either. A red Porsche convertible zipped to the shoulder ahead of him. The driver, a young man about Steward's own age, with the tanned, virile appearance of a surfer and wavy blonde hair down to his shoulders, turned around and gestured with his hand for Steward to get in.

"You need a ride and I need company," he said.

"Well, thank you. Glad to oblige," Steward replied as he came running with his pack.

Soon they were zooming ahead as the sunlit highway led them through the spectacular country of Big Sur. On their landward side, steep slopes covered with chaparral rose to peaks covered with cedars and fir. On their ocean side, the descent was just as steep to the jagged coast where white- capped waves rolling in etched brush-like patterns perpendicular to the coast for miles in the distance.

The driver was casually dressed, in the California dress-down style, in shorts and sandals and a sleeveless blue shirt, with a necklace with a peace sign, which suggested, Steward thought, that he might have been associated with countercultural ideas, and therefore dismissive of money, as many people associated with the counterculture were, but the past few years, the driver said, had brought him into unexpected personal wealth, which he had inherited, to begin with, from an uncle, and then had invested in real estate in ocean lots in Carmel.

"I figured this money just came to me, I better put it to work, as they say," he remarked with an obliging smile. "So how about yourself. Where are you from? What do you do?"

"I'm from Gallup, New Mexico, at the time being," Steward replied in his formal, courteous manner, "and I'm between situations. Guess you could say, I'm doing nothing."

"Hey, I can relate to that, brother!" the driver laughed. "Lot of people would be too up tight for what you're doing. Lot of people could not handle it, let me tell you!"

In reply, Steward just nodded his head.

"Nothing is extremely underrated," the happy youth added with a glance of his bright, blue eyes.

The peace sign, the Zen-like comment about being able to relate to nothing, Steward thought, as he set off by himself later, after the young man had turned off in another direction—now, there was a person of his own generation who had somehow found a way to contemplate and accept some of the more contentious or untraditional ideas of his peers and who yet was well on his way to being a real estate mogul in the new

school. Was there anything wrong in such an approach? Once he had a ready answer for such questions, he thought, but now he was ready to admit that questions of this kind were beyond his understanding.

Soon, also, he had another experience, bringing him further along the same thread of thought. He was on his fourth ride when the landscape opened up into a coastal grassland with the look of an African savanna, except on the landward side of the highway the grassy hills with scattered chaparral brush and oaks rolled up to fir-covered peaks that appeared to be miles inland. There he noticed what he first thought was a village with a two-towered church and Spanish-style buildings, but he found out later, from a roadside sign, that it was a modern castle, built by newspaper tycoon Randolph Hearst, in the "heydays of the Roaring 20's." "With 250,000 acres of ranch land and 14 miles of ocean shoreline, this storied estate was a coveted resting place for the most powerful and wealthy notables of American society."

More of the American dream of "making it big" that the Porsche-driving youth had positioned into so readily, Steward reflected. It was the dream Don Andrews and Kris and the members of the Thunder Mountain band all aspired to, was it not? That, too, he had regarded as too materialistic, in his quest for purity of purpose.

But was there anything wrong with this, either? Was it compromised in some way? No, he thought, there was nothing wrong with it. People had a right to strive to be happy, and yes, to be rich. The problem had been in his discomfort with it, or maybe just his lack of interest. The dream had no luster for him, but it had luster for Kris, and that was part of why she had left him for a more promising life in that respect.

He thought about that as he hiked along until he reached the next town on his map, named Cambria, to find there an appealing scene of motels and houses lining a road across from a boardwalk and a sandy beach with a low, flat rock extending out into the ocean. A man and woman were walking along the rock with three young children, showing them the tide pools. Another man was sitting by himself on a isolated finger of the rock, fishing in the quiet water of a cliff-sheltered nook.

An appealing scene, but Steward, thrown by it into a mood of loneliness, and seeing no place isolated enough to spend the night, headed out of town again along the highway. He had only gone a little way when two young men in a pickup pulled to the side of the road and waited to speak to him.

"We're going to a ranch here just out of town," one of them said. "About five miles out. You can ride in the back."

Thanks to this ride, Steward soon was in a rural area again, where the highway followed a cliff with a strip of beach visible below the cliff and pockets of grass in the shelter of overhanging rocks. He found a path

heading toward the cliffs and, after waiting to make sure no one saw him, left the road and followed it over the rocks and down through a cleft in the cliff to a solitary beach where waves crashed in.

For this one time, he would build a fire, he decided. He had bought some wieners and buns in the last town he had passed through. By the time the sun had descended low enough to impart the sunlight coloration to the clouds on the horizon, he was seated on the grass with a fire burning, holding his first hot dog on a stick above the fire.

His thoughts, as he ate and watched the sunset, returned to some of the themes of the day, in particular, to the various people who had passed through his mind.

Kris was the first person he thought of,—again. He recalled sitting with her on just such a beach in Goleta on the evening when he and she (later at his apartment) had first slept together. She had left Santa Barbara soon after that to return to Los Angeles, though he had just moved up from Los Angeles to be where she was, and he had then followed her back down to Los Angeles again. It had been a whirlwind of a romance, really, without much discretion on either side. She had been too young to commit herself to so much, he reflected.

"I have to keep that in mind," he said. "I have to remember what she was and do my best to understand her and help her any way I can."

Next to enter Steward's mind was his father, Joe. If his father was in a down mood, Steward thought, he would need to respond as strongly as he could during his brief stay in Minnesota. His father would want him to remain in Minnesota. But he would not be able to remain in Minnesota, now was not the time for that. He would need to continue his private explorations, he would need to draw the threads together somehow, in his own mind, to the experimentation and intellectual concerns that had been at the core his life for the past several years, since college.

That was where Matt and Mary Brandt would come in, Steward thought. They had a special place in his life as representatives of the life in the counterculture that he and Kris and they had shared. There was something related to them that he needed to conclude. O'Rourke had been part of it, also. They had shared in a process too broad and nebulous to be put in words, but he knew what it was, and he knew it had to be taken to its logical conclusion.

Steward mulled that over for a while, but by the next morning, his imminent visit with his former wife was foremost in his mind again. When his first ride mentioned that he was headed for the nearby intersection with the 101 freeway and then directly into L.A., and offered for Steward to ride along, Steward agreed at once.

"I guess I've seen enough of the ocean for a while," he said.

He was glad in late afternoon to finally make the phone call he

assumed she would be waiting to receive. But Kris, after a moment of hesitation, expressed surprise at his presence in L.A.

"I did see the letter, but I didn't read it really closely yet," she said. "I'm sorry, Tom."

So that was what it had come to, Steward thought, he was not even worthy of a thorough reading of his letter anymore.

"Kris, I can go right on," he said. "I can just pass through. I won't be offended."

"Oh, that's ridiculous, Tom! Where will you sleep? I'm going pick you up. If I can locate a car!"

She did borrow a car from someone and a half hour later drove up to a corner in Hollywood he had walked to in the meanwhile.

In her shorts and red blouse, with her blonde hair neatly arranged, she looked shapely and attractive as always, but something was not right. She seemed distracted and distraught.

"Tom, I have to tell you right away," she said. "I'm living with David now. We're sleeping together."

"I know you have your own life," he replied, but he was alarmed at the intensity of emotion he felt at once with respect to this man that he still associated with the breakup of his marriage.

"I don't want you to be hurt by it," she said.

"I'll try not to be," he said. "I just thought we could talk for a while as old friends."

"I'd like that, too."

"Has it been good with David?" he asked.

"Has it been good? I don't know," she said. "It's better than being utterly lonely, I can tell you that! But, I'm sorry, Tom, I don't mean to burden you with my problems."

"No, that's okay, Kris. My life isn't perfect, either."

"I've been sick, Tom. We've both been sick, Dave and I. He got the clap with someone, when we were apart for a while, and he didn't know it, and he gave it to me. So now, you know, it's embarrassing, it itches, it wears me down. You must think I'm a wreck."

"I've never thought that about you for anything," he said. "I think you made some hard decisions, trying to be independent. You've been brave. It doesn't sound like it's your fault anyhow."

"No, it isn't," she said. "But I drove him off, you know, just like you. I've been good at that, at least."

"You didn't drive me off."

"I left you, though. It comes down to the same thing."

"How is the band doing?"

"We still have our hopes, you know. We can talk more later."

With so much talked about so quickly, it seemed a lot more would be

discussed in the evening ahead as they pulled up to a housetop hill where, as she explained, the band and their girlfriends lived together and shared the rent. But the inside of the house was a gloomy mess and Steward did not encounter the welcome of the past. David, Kris's brother John, and the bass guitarist Steve were the only ones home. David was clearly pained to see him. John and Steve said a perfunctory hello and left at once for somewhere else. Then Kris and David disappeared into a back room and Steward heard them arguing.

Steward waited expecting Kris would soon return, but an hour went by and then another, and when she did return she looked weary and her hair was in disarray.

"Tom, I'm so sorry to just leave you here," she said.

"No, Kris, I came at the wrong time."

"David doesn't like you being here. He's angry."

"I can leave, Kris."

"No, Dave and I discussed it. He and I already had something planned, a party, kind of, to listen to this group we just heard about, just an LP. We may stay over there, Tom, I'm sorry."

"No, Kris, it's my fault. I should have given you a better warning."

"You tried."

"Well, I guess it's goodbye then."

"Yes, I'm sorry, Tom. We'll talk another time."

She came up to him to hug him and stood in his arms briefly, but he felt no remnant of the physical charge that had once happened when they made physical contact with one another.

He slept in a side room she showed him. There was music later in the living room, but he didn't go out to see who it was. At the first light of dawn he hiked down the hill and out to the freeway.

By noon he was already at the state line in Needles. By evening, he had made it to Flagstaff. He was thinking about where to spend the night when he walked past a train station and discovered the eastward train was due in an hour. A ticket to Gallup was $14. He still had $23 from the amount he had allotted himself for his trip.

He had made a mistake in visiting Kristine, Steward reflected as he watched the familiar landmarks outside the train window along the highway between Flagstaff and Winslow that he and she had traveled on together so often. He had tried to be understanding and helpful, as he had resolved, and to some extent he had succeeded, but he had to admit to himself that she no longer even looked to him for that. She had increased the distance between him and her. She would continue to increase it. Too bad her life had brought so much travail, but he did believe what he had told her, that she had shown great character and bravery in striking out as she had for her own independence.

320. Steward decides that America is found in a vast mosaic

"Looking for America"—it was a theme and personal ambition that Thomas Steward had thought of many times since seeing the movie *Easy Rider* in Charlestown, West Virginia, in December of 1969; and he thought of it again, early on Tuesday, August 25, 1971, as he took a long last look at Gallup, New Mexico, before running, with his orange backpack slung over his left shoulder, to the passenger side door of his first ride of his next hitchhiking trip, to St. Paul, Minnesota.

"Where you headed?" the driver asked.

"Albuquerque, then up through Santa Fe."

"I can take you as far as Albuquerque."

"Sounds great. Thank you."

The red cliffs of the little town of Church Rock followed after that, then miles of the wide open mesa, dotted with sage and pinyons, with often a view of a distant road curving up over a hill or around a solitary outgrowth of rock or down into a jagged canyon and then out of sight, while Steward's mind went on.

Had he found America? All of it, surely not. But he had seen a vast section of it, at least, in his journey up through Utah and Nevada to the Bay Area then down the coast to L.A. and from there back to Gallup; and in that section he had observed, from his vantage point on the open road, that the immense land the pioneers had encountered was still there, and that their history was still all around, though fading off, just as his own history was fading off, as he had learned in San Francisco.

"Even at this moment, the history is here, and new history is being created," Steward said to himself.

"Where you off to after Albuquerque?" the driver asked after he and Steward had gone about ten miles. He was a bald, middle-aged man, maybe 15 years older than Steward, with a mustache and alert brown eyes. He was dressed in neatly pressed slacks and a short sleeve white shirt with a blue tie.

The tone of the question was not inquisitorial but suggested a true interest and curiosity.

"St. Paul, Minnesota," Steward replied.

"What's up there?"

"My family. I grew up there."

"Heading home, huh?"

"Yes, just for a visit."

"Then where you going?"

"New England, I think."

"What's out there?"

"Just some friends."

"How do you get out there?"

"Up through Canada, I think."
"Hitch-hiking, in other words."
"Yes."
"Well, I admire your adventurism."
"Thank you."
"Better not tarry too long on that, by the way. Canada gets cold."
"Yes, I know."
"You camp outside?"
"Yes."
"Right on the roadside?"
"Yes."
"You are an adventurer, aren't you?"

Soon they passed the little town of Thoreau, Steward noticed, where his four friends, the former VISTA volunteers, lived in or by the solitary house where he had been their guest at some evening meals. There Steward saw the blue bus in the backyard that the two of them that still lived in it had traveled in for more than a year while driving around the country looking for land. That brought him back to his thought process regarding "looking for America" as his conversation with his amiable driver of the moment faded off.

These friends in their blue bus were another example of "looking for America," Steward thought, another example of the great exploration of his peers. As his friends had described what they had done, they had not only looked at different places, they had tried them out by getting temporary jobs and actually living in the places for a while to experience them from a local perspective. They had lived in Washington for a while doing that, on the western side of the Puget Sound, working in a fish freezing plant, and they had lived in similar situations in Portland, Oregon and Eureka, California.

That kind of larger searching through living in situations not just looking at them was part of looking for America, also, Steward reflected. He had done that himself—had he not?—in the situations that had taken him from St. Paul to North Carolina to California, where he had met Kris, and then, with her, to West Virginia, back to California, and finally to Winslow, to wind up in Gallup alone.

Yes, that had all been part of looking for America, Steward replied in his mind; and, from this, he proceeded to lead himself through a series of memories related to these situations he had tried out himself, as he continued to gaze at the scenes of the New Mexico countryside that he was passing through at the moment.

North Carolina came to his mind first. He thought of the loop road winding down through the Dulatown hollow between the odd mix of modern and ramshackle dwellings. He thought of Ma Florence's three-

room house, with no running water or bathroom, and with the food set out on the table that she cooked for her grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and anyone else that cared to stop by. He thought of the rats at night gnawing below the overly blanketed bed that Ma Florence had prepared for him, thinking of him as a special guest. He thought of the newly painted interior of the community center and the alert eyes of the kids looking toward him as he talked about college and jobs. He recalled the cement-block church with its rhythmic, beautiful music and its emotional, authentic prayer.

Next to enter his mind was his former rowing teammate and old hitchhiking buddy, the red-headed former coxswain, medical corpsman, and war hero, Bill O'Rourke. He thought of traveling with O'Rourke on the "L" train in Chicago through the disparate neighborhoods with their names on shop and street signs reflecting the ethnic diversity of that great city. He thought of the walk from the Granville "L" station through the youth culture neighborhood of that time to O'Rourke's brother Patrick's Loyola apartment with its refrigerator door posters calling for demonstrations against the war and its clipped newspaper article about the "Chicago Eight."

He recalled, also, the rooftop in Indiana where he and O'Rourke had talked so earnestly about the "culture war." He recalled riding with the former coxswain over the San Bernardino Mountains into the metropolis of L.A. with his and O'Rourke's benefactors of the moment, the hippies from San Francisco, propounding on the "big vibration" and on "being a camera for the akasic record." He recalled sloshing with O'Rourke through the river-like streets of Pasadena in torrential rain; the garage home in East L.A. he and O'Rourke had shared; the picket lines he and O'Rourke had walked in together, exhorting people to boycott non-union grapes. An image came to his mind of O'Rourke sitting on his bed in their garage home with his backpack neatly organized and the poster behind him of Pancho Villa with a bullet bandolier.

Kristine DeSolt and the California world he had encountered through her brought yet another series of memories to Steward's mind. First came Kris herself, with her blonde curls wide as her shoulders and her girlish yet sophisticated face, her blue eyes regarding him with the unquestioning devotion she had granted him for a while; then came California the culture and place, with its endless freeways and sand beaches, its white-crested surf crashing in, its backyard pools and pool party guests talking of celebrities and making it big and acquiring a name; then the gracious, cheerful household of Don and Audrey Andrews, the fervent talks with Don about art in the modern world, the domestic manners brought by Audrey to America from New Zealand as a result of the interface of cultures that had occurred during the war in

which Don, the boy from Cleveland, had fought against soldiers from halfway around the world; the evening tea; the fireplace counter lined with awards.

Then West Virginia: the house on the hillside in Morgantown, above the university buildings and glass factories located on the Monongahela River; the meetings in the small office downtown; the downtown itself with its two-story brick buildings and sidewalk shops; the lonely farmhouse in Preston County; the storefront welfare rights office in Kingwood; the poor people ferried to town for shopping and the obligatory meeting; the inane role of provocateur for people who only wished to secure the necessities of life; Clara Shoats' mountainside cabin with its Mason jars of canned groundhog and its TV antenna high in the tallest tree; Rachel Locke in her flat shoes trekking up the long hill from Reedsville, her bag filled with coal lumps and food; her blind husband by the stove, coffee cup in both hands; the older sons unable to speak, grunting; the younger son alert with the hopes of a normal boy.

The America that he had found, Steward noted, was a mosaic formed of pieces as complex and diverse as these pieces of his personal memory; and yet, had he not found, also, that it was unified by the common pride in the people he had met of being American, and the common sense of being entitled thereby to American rights: the right of free expression, the right to participate in the democratic process? That was the glue that held the pieces of the mosaic together.

The "Sky City" pueblo of the Acoma Indians was the next topic to draw Steward and his driver into conversation as they approached nearer to Albuquerque, though still 60 miles out. The driver told Steward that he had driven out to Acoma one day when he had found himself with spare time, to ascend a staircase carved in the sandstone cliff, the only entry to the mesa from the surrounding flat land.

Steward and his driver could see the mesa from the highway, about a quarter mile to the south, with its cliffs on all sides. It was a mile long in an east-west direction, the driver said, and 367 feet high.

"That village has been there since the 1200's, think of that, since the Middle Ages," the driver remarked. "They still have the same customs, the same design of their adobe buildings, the same language. They dance the same dances, handed down. Though I have to admit I don't know how anybody could verify that, but that's what they say."

Steward replied with his own story about Canyon de Chelley and the cliff dwellings of the Anasazi people, not mentioning that he had seen them with Joan Shannon. Even so, the moonlit tent he and Joan had camped in on the rim of the canyon returned to his mind.

"Well, I wish I could take you further," the driver said when he and Steward parted ways in Albuquerque. "But the day is still young, and I'm

a working man, you know. Wife and two kids. Got to do some serious pitching."

"Pitching, you're a baseball player?" Steward said.

"Ha! Ha! Nothing so exciting, I'm afraid. 'Pitching' as in 'sales pitching.' I represent a line of groceries. Go to the little stores. Offer them a deal. Imagine you can't think of anything more boring amidst all your adventures of the road."

"No, it sounds great. It sounds challenging. Good old honest work. And I appreciate the ride," Steward replied.

By noon, he had passed Santa Cruz, and soon after that, he saw the distant peaks of the Rocky Mountains, as his thoughts of earlier in the day rose up once again in his mind.

He saw more of the complexity he had pondered in the vistas he saw as the day went on: ranches with cattle grazing on the brown and yellow slopes leading up to the pine-covered Sangre de Cristo mountains, Hispanic style churches with adobe towers, walled in cemeteries, and aqueducts and fountains; irrigation ditches carrying water between fields of sweet corn; young people loitering in the sunlit streets of a town featuring art stores and crafts.

Late in the afternoon, there was a further sight for consideration when he fell asleep in the back of a pickup truck and was awakened to a rural scene of golden wheat fields on a flat landscape with a cloudless blue sky in the distance.

"Came off on a detour here," the driver said to him, coming around from the cab. "Probably this is where you want to get off. We're going north to Cheyenne. This highway here runs parallel to the freeway, up toward Nebraska. Signs said the detour is 32 miles."

"Sure. Well, thanks very much," Steward replied.

Jumping from the back of the truck then, he turned to see two tall silos on the narrow end of a grain elevator, obliquely angled with respect to his point of view and towering hundreds of feet directly above him in an unbroken surface of smooth concrete, painted white, and gleaming with sunlight against the blue sky.

The silos had no external features at all except for the giant word "COOP" painted in blue letters at the top of a central tower. A railroad track extended from the building in a long line bordered by scraggly trees between a sea of golden blades waving in the wind. In that direction, too, the sky was a perfect blue.

If a mosaic was the answer to where America was found, this was an interesting piece of it, Steward thought, so forthright in its functional simplicity with the unaffectedness of the plain-speaking people of this region which he had just entered.

It was near sunset, he noted as he proceeded up the highway through

a nearby small town with a water tower, a baseball field, a two-block main street, and a one-story school. Behind him, to the far west, was a bank of dark clouds above a distant ridge of mountains.

Outside of town, he came upon a bridge where the highway crossed a stream edged with cottonwoods. After waiting for traffic to pass, he left the road and found a secluded place with a waterside view of wheat fields and a far-off two-story farmhouse.

Like the other places he had camped on his trip, this place, which looked unremarkable from a distance, as he approached it at, became at once bigger and more real as he came near. It was a little world unto itself, a place off the beaten path where few people ever ventured, he imagined. But there were tall blades of clover along the edge of the field with pink flowers that when he examined were not each a single flower but an inflorescence of tiny flowers, each with a pale pink base and a deep pink outer petal. A red-winged blackbird shrilled from a tall cattail beside the stream.

Thanks to his first driver of the day, the grocery pitcher, Steward had with him a package of cinnamon rolls given as a good-natured farewell. In the town, he had bought baloney and orange juice. He placed a piece of baloney between two of the rolls, opened his quart of orange juice, took a swig, and ate his meal, watching the successive tones of sunset light on the farmhouse. If it rained, he thought, he would follow the stream back to the bridge and take shelter under it.

The sky grew dark and filled with stars as lights illumined the farmhouse windows.

Seeing the stars, Steward recalled the evening in Canyon de Chelley with Joan Shannon that he had briefly recalled earlier that same day. He had wanted her to fall in love with him, he admitted to himself. He had wanted to fall in love with her. He should have just said that. Why had he not? He thought again of Kris DeSolt, too, and the related emotions of love and passion, hurt and anger, took hold of him until he managed to throw them off.

Next morning, as he walked back along the stream, the rain clouds arrived that he noticed above the mountains the previous evening. As the rain began to fall, he reached the bridge and took cover under it until the storm had passed.

It grew hot after that, and all day, as he traveled, the weather grew more oppressive until hours later, at the edge of another small town, he was standing hitchhiking in the heat when he saw a girl of about eight approaching him on a bike. She stopped and took a bottle of soda pop from her backpack.

“My mother said to give this to you,” she said, smiling brightly.
“Really? Well, thank you very much!” Steward replied.

He waved back toward the house at that, but he could see no one at a door or window, and soon a ride took him to the freeway again, where he continued eastward toward Iowa. Now, of all the pieces of the mosaic, that one had been the most striking, Steward thought, the innocent face that had beamed up at him with the joy of being able to extend a gesture of kindness to a stranger passing through.

[Chapter 320 notes]

321. Back in Minnesota, Steward reconnects with his family and heritage

As Tom Steward, traveling on Interstate 40, reached Des Moines, Iowa, and turned north on I-35 toward the Twin Cities, he turned in his mind, also: toward his upcoming reunion with his father, Joe. He would also have reunions with other members of his family, of course,—his mother, sister, and younger brother,—but he expected these reunions to be simply pleasant, whereas his reunion with his father, he expected, would be involved and problematic.

At least, such had been the case in his recent visits home; and a recognition of this trend toward increasing intensity entered his thoughts as he stood at an onramp near Mason City, watching in the bright sunlight as a car left a filling station on the road below and came up the ramp toward him beside a field of tasseled corn.

He was glad for his closeness with his father, Steward acknowledged to himself. He was glad for the family history his father tried to pass on to him. If his father was in a downswing in his mood cycles, as Art had warned, then his father would be overly protective and intrusive in giving advice. He would have to excuse his father for that; it was part of the illness, he reminded himself.

Maybe, as lately had also happened in his father's down moods, his father would not only seek to help him as his father always did, but he would look for help in return. He would look for psychological support and assurance of being alright, as his father was inclined to do when his inner security crumbled.

"Well, as far as that goes, I'll do the best I can," Steward told himself.

He soon secured a ride—in the back of a pickup again,—and he sat looking out over the wide fields of corn and soy beans gleaming in the sunlight, as memories of his father passed through his mind. He recalled his interaction with his father in the basement room his father used as an office for his writing projects, talking about the WPA walls his father had been researching and the Mounds Park plaque inscription regarding the ancient River Warren his father had entered into one of his articles word for word. He recalled, also, his last "little trip" (as his father called it) to the old East Side locations where various events or situations in family history had taken place.

He would try to set up a trip like that during his upcoming visit, Steward thought. Activities like that seemed to help his father break out of his down moods, and he, the son, found them helpful in understanding his heritage. That interest in family history and heritage was something that he shared strongly with his father, more than any of his siblings, Steward thought.

Southern Minnesota passed by with many scenes of farm houses and

outbuildings within islands of trees amidst miles and miles of lush crops. Now and then, in the distance, he saw a lake or pond of the "sky blue" color of Minnesota promotions. With these scenes, he felt the world of his childhood settling around him in memories of his boyhood curiosity and pride in being a native son in such a landscape.

His last ride took him to the bridge where the road his parents lived on passed over the highway. From the top of the hill, he could see the two-lane road, bordered by overhanging trees, extending to the corner, about a mile away, where the family house was located.

He lifted his backpack to his shoulders and set out down the hill, looking off to the section of the lake that could be seen above the oak trees on the hill by the public beach. Soon came a shoreline bordered by cattails where red-wing blackbirds trilled as he passed. As this wider part of the lake, he could see the low bridge he had canoed under as a teenager to pass through the swampy low area there to a further, more solitary lake where he could be alone in his thoughts.

Next came the tan stucco house on the hill above the lake, where Steward saw that his father was standing in the family room, visible in the window, still dressed in his pajamas, though it was midday, a sure indication of the state of mind Art had warned of.

"There's Tom!" Steward heard his father say as he walked up the driveway to the house.

From the sense of urgency in the voice and the hurried pace toward the door, Steward detected that his father was both excited to see him and, in his frantic way, preparing an appropriate face to greet him. He had witnessed often this act of mental rousing up by which his father tore himself from the separateness of his condition in order to attend to something of immediate importance, while never seeming able to fully escape his underlying anxiety.

When Steward reached the house, his father was at the open door.

"Thomas," he said, "You're early! Welcome home!"

"Got some good rides."

"Well, let me give you a big hug."

"Welcome home," said Steward's mother, coming forward to give him a kiss also.

For a moment, they stood in the family room together by the door, smiling at one another.

"Well, how about this?" Mrs. Steward said. "Dad was just on his way to clean up and get dressed. I'll make some coffee and we can sit and catch up on what you've been doing."

With that plan agreed on, the son came into the house, set his pack on the deacon's bench at the back door and went through the family room into the living room to look out toward the lake. From this view he could

see the lake he had thought of just a few moments before, the one he had used to canoe to, and he could see the radio towers on the hill beyond it with the red lights he had watched on many nights as he sat alone in the living room.

"Dad's not working today?" he said when he returned to the family room.

"He took a medical leave," his mother replied. "He's not been doing well, Tom."

"I noticed. Art warned me, too."

Joe Steward, when he returned to the sun-dappled family room table set with coffee and rolls, was cleanly shaven and dressed in a shirt of the yellow color he used to ward off his dark moods, but he betrayed his state of mind by sitting with head bowed, now and then looking up with a focus that seemed too intense.

"Well, we sure are glad to have you back home," he said, knocking several times rapidly on the table. "We'll have to do something special."

"I was thinking maybe a ride together back to the East Side," said the son, following his plan.

"I'd love to do that. Yes."

"How about Sunday evening? I'm going to leave on Monday."

"Monday already!"

Thomas had decided on this timeframe while in transit from Iowa. He had decided, also, that he would proceed with his plan to hitchhike to New England, to Matthew and Mary's farm. He would stay in Minnesota for five days and leave for the farm on Tuesday, August 31. Assuming a four or five day trip across Canada (he planned to follow a northern route, above the Great Lakes), he would arrive at the farm in early September, early enough to help with fall chores.

With this much decided, and the "little trip" agreed on that he had hoped to go on with his father while at home, Tom Steward proceeded to the next several days of activities with his family, which soon included also his sister and younger brother. They were happy to see him, as always, his gracious and fair-haired sister Karen and comedian younger brother Nate, laughing and joking and asking him pleasant questions. He had never had the slightest dispute with either one of them.

Indeed, there were many occasions for him to recall his realization of his prior visit home: that, despite all the cultural exploration of his other world away from home, there was precious little amiss in this world from which he had come. Love, strong family values, a strong work ethic, a proud sense of heritage were readily at hand. He also recalled, however, a further realization that he had had on his prior visit: that the one fault this world did have was a kind of reverse property of its goodness; it was so grounded in its own validity as to preclude any different course of action

from those that had come before.

Along with this, Steward recalled his judgment, arrived at on his prior visit home, that this same cultural preclusion, repeated in many families like his own, had allowed the unquestioned early rise of the Vietnam War and, through the prevalent complacency (the much remarked upon "conformity" of the 1950's) had helped to create the felt need to break out, and as a result the flight to the counterculture in so many of his generational peers.

It was the "society without opposition" of Herbert Marcuse. He had heard that quote somewhere, perhaps in his experiences in VISTA, perhaps from one of his fellow volunteers.

It occurred to the son, also, that his father was representative of this "society without opposition" in his lack of questioning and inability to abstract. Many times he had posed questions to his father, as he might have to his friends, regarding what this or that meant to him (especially regarding the cultural past), but his father never replied, as a friend might have done, with a thoughtful analysis. Surely, this was a quality that had made it difficult for him to emerge from self-preoccupation, depriving him of a possible avenue to a more expansive outlook.

Of course, his father's mental condition was much more complex than that. Of this, the son was newly aware after several days of befriending, cajoling, prodding, challenging, and, at times, accusing his father in an attempt to jar him loose from the hold of his depression. But Joe Steward was adept at turning everything back upon himself in what seemed an anger of self-contempt.

"Intrapunitive" was the term for it,—Thomas had learned it from the briefings he had attended on the psych ward in Gallup.

Young Steward had just learned, also, the disturbing fact that his father had had electroshock treatments just a few months before,—and not of his own free will; he had been committed by Mrs. Steward due to his worsening situation. That was the reason for the occasional confusion; sections of his brain had been blocked from ready access.

The medicines added to his father's confusion, also, Thomas had observed. They seemed to cause him often to be sedate or sleepy. He spoke of feeling like he was moving within a fog that he could not dispel. It was so hard to reach him in this condition.

There were numerous apologies, also, apologies such as no amount of forgiveness could abate, as was the case when father and son began on the trip to the old neighborhood,—as planned, on the evening before young Steward's departure for Canada.

"We've been looking forward so much to having you home," Joe Steward said, "and now I just can't break out of this. I'm sorry if I have to be like this when you're home."

"You're fine, Dad," the son replied. "Let's just enjoy this."

Their trip took them down a familiar route down Payne Avenue, the main street for the Swedish American community Joe Steward had grown up in, to the building there where Grandpa Art Steward had had his bar. There they paused to reflect on the old stories connected with that. Then they continued over the railroad tracks past the old Hamm's brewery to the warehouse where Joe Steward had worked as a truck dispatcher.

Father and son got out there to ascend the four steps to the dock and peer into the dispatcher's office. Through a small window on the door, the dark interior no larger than a large closet could be seen.

"Doesn't look like much," said Joe. He appeared to be reforming the memory in his mind. "But we had a stove in there, and a desk and a lamp. You kids used to come all the way down here on your sleds in the winter. You remember that?"

"Yes, I do."

Next they went to look once more at the store front building where Grandpa Art had had his shoe repair shop and where Joe Steward had worked after his first "nervous breakdown."

"Grandpa knew what I needed," Joe said. "He knew I just needed to get doing something. I didn't have any gumption, just like now."

"You shown plenty of gumption in your life, dad, if you ask me," the son replied.

"When I've had to, when I've been forced to, maybe. But I don't have any self-discipline. I don't have any character."

Young Steward let it go at that, seeing there was no way he could break through with comments of this kind, but he could see that the effect he had hoped for, of prying his father out from his down mood, was in fact occurring. He watched for the next landmark, the two story box-frame house where the Steward family had lived in his childhood. There again, father and son parked at curbside to recount old stories.

Leaving the house, they drove past the store front shop on East 7th Street where Grandpa Art had lived in the back of his shop and had died of a heart attack alone.

Then came Mounds Park and the view from the bluffs of the river and railroad tracks below. Father and son walked along the bluff to a picnic area where they had used to go for family "pow wow's."

From the southeastern edge of the grass, they could see the tracks below, by the river.

It was a marvelous view, thought Thomas, evoking so much of his and his father's common past, with the sun gleaming on the river, which bent off to right (to the south), and on the two-part lake (called Pig's Eye) through which a section of tracks passed on a causeway. There was a

great Y of tracks, he noted, the southern arm of it following along the river past the old round house and a line of industrial buildings; the northern arm, much more intricate in design, fanning out from a half dozen central tracks into a harplike configuration of 20 or more tracks around the eight tracks comprising the "hump" used for letting the boxcars coast down to join them into trains.

A diesel engine with yellow lights blinking passed on the track below the bluff and continued unto a central track marked with red semaphores. It emitted a wail lasting several seconds, and then two wails in quick succession and of shorter duration.

Father and son found an old path in the woods and descended a long straight stairs to a kind of platform below the hill with a fire wall and fireplace surrounded by overhanging trees.

"This was our secret place," said Joe Steward. "Or so we thought."

"When was that?"

"In high school. This is where we'd have our Glee Club meetings. We'd build a fire here and sit around singing. All the good old songs, you know,—'Peg of My Heart,' 'There's a Long Road Winding,' 'Give My Regards to Broadway.'—We thought we were pretty good."

A simple fact, but again young Steward noted the immediate positive effect on his father's state of mind, evidenced by changes in facial expression and posture.

At home later, father and son sat in the living room, watching the daylight fade on the lakeside scene.

Now it was the son's turn to talk as he described his plan of hitching out across Canada to Montreal and then down to New Hampshire to the farm.

Struggling to not betray his annoyance, Thomas endured the fatherly questions and concerns (which he knew were well-intended and exaggerated by his father's anxiety) regarding his lack of money and practical plans and the possible dangers of camping out alone.

"But where will it all end?" Joe Steward said.

"If I knew that, dad, I wouldn't need to go."

"Sometimes, you know, you'll have to settle down."

Thomas thought about this statement of "settling down" as he sat in the living room, after his father had gone to bed, with the red lights on the far side of the lake blinking in the distance. In this statement, he detected the implication that all of his heartfelt searching and earnest situational trials added up to no more than the cultural equivalent of "sowing wild oats."

He found the prospect of returning home disturbing. If he did come back, ever, would matters of such import at the moment just fade away as the follies of youth?

Thinking of this, he felt all the more eager to return to the open road and continue his journey to meet with friends who had shared in similar experiments in the years since college.

322. Steward hitches to the farm looking for a synthesis of ideas

There was one more intense interaction between Tom Steward and his father, on the side of the highway where his father brought him the next morning to begin on the final leg of his hitchhiking trip, across Canada to New England.

"We'll see you again, Tom, won't we?"

"I imagine so. Yes, of course."

"Life is going on here, too. We'd like you to be part of it, when you come back."

As with his father's "settle down" remark of the previous evening, this "we'd like you to be part of it" remark of the current day resonated in young Steward's mind for a long time as he made his way up Highway 61 along the route that his family had employed many times in his childhood for "going up North," as Minnesotans say it.

Just south of Lake Superior, in West Duluth, Steward wound up being let off at the junction of Highway 2 and Highway 61 and walking from there for several miles on a four-lane section of the new highway along a ridge of Thompson Hill above St. Louis Bay. From the high elevation there of about 1000 feet, he could see off to the northeast, across the bay, to the silver-colored steel central arch of the Blatnick Bridge (which spanned the bay at its mouth from the docks of Superior to the downtown buildings of Duluth). Beyond the mile-and-a-half span of the bridge, and lined up in parallel above it, were the harbor basin, the Park Point sandbar, and the great lake itself, a crystal blue mass opening out, in the direction of its long northeasterly main axis, as far as the eye could see to the northern horizon toward which Steward was headed.

The gray shape of an oar ship moving across the basin caught Steward's eye, awakening a memory from out of his distant past. The memory was of the same basic view, though Steward recollected a smaller older bridge that had swung on a kind of hinge at the entry of the bay to the harbor basin. In this memory, he and his brother Art stood with his father next to the produce truck his father had driven when he and Art were not yet in school. The occasion was a trip he and Art had made with their father to learn what their father did for a living.

He recalled his father saying, "See, this big 'bay,' they call it, down below us here, it flows north toward that bridge, and that big lake there is Lake Superior. It's foggy out there now, but you're not going to believe it, boys, this lake is so big you can't even see across it. And you see all them big ships and them big docks?"

To which, as he recalled, he had answered with an eager "yes."

"Those are oar boats. They fill them with iron ore from up north and these boats carry the ore all across the great lakes, there's five of them,

out East somewhere where there's a lot of coal. They burn the coal to heat the ore and the ore melts and gets so hot it glows like an orange light, and they pour it into molds, kind of like your popsicle molds, only much, much bigger, to make iron."

Steward had not thought for many years of this image,—of the glowing orange liquid being poured into molds,—but this image, coming back into his mind on this morning, as he walked above St. Louis Bay, brought a poignant sense of what his father had meant to him at that young age,—what a giant, what a hero, his father had been, and how sweet in his tenderness toward him and Art.

"Life is going on here, too. We'd like you to be part of it, when you settle down," he heard his father saying.

Steward's next ride took him through Duluth past the Aerial Bridge, where, as he passed, with window open, he heard the low blast of the horn that announced the bridge was about to lift. People were lined up, waving, along the light house pier beside the canal as a freighter approached the bridge on its way to the harbor basin, with the sailors waving back and hundreds of sea gulls taking flight above them. That scene evoked many memories, also, of trips to Duluth with his father and other members of his family in previous years.

By early afternoon, he had reached Silver Cliff, just north of Two Harbors, where the highway followed a roadbed carved out of rock more than a hundred feet above the water. By chance again, he wound up walking. He was glad for the brisk air with its scent of pines, and glad for the view of the lake, glittering with sunlight to the eastern horizon. Ahead of him, to the northeast, the shoreline extended in a jagged line of pine-bordered rocky beaches. Along the highway, the sumacs were red and some leaves on the birch trees were yellow; the first sign of autumn.

The world was so grand, so large! Steward thought as he continued northward past the cabins, motels, restaurants, curio shops, and tourist attractions along the lakeshore. It offered so much! The future was ahead without definition! But his roadside parting of hours before with his father still repeated in his mind.

It was not his father's parting words so much that Steward thought of as the day went on, however. He began to think instead of the look that had come to his father's face as he and his father had said goodbye. What struck him was that what the look had said was "Please help."

As soon as Steward realized this and verbalized it in his mind, he started to feel sad and lonely. His sadness and loneliness increased as he continued north toward the Canadian border through the Minnesota towns of Silver Bay, Grand Marais, and Grand Portage.

Let out around sundown just north of the border, in Thunder Bay, Ontario, at the junction of Highway 61 and the Trans Canada Highway

17, Steward walked toward town along the Harbour Expressway and soon found himself alongside a college campus, which he detoured into looking for a store to buy food. He found a street with shops catering to students and bought some lunch meat to eat with his bread which he had baked several loaves of with his mother's help before leaving Minnesota.

He sat by himself on a secluded area of the mall, cutting his bread and making sandwiches with no notice from anyone as the sky grew dark and students emerged from buildings and walked to the parking lot next to the campus, where the night lights had come on.

It was a commuter campus mostly, Steward surmised. The last classes were over and students were leaving the campus in their cars. There were a few students, though, who walked toward the lighted houses on a street beyond the wooded area that bordered the campus. Steward walked in that direction, also, and found a secluded place in the woods where he could set out his sleeping bag without being seen.

The sight of the lighted houses made him feel lonely. He felt more alone then he had felt since leaving Gallup for California almost a month before.

He thought of his father again. Was he deserting his family at a time when he was needed? Could he go back somehow and not lose his own identity? He was starting to think that maybe his father was right that he needed to settle down and decide on some course of action.

He was glad to see the sky lightening in the morning. When the sun first appeared, he was already walking toward the highway.

An hour later, having secured a ride out of Thunder Bay, Steward was hiking down a long, winding hill, with a line of pines and birch trees on one side of him and, ahead, a view of pine-bordered bays opening up along a curving section of the Lake Superior northern shore.

Reaching the bottom of the long hill, where no human buildings or indeed presence of any kind could be seen except for the traffic passing on the highway, he paused at a place where the highway passed over a river rushing down from the hills. He walked back along the river until he was out of sight of the road, and took a bath in the cold water, letting the air serve to dry himself. He had no towel.

Gone were his concerns of the previous night, and the sadness and loneliness of the previous day. He dressed and, with his pack strapped to his waist, headed out along the two-lane highway that bent in and out of the densely wooded shoreline as far as he could see.

He had found America, he thought. He had done that much, at least. Now he just needed to find himself. That would be the last great task of his odyssey. The question he needed to ask himself, he knew, was the one that he had heard many times in his weeks on the open road: "Where are you headed to?"

"So you're still searching, ey, still looking?" one of his drivers, a young Canadian with his girlfriend beside him, remarked at one point after Steward described his destination of New England and his uncertain plans thereafter.

As he made this remark, the driver gestured with two fisted hands, as if to imply this was a strong, vital thing to do, while his companion smiled at Steward and nodded in approval.

"Yes, I guess so."

"How are old are you. man?"

"27."

"Good for you!"

Later, thinking of that, Steward contemplated how close to the edge he was of the age when he could keep on searching as he was doing without people regarding him as odd. At a certain age, not too far in the future, he would stop being regarded as a seeker and start being regarded as a drifter.

The object of the journey should be arrival, he thought, and not just physical arrival but intellectual and philosophical arrival also. He would have to work it all out into an answer or at least into some kind of understanding that would take him into the future.

At Sault St. Marie, Steward saw ore boats passing through the locks, with the bridge just beyond linking the United States and Canada at the juncture of Lake Superior and Lake Huron. By late afternoon, he was at Salisbury where the emissions from the nickel plants had turned the land all around into a treeless landscape of rock and ash.

Then came the small towns of the more populated areas of eastern Ontario as he left Lake Huron and followed the highway due east toward Ontario and Montreal.

Nightfall found him at the town of North Bay on Lake Nipissing. Let out there, he walked to a marina three blocks from the highway and bought a hot dog in a lakeside stand. Then, when dark came fully on and the park grew deserted, he threw his pack onto the flat rooftop of a tourist center and shinnied up the pipe to spend the night out of view.

He sat on the roof with his sky map, looking at the constellations that he recalled having explained to Joan Shannon. Whatever the future might bring, he thought, the upcoming reunion with the Brandt's would help him to find his way. Maybe, if the farm turned out to be a good situation, he would stay for a while. Maybe it would turn out to be a good life.

As a case in point, almost, or so Steward took it as in his ongoing thought process, a young couple picked him up the next day as he neared Montreal and after a thoughtful exchange of views wound up inviting him for supper and a stay overnight at their communal farm.

"We have a different set of causes to be concerned about in Canada.

Ours in Quebec Libre," the dark-haired young woman said in English with a French accent. "But the youth culture, it goes across borders, no? We all want the same thing, I think."

"To control our own lives," her companion threw in.

Indeed, there were more visual cues that Steward could relate to as he sat in the wood-floored plain farmhouse kitchen, conversing with these people from a different country and culture who seemed to share in a vaguely defined common cause.

There were three others at the table, in addition to the couple who had picked up Steward on the highway. The men were all bearded, as was Steward himself. The women had the straight hair and lack of makeup he had become used to among those he felt he shared values with. Outside the high windows, visible in a yard light, was sights such as he would not have seen as a child, a tall wall of corn and dark forms of leafy vegetables in a neat row in a garden.

Steward shared with the group some of the homemade bread he had brought from Minnesota, and when he left in the morning, after being taken to the highway that led south to Vermont, he felt he had made a further incremental step toward a definition of where he belonged.

The sky had grown cloudy. A steady drizzle came down. He would have perhaps one more night on the road, he thought, and tomorrow would arrive in New Hampshire at Matt and Mary's farm.

By that night, with the sky still gray, he was in Vermont by Lake Champlain. He stopped at a wayside rest across from a boarded up stand or shop of some kind, and, in throwing a scrap of paper in the trash barrel, discovered a plastic-cased 12-pack of wieners, still cold. He was the only one at the wayside. He ate the wieners with the remainder of his bread, looking off to the lake.

Later, with a steady rain coming down, he went over to look more closely at the abandoned stand and found that the side door was unlocked. Inside it was clean and dry with tables stacked in a corner. He also found there was a latch to secure the door from inside and a back window to go out of if he needed to.

"My last night on the road," he said aloud as he sat down on the floor to write in his journal. "At least, for a while."

Next day he was up again at the crack of dawn, hiking along the lake southward. The gray clouds had broken. The sun came up golden below one of the remaining few shards of clouds in the eastern sky.

He walked a good part of the morning. Now that he was close, he felt hesitant to appear at the farm. Why he didn't know. Surely he had been invited many times.

He reached the state line about suppertime and Concord in early evening with the sun already low in the sky. From Concord, he headed

out to the village of Canterbury and then out on a dirt road, following a map Mary had sent him.

The walk was further than he had expected. He continued in the dark, stepping unsteadily as the road was uneven and he could no longer see the surface of the road to plant his feet squarely.

There, at last, at a turn of the road, with a low hill rising up on his right side, he saw a collection of buildings, one of which had the outline of a barn against the stars in the sky, and another a house in which the front windows were lit.

Going up to the door, he looked inside before knocking. There was no mistaking the black-haired, high-browed woman that looked toward him. It was Mary Brandt.

"Thomas, you did come! You made it!" Mary chimed coming forward to hug him. "Matthew! Matthew! Thomas is here."

A second figure appeared then and Steward was surprised at what he saw. It was Matthew alright, but he had shaven off his wild hair and beard and had returned himself to the shorn head look of the lanky lad of four and a half years before that Steward had rowed with in an eight-man crew and in a two-man skull.

Steward grinned as Matthew came across toward him.

"Oh, my God, Matthew," Steward said. "The Army get a hold of you or something?"

"What I want to know, Stewmeat," Brandt replied in his flat voice. "Are you going to be there tomorrow, six o'clock sharp, when I put the shell in the water?"

Steward laughed. "Just about then, I'll be coming back from running and doing the stairs."

Brandt came across the room and grabbed a hold of his old rowing doubles partner. He lifted Steward off the floor, pack and all, and spun around several times with Steward in a bear hug.

It was odd seeing that buzzcut head again with the virile toughness of features that were Brandt's natural visage, Steward thought later as he lay in his new bed, but odder still was how his old friend's eyes had not changed back to the boyish eyes he remembered. Even without the long hair and beard, the eyes still were what some of his fellow workers back in Gallup would have called "weird," intending that as a expression of approval.

What a shock, though, Steward thought, to find Matthew so changed in physical appearance after coming so far looking to him as someone with a similar experience in the counterculture who could point the way to the future when coming out of that. Surely, Matthew had cut off his hair and beard for a reason, Steward thought. He was eager to find out what the reason was.

323. Steward and Brandt get along working but talking is strained

Matthew Brandt reacted to Tom Steward's presence on the farm with a mix of feelings such as others might have tried to rationally and verbally sort out, but, as was typical of him, he felt no inclination to analyze or articulate this major change in his immediate situation.

One thing Brandt was vaguely aware of, however, without submitting it to analysis or words, was that he was glad for the presence of another man on the farm and glad for the presence of an old friend. He had sorely felt the absence of Dennis Kelly and Darren Houghten, and he missed having Dennis as his work companion each day. But this, too, Brandt had never admitted to himself, and he had never mentioned to anyone the sadness he had carried within him since he had, in effect, driven away his closest friends by his show of violence.

Brandt also had some negative feelings regarding Steward's presence on the farm that he was aware of, but had not taken beyond premonition of a looming threat. And this was that: while Steward was, indeed, an old friend and acted like one; while Steward could be counted on to work hard, and so, with no complication, would fit into the physical regimen of the farm; while Steward could be trusted to take an interest in details of the farm, such as what to do about crops, animals, and machinery (in much the same way as Steward showed an interest in just about everything brought to his attention); yet, Steward was one of the careful-talking, literary types Brandt had heaved away with such contempt when he had driven off the people he had referred to as the "slackers." Without spelling it out for himself, Brandt sensed that Steward had brought such preciosity back to the farm.

In addition to this, there was an economic factor, and again this was something Brandt had not laid out in his own mind but merely sensed as a potential problem. Since the evening by the hay wagon when Matt, Mary, Gail, and Jane had agreed to pay off the others for what they had put into the farm, he had become aware of a new reality: debt. He was newly aware, also, of a main corollary of debt, the extreme importance of money. As never before, he was continually scheming for what he needed to do, in the general state of affairs, to turn the farm into an enterprise that could earn a profit. Now how would Steward fit into that? Brandt knew from past experience with Steward that Steward was impractical and would have no sense at all of such financial concerns.

On this score, Brandt had noted with amusement and some alarm how Steward, before going to bed the first evening, had brought forth a 20 dollar bill from his pocket to help pay for food. Brandt suspected that that crumpled bills Steward had flashed at the same time were Steward's total assets other than his backpack.

Brandt realized, though, that, whatever might be his unarticulated reservations about his former doubles partner, Steward was not at fault. Steward had been invited to the farm. Brandt himself had invited him, and with no qualifications. Mary had sent Steward invitations, also, Brandt was quite aware. The gist of all these communications had been that, as an old friend from the old days, Steward was welcome at any time to stay as long as he was inclined to.

Of course, these invitations had gone out before the members of the original collective had fallen out with one another, Brandt realized. No one had warned Steward that the situation had changed.

Matthew was also aware of how pleased he was, on the first morning of Steward's presence on the farm, when he came down from his yurt on the hill, entered the old farmhouse, as he did each morning for breakfast, and found his former doubles partner seated at the dining room table, cup of coffee in hand, and dressed and ready for work. Seeing that, Matthew felt a revisitation of the sense of comradery that had held the members of the rowing team together back in that time when youth and the prospect of the river scene and racing had been enough to spice the vibrant days with excitement and joy.

"Mary said you started at 6," Steward said.

"Yes, I do," Matt replied.

"What's on dock today?"

"I was thinking of clearing out some rocks from this field we rent. We call it the 'ten acre field'."

Brandt had originally had some lesser task planned, but he could not resist the thought of putting his old team mate to the most arduous task he could imagine. He found it amusing to observe how Steward's face lit up at the prospect of physical exertion, a trait Steward had had on the rowing team, years before, that had made him the brunt of many good-natured jokes.

"These are some goddam big rocks, Stewie," he said. "We're going to have to pry them out with poles."

"Sounds great," Steward said in just the voice he had used to speak in on the dock as they readied the boat. "What's to get ready?"

"Find some metal pipes for crow bars, check the oil in the tractor, rig up rake, and we're ready to go."

Due to the early hour, no one else was up yet in the big farmhouse, though Steward could hear footsteps and children's voice upstairs. He had not even exchanged a greeting with the others, and in fact was not even sure anymore who else still lived at the farm. He had met Jane Larue and Gail Martin earlier, in D.C., and he had met their four children. He had also met Darren Houghten and Dennis Kelly, at that time, but he was not aware that the original group at the farm had broken

up leading to the exit of Houghten, Kelly, and the others.

Brandt and Steward did see Mary, though, as they left the house and headed across the yard toward the shed. She was just leaving her cabin in her blue jeans, red and blue flannel shirt, and sturdy construction boots, with her black hair pulled tightly back from her forehead, beneath which the serious eyes lighted with recognition and good cheer as the two men came across toward her.

"Looks like a good one!" she chimed in her hearty voice, nodding toward the woods on the perimeter of the farm, where the sun was rising, an intense point of radiance before the metallic blue background of a cloudless dawn sky.

"Yes," Matthew replied. "Gonna heat up, though."

"Doesn't bother me."

"What you up to today?"

"Squash from the garden. Going try some canning."

"With Gail and Jane?"

"Yes, the whole crew," she replied, and then added, nodding at Steward. "I see you got yourself some good help there."

"Just the kind we like, strong and stupid."

At that, Steward laughed.

"Don't mind him, Stewie. He doesn't like to be shown up, in the work department."

"Guess this is not his day then," Steward answered with a grin.

With that brief reprisal of the boat house levity of former years, they set off together on the tractor as they had set off in years past in a double skull. Brandt was at the wheel, Steward standing beside him, as they turned out of the shed and headed up the dirt road overhung with leaves of trees and dappled with morning sunlight.

"How big are these rocks?" Steward yelled into Brandt's face to be heard above the noise of tractor motor and the chain and pipes clinking and clunking in a wagon they were pulling.

"Some of them, we can toss in the wagon. Some, we can leave on the ground and drag them off with the chain."

"I'll help you with the big ones, Mattie. I know you have a problem sometimes."

"Just don't hurt yourself, Steward. I don't have time to take you to a hospital."

From the farm to Stumphand's, it was for Matthew a familiar ride up the dirt road past the old farmhouse and the guest cabins and then through the maple woods extending on both sides, around the curve at the top of the hill and left on the "Y" in the road there at Stumphand Moore's mailbox, from which his paint worn white house could be seen with the saddlelike depression in the middle where the roof beam was

broken in, though they did not go to the house but off at an angle to the ten acre field where they would be digging up rocks.

It was a world that, in the most rancorous days of the collective, as the initial ideals had sunk into rapid demise, Brandt had always held to as somehow embodying the plain-speaking, no-bullshit farm world of his Minnesota boyhood (though Brandt's own childhood farm had never been in such a neglected condition as Moore had lately allowed his own farm to sink into).

For four hours, they strained together in the hot sun as the day grew more and more humid, prying out rocks from the hard soil and lifting them into the wagon or dragging them off to the side of the field with the help of the chain until there was a pile of rocks on the side of the field about waist high and they were both drenched with sweat, including even their pants and socks.

Then came lunch and the other strain of conversation for two quiet men who felt a considerable bond with one another and had a great deal of a common past; but who, nonetheless, had not talked together on a one-to- one basis for more than a year, since they had talked by the Potomac River in D.C. at the time of the 1969 Moratorium demonstrations. Brandt had no words at all in his mind that were waiting to come forward. Steward had a wealth of words, but was not inclined to bring them forth except in an atmosphere of trust and shared intellectual concern, which he had not reestablished with Brandt.

Out of a sense of debt for the hard work just done, Brandt made an effort, however, leaning forward with his odd visage of shaved head and face overgrown (by this time) with a dark new stubble all around his head and neck like fur, from the midst of which his troubled eyes peered out with no sign of sympathy.

"So you're done with the gig out in New Mexico?" he said.

"Yes," Steward replied. "Put in my two years."

There was a considerable silence at this point as Brandt poured himself out a cup of kool aid and looked around at the stone walls surrounding the tiny graveyard in the distance.

Brandt nodded in that direction. "As you can see, these rocks can be put to a lot of uses."

"Yes, I've noticed," said Steward.

"Yea, see, Stewball," Brandt went on in his flat voice, "this whole goddam state was actually, at one time, a single big rock, and ever since then the crazy people who live here have been chipping away at it to get it to what it is now."

"Glad to join in the struggle."

There was silence again as they both ate quietly.

"So the big gig is over. You've been hitchin' around, I take it,"

Brandt ventured again. “Where all you hitch to?”

“All over the place,” Steward replied, and he listed some of them out. “Up through the reservation, Utah, Nevada, San Francisco, to see my brother, down along the ocean highway, to LA to see Kris.”

“You still keep in touch with her?”

“Yes.”

“How is she?”

There was something in how Brandt said this that indicated to Steward a lack of true interest, so he just said: “Fine,” to which he added, “All part of the journey, I guess.”

“What journey is that?”

“Oh, I don’t know. The great journey of life, I guess. The journey to find America, I guess.”

Brandt’s dark, stubbly visage with the keen, angry eyes staring out showed no indication that the journey alluded to was anything he cared to hear about.

“Well, me, I just been the plow boy here,” he said. “Trying to get the seeds in the ground and the rocks out, as you can see.”

“Yes, so I learned.”

They sat in silence again, finally cooled a little by the shade and breeze, though still with sweat streaming down from their foreheads.

“How about you?” said Steward.

“How about me how?”

“Oh, I don’t know. You and Mary. The farm. Has this been a good change for you?”

Brandt hesitated, realizing that this comment from Steward was the standard switch in conversation from one person to the other. Steward had made a try, at least, to say his part, and now, in his clumsy manner, he was trying to hand him the “speaker’s wand,” as Brandt had once seen done at a summer camp to train the kids to allow one person to speak at a time, the one holding the wand. Now he had the wand, Brandt thought, but he did not want to have it, and anyhow having it with Steward would not be the same as having it with his departed yurt partner Dennis Kelly. There was something of the solicitous counselor about Steward, something of the correctness and obligatoriness of the counterculture that he did not like, and that reminded him of the soft-speaking effeteness he had just gotten free of.

“What can you say, man?” he said, placing his hand on the ground to boost himself up, as if to say the conversation was done. “One thing you can say about it, at least, it’s real.”

“Yes, it does speak to a ground awareness,” Steward replied in his thoughtful manner. He had read about this “ground awareness” on his recent trip, in a Zen center in Berkeley, and had thought about it on his

quiet nights alone.

"'Speak to, speak to,'" Brandt mocked as he stood up, brushing the dirt off his soggy pants. "Where you come up with this shit?"

"I don't know. It's just an expression," Steward answered with a look of surprise.

"'Speak to, speak to,'" Brandt repeated, shaking his head. "Well, it will really speak to me if we finish these damn rocks."

"Amen to that," Steward replied, and he went back to work with the same outward show of energy as before, but inside he felt the lingering sting of the rebuke, which seemed to him harsher than his simple remark had warranted.

324. Steward learns of the farm's conflicted past and departed members

After Tom Steward completed his first day of hard work at the farm and parted with Matthew Brandt in the shed to go into the house to take a shower and get ready for supper, he thought again of how his former rowing teammate had repeated "speak to" with such contempt. Combine that with the cutting off of the hair and beard, Steward thought, and the implication was that Matthew was in the process of repudiating the counterculture on some extreme level. He had followed the progress of Matthew's distrust of intellectual pretensions and fine words, starting back in college, and he had observed that the distrust had increased in D.C. despite the counter influence of Mary, so he was not surprised to again encounter this attitude, but the level of vehemence surprised him.

At the supper table later, Steward had a further revelation as he waited with Matthew and Mary for the others to come down for supper. As of this time, he had not seen any of the others, though he had heard their movement upstairs and sounds of the children's voices.

The hearty farmgirl, Gail Martin, was first to emerge from the door to the steps upstairs, looking healthy and strong in her blue T-shirt and jeans, with her well-behaved children, Angela and "little Matthew" behind her. Next came the petite, red-haired Jane Larue, an immediate contrast to Gail in her more explicit feminine attire, on this evening a white blouse with tufted sleeves and an embroidered rose on each lapel. Her children, following her, were not so pleasant in appearance, however. Mandy looked troubled, as she often did, while Dylan held back from the table and glanced around with a defiant expression.

"Dylan, sit down, please," his mother said softly.

"I'm not hungry."

"Just try a little."

"I hate this stupid food."

The setting for the evening was corn-on-the-cob, long green beans (uncut), baked beans made from scratch (starting with dry beans), boiled potatoes, and roast beef.

"Why can't we have hamburgers and fries like normal people?"

"This is what we have. Just be grateful for it."

No one made an effort to assist Jane with her difficult son, giving the impression she did not engender much sympathy from the other adults for her dearth of skills in parenthood. From the stolidity of the expressions, Steward gathered that this was an ongoing affair.

The failure of more people to present on the scene was where his curiosity was soon directed, however.

"Where is everyone else?" he asked as he reached for food,—as did everyone else; the meal started without prayer or any kind of verbal or

formal announcement.

"Not here," said Gail.

"Not here ever," Jane added.

"Not here anymore?" Steward continued, having no sense that he was probing into a sensitive area.

"No, said Mary, "I guess you were never informed, Tom. I'm sorry. There were five others. They left about a month ago."

"And why was that?"

"Essentially, we just had a parting of ways," Mary remarked.

"With a little encouragement," said Gail.

That last comment brought a round of soft laughter from the adults and gleams of being in on the joke from the children, except for Dylan, leading Steward to conclude that there was more to this situation than anyone cared to tell him about at the moment.

Steward found out more about it after supper in the kitchen when he volunteered to do dishes and wound up with Jane Larue beside him drying as he set the dishes in the drainer.

"What exactly was the story with the people leaving?" he asked her as she talked with him in her quiet manner, often allowing her sentences to trail off without completion.

"Well, let's just say Matthew was not happy with them for all their evening noise and talking," she answered softly. "And things got out of hand. Matthew lost control."

"Lost control how?"

"Drove them out like some kind of Jeremiah. But I suppose he had his reasons, wanting the farm... He has his own goals, you know. The work ethic... I don't want to fault..."

"Ah, yes," Steward answered, meeting her green eyes strongly for an instant. She was a mysterious one, he thought, seeming to harbor an inner sanctum that she would not reveal for fear of having it treated with less respect than she felt it deserved. He was aware of a medieval quality in her Botticellian features, a delicate fineness like the elaborate swirls in a Celtic design. She seemed to have the sensibility of a mystic or poet, a quality not appreciated by the present group on the farm, he had already observed,—even by Mary, who was open intellectually but in the end wanted ideas to have a social or political aim.

That night, as Steward lay in his bed, in the room adjacent to the kitchen and dining room (he was the only one who slept in the ground floor of the house, as Matt still slept in the yurt on the hill and Mary in her cabin by the maple works), he had another revelation. He heard the front door of the house opening and closing, and then heard footsteps, which he recognized as those of Matthew, moving across the living room and dining room and up the steps to the second floor. A door opened

upstairs and a female voice rose in the darkness in a muted recognition. The voice was that of Gail Martin. Steward tried not to pay attention, but he could not help noticing that Matthew remained upstairs for a long time, and that, a half hour or so later, there was a rhythmic creaking of boards over his head. From this, Steward concluded that Matthew was having a sexual affair with Gail.

Finally came a third revelation. As Steward was passing through the house, he came upon Mary talking on the phone and leaning forward as she did in a posture of intense focus on what she was saying.

"Ellen, you did all you could, you were the very best of wives, and I know this has been such a great sorrow for you. Ellen, what happened was not your fault. Now you just have to go on."

There was silence as Mary listened.

"Well, I have you in my thoughts," she said. "Just remember that, Ellen."

Mary had glanced up in the middle of speaking, as Steward came into the house. As soon as she had hung up, she sought him out in the kitchen to explain what Steward had not been aware of until this moment, that Jim Morris had killed himself about a month before.

"He stopped to see me in Gallup," Steward said. "He must have done that about a week later. I didn't realize he was in such dire need."

"I'm sure you did all you could, Thomas," Mary said. "Jim left the war, finally, but the war never left him. Jim was a casualty of the war just like the guys who died in battle."

"I'm just so sorry to hear it."

Next morning again, Mary sought Steward out when he was working on the front porch. At Matthew's suggestion, he was boxing it in with 2x4's to make it possible to nail up storm windows found in the shed. Matt had explained how to do it.

"Have you seen the sheep yet?" Mary asked.

"Just from a distance."

"Well, come on, let me show you the set-up. I'm kind of proud of it. It's been my personal project."

Steward went forward gladly. Since arriving at the farm, he had not spoken with Mary on a one-to-one basis. Indeed, he had not done so at any time since last talking with her in the basement apartment in Morgantown, West Virginia, more than a year before. In the meantime, though, there had been many letters exchanged between him and Mary and, on this account, he had come to think of her as a special friend. Moreover, more than any other person, she had come to be for him a voice of reason and common sense amidst all the changes in the lives of their peers and in the counterculture they had all taken part in together.

"Thomas, you are not going to believe what a shepherd and farmer I

have become!" she said in her pleasant, upbeat manner as she led Steward to the barn.

As usual, Mary Brandt was dressed in sturdy, plain clothes,—at the moment, blue jeans, construction boots, and a man's tan Army shirt, left hanging outside of her pants like a dress. Her lustrous, thick, black hair was pulled straight back from her intelligent brow, which was fixed in her trademark frown, a frown that he knew from experience did not indicate disapproval of any kind but merely denoted her habit of focusing intensely on whatever the matter was at hand.

Mary had a bouncy quality in her step as she moved along,—she seemed to have become markedly healthier and physically stronger from her experience on the farm,—and she moved with a definite sway of the feminine structure of her middle body, a quality Steward was aware of as he walked beside her. She seemed more open in attitude and carriage somehow, in a subtle way more like a single woman, though she was not in any way coquettish or coy.

Steward found the whole effect disengaging, especially so owing to his months of virtual celibacy since his breakup with his former wife, but he had not the least inclination to regard Mary as a potential romance or sexual involvement; he saw her still as aligned with Matthew, as she had been the whole while he had known her.

"Well, the first thing I will tell you, Tom," she exclaimed with a sudden, bright look of her dark eyes, as she gently touched his arm to lead him through a gate. "We have 20 sheep now, 12 ewes and eight lambs, after our first successful lambing season this spring!"

In the barn cellar, Steward followed Mary to the door that led out to the barnyard to look at the barrier of 2x4's and plywood she had built into the door frame. It was about four feet high and had a narrow opening about two feet wide on one side to allow passage of only the new lambs, born the previous spring, into the interior of the barn where grain was set out for them.

"A big part of the business is in the lambs," she explained. "We fatten them up in the summer and sell them in the fall."

"Sell them for what?"

"For slaughter... I know, it seems harsh. But it's something else I've had to accept to be a farmer."

"How much do you get for them?"

"Lately, they've been earning about 50 dollars a head. So if you have a hundred lambs, you can make about $5000. That's my goal."

"How many were there this year?"

"25."

"You don't sell wool?"

"Yes, we do sell wool. From the ewes, not the lambs. I shear them

myself, using shears hooked up to a drive shaft from a gas motor. It works much better than an electric shears, but it's still a really hard job."

"How much does wool get?"

"Lately, about two dollars a pound. From a big ewe, you get about ten pounds a year. So that's $20 a ewe. If you have 50 ewes, which is what I would like to have eventually, you get about a thousand dollars a year. It all adds up."

Steward was impressed by how skilled and practical Mary had become and by how determined she was to apply her knowledge in this way. He felt he was learning, also, about how it was possible to make enough money on the farm to pay for food, transportation, and so on.

As he saw it, these money-making activities were something he could contribute to,—if he stayed on the farm for a while. He did not, however, carry this notion further to ownership of the farm and how that initial outlay of money—from everyone except him—had provided the platform upon which sustenance was possible.

Later, when Steward and Mary went over to Mary's cabin by the maple works to have coffee together, a more intimate conversation happened regarding events in Steward's life leading up to his arrival on the farm and the general situation at the farm including personal relations and the breakup of the original group.

Hearing from Steward that he had visited his former wife Kristine DeSolt in L.A., Mary was inquisitive about that.

"Well, one thing you have to say for her," Mary said when she heard about Kris's recent physical problems and her new life with David, "she showed a lot of courage in how she struck out for herself."

"Yes, she did," Steward replied.

"She was a good person for you, a good wife, a good friend, when you and she were living together."

"Yes, I know."

"It just couldn't continue, though, at the present time. She had to strike out. She was just too young."

Mary soon confirmed what Steward had suspected regarding Matthew's sexual relationship with Gail, to which she added details Steward had not suspected regarding the love triangle presently existing, with Matthew involved on and off with both women, and with Mary and Gail having talked about it and agreed to remain friends.

"That had something to do with the breakup of the farm, I think, too," Mary said. "The arrangement wound up putting a lot of pressure on Matt... One thing about Matthew that I admire very much is he can always be counted on to be direct and honest."

"Not verbal about it, though," Steward said. "Direct and honest in his actions."

"Precisely."

"Well, we're very glad to have you here," Mary went on soon later. "I'm very glad, everyone is, everyone likes you."

"Thank you."

"And it's been so great for Matthew to have an old friend around. I know he really misses Darren and Dennis."

Steward thought about this conversation later. He felt glad for it because Mary had spoken so highly of his positive contribution on the farm. He resolved to himself that that was what he wanted to do most of all, for so long as he remained on the farm. He wanted to be a positive influence by being a good friend to Matthew, by participating cheerfully in the chores, and by being an emotional bulwark to anyone who needed him. Surely Jane needed a friend, and surely the children, especially her children, needed adult attention.

325. Steward cleans a chicken barn, gets chickens for the farm

As each day passed in his new life at Cranston Farm, Thomas Steward felt more eager to be regarded as contributing to the farm, although he had not made any definite plans either to leave or to stay and no one had talked to him about this subject.

Steward had finished boxing in the front porch with storm windows as Matthew Brandt had asked him to do, a job that had taken him six days. He felt satisfied in having done a good job. He had even installed hinges on top of the windows to allow them to be swung out to let in fresh air. The next job he intended to do was to pick the apples on the apple tree in the pasture, a job Mary had suggested.

Then, on Friday of Steward's second week at the farm, Mary Brandt told the group at supper that she had come upon a note on a bulletin board in Canterbury Center with an offer for someone to obtain 50 free chickens in exchange for cleaning out a chicken barn. Steward volunteered at once to do the job.

"Well, it does make sense to have chickens," Gail Martin remarked. "We could set them up in that little shed behind the barn."

"That's what it was used for," Matthew said.

"We would have eggs and meat."

"We could even sell eggs," Jane Larue added softly. "Just put up a sign, out on the..."

"Or in town at the market," said Mary.

Pursuant to this discussion, on the following Monday, September 18, Steward drove the farm pickup truck to a hamlet called Hills Corner where the chicken barn was located.

First, though, at the request of their mothers, Steward brought Angela Martin and Dylan Larue to the school they attended near Canterbury Center. They had missed their school bus. He then headed due east along a dirt road called Baptist Road and north along a paved road labeled Shaker Road, following a map Matthew had drawn up for him.

Steward thus wound up traveling on the same road the original group (the self-styled "Woodstock family" of Matt, Mary, Gail, Jane, Dennis, and Darren) had traveled on the day they had first come upon Cranston Farm, as a result of which he came upon the Shaker Village the group had toured that same day.

Steward did not stop for a tour himself, but, seeing a sign calling attention to the village, and knowing of Shakers from his previous inquiries in American history, he focused on the village as the site of an experiment in communal life such as he himself (as he saw it) was engaged in at the present time.

From this perspective, as he drove slowly by, looking off to the

sturdy buildings, Steward was impressed by how substantial and complex this past experiment in communal living had been compared to the one he was a part of himself.

He could see at once the obvious differences in the approach of the Shakers versus the approach of his fellow farmers, differences reflective of the great changes in attitude and sensibility that a hundred years of American life had brought.

The Shakers had forsworn sexual activity, as he recalled. They had separated the genders into separate living quarters. They had held to a rigid set of beliefs and had followed a rigid work schedule.

As a result of which, of course,—he added parenthetically in his thoughts,—the Shakers had produced the simple, well-crafted furniture, clothes, and other goods that they had become known for. By contrast, the people at Cranston farm had stumbled over sexual complications in their determination to not dictate personal behavior or constrain sexuality with moralistic requirements. They had differed with one another regarding the importance of work and willingness to do it. In place of the strict religious tenets held to by the Shakers, they had adopted the vague idealisms of the Movement.

In such terms, at least, Steward assessed the situation, on this particular morning, as he passed through the neat grounds and buildings of the Shaker village and marveled at immense barn on the hill and the pasture below with its stone wall perimeter and human-made pond.

Though aware that Cranston farm, as an experiment in community, had failed to measure up to the initial high expectations he had first learned about in letters from Mary, Steward still regarded it as an genuine and important effort, in this regard. He was glad to have become part of the farm experiment to the extent that he had through working and living with the others, unsure though he was how long he would stay.

Knowledge of the troubled recent history of the farm, disclosed in his recent talk with Mary, had not made Steward less keen on taking part. In his idealistic manner, he saw the farm as a chance to do good. He could do good, he repeated to himself on this particular morning, by being a cheerful worker and thus reducing the physical burden on the group, and by interposing himself in such a way in the interpersonal dynamics of the farm so as to provide moral support and lessen conflict.

Arriving at the crossroads given, Steward spotted the white-painted two-story building that had been described to him, and found there a blue pickup truck in a bare dirt lot.

The door of the pickup opened and a thin, balding, middle-aged man in a blue denim jacket and tan slacks came out of the back door of the house, waving in his direction.

The man had a friendly face, Steward saw, as the distance between

them closed.

"Well, you must be the one from up in Canterbury," the man said.

"Yes, I am."

"You got a big job ahead of you."

"So I heard."

"Well, let's go have a look."

With the balding man in the lead, they went in a door on the short end of the shed and directly up the steps to the second story, where an inner door opened to a single room about 20 feet wide and 40 feet long, with windows all around above six feet apart.

The floor of the room was covered ankle deep with a scrabbly mixture of dark brown and light brown items.

"Well, this is the room," said the man.

"What is this anyhow?"

"Well, half of it is sawdust."

"What's the other half?"

"For lack of a better word, chickenshit."

Steward considered that as he looked down the length of the room.

"Where does it go to?" he asked.

"You push all of it down to one end, down there. Then you shovel it out the windows there. There's a dump truck outside below the windows. The windows lift off."

"You got more chickens coming in?"

"Naw, we had it with the chickens. Gonna put a shop in here, wood shop for cabinets."

"Oh, that sounds nice."

"Yes, we think so. Hoping so, you know."

"Well, I'll get right to it. Where are the brooms and stuff, and the shovels?"

"Come on. I'll show you."

Steward went downstairs with the man and, on the way to the tool closet, he noticed through a crack in the door that a similar long room downstairs was filled with the same material. There was not as much of it. The room looked partially used.

"This room needs cleaning, too?"

"Well, it's not part of the bargain."

"That's okay. I'll clean it."

"We sure would like it if you did that."

"Where would the stuff go down here?"

"Down in the corner there, by that window, there's a trash bin. If you throw it in there, the garbage truck can lift it out."

"Where are the chickens?"

"They're outside in the little shed out there. You want to see them?"

"Yes, I would, actually."

"Let's go have a look."

Outside the man showed Steward the chickens inside of the shed. There appeared to be about 20 of them, white and brown in color, roosting on long poles.

"There's two roosters among them. See that one over there in the corner? That's one of them."

"Cocky little guy."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I guess I'll get to it."

"When you're done, please just lock the padlock on the outside door and take the chickens with you."

"Where would we put them?"

"There some long crates out there. You can have them. That's what we use for transport."

"Okay. thanks."

"There's a few rolls of chicken wire out there, also. You can have them, too, if you want it."

"Okay. thanks."

Steward watched the man drive off in his pickup truck and went to the closet to take a good look at the tools. There was a regular broom, a whisk broom, a push broom, a flat shovel, and a rolling mop pail with a mop squeezer and mop.

With the push broom in hand, he went upstairs to the first room he had been shown. The place was big and quiet, and Steward was glad for the prospect of having a full day of physical work ahead of him in a setting where he would have his whole mind for his own thoughts.

Before starting to sweep, he walked down to the end of the room and looked out the windows to confirm that the dump truck was below them as described. He tried the window and saw that it was secured by two strips of vertical wood that the window slid up and down behind and from which the window could be slid all the way up until completely free of the window frame.

"Well, I better get to it," he said out loud.

For the next few hours he was occupied in pushing the sawdust and chickenshit material down toward the far end of the room, forming at last three large piles each about eight feet in diameter and about five feet high at the center. He lifted off the window and shoveled the material out of the window into the dump truck, completing the first room by what he figured was about midday.

Steward then washed his hands and sat outside below a tree eating the lunch that Mary had packed for him. For a beverage she had given him Kool-Aid in a coke bottle closed with a cork.

In the second room, Steward worked faster, completing the entire sweep out in several hours. He swept carefully around the sides of both rooms, and mopped both floors over and over until the boards showed no signs of their former use.

The man in the pickup came back at this point and, appearing at the open door, seeming surprised that Steward was still at work.

"Now, that is what I call a damn good job," he said.

"Thank you," Steward replied.

"Least I can do is help you with the boxes out back," the man said. "Ready for that?"

"Sure, why not?"

In the chicken house, the frightened chickens ran around clucking and colliding with one another until they had all been snared with long hooks and placed into the wooden crates used for transport.

"Looks like they're more than I thought," said the man, counting. "Looks like it comes out to about 70."

"Thank you."

"You deserve it for that nice job. This will get us off to a good start on the cabinet shop."

"Well, I hope so."

"Thanks again."

They shook hands at that, and Steward headed out onto the paved road again, passing the Shaker village once more and arriving back at Cranston farm directly after that, producing an image of contrast of the sturdy buildings of the Shaker village versus the box frame farmhouse and blue barn of Cranston farm. The Cranston farm was more in the traditional image of the American farm, Steward noted. He could see why the similarity to Brandt's childhood farm created such an effect in his old friend.

The children, including even Dylan, who usually held back, came out of the house when Steward drove up. All of the adults soon emerged from the front door of the house, also, this being one development that had everyone beaming, much to Steward's satisfaction. He thought to himself that surely this was the best thing he had done for the farm since his arrival three weeks before.

326. Steward, unaware of financial make-up of farm, considers staying longer

Bringing the chickens home to Cranston Farm had brought Tom Steward his first taste of being regarded by the group as having done something of value to the community. The result was an increase in the intensity of his desire to be accepted by the group as a fully contributing member. Still, Steward had not yet, even in his own mind, made any commitment to stay on the farm. He had still never talked to anyone about it, and he was still unaware that the other adults on the farm not only took part in the work but had paid for partial ownership (something that, owing to his lack of money, he could not have done even if he had wanted to).

In this undefined state, Steward continued from day to day in his idealistic manner, trying to be a help to the community by working hard and getting along with everyone.

For the time being, he focused his efforts on moving the chickens into the shed behind the blue barn. He cleaned the shed and, with Matthew Brandt's guidance, built step like roosts for the chickens. Then, he went to town with Mary Brandt to buy lay mash, as Stumphand Moore from up the road had in the meanwhile advised.

A few mornings later, Steward found three chickens sitting on eggs. He carried the eggs into the house to show them to the other people, who were all gathered in the area of the dining room and kitchen, either cooking or waiting for breakfast. Once more, there were smiles and commendations from everyone.

"I was thinking I may stay on here for a while longer," Steward remarked to Mary later that same morning. "Do you think I'm starting to overstay my welcome?"

"No, absolutely not," she replied at once. "Tom, you can stay here as long as you want to. You've been absolutely a positive presence here. Everyone thinks so."

"Well, I may stay a few more weeks, at least."

"That's absolutely alright."

Steward went off from this interaction feeling like he had done the right thing by bringing up the subject and had thereby resolved any issues related to his presence, but Mary had a more nuanced reaction. She had become aware in the past week or so, in speaking to Matthew, that she had never addressed the issue squarely of Steward's possible permanent stay at the farm and the money and ownership complications that would necessarily attend upon that.

Mary realized, also, that she had held back from mentioning this issue not only because of Steward's lack of money, which she was aware of, but also because she knew, from her private talks with Matthew, that

Matt had gone hot and cold regarding his old friend's presence. She knew that Steward was aware on some level of Matthew's negative feelings in this regard, but she knew, also, that he did not understand how passionately Matthew had come to renounce much of the modes of thought, speech, and behavior of the years since college.

Steward, after talking to Mary, proceeded with his workday, setting out grain for the lambs as he had been doing each morning and filling the troughs with water. Then he went outside to look off for a moment at the peaceful scene in the pasture behind the barn. Seeing the single apple tree on the hill, he reminded himself he had volunteered to pick the apples. He would do that sometime soon, he told himself.

Before returning to work, he decided, he would take a little walk to think through the various aspects of his life, as he was accustomed to doing at regular intervals. He had not done so since the month before on his hitching trip down the California coast.

In his methodical manner, then, Steward led his mind through the various aspects of his current life regarding which he wanted to have a deliberate intention.

First to consider, Steward said to himself, as he headed across the pasture in the crisp morning air, was Matthew, his old friend. The best he could do with respect to Matthew, he decided, was be a friend when Matthew needed a friend while respecting the conflict Matt was in the midst of with regard to Mary and Gail, and speaking when possible in the plain manner Matthew preferred so as not to cause any further tension between himself and his former doubles partner.

As for Mary, Steward continued on in his mind, he would try to be the intellectual friend he sensed she wanted him to be. There would be no need to advertise this in front of the others, or to make his friendship with her an issue with Matthew. He would seek to connect through Mary with her inner world of reason and common sense that he had learned to respect so greatly as representative of the best thought of his own generational peers in the years since college.

Gail Martin, on the other hand, would never be that, he observed to himself. She had no interest in such a thought process. But Steward could tell that Gail appreciated how he interacted with her children and that, for this reason, she was glad to have him around. And the feeling was reciprocal; he liked her a lot.

As for Jane Larue, that was a more complicated manner. He was aware that she acted as if she saw him as a potential mate. She was intriguing with her Celtic red hair, green eyes, and diminutive, shapely figure, her whispery soft voice, and her frequent allusions to mysterious beliefs. At the same time, he knew she was not just an unattached woman, but a mother with two children, and living in a communal setting

where little passed between people that was not soon known by everyone.

He would have to be careful how he acted around Jane, Steward told himself. He did not want to add another romantic entanglement to the mesh of relationships that already existed on the farm. In any case, he was not sure enough about her to rush ahead. He did not like how she mumbled and dropped her thoughts in mid-air. He could not help judging her against Mary's combination of intellect and femininity, which he had come to regard as the ideal.

He observed to himself, though, that Jane was isolated on the farm because of her interest in things like mysticism and magic that everyone else seemed to regard as peculiar. He did not want to further isolate her in his attempts not to become involved with her. He resolved to find the strength of character to become her friend without giving any signs of a sexual interest. The impulse was strong enough, he realized, that he needed to make this resolution.

So his mind went on.

Coming back toward the barn soon later, Steward noticed Matthew by the maple works next to a pile of scrap wood. Brandt was setting up some kind of equipment on the John Deere tractor.

Steward went immediately toward him.

Brandt, by this time, after not shaving again since cutting off his beard almost a month before, with the hair on his shorn head also growing back rapidly, had been approaching in appearance to his former hairy self, with only the area around his forehead, eyes, and upper cheeks not covered with hair. The eyes, as usual, looked sullen and intense.

Steward, as he drew near to Brandt, recalled his suspicion of weeks before that Brandt's cutting off the hair and beard had been some kind of symbolic renunciation of the counterculture. If that was true, he thought, was the growing back a symbolic act in the other direction? A renunciation of the renunciation? He had no idea. Brandt had continued to puzzle him with occasional shows of the old comradery alternated with shows of seeming resentment.

"Hey, Matthew, what are you doing?" Steward said.

"What am I doing?" Brandt replied in his mock serious way. "I am taking this here driver belt and attaching it from this here PTO drive shaft to this here radial saw. Then, having done this, I will start the tractor, the driver shaft will go around, and the saw blade will go around. Voila!"

"Alright."

"Looking for some poor slob to man the saw."

"Is that right? Are you serious?"

"I'm always serious, Stewball."

"I'll be glad to do it. Just show me the basics."

"Basics... Tractor on. PTO on. Pick up wood. Move wood across to saw. Ever so careful, Stewball. Not to push the hand too far."

"Yes, I can see."

"Your hand will be gone before you feel any pain."

Steward set to it, with Brandt handing him the wood. Soon they had a rhythm going remindful of the days when the former doubles partners had kept up a similar rhythm in a shell while proceeding, each with two oars, down the quiet daybreak water of the Mississippi River in St. Paul.

After about an hour together, Brandt left Steward to complete the pile himself. He returned a couple of hours later, in mid-afternoon, as Steward was placing the last cut pieces on the rectangular stack he was building. The stack was about two feet deep and four feet high, as Matt had shown him to do.

"You get a length of about eight feet, that's one cord," Brandt remarked.

"How many cords are we going for?"

"Three. One for the house, two for the maple works next spring."

"Got a ways to go then."

"Getting there, though."

"Where does this wood come from anyhow?"

"Guy down by the Merrimac River, tearing down some outbuildings. He had a sign up for free wood if you haul it away."

"So this is the last of it?"

"Oh, no. In fact, I was thinking, how about a little ride? We can load up another pile before supper."

"Sounds great."

They headed off in the old pickup truck after first stopping at the shed for Brandt to grab a six-pack of beer. It was a brilliant day with the maples leaves just starting to show red and yellow colors.

Their route took them down Hackleboro Road to the Canterbury town center, then east along a gently winding road through wooded hills and down a long slope to the Merrimac River. Reaching their destination, an abandoned farm with outbuildings in various stages of dismantlement, they got out and sat on the tailgate of the truck, looking off to the river, which could be seen about a hundred feet below, between the trees.

The outbuildings had been bulldozed down, leaving many of the old boards as ripped off pieces of various length.

"So what's the deal with this place?" Steward asked. "How come they're tearing this down?"

"That I do not know, amigo Stewballo," Brandt replied, handing Steward a beer.

"What do you think of that river down there? Maybe we should go down and have a little row."

"I would be so inclined, had we a boat."

"I'd have to whip you into shape again."

"Sad but true."

In this way, they tried once again to rekindle the old comradery of the boathouse days, but they were both aware of encountering a strain in the effort. Much as Brandt regarded Steward as essentially a decent person and full of the right sympathies, he could not help comparing him, at the moment, against his former yurt mate Dennis Kelly (by this time, long gone and reestablished in the shoe factory in Kensington, Kentucky); and, much as Steward tried to be easy in conversation, the reality was he could not really engage with anyone except on a serious intellectual level, which Brandt resisted at any divergence of topic in that direction.

The two men, both so physical in their basic personalities, did have a good time together, however, after they went from talk to work, as they competed on who could throw wood in the truck fastest, shouting and laughing as they flailed away at the chore.

In a good mood because of that and the growing effect of a few more beers on the ride home, they arrived back at the farm to find Mary, Gail, and Jane out in the garden on the side of the house, picking string beans and tomatoes for supper, with the four kids nearby, playing by a swing set between the garden and the guest house.

"Looks like the men folk are back," Gail said as they approached, making a joke of the hillbilly setting. To this, the women reacted with a collective laugh, looking up with smiles of welcome.

It was near sunset, with a golden glow on the lush green plants in their orderly rows, and the women, their hair an interesting contrast of black, flaxen, and red, as various in detail as the natural world around them, looked so lovely and maternal with the children beside them. A scene of fruition, Steward noted to himself. Such a scene as this men had come back to for many generations, he thought; and their other spheres of work and physical exploration had made sense because of being anchored in to such a scene as this. Of course, male-female polarities were changing in the modern era of gender redefinition; of course, he was glad for such a change allowing these women he lived with to be more independent, likely, than their female forbears had been; but there could be no doubt of the power of the scene,—going back, who knew how many generations?—a power so much deeper psychologically, he thought, than any opinion he could form about it.

All the next day, Steward recalled this scene and thought about how the women had looked at him with such approval, as women of years past, he imagined, in a village or some other communal setting, would have looked at a man regarded as a contributor to the common good.

With Matt away from the farm helping Stumphand Moore on some

other matter, Steward spent the day sawing and stacking wood, driving twice in the old pickup over to pick up more wood at the place he and Brandt had driven to the previous evening. By the end of the day, near sunset, he had completed one cord and was a good part of the way to a second.

Dylan Larue, the ever rebellious teen, came across from the house as that point, asking for a ride in the back of the truck, as his mother watched from the garden where the three women were again working together. Steward was the only adult on the farm (except for his mother) that the boy spoke to in a normal tone.

"Well, I don't know. I guess maybe we could accommodate that," Steward replied. "Where did you have in mind?"

"Just into town and back. C'mon, it'll be fun."

On seeing Dylan climbing into the back of the pickup, his sister Mandy came running across, followed soon by Gail's two children, Angela and little Matt.

"We want to go, too!" they cried.

Steward looked back at the women. "I don't know," he said. "Your mothers might not like that."

The women then came across the road, not with attitudes or facial expressions suggesting anger, but with looks of concern to assure there would be no danger to the children.

"You must all sit with your backs to the cab and not get up for anything while the truck is moving," Gail said.

"How about this?" Jane said. "I'll ride along."

"That would be better."

With Jane in their midst and the four kids seated side by side in the bed of the truck, backs against the cab, as directed by their mothers, Steward pulled out from the shed to encounter Matthew in his VW bus pulling in at the same time.

Matthew was clearly infuriated by what he saw and he made no show of being diplomatic.

"What the hell are you doing?" he shouted at Steward.

"Get out of the truck!" he shouted at the kids. They all scrambled out, including Jane, who looked just as scared as the children.

"Don't ever try this again!" Brandt shouted at Steward. "What do you think this is, some kind of hippy trippy circus? What do you think people think? We're trying to be a regular farm!"

With everyone looking on, Steward felt ashamed at being called down for lack of judgment. This incident made clear to everyone, he felt, that he was not a full member of the community, as he had started to think he was becoming.

327. Jane Larue offers Steward a bridge to the "primordial mind"

Several days after this altercation, by the pickup truck, between Matthew Brand and Tom Steward, Mary Brandt happened upon one of her old Venceremos friends in Concord and wound up being invited to stay overnight at a house owned by a collective this person belonged to in Portsmouth on the Atlantic coast, about 50 miles away. Gail Martin and Matt were on hand at the same time (at a seminar they all attended together), and soon Gail and Matt were also invited, the offshoot being that Mary, Gail, and Matt departed from the farm, on Wednesday, October 6, leaving Steward and Jane Larue alone together (though with the kids also present) for the first time since Steward had arrived at the farm.

Neither Steward nor Jane made any mention of being alone together. They sat at breakfast with the others, talking as normal, said goodbye and wished them well, and then proceeded with their normal days. Steward first set out grain for the lambs, as he did each morning, then he headed out to the pasture to pick the apples on the single tree there, as he had volunteered to do. Jane announced that she planned to spend the day in the garden and kitchen, boiling and canning the late vegetables.

The entire day went by in this way, with a few interactions between Steward and Jane, but nothing suggesting being paired off.

From the hill in the pasture, where he was working in a step ladder by the apple tree, Steward could see Jane moving between the house and the garden, or kneeling amidst the plants, with her red hair gleaming in the sunlight. Her motion had the same soft quality as her manner of speaking, he noticed. In her cut-off jeans and orange T-shirt, tied at the waist, she looked like a shapely college girl.

On one occasion, seeing him looking toward her, she waved. He took note of that, and he was mindful all day as she worked of her being alone in the house, but he refrained from going to the house, out of not wanting to give an appearance of trying to hit on her when the others were gone.

He did go in at one point to ask if she needed help with supper, as it was her turn to prepare it, but she gently replied in her soft voice that she could handle it herself.

"I do appreciate the offer, though," she said as he went out.

He was placing the apples, as he picked them, ever so carefully so as not to bruise them, in brown shopping bags in a "farm wagon," as it was called, which was like a square wheelbarrow with two large wheels and a liftable U-shaped handle for pushing or pulling the load. In the course of the day, he had filled eight bags, with room for one more bag in the wagon, and six more or so bags, he figured, still on the tree, left to be picked some other day.

As he began on his ninth bag, the school bus appeared at the bend in the road and the four young people of Cranston Farm waved at him from the windows as the bus passed by the tree. He saw them running into the house and then heard them slamming in and out of the front door as they went about their school projects and games.

Later, Dylan Larue, his shoulder-length brown hair flying behind him, came racing across the pasture on his bike, yanking the bike up in the air over bumps as he circled around Steward.

"Amazing how you get that bike flying," Steward said.

"What you gonna do with all the apples?" asked the boy.

"I don't know, eat them?"

"That's gonna be one big belly ache."

"You think so?"

"I don't know."

Throwing the bike aside, the boy climbed up the tree, swung across on a branch, and started handing Steward apples. Together they finished the ninth bag, placed it into the last available space on the wagon, and headed back toward the barn, with Steward pushing and the boy riding beside him.

Jane Larue came to the front door and watched Steward and her son as they walked across from the barn to the house for supper.

"How many did you pick, Dylan?" she said in her soft voice.

"A whole bag."

"Did he really?"

"Yes, he sure did. He's like a monkey in that tree. Doesn't even need a ladder."

Supper proceeded in the same quiet manner, with gentle Jane asking the children for news of the school day. She was just as attentive to Gail's two children as to her own children.

After supper, Steward went out to set out grain for the lambs. He came out of the barn about an hour before sunset to see Jane standing on the road between the barn and the maple works.

"I was thinking of going up to the Lampsher farmstead," she said. "Ever hear of it? It's the place up the road there beyond the bend."

"I thought it was abandoned."

"That's why I want to go see it. Lots of history."

"What kind of history?"

"Haunted."

"Really?"

"Yes. Come on along, why don't you?"

"Okay. Sure."

He came across toward her and hopped the fence there between the sheep pen and the road.

"You aren't scared of ghosts, are you?" she inquired with a smile, glancing toward him with her green eyes.

"Not so far."

"Ha!"

He was conscious of her small size as he walked beside her. She was only about 5-2. He noticed also her red hair, which was quite amazing in the sunlight. It was a golden red evoking for him images of seafarers such as were depicted as having settled Ireland and the Atlantic islands west of Norway and Scotland. There was a folkloric quality to the hair, also, a suggestion of maidens with long skirts and pointed hats such as were seen in fairy tales or medieval tableaus.

"So what is the story with this farm?" Steward asked.

"The story? Well, the Lampsher couple who lived on the farm, back two generations, had just one child, a girl. She married, and she and her husband took over the farmstead after the parents died. For some kind of medical reason, she was unable to have kids. So she and her husband lived childlessly in the old house for all their married life,—about 60 years before he died, then 15 or so more for her. She lived until her late 90's in that same old house she had grown up in."

"How long ago was that?"

"12 years now. She died in 1959."

"No one has lived there since?"

"No, that's the weird thing, I heard. The house never went up for sale."

"Who owns it then?"

"I don't know. I've never seen a single soul there, in the flesh, in all the time I've been here, and the farm is 120 acres. I heard it's good land."

"In the flesh, you say."

"Yes, never in the flesh."

They walked quietly after this, as the sun lowered into a lattice of gray clouds on the western horizon, above the lone tree in the pasture where Steward had been picking apples. Beyond the slope of the hill there was the ragged edge of a tree line, amidst which a rooftop could be seen. That was the Lampsher house, Jane informed.

The house, located about a hundred yards back on a driveway, was hidden in the trees. They turned in toward it and walked through the narrow corridor of trees to the house.

The house, as it came into view, was revealed to be a box frame two story structure with a built-out porch in the back that the driveway bent near to accommodate the obvious main entry to the house there. The front door could only be reached by walking around the outside of the house along a narrow sidewalk.

"Looks like we have about a half hour of daylight," Jane said. "Let's

just stay a little while."

"Alright."

Finding the back door ajar, they went in through the small, empty area of the back porch into a large, completely open, pine-floored room that appeared to have been a dining room in the farm house style. To one side of that was a linoleum-floored room with cabinets, a table with two chairs, a sink with a pump faucet, and windows looking out to the branches of the trees that surrounded the house.

The room did have an otherworldly ambience in the prevalent silence of the place with the sunset colors on the solitary table and the leaves swaying slowly outside the dusty windows. On the table was a single plate and cup such as might have been left as a memorial to the last person to occupy the house.

"So why would a ghost choose to live in such a place as this?" Steward inquired of his companion.

She was standing beside him, not touching but with her red curls and shoulders inclined toward him and so close he could have thrown his arm over her shoulders with no movement on her part.

"Because it has memories. And maybe other ghosts. It has the family past," she replied, looking toward him. "It can be understood as just a simple human wish. The spirit of a human is human. Just like we are. You don't believe that, Tom? You don't believe spirits could inhabit a place like this?"

"I don't discount it," he answered.

A noise came up as of two objects touching against one another. The exact derivation could not be determined. She drew back against him, her red hair settling below his chin, emitting a scent of perfume, her hips pressing against his thigh.

"Well, we should go," she whispered, twisting her head around to peer at him with her face nearly touching his own. "We should respect their privacy, if anyone is here."

They headed out of the house to find the red shape of the sun just above the trees. Side by side, they walked out the long driveway toward the road.

Near the road, she stumbled and started to fall. Reaching out to steady her, he grabbed her upper arm. Her upper torso yielded at once to his motion. He let loose of her arm, but she stayed close, bumping against him as they walked. At the road she reached for his hand and held it as they walked back toward the farmhouse.

"Tom, when we get back, after the kids are asleep, will you come up to my room?" she said. "It would be very special to me. I hardly ever have anyone in my room. I can make you tea."

Steward knew she had a room in the attic of the house. She was the

only one who lived in the attic. He had never been there, though he had noticed the stairway that led up from the second floor.

"Sure, I would like to," he said.

"I'm not inviting you for sex."

"Tea will be fine."

Steward waited in his room until the four children, who slept in the rooms just above his own, were quiet. In stocking feet, he ascended the steps to the attic, where he could see a door ajar he assumed was hers, with flickering light beyond.

He knocked with one finger and heard her rise up and come across toward him with footsteps as soft as her voice.

"Welcome, my friend," she said, opening the door.

He stood for a moment outside the door, looking in to her small room, which was located directly under the central, inverted V of the roof beam, with the underside of the roof slanting down on both sides to walls, about five feet high, made of plywood. The only illumination was from candles on a dresser and small desk.

"Well, please come in," she said. "You can sit on the couch."

"Thank you."

The couch was her bed, also, he saw. Pillows propped against the wall provided a backrest.

"How do you like my room?"

"I like it."

"Well, let me get you some tea."

He sat down and watched her as she set out two cups of tea. She had changed into a green dress with a blue breast plate embroidered with red flowers amidst swirls of leaves. On her wall was a print of a painting he recognized as being one of the Pre-Raphaelite School. It showed a young man and young woman seated together next to a stream, the woman dressed in a white gown, the man in a kilt with sheep in the background. The print was labeled, "The Hireling Shepherd." On the shelves below it were objects of various kinds including a seashell, a horseshoe, and plants in glazed clay pots.

"Well, Thomas, this is my little world," she said, "my little world to retreat to when I'm done with my other work... with the farm here, with the kids. I light my candles. I sit here and read and think and sometimes lately I try to write poems."

"I'd like to see them sometime," he said.

"Maybe someday you can do that."

"What do you read?"

"What do I read?" she said, handing him a cup of tea. With her own cup in hand, she sat down on other side of the couch from him, drawing up her legs to turn toward him. "Well, lately, all the while I've been on

this farm, my big project has been reading J.R.R. Tolkien, the three Ring books. Do you know of him?"

"Just a little."

"For me, it's more than just reading," she continued in her gentle, earnest voice, looking all the while directly into his eyes. "It's going back to this mysterious time. Centuries ago. It's learning the ancient mind, the primordial mind."

He noticed that she did not leave her sentences drop as often when she spoke in a situation like this, one in which she apparently felt less judged or less anxious.

"You think the ancient mind was different, or the primordial mind, as you call it?" Steward said.

"Yes, Tom," she said softly. "I'm talking about the mind of people who lived many centuries ago, when poems like *Beowulf* were created, or the stories in the *Kalevala,* in Finland. Just think. It was a time without science, without machines. There were so many... So much had to be done with brute force. People fought for control, killed for control. Everything was so much more fundamental. There were sages and magicians. Like Merlin, you know with King Arthur?"

"You think he actually did magic?"

"Yes, I do. I think it follows from being more intuitive, as we've forgotten... But they were, I think. The Druids, you know... There was a connection to elemental forces."

"You want to regain it?"

"In my own little way. Like tonight, we were talking about spirits. I really believe in that, you know. Like, I heard some people can detach their spirit from their body. Fly out of their body, you know."

"Where would you go?"

"For starters, to that farm we went to tonight. Just to talk to the people there."

"You think you could fly over and talk to them?"

"If I could get free. I'm a spirit. They're spirits. It would take a high level of consciousness. I don't make any claims..."

The conversation turned soon to other topics, as some reference by Steward to his past experiences led to inquiries about his college years and marriage, which he described, and to which she listened with a look of sympathy. She talked about her own past, also, the whole story about her Marine husband who had died in Vietnam, a story Steward had not heard until this time. Several times in bringing him tea, Jane brushed so close to Steward he had to refrain from reaching out to touch her, remembering what she had said about no sex. Later, as he lay in his own bed, he thought of her upstairs trying to send her spirit out to the farmstead where he and she had been together earlier that same evening.

328. Brandt informs Steward remaining on the farm requires buying in

After talking to Jane Larue in her room several days before, Thomas Steward had not talked to her again on such an intimate basis, though she met his eyes directly whenever he looked towards her.

Steward wasn't sure what do about her after having resolved to keep some distance from her and then having wound up so quickly on a romantic basis. He had not had sex with her, he was quick to reassure himself, and, moreover, she herself had forewarned him not to attempt to do so; and yet the entire time he had been with her the air had seemed sexually charged. She was undoubtedly an attractive woman, he reflected, and he found it appealing that she was a mother with children; that made her seem more feminine somehow. But he reminded himself that the overall situation on the farm had not changed in terms of the potential pitfalls of becoming involved with a mother with two children in such a communal setting. Even if that were not the case, he thought, the relationship would not signal full speed ahead. Jane's mentality was a matter of concern. All the talk about magic and a primordial way of thinking was extremely interesting, he admitted, but could he accept such a mentality as his main reference in an intimate relationship? There was always Mary Brandt to compare to: Mary who was so exquisitely feminine, also, while so much more comprehensive in her intellectual ken. Mary was not available, though, he reminded himself; she was just a friend. The crux of the matter, Steward told himself, was he felt thoroughly confused and needed to proceed carefully so as not to wind up in an emotional mess.

In the meanwhile, there was work to do, and he wanted to continue doing his fair share.

After having been diverted by other chores from picking the rest of the apples in the pasture, he headed out alone on the following Saturday (October 9), three days after his attic talk with Jane. Again, Matt, Mary, and Gail were gone, this time for just a few hours, to the weekend market at the town center. By mid-morning, he had the remaining apples picked, two shopping bags full instead of one as he had estimated. With the bags in the farm wagon, he pushed the wagon to the house, where he transferred the apples to a barrel on the front porch, then he looked out to the autumn colors of the trees along the road.

The task was done, he thought. No work remained to be attended to, for the time being. He went into his house and through the living room and large bedroom to the far corner that served as his own private area. In a wooden box there, he kept his journal and some books he had picked up that he had seen lying around the house.

His brief interchange with Jane regarding her interest in poetry had

gotten him thinking along those lines. Seeing an anthology of poems among the books in the box, he took it in hand and walked outside. How seldom it had been, he thought, when he had had time on the farm alone without work to attend to.

He walked out into the front yard and then, on an impulse, across to the barn and through the open double doors of the wagon entry to the haymow. Though he had often lately worked in the barn cellar setting out feed for the lambs, he had not had much occasion to look around upstairs. A shaft of sunlight from a window at the apex of the western wall crossed diagonally to an area where there was a stack of hay bales with loose hay lying all around it. He went across to that spot and sat down.

Without being aware of it, he had positioned himself under the loft that Matthew had helped to build for Darren Houghten. Steward had never even heard that the loft had been built in the heydays of the farm when the original group on the farm had gotten along so well.

For a long time, Steward sat on the hay in silence, reading through the poems. He realized that he had not taken such a time for thought and meditation since he had arrived at the farm. He had been caught up so much in work. That was good, of course, he reflected. He knew a strong output of work was an important part of contributing to the community. But he had a mental side, too, the side that he had expressed in his journal and attempts in writing.

"Thomas, is that you?" a soft voice called from the door.

He looked in that direction and saw the unmistakable flaming red hair and petite form of Jane Larue.

"Oh, hello!" he answered. "Yes, I don't know. I just got in a mood, I guess. I suppose I should be working."

"No need to work without ceasing!" she said with a laugh as soft as her speaking voice. "We do have our intellects, also!"

"Yes, I was just thinking that, actually," he said. "Do you come out here often?"

"Me? Oh, no. Hardly ever. I was just looking for some strands of hay for something Angela is making for school. You know, the typical autumn project, hay and leaves and maybe some red apples."

"How is she doing?"

"She's doing well, I think. Little shy at first. Guess she gets that from me."

"Not easy being the new kid."

"That's for sure, Thomas. I like how you understand."

"Sometimes."

"No, you're very good that way. I meant to tell you the other evening. You know what the kids call you, their nickname?"

"No."

"They call you 'Friendly.'"

"Really? I never heard that."

"Yes, they do. To one another. All the time. 'Where's Friendly?'"

Steward laughed. "Well, I guess that's a compliment."

"Yes, it is."

She sat down on the hay beside him, in the sunlight streaming in from the window. "Can I ask you what were you reading?" she said. "I don't mean to be nosy."

"Oh, you're not being nosy."

She looked at the page the book was open to. "Dylan Thomas," she said. "Do you like him?"

"Yes, I do."

"Will you read to me?"

"I don't know, Jane. I feel self-conscious."

"Don't judge yourself, Tom. I love your voice. I'm not looking for any kind of phony drama."

He began reading: "'Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs, about the lilting house, and happy as the grass was green, the night above the dingle starry, Time let me hail and climb, golden in the heydays of his eyes...'"

He looked across at Jane, about halfway through the poem, and saw she was crying. It struck him as an overreaction, but he kept reading until the last line: "'Though I sang in my chains like the sea.'"

A footstep in the barn at the point, as the poem ended, alerted them both that someone had come through the wagon doors. It was Matthew, with a pitchfork in hand. Apparently, he had just returned from town. From his facial expression, it was clear that he was surprised at seeing Steward paired off with Jane and reading poetry on a bail of hay.

"Hey, how's it going, partners?" he said, not meanly, though not in a friendly manner either. "I was just going try to gather up all this hay on the floor."

"I'll give you a hand," said Steward agreeably. "I finished the apple tree."

"Yea, I saw that."

"You got another pitch fork?"

"Down in the cellar, hanging on the wall."

"Okay, I'll go get it."

Jane had sprung up at once when Matthew came in, like a rabbit at the sight of a weasel, with a frightened look in her pretty eyes. Neither of the men had thought much of that, however, since the shy, quiet woman often had a similar expression, and for no reason connected to anything obvious or reasonable, from their perspective.

"Did you have a nice time in town?" she almost whispered to Matthew as she came past with a light, feminine tread.

"Oh, yea. Lots of things there to buy. I was just looking, though."

"What did you see?"

"Deal to pull out fence poles."

"To take out the old fence?"

"Yes. The one along the road."

"On the other side of the corn field?"

"Yes."

Jane went on out the door without further remarks, as she and Matt both knew that she asked questions like this out of politeness and had no real interest in the operation of the farm.

Nothing further happened related to this matter until the following evening (Sunday, October 10), when the entire group of six adults, after having a pleasant supper together, went out to enjoy the crisp air and stood drinking beers together. As often happened, the talk turned to common concerns having to do with the farm.

Matthew then betrayed how concerned he was about money and the need to make long-term plans and buy certain key machinery in order to make the farm profitable.

"Well, the maple works are a real possibility, I think," said Mary in her earnest, businesslike manner. Unlike Jane, she was as practical as Matthew about these matters, and was determined to be, on the principal of the non-gendrification of tasks. "I can do an inventory of the equipment. Go talk to Stumphand maybe. He said he used to make syrup."

"Yes, he would be a good one for that," Matthew replied.

Gail Martin, seated on a hay bale on the wagon in a plaid shirt and brown boots, listened as Matthew and Mary talked. In non-gendrification of tasks, she was about halfway between Mary and Jane. She was making an effort at the physical work, at least, and no one ever begrudged her for anything, anyhow, due to the lightness and hearty optimism of her native personality.

"I could help with that, Mary," said Steward. "I could help to put the pails out. You know, under the trees. Like you see in the movies."

Everyone laughed at that.

"Well, they really do do that," Mary said. "And you really have to go around tree to tree. It's a job of work, as they say in the song."

"Just watch out for the leprechauns," Jane remarked softly.

It was a moment of lightness for Steward and the two women, but the assumption of Steward that he would still be on the farm in spring, five or six months away, brought Matthew to a mood of constrained agitation as he paced back and forth by the wagon. He was in constant motion,

trying things with his hand and jerking on supports and hanging objects to make sure they were secure.

"Look it, Stewie," he said abruptly, with no introduction, "this farm is not la la Walden, you know, clean out a chicken coop, you're a full-fledged member. Who you think bought this place? Mary and I put in our entire life savings for this place, as did Gail and Jane. As did the others that left, we gotta pay them off."

"I don't see it as a material thing like that," Jane remarked in her soft, soft voice. "This farm is just a place for us all to grow together."

"Oh, yea, grow," said Matthew. "Who could argue with that?"

"There does have to be fairness in the money," Gail threw in. "We can't just take people on."

Though this last interaction went past as matter-of-factly as any other, the effect on Steward was much greater as it revealed to him for the first time the financial arrangement of ownership on the farm.

In addition, Steward was taken aback by the hostility in Matthew's comment. He related it at once to Matthew's "hippie trippy" comment about giving the kids a ride in the back of the truck the week before. He had not thought through the question of whether he would want to stay on the farm until spring. He had just thrown out an offer to help with the maple works out of a spirit of supporting Mary.

"Tom is not just 'people,'" Jane said. "I've been very glad to have him here."

"Well, thanks for that," Steward replied.

"I've been glad, too," said Gail.

"Me, too," said Mary.

Matthew smiled and shook his head. "Me, three, then. Stewie, you're a goddam good worker, I'll say that for you."

"Thanks, Matthew."

"Yes, he is," threw in the others.

"And lovely to the children," said Gail.

"Yes," said Mary and Jane almost at the same moment.

"Even so," said Matthew, pacing around just inside the double doors of the barn. "Compliments aside, this is serious business, Stewie. This is not something, you can just join up, and I don't mean to offend you, man, but I am trying like all get out to make this a real farm. This place is legal. As was pointed out by Darren not so long ago."

"He had a right to say that," said Mary.

"Yes, he did, Ms. Kass, and so do I."

The group was silent, as the discussion thus far had merely created a division with no resolution in sight.

"Well, what if Thomas stays, and puts in money somehow, to the rest of us?" Gail said.

"Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but far as I know, Stewball arrived with a couple of bucks and a loaf of bread," said Matt, "and three cheers for simplicity and all of that, but where's this money coming from?"

Steward shook his head thoughtfully. "I do see the issue, Matt," he said. "I don't know, maybe I could get a job in Concord or something, save up and put in."

"Well, one thing I've learned from this whole communal thing is the concept of 'up the road,'" Matthew said, and he then went on to explain the exact concept he had explained to Houghten just weeks before, the concept of people living on the same road but not in the same house.

The three women recognized the parallel at once. That comment had been Matt's overture to accepting Houghten's departure, and this was his way of saying Steward could go, too, for all he cared, or Steward could live up the road,—those were the two options.

"As I remember, Matthew, our original idea was working together, sharing together," Jane whispered.

"Yea, work together, share together," Matt replied. "Same general concept. Up the road works fine."

"Well, Matt, I'm sorry if I've made assumptions," Steward said, looking directly at his old doubles partner. "I assure you, I will do absolutely nothing here that you won't feel alright about, that you don't agree with totally. I know this is your place. And all you guys. I'm just glad to have been here so far."

"We've been glad to have you, Tom," Mary said.

"Yes, we have," echoed the two women.

Matthew made no further comment, but he appeared to have been mollified by Steward's final comment.

The informal meeting soon ended as informally as it had begun, when Gail and Jane excused themselves to go check on the children, but Steward kept thinking about it late into the night. He understood the part about how if he stayed on the farm would have to buy in, but the part about "up the road" had left him with the feeling that Matt was not only worried about money, he also just wanted him gone.

"I'll look for work in Concord in the morning," he said to himself, not sure, though, as he thought this, whether it was even a solution, in light of Matthew's attitude, but still thinking it was a step in the right direction. "For the time being, I can pay rent. If something does come up, as far as buying in, I'll have some money for that."

Even as he turned these ideas over in her mind, however, Steward realized the farm had suddenly become a far more serious commitment than he had anticipated. If he did buy in, he would in effect be joining for life. The thought of it scared him.

[Chapter 328 notes]

329. Steward realizes he found discord, not the synthesis he sought

Thomas Steward woke up early the next morning, and at once recalled the disturbing events of the previous night and his subsequent decision to go into Concord to look for work. While still under the covers, he noticed the drumming of rain and looked to the window, where the sky was dark and just barely illumined with the first light of dawn. Over to one side, he could see rain drops glistening in the illumination of the yard light on the corn stalks in the garden. His room was still dark except at the entry from the dining room where a light projected in from the small lamp that was always left on in the kitchen.

"Well, rain or not, I've got to go," he said to himself, sitting up in the bed. "I just need to wear a jacket."

He did have the olive drab Army jacket still with him that had been with him since the days when he and Bill O'Rourke had lived in the garage together in East Los Angeles.

No one else was up yet, he determined after listening closely for other sounds in the house. Soon, though, he heard the sound of a tread that he recognized as that of Jane Larue.

The footsteps came in his direction and then he saw her form in the doorway, silhouetted against the light from the kitchen. It was a shapely feminine form, topped by the shape of her frizzy hair which was a glowing red around the edges where the hair was diffuse enough to allow the light to shine through.

"Jane," he said.

"You seemed so down last night," she ventured in her gentle voice. "Just thought I would see how you are."

"Oh, I'm okay. Come in."

"Thought I'd stop early... The privacy..."

Jane stepped into the room, out of the backlight from the kitchen. In the diffuse light in the room from the yard light outside, her features become more clear. She was dressed in the mid-thigh, cut off blue jeans she often wore and a yellow T-shirt, outside at the waist, with the shape of her breasts and nipples pressing out below the cloth. As Steward knew, she was of the "natural" school, then in vogue, of now and then not wearing a bra.

"Jane, I don't know how this is going to end up," Steward said at once. "I'm starting to think, maybe I'll leave. New Hampshire entirely. Hit the road again, I don't know. If I don't find something."

"Yes, Tom, I know."

"Things get so complicated."

"Yes, I know. Let's forget the complications. We deserve a moment like everyone else."

He reached forward to kiss her, though he hardly needed to reach at all. All this while, she had been looking steadily at him with her green eyes just inches away from his own eyes, and with her body, though not touching, within reach of his hands.

He brought his hands up under her T-shirt, anticipating a degree of resistance, as he was used to in his limited experience, but instead she took hold of the bottom of the shirt with both hands and lifted it up to her shoulders to let him see and feel.

He lifted the cover and pulled her into the bed with him under the cover. She made a clicking sound in the back of her throat as he pulled her in.

A noise came from the front room. It was the external door from the front porch. Footsteps could be heard with the strong, determined cadence peculiar to Mary Brandt.

Jane jumped up, put her clothes back in order, and went out of the room. Steward heard her in the kitchen where Mary had gone, saying good morning to Mary.

"Did you just get up?" he heard Mary ask.

"Yes, just a little while ago."

"Rainy day, looks like."

"Guess we have to have some of them."

"Yes."

By the time Steward had dressed and went out into the dining room table himself, to sit there by the fireplace and have coffee, Jane was no longer in sight. Mary was seated with her notebook, in which she made a list of task each day. Gail was in the kitchen with her five-year-old son "Little Matthew" standing at her side.

"So what's in store for you today, Tom?" Mary inquired in her pleasant voice, looking over toward him.

"Going in to Concord," Steward replied.

"Concord? How come?"

"Figure I'll look around for jobs."

Gail came out from the kitchen on hearing that, and the two women regarded Steward with amusement.

"There's no need to be urgent!" Gail said.

"We're not going to throw you out," Mary added.

"Yes, who would do all the work?"

"Well, I know you're both being nice," Steward answered. "But I still want to go."

"Tom, we're sorry if last night made you feel bad," Gail threw in.

She and Mary had this way of speaking collectively at times, as they both assumed the other would agree on matters of this kind.

"I just feel confused about Matthew," Steward said.

They both laughed at that.

"Well, the reason you feel confused," said Gail, "is he's confused himself."

"He would feel sad if you left," Mary remarked.

"He likes you. You're one of his best friends. He needs a friend like now. He just doesn't know it."

'Well, I figure first thing anyhow, is look for a job. After I get a sense of that, I'll have a better idea of what I could do."

"We'd like you to stay," said Gail.

"Yes, we would," said Mary.

Steward nodded thoughtfully as he put on his jacket. "How are you going to get to Concord?" Mary asked. "Walk or hitch if I need to."

"It's ten miles, Tom."

"I managed to cover about 5000 miles before I came here."

"Give me a half hour or so and I'll give you a ride."

Mary returned to her cabin, and, in about a half hour, as she had promised, she pulled up in the VW bus to the front porch of the house where Steward was waiting.

"I'm sorry so much is in flux," she said to Steward as they drove to Concord with the windshield wipers clapping back and forth in heavy rain. "We've had to accommodate. It's made us all different. Matthew is still in the thick of it. Later on, he'll come to his senses, I think, and then he will be sorry for how he's treated some people."

To this comment, Steward merely nodded.

"It hasn't been easy for me, either, to tell you the truth," Mary continued. "I was so used to Matthew's exclusiveness. I tell myself I'm above the jealousy, but it wears me down. We all put so much into this place and, at times, when the raw feelings break through, I wonder how anyone will get away unharmed."

Steward was aware, as he listened, that this expression of personal hurt was unusual for Mary. Through it he understood, for the first time, that Mary was under a great deal of strain, and worried about the farm and her relationship with Matthew.

Left off near the city center, with the domed Capitol building in sight, Steward crossed the plaza amidst people with umbrellas, hurrying, he assumed, to their jobs in the buildings across from him. Having no umbrella himself, he hunched into the upraised collar of his jacket. If he did get a job even while continuing to live on the farm, he thought, his life would be this: going to a job, working the job, returning from the job. He would only really be on the farm, to take part in the farm, in evenings and weekends.

Arriving at a state building with a pubic lobby, he went inside and seeing a newspaper left on a counter, he picked it up and sat down with it

on one of the large marble blocks where other people were sitting. He opened it directly to the job ads and in a scan saw most of the jobs were in state offices, and for most of them typing skills (which he did not have) were required.

He saw only one ad that that he felt he was qualified for, a job as a receiver in a warehouse.

He circled that job, went out, asked for directions, and walked to the warehouse, about a mile away. At the personnel office, he was given an application form.

"Fill that out, young man, and bring it back Wednesday. Ralph will be conducting interviews then."

"Okay, thank you," he said.

Skimming through the application, he saw he would be required to list all of his jobs since college. VISTA, his volunteer job with the United Farmworkers, the poverty program in West Virginia, the odd jobs he had wound up with the Wide Mesa Indian Foundation in the Southwest came to his mind.

What could he say about such activities? They would be regarded as indicating a person who couldn't stick to one thing.

Seeing a McDonald's just ahead of him, Steward considered that his savings at the moment consisted of the two bills in his hip pocket, a twenty and a ten. He decided to break the ten to buy coffee.

With coffee in hand, Steward sat down by a window that looked out to the same plaza he had started at earlier, where the work crowd was passing between the buildings. The weather had broken. The oak and maple trees around the plaza, still wet from the morning rain, glistened in bright autumn colors in the sunlight.

How was it, Steward asked himself, that he had come to this place, Concord, New Hampshire, to the 120-acre Cranston Farm, and suddenly that farm had become his entire existence to the point where he was willing to devote himself to it with almost monastic devotion? He had forgotten about the big world outside of the farm; he had forgotten how much he longed to see that wider world, too, and had wandered so many miles, from New Mexico to California to Minnesota across Canada and now here.

His thoughts went back to his recent visit to Minnesota and talks with his father. Was he really going to turn his back on all that? Would his future interactions with his parent as they grew older be limited to occasional visits home?

Steward thought also about his original objectives for visiting the farm. He had come principally not to become a communal farmer but to visit Matthew and Mary, his fellow travelers in the so-called Movement and other experiences since college, hoping to find in them and their

associates on the farm, a synthesis of what they had all gone through together. Had he found that? No, he thought, what he had found was the antithesis of that. He had found division: a division between Matt and the people Matt had thrown out, who apparently had been too artsy for Matt's taste and not hardworking enough; a division between Matt and Mary, in their marriage, though the love triangle that had replaced it (inadequately, it seemed) still survived; a division between Matt and himself, arising, apparently, in Matt's displeasure with how he thought and spoke and what he read; a division between Mary and Gail, on the one hand, and Jane Larue, on the other, for it was quite clear, Steward had observed, that the "collective we" of Mary and Gail did not include Jane. Jane, with her magical, mystical, fairy tale interests, did not fit in.

And yet, Steward thought, had this kind of interests not been part of the counterculture all along? Tolkien, Kafka, the occult, astrology, Tai Chi, Tarot cards, *The Teachings of Don Juan*? He had briefly explored such things himself in Gallup. Surely they were part of the collective experience of his generational peers.

He had seen such divisions all around, Steward observed to himself, where, just a few years back, opposition to the war and the counterculture that had grown out of it had seemed to bring all America's youth together in a shared spirit of resistance and rebellion combined with a commonality in new ideas, new attitudes, new ways of life.

That commonality was breaking down, Steward thought. A new spirit of intolerance was creeping in. This was what he had discovered in place of the synthesis he had sought.

As for Jane Larue... Now that was a far different matter... He was glad, he thought, that he and she had not gone ahead and had sex. Was he ready to jump into a situation where he would, in effect, be a father with two children, and have all those responsibilities? He hardly knew Jane. There was much still about her that he had reservations about. And yet there was no doubt the sexual attraction was strong... The sexual attraction was pulling him in.

The real problem, Steward thought, is he needed to figure himself out once and for all before he took on such responsibilities. He had not done that yet, despite his physical and mental wanderings; he had not completed the task of self-consolidation.

Could he figure himself out in the situation he was presently in? He was starting to think he could not. He would simply become part of the divisiveness and be torn apart himself,—on or off the farm, with or without Jane Larue.

330. Steward decides to leave and heads out with intense farewells

Tom Steward went running early the next morning and, as he looked off the traffic passing on a highway visible from a hill he crossed over, he realized that nothing could prevent him from being on that highway, or some highway, that very day, or that very morning. Why delay the departure anymore? He knew what he had to do. He merely had to inform everyone and say his goodbyes.

Back at the farm later, he went out behind the guest house, as he often did, to do his after-run stretching. Looking up toward the woods that bordered the field there, he saw a figure approaching in the fog- shrouded lane. It was Jane Larue.

"Where are you coming from?" he said.

"Just a morning walk. I often walk out the lane. I don't like to deal with traffic. You know, on the road..."

She came up to him and stood in front of him, looking into his face with her green eyes. She was dressed in blue sweat pants, pulled up to her knees, and a gray hooded sweat shirt, so large it extended to the middle of her thighs. Her red curls stuck out along the rim of the hood.

"Jane, I've decided to leave," Steward said.

"I thought maybe you would after what you said yesterday morning," she answered. "We all gotta do, you know..."

"I'm sorry."

"No need to say you're sorry. You didn't make any promises. Maybe someday. The time wasn't right."

He reached down to kiss her. She responded with a kiss and sank into his chest.

He led her behind a woodpile by the guest house and pushed her down to the ground. She yielded with the same clicking sound in the back of her throat that she had made the previous morning.

This time there was no interruption, but afterwards, as he lay with her in his arms, he was already imagining himself going into the house, packing his things in his backpack, and heading for the road.

In the house, he packed his bag quietly as he listened to Mary and Gail talking in the next room about their plans for the day, as they often did in the morning.

When he came out with his pack, they looked surprised.

"Mary and Gail, I did a lot of thinking yesterday and I decided to leave," he said. "I was going to stay a while longer, but then it hit me this morning the best thing to do would be to leave right away."

"You don't look like a person who could be dissuaded," Mary said.

"No, I can't."

"So you're leaving right this minute?" asked Gail.

"Going to just look for Matt to say goodbye."

"I can give you a ride to the highway," said Mary.

"Where should I look for you?"

"Stop back here, why don't you?"

"Okay."

Steward left his pack in the dining room and went out the front door, looking for Matthew. He saw him over in the shed, bent down over some equipment he was hitching on the tractor.

Brandt heard Steward approaching, but he did not look up from his work when Steward came in.

"Amigo Stewballo," he said.

"Matthew, I've decided to leave," Steward said at once.

"Leaving for where?"

"Minnesota."

"Well, I heard that's a good place," Brandt said, turning toward his old friend.

Brandt rose from his crouching position and wiped the grease from his hands, staring into Steward's eyes. His appearance was once again more in keeping again with the recent past. In the six weeks of Steward's stay on the farm, not out of any purpose but out of dislike of shaving, he had allowed his dark beard to grow back. His hair was long and scraggly again, enough to cover his ears.

"Never did get the three cords done," Steward said.

"Guess, without my beast of burden, I will need to attend to that myself."

"Guess so."

Steward, looking at his former teammate, observed to himself how greatly Brandt had changed from the buzz-cut, almost bald-looking, young man he had rowed with,—what was it anyhow, he asked himself,—four years, no more than that, four and a half years before. A memory came into his mind of coming across the bridge to the boat club to see Brandt at the point of the boat club island, much skinnier, with no hair, hurling chunks of driftwood into a pile, as Brandt had used to do before practice, with the inexplicable fury of pent up energy that had so characterized him at that time.

In that respect, Brandt had not changed, Steward thought. He still had that fierce energy.

Brandt looked back and, by some coincidence, the exact same scene came to his mind,—Tom Steward, his boyish, earnest teammate coming up to him with his letter from the draft board in hand. For a moment he felt a tender emotion toward Steward. Words formed in his mind. But he didn't say the words. In his facial features was no indication that this thought had passed through his mind.

"Well, Matt, I just want to say, " Steward ventured, "we've been through a lot together, we've done a lot together. Against the war, trying to bring about change. I know it didn't all pan out, but it's meant a lot to me. I'm sorry to see it end."

"Just tell me one thing, Stew," Brandt said, running his hand along the rough edge of the wood, "all these things we supposedly did, you and I, and everyone, in service of the so called cause, whatever it was, what goddam good came out of it? All the goddam speeches. I can't even stand the thought of them goddam speeches."

"Yea, I know that, Matt. I'm sorry."

"The so-called 'revolution.' What a goddam joke, Stew. Monument of bullshit. 'Round and around the mulberry bush. We all fall down.'"

Steward let the words fall without a response.

"So who gives a shit, anyhow?" Brandt said. "I don't mean to be so rough on you, man."

"That's okay, Matt. I'm used to it," Steward replied.

Brandt grinned at that and for an instant Steward saw the college boy again that he had known years before.

"Well, keep on truckin', man," Brandt said. "Keep on keepin' on."

"I intend to, Matt. Same to you."

Back in the house, Steward found Mary and Gail at the table with the flap of his backpack open.

"Made you some sandwiches," they said.

"Thank you."

"Put in a beer for you, too."

"Thanks."

Jane Larue emerged from the stairwell at this time, dressed in a pink, pioneer-style calico dress, only not full-length but knee-length, with a white cotton belt tied at the waist into a bow.

As the other women were unaware of what had passed between Steward and Jane in the past two days, they saw nothing unusual in this at all, and the dress was not unusual, either, for everyone knew that Jane was fond of traditional feminine clothes.

"I couldn't help overhearing," she said in her gentle voice. "I'm so sorry you're leaving, Tom. I feel like I was just getting to know you. All the good times..."

"I'm sorry, too," he said.

"It's too bad the children aren't here to say goodbye," said Gail.

They were all at school.

"Yes, too bad," said Jane.

There were hugs all around, and Mary and Steward drove off in the van with Steward's backpack on the floor behind them. She had dressed more attractively than usual, he noticed, in clean, new jeans and a blue

denim blouse tucked in neatly at her trim waist. She had pulled back her dark hair simply, as always, but she had left curls falling down in front of her ears. He could smell perfume, which he had never smelled on her before.

To the highway Steward had decided on, which went west across Vermont and upper state New York, it was only about eight miles. "Matthew had some angry words to say," Steward said. "About what?"

"About the 'so called Revolution,' as he called it. Said it was a monument of bullshit."

Mary sighed, looking towards Steward with her dark, intelligent eyes. "Tom, he says things like this, as a parallel statement, almost, to something else that he should have said, where the emotion is coming from. In this case, I think, the emotion is he's sad to see you go, he's losing an old friend, he's driven you away. But he doesn't say that, he talks about how the Revolution let us down."

"Do you think it did?'

"No, I do not," she replied in her carefully enunciated speech. "I have not renounced, I will never renounce, an iota of what we did together and became to one another, you and I, and everyone else. I'm proud of what we were, and, for me, it never stopped."

"I'm glad to hear that."

They drove quietly then through the beautiful, autumn-colored hills and down across a bridge on the Merrimac River where sunlight glimmered on the water.

"You know what I think about?" Mary said, "Remember when we were coming back from Woodstock, how Darren said it was a 'great flowering.'"

"I wasn't at Woodstock."

"Oh, isn't that something, Tom? I was thinking you were with us."

"That's when Kris and I were in West Virginia."

"Oh, yes. Of course. It just shows, though, how much I've come to think of you as part of our family."

"Thank you."

"And what I was going to tell you, Darren said it was such a great flowering, Woodstock was, or it indicated this great flowering that we all had accomplished together. And we did, Thomas, we really did. I've thought a lot about that, how the flower grew like that, and then it just started growing wilder and wilder until it got out of control and was pulling itself apart."

Steward had nothing immediate to say in response, but his thoughts of the previous day came to mind about looking for synthesis and finding division instead.

"You know what I really think, though, Tom?" Mary said as they

continued down the road. They were nearing the onramp to the freeway. He saw the green signs just ahead.

"No, what?" he obliged.

"We're not there yet, but we will be."

He nodded but did not reply.

"We'll get there, Tom. I believe it so much," she said, pulling into a wayside park just down the hill from the higher elevation on which the highway ran past.

"Yes, I guess so," Steward said, pulling his backpack onto his lap. "You were a great presence at the farm, Tom, money or not," Mary said. "The money thing, we'll get beyond that someday, too."

"Well, I appreciated the hospitality. I appreciated the experience, the fellowship."

"I know. We loved having you around."

"Thank you."

For a moment they sat in silence in the park, just looking out at the cars entering onto the ramp that led up to the highway.

"Well, I guess I better hit it," Steward said, placing his hand on the door handle.

"Can I kiss you goodbye?"

"Of course."

Mary kissed Steward then, not with a peck on his cheek, as he expected, but with a lingering kiss on his lips. It was not a come-on kiss, to his perception, but it was the parting kiss of a lover.

"Well, as they say, fare thee well," she remarked with a smile when she observed his puzzled expression. "You take care now, Tom."

"Yes, I will."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

331. Steward hitches to Minnesota thinking the whole era is over

Tom Steward, surprised by Mary Brandt's lingering kiss, looked back once as she drove away. She glanced at him with a smile and a final wave. Her earnest eyes looked troubled, the eyes he had learned to trust as the outward sign of her inner world of reason and common sense.

"That's one more crazy thing I'll never figure out," he thought to himself as he headed up the onramp to the highway. "Why did she kiss me like that?"

He thought about Mary Brandt a great deal as his journey took him slowly across Vermont. That night, as he slept in an empty semi trailer, in a truck lot in Troy, New York, he dreamed about her, also. He dreamed that she had given him an apple to eat, like a modern day Eve, and that she had kissed him again, more passionately, with her tongue swishing around inside of his mouth.

For the first time, thinking of that, Steward admitted to himself that, had it not been for Matt and loyalty to an old friend, he would have had a romantic interest in Mary Brandt. He wondered where that interest would have gone under different circumstances.

For the first time, also, he allowed his sexual fantasies to focus on Mary Brandt. It was intriguing to think that a female animal was there, beneath the reasoned, articulate façade. He had no doubt that that would be so. She would bring to sex the same intensity that she brought to all her other endeavors.

From that item of interest, his thoughts went on to another, as he continued his journey that same day, along interstate I-90 through upper state New York: why, after years of not allowing the notion even to enter his mind, had he all of a sudden allowed himself to contemplate sex with Mary Brandt? Why had his loyalty to Matthew all of a sudden broken down? Why hadn't it stood in the way as it had before?

"Well, I know the answer to that," he remarked to himself. "Matt is gone. Let's just face it. Matt is gone. I tried to stop it. I did my best. There was nothing else I could do."

He recalled how he had used the phrase "speak to" in talking to Matt and how Matt had responded with such scorn and with the same hidden anger as had erupted in the last days of the farm.

That had been the heart of the conflict, Steward thought: Matt wanting to throw off the refinement and intellectualism of the past years. Matt had come to see him as part of what he wanted to throw off. Matt was directing that anger to him as an example of someone given up to the convolutions of thought he hated. It was as simple as that. He and Matt would never be friends again.

By the same token, Steward had a feeling that more had ended in his

leaving the farm than just that particular experience. Not only the farm but his whole experience in the so-called Movement had ended. He felt that distinctly, and he felt that it was true in general, that the Movement was coming to an end, not just for himself but for many people. It was in the air somehow, a changing of the guard.

"'Spirit of the times,'" he pronounced aloud.

He observed to himself later, continuing along in this same train of thought, that he couldn't think of anyone who had better represented the Movement, for the best it had been, than Mary Brandt. Now the Movement was fading from his life, and she was fading from his life, also.

Mary had said she would write, and he would write if she did, but he doubted it would continue for long, despite the intensity of her kiss of farewell. He didn't know why. He just felt that, too. Jane would maybe write, also, but he doubted that that would go on for long, either. He was amazed at how the passion of hours before was fading. The farm was gone, he thought; there was no going back.

There would be no going back for the Movement, either, he concluded in his mind. What was there, anymore, for it to go back to? The Movement had been taken to its logical end. It had gone down in the throes of that same logic, torn apart by the clash of odd partners it had drawn in.

"'Victim of its own inconsistencies,'" he pronounced again.

Later that day, he noticed a sign for the Catholic Worker Farm, a place he had heard about, such as he would have once regarded as an outpost of his own philosophical camp. He decided to go visit, to see if he could find any thread of thought that he could follow into the future, any written or spoken expression that would point a way.

He knew a fair amount about the farm from his previous experience. He knew that it had been started by Dorothy Day. Its official function, he had heard, was to give down-and-outers from New York City a place to dry up and get their lives in order living in a rural setting, doing physical work. He knew also that it had served as a retreat for radicals and a sowing ground for "brave, new ideas" in social policy and politics.

Two hours of hitching brought him to the side road where the farm was located. His first view of it, a cluster of brick buildings and farm outbuildings, partially hidden in trees, revealed a strange hybrid of institution and farm.

The brick buildings had a monkish, Catholic ambiance, he noted as he drew closer, hiking on a gravel road, with his pack slung over his left shoulder. The farm buildings looked like standard farm buildings, but the "farmers" working by them were organized into desultory groups; they lacked the look of purpose seen in the average farmer owing to the

independent life.

Inside, Steward encountered a receptionist who was obviously tired of repeating the same instructions many times. She told him that he could stay one night and one day free after which the “no work, no food” rule would apply and the lodging would no longer be free.

“It may seem harsh,” she said. “But we have to set rules to make it right for those who want to use it right.”

“Do people here grow their own food?” Steward asked.

“Yes, we do. Our staff farmers plan it. They are here all the time. They’re the ones who organize the crews. Someone has to keep track of what needs to be done.”

That night Steward ate supper in the main hall, which reminded him of the Benedictine abbey where he had been a student in his freshman year of college. He didn’t take part in any conversations himself, but he heard people talking about how the war was winding down and how it would end as an American defeat despite all the people killed in it. It was an intense conversation, bringing forth concepts like “the ideal of social democracy” that he would have warmed up to in the past. In his new present, though, the ideas seemed dated. The mirthless assembly of indigent men, most of them old, and intellectual sympathizers, most of them old, too, was a depressing sight. The cafeteria-like room seemed devoid of joy.

Early the next morning, Steward was on his way again, not delaying for breakfast. He was glad to leave the institutional farm, with its old ideas and serious discussions.

Later, at a T-intersection, leading east or west, he encountered someone he recognized from the group at the farm, a young man about his own age who had been sitting by himself the night before. The young man had a mane of dark, frizzy hair, held in place by a red bandanna tied around his head like an Indian headband. He was approaching at a brisk pace, with his pack on his back, now and then shaking his head. He had been sticking out his thumb until he saw the “T” ahead.

“Hey, how ya doin’?” Steward said as the man came near, “Saw you back at the farm, didn’t I?”

“Yea, just thought I would stop by.”

“How long were you there?”

“Just one night.

“Me, too.”

“Where are you heading?”

“Out east. Boston.”

“I’m heading the other way. Chicago.”

“Too bad. We could have traveled together.”

“What are you going to do in Boston?”

"Survive, man. I'm going to survive."

"Well, I wish you luck at that."

"What you're looking at, man, is a goddam old soldier, a fuckin' veteran of the counterculture war."

"You mean to say, you played it out?"

"Yea, per Yeats, I played with all masks."

"I guess I could say I played it out myself."

"Where you coming from?"

"Communal farm in New Hampshire."

"I did that gig, too."

"Where was that?"

"Down south. In Georgia."

"The farm still going?"

"Naw, it broke up."

They were silent for a moment whereupon the man suddenly shook his head violently and blinked his eyes.

"Don't mind me, man," he said. "I'm totally zonked. Like I'm wired to the cosmos, if you know what I mean."

"My name is Tom Steward. Pleased to meet you," said Steward, extending his hand.

"My name is Jim Frier. Captain Jim Frier of the Cosmic Army. Pleased to meet you, too."

They stood silently facing one another for a moment.

"Well, Tom Steward," said the man, "I better get on over there. I'm not going to get a ride standing here. Unless somebody can read minds, and that I don't doubt, but I don't have time to try it out."

"Sure, Jim. Good luck."

At that, they shook hands and Jim Frier crossed the road with his pack and took up position on the other side of the road. A car came past. He stuck out his thumb, not getting a ride.

"Hey, man, you know what?" Frier yelled from the other side of the road. "We ought to do a big OM together, a big final OM. It's so damn quiet here. It's perfect."

Steward had no immediate response.

"Will you join me?" yelled the man.

"Sure, why not?" Steward yelled back. "Just tell me how."

"I'll do the first part," Frier called across the road.

He took a deep breath, paused for a moment, and chanted in a loud monotone voice, "OM MANI PADME HUM," drawing out each syllable slowly.

"Now we do it together," he called across the road.

Steward chanted with him, "OM MANI PADME HUM."

"Now we just do the OM part," the young man shouted. "Real drawn

out, you know, so it vibrates."

They did it together: "OM-M-M-M-MMMM."

"One more time, man! These waves are going to travel! These waves are not going to stop!"

Steward joined in again: "OM-M-M-M-MMMM."

"Who knows?" yelled Jim Frier. "Maybe they'll make it to fuckin' Mars! Maybe they'll make it to Andromeda! We did it good, man! We did it fuckin' good!"

Just then another car came by, the thumb went out again, and this time the car stopped about 100 yards up the road. Jim Frier ran after the car, throwing his headband into the wind as he drew near.

"The day of the headband is over!" he called back. "Nice to meet you, Tom Steward. Good luck!"

"Good luck to you, too!" Steward yelled.

He watched the car with the young man inside it as it progressed up a hill and turned out of sight. Directly upon that, the silence came back. If the "OM" waves were still going, they were out of range.

Steward started hiking in the opposite direction, sticking out his thumb for several cars without luck until finally a pickup truck stopped on the side of the road. Steward ran to get in and found a middle-aged man in the driver seat. The man was wearing a yellow construction hat.

A friendly conversation ensued with the driver asking Steward where he was coming from and with Steward answering frankly and not encountering any disapproval of the communal style of the farm.

"Tell you what," the driver ventured after they had gone about ten miles up the road. "I got a proposition for you. You look like a good strong kid. How old are you anyhow?"

"27."

"27, huh? Well, you got some experience then. Old enough to know better, huh?"

"Sometimes."

"Ain't that the truth for us all?" the man replied with a chuckle. "The reason I'm inquiring, son, I run a trucking company out here. Looking for workers."

"I'm just passing through," Steward said.

The man laughed at that and shook his head. "I know that, son... I was once just passing through myself... But think about it a minute. It's a pretty good job. Outdoor most of the time. Get to drive a truck. Nothing overnight or out of town. Ten bucks an hour to start out with. You want to give it a try?"

Steward did give it a minute's thought, as he looked out across the autumn-colored fields and woods. He could stay for an adventure, maybe. He could start a new life. But something about it didn't seem

right.

"No, I don't think so," he said. "It's just the wrong time."

"Well, I wish you good luck, young man," said the man when he let Steward off later. "You're the image of freedom. I envy you for that. Enjoy your freedom when you have it."

"Thank you, sir. I will."

By the end of the day, Steward was in South Bend, Indiana, where he slept in a park on the roof of a utility building, thinking of the rooftop in Indiana where he and Bill O'Rourke had camped three years before. Next day his journey brought him a sunrise view of Lake Michigan, reminding him again of the boyhood trips to Lake Superior that he had gone on with his father. That association, in turn, brought a recollection of his father pacing back and forth, wringing his hands. He recalled the last words his father had said when his father had dropped him off on the highway: "We'll see you again, Tom, won't we? Life's going on here, too. We'd like you to be part of it when you settle down."

Several miles beyond that, the landscape suddenly expanded in the orange light of sunset. The sky became an immense, vaulting dome, as the wide expanse of the prairie approached in northern Illinois. "The West was opening up again," Steward repeated to himself, "as he had seen it once before."

He could keep taking the highway west, Steward thought to himself. Who could say where that would lead, to what kind of further explorations and adventures? But, as the small town and rural scenes along the highway passed into his view, Steward remembered how Bill O'Rourke had talked about "blasting west" on his and O'Rourke's trip to California, then he remembered the day when the news had arrived that O'Rourke had died in Vietnam. He thought of his old friend, Jim Morris, the once proud pilot, and of how Morris, the returned prisoner of war, had appeared outside of the little house in Gallup, his eyes clouded with defeat. He thought of Matt Brandt saying "speak to, speak to" in scorn. He thought of Kristine DeSolt, as she had appeared on his and her last visit together, when for just an instant she had glanced at him again with the look of love he had taken for granted.

No, Tom Steward told himself, the days of the open road were gone, too. That era of innocence and exploration could not be brought back, any more than the lives of O'Rourke and Morris could be brought back, or the friendship of Matt Brandt, or the love of Kristine DeSolt. In their place remained only the task of trying to figure out what had happened in those years formed against the war, of trying to sort out what the future could be, with that experience left behind.

Chicago flew past, with the skyline Steward recalled from his stays at Patrick O'Rourke's. A series of rides took him through Wisconsin and

into Minnesota. Then, by chance, in early evening, the time of day when the rowing team had used to practice, his last ride brought him to the West Side of St. Paul in the area of the boat club.

Steward stopped there to walk out on the Wabasha Street Bridge, and looked down on the gleaming water where he had seen the crew coming down four and a half years before, on the day when he had received the letter from the draft board that had set his life on a different course.

THE END

PART V: BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography contains five items: (1) a list of the most important references for this novel in order of importance; (2) a table with per chapter comments regarding sources and factuality (this table only includes chapters for which there are comments); (3) a list of sources that were quoted or directly referenced (meaning, in most cases, paraphrased); (4) a list of additional sources that were consulted (but not quoted or directly referenced); (5) a list of websites providing major content, background, or context for the events in this novel (though there are many websites of minor importance to the novel that are not included in this list). Some websites listed in item (5) are also listed as sources in item (4) or item (5).

Where possible all references to websites are live (hyperlinks), so, if the device you are reading this with has a connection to the Internet, you should be able to connect to the website. All hyperlinks were confirmed to be working as of April, 2013.

Roland Menge (2013)

1. Most important references for this novel in order of importance

NOTE: Links in this section were checked and verified or corrected for AGAINST THE WAR v2 in 2026.

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Bell, Brig. Gen. Kenneth H., USAF, Retired. 100 Missions North: A Fighter Pilot's Story of the Vietnam War. McLean, VA: Brassey's, 1993. Print. (This book is available as a Kindle book at www.amazon.com/100-Missions-North-Fighter-Vietnam/dp/1574886398.)

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Wikipedia. Many articles. Web.

Caudill, Harry. Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1962. Print. Amazon: www.amazon.com/Night-Comes-Cumberlands-Biography-Depressed/dp/1931672008.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War. (31 January - 2 February 1971). Winter Soldier Investigation. Web (www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_entry.html).

World Book Encyclopedia. Print.

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Foxfire Book series on Appalachian crafts and lore. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970. Print. https://www.amazon.com/Foxfire-Book-Collection-Books-Brand/dp/B01HUQY2TQ

Marcuse, Herbert. One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Technological Society. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 1964. Print. Also Web (www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmcontents.html).

Hair, Lt. Frank. "The Summer Offensive in the A Shau Valley." No Date.

Web. 101st Airborne Division Vietnam Veterans Organization website: https://www.101namveteran.com/a-shau-valley.html

2. Per chapter comments regarding sources and factuality

This section only includes chapters for which there are comments. All sources cited here are also listed in items C and D of this bibliography.

NOTE: Links in this section were checked and verified or corrected for AGAINST THE WAR v2 in 2026.

Chapter 0 (Statement of Purpose)

"Between 1964 and 1973, the U.S. military drafted 2.2 million American men out of an eligible pool of 27 million." (The Military Draft During the Vietnam War · Exhibit · Resistance and Revolution: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement at the University of Michigan, 1965-1972).
Averaged out over the seven year period, about 30 percent of the soldiers in Vietnam during the era were draftees. The rest were volunteers.
As for those who were not enlistees or drafted, these included: **Hardship (paternity) deferments:** \4+ million (1969); largest documented category; **Student deferments:** Fewer than half of paternity deferment; enrollment increased 4–6 percentage points due to draft avoidance. **Total deferred/exempt/disqualified:** > 13.5 million (over half of 27M eligible). This is according to MicroSoft Copilot (2026).
Also, per CoPilot: **Emigration:** (Canada, Sweden) 60,000–100,000; well-documented range. **Conscientious objectors:** No reliable percentage; known to be smaller than major deferment categories. **Alternative service (VISTA, Peace Corps, Teacher Corps):** No reliable percentage (but see Chapter 132). **Dropping out / underground / resistance:** No reliable percentage (but see Chapter 132). Culturally significant but numerically small.

Chapter 1 notes

Some of radio broadcast details are from the *New York Times* of April 7, 1967: "1500 of Foe Raid City in Vietnam, Freeing Captives" on page 1, for air campaign cited; "Draft Card Burner is Sentenced to 2-1/2 Years for Violation of His Parole" by Edward Ranzal, on page 6, for draft card burner; "Berliners Applaud Humphrey Speech on Vietnam" by John W. Finney, on page 1 for Humphrey speech. St. Paul Pioneer Press of same date was also a source for references to Hubert Humphrey ("War Foes Harass Hubert in Berlin" by Al Eisele on page 1). The boat club in this chapter and throughout this novel is modeled on the Minnesota Boat Club in downtown St. Paul. (Photo (c) Becca Dilly) [go to chapter 2]

Chapter 2-3 notes

President Lyndon Baines Johnson's speech regarding the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the wording of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, may be found at the following website: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/tonkin-g.asp. Information on Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, Jr. is from "Gen Abrams Gets Post in Vietnam" by Ron Reed, April 7, 1967, *New York Times*, page 1; also, from the article "General With a Flair" in the *New York Times* of the same date on page 7. For more about the Minnesota Boat Club, see https://www.minnesotaboatclub.org. [go to Chapter 3] [go to Chapter 4]

Chapter 4 notes

Details on Morris's pilot training, such as location, base name, and duration, as well as his rank at this time, are based on USAF biographies of officers who participated in Vietnam. These were obtained from the Air Force websites for the various bases and units. Air Force ROTC graduate school deferment program actually existed as described (author experience). [go to Chapter 5]

Chapter 11 notes

Facts on troop levels in Vietnam are historically accurate, but exact source is not known, probably *New York Times*. [go to Chapter 12]

Chapter 12 notes

Facts on USAF missions from aircraft carrier *Bon Homme Richard* and out of Thailand (targeting Nguyen Khe storage area) are from articles appearing in *New York Times* on May 25 and May 26, 1967. The report on the three downed choppers at Hill 117 is from the *New York Times* on May 27. Four year draft extension by U.S. House of Representatives, on vote of 362 to 9, was reported in *New York Times* on May 25, 1967. [go to Chapter 13]

Chapter 14 notes

Many details on Appalachia are derived from *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* by Harry Caudill (Amazon: www.amazon.com/Night-Comes-Cumberlands-Biography-Depressed/dp/1931672008). Ron Eller of the Appalachian Center was also an important source. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* was a common reference at this time in discussions of American poverty (author experience). [go to Chapter 15]

Chapter 15 notes

The AFROTC program described in this chapter and succeeding chapters actually existed at this time at Fairchild AFB in Spokane (author

experience). Fairchild AFB website: www.fairchild.af.mil. Fairchild AFB history, including Vietnam War era:) https://www.fairchild.af.mil/Information/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/238991/fairchild-air-force-base-a-brief-history/ [go to Chapter 16]

Chapter 16 notes

The map Orin Brown shows to Tom Steward is "The Cold War, 1947-1973" in *The Times Concise Atlas of World History*, edited by Geoffrey Barraclough, 1982 (Amazon.com: www.amazon.com/Times-Concise-Atlas-World-History/dp/0723002479). The map title was changed because the years cited in the title are beyond the current time of the events described in this chapter. [go to Chapter 17]

Chapter 22 notes

This chapter contains accurate details from the *New York Times* on riots occurring in Detroit in August of 1967, source article name unknown. [go to Chapter 23]

Chapter 25 notes

Details on Scotts Bluff are from the National Park Service website (www.nps.gov/scbl/index.htm), in particular the articles "Scotts Bluff National Monument" and "Scotts Bluff Official Map and Guide." Also referred to was the Wikipedia article on Scotts Bluff (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotts_Bluff_National_Monument). Radio reports Morris listens to contain facts obtained from *New York Times* (Vietcong forces ambush of 25th Infantry Division; U.S. jet fighters return to North Vietnam; air strikes on Hoalac; Lt. Gen Nguyen Van Thieu, etc.) are from August 21 and August 25, 1967. Opinions toward upcoming election (presented as a radio report in the story) are actually drawn from a *New York Times* editorial that appeared on August 21, 1967. [go to Chapter 26]

Chapter 29 notes

This chapter has accurate specifications of warplanes (weight, engine type, etc.) including the "Thud" and the "Jug" (planes flown by Jim Morris and his father). These facts are from a history of warplanes (name not known). For an article and images of the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt ("Jug"), see the American Aircraft of WWII website, select from Fighters listed: www.daveswarbirds.com/usplanes/american.htm. [go to Chapter 30]

Chapter 32 notes

This chapter has a quote from *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the*

Ideology of Advanced Technological Society by Herbert Marcuse. Web source: (www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmcontents.html). [go to Chapter 33]

Chapter 33 notes

The model for Dulatown is an actual community in North Carolina called "Harperstown" that existed at that time. It was located due north of West Lenoir at the crossroads of North Fairview Drive and Hoods Creek Road (author experience). As described here, all events were "counted" for documentation in reporting activities to the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) (author experience). [go to Chapter 34]

Chapter 37 notes

Hattie Beecher's dialect (including words such as "wadn't" and "fam'bly") is based on interviews of Appalachian natives recorded in the Foxfire books (Kindle: www.amazon.com/Foxfire-Book-Dressing-Building-Moonshining/dp/0385073534), as are her ideas about moon planting and self-reliance. [go to Chapter 38]

Chapter 38 notes

This chapter refers to two ideas of Marcuse much discussed at the time, namely, that the "machines" provided by technology had to be subordinated to human purposes; and the societal structures of the present had to be compared against possible alternatives and not just accepted because they existed (author experience). Web source for Marcuse: www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmcontents.html. [go to Chapter 39]

Chapter 39 notes

This chapter refers to *New York Times* articles that appeared on the date mentioned (Wednesday, October 25, 1967) with the exact headlines and wording cited. Included are reports of war action, a speech by Sen. Albert Gore of Tennessee, a statement by then Fmr. Pres. Dwight Eisenhower in support of the war, and news of a sit-in at the University of Minnesota. The words attributed to Sen. Gore in his speech are his actual words reported. [go to Chapter 40]

Chapter 40 notes

Lt. Gen. Lawrence Moynihan, quoted here in detail, is fictional, but he accurately describes the Rolling Thunder campaign, the Survey V moon landing (and subsequent chemical analysis of lunar soil), the Apollo spacecraft, and the Saturn rocket with its 36-story height and seven and a half million pounds of thrust. [go to Chapter 41]

Chapter 41 notes

Aerial refueling mishap is based on a similar incident described in *100 Missions North* by Brig. Gen. Kenneth Bell, who served in the Rolling Thunder campaign in 1964-65. The situation presented in the book is somewhat different, solution to the problem is different, and nothing is quoted or paraphrased. (*100 Missions North* is available as a Kindle book at www.amazon.com/100-Missions-North-Fighter-Vietnam/dp/1574886398.) [go to Chapter 42]

Chapter 44 notes

The ghost town described in this chapter is based on a real ghost town, "Lost Cove," located in the Appalachian mountains near the border of the North Carolina and Tennessee (southernappalachian.wordpress.com/2013/01/22/lost-cove-ghost-town-in-the-national-forest). [go to Chapter 45]

Chapter 45 notes

Details on strip mining issues and locations are based on many sources, most importantly Harry Caudill and Ron Eller. Wikipedia article on strip mining, called "Mountaintop Removal Mining": en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountaintop_removal_mining.[go to Chapter 46]

Chapter 49 notes

The two books mentioned in this chapter (Where is Vietnam?, a collection of poems, and Trout Fishing in America, by Richard Brautigan, were popular in the nascent counterculture (author experience). Website information on this book (https://allenginsberg.org/2025/01/t-j-30-9/). Memo from Director of Selective Service Gen. Hershey saying draft war protesters first actually existed, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hershey_Directive. [go to Chapter 50]

Chapter 55 notes

Details on water project are based on author experience. [go to Chapter 56]

Chapter 57 notes

Details on the shifting of forces in response to the invasion of North Viet forces in the area of Khe Sanh is based on a *New York Times* article on January 28, 1968. [go to Chapter 58]

Chapters 58-61 notes

News details on TET offensive in this and subsequent chapters are from the *New York Times*, January 29-31, 1968. U.S. Office of the Historian

page on the Tet Offensive: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/tet. Dr. Edwin E. Moise's page on the Tet Offensive: https://edmoise.sites.clemson.edu/tet.html. Details on Puerto Penasco (true to map detail) are from Puerto Penasco tourist website www.puerto-Penasco.com. Hotel in story is modeled on "The Villa Granada, "Penasco's oldest operating hotel." [go to Chapter 59] [go to Chapter 60] [go to Chapter 61] [go to Chapter 62]

Chapter 62 notes

There was generally a movement at this time from quasi-political organizations like the CAPs, with token community involvement, to actually political organizations, such as county boards, leading to an effort to increase the political power of the poor by registering poor people to vote (author experience). [go to Chapter 63]

Chapter 63 notes

Details on New Hampshire primary are historically accurate and were obtained from various articles in the *New York Times*. Radio program (Minnesota Public Radio) on "How the 1968 New Hampshire Primary Changed History": minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/03/12/midday1. [go to Chapter 64]

Chapter 68 notes

Details on Dr. Martin Luther King's actions and remarks in Memphis are from the *New York Times*. For full text of Dr. King's speech delivered on April 3, 1968, in Memphis ("I've Been to the Mountain Top"), go to the American Rhetoric website: www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm. [go to Chapter 69]

Chapter 70 notes

This chapter is an attempt to accurately reflect the widespread events following Dr. King's death. This is based on numerous sources. Wikipedia article on the King assassination: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_of_Martin_Luther_King,_Jr.. Comments on Democratic contenders for presidential candidate and effect of the TET Offensive on options still available to avoid military service are based on articles in the *New York Times*. [go to Chapter 71]

Chapter 71 notes

This chapter contains historically accurate details for the King funeral including the sharecropper clothes worn by several black leaders, the

mule-drawn carriage, and the presence of political leaders (Humphrey, Robert Kennedy, and Eugene McCarthy). For photos of the King funeral, see MLK funeral photos.
[go to Chapter 72]

Chapter 72 notes

This chapter contains historically accurate details of student sit-ins at Columbia University that occurred at this time. The statement by Columbia SDS leader Mark Ruud is verbatim. For the full text of the statement ("Open Letter to President Kirk"), see https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/1968/item/5584. For more on the "Columbia University Revolt, 1968," see the SDS-1960s website: www.sds-1960s.org/columbia.htm. The background photo for the cover of this book depicts Columbia students of this period: www.columbia.edu/cu/computinghistory/1968/68-dc1.html. The television special mentioned, "Why We Won't Go," was an actual program. Descriptions of world wide events are historically accurate. Most of this came from the *New York Times* (including the listing of television programs). [go to Chapter 73]

Chapter 73 notes

Details on the air war are from numerous public and USAF sources such as the official history of the Rolling Thunder campaign. The article and photograph described for the first day of peace talks were actually on page 1 of the *New York Times* on the day cited (May 12, 1968). (Here is the text of President Johnson's speech announcing the bombing halt: https://www.lbjlibrary.org/media-kit/lbjs-march-31-1968-speech). The *New York Times* for that day also contained reports of new North Vietnamese and Viet Cong activities in the DMZ, around Saigon, and so on. The 354th Tactical Fighter Wing mentioned in this chapter and succeeding chapters actually served at the Takhli RTAFB and anecdotal information (about leisure haunts, and so on) was obtained from the Takhli historical website. Events in France cited (at the Berliet, Rhone Poulenc, and Rhodiaceta companies in Lyon) were described in the *New York Times*, as was USAF attack on the Vinh airport in North Vietnam and accidental discovery there of a camouflaged MIG-17. For a historical background view of the Rolling Thunder Campaign, see "Rolling Thunder 1965: Anatomy of a Failure" by Col. Dennis M. Drew: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA215903.pdf. [go to Chapter 74]

Chapter 74 notes

The "inner home" concept presented in this chapter and throughout this novel is modeled on the "mental home base" in the *Military Survival*

Guide by Dennis Gerston M.D. (which was used in the Iraq War, not in Vietnam). (Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/POW-Survival-Guide-David-Gersten/dp/1517656559.) The "inner home" in the novel is similar to Gerston's "mental home" in that both are repositories of people and ideas intended as self-fortification against deprivation and torture. Morris does not follow the instructional details given by Dr. Gerston, however, including use of evocative key words; therefore, Morris's inability to protect himself through use of his "inner home" cannot be taken as a critique of Gerston's method. [go to Chapter 75]

Chapter 82 notes

Events in this chapter are set on an accurate Chicago map with actual landmarks including "L" stations. This was obtained from Chicago Transit Authority website: www.transitchicago.com/maps. [go to Chapter 83]

Chapter 83 notes

"WANTED for treason and sedition, Jesus of Nazareth" poster actually existed at the time (author experience). "A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority" was widely distributed at this time (https://vietnamwar.lib.umb.edu/warHome/docs/1967CallToResistIllegit.html Richard J. Daley's statement is a quote from the *New York Times*. [go to Chapter 84]

Chapter 87 notes

Sources on the immigrant conditions described in this chapter include: "Georgia" article in Encyclopedia Britannica; "For Migrant Workers, Conditions Hardly Changed Over Decades" by Evelyn Nieves (in her book *Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*); "Health Care for Children of Farmworker Families" (from June 1995. American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement. Volume 95, Number 6); "Who Are America's Farmworkers?" an article on the website for the National Council for Health; "Working in the Lettuce Fields" by Carlos Garcia. "Statistics about working the onion fields" in the Savannah GA Morning News. Prof. Schweringen's tobacco details come from "Major Foliage Feeding Insects of Tobacco" from University of Georgia College of Agricultural & Environmental Studies Cooperative Extension Service. [go to Chapter 88]

Chapter 89 notes

This chapter describes a company town of the kind that existed in many places in Appalachia in the heydays of the coal mining era. An example is Haymond KY:

https://coaleducation.org/coalhistory/coaltowns/haymond.htm. The Coal Education has about 20 examples in total: https://coaleducation.org/coalhistory/coaltowns/coal_towns.htm. Also, *Wikipedia* articles for "Coal Towns" and "Strip Mines." One source for descriptions of Kentucky railroads was *W&H Main Yards: Guide to Appalachian Coal Hauling Railroads*: www.spikesys.com/Trains by Robert Vaughn. "Minin' in Harlan" is an actual song by Phillip Ochs and words quoted here are his. [go to Chapter 90]

Chapter 90 notes

Birl Poling's facts are true to Appalachian coal mining history and were obtained from various sources not recorded. For example, see: https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1789&context=all_fac and history.ky.gov. [go to Chapter 91]

Chapter 92 notes

Hattie Beecher's cooking practices and descriptions were obtained in part from various *Foxfire* accounts. Amazon: www.amazon.com/Foxfire-Book-Dressing-Building-Moonshining/dp/0385073534. [go to Chapter 93]

Chapter 93 notes

Some aspects of life at the Takhli RAFB including radio dialogues are based on descriptions in Brig. Gen. Kenneth Bell's book, *100 Missions North*, though none are quoted directly and also the events in this novel occur several years after Gen. Bell (then a major) was at Takhli (Kindle: www.amazon.com/100-Missions-North-Fighter-Vietnam/dp/1574886398. History of 355th Tactical Fighter Wing comes mainly from Takhli RTAFB website (www.takhli.org/bob/bobsindex.htm). Col. Collard's remarks on the effects of LBJ's bombing pause are based on "U.S. Aides in Saigon Assess Restraints on Bombing" by William Beecher in *New York Times* on Friday, August 2, 1968. Remarks on Laotian political situation derive from U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968 Volume XXVIII Laos* (http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28), a U.S. Department of State declassified document. [go to Chapter 94]

Chapter 94-95 notes

F-105 armaments (for type of mission described), location of controls, and instrument panel details are derived from *F-105 Thunderchief in Detail and Scale* by Bert Kinsey. General facts on Takhli are based on photos and stories posted on the Takhli RTAFB historical website

http://www.takhli.org/bob/bobsindex.htm, though none are directly quoted. This website also provided anecdotal background on day-to-day life at Takhli. Some takeoff details are derived from *100 Missions North* by Brig. Gen. Kenneth Bell, but the account is updated for the different year and the takeoff is not described in his words. Gen. Bell's book is available as a Kindle book at www.amazon.com/100-Missions-North-Fighter-Vietnam/dp/1574886398. Details like radio chatter, airfield ambience, switchover to Cricket Control, and so on, draw from Gen. Bell, however. [go to Chapter 95] [go to Chapter 96]

Chapter 96 notes

Takhli social scene is derived from personal stories, emails, and 1960's era photos posted on Takhli RTAFB website (http://www.takhli.org/bob/bobsindex.htm). [go to Chapter 97]

Chapter 97 notes

Pigasus description is the actual description handed out by the Yippies. Wikipedia has an article on Pigasus: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pigasus_(politics). Patrick O'Rourke's rendition of the "anti-war plank" is based on "Doves Are Cool to a Compromise: Bitter Floor Fight Expected at Convention" by John W. Finney, which appeared in the *New York Times* on August 24, 1968. The "LBJ Unbirthday Party" was an actual event organized by MOBE. It is described here occurring where it actually occurred, at the old Chicago Coliseum on 15th and So. Wabash, which had a Civil War prison incorporated into its facade as described (South Loop history mention: https://southloophistorical.wordpress.com/2013/10/08/the-chicago-coliseum-1513-s-wabash-ave-1900-1982/). The coliseum was torn down in 1982. Other events described are derived from *New York Times* accounts of the 1968 Democratic Convention and surrounding events including: "Tear Gas Is Used to Clear Parks," and "Defeat for Doves on Vietnam Plank Reflects Deep Division Within Party," which appeared on August 29, 1968. [go to Chapter 98]

Chapter 98 notes

McCone Commission statements are quotes from the actual report (https://ia801401.us.archive.org/0/items/ViolenceInCity/violence%20in%20city_text.pdf). One photo described is from the article, "Highway 1 Between Dong Ha and Quang Tri" on The Vietnam I Remember website (thevietnamiremember.com) by Steven Curtis. (2/13/2013 note: Photo referred to in the text is no longer on the site.) "LBJ Unbirthday" remarks of William Burroughs and Jean Genet are quotes of their actual remarks at this event. Song and lyrics (Phillip Ochs, "I Ain't Marching Anymore")

are the actual song and lyrics presented at this event. These facts were all obtained from *New York Times* accounts of the event. [go to Chapter 99]

Chapter 99 notes

Bobby Seale's comments are quotes from *New York Times*, but they are described here as appearing in the *Chicago Tribune*. Here is a video of Bobby Seale outlining the "Ten Point Program" of the Black Panther Party: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHvbui7N70o. Location and circumstances of the Grant Park gatherings are based on various accounts including: "1968 Chicago Democratic Convention," by Paul Sequeria; "Groovin' in Chi, November 1968," by Terry Southern; "Chicago '68, the Unconventional One," by James P. Turner; and "1968, August: Disturbances at the Democratic National Convention" from Chicago Public Library Historical Information. MOBE statement is verbatim as presented at the event. Yippie statement is their actual statement distributed in Chicago at this time (but maybe not read to the crowd as depicted here). Yippee history : https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/lorraine-and-fredy-perlman-chicago-1968. [go to Chapter 100]

Chapter 100 notes

Description of events in this chapter is based on news accounts in the *New York Times* on August 29, including: "Police Assaults on 21 Newsmen in Chicago are Denounced," by Donald Janson; and "Humphrey Nominated on the First Vote After His Plank on Vietnam is Approved; Police Battle Demonstrators in Streets," by J. Anthony Lukas. See also, Google images of "Chicago 1968 democratic convention": www.google.com (too long to display). Here is a video showing the worst of the confrontation, including the "Whole World is Watching" chant and the police charge on the demonstrators: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_9OJnRnZjU. [go to Chapter 101]

Chapter 102 notes

This chapter draws partly from Encyclopedia Britannica articles on Martin Luther King Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich. Also: "Theism Rewritten for an Age of Science" from *God and Science by Charles P. Henderson Jr.* Passage quoted of Vincent Sheehan is from his book *Not Peace But a Sword* (Amazon: www.amazon.com/Not-Peace-Sword-Vincent-Sheean/dp/1179507304). [go to Chapter 103]

Chapter 103 notes

History of Vietnam is mainly based on Stanley Karnow's book *Vietnam A History* though other facts were obtained from websites, encyclopedias,

etc. (Amazon: www.amazon.com/Vietnam-History-Stanley-Karnow/dp/0140265473). Quotes from Tolstoy and Thoreau are verbatim. Facts on amount and value of French exports from Indochina are derived from Ho Chi Minh's writings. (Equivalence of French francs to US dollars for statement, "807,739,362 francs worth of exports in the previous year, 1921": = 89,748,818 USD (1921) = 174,112,706 USD (1968) = 1,669,759,793 USD (2026).) [go to Chapter 104]

Chapter 104 notes

This chapter includes quotes from the Selective Service Form 150 ("Claim to be a Conscientious Objector") used at the time. [go to Chapter 105]

Chapter 109 notes

Comments on student disaffection are from "Politics Hollow for Missouri Students" by Douglas Kneeland. Spiro Agnew's quoted remarks are from "'We Will Listen' Republican Says But 'We Not the Poor Will Take Action' He Adds," by Thomas A. Johnson. George Wallace's platform is from "Excerpts from American Independent Platform." Speculation on youth sympathies derive from "Where Will the McCarthy Vote Go," by William V. Shannon. All these articles appeared in *New York Times* on October 14 1969. [go to Chapter 110]

Chapter 111 notes

This chapter draws from the following articles that appeared in the *New York Times* on November 1-2, 1968: "Nation Will Vote Today, Close Presidential Race Predicted in Late Polls," by Tom Wicker; "Elector Vote 287," by Max Frankel; and "Thieu Says Saigon Cannot Join Paris Talks Under Present Plan; U.S. to Step Up Bombing in Laos," by Gene Roberts. [go to Chapter 112]

Chapter 112 notes

Information on the number of sorties flown is from "355th TFW History" (https://www.dm.af.mil/About-DM/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/666235/davis-monthan-355th-wing-fact-sheet/) and "An Uncommon War: The U.S. Air Force in Southeast Asia" by Bernard Nalby. See also *Air War Over South Vietnam 1968-1975* by Bernard C. Nalty (electronic copy: https://media.defense.gov/2010/Sep/24/2001330077/-1/-1/0/AFD-100924-004 .pdf). Intelligence information presented by Col. Collard draws from U.S. Department of State Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968 Volume XXVIII Laos (history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28). [go to Chapter

113]

Chapter 114 notes XXX

Takhli RTAFB photo page (www.takhli.org/bob/TakhliMemoryJoggersPage.htm) had a photo of a Thai rock group playing at a bar dressed as described (men with Beatle-cut black hair, woman singer in mini-skirt with Jackie Kennedy bouffant). [go to Chapter 115]

Chapters 120-122 notes

Streets and places described in Bangkok are actual streets and places frequented by American soldiers, as conveyed in their anecdotes posted on websites. Pat Pong was the actual sex trade area in Bangkok. Some information on Bangkok comes from "The Many Faces of Thailand" by Noel Grove, National Geographic, February 1996. Information on Detachment K is from Military Intelligence in Southeast Asia, 1970-1975 by Sedgewick Tourison (www.vietnam.ttu.edu/events/1996_Symposium/96papers/miinlaos.htm). Orin Brown's information about the status of peace talks and the dispute about the shape of tables is partly from "U.S. Offers Plans to End Deadlock in Vietnam Talks," by Paul Hofmann, *New York Times*, January 2, 1969. [go to Chapter 121] [go to Chapter 122] [go to Chapter 123]

Chapter 123 notes

This chapter refers accurately to several actual articles in the *New York Times* on the cited dates with the headlines quoted and containing the exact text quoted. [go to Chapter 124]

Chapter 125 notes

This chapter contains an accurate description of the circa 1969 U Shaw neighborhood in NW D.C. The "14th Street Corridor" was the scene of riots, as described. Muhammed Ali poster ("The Vietnam War According to Ali: White Men Sending Black Men to Kill Yellow Men") actually existed at the time (author experience, can't find on internet). Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Wikipedia article: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stranger_in_a_Strange_Land) was a celebrated book among those speaking of "alternative consciousness" (author experience). [go to Chapter 126]

Chapter 127 notes

Events described in this chapter are partly drawn from the following *New York Times* articles of January 10, 1969: "Capital Hails History's Boldest Explorers, Crew of Apollo 8 Is Saluted by President and Congress," by

John Noble Wilford; “Excerpts from the Apollo 8’s News Conference;” and “Negro Priests in Chicago and Other Cities Threaten to Resign in Dispute With Bishops.” [go to Chapter 128]

Chapter 128 notes

Some sources for this chapter: The MacArthur Bridge “(www.builtstlouis.net/macarthur.html)“ (*Built St. Louis* website); and “Geronimo’s Surrender – Skeleton Canyon, 1886” by James W. Hurst https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Geronimos-Surrender.pdf). [go to Chapter 129]

Chapter 129 notes

Nixon quotes are excerpts from his 1969 inaugural speech (www.bartleby.com/124/pres58.html). Hippie ideas introduced later in this chapter are derived from Stephen Gaskin’s recorded monologues in his “Monday Night Class” (https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/monday-night-class.pdf) held in San Francisco, in the late 1960’s, in the old amusement park (which no longer exists) on the west end of Golden Gate Park. Gaskin also wrote a book called *Monday Night Class*, printed by Bookfarm, but the information in this chapter is obtained from fragments of that book available online. [go to Chapter 130]

Chapter 132 notes

Statistics on troop levels and numbers of people in volunteer organizations are historically correct, obtained from World Book articles and other encyclopedias and websites. This chapter also draws from: “Teachers’ Ranks Swollen by Men Avoiding Draft,” by Lasey Fosburgh, *New York Times*, January 7, 1969. [go to Chapter 133]

Chapter 133 notes

Alfred Stieglitz’ “The Hand of Man” (www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=106162)“ is an actual photo containing the view described. This chapter contains a quote from remarks on the described photo in xroads.virginia.edu, a website that was archived in 2016 and is available as a downloadable WARC (Web Archive) at https://archive.org/details/warc-xroads_virginia_edu. Other sources for Walker Evans: Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC): www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evan/hd_evan.htm); see also xroads Virginia website: https://archive.org/details/warc-xroads_virginia_edu. As this chapter indicates, Brandt at this time has an interest in the Farm Security Administration (FSA) Photography Project, all the images of which are viewable online on the Library of Congress website:

www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?st=grid&co=fsa. The particular artists mentioned here include (in addition to Walker Evans): Ben Shahn (Web: https://www.nga.gov/artists/3030-ben-shahn/artworks). Dorothea Lange (Web: https://www.loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/?q=lange,+dorothea), John Vachon (Web: https://www.loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/?q=vachon,+john), Arthur Rothstein (Web: https://www.loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/?q=arthur+rothstein), and Gordon Parks (Web: https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/docchap7.html). One example of an artist who has focused on the "chance encounters such as city life provides"(in one period of his art) is Lennart Anderson of New York (Web: jssart.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/street-scene-accident.jpg; see also his website: www.lennartanderson.com). [go to Chapter 134]

Chapter 134 notes

Mary's literary interests are typical of the feminist movement of the time (author experience). This chapter contains a quote from Mary Brandt's model (of the moment); Simone Weil (simoneweil.net/home.htm). Other women notables mentioned in this chapter include: Anais Nin (www.anaisnin.com); "Mother" Jones (www.aflcio.org/About/Our-History/Key-People-in-Labor-History/Mother-Jones-1837-1930); Sojourner Truth (https://www.history.com/articles/sojourner-truth); Sylvia Plath (www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/sylvia-plath); Susan Sontag (www.susansontag.com); and Eleanor Roosevelt (https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/). [go to Chapter 135]

Chapter 135 notes

This chapter contains an accurate account of UFW history and current events in spring 1969 obtained from the UFW website history page (https://nfwm.org/about/our-history/). [go to Chapter136]

Chapter 137 notes

This chapter contains an accurate history of the Santa Barbara Mission (www.santabarbaramission.org) with quotes of some material available for tourists. [go to Chapter 138]

Chapter 140 notes

This chapter is partly derived from "Apollo Spaceship in Orbit Links Up to Lunar Module," by John Noble Wilford, *New York Times*, March 4, 1969. [go to Chapter 141]

Chapter 141 notes

Accounts of war activities are from *New York Times* (for example, "Enemy Uses Tanks in Attack on U.S. Camp in Highland but is Repulsed," and "That Vietnam Understanding" an editorial that appeared on March 1). Articles cited had the headlines and text given. This chapter contains accurate statistics for 355th Wing KIAs, obtained from the USAF Statistical Digests and Summaries. Here is a 2026 reference: https://www.virtualwall.org/u-usaf/355thtfw.htm. [go to Chapter 142]

Chapter 142 notes

This chapter describes a traditional Thai wedding ceremony with the actual words said at the wedding. This was obtained from various websites describing Thai traditions. [go to Chapter 143]

Chapter 147 notes

This chapter has quotes from the *Rolling Stone* "Revolution" issue of April 7, 1969, including excerpts from articles by Jann Wenner, Michael Rossman, and Conrad William. Remarks attributed to George Mason Murray are his remarks as reported in *Rolling Stone*. Here is the cover: https://static.lib.virginia.edu/sixties/unrest/protest/rollingstone.html. [go to Chapter 148]

Chapter 148 notes

This chapter has excerpts from Franz Kafka, J.R.R. Tolkien, Carlos Castenada, and the rock band, *The Fugs*. The *Fugs* lyric is actually a quote of a poem by Matthew Arnold. [go to Chapter 149]

Chapter 149 notes

The book *A Garden of Earthly Delights* by Joyce Carol Oates was a best seller at this time, and popular among feminists (author experience). Here is the Wikipedia article on the book (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Garden_of_Earthly_Delights). Here is the New York Times review (www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/21/reviews/oates-garden.html by Thomas Lask. [go to Chapter 150]

Chapter 150 notes

The described U.S. government-sponsored Amchitka Islands archaeological project actually occurred at this time prior to nuclear testing (author experience). [go to Chapter 151]

Chapter 154 notes

Information about the see-saw battle for control of the Plain of Jars is mainly based on U.S. Department of State declassified documents for the

period described (summer 1969), collected in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968. Volume XXVIII. Laos: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28*. Another source was *CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974, Supporting the Secret War* by William M. Leary (https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/CIA-Air-Ops-Laos.pdf). [go to Chapter 155]

Chapter 157 notes

The articles described in this chapter as appearing in the *New York Times* actually did so on the cited date (May 15, 1969) with the exact headlines and text indicated in the chapter. The lead article on the troop pullout cited was by Robert B. Semple Jr., who also wrote a related story, "Nixon Asks Draft Lottery With 19-Year-Olds First; Orders Deferment Study." [go to Chapter 158]

Chapter 164 notes

O'Rourke correctly summarizes the nature and effectiveness of combat medical support in Vietnam. This is partly based on *Dust Off: Army Aeromedical Evacuation in Vietnam* (https://history.army.mil/portals/143/Images/Publications/catalog/90-28-1.pdf) by Peter Dorland and James Nanney of the Center of Military History, United States Army. But also, there are many anecdotal accounts to draw from, telling experiences of men and women in uniform. [go to Chapter 165]

Chapter 167 notes

Apollo 11 details are historically accurate including names of astronauts, timeframe, and radio exchanges between crew member and mission control (which are given here verbatim from the NASA flight transcript (https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/as11-cm.pdf?emrc=0b1223). The use of geosynchronous satellites to broadcast the event worldwide is also historically true. [go to Chapter 168]

Chapter 168 notes

As described in this chapter, a highway across northern Laos was being constructed at this time in three segments: in the west, from Yunnan to Muang Xay (the "China Road"); in the east, from Muong Soui to Dien Bien Phu; and, between these west and east segments, along Route 19 between Muang Xay and Muong Soi. In summer 1969, the western segment had not been completed; the eastern segment was completed; and the middle segment (in which Morris goes down, on the east end of it) was being improved. Meanwhile The USAF was involved in a related interdiction operation called Commando Hunt (I-V). Here is the

Wikipedia article on the Commando Hunt Operation (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Commando_Hunt). This chapter is partly derived from "Vietnam Service 1958-1973" from the USAF historical site. (Note, 2013: This book is no longer available online. [go to Chapter 169]

Chapter 169 notes

Morris's "hideout" is at latitude 20°37'N, longitude 102°23'E. Landmarks Morris identifies in the fog are true map locations and names. His described evasion route takes him across the mountain called Pha Louong, which is also a true map location, adjacent to the Nam Ou River, as described. Refer to Map NF48-13 (911gfx.nexus.net/mapnf4813.html) (1:250,000), specifically to the two sections in "rows" 1 and 2, "column" 2 (/911gfx.nexus.net/vietnam/maps/nf48-13/nf48_13b.html). (In this map, Morris's hideout is at the highest elevation point in the hill to the left of the marker "LS203,"where there is a small black circle on the map. Highway 4, that Morris refers to runs down through the valley that would be visible from Morris's location.
The cliff that Morris's plane crashes against is below and to the right of the marker "L203" by the smaller letters "3353.") [go to Chapter 170]



Chapter 174 notes

All events described in this chapter occurred at Woodstock including huge crowd, heavy rains, use of a helicopter to bring in entertainers because of clogged roads, sharing of food in the crowd, Hog Farm supply of free breakfasts, medical conditions treated such as burnt eyes from looking into sun, widespread use of grass and acid, and people sliding on the muddy hillsides. General facts regarding Woodstock and how it was laid out were. obtained from "How Woodstock Happened" (www.edjusticeonline.com/woodstock/history/index.htm) by Elliot Tiber (1994, *Times Herald-Record*), though there are no direct quotes of Tiber's descriptions. Other facts were obtained from the Woodstock website and from many other accounts in websites, encyclopedias, television programs, etc. [go to Chapter 175]

Chapter 175 notes

This chapter contains quotes from the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Spring 1969. Web purchase: https://wholeearth.info/p/whole-earth-catalog-spring-1969. [go to Chapter 176]

Chapter 176 notes

This chapter contains accurate facts for the Welfare Rights Organization, obtained from a historical page in the WRO website (www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/national-welfare-rights-organization). The article "Social Work for Social Change," cited in this chapter, is a wholly fictional article. It does, however, state the central philosophy of the process used to placate the town while still being "radical" (author experience). [go to Chapter 177]

Chapter 182 notes

Chu Lai landmarks, buildings, beachfront, and roads are derived from military unit historical websites, maps, photographs, and stories of people who served at Chu Lai. Triage scene is based on stories of medical personnel who worked in triage areas with wounded soldiers ferried in on medivac helicopters—for example: Army nurse Chris Banigan: https://www.facebook.com/smallestsoldier/posts/us-army-nurse-captain-chris-banigan-in-vietnammilitarynurses-armynurses-nurses-s/1249064393907558/. General scene draws from Chu Lai Coastal Division 16: www.pcf45.com/chu_lai/chulai.html. [go to Chapter 183]

Chapters 187-189 notes

These chapters draw from the following articles in the *New York Times*, October 15-16, 1969: "Vietnam Moratorium Observed Nationwide by Foes of the War; Rallies Here Crowded, Orderly; Protests Staged in Capital as Nixon and Aides Meet," by E.W. Kenworthy; "Campuses Remember Slain G.I.'s," by Bernard Weinraub; "Demonstrators Make Up Patchwork Quilt," by McCandish Phillips; "Moratorium Backers Say Nixon Will Have to React," by John Berbers; "In the Wake of the Moratorium" (editorial); "Nixon Vows Not to Be Swayed by War Protests," by James M. Naughton; "Text of Nixon Exchange With Student;" "Leaders of the Moratorium Now Look to November." Also, from *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1969: "30,000 War Foes Parade in Capital. [go to Chapter 188] [go to Chapter 189] [go to Chapter 190]

Chapter 190 notes

The cowboy style of Air America pilot Bryan Zastrowski is modeled on stories and photos on historical websites maintained by former Air America pilots. Here is their website (www.air-america.org). [go to

Chapter 191]

Chapter 192 notes

This chapter draws from the following articles in the *New York Times*, November 14, 1969: “President Thanks Congress for War Support, House and Senate Speeches Invite Members to Provide ‘Constructive Criticism,’ His Plea is Bipartisan,” by Robert B Semple Jr.; and “Transcript of President’s Remarks in House on Support for His Policy in Vietnam.” [go to Chapter 193]

Chapter 193 notes

This chapter draws from the *New York Times*, November 15, 1969: “Apollo Heads for Moon; Powerout Momentarily During Take-off in Rain,” by John Noble Wilford; Highlights of Flight Plan of Apollo 12 on Its Voyage to the Moon.”; “‘March Against Death’ Begun By Thousands in Washington,” by David E. Rosenbaum. [go to Chapter 194]

Chapter 194 notes

This chapters draws from *New York Times*, November 15, 1969: “250,000 War Protesters Stage Peaceful Rally in Washington; Militants Stir Clashes Later, A Record Throng” by John Herbers; “Tear Gas Repels Radicals’ Attack, Capitol Police Retaliate as Youths Hurl Bottles and Rocks at U.S. Buildings” by John Kifner. [go to Chapter 195]

Chapter 196 notes

Descriptions in Barb Carpenter’s letter are partly derived from oral stories of Vietnam nurse Rhona Prescott (https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.01146/). This is from the *Experiencing War—Veterans History Project* (www.loc.gov/vets) . Another source: “Military Nurses in Vietnam” (https://teeitupforthetroops.org/blog/2023/08/21/the-nurses-who-served-in-the-vietnam-war/). [go to Chapter 197]

Chapter 197 notes

This chapter draws from maps and photos on historical websites. Descriptions of Can Tho and Binh Thuy were partly derived from photos of Can Tho and Binh Thuy on the Delta Dragon Can Tho Run website (www.cantho-rvn.org/air.html). [go to Chapter 198]

Chapter 198 notes

Base layout, mess hall, and pizza stand are based on photos of the actual base viewed on Binh Thuy photo section (www.cantho-rvn.org/camp.html) of Delta Dragon Can Tho Run historical website. [go

to Chapter 199]

Chapter 200 notes

Quotes of *Easy Rider* are from the Easy Rider movie script(www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/e/easy-rider-script-transcript-hopper.html) by Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and Terry Southern. [go to Chapter 201]

Chapter 201 notes

This chapter is partly drawn from "Chinese Message Exhorts Vietcong to Protracted War." *New York Times*. December 19, 1969. [go to Chapter 202]

Chapter 202 notes

The historical plaque described is actually inscribed with the quoted words about the "River Warren." The plaque is located in Indian Mounds Park on Dayton's Bluff in East St. Paul (https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=225300). The WPA walls described actually exist, including the high wall on Wells Avenue in East St. Paul. [go to Chapter 203]

Chapter 205 notes

Dr. Tyler Moy's speech about "strangeness" that Matt Brandt refers to takes place in Chapter 125. [go to Chapter 206]

Chapter 206 notes

The idea of a personal aura has been attributed to many sources, but, in this historical period, it draws mostly from Stephen Gaskin of "Monday Night Class" (https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/monday-night-class.pdf). [go to Chapter 207]

Chapter 207 notes

Quotes of Fidel Castro's speech are from the Castro internet archive (www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1959/05/17.htm). Historical details are from J.A. Sierra's History of Cuba website (www.historyofcuba.com/cuba.htm). Some seasonal and agricultural details came from *Rural Cuba* by Lowry Nelson (Octavia Press, 1970). Historical events are drawn partly from the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* article by Herbert Matthews quoted in the text is the actual article and all quotes are verbatim. The Platt Amendment referred to in this chapter (https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/platt-amendment) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1903 in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. [go to Chapter 208]

Chapter 208 notes

General setting of Sam Neua presented in this chapter, including location at a commandeered Buddhist temple and use of caves for imprisonment, is based on second hand accounts of sightings of Laos MIAs held by Pathet Lao. For more on "inner home" concept, see note for chapter 74. Here is the Wikipedia article on Sam Neua (alternatively spelled Xam Neua) (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xam_Neua). [go to Chapter 209]

Chapter 209 notes

Quotes of Ho Chi Minh are from the Ho Chi Minh internet archive (www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/index.htm). References to Minh's living situation, dress, manner, and clothes are from multiple sources including same website, Wikipedia, Stanley Karnow, the World Book, etc. Xuan Than is modeled on Nguyen Hung (described in *The Century* by Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster). Some facts are from World Book articles on "Vietnam" and "Vietnam War." (One of the actual North Vietnamese peace negotiators at this time was also named Xuan Than. This is just a coincidence.) [go to Chapter 210]

Chapter 210 notes

Many facts in this chapter are from Stanley Karnow's history of Vietnam (Kindle: www.amazon.com/Vietnam-History-Stanley-Karnow/dp/0140265473). The quote on the Annamites being "ripe for servitude" is also from Karnow. Facts on the Battle of Dien Bien Phu are from *Wars of National Liberation* by Daniel Moran. Model for Xuan Than is Nguyen Hung, as mentioned above. [go to Chapter 211]

Chapter 211 notes

Facts on total pounds of bombs are from the World Book article on the "Vietnam War." Xuan Than's lover, Mai Thi Li, quoted by him in these last meetings with Jim Morris, is modeled on Dang Thuy Tran, an NVA combat surgeon who died in a battle in 1970 in South Vietnam. Excerpts from her diary, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* (www.vietnam.ttu.edu/resources/tram_diary were obtained from The Vietnam Center and Archive. [go to Chapter 212]

Chapter 212 notes

Physical descriptions of the Cuban town Mary stays in are based on the article "Trinidad, Cuba" in the National Geographic Vol. 196, No. 4, October 1999. [go to Chapter 213]

Chapter 213 notes

Radical ideas presented here are based partly on "What Legacy from the

Radical Internationalism of 1968?" by Max Elbaum, Radical History Review, Issue 82, Winter 2002 (https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/elbaum.html). [go to Chapter 214]

Chapter 215 notes

References to U.S. Army's unofficial policy of dumping unused meds on the local populace to give the impression of providing medical help are based on the "Complete Winter Soldier Investigation Testimony," Medical Panel Part 1 (www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_51_Medical.html), specifically the comments of Dr. Joseph Grosso, Captain, General Medical Officer, 173rd Airborne Brigade, Field Hospital, Nha Trang (April 1967 to December 1967). [go to Chapter 216]

Chapter 216 notes

The practice of refusing medical assistance to wounded enemy soldiers as a means of extracting information is based on the "Complete Winter Soldier Investigation Testimony," Medical Panel Part 1 (www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_51_Medical.html), specifically the comments of E4 David F. Fortin, H & S 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. [go to Chapter 217]

Chapter 217 notes

"Ethics of Ambiguity" (alluded to by pilot Capt. Ken Forland) is the title of a book by Simone de Beauvoir. Details of Communist atrocities cited by intelligence officer Orin Brown in this chapter are such as were claimed by Dr. Tom Dooley in his book, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Story of Vietnam's Flight to Freedom*, published in 1956 (summary: https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Tom-Dooley.pdf). Another example of a similar source of such information at the time: "The Blood-Red Hands of Ho Chi Minh," published in Reader's Digest, November 1968 (https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Blood-Red-Hands.pdf). [go to Chapter 218]

Chapter 222 notes

Quotes of Nixon's speech are from "Transcript of President's Address to the Nation on Vietnam," which appeared in the *New York Times* on April 21, 1970. For an audio of this same speech, refer to the Presidential Audio/Video Archive Richard Nixon: Address to the Nation on Progress Toward Peace in Vietnam, April 20, 1970 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7vlMXibu9s). [go to Chapter 223]

Chapter 225 notes
Same Nixon speech is referred to here as in Chapter 222. [go to Chapter 226]

Chapter 226 notes
Information on Cambodian Incursion is from "Nixon Sends Combat Forces to Cambodia to Drive Communists form Staging Zone; GI's and Bombers Begin Drive on Foe's Sanctuary," by Robert E. Semple Jr. *New York Times*, May 1, 1970. [go to Chapter 227]

Chapter 227 notes
Descriptions of student unrest following announcement of Cambodian Incursion are based on: "Big Rallies are Planned," by Linda Charlton, *New York Times*. Descriptions of "culture war" manifestations such as display of flags and radio programs are from author experience. [go to Chapter 228]

Chapter 228 notes
Details of military organization, unit names, locations, and assignments at the time described in this chapter are from Stanton's *Vietnam Order of Battle* (Amazon paperback or Kindle: www.amazon.com/Vietnam-Order-Battle-Illustrated-Reference/dp/0811700712.) [go to Chapter 229]

Chapter 230 notes
Description of lead-up to Kent State murders are partly based on "Violence on Campuses," *New York Times*, May 3, 1970. For a day by day detailed summary, refer to https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/may-4-chronology. [go to Chapter 231]

Chapter 231 notes
This chapter draws on several accurately quoted and credited articles from the front page of the C*hicago Tribune* of May 5, 1970, including the headline article: "Kent State Riot; 4 Killed; Troops Fight With Students." Kent State University archive: (Web: https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/kent-state-shootings-may-4-collection). Wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kent_State_shootings. The hitch-hiker with "the wild long hair and full beard of a Biblical prophet" is based on author experience. [go to Chapter 232]

Chapter 235 notes
Ban Hatbay is modeled on Ban Lao, Laos (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Xiangkhoang_Province,_Laos.jpg),

located on Laos Route 7 about 20 miles northeast of Phonsavan, Laos, and 200 miles south of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam. Descriptions of Lao Theung society are based mostly on Laos: A Country Study, Library of Congress, Andrea Savada, editor (https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/la/laoscountrystudy00sava_0/laoscountrystudy00sava_0.pdf). [go to Chapter 236]

Chapter 236 notes

Part of the speech by Maj. Gen. Jake Landers (regarding something worthy of dying for and J.S. Mill) may be an actual quote of some real officer, but, if so, not known. This speech was developed from notes kept by the author with no designation as to source. So, apologies are due to someone if this is an actual quote and not credited. KIA statistics and timeframe are from Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) (aad.archives.gov/aad). Some historical facts on 101st Airborne are from *Wikipedia*. Fire support base locations were obtained from a website run by Tony Mabb (on which he says, "For reference purposes, the book *Where We Were* by Michael P. Kelly, Hellgate Press, 2002, provided much of the information. (Mr. Kelly served with D Co 1/502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Division 1969-1970.) Map topographical details were obtained from the topographical maps on John Paul Rossie's map website (which no longer exists in 2026 but here is an alternative map website with links to many maps: https://www.pritzkermilitary.org/explore/vietnam-war/map). Orin Brown's presentation is partly based on A Shau Valley Campaign (www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0390126001), December 1968- May 1969 by Col. Bert Aton & William Thorndale. [go to Chapter 237]

Chapter 237 notes

Details of military organization, unit names, locations, and assignments at Fire Support Base Ripcord are from Stanton's *Vietnam Order of Battle*. (Here is a link to the Kindle version: www.amazon.com/Vietnam-Order-Battle-Illustrated-Reference/dp/0811700712. Visual details are partly drawn from historical photos posted on the Firebase Ripcord Association website and the Currahees website. Another source was *Wikipedia* (articles on Battle of FSB Ripcord (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Fire_Support_Base_Ripcord) and 101st Airborne (Airmobile) (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/101st_Airborne_Division). Medical organization and duties are based on medical unit websites. [go to Chapter 238]

Chapter 238 notes

A general sense of military life in the field was obtained from Jim Loy's website (www.pritzkermilitary.org/explore/vietnam-war/map), which in 2026 no longer exists. Combat situations described in this chapter including deployment of a unit to observe the effect of a carpet bombing and carrying of a soldier on a pallet down a dark road for medivac evacuation are based on soldiers' stories from FSB Ripcord. [go to Chapter 239]

Chapter 239 notes

"Wide Mesa Indian Foundation" is modeled on the Southwest Indian Foundation of Gallup NM (https://www.southwestindian.com/), which existed at this time with many of the organizational characteristics described (author experience); but WMIF has fictional departures so no information in the novel is meant to disparage the real foundation. [go to Chapter 240]

Chapter 240 notes

This chapter draws partly from "California Regents Drop Communist from Faculty," by Wallace Turner, *New York Times*, June 6, 1971; also: "Miss Davis Calls Trial a Frame-Up; Seeks a Role in Co- Counsel in Her Own Defense," by Earl Calder, *New York Times*, January 6, 1971. Wikipedia page on Angela Davis: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela_Davis. [go to Chapter 241]

Chapter 244 notes

There were many sources for this account of the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord including: Keith Nolan (*Ripcord: Streaming Eagles Under Siege. Vietnam 1971*); the FOX News special on the battle; Firebase Ripcord Association website (https://ripcordassociation.com/); 2/505th 101st Unit History 1970; John Dennison Vietnam Medic website (www.1stcavmedic.com, which in 2026 no longer exists); official U.S. Army after action report; Lt. Frank Hair's "The Summer Offensive in the A Shau Valley" https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/A-Shau-Valley.pdf); Mike Conroy (*Dangerous Rings of Fire*); John Paul Rossie's map website (which no longer exists in 2026 but here is a alternative map website with links to many maps: https://www.pritzkermilitary.org/explore/vietnam-war/map); and Stanton's *Vietnam Order of Battle* (here is a link to the Kindle version: www.amazon.com/Vietnam-Order-Battle-Illustrated-Reference/dp/0811700712). None of these sources was quoted or paraphrased. [go to Chapter 245]

Chapter 245 notes

This chapter has field medicine details derived from *Voices from Vietnam* by Richard Burks Verrone & Laura M. Calkins. Also some details are from *Chinook Crash* by Gary B. Roush. [go to Chapter 246]

Chapter 246 notes

This chapter is partially based on accounts of the gallantry of medical corpsman Kenneth Michael Kays of 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, May 7, 1970 (https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/kenneth-m-kays). [go to Chapter 247]

Chapter 253 notes

Descriptions of the Canterbury Shaker Farm are partly drawn from the farm's historical website (www.shakers.org) and the *Wikipedia* articles on American Shakers in general and this particular farm. [go to Chapter 254]

Chapter 262 notes

This chapter draws from the following articles in the *New York Times*: 'U.S. Vietnam Force Drops to 4-Year Low," October 20, 1970; "Ex-GI Says He Saw Calley and Mitchell Kill Civilians," by Douglas Robinson, October 20, 1970; "B-52's Said to Raid Trails in Cambodia," October 20, 1970; "Scraps of Paper from Vietnam," by James P. Sierra, October 18, 1970; "War-Weary Laotians Hope for Cease-Fire With Pathet Lao at Least in North of Country," by Alvin Shuster, October 16, 1970; "Ho Chi Minh Trail is Bombed 13th Day," October 22, 1970; "Nixon Peace Plan Rejected Again, 'Definitively,' at Paris Talks," by Clyde H. Farnsworth, October 23, 1970; "Hanoi Predicts U.S. Will Extend War," October 24 1970; "Soldiers Arriving for Service in Vietnam Find Little Cheer in Nixon's Plan to Step Up Withdrawals," by Gloria Emerson, October 25, 1970. [go to Chapter 263]

Chapter 263 notes

Setting in Hong Kong and areas frequented by American G.I.'s are based on stories and photos available on soldier websites from the Vietnam era; no direct quotes. {go to Chapter 264]

Chapter 264 notes

Henry Hotel, with this name, actually existed at the narrated time, and the building still exists (as of 2/11/2013) on the SW corner of Main Street (Old Highway 61) and Strong St. in downtown Gallup (https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Henry-Hotel.jpg); (https://rolandmenge.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Henry-Hotel-2.jpg). [go to Chapter 265]

Chapter 265 notes

Scene and details for Monument Valley are based on author experience and Navajo Monument Valley Park website: https://navajonationparks.org/navajo-tribal-parks/monument-valley/. [go to Chapter 266]

Chapter 271-273 notes

Information on Lam Son 719 is derived from a number of sources, first and foremost Indochina Monographs: LAM SON 719 (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D114-PURL-gpo82053/pdf/GOVPUB-D114-PURL-gpo82053.pdf) by Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). Also of note are the U.S. After Action Report for the 101st Airborne by Brig. Gen. Sidney Berry, the *Wikipedia* articles on Dewey Canyon 2 and Lam Son 719 (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Lam_Son_719), Stanton's *Vietnam Order of Battle* (www.amazon.com/Vietnam-Order-Battle-Illustrated-Reference/dp/0811700712), Mike Slonniker's "compiled memories" (which in 2026 no longer exist but here is a summary: https://www.americal4ofthe3.com/images/Lam_Son_719__Dewey_Canyon_II.pdf) and the various websites for units that took part in this operation.

None of these sources is quoted or paraphrased. Information on Dewey Canyon II is difficult to find because this operation had little engagement with the NVA. Sites mentioned in the account are mostly from Dewey Canyon I. Dates are not exact. The 506th Infantry "Currahees" Bravo and Charlie companies may not have been involved in Dewey Canyon II, though some units of the 101st Airborne were involved. For continuity of characters (mainly platoon leader Kevin Klein), these units were placed in these chapters. Some topographical and map details are from Thomas Pilsch's *Air Operations* website.

Also, some descriptions drew from the following articles in the *New York Times*: "Troops at Khesanh, Recalling Siege by the Enemy in 1968, Are Digging In," by Craig B. Whitney, February 20, 1971; "A Move Toward an Inviting But Treacherous Target: Wider War?" by Alvin Shuster, February 7, 1971; "U.S. Officials Feel Nixon Has Decided on Strike in Laos," by Terrence Smith, February 6, 1971; "Troops of Allies Mass Near Laos; Crossing Denied," by Alvin Shuster, February 5, 1971; "Khesanh Then and Now: Dust and Mud and Airstrip on Windswept Plateau," by Gloria Emerson, February 5, 1971. [go to Chapter 272] [go to Chapter 273] [go to Chapter 274]

Chapter 279-281 notes

The account of the final days of Lam Son 719, including the NVA attack on FSB Hope, the ARVN assault on Tchephone, and the last minute substitution of a new, uninitiated AHB for the war-weary Commancheros is based on the same battle reports as cited for chapters 271 to 273. LAM SON 719 (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D114-PURL-gpo82053/pdf/GOVPUB-D114-PURL-gpo82053.pdf) by Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh. [go to Chapter 280] [go to Chapter 281] [go to Chapter 282]

Chapter 282 notes

The actual date for the quoted headline in the *New York Times* ("Calley's Jury is Shown a Picture of Women's and Babies' Bodies") was March 17, 1971. The historical dates was shifted slightly to conform to the timeframe of the fictional story. See also, the William Calley court martial transcript (https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llmlp/MyLaiHearings/MyLaiHearings.pdf).

Chapter 283 notes

This chapter has quotes from the William Calley court martial (https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llmlp/MyLaiHearings/MyLaiHearings.pdf) in March, 1971. George Latimer was the actual attorney for the defense at this trial. This chapter also draws from: "The Nation: The Clamor Over Calley: Who Shares the Guilt?" *Time* magazine. Monday, April 12, 1971; and "Kennedy Puts Vietnam Civilian Dead at 25,000 in 1970," by Neil Sheehan, March 15, 1971, *New York Times*. [go to Chapter 284]

Chapter 286 notes

Remember Be Here Now (website:https://www.amazon.com/Be-Here-Now-Ram-Dass/dp/0517543052) suddenly made an appearance at this time, while all at the same time, many similar Asiatic spiritual ideas were being talked about by everyone (author experience). [go to Chapter 287]

Chapter 287 notes

Sources for these chapters include: "Libido and PTSD" by V. Gruden and V. Gruden Jr., Coll. Antropol. 24, (2000) 1: 253-256 (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10895553/); "The Etiology of Combat-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," by Jim Goodwin, Psy.D (http://www.trauma-pages.com/a/goodwin.php); and "Sexual Dysfunction in Male Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Patients," Koler Kotler et. al. in *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 2000, 69:309-31 (abstract: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11070443). [go to Chapter 288]

Chapter 289 notes

As noted in this chapter, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War held a march in April, 1971, in Washington D.C. involving about 100,000 participants. Similar march was held in San Francisco. Dylan Erland's references to hearing someone say on TV that "the was a lie, people died for a mistake" is an indirect quote of then Lt. Sr. Grade (later Senator) John Kerry's statement to Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 22, 1971 (https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/kerry-statement-before-the-senate-committee-speech-text/):"How do you ask a man to be the last one to die for a mistake? The site referred to here has editorial notes by Dr. Ernest Bolt, University of Richmond. [go to Chapter 290]

Chapter 290 notes

Tractor facts for the John Deere 70 (https://www.tractordata.com/farm-tractors/000/0/3/37-john-deere-70.html) are from the website *TractorData* retrieved on August 24, 2010. [go to Chapter 291]

Chapter 297 notes

This chapter draws from the following articles that appeared in May, 1971, in the *New York Times*: "60 Western Intellectuals Berate Castro;" "Havana Discloses Arrest of Writer;" "Text of the Statement;" "Cuban's Ordeal Arouses Artists," by Juan de Onis; "Embattled Cuban Poet: Heberto Padilla Lorenzo;" "Castro Says Poet Wasn't Tortured;" "Cuba Seeks Rise in Output by Labor;" "Panel Date Set for a Sugar Bill," by William M. Blair; "'Confessions' of a Cuban Poet;" "Cuba," by James N. Goodsell; "Havana Announces Release of Writer." [go to Chapter 298]

Chapter 298 notes

This chapter draws in part from "In City and Country, Cuba Invests Big Effort in Schools," by Ludina Barzini, *New York Times*, April 3, 1971. The Cuban law that Dr. Juanita Tancredo refers to (that everyone must work) is historically accurate (source unknown). [go to Chapter 299]

Chapter 301 notes

Canyon de Chelley descriptions are based on the National Park Service website www.nps.gov/cach/index.htm plus author experience. [go to Chapter 302}

Chapter 302 notes

These chapters draw from many sources on life in Cuba after the Revolution (improvement in literacy, building of clinics, access to utilities, and so on), most importantly J.A. Sierra's History of Cuba website (www.historyofcuba.com/cuba.htm). [go to Chapter 303]

Chapter 303 notes

The suppression of the free press in Cuba, with the concomitant ideological cleansing of Havana book stores (in favor of fiction emphasizing cultural heroes who give up bourgeoisie life to take up a life of revolution) is based on accounts read by the author (source lost). This chapter has a quote from Fidel Castro. [go to Chapter 304]

Chapter 305 notes

Members of the Venceremos brigade reported being tracked by the C.I.A. after returning from Cuba to the United States (author experience). [go to Chapter 306]

Chapter 306 notes

This chapter has details from the actual lead article, printed on June 15, 1971 for the *Pentagon Papers* series ("Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement," by Neil Sheean). Website for Pentagon Papers (in general, not specific article): www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers. [go to Chapter 307]

Chapter 307 notes

The *New York Times* articles quoted in this chapter were exactly as described in headlines, authorship, and verbal details. In the latter half of June 1971, more than 40 articles regarding the Pentagon Papers occurred in the *New York Times*. Website for Pentagon Papers (in general, not specific article): www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers. [go to Chapter 308]

Chapter 312 notes

This chapter has a mix of factual history and fiction. The facts on the Indian wars and on the promotion of the transcontinental railway are historically accurate. The photograph described of an Oregon Trail family is an actual photo from the era. The painting mentioned, "American Progress," by John Gast, 1872, is an actual painting (https://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/john-gast-american-progress-1872/). The article quoted, "Not All Have Praise," is completely fictional but based on historical facts. [go to Chapter 313]

Chapter 317 notes

This chapter has historically accurate references to the Mormons in southern Utah and Salt Lake, to the vanished railroad town of Turner, and the miner route across Nevada to the Mother Lode country in California. [go to Chapter 318]

Chapter 318 notes

This chapter draws from "Crime Taking Over in Haight-Ashbury" by Earl Caldwell, *New York Times*, January 2, 1969. Also, this draws partly from author experience of San Francisco 1971 and later stories heard while driving cab in San Francisco 1973-1980. San Francisco beach chalet murals: www.sfmuralarts.com/mural/389.html. [go to Chapter 319]

Chapter 320 notes

This chapter contains some accurate facts on the Acoma pueblo (www.puebloofacoma.org). [go to Chapter 321]

Chapter 328 notes

This chapter quotes Dylan Thomas's poem "Fern Hill" (www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15378). [go to Chapter 329]

Chapter 331 notes

The Catholic Workers Farm described in this chapter actually existed and had the general qualities described (author experience).

3. List of quoted or directly referenced sources

This list includes sources quoted or from which some content was directly referenced (meaning, in most cases, paraphrased) in this novel. Some sources in this list include URLs for the websites from which they were retrieved. If so, the websites may also be included in item 5.

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5. List of websites

This item includes some key websites that contributed to the content, background, or context of the events recounted in this novel.

NOTE: Links in this section were checked and verified or corrected for AGAINST THE WAR v2 in 2026.

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Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program (University of Kentucky): appalachiancenter.as.uky.edu.
Chicago Digital City: digital.cityofchicago.org.

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Cross-Currents. 2026: https://cross-currents.com/.
Cuban Government. Sitio del Goberno de la Republica de Cuba. 2026: https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/.
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Dyess Air Force Base Air Park. 2026: Aviation Enthusiast Corner: https://www.aero-web.org/museums/tx/dlap.htm.
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Fire Support Base Hill 4-11 Gallery. 2026: https://www.hill4-11.org/photos/.
Georgetown University: www.georgetown.edu.
Georgia Institute of Technology: www.gatech.edu.
Home of Heroes Website. Site provided by Doug Sterner: www.homeofheroes.com.
Homecoming II Project (for POW Returns). (Compiled from "U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, and interviews.") 2026: https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/192659
Jim Loy's Home Page. Website on Vietnam War. 2026: Not Found but here is testamonial page: https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/31432/JAMES-R-LOY/.
Kentucky Coal Education: https://coaleducation.org/.
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POW Network: www.pownetwork.org.
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Takhli Royal Air Force Base website with photos, maps, and email accounts of soldiers who served at Takhli: www.takhli.org/rjw/index.htm.
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The Vietnam I Remember. Provided by Steven Curtis: thevietnamiremember.com
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University of Missouri at Kansas City Law School, Famous Trials (Douglas O. Linder). 2026: https://www.famous-trials.com/.
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Vietnam Center and Archive. The Oral History Project of the Vietnam Archive: www.vietnam.ttu.edu/oralhistory.
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What a Long Strange Trip. 91st Evac, Chu Lai. 2026: Not Found.
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Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Air Museum. Modern Flight:

www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=311.

6. Table of Main Changes Made 2013 to v2

Table below summarizes main changes made, describes each change, and lists affected chapters.

Summary	Detailed Description	Chapters
Changed Barb Carpenter's training to make possible a January 1969 arrival in Vietnam	Made Barb Carpenter start as a sophomore nursing major at U of MN (rather than freshman); changed her selected program to inhospital, accelerated, leading to RN, officer commission (no BS degree); heavy hands-on experience	003, 010, 022, 049, 050. 053, 054, 075, 085, 101, 127, 150, 218
Changed O'Rourke-Carpenter interaction	Describe O'Rourke from the start as aware of possible rank difference issues affecting his and Carpenter's relationship and more involved in finding ways to get arround them; changed details such as Carpenter's eventual assignment to Binh Thuy (after Can Tho); added O'Rourke's ongoing concern with and observance of rank potocol	003, 010, 022, 049, 050, 053, 054, 075, 085, 101, 127, 150, 196, 197, 198, 227, 228, 229, 247, 272
Expanded O'Rourke-Steward rooftop talk	Added reference to Carpenter in O'Rourke and Steward's rooftop talk. O'Rourke states it would be "tricky" to see her in Vietnam	084
Made O'Rourke-Ken Forland interaction more rank protocolled	Describes O'Rourke as more respectful and using correct address such as "Captain" and "sir," as well as nickname "El Capitan"	181, 196. 197, 198, 247
Made O'Rourke-Orin Brown interaction more rank protocolled	Describes O'Rourke as more respectful and using correct address such as "Captain" and "sir"	215, 216. 217, 236, 247
Made O'Rourke-Kevin Klein interaction more rank protocolled	Describes O'Rourke as calling Klein "LT" while Klein calls O'Rourke "doc"; despite formality, they regard one another as friends	237, 238, 244, 245, 246, 271
Made O'Rourke-	Describes O'Rourke calling Art	271, 273

Art Steward more rank protocolled	Steward “Captain” and “sir”	
Changed details on Bill O’Rourke	Small corrections such as in names of military units	247, 271, 279, 280
Changed details on Jim Morris	Xuan Than references to Agent Orange changed to generic defoliants, less known results; reference to Bradley tanks changed to Patton tanks; reference to Special Forces agent committimg rape changed to be presented as rare	59, 60, 209, 210 211
Corrected USAF flight terms	“kink” to “jink” (autocorrect typo)	245
Made Manson-like hitchhiker generic “longhair”	Made hitchhiker less Mason-like but still reflecting author-experience; removed endnote on Manson	231
Changed names “Shoats” and “”Mohs”	“Rachel Locke” to “Rachel Shoats”; “Ray Locke” to “Ray Shoats”, “Clara Shoats” to “Clara Mohs”.	178, 185, 186
Changed Kelly’s plans	Changed whether he will stay in KY to be more up for grabs	226
Change squaw dance words	“Yah-Nah Hey-Oh-Oh-Oh” to “Yah-Nah Ha-Oh-Oh-Oh”	296
Corrected DC park name	“Rocky Creek” to “Rock Creek” (in Washington D.C.)	149
Small typos, etc.	“Sled” to “Thud”; “camaradery” to “camaraderie”; “paratroop” to “paratrooper”; “Hunan” deleted; “Kanturn” to “Kontum”; etc.	41, 57, 58