

Anything That Moves

The Conscience of a Radical

K. Sena Makeig

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For the citizens of the world

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“People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”

—George Orwell

“Anyone who thinks must think of the next war as they would of suicide.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Chapter One

“Fortunate Son”

(as performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival)



My going to war was so inevitable that I enlisted while wisps of smoke were still circling above the extinguished candles on my eighteenth birthday cake. A long family tradition of military service and the weight of generations of expectations sealed the deal. The possibility that my lifeless form might someday end up face down in the mud of some distant battlefield, or that I could return home with pieces of me missing never engendered a moment of self-reflection. Just hand me a gun and point me in the right direction. Hesitation equates with weakness, or worse, failure. Soldiers don't question authority if they want to succeed. Besides, the wisdom of my decision to enlist was reaffirmed daily by the reassuring statements churned out by the Johnson White House press office. We were winning in a glorious crusade to keep Southeast Asia from the horrible domination by the Red Menace.

One excuse for my rashness was that I was raised by parents who positively rejected introspection. My dotting, Betty Crocker-like mother was an unenviable product of the fifties. In the late afternoons, her housedress transformed into stockings, pearls, and lipstick before my father arrived, as if to hide the tediousness of her mornings from the mundane evenings that inevitably followed. Although she had attended Wayne State

University after high school, she dropped out in her sophomore year to marry Raymond, the handsome Korean War vet with “great potential,” as my grandfather used to claim. Their marriage produced three children—me and two younger siblings, Billy and Christine. Although Christine was under the protection of my mother, my brother and I suffered a nearly constant barrage of disapproval from a frustrated man whose “great potential” and middle-class aspirations were often thwarted by working-class prejudices. His military service in Korea and occasional hunting trips to Canada were the only times he left the confines of Detroit and his factory work for the Ford Motor Company. And when I finally was discharged from the service, I was expected to start a life just like his.

My brother, Billy, was another story. We all inherited our mother’s attractive features, but while Christine’s remained soft and delicate, Billy’s and mine were roughened by our father’s manly angularity. Only one year my junior, Billy seemed much younger and looked absolutely nothing like me. I came with dirty-blond hair without the hint of curl, while he was topped by auburn ringlets, almost too precious for a boy. I was solid and well-muscled, while he was slender and graceful. My eyes were a blazing blue, and his were a deep, thoughtful brown. He was scholarly, and I was . . . well I was said to have a forceful personality. If I was a fighter, he was the poet. While I unwisely defied our father at every opportunity, Billy hid behind a pile of books and mostly ignored the rancor that permeated our household. He could be found at the library more often than at the empty lot that served as a makeshift ball field at the end of our street, where I happened to spend most of my childhood.

Perhaps our appearance or demeanor or the goddamned look in our eyes somehow presented a challenge to our father, engendering his simultaneous admiration and contempt. I think psychologists call it transference, but back then it forced me to protect my own ass and that of my brother. I didn’t mind. Constant admonishment taught me to stand up for myself, to persevere, to be a young warrior even in my own home and, eventually, whatever part of me that once harbored a gentle nature soon withered from neglect.



I’d always been a good shot. My father recognized my talent early on and bought me my very own bolt-action, Remington Model 700 rifle and a box of cartridges. It didn’t occur to him that a new Schwinn bicycle probably would have been a more appropriate gift for a ten-year-old, but to me, it represented my entry into that mysterious realm of manhood. The two of us often drove out to an empty, overgrown field near the abandoned Willow Run Airport to practice shooting paper targets. It was the only time during those early years that I remember having anything approaching a normal relationship with my old man.

I soon became more proficient than him, which might have humiliated him some, but I didn't understand that at the time. I simply thought it was a chance for me to win his begrudging admiration, which I did as long as I held a gun.

The next year, my dad decided that I should join him and a few of his army buddies on their annual deer-hunting venture to northwestern Ontario. Our destination was across the border from Minnesota, along the banks of Rainy Lake, a few miles outside of Fort Frances. The town of Fort Frances, with its one-pump Sunoco gas station and cinder-block diner, was unremarkable, and we stopped there only to resupply. We weren't there for sightseeing; we were there to hunt.

I knew my .22 was too small to bring down a big buck, but it could slow one down enough for my father to finish him off with his lever-action .30-30 Winchester. Most of the time, I contented myself with taking potshots at any rabbits foolish enough to wander within range. When my father finally deemed me old enough to handle his gun, I tagged some bigger trophies, but it would be a few more years before I saved up enough money to purchase a real hunting rifle of my own, just like my dad's Winchester.

The winter I turned fourteen, the Ontario woods seemed to magically transform him from the gruff, oppositional person he was at home into a kind of primordial woodsman who temporarily viewed me as a scion worthy of his time and instruction. He usually was a reticent, mostly unapproachable man, and I think I knew even then that winning his approval would be a lifelong endeavor, but I never gave up. In the frigid, predawn mornings up in that deer stand, ensconced in cozy layers of thick flannel, I felt an uneasy communion with my dad.

One morning, the winter wind that swept east across the barren, ice-crusting fields of Manitoba had mostly exhausted itself by the time it reached us, with barely the strength to lift feathery swirls of snow from the nearby trees. We stayed out all day, dusted in whiteness, numbed from the cold, and stiff from hours of immobility. We were an invisible part of the forest. The crisp stillness was punctuated by infrequent and distant echoes of discharging firearms, but for most of the day, we sat in total silence. I imagined that my dad and I were the last people left on earth—a frightening thought, to be sure.

As twilight descended, the other hunters assembled on the forest floor below us, summoned from their hiding places by the idea of a warm fire. Snow squeaked beneath our boots as we trudged back to the cabin empty-handed. Each of us gathered an armful of wood by the front door and stomped the snow from our boots before entering. I was looking forward to a hot meal but was even more eager to hear their war stories, recounted in the flickering firelight. Even at that age, I knew most of their stories were bullshit, but they contained enough truth to open a small window into what I imagined was my father's soul.

During the Korean conflict, the old friends who now warmed their feet by the fire had been stationed together near Seoul. They casually smoked in the flickering light, their necks thickened from encroaching middle age and their faces obscured behind a week's worth of whiskers. In some respects, time seemed to have stood still for them. Since leaving the army, most had married, started families, and settled in the upper Midwest, where jobs were abundant in the 1950s, but every winter, they looked forward to these few weeks when they could trade familiar, time-softened complaints about their former lives. It was the same every year, but I never tired of the stories. Even the routine acts of soldiering took on an aura of significance. They talked of comrades, some fallen in battle, but most slipping back into a prewar existence upon separation. Their nostalgia for an orderly, conscripted world was palpable, and as I sat spellbound, listening to exaggerated feats of bravery, I hoped someday to have my own war stories to tell.

Back then, I saw war as “the great equalizer,” mixing people from all walks of life who otherwise never would have met, especially after Truman integrated the military shortly after the end of the Second World War. War's unintentional diversity could be traced as far back as the Civil War, when city boys who had never encountered a living cow were thrown together with country lads who were unconvinced that any building could or should be taller than their barns.

The next dawn, a fresh blanket of snow muted the sounds of the forest as my father and I once again perched in our tree stand high above a frozen travel corridor, waiting for the does to discover the bait we'd set for them. It was rutting season, and the females inevitably brought in the single-minded, hormone-driven bucks. My sense of fair play was offended at the manipulation of those poor, addled bucks, but I willingly overlooked the injustice for a chance to take one down.

Midmorning, I finally spotted a thin-legged silhouette against the brilliant, white backdrop of snow. She was about forty yards from us, head down, nosing aside the snow to uncover hidden blades of grass. My father had seen her too. Neither of us moved. Perhaps sensing my excitement, she suddenly lifted her head. The reason for her alarm soon became apparent when a young buck appeared several yards behind her. His four-pointed antlers still displayed a bit of drying velvet. Keeping his head low, he followed her scent and seemed unconcerned with his surroundings—focused only on getting to that doe. With minimal movement, I silently chambered a round and carefully lifted my rifle to take aim. I slowed my breathing and heart rate as I lined up my target, using the iron sights along the barrel of my rifle. (My gun wouldn't be equipped with a scope for another year.) By now, the doe had moved a few yards farther away, and the buck followed her, oblivious to the danger. I exhaled until my lungs were almost empty before gently squeezing the trigger. The recoil slammed into my flannel-padded shoulder and reverberated off the nearby trees, creating a shock wave that caused tiny icicles to break off from the bare branches and pierce the snow below in what looked like a line of miniature daggers. The doe sprinted away, defiantly flicking the white underside of her

tail as she quickly disappeared. Meanwhile, the surprised buck fell to his knees, collapsed heavily onto his side, and died without a sound.



That was over five years earlier, although it didn't seem like it as I lay inert on a small rise just above another travel corridor, sweating through jungle fatigues rather than flannel, slick from the combination of camo paint and insect repellent smeared across my face and neck. The drone of mosquitoes joined the rustle of the thick canopy swaying overhead. It was almost as if the jungle had a heartbeat of its own, mystically joined to mine. I waited.

The lieutenant had sent us out ahead of our unit. He couldn't spare any spotters, so we four snipers were on our own, creeping through dense vegetation in predawn hours heavy with humidity. We wordlessly split off in four directions to station ourselves at the perimeter of an abandoned, disorderly cluster of crudely constructed hootches. A few days ago, one of our scouting patrols had returned with the news that the North Vietnamese Army, also known as the People's Army of Vietnam, was in the neighborhood and appeared to be planning to use the village—you could hardly call it that—for resupply, although it looked as if everything had been abandoned some time ago. The village didn't much resemble the well-stocked Binh Tram supply outposts I'd encountered along the Ho Chi Minh Trail when I was working in Region 1 near the Laotian border. Nevertheless, the CO assumed the enemy patrols recently spotted in the area would be coming to replenish their supplies before moving on. We snipers were ordered to keep the NVA in the village long enough for friendly reinforcements to arrive. In other words, no one was to escape to warn other enemy units of our presence. It was fairly straightforward compared to some other missions we'd undertaken.

I was about two hundred meters from the village center. My orders were to contain hostiles in the northwest quadrant and terminate any who tried to leave. To accomplish this, I didn't carry a modern sniper's rifle, not like the heavy Remingtons the marine snipers used, but made due with an old Springfield M1D. It'd been a ubiquitous sniper rifle during the Korean War and with a standard ball was fairly accurate to a distance up to about four hundred meters. Later, in Recondo School, I would have a chance to shoot one of the new M21s and would look back on this day wishing I'd had one, but they were almost impossible to get. So I'd tricked out my M1D by removing the flash suppressor and adding a few items, like a leather cheek pad, a special match barrel, and a new side-mounted Leatherwood 3-9x scope rather than the standard M84 2.2. In addition to an eight-round internal magazine, I carried five twenty-round mags of match-grade ammo, difficult to obtain in the field but more accurate in my mind than the heavier AP loads, although I knew plenty of snipers who would disagree. The M1D was a good gun—I didn't mean to complain, although most of my unit still carried their trusty M14s. On my hip hung a 1911a1 sidearm, also not standard issue but an unofficial insurance policy

graciously overlooked by my CO. I hadn't had an occasion to use it yet and hoped I never would because that would mean the enemy was in my face.

The patience I'd practiced as a kid in the frozen forests of Ontario was now paying off. I'd been motionless for the better part of a day. Long ago, I'd perfected the technique of flexing different parts of my body without actually moving them, to stave off muscle cramping and fatigue. To keep hydrated, I drank a lot of water, most of which I sweated away or peed into the dirt, also without perceptibly moving. Covered with branches and leaves and flattened against the warm soil, I was part of the jungle.

A sudden sound alerted me to figures emerging from the foliage. In an exhausted, single-file procession, they slowly made their way into the village. According to my intelligence briefing, as far as they knew, the closest U.S. troops were still miles to the east, so they weren't trying to be quiet. A few of them scanned the tree line without urgency, rifles casually balanced in the crooks of their arms, while the slackened faces of the rest told me they were preoccupied with their need for rest.

As if they were mere pieces on a chessboard, I dispassionately counted them as they emerged from the shadows, squinting against the bright sun. I selected my first target—a bedraggled soldier who had just dumped his gear in front of one of the primitive hootches. I watched him through my scope as he lit a cigarette and rested against the doorframe, lifting his chin slightly to blow smoke into the air above his head. His rifle, momentarily forgotten, was propped against the wall at his feet. I could make out his weary features as he wiped sweat onto the shirtsleeve of his worn, pajama-like uniform.

I couldn't be certain that everyone was now in the village, that some sentries hadn't remained hidden at the edge of the trees, but the demeanor of the exhausted troops made that unlikely. It was a chance I'd have to take. I couldn't see the other snipers but could sense their presence, as I was sure they sensed mine. Create chaos, the CO had instructed us. Keep them in the village until the rest of our company arrives. Don't let anyone leave.

Patience was a valuable skill, second only to marksmanship for a sniper—that and the ability to see people only as targets. I began to take deliberate, steady breaths. Beating against my rib cage, my heart was willed to slow. My rifle was already positioned, a round chambered, safety off. My fingertips caressed the sun-warmed metal as I rested my cheek against the leather pad and moved my finger from the trigger guard onto the curved trigger. When most of the air had left my lungs, I calmly squeezed off my first shot.

K. Sena Makeig

“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“All the war-propaganda, all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting.”

—George Orwell

Chapter Two

“War (What Is It Good For? Absolutely Nothing.)”

(as performed by Edwin Starr)



It had been a couple of weeks since I’d slept for more than a few hours at a time. Most nights were spent with my eyes closed, sitting in the dark living room of my parents’ house with a forgotten beer warming in my hand, afraid I might doze off. I’d been home for over a month, and my family was starting to wonder if there was something seriously wrong with me. I was beginning to wonder that myself.

They’d been glad to see me when the flight carrying me and three other Michigan vets finally landed at Detroit’s Metropolitan Airport. There were no crowds of well-wishers. We didn’t even warrant any anti-war protesters. Only our immediate families showed up, grateful to have their sons returned to them in one piece, or nearly so. The three other vets on my flight were from different parts of the state, so we only knew each other from our time together in the hospital. The two army infantry grunts were from Warren and Flint, and the navy petty officer first class was from Kalamazoo. The four of us, not anxious to become friends, had recovered in a field hospital at our forward operating base until we were healed enough to return to the world, and we remained

battle-scarred strangers even during our mustering out at Fort Dix. We knew we would go our separate ways once home, so we thought maintaining our distance was a good idea.

Feeling as if I were traveling through time, I legged it across the sun-warmed tarmac with my duffel bag slung over my shoulder. The close military camaraderie I'd enjoyed during my tours overseas was going to be replaced by an estranged family with whom I'd kept in touch only through awkward, hastily written letters. I'd left home as an eager eighteen-year-old to return four years later an uneasy former POW. How was that going to work?

I was one of the lucky ones, so I had no right to complain. My physical injuries were not severe and were almost healed by the time we'd touched down at Metro. The cast would be coming off in a couple of weeks, and I barely noticed the headaches anymore. Nevertheless, this readjustment was going to be a bitch. I was returning to a world that couldn't begin to relate to my military experience—a world full of people who'd never watched someone's blood dripping off banyan leaves . . . who hadn't had to listen to men being broken one piece at a time.

Well, my old man might be able to imagine some of it, but Korea had been different. When he left the service, he'd returned to a country that appreciated his fight against encroaching communism, or at least didn't disdain him for it. I was returning to a country that was being torn apart from the inside. Yeah, we'd read the *Army Times* and heard it on AFVN radio in camp, at least enough to sense what was going on back home. I looked over at the other three vets for some reassurance, but they never looked back, as if abandoning me in hostile territory.

The army had tried in vain to shield those of us closest to the conflict from the stories of anger and hatred back in the States. Most of us couldn't understand why our fellow citizens weren't mourning those who would never return, or who would return but never be the same. After all, we were over there for them. Instead, they reviled us. They spat on us and called us baby killers, as if we'd lost our humanity. In their ignorance, they didn't even bother to distinguish between career soldiers and draftees. Actually, I felt sympathy for those poor SOB draftees who'd been unceremoniously ground up by the war machine. Most of them didn't want to fight any more than the peace freaks who screamed insults at them. At least I'd volunteered and felt a genuine commitment to protect the world from evil. Many of those poor draftees arrived in country frightened and resentful, only to return home conflicted and ashamed or else so disillusioned that they joined forces with an anti-war movement filled with assholes either too self-righteous to fight or too rich to have to.

As I stepped into the bright lights of the terminal and scanned awaiting faces for someone who looked familiar, I spotted my sister, Christine, sprinting over to throw her arms around me. I encircled her with my one good arm and rested my chin on the top of

her head, absorbing her love like some long-denied barbiturate. She clung to me for the few minutes it took for my parents to join us. My mother took my face between her hands and inspected me, reaffirming that I was indeed her son, only to take me into her arms and wordlessly press her damp cheek against my chest as if to confirm that my heart was still beating. My dad silently shook my hand. If I hadn't known better, I would have sworn his eyes were a little misty. Billy was nowhere to be seen, and my questions about him were met with a strange combination of obfuscation and uneasiness. I decided to let it drop to keep the peace.

We stood looking at each other in the emptying terminal, not sure what to do next. Finally, my father absently patted his pockets for his keys and declared, "I'll get the car. You three wait for me by the front door." He avoided looking directly at me, and I couldn't tell whether his reticence was from apathy or not being sure just who the hell I was.



Billy wasn't at home when we arrived, and I still couldn't get a straight answer from anyone as to his whereabouts. He was out. Obviously they were hiding something, but if I'd learned one thing in the military, it was that it didn't pay to ask too many questions, especially when you were outranked. I'd just have to give Billy some grief for not meeting me at the airport when I saw him.

The next day, Christine wanted to treat me to a milkshake as a kind of chocolatey welcome home. It was fine by me. I needed to get reacquainted with the kid sister who'd grown into a full-fledged teenager while I was overseas. We walked the few blocks to a familiar neighborhood hangout, a small diner called Wilson's. I didn't know if there'd ever been an actual person named Wilson, but the diner was well known for having the best burgers and milkshakes in town. The three of us had gone there often as kids and sat at the counter, impatiently swinging our feet as if our restless energy would cook our food faster. When I was tall enough, I would watch myself eat in the mirror behind the soda fountain and pretend I was in a commercial on television. Upside-down soda glasses were still lined up on clean, white dish towels spread over the stainless-steel countertop.

Christine and I seated ourselves at the counter on stools made out of fake red leather. Shiny chrome bands encircling them made them look like oversized overcoat buttons. You could rotate the stools three hundred and sixty degrees to take in the entire diner without leaving your seat, including the booths along the walls and the picture window that took up the entire storefront.

We sat companionably at that counter as if we'd been there only last week. Perched on my stool, I couldn't resist the urge to spin around. Christine smiled and did the same. We ordered two chocolate shakes and cheeseburgers with plenty of pickles.

“I’m real glad you’re back,” she began. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too, Chris. So tell me what’s been going on with you lately.”

She shrugged. “Not much, really. Hanging out with Janice and listening to music.”

“Yeah? What have you two been listening to?”

“Just stuff. You probably wouldn’t know it.”

I smiled. “Oh yeah? I wasn’t on the moon, you know.”

Christine looked as if she were a little disappointed with me. “Be serious, Jamie. I know you weren’t on the moon. I bet you didn’t even get to see the moon landing, did you? Absolutely every one of my friends watched it, especially the part on television where they used those little plastic models to show you what was going on, minute by minute. It was wonderful.” She swung around to face me and continued in earnest. “That’s when I decided that I want to go there . . . to the moon, I mean. I’m studying science in school, and I’m pretty good at it. Maybe I can be the first woman astronaut and establish a colony up there, do you think?”

“That’d be far out, but I don’t think women will ever be allowed in space.”

“Why not?”

I pondered this for a moment. “Because men run things, and they don’t want women messing things up.”

She was obviously offended by this. “Don’t you think it’s men who mess things up?” When I raised an eyebrow, she continued. “Who started that stupid war anyway? Not women.”

“True,” I had to admit. “Man can do some stupid shi—stuff too, I guess. But now you’re starting to sound like that Gloria Steinem chick.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

I was beginning to regret the tenor of our conversation. “You know those women are all crazy.”

“They’re not crazy. Besides, Gloria Steinem is too famous for me to talk to. I’ve been talking about it with Janice.”

“Well don’t let her talk you into becoming some women’s libber.” I wasn’t sure I had any real problems with the burgeoning women’s movement, but I didn’t want my sister getting involved in politics, especially when it would upset the fragile balance of

power in our family. No need for her to aggravate the old man any more than necessary—that was my job.

Christine wisely changed the subject. “I see nobody’s signed your cast yet.” She tapped my plaster-encased arm with her forefinger. “If you want, I can draw something on it when we get home.”

I chuckled. “Sure, as long as it’s not a peace symbol.”

“I’ll draw something wonderful, don’t worry. Besides, you’re getting it off in a week or two, so whatever I draw will be gone soon. And I promise I won’t draw flowers or anything girly.” She stirred her shake with the straw and hesitated before asking her next question. “So how’d you get hurt anyway?”

“Oh, you know. Things were a little rough over there.”

I hadn’t told my family about my captivity. The army had notified them of my MIA status a couple of months after I’d gone missing, but fortunately it was only a few months later that I’d been rescued from a POW compound and sent to a hospital to recover. I can only imagine how difficult that whole thing had been for them, but I didn’t want to discuss it, especially with my sister.

Like fragments of a bad dream, something had been roiling around in my head ever since I’d left Nam. My return to the world made me uneasy. Yet it wasn’t restiveness that was bothering me but something more like disappointment . . . disappointment at not being allowed to finish the job over there? No, that wasn’t it. Like some indistinct figure relentlessly pursuing me from the shadows, there was something else bothering me, something insidious, more like anger . . . anger at myself for having left Billy and Christine unprotected, anger because I felt like a goddamned intruder in my own house, and especially anger at Nixon and all the others who prevented us from winning the war. People were still dying over there while I was having a beer and watching it on the nightly news. How could I have mistaken my anger for melancholy? My whole patrol had been annihilated, and I had attributed my mood to simply being bummed out.

I saw the look of alarm on my sister’s face and tried to reassure her.

“I’m okay,” I said, but that was a lie.

Christine silently resumed eating. From over my shoulder, the image of a street scene was reflected in the mirror behind the counter, and I stared at it, lost in thought. Cars were stopped at the intersection, waiting for the light to change, engines idling, drivers with their arms casually draped out the windows, hanging loose like drying fatigues fluttering on a clothesline. The scene in that mirror was so utterly normal that the last four years of my life might never have happened. But it had, and I couldn’t ignore the

disturbing memories that kept drifting before my eyes like bits of flotsam after a shipwreck.

Johnson could have won it, or at least stopped it. Instead, I'd read that he didn't want an inconvenient war to distract from his domestic agenda—his War on Poverty. He wanted the news out of Vietnam to be positive. According to his press statements, victory was right around the corner after the next campaign, after the next big push, after the next bombing runs. Now Nixon could stop it too, but he seemed too concerned with taking revenge on his enemies at home to worry much about those overseas.

From what I'd heard, the Tet Offensive, launched by the North Vietnamese last year, shook our entire military's confidence and made some people question whether the war was even winnable. Most men in my company never discussed it, certainly not while we were working, and especially not among the guys in my unit—the other LRRPs.

LRRP stood for “Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol,” an irreverent byproduct of the army's intelligence operation. We were the army's bad boys. The brass only put up with us because they needed the intelligence we provided and because they had trouble recruiting replacements for us. More often than anyone wanted to admit, LRRP patrols came back a man short, or didn't come back at all. Maybe that accounted for our cavalier attitude, compensation for the fact that we risked our lives every time we went out on patrol, or then again, maybe we were just being assholes.

I turned at the sound of Christine sucking the last remnants of milkshake from an otherwise-empty glass.

“Hey, Chris,” I began as the faces of my patrol faded, “I need you to tell me what's going on with Billy. Where is he? Why didn't he come to the airport to meet me? Is he in trouble or something?”

Christine shrugged noncommittally.

“Chris . . .”

“I promised not to tell.” She looked sheepish.

“Well, you know you can tell me anything, don't you? I won't say anything to Dad.” Yes, I was exploiting our past closeness and throwing in a bit of guilt as well. I knew she wouldn't be able to hold out for long.

She pushed back her glass. “They told me not to tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because you won't like it.”

I looked at her reflection in the mirror. “What won’t I like?”

“Promise me you won’t tell.”

I tightened my lips and nodded.

“Well”—she looked back at me in the mirror, reluctant to face me directly—“he enlisted.”

“Christ!”

“Don’t say anything. Please. Don’t tell them that I told you.” She looked worried.

“Damn,” I said under my breath. Why the hell would he do that? He and the military were about as compatible as . . . well, shit, they weren’t compatible at all. “Billy has no business in the army,” I finally was able to say in a relatively calm voice.

“Oh, he isn’t in the army,” Christine quickly reassured me. “He’s in the air force.”

“Christ.”

Christine made a small sound of distress, and I swung her around on her stool so we faced each other.

“It’s okay, Chris. You did the right thing by telling me. I won’t let on that you said anything. I just can’t believe Billy would be so stupid.”

She seemed perplexed. “Why is that stupid? You did it.”

“I’m different.” I was sure my father had talked him into it. Shit. Why Billy? Wasn’t one warrior son enough?

“Well I don’t like either one of you being in some stupid old war. I don’t approve of any of it. In fact, I’ve joined a movement at school.”

“What d’you mean? What kind of movement?”

“You know, one of those peace movements. I didn’t join right away, what with you and Billy being overseas and all. It seemed kind of disloyal, but then I started thinking maybe if we could end the war, the two of you could come home and we could be together just like we were before—a family and everything.”

I took hold of her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Chris, it’s never going to be like it was before. Just look at you. You’re practically grown up. Billy will come home and we probably won’t even be able to recognize him, he’ll be so big. And me, well, I’m twenty-two now and should be living on my own.”

“You mean you’re gonna move out?” She took her hand away. “You’re gonna leave again?”

I shrugged. “It’s kind of inevitable. I can’t live at home forever. I just need a little time to get my act together.”

“I thought you were gonna stay in the army, like Gramps. I thought you were a lifer.”

“Yeah.” I broke her gaze and spoke to our two reflections in the mirror. “I thought so too.”

“So what happened?”

“Things change.”



“Dinner’s ready,” my mother called from downstairs.

The summons was followed by the sound of Christine’s bedroom door slamming as she sprinted down the stairs, two at a time. I heard the rustle of the newspaper as my dad fought to fold it, the slight groan as he lifted himself from his recliner, and finally his heavy, uneven footsteps in the hallway as he lumbered toward the family table.

“Jamie,” my mother called again when there was no sound from my room. “Dinner.”

I lay unmoving on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Since I’d returned home, I felt unnerved, out of place. Household sounds were admittedly familiar. I’d heard them throughout my childhood. I recognized the ancient oil-burning furnace as it rumbled to life in the basement, the sound of dinner being prepared, and the low conversational tone of Walter Cronkite reporting the nightly news on the television in the family room. These were sounds that should have comforted me but didn’t because I no longer viewed this place as my home. Maybe I no longer had a home.

My gaze slowly moved to the poster of the 1968 World Series-winning Detroit Tigers hanging on the back of my bedroom door. Billy had hung it there, I was certain. That magical journey had taken place in the middle of my third tour, so I’d missed the entire season, but I still heard plenty about it in letters from my younger brother. The entire city had rejoiced in their triumph, almost enough to repair some of the damage from the riots of the previous summer—at least it looked that way from nine thousand miles away. Christine had kept a scrapbook of articles from the sports section of the *Detroit News*, which now lay open on my dresser. It seemed strange not to have Billy sitting on the edge of my bed, recounting in minute detail each exciting play of the series

or bragging about the fact that Denny McLain had won both the Cy Young and the American League's MVP awards that year. Unfortunately, by the time I finally was discharged from the army, my little brother already had finished basic training and shipped out.

"Jamie, get down here." It was my father's voice this time, colored with irritation.

I rolled out of bed and slowly descended the stairs. Like a staged still life, the others patiently waited for me at the table, poised to say grace. Christine cast me a wary look as I took my seat. Our heads bowed, I peered at my father out of the corner of my eye.

"Lord, bless this food that we are about to receive," he said. Then he added, almost as an afterthought, "And thank you for returning Jamie to us."

Amen.

My father reached for the roast beef and forked some onto his plate. Without looking at me, he started right in again. "You're spending too much time up in that room of yours. What the hell do you do up there all day? You need to get a job and quit moping around."

"Raymond," my mother said warily, "how can he work with his arm like that?" The pearls at her throat shifted in the hollow of her neck as she spoke. She smiled at me reassuringly.

My father looked at the plaster-encased arm that rested on the table next to my plate, which I quickly moved onto my lap. His chewing was slow and deliberate.

"Seems to me like it should be healed by now," he said, pointing his fork accusingly in my direction. "When do you get that thing off anyway?"

I didn't bother to answer, as I knew the conversation would continue perfectly well without me.

"In about two weeks," my mother replied as she helped herself to mashed potatoes. "It wasn't just a break, remember. It was major surgery." She made it sound as though I'd gone through some mystical ritual, something she didn't fully understand but knew she shouldn't dare question.

My father eyed me suspiciously. "Well barricading himself in his room all day won't make it heal any faster. I'll talk to my union rep in the morning and see if there're any openings at the plant." He returned his attention to his meal. My mother sighed.

Annette Breedlove was a combination of June Cleaver and Donna Reed, brimming with blonde wholesomeness and looking slightly mystified at being a housewife in the suburbs. Every morning, she donned a cotton housecoat with big patch pockets to temporarily store the miscellaneous detritus of the family as she cleaned the house. Like clockwork, each evening, she doffed her daytime clothes and put on a nice dress and pearl earrings, just like countless TV moms who set the standards in those days. Dinner was on the table by 5:45. My sister was in training to be just like her.

On the other hand, Raymond Breedlove commanded his family as if he were still in the military. He'd returned from Korea with shrapnel wounds to his leg, causing his stocky body to roll as he walked, like a sailor at sea. He'd been a handsome young man but had not aged well. Extra weight encased his torso like an ill-fitting coat, and his jowls were trying to pull his face into his neck. I'd only recently noticed the melancholy in his eyes, although it might always have been there. His affection for his family was delivered in a way that I never quite trusted. Even the temporary closeness that he and I had shared on those winter hunting trips vanished after my enlistment, another casualty of the protracted war.

Despite his war injury, my father was able to seamlessly slip from Korea into his former job at the enormous Ford Motor Company complex. Even though Ford was downsizing the plant and selling off pieces to independent manufacturers, the United Auto Workers labor contract had secured his job while he'd been overseas. Now he worked at the Dearborn Assembly Plant, producing the wildly popular Ford Mustang. His negotiated wages and benefits were good enough to afford the Breedlove family a comfortable, middle-class existence in their all-white, middle-class neighborhood, where the two Breedlove boys shared both a bedroom and a neighborhood reputation for raising hell—well, at least one of us did.

His membership in the UAW had made Raymond Breedlove a lifelong Democrat, despite his conservative values and vocal condemnation of today's youth. These values apparently were shared by my mother, who fulfilled her husband's every need like some worker ant. In fact, both my parents were upset by the turn American society had taken. They were scandalized by Hollywood's depiction of rebellious, disenfranchised youth as some kind of new American hero. The admirable ambitiousness of the 1950s had mutated into a monstrous, hedonistic disease that was infiltrating popular dress, music, radio, television, and morals. The American Dream was obscured by a cloud of marijuana smoke, which made my parents cling evermore tenaciously to their post-World War II idea of fulfillment.

Having missed the beginnings of this so-called cultural revolution, I was somewhat adrift, with tentative opinions mostly formed from secondhand sources. There was a distinct division in the army between those who thought the war was hopeless and immoral and those of us who were committed to winning. That's what was so frustrating. My commitment to winning didn't seem to be shared by the bureaucrats with the funding.

It seemed to me that either you gave the military what they needed to win or you pulled everyone out and labeled it a lost cause. But that would be admitting defeat, and the U.S. never would do that. We had never lost a war and weren't going to start now.

My father spoke up again as if I weren't in the room. "Our union rep might be able to find something for him, temporarily, until he decides what to do with himself."

"I'm not working at the plant." I said it so quietly that the three of them looked at each other for confirmation that I'd spoken.

"What's that?" My father dropped his fork with a clank, looking from me to my mother and back again. "What did you say?"

My mother started to say something but was halted by my father's raised hand.

"I said I'm not going to work at that damned plant."

My mother grimaced at my profanity.

"What the hell are you saying?" shouted my father, causing my mother to grimace again. "Do you think you're too good to work at the plant? I can tell you that you're not going to sit around the house like one of those hippie freeloaders."

"Ray," my mother cautioned.

This time, my father's expression silenced her. "Hard work is what will cure him, shake the cobwebs from his head. Stewing about his bad luck isn't healthy, and I won't have it."

Bad luck? I stifled a derisive snort.

Throughout my life, my father's moods had ricocheted between a subdued affection for his family and a begrudging resentment for his unrealized ambitions. I wasn't sure why he always was so unhappy, but all of us had learned to live on the edges of our seats in anticipation of an explosion.

My father wiped his mouth and tossed his napkin onto the table. "In fact, I've been asking around." He looked over at his wife. "You remember a guy in my outfit named Sid Barker, the one who joined the FBI?"

If he'd directed his question to me, I'd have told him that I remembered Sid Barker as one of the more stern-faced, unpleasant men to join our annual hunting trips. I wasn't surprised to hear that he'd gone into law enforcement. Figures. He must love carrying a gun and ordering people around.

“I don’t recall,” replied my mother as she started clearing the table. Christine began to help without being asked.

“Well”—my father raised his voice so she could hear him while she moved between kitchen and dining room—“he’s in the Chicago office and just might be able to help out here.”

“Help how?” asked my mother, looking dubious.

“Sid mentioned that they might be looking for some help at the Bureau. He seemed to be interested in Jamie’s background. It’d be nothing fancy, like a file clerk or something.” My father followed his wife into the kitchen when she didn’t reply. He stood behind her while she worked at the sink. “It’d be good for him.”

He didn’t bother to lower his voice as he mapped out my future, but my mother furtively glanced toward the kitchen doorway to see if I was listening. She needn’t have wondered. I could hear them perfectly well from my seat at the table.

“It’s not that. I’m just not sure he’s ready.”

Her husband’s only answer was an exasperated exhale.

“Ray, he’s been through a lot.” The pity in my mother’s voice made me resent her.

“Well his head will never get back on straight by us coddling him.”

My mother turned around, her hands still sudsy with dish soap. “We don’t understand what he went through over there. He came back, well . . . different.” She had lowered her voice, but not enough so I couldn’t hear.

My father’s voice softened a bit. “I know. War changes a man, but he’s a tough kid. If it were Billy, I might be worried, but Jamie will be fine. He just needs a kick in the, ah, rear end. I’ll give Sid a call tomorrow and see if I can set something up. I’m sure it’s gonna work out. Don’t worry so much.”

I’d moved to stand just outside the kitchen doorway and saw him give her a quick, self-conscious kiss and then motion for her to return to the dishes.

I noiselessly climbed the stairs to my room, where I lay down on the same blanket that had covered me since grammar school. I was surprised by their naiveté. His time in Korea seemed to have changed my father little, other than supplying him with a set of buddies and a pronounced limp. I resolved not to be like them. The army may have robbed me of my adolescence, but at least it had given my brain a much-needed kick start.



We three kids had grown up in a tree-lined neighborhood of Southfield, just northwest of Detroit. Our claim to fame was that Southfield had the first indoor shopping mall in the country, a vast array of stores, anchored by J.L. Hudson Company, surrounded by a parking lot so vast that they had to label the rows to remind you where you parked. Christine and our mother always seemed to be in need of something that took them to Northland, and Billy and I made ourselves scarce whenever we heard them planning a visit.

Our block was overflowing with kids conceived after World War II as part of the baby boom generation, sometimes aptly described as the bulge in the snake's belly. There was almost never a problem finding enough kids to field a team for a pickup ball game. During those rare occasions when we couldn't scrounge up a team, we would gather around someone's new transistor radio and tune into the Tigers' game. I loved listening to the smooth baritone of Ernie Harwell calling the play-by-play and the sweet southern drawl of color man George Kell. Al Kaline and Norm Cash had us convinced that sports stardom was in all our futures.

In high school, most of my Saturday nights were spent clumsily attempting to uncover the mysteries of the female body, followed by atonement at church the following morning. We attended the Methodist church, although I couldn't tell you the first thing about their theology and imagined that I was pretty far past the point of redemption already. I knew I should feel guilty for some of the weaknesses in my character, but I figured God probably was too busy to pay much attention to me. Funny, but I had that same feeling while sitting on my bunk in Vietnam, reading my mom's letters about the 1967 riots in Detroit. God obviously was too busy to pay much attention to my hometown too. In fact, I wasn't sure that God was paying much attention to the war either, although what more important thing he was doing instead, I could never figure out. I'd certainly heard enough bleeding soldiers trying to get his attention to make me wonder.

Billy was a big part of my life when we were kids. Even as far back as grade school, my friends and I included my kid brother in just about all our activities. Objecting would result in some painful attitude readjustment from me. Besides, Billy got away with just about everything anyway. His beatific grin made it impossible for my parents to punish him, even on the rare occasions when he actually was guilty. Whereas I experienced the unpleasantness of my father's reckoning, Billy was merely scolded and sent to his room, where he happily whiled away his incarceration reading. I'm not sure why our dad always seemed so angry with me, but the sensation of that belt across the back of my thighs is still fresh in my memory. Perhaps Billy eluded more severe punishment because he was the baby of the family, at least until our younger sister came along. Even so, she was under the protection of our mother, while I took the brunt of our father's discipline. Maybe Billy just fell through the cracks that so often result in middle

children being overlooked, or maybe our father was trying to toughen me up, to turn me into the man he wished he was.

I was eight when my dad first laid his hands on me. Too young to be afraid when he caught me in the garage using one of his power tools, I was still holding on to his saber saw when he smacked me across the face. He didn't bother to admonish me about the danger or scold me about using his tools without his permission. In fact, he never said a word. I staggered backward from the violence of his blow, my eyes filling with tears. As the saw clattered to the cement floor, my dad cursed under his breath and struck me again, only this time not as hard, as if he were having second thoughts. I remember lying on the concrete floor, waiting for him to leave so I could let my shame stream down my cheeks. From then on, he didn't hold back, as if hitting me became easier with practice.

This family dynamic didn't change even after I started high school, although by then, my fear of him became tempered with defiance. It showed in my disinterested attitude toward school, and as if to further antagonize him, I became an avid reader. I was captivated by history and the civics course we were all required to take to graduate. Consequently, when I wasn't out playing sports, I spent my time in the relative safety of the room I shared with Billy, studying the maps that came with our family's *National Geographic* subscription. The articles were interesting, but I mostly enjoyed the bare-breasted African women in those scandalous photographs, the ones we hid in our lockers at school before girls became a reality for us. I daydreamed about traveling the world and living among different cultures. Little did I know that I would get my chance in an unknown Asian country a few years later, not exactly what I'd envisioned while thumbing through those magazines, but that story's for a little later.

It wasn't until I reached the relative maturity of my twenties, with an ocean separating us, that I realized the beatings were about him, not me. He never hit me in front of my mother, but she must have wondered at the clumsiness of her elder son, who was always covered with bruises. I was constantly falling from my bike, or getting injured at football practice, or experiencing some other accident that left me various shades of yellow and purple. Billy knew what was happening. He would sneak down to the kitchen to retrieve a package of frozen peas for my swollen eyes or bleeding lips. I guess that's why he was so glad to see me enlist, so I could escape to the relative safety of war.

After a while, I became pretty good at ignoring discomfort and pain. It paid off in the army when I had to endure hours of silently fighting my way through nearly impenetrable jungle or sleeping standing against a tree in the pouring rain. And it helped me ignore my damaged arm and the throbbing, debilitating headaches during my time as a POW. Yeah, I had my dad to thank for toughening me up, alright.

A week before I shipped out, I encountered my father alone in the garage. He'd had a few beers, but I didn't think he was drunk. He started in on me, but I could tell his

heart wasn't in it. Maybe I'd finally outlasted him. Suddenly, some reckless burst of adrenaline made me, without thinking, grab him by his shirt front and back him up against the garage wall hard enough to rattle the tools hanging behind him. I had a good grip and didn't let go. My face drew within a few inches of his, close enough to smell the beer and cigarettes on his breath. He stared at me as if I were a stranger.

"I'm leaving in a week," I began, biting off my words, "and if I hear that you ever lay a finger on Mom, or Billy, or Christine while I'm gone, I'll come back and kill you."

He swallowed in astonishment, his glassy eyes fighting to focus. Releasing my grip, I left him standing there, perplexed and uncertain. Needless to say, he kept his distance from me over the next week. When he finally shook my hand as I boarded the bus to the airport, I thought I saw a twisted admiration in his eyes, almost as if he thought his abuse had finally paid off. That was complete bullshit. All it did was make me hate him.



In 1965, President Johnson consented to allow ground troops to participate fully in the war effort and soon announced that he would need one and a half million men in country over the next three years. My enlistment in early 1966 was part of Johnson's mobilization. I was all of eighteen when I left for Vietnam, feeling both proud and terrified—proud that I could serve my country and terrified of . . . I wasn't sure what, maybe everything else. I'd always known that I would join the military but had no inkling that combat in a small, Southeast Asian country most people had never heard of was turning into a brutal, full-fledged conflict. The Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry Divisions and the reactivated Ninth were deployed to help in Johnson's buildup. I was part of the Twenty-Fifth, known as "Tropic Lightning."

After basic training, I spent a few uneventful months as a green private shuffling papers in Honolulu, but before I could fully appreciate that I was an unattached male living in a tropical paradise, I found myself deploying from Schofield Barracks to Pleiku in the Central Highlands of Vietnam as part of a troop buildup called Operation Blue Light. The U.S. military had sliced up the country of South Vietnam into three bite-sized pieces, and Pleiku was in II Corps Tactical Zone (Region 2) just south and east of the border between Laos and Cambodia.

Blue Light was the largest airlift in the history of the military to date and consisted of some four thousand infantrymen and about nine thousand tons of equipment and supplies. We joined the one hundred and eighty-four thousand troops already in country. Nearly four hundred thousand troops were stationed in Vietnam by the end of my first tour, joining the Special Forces—Green Berets—who had already been operating on the ground for some time. Supposedly they were serving only as "advisors and trainers" in the proverbial foot-in-the-door strategy that President Kennedy had pursued. As 1967

drew to a close, our military forces in country consisted of seven divisions, almost half a million men, two-thirds of which were army, and one member of which was me in my full nineteen-year-old glory.

Until that time, the military's posture had primarily been defensive, but now it transitioned into an offensive campaign. We were determined to uncover the elusive Viet Cong headquarters, or COSNV, rumored to be in III Corps Tactical Zone (Region 3) to the south, where the U.S. Army was building strength for a new operation called Junction City. We were attempting to construct a shield of defenses around Saigon in a "hammer and anvil" type operation, and the Twenty-Fifth was part of the hammer. Tropic Lightning had seen some heavy action a year or so before I got there, and we enlistees were excited that we, too, might finally get a chance to kick Charlie's ass. It was another story altogether with the conscripts, who comprised almost half of our company and who didn't appear to be particularly thrilled at the prospect. This being my first rodeo, I hoped that combat would teach us to fight as a single organism so we all could return home victorious and proud. Things didn't exactly follow that script, however.

As one of a half-million nameless grunts, I was perfectly content to carry out my orders in obscurity, although that didn't last long. My consistently high scores in marksmanship made me a target (no pun intended), and my CO soon plucked me out of my unit and unceremoniously dumped me into sniper school. It stood to reason—shooting a rifle was inherent to my makeup. However, I soon learned that there is a rather significant difference between shooting an animal you intend to eat and shooting at a human you intend to kill. I wasn't thrilled that my telescopic sight served to magnify this distinction. (Ok, that pun was intentional.) Using a scope left no doubt about either the target or the outcome. There was something to be said for the anonymity that the M16 or even the M60 provided. Firing away at an unseen enemy often left you wondering what it was that you hit. It could be that you hadn't hit anything at all, just scared the crap out of some poor bastard who, much like those unfortunate Canadian rabbits, was attempting to run for the hills.

All the time I'd spent as a youth freezing my ass off in a deer stand now worked to my advantage. Snipers spend most of their time motionless, and I was damned good at sitting in a tree or positioned behind some rock without moving. In fact, most of my job now was waiting—for orders, for more favorable wind and light, for the new ammo that never came, for Charlie to spot my position, for my target to move into range, for my spotter to finish taking a leak. The waiting seemed eternal. Patience, after all, was just as important as being able to judge distances or trajectories. Unfortunately, the solitude engendered from waiting also afforded me plenty of time to think.

Some saw the job of the sniper as glamorous, but I knew it was not only fairly mundane but a necessary evil, a job few snipers actually relished. Most of us didn't enjoy the act of taking another life, but if it made things safer for our fellow soldiers, that was all the justification we needed. Besides, you didn't want to spend too much time in your

own head. Second-guessing myself made my hands shake, and trying to judge the morality of my job made me drink, which also made my hands shake. Avoiding shaky hands was one thing I could control among the millions of other things I couldn't. Just squeeze off that round and try not to give away my position—those were my immediate concerns. The self-reflection could wait until I was sacked out in the dark.

Sniping was not my full-time job because our unit's primary mission was to aid in securing the base camps north of Saigon and help the South Vietnamese Army clear Cu Chi, an area west of the capital. The Twenty-Fifth guarded the western approaches, primarily along Route 1 and the Saigon River, while the Second Brigade, which I currently was a part of, served as a buffer between Saigon and the enemy's bases in Tay Ninh Province. We worked alongside a company of engineers who were feverishly rebuilding roads before the monsoon rains made construction impossible and the roads impassable. Our company provided security for the engineers as they used D7E and D9 dozers with Rome plows and armored cabs to carve out a "safe" zone in the jungle, especially along roadsides. Thankfully, there wasn't much resistance from the locals, who seemed happy to have a way to get their produce to market.

My fellow grunts and I eventually fell into a routine. Our lives consisted of endless days scented by diesel exhaust, oppressed by heavy humidity, and inundated with annoying insects. We were a bit disillusioned in that there was no real fighting with this job, unless fighting off boredom counted, and there was no chance to snipe at much of anything besides a few unlucky snakes.

One afternoon, my CO caught up with me as I was walking patrol along the road.

"Breedlove, I need a word." He had to raise his voice to make himself heard above the dozers.

"Sir?" I slung my rifle over my shoulder and propped a foot up on a nearby tree stump, hastily using my sleeve to wipe off the sweat running down my temples.

My CO was in his mid- to late twenties, lanky and fairly bookish looking for a soldier. He had been midway through a graduate degree in sociology at the University of Colorado when his on-again, off-again enrollment status vacated his student deferment and left him unprotected against the draft. He was classified 1-A before the ink had dried on his draft notice. The army immediately sent him to "shake and bake" school for officer training, from which he emerged as a brown bar, or second lieutenant. He was rather indifferent to his new rank, but he took most other things fairly seriously. I'd always liked him for his willingness to embrace the mission despite some obvious reservations.

"You'll be leaving tomorrow at 0600 hours," he said almost offhandedly as he lit a cigarette. "You've been volunteered to go to MACV Recondo School. It comes with a bump in rank and pay grade," he added quickly, as if trying to convince me that I had just

won some kind of sweepstakes. He squinted at nothing in particular and blew out a small jet of smoke, awaiting my reaction. When I didn't have one, he continued. "You do know what Recondo School is, don't you, Private?"

I knew. Everyone knew. The school was where a small group of handpicked soldiers were trained by the Special Forces to secretly reconnoiter behind enemy lines. The graduates were known as LRRPs. I also knew about their casualty rates. I was pleased that my skills had been recognized up the chain but wasn't thrilled at the prospect of getting my head blown off.

"I've heard of 'em, sir."

He pushed his helmet off his forehead with his thumb. "They say they're a bunch of crazy bastards." The young lieutenant sounded almost wistful. "I've seen 'em in town, dead drunk and looking to get laid." He gazed at me as if reconsidering. "On second thought, it doesn't sound much like your kind of people, does it?"

I had a reputation in my company as someone who didn't drink much (the steady hand issue) and didn't seek to get laid (the clap issue). I tried to reassure him by spitting into the dirt. "Sounds like fun, Lieutenant. Tomorrow, huh?"

"Yeah. I realize that doesn't give you a whole lotta time to kiss everyone goodbye." He picked a speck of tobacco off the tip of his tongue and grinned.

"I think I can make it work, sir." I smiled. "Thanks for putting in a good word for me."

He held my gaze. "Just watch your six, Private."

"You too, sir." I saluted, and he grimly returned my salute. I watched him start back down the road toward camp, looking as if he were relieved to have gotten that off his chest.

Damn. This was gonna make things a whole lot more interesting.

I spent the rest of the day trying to recall everything I knew about LRRPs. Recondo School graduates had been used to populate somewhere between eleven and thirteen active LRRP units in country, the number varying with the intensity of the war effort on any given day but still a paltry contingent for the number of troops in town. The operation wasn't search and destroy as much as sneak and peek. I knew LRRPs were a peculiar bunch, but they were viewed as a necessary and valuable commodity throughout the army. It wasn't where you went to become a hero. By joining them, you pretty much disappeared, occasionally reemerging only to disrupt camp life on your days off.

Displaying a unique combination of irreverence and daring, the LRRPs operated under the radar, different from regular army and, for the most part, were looked down upon as odd half-breeds by their Special Forces trainers. Everyone else viewed them as curiosities, not worth befriending because they never were around for very long, and not always because they were transferred elsewhere. I had occasionally seen a few LRRPs around camp, easily recognizable by their camouflage jungle fatigues and bush hats, not the OD fatigues and steel pots worn by regular army. It was well known that the casualty rate among their ranks was high, but then again, shit could happen to anyone in a war zone.

I said my goodbyes quickly, knowing that by the time I finished my schooling, my company could be somewhere else. A few days later, I began three intensive weeks of eighteen-hour days, training under the unremitting instruction of the Special Forces. By day, I kept busy in class, learning the specifics of warcraft. Nights, when I wasn't participating in field exercises, were spent in unconscious oblivion, either exhausted on my bunk or sitting in a dark booth at one of the local dive bars in town, watching my fellow trainees toss back the local Biere 33.

Although Recondo School taught us how to use just about every kind of offensive weapon available to the foot soldier, our instructors spent just as much time teaching us the finer points of communication, navigation, escape, and wilderness survival. I was able to perfect skills I already possessed—camouflaging my position, gauging distances, moving silently, and waiting. Although we were taught to lay booby traps and mines, our actual survival depended on us not confronting the enemy at all. We had to remain invisible, silent ghosts. I loved it. It reaffirmed that I was meant to do more than watch heavy machinery fell a bunch of trees or wait to pull a trigger.

In fact, LRRPs rarely used guns. The whole purpose of the LRRPs was to gather intelligence, call in forward air control and artillery, and provide the command structure with information about enemy position and strength to help inform the brass's decisions. Whenever we could, we also snatched live enemy soldiers for interrogation. Dead ones also could prove useful because their pockets sometimes contained maps and other helpful information. When I finally graduated, I felt well prepared and dangerously invincible.

LRRPs operated in the shadows while on patrol but were often highly visible miscreants while in camp. Successfully completing a mission was always a relief, but the NCOs and COs at base camp dreaded it when we returned because it took several days for us to unwind. We were known for disrupting business as usual and flaunting military protocol. As a result, we tended to be well supplied, not because we were well funded but because we took whatever we needed. Need a ride into town? Take a jeep from the motor pool when no one's looking. Need to upgrade your weapon? Open the new shipment on its way to camp and help yourself. We carried tricked-out guns and a couple of knives—

none standard issue. We felt entitled, yes, but the dangerous nature of our missions made most COs look the other way.

Every LRRP patrol gives themselves a name. I guess that's how we establish our unique identity and bond as a unit. The patrol I joined called itself the "Pain Patrol," not entirely tongue-in-cheek, and disturbingly prescient, as it turned out.



It was the fall of 1968, and I was well into my third tour as a brand-new SP4. Ever since the Tet Offensive, launched by the NVA and Viet Cong, or VC, the previous January, the army had been on high alert to other potential large-scale attacks. In my humble opinion, it was rather like closing the barn door after the damned horse had already escaped, or however that saying goes. It was finally beginning to dawn on us that we weren't winning this war and that the allied military no longer controlled the country, if it ever had. I heard that even the revered and trusted newsman Walter Cronkite now thought the war was unwinnable. Consequently, the information gathered by the LRRPs became even more essential to the war effort, and as a result, we spent more time in the jungle than ever. We tried not to think about it. Thinking about it could be a distraction, and being distracted in the jungle could get you killed.

The news from home was not that great either. There had been disturbing reports about riots after the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., and it made me wonder what kind of country would be awaiting our return. It was bad enough that my hometown of Detroit had been torn apart by race riots the previous summer, but soldiers with machine guns perched on the steps of the Capitol was unconscionable. It seemed as if everything was falling apart.

Letters from my sister were the only bright spot. She was beginning her last year of junior high and sent me recitations filled with the drama of heartbreaking crushes, stormy news of the Beatles as they devolved into pot-smoking hippies, and the latest fall fashions from *Seventeen* magazine. Infrequent letters from my mother were filled with neighborhood gossip and updates on her favorite television shows, the usual pabulum. My father sometimes added a postscript, the sum total of his communication. Although my brother had written me fairly often during the summer, the fall found him utterly silent, even in the run-up to the World Series in which my beloved Tigers were slated to take part. I found it odd that no one would give me any information as to why he'd stopped writing so suddenly. Well, there was nothing I could do about it from this distance. I wasn't to find out until I was back at home that he already was in Vietnam, probably only a couple hundred miles away from where I presently sat.

The southwest monsoon rains finally began to dissipate as winter approached, allowing the frequency of LRRP patrols to increase. That didn't leave me much time think about baseball or worry about my brother. It barely gave me time to wash my

fatigues before I was back out on a new patrol. Our unit adopted an exhausting one-week-on, four-days-off schedule, and fatigue was beginning to be a factor in our performance. I sometimes wondered how long it would be before someone made a mistake.

The Pain Patrol included a Kit Carson Scout named Kim, who served as our forward observer. I'm not sure if that was his real name, but that's what he wanted us to call him. Kim was a Montagnard from the Vietnam Central Highlands. It was well known that they didn't get along with the lowlanders from farther south, but the Montagnard KCs turned out to be good scouts and decent guys, so most LRRP patrols used them. I assumed that by employing natives, some brain at the Pentagon thought we could "Vietnamize" the war, as if that would somehow legitimize everything. The word on the street was that it would allow the U.S. to extricate itself sooner because natives were being integrated into the operations, even though I'm not sure that's what the natives believed or even wanted. Consequently, the army identified the best natives and inserted them onto the LRRP teams, and the best natives were Montagnard. I suppose it was a good idea. I'd worked with Kim for over a year, and we were pretty good at reading each other.

Our patrol leader, a black guy named Sammy Snyder, held the rank of sergeant. Sammy was the oldest in our group and career army. He knew how to game the system, making him pretty handy to have around. Bryan, aka Ditto, an outgoing kid from Arizona who constantly complained about the humidity, was in charge of the PRiC 25 radio. Gizmo, hailing from Texas, was good at fixing just about anything that broke, which was pretty much everything all the time. We'd been lucky to get this refugee from the motor pool, and I was sure Sammy had something to do with that. Me, I was nicknamed "Motown," which was fairly ironic, as my blond hair and blue eyes made me a pretty unlikely soul brother. It was Memphis-born, ebony-skinned Tyrone Jackson who had hung the moniker on me, and he thought it was positively hysterical, and if Jackson thought something was hysterical, everyone pretty much agreed with him because you didn't want to mess with Jackson. He was as strong as anyone I'd ever met and topped out at well over six three. As the two riflemen of the patrol, Tyrone and I rotated as rear security guards, but we all had been cross-trained in each other's jobs, just in case.

Each member of the patrol carried almost eighty pounds of gear, which we noiselessly humped across long distances, over difficult terrain, and through all kinds of weather. We moved mostly at night and slept during the day, sometimes leaning semiconscious against a tree. Operating in silence, we used hand signals to communicate with each other in the jungle, constantly vigilant not to create the slightest sound that might give our position away. We tried to stay downwind so Charlie couldn't smell us, and there was absolutely no smoking on the job. I don't think a little smoke would have mattered much because we were plenty rank after a couple of days spent sweating in the heat. Our safety depended on our invisibility and stealth, and we were deadly serious about it.

When we'd left camp three days earlier, no one had any inkling that this would be our final patrol. Our lieutenant had returned from the previous day's flyover and summoned us to the usual briefing beforehand. We were given maps and codebooks and discussed the disengagement drill so we could get out quickly and regroup at a rally point once the mission was complete, all typical of the pre-patrol preparations. After that, we were left to organize our equipment for inspection. Most of what we carried consisted of guns and ammo. I favored the M2 carbine with a fully automatic selector switch because it accommodated a thirty-round magazine. Most of us also carried a .45 sidearm, hand and smoke grenades, Claymore mines, canteens of water, dry rations, and an assortment of other supplies that would allow us to survive in the jungle for as long as a week at a time.

I was dead asleep when we got the call at 0430 the next day. No one spoke as we grabbed our gear and made our way to the choppers. Insertions were supposed to be done with four Hueys and two gunships, but we went in that morning with only two slicks and a single gunship. I guess Uncle Sam was trying to save money that week. Being under-resourced was not that unusual, and we shrugged it off as we arranged ourselves on the floor of the chopper for our ride to the landing zone. The heavy vibrations shook our bones, and the loud pulsing of the rotors made it seem like we were inside some oversized, mechanical heart. Sammy and Bryan dangled their legs out the side doors as if they were on a ski lift, surveying the landscape for anything unusual. As we descended below fifty feet, all of us moved to stand on the skids so we could quickly drop off as soon as we were about five feet off the ground. I was relieved that this time we were able to get low, much preferable to the few times we'd had to drop down from the end of a rope that extended from a chopper hovering above us at what seemed like skyscraper height.

Once on the ground, we rapidly gathered into patrol order and moved off the landing zone, running like hell through the elephant grass to the welcoming cover of the trees. We were dropped a couple of miles from where the intel said we'd be most likely to first encounter the VC. Once they'd discharged their cargo, the choppers moved off to hover about three clicks away, waiting for Sammy to release them, which he did about fifteen minutes later, but only after he was convinced that no one was lying in wait to ambush us. Although we operated in silence, the choppers obviously didn't, and ironically, the sooner they moved away, the safer we felt.

The first day was uneventful. As we oriented ourselves, we began patrolling the surrounding environs in ever-widening sweeps. It wasn't until the next day that we encountered fresh signs of the enemy and our efforts became more focused.

When things eventually turned to shit, we'd been on patrol for three days, penetrating ever deeper into the jungle, hot on the trail of what looked to be a VC scouting party. That day, Kim took point as usual, leading the patrol on a course that ran

parallel to a NVA supply trail but staying hidden in the bush. Bryan had radioed in our position a couple of hours earlier.

We were in pursuit of the enemy patrol, keeping about forty yards behind them, when something went wrong. I have no recollection of exactly what that was—it could have been as simple as somebody's grenade inadvertently clicked against the metal of his weapon. I suddenly heard the unsettling pop-pop of an AK as the first shots dropped Sammy, and then Kim's head exploded into a million bloody pieces right in front of me. Our training instantly took over. Jackson stepped up to become point man and started emptying his M16 into the dense undergrowth in front of us. The rest of us dropped to the jungle floor and faced outward, back-to-back. When Jackson was empty, he hustled to the back and the slack man, Gizmo, took his place. Gizmo was using an M60 machine gun that began glowing red after a few minutes. Through it all, I heard the ceaseless ping of ejecting brass and inhaled the acrid smell of cordite. I still couldn't see who had ambushed us.

The thwack of rounds hitting the trees near my head kept my attention, and amid a shower of falling leaves and splintering wood, I emptied one magazine after another into the bush at the unseen enemy. No one wanted to throw grenades in such a dense jungle, afraid they might hit a tree and bounce back on us. I could sense Charlie moving ever closer, a tactic they often employed to discourage the involvement of our air support. Bryan radioed for our evacuation, and we attempted to disengage, setting off smoke until our patch of jungle was totally obscured by a strangling, gray cloud. That's when I heard the sickening sound of Gizmo getting hit. His real name was Dan Gonzalez, and he was from Houston, Texas. My mind churned as if nothing was more important than recalling Gizmo's given name and hometown. I'd never been to Houston. I'd never been any farther than Kalamazoo, actually. Now it looked as if I never would. Gizmo had been kneeling with his back to me, firing his M60, when he caught an AK round square in the chest. It went clear through his body, ricocheted in transit off what was likely a rib, and angled up to hit me in the head, knocking me out cold.



The jungle was quiet and most of the smoke had dispersed by the time I regained consciousness to find myself bound hand to foot and dangling from a pole between two VCs, struggling to hoist me onto their thin shoulders. Despite a terrific headache, I was fortunate to be alive, as it was well known that Charlie routinely shot LRRPs on the spot. I had no idea why I'd been spared but wasn't about to complain.

That entire day, I drifted in and out of consciousness, head pounding, swinging like a cured ham between two Sherpas who had the unfortunate assignment of carrying the heavy American through the jungle. They silently and relentlessly plodded up hills and down along gullies with their burden. I could tell we were moving northwest from the shifting position of the sun, probably toward Cambodia. Shit. Cambodia was full of

POW camps, and rumor had it that LBJ was about to start bombing the shit out of the country.

The thunderbolts in my head and the persistent throbbing in my back and shoulder made it difficult for me to think. I didn't realize I'd been shot until they cut me down that first night and my shoulder began snarling in pain. The front of my fatigues was covered in dried blood, mostly that of others. No one else from my patrol was with us, including Tyrone Jackson, the only other member I hadn't seen shot, which led me to conclude that I was probably the only survivor.

The next morning, my captors secured my hands to my waist and made me walk on my own, tied to a lead rope around my neck. The bleeding from my shoulder had stopped during the night, but unrelenting pain in my head blurred my vision and made me nauseous. They wouldn't let me stop to puke, so I just threw up as I walked, and soon the front of my pants and boots were covered in vomit.

The next day, we reached what looked to be a temporary encampment, where we met up with another NVA contingent for a few hours of rest. Although they tied me to a tree, there was no need. I wasn't going anywhere. Loss of blood and what I assumed was a severe concussion kept me disoriented and weak. Along with everything else, my stomach churned from hunger and intestinal distress, and it started to rain, but I kept telling myself that at least I was alive, to convince myself more than anything else.

Over the next few days, we continued our journey until I figured we'd crossed into Cambodia. Although everyone denied there were any troops in Cambodia, word was that both NVA and allies were there. Back at camp, I'd heard speculation that the elusive, mobile COSNV headquarters that we allies were spending so much time trying to find might actually be located there as well. Maybe that was one of the reasons Johnson decided to bomb Cambodia, to make up for our failure to locate and destroy the nerve center of the Viet Cong army while it had still been in Vietnam.

Eventually, the jungle thinned and the land flattened as we continued our trek across Southeast Asia. We could have reached Thailand by now, for all I knew. I was able to inventory my complaints as we walked. I was filthy, but beneath that nastiness was a throbbing shoulder, raw wrists and neck from rubbing against my restraints, and blistered feet, all topped off by a screaming headache. Actually, it was the headache that worried me most. That slug really had rung my bell, and I longed to close my eyes and get a decent night's sleep.

It was well known that allied prisoners were being held in Cambodia, a fact confirmed the next day when we reached a crudely built prisoner-of-war compound. It looked to me as if it had been built by embittered prisoners because their resentment was apparent in its stark construction. The compound was enclosed with barbed wire and circumscribed by trenches filled with stinking latrine waste along its perimeter,

presumably as an additional deterrent to anyone looking to escape. In our short walk through a barren dirt yard, I took in as much of the layout as I could. Towers made of bamboo were spaced along the fence line, and in ominous rows stood the squat, wooden barracks that probably housed the guards. I didn't see any other prisoners, although I was certain I wasn't the only guest. The butt of a rifle urged me to the far side of the camp, where I was shown my new accommodations hanging from the thick branch of a banyan tree. I knew my chance of escape had been better in the jungle, but I can't say I was unhappy to be able to finally rest, even if it meant being caged like a captive animal.

My primitive bamboo cage was suspended about five feet off the ground. I didn't mind it as much as I should have because it kept me off the jungle floor and mostly away from the bushmasters. The GIs referred to those evil snakes as "two steps" because once one of those suckers bites you, you can only make it about two steps before you collapse.

Being out in the open meant I was readily assaulted by Mother Nature's weather arsenal, including blazing sun and oppressive humidity. Being in a tree probably saved me from having heatstroke, as the leaves diffused some of the blinding sun. I also was fortunate to avoid the southwest monsoons for the first portion of my captivity, but once they started, they lingered throughout the winter months. Swinging in their relentless winds and ceaseless rains meant that before the season ended, I was able to add a severe case of jungle rot to my list of complaints.

The NVA must have thought I might know something useful and mistakenly assumed it would be relatively easy to get me to cooperate, given my youth. I have to give them credit. They were persistent little bastards. I'm sure it annoyed them to have completely underestimated the effectiveness of both my Special Forces training and my harsh upbringing. That's when they broke my arm and a couple of ribs, making it difficult for me to breathe for a while. My head was still flashing bolts of pain, and my shoulder continued to throb, but that was from the ambush more than anything my interrogators dreamt up. When I probed it with my finger, I could feel the slug floating in the muscle just under the skin of my shoulder. I couldn't understand why it hadn't become infected, but I wasn't going to worry as long as my shoulder didn't turn green or my arm drop off. Eventually, one of the more benevolent guards fished it out with a dirty pen knife. One problem solved.

Even as the rest of me began to heal, my broken arm worried me because it hadn't been properly set. I tried to set it myself one day but passed out before I could finish. Frustrated and desperate, a few days later, I used my shirt to tie my wrist to one of the bamboo poles of my cage and was able to pull it nearly back into place. Despite this minor success, it continued to pain me for the duration of my captivity, especially when my interrogators focused on it. I'm not sure what they hoped to learn from me. Any information I could have given them by that time was probably too out of date to be of much use to them, but they nevertheless persisted, enjoying the grim game of seeing if I

could remain conscious a little longer each day. My old man would have been proud of my ability to withstand whatever they did to me.

The details of my imprisonment are unimportant to my story. The majority of the time, I was held in isolation, but occasionally I caught a glimpse of other prisoners, mostly miserable-looking U.S. airmen, probably from the 101st. From what I could tell, they'd been there for some time.

I didn't hold out much hope of our imminent rescue because I doubted any allies knew where we were being held. I remembered that Ditto had radioed in our position before the ambush, but this encampment was days from where the firefight had taken place. I continued to pay attention to the sounds of the camp and those of the forest until what I originally mistook for thunder one day began to sound more like an aerial bombardment. I figured Johnson had started his bombing campaign. I just hoped that whoever was feeding them their targeting information would eventually notice us and not blow us up.

It isn't only the marines who don't leave their brothers behind, so I was confident that if I could just hold on, the LRRPs would eventually find me. At least I hoped it would be the LRRPs and not the Soviets or Chinese. As bad as things were, they could always get worse.

My perseverance was rewarded early one morning, when I heard the distant but familiar sound of choppers punctuated by thunderous explosions. The people making all that racket had brought with them plenty of firepower in what sounded to me like Cobras equipped with 2.75 rockets. Although I was thankful for what I presumed was a rescue operation, it was well known that NVA standard practice was to shoot all prisoners during any attempted rescue, so I was a little hesitant to rejoice until I actually saw an American soldier standing beneath my cage. As it turned out, the rescue was so swift and so utterly devastating that the NVA never got the chance to shoot us.

A heroic LRRP scout, whose name I later learned was George Campbell, helped me down from my cage and carried my weakened body to an awaiting Huey. I knew the worst was finally over when I felt the rotor wash blow sand into my face. As soon as his cargo was aboard, the Huey pilot lifted up and swung to the east. A corpsman knelt beside me but, seeing that my condition was not life-threatening, quickly made me comfortable before attending to the rescued airmen who were in much worse shape. I rode with my eyes closed until we reached the aid station. There, they evaluated us before we were flown to the Twelfth Evac Hospital at Cu Chi, where they operated on my arm. After a few weeks of recuperation, I returned to Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, then on to Fort Dix, and finally back to Detroit in a full circle of my life so far. After four long years, I would end up pretty much where I started.

“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.”

—John F. Kennedy

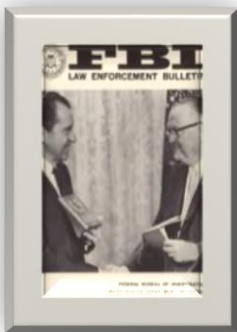
“Our present course [in Vietnam] will not bring victory; will not bring peace; will not stop the bloodshed; and will not advance the interests of the United States or the cause of peace in the world.”

—Robert F. Kennedy

Chapter Three

“No Man Can Find the War”

(as performed by Tim Buckley)



I bent over the engine of the 1967 Mustang and revved the throttle with grease-slicked fingers to the welcome sound of well-executed engineering and the promise of the open road that I loved. With my head under the hood, I didn't hear my father approach until he was standing right next to me.

“Looks like you got that thing humming.”

Straightening up, I wiped my hands on the rag draped over my shoulder. “Yeah, she sounds pretty good now.” I'd put off the tune-up until free of my cast. My newly exposed arm was still weak and exhibited an angry red scar, but the doctors assured me it would fade over time. Hell, I didn't care how it looked as long as it eventually worked again.

Ever since I'd returned to the world, my dad had been treating me as if I had some communicable disease. The days of his physical abuse were over, although full

acceptance of me as an adult still seemed to pose a problem for him. The army had saved us in a way. If I'd stayed home, one of us probably would have ended up dead and the other in prison.

Silently standing behind my father was a man in a gray suit with narrow lapels, an ironed white shirt, and a narrow black tie, with short brown hair slicked away from a perfect part—definitely government. My father turned toward the man.

“Ah, Mr. Housner, I'd like you to meet my son Jamie. Jamie, this is Special Agent Bill Housner from the Chicago office of the FBI.”

The Mustang hood fell back into place with a muted metallic thud. I extended my hand after wiping away as much grease as I could. Housner shook it anyway.

“You remember Sid Barker? I think he came on a hunting trip with us a few years back. Well, Sid asked Mr. Housner to come all the way from Chicago to meet you.” For some reason, my father wore the guilty look of someone who'd just been caught cheating on his taxes.

“Yeah?” I resumed wiping my hands on the rag as I regarded Housner, who wore a smile that looked as if it had been painted on.

“That's right,” Housner said. “What do you say we go inside the house and talk, son?”

I remained leaning against the car with my arms folded, a little surprised the patronizing stranger hadn't tried to tousele my hair. “What is it you want to talk to me about?”

My father, all too familiar with that tone in my voice, quickly intervened. “Jamie, just come inside. Your mother's already made us some coffee.”

I shrugged, tossed the rag onto the hood, and followed the two men into the house. After I washed my hands at the kitchen sink, my mother handed me a towel.

“Please, Jamie,” she implored in a nervous whisper, “just listen to what he has to say.”

My lips compressed into a tight line.

“For me.” She absently rubbed her thumb across my cheek to remove a grease smudge as if I had just come in from the playground.

“Fine.”

The two men were already seated when I took a chair on the opposite side of the room. No reason to negotiate in enemy territory. The stranger's face was friendly but purposeful.

"What's this about?" I asked as I poured the coffee and offered it to the two older men.

"Thanks." Housner took the cup. "It's more of a meet and greet than anything else, Jamie."

"What? Did the FBI run short of work in Chicago?" There was that darned sarcasm that unavoidably slipped out by itself sometimes.

My father started to say something, but Housner held up his hand. "Jamie, I've heard a lot about you, both from Sid Barker and from your dad. I've had a chance to review your Record of Separation. Your DD-214 lists quite a number of commendations in addition to your Purple Heart." As he talked, he removed a folder from the briefcase sitting on the floor next to his polished wingtips. He took his time opening it. The file he held up contained a number of pages, and clipped to the top page was a picture of me in my dress uniform. I waited to hear him explain why the FBI had a file on me.

"Your background piqued my interest." Housner wore a grim smile. "It looks like you come from a long line of military men, dating back to the Civil War. Mostly army, I see, with a few marines who served in the South Pacific during WWII, and of course your dad in Korea, and now you and your brother in Vietnam. I understand that your brother is still there. Your country appreciates you both for your sacrifices."

I was quite sure there were many in my country who thought Billy and I were lower than pond scum but kept my mouth shut. Billy was secure for now, providing logistical support from the relative safety of one of our biggest military bases in eastern Vietnam, flying in military transports that shuttled soldiers and equipment to our bases along the coast. Whereas the Twenty-Fifth had been deployed in the thick of things between Saigon and the Cambodian border, Billy was working over mostly friendly territory. Hopefully he would stay there until his hitch was up.

"You volunteered for the infantry in 1966." Housner read as he continued thumbing through the papers in the manila folder. "The infantry, now that's putting yourself on the front line, son."

Housner's condescension was beginning to annoy me. I didn't need some desk jockey reciting my military record to me, and the look I shot him made that obvious, but he was undeterred.

"Looks like you served in the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division for four years and received an honorable discharge a month ago." He carefully closed the file and studied

my face. "It also says you were a POW for five months and then spent the last four weeks of your hitch in the hospital recovering. Tell me a little about that, Jamie." Housner leaned forward in his seat, wearing the expression of someone who'd never seen a war up close.

"Sir, I'd rather forget all that if you don't mind." I spoke more politely than the audacious request warranted. Not even my father had dared ask me about my captivity.

Housner nodded. "I understand completely. There is one thing I need to know though. Are you well enough to take on a new job?"

I wasn't sure what he meant by "well enough" or "new job," but I answered in the affirmative. "My left arm will be fine once I build up my strength, and I'm working on that."

Housner took a drink of coffee. "And how about your emotional health? I only ask because I have to." He looked slightly embarrassed now.

"I have some trouble sleeping," I offered.

"That's to be expected." He looked relieved. "You must be wondering why I'm asking you all these questions."

I inclined my head.

Housner cast a glance at my father before he continued. "I've met with a lot of returning vets lately, and I have to say that it's a damned shame the way the press and the public have treated you people. You've spent years overseas fighting for this nation, putting your lives on the line every day." He paused to gauge my reaction. When there was none, he went on.

"These anti-war protesters have vilified you men. They've essentially turned this country into an armed camp. Not only did your hometown have to endure the riots last summer, but we had to call up the National Guard to keep the peace in one hundred and twenty cities around the country after those unfortunate killings last year."

I assumed he was referring to the twin assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. "Unfortunate" didn't quite capture it, in my opinion.

He slowly shook his head. "That seems to have given these campus radicals and communist agitators a reason to start bombing things and taking over universities. Can you imagine, sit-ins right here at the University of Michigan?" He glanced out the window as if expecting to see a riot forming on our front lawn.

“Yes, siree,” he persisted. “You fought the good fight overseas, and now we’re fighting it right here at home. Am I saying something you can support, Jamie?”

I looked away. I’d heard it all before, and by now it was beginning to sound like just so many words to me. I wanted to stay away from politics. I’d enlisted because I felt a duty to defend this country. I was proud to have served in the army. The outright hostility that met me upon my return was disconcerting but not unexpected. My friends who had stayed home to go to school or work now looked at me as if I’d committed some kind of crime.

“I don’t know what to think, sir,” I finally confessed. “This whole thing seems to be kind of a mess.”

“Oh, I agree with you one hundred percent, one hundred percent. And you know who’s to blame for the mess? It’s those kids who are burning their draft cards and their braziers and sewing flags onto their butts.”

Housner, mistaking my scowl for agreement, continued even more earnestly.

“The FBI is using all of its resources to put a stop to this before things turn any more violent. These groups are destroying valuable property. They’re blowing up draft boards and damaging important records. They’re occupying college buildings. They’re totally disrupting our political system, and if we don’t put a stop to it right now, they’ll be blowing up Wall Street next in order to destroy our economy, opening the door for the communists to march right in.” He seemed pretty certain of his conclusions.

Overblown rhetoric aside, I couldn’t really disagree with him. I glanced at my father, who was nodding enthusiastically.

“Sir, can I ask what this has to do with me?” I finally asked.

“Well, the Bureau needs young men like you.”

“Hold on a minute. I don’t want to join the FBI.”

Housner rose to his feet. “I completely understand, Jamie. You’ve already done your part, but I’m not asking you to become a federal agent. I’m just trying to see if you’d be willing to serve your country one more time.”

He was beginning to sound suspiciously like my army recruiter.

“I’m hoping you could give us a hand, just until you figure out your next step. The Bureau needs young men with a commitment to service, a real patriotic sense of duty.”

“To do what?”

Housner looked over at my dad. “Ray, would you please excuse us? I’d like a private word with Jamie, if I may.” My father obediently nodded and left the room. It was strange how he could be so easily intimidated by someone he judged to be more powerful.

Once we were alone, Housner lowered his voice and continued. “You might not know this, Jamie, but the Bureau employs all sorts of people—assets. You were in the intelligence-gathering business for the army, so you know what it means to employ human assets in addition to using technology and weapons. Vietnam is not the only war we’re fighting, believe me. You had a security clearance, so you understand the importance of covert missions. We’d like to put that experience of yours to use again, stateside.”

“To do what?” I repeated.

Again he ignored my question. “Your father told me that you want to attend college someday. Isn’t that right?”

I shrugged noncommittally. That was a bit of wishful thinking on the part of my mother, not my father. Besides, I’d always thought Billy would be the scholar of the family. Up until six months ago, I’d planned on making the military my career.

“Well we can make that happen, and you can help us out at the same time. Think of it . . . a free college education compliments of the FBI. How does that sound?”

It sounded like bullshit to me. “In return for what?”

Housner smiled like a ballplayer rounding the bases after clearing the fence. “We want you to enroll as a student at the University of Michigan to help us keep an eye on some of these radical groups.”

A curt laugh escaped me. “I’m sorry, sir, but are you saying that you want me to spy for you?”

“We want you to gather intelligence that will allow us to more effectively combat this menace, just like you did in the army.” Home plate must have been in sight, because he stepped up his pace. “If you consent to do this for us, we have it all set up for you to enroll for the fall semester that starts in a couple of weeks. All you have to do is agree, and I’ll make it happen. We’ll even pay you a small stipend.”

“Let me make sure I understand you correctly. You want me to enroll as a student at U of M and inform on campus radicals for the FBI?”

“That’s precisely what I’m asking.”

Maybe my time as a LRRP had imbued me with the notion that almost every risk was worth taking because, although the proposal was outlandish, the more I considered it, the more it began to appeal to me. I wanted to get out of the house, and here was my chance. Continuing my education wasn't something I'd planned, but it suddenly sounded relatively intriguing, certainly preferable to watching the sunrise from a chair in the living room every morning. The spying part . . . that was going to present a problem. I knew how to gather intelligence, but I didn't know shit about spying, nor was I convinced that I wanted to.

"I know nothing about being an informant," I finally admitted. Saying the word aloud made it sound a bit tainted, if not downright sinister.

"We don't expect you to, but the Bureau will train you. We'll provide you with everything you might need. You'll have one of our agents right there with you in Ann Arbor, and he'll be able to guide you every step of the way." Housner shifted in his seat before continuing. "I have to clarify one thing, though. The Bureau uses lots of student informants. These are just regular schoolkids we ask to take notes at some meetings or attend demonstrations. Because of your maturity and your background, we see you in a somewhat-embellished role. You'll still be a student, but you'll be working directly with us."

"Not as an agent."

"No. More like a consultant."

I considered this. "How do you intend to get me into the University of Michigan? I'm sure you know I was not the greatest student in high school."

Housner smiled at this. "The Bureau has a good relationship with the administration there. Don't worry about that."

I was skeptical, but still. "How long a commitment are we looking at?"

Housner appeared to think he had set the hook and just needed to reel me in. "The length of an undergraduate education—only four years—just like your army hitch."

I leaned back in my chair and took a drink of cold coffee while I considered the pros and cons of his proposal. Finally, I blew out my breath.

"Alright."

Just like my army hitch, I thought, only no one would be shooting at me this time . . . I hoped.



“How many tours?”

“Two,” came the reply.

The cool basement of the United Methodist Church of Southfield was filled with metal folding chairs arranged in a circle on a scuffed linoleum floor adorned with gray swirls. It made me slightly light-headed to have spent most of the evening staring at them.

“That seems to be about average,” said the small, balding man with mutton chops so bushy they made his head seem slightly deformed. Dr. Olinger, who was leading the rap session, wore wire-rimmed glasses and a cardigan sweater over a turtleneck shirt, looking more like a folk singer who’d misplaced his other bandmates than a professor of sociology from Wayne State University. He and two of his colleagues were conducting research for a study on returning veterans, funded in part by a grant from the Veterans Administration. The professors wanted to gather firsthand data and perhaps help some of the vets in the process. We were their laboratory rats.

Although the rap sessions had been occurring for more than a year, I’d joined them only three weeks ago at the urging of my sister. She heard about them from one of her friends whose brother was having a difficult time since his discharge. Christine thought talking might help her own brother, who’d not yet entirely returned from the war. In fact, none of the men in the room had fully returned, and there were a variety of opinions about whether that was even possible.

So far, I’d shared my name, hometown, unit, and dates of service, but nothing more. It wasn’t that I didn’t trust these men, all of whom had recently returned from Nam, but I couldn’t find the words to describe what I was feeling, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to share pieces of my life. Besides, I couldn’t quite bring myself to respect the facilitators, who seemed nice enough but were searching in vain for the specific trauma that had triggered our distress, as if somehow it wasn’t every minute of every day.

“I feel like I’ve been lied to,” said a marine from Dearborn. “You get the Corps’ viewpoint, and you believe it because if you don’t, you spend every day wondering why the fuck you’re there. Then you come home and get shit from everyone here. Some of my own friends think we’re a bunch of psychos.”

There was a murmur of agreement among the dozen men in the group.

Dr. Olinger previously had made it clear that he was not there to provide therapy but to facilitate a discussion. I couldn’t blame him. This was one fucked-up bunch of broken men.

“I’m interested, Jack,” Dr. Olinger said. “Just how does this homecoming align with your idea of the returning warrior soldier?”

The marine looked mystified, like he didn't understand the question. "There was no opportunity to be a warrior over there."

"Yeah," said David, another marine, from Hamtramck. "I went over there thinkin' I was gonna win the war all by myself, you know, like most guys right out of boot camp do, but you get there and it's like you're fightin' with only one arm. The brass made it all kind of half-assed. By the time I left, even the diehards wondered if winnin' that thing was possible."

Again the room expressed their agreement. The professor looked around sympathetically. "Let's see if we can hear from some of those who haven't said much. How about you, Jamie? Would you be willing to share your opinion?"

I hadn't planned on saying anything, ever. I lifted my gaze to meet the kind-but-clueless owl eyes of the professor. "Ah, I don't really know," I answered with obvious ambivalence. "I guess I agree."

"Can you elaborate?"

"I'm pretty angry too."

"What are you angry about?"

"Everything, I guess." This statement was met with nervous laughter of the group.

"Can you be more specific?" The room now was watching me, waiting for my answer as if they expected me to articulate what was wrong with all of us.

"I'm angry that I've lost the feeling in my left thumb," I said tentatively, flexing my hand. This made some of them nod and smile.

"Okay," said the professor. "What else?"

"I don't know. These days, just about everything makes me angry. I can't watch the news or read a newspaper without feeling like a freak." This brought nods of agreement around the room.

"So you feel like you're alone in this?"

"Maybe. Listening to you guys helps some, I guess. I wanted to make the army my career, like my grandfather and his father, but this whole thing isn't like the wars they fought in. There seems to be no honor in serving in Nam."

"Right on," said someone in the room.

I'm not sure why I continued, but the words came out in a torrent. "My younger brother's over there now, but I'm the one who should be there, and he should be home in college. He's not cut out for this, and I can only hope it doesn't screw him up for good. I guess that's what I'm most angry about—that I'm home and he's not. That he only enlisted because I did, and I wasn't there to stop him. I dream about that sometimes."

I didn't realize that while I was speaking, a hush had fallen over the room. When I looked up, everyone was looking at me as if I had just read their minds. I crossed my arms and tightened my lips, resolved not to say another word.

Dr. Olinger was nodding. "Yes, that's a pretty familiar genre of guilt. I think many of us have experienced something like that in our lifetimes. Dreams can be our subconscious mind attempting to work things out while we sleep because we haven't had much success doing it while we're awake."

"So will the guilt ever go away, Doc?" asked one of the vets.

"It might, eventually. You fellas have a lot to work through first though. These feelings might manifest themselves in many different ways—anger, substance abuse, violence. We just hope that talking about it will help keep you from acting out in destructive ways, especially against the people you love."

Dr. Olinger turned back to me. "I understand that you were a POW, Jamie. Are there any others here who were POWs?" One other vet raised his hand. "Your ability to recover from that experience depends on a number of things, particularly whether you believed you would eventually be rescued." The look of encouragement on his face indicated that he meant for me to respond.

"I guess I was a lot luckier than many of the guys. I never once thought I wouldn't be rescued. LRRPs take care of their own."

"That's good to hear. Keeping that hope alive allowed you to draw upon your internal resources to persevere, and it means that it's likely you will be able to put your ordeal behind you and get on with your life in a healthy way."

I kind of doubted that. My resentment went much deeper than what I'd endured at the hands of the NVA. In fact, I shared a house with someone who was never going to let me live my life in a healthy way. Getting away from him was the main reason I'd agreed to the FBI's proposal.

The doctor looked around the room. "I realize that many of you have resorted to some pretty self-destructive behaviors—taking drugs or drinking, for instance. It may temporarily dull the pain, but it never will root out the underlying truths. I hope you can keep coming to these sessions and sharing your experiences. Over time, the wounds will begin to heal. I'm sure of it."

The professor put his hands on his knees and stood up. “I’m sorry, but that’s all we have time for this week. I hope to see you all next Wednesday, and if you have any friends who might benefit from these rap sessions, please bring them along.”

I declined the invitation to join several of the participants for a drink and instead headed for home. I guess it was good to know I wasn’t the only one fighting these demons, but by the time I reached the house, I was thoroughly depressed. A beer helped some. The second beer helped more. By the time I felt like going to bed, there were five empty bottles lined up on the counter. I tossed them into the trash so my mother wouldn’t see them when she came down to cook breakfast. Steady hands seemed fairly pointless now.



I was hung over on the flight to Chicago the next morning. The plane was a turboprop, and the air had been choppy most of the way, so by the time we landed at Midway, I was feeling pretty lousy. That surprised me because I’d endured countless chopper rides under considerably worse conditions—but without a hangover, possibly a factor. Maybe it was the hangover, or perhaps it was simply my entire life that was making me sick. Whatever it was, I couldn’t dwell on it because as soon as I crossed into the terminal, I saw some guy in a gray suit and matching fedora holding a sign with my name on it, so I figured he was my ride.

His “federal-ness” stood out among the neatly dressed travelers scuttling around us. As for me, my mother had cajoled me into wearing an ill-fitting suit left over from high school, which was now too tight in the shoulders and had pants that ended above my shoe tops. I hadn’t worn much of anything but T-shirts and jeans since I packed away my fatigues, so not only did I feel like I was wearing undersized, secondhand clothes, but it looked that way too.

The agent smiled as soon as I signaled that I was the one he sought. “You must be Breedlove,” he said upon my approach.

“Yes, sir.”

“Wingate,” he said, extending his hand. “Special Agent Wingate.”

One skill I’d acquired in the army was the ability to quickly size someone up. When you have to rely on strangers to keep you safe, it’s a good skill to have. Wingate was not much older than me, probably early thirties. I guessed he might have joined the Bureau right out of college because there was a lingering preppiness about him that the Bureau had not been able to totally expunge. He was definitely giving off a Midwestern vibe, so I imagined he was raised somewhere in the area. He seemed pleasant enough,

and he definitely dressed better than me, but there was a furtiveness to his gaze that made me not want to trust him completely.

“It’s a pleasure, sir,” I said, shaking his hand. The “sir” was a conditioned response, and my deference seemed to score a few points with Special Agent Wingate.

He didn’t offer up a first name, so I assumed he wanted to make sure I knew he was in charge. It didn’t bother me. I was used to the subordinate role. It came naturally after four years as a grunt. Besides, what little was left of my ego currently seemed to be on permanent furlough.

“How was your flight?”

Small talk—I hated it.

“It was good,” I lied. “Uh, thanks for meeting me.”

Special Agent Wingate motioned for me to follow him. “I borrowed a vehicle from the motor pool. It’s parked right outside.”

I grinned to myself, recalling how the LRRPs so often “borrowed” jeeps. The ride to the Chicago office was filled with more small talk.

“We just moved into a new building a couple of years ago,” Special Agent Wingate explained as he drove. “It’s right downtown in the Loop on Dearborn Street, state of the art, a lot better than our old one.”

I tried to appear interested, but my attention was instead drawn to the scenery. Midway Airport was located at the southwestern edge of the city, so our commute afforded me an opportunity to view a landscape as it became more interesting the closer we got to the lake. Like an eager tour guide, Wingate took a detour to show me Lake Shore Towers, the Hancock Building, the Art Institute, Soldier Field, and the beautiful Lake Michigan shoreline. I had to admit, Chicago’s skyline was a lot more impressive than Detroit’s. The Motor City had a smaller downtown and fewer skyscrapers, but in its defense, it exuded a certain funky charm of its own (once the fires from the riots had been extinguished, that is).

“Right over there, Sears soon will be breaking ground to build a tower that they say will be the tallest building in the world.” He gestured vaguely toward the south.

“Impressive.”

“The Bureau takes up the entire ninth floor, and there’s talk that we’re thinking of expanding to other floors,” he informed me as we rode the elevator up from the underground parking garage. “The Chicago Division houses around two hundred and

eighty special agents and almost two hundred support staff. We've come a long way since the time we hunted down Al Capone and John Dillinger." Wingate sounded proud enough to have led those dragnets himself, even though I seemed to remember that Dillinger had been shot down in cold blood by federal agents in front of a movie theater and that Capone had been caught by the Department of the Treasury because he cheated on his taxes.

The elevator doors opened, and we stepped out.

I'd smoked a little weed in the service, and this was definitely weirder than that had been. Leaving that elevator was like passing through Alice's looking glass. I was no stranger to a bureaucracy—the military being the one that came to mind—but this scene left me speechless. On second thought, it reminded me a little of Billy's ant farm.

The first thing I noticed was the noise. Granted, it certainly wasn't as loud as the sound of artillery, but it was an unfamiliar, disturbingly persistent cacophony of ringing phones, clattering typewriters, and competing, high-decibel conversations. I wondered if all offices were like this. The only other time I could recall being in an office, other than the occasional mandatory chat with my high school principal, was when I'd signed away my youth to that army recruiter.

Like a plantation overseer, Wingate stood with his hands on his hips, admiring the scene. I had to admit, it was all a little creepy.

There was a vast array of desks lined up like morning formation. Men in white shirts and flannel trousers, suit coats carefully hung across the backs of their chairs, moved purposefully between desks piled high with file folders. More than a few of them wore shoulder holsters with firearms resting against their ribs—unloaded, I hoped.

And there were women everywhere. In fact, I'd never seen so many women in one place at the same time. My own mother had never worked. The women I'd encountered over the past four years had usually been in uniform. Yet here was a whole bevy of working women, from those younger than me to some older than my mother, maybe even my grandmother. They all wore high heels and lipstick and appeared very professional and tidy. Every one of them appeared to be a secretary.

Even more surprising to me—everyone was white. There wasn't a single brother or sister in the bunch, making me wonder if this was 1969 or 1949. Even the military had been integrated twenty years earlier. It was strange to see row after row of white faces after spending time in the infantry, working next to people of all colors. I let out my breath. Specialist Tyrone Jackson would have been very bummed about all this.

"Impressive, isn't it?"

I'd almost forgotten about Special Agent Wingate.

“Yes, sir.”

“Come with me, Breedlove. Housner wants to see you. Then we have a whole day of briefings planned for you.” Wingate’s tone hinted at an unnatural fondness for meetings.

My meeting with Housner was perfunctory and probably disappointed Wingate, who sat at attention in a straight-back chair off to one side. Housner told me how glad he was to have me in Chicago. He informed me that I would be taking some tests, primarily psychological assessments, followed by a film about the history of the FBI. Then there would be an orientation about security, the Bureau’s structure and protocols, comportment and dress, and instructions on how I was to wipe my ass, which made me conclude that this was going to be pretty much like the army after all.

I soon learned the briefings were going to take a couple of days, so I’d have to stay over in Chicago. During the afternoon meeting, I was inundated with more information about the inner workings of the Bureau than I probably needed, but I was getting paid, so I listened attentively. As I did, I began to detect a modicum of paranoia in everything that was said. I’d experienced enough of it myself to know that a healthy amount of paranoia in a war zone played an important role in keeping you alive, and I wondered if the same thing might be true when tracking down criminals. But it made me a bit more apprehensive than I had been when I initially stepped off that elevator and into this strange wonderland.

During a break in the action, I finally cornered Special Agent Wingate. “Excuse me, sir. I’m a bit curious. This seems like a lot of information for someone who’s not hiring on to be a field agent. Exactly what is my role going to involve?”

Wingate winked conspiratorially. “You think its overkill, do you?”

“Well, I wouldn’t have used those exact words, but . . .”

“That’s okay,” he said, reassuringly slapping me on the back. The long meetings seemed to have animated him. “You’ll understand soon enough. I admit, we are stalling a bit until your psych evaluation report gets back to us, but that should happen before the end of the day, and then we can get into the specifics. Thanks for your patience, Breedlove. Now, why don’t we get a cup of coffee before things start up again? I think they’re planning on bringing in some dinner in a little while. You’re hungry, aren’t you?”

It sounded like a diversionary tactic to me, but my stomach responded in the affirmative.



“Come on into the conference room, Jamie,” Housner said as Wingate and I emerged from the elevator the next morning. “Nancy, honey. Get Jamie a cup of coffee, will you?” He winked at his secretary. She hurried off.

“Black, please,” I offered to her retreating figure. She turned and flashed me a smile before resuming her search for my morning shot of attentiveness.

We seated ourselves at a large table centered in a nondescript conference room, with a blackboard on the wall at one end and a perimeter of metal folding chairs. The setup looked like the Bureau was spending their funds elsewhere, certainly not on office decor. Off to the side was a small desk containing a phone along with some strange-looking cylindrical contraption that I later learned was a Magnafax telecopying machine. Amazing—you could send a copy of a printed page, via a telephone line, across the country in about six minutes to anywhere another one of these machines was active.

A few minutes later, agents started drifting in as “Nancy, honey” set cups of coffee in front of Housner and me. Once everyone was seated, Housner made his introductions, but because I’m notoriously bad with names, I promptly forgot who everyone was. It didn’t really matter, as they all looked interchangeable anyway. They replied with the requisite FBI nod. I wasn’t sure how I was expected to respond, so I nodded back.

“Mr. Breedlove, we are delighted to have you here. Let me just start out by thanking you for defending our country.” Housner addressed me as if we’d never met before, and he might have expected me to reply, but I only inclined my head, believing it was not my place.

“First I’ll explain the nature of this operation, and later we’ll be joined by the assistant director of the Chicago field office. His endorsement demonstrates this operation’s importance.” The gathering murmured their concurrence. Another nod to “Nancy, honey” and she turned off the lights and powered up a slide projector. The large screen she lowered temporarily covered the chalkboard. “Operation Hidden Storm” appeared in large, block letters.

“Operation Hidden Storm is classified,” Housner said. “Our security review of Mr. Breedlove’s background and military record allowed us to quickly upgrade his security clearance so he can hear these details, in case any of you are wondering. Obviously, nothing said here is to leave this room. Mr. Breedlove, you will be required to sign some paperwork to that effect after we adjourn.”

“Understood, sir.”

That got me wondering what skills I possessed that could be of use to these G-men, other than maybe my ability to hit a target at seven hundred yards, which I was pretty sure wouldn’t come up all that often at the university. Coffee notwithstanding, my

mind started to drift as I looked around the room and wondered how many of these agents had actually shot at another human.

“The Bureau has been investigating subversive organizations since before the First World War,” began Housner. “We redoubled our efforts after the end of World War II with Senator McCarthy’s hunt for communists in the government and public institutions. Our efforts escalated further during the Cold War due to the increased threat from outside agitators and communists in Eastern Europe. Now, domestic terrorists, at the direction of communist agents, have been infiltrating our educational institutions, imposing their influence on the thoughts and actions of enrolled students. The communists’ goal is to promote a Marxist-Leninist armed struggle within the United States, and their organizing efforts now are focused on college campuses, where the young population is particularly susceptible to their rhetoric and influence.”

As Housner talked, his secretary advanced slides across the screen, showing student demonstrations at various colleges. I’d seen some of these same pictures in the newspaper and on television—faces contorted in anger, long-haired radicals yelling nonsensical chants and slogans while flashing the peace sign and carrying hate-filled placards decrying our government, the war, and soldiers like me. In my estimation, it was all rather pathetic, but if the people in this room thought they were dangerous and a threat to our country, I was willing to take their word for it.

Housner continued. “What began several years ago as peaceful demonstrations by some misguided youth has opened the door to all sorts of undesirable elements, many of whom are known revolutionaries from Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. These agitators have been traveling to places like Cuba and Central America to collude with other insurgent groups. They revere leaders like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as revolutionary heroes. Sure, some of these student demonstrators are merely naïve, but many of them are hard-core communists who want to make our country the center of an international revolution. Believe me when I say that they are committed to a dangerous and violent ideology.

“There are many radical organizations that originated on college campuses over the last few years. The best known is the Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, which was born at the University of Michigan. A more radical group known as the Weathermen, or more recently the Weather Underground Organization, WUO, spun off from the SDS during their national convention that was held last summer right here in Chicago. We now believe that a contingent of WUO exits in Ann Arbor. I trust that you are all familiar with the SDS. Mr. Breedlove”—he lifted an eyebrow at me—“we will provide you with the necessary information so you can get caught up.”

He looked back at the screen. “We understand that the SDS meeting last July was rather contentious. The Progressive Labor Party, an old communist organization, was there trying to attract younger radicals through a group called the Worker-Student

Alliance. WSA caucuses inside SDS chapters to promote a working-class revolution. The PL and WSA differ from the SDS in that the former two don't want anything to do with minority communities, including the Black Panthers or this so-called Women's Liberation Movement, whereas the SDS is trying to broaden their appeal by making overtures to both of those groups. The Black Panthers are, themselves, a threat, but that's the concern of another task force, and we won't be discussing them here.

"We have found that the PL is patiently building their movement, while the SDS appears to be ready for action. Furthermore, the PL is overly organized, but the SDS is chaotic. Still, the SDS has the energy of a more youthful membership, which makes them especially dangerous and unpredictable. We believe the differences between these groups can be exploited to our advantage.

"Today we will be focusing our attention on the SDS and WUO. As I said, we've traced the SDS's origins to the University of Michigan. What began as an offshoot of the old League for Industrial Democracy was reimagined by the editor of the student newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*. The editor is some fellow named Tom Hayden. Your briefing folders contain his picture and profile along with a copy of the 1962 *Port Huron Statement*, which Mr. Hayden produced as SDS's manifesto."

As he said the word "manifesto," he used his fingers to make invisible quotation marks in the air, as if mocking the earnestness of the organization. "At the convention last July, some of their little friends from U of M and New York presented a program called "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows." I understand that's from a protest song by that folk singer, Dylan. The splinter group, the Weathermen, aka the WUO, called for an armed rebellion, which I think was a bit over the top for even the SDS and goes well beyond what we've seen to date from any of the other radical groups.

"Internal infighting has weakened and distracted these two entities, presenting us with a golden opportunity to infiltrate both organizations. This tumultuous situation makes them vulnerable to sabotage from within, and once inside, we can obtain critical intelligence to put an end to their insurgency."

I wasn't surprised that what he was saying mirrored much of the ideology driving our involvement in Vietnam—undermine the insurgency by destroying it rather than address the root cause. My attention shifted back to Housner as he appeared to be nearing the end of his discourse.

"That brings us to the reason Mr. Breedlove has joined us. He will be going undercover as a student at University of Michigan to infiltrate the domestic terrorist group known as the Weathermen." There was a murmur around the table.

Undercover? He had my full attention now. I suddenly wondered if I'd been duped—presented with a benign assignment to rat on my fellow students when in reality they expected me to take on the dangerous job of infiltrating a militant organization and work undercover. Didn't they have actual, trained agents to do this?

Housner stopped to sip his coffee as my respiration quickened.

“Is this going to be different from our initiative against the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley?” asked one of the other agents during the pause.

“Somewhat,” Housner said. “The Free Speech Movement, although important because it was the first big civil disobedience demonstration on a college campus, had more to do with academic freedom and singing protest songs than armed revolution. Besides, all that was largely over in a year. The Weathermen are thriving and violent, and they're using protests against the Vietnam War to promote their left-wing agenda. They're far more dangerous than the Free Speech Movement.

“As you know, for several years, the Chicago Division has monitored colleges and universities with a history of unrest, colleges like Columbia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Berkeley, and the like. Groups on these campuses have been meeting with representatives from the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Viet Cong, to intensify anti-war sentiments in the United States. I'm sure many of you have heard the well-known protest chant that goes, ‘Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh. The NLF is gonna win,’ which is contrary to our aim to unify the country under democratic rule. I believe that's also what Jane Fonda is promoting, to her disgrace. This, in my mind, is giving aid and comfort to the enemy and is traitorous behavior.”

The room erupted in vocal agreement. Nothing like using celebrity to stir up both sides.

Once things quieted down again, Housner continued. “We can discern from their mission statement that the Weathermen believe that the major conflict is between U.S. imperialism and the oppressed peoples of the Third World, and that an armed struggle is necessary for the political revolutionaries to seize state power and defeat our country's imperialistic goals. So they've evolved from wanting to stop the draft and the war to wanting to overthrow the government. These so-called revolutionaries met in Havana as recently as last July, and we believe they're going to use the Cuban revolution as a road map for an armed struggle in this country. We have information that the representative of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam met with the Weathermen and instructed them to ignore the people who talk and to look for the people who fight, which leads me to believe that the Weathermen are now looking to recruit trained militants and professional agitators.”

Housner motioned for the lights to be turned back on.

Most of this was news to me. I'd been preoccupied with doing my job and staying alive for the last four years, although not necessarily in that order. I hadn't realized how hard-core the protesters had become. As I sat listening to Housner, I wondered why things had become so polarized, why everyone couldn't understand the need for us to be fighting in Vietnam. It was to protect them and their way of life, after all. Why was that so difficult to see?

Soldiers usually don't second-guess their commanders, and the men I knew who were doing the fighting tried not to speculate on justifications for the war. Sure, there'd been some political discussions during our free time in camp, but the talk was mostly philosophical in nature because the protests back home were still abstractions to us. Most of the brass appeared to be limiting their political activities to lobbying Congress for ever-larger appropriations and demanding more autonomy in the field. After all, the military wasn't supposed to be political.

"The militants not only want to upset the social order and disrupt commerce—they intend to bring down our entire economy. Things have become so critical that Director Hoover has allocated a substantial budget to preemptively gather intelligence that will disrupt them and prevent this from happening," Housner continued.

"Even as we speak, this militant element may be planning attacks on institutions of this country—draft boards, police stations, university computing centers . . . things that represent successful businesses and advancing technologies, something they disparagingly label as the military-industrial complex."

I was confused. Wasn't the military-industrial complex something President Eisenhower had disparaged too?

"Make no mistake," Housner said, "the Weathermen are the white person's version of the Black Panthers, and they're just as dangerous. We'll be using every means at our disposal to stop them. Operation Hidden Storm will focus close to home, primarily at the University of Michigan." Housner now turned to me. "That's why we've brought Mr. Breedlove into our organization."

All eyes fell on me as I uncomfortably shifted in my chair.

"We need better current intelligence so we can plan our counter-activities. Until now, we've been gathering intel around the periphery, but we need someone to go deep. Our recent assets have aged out of the operation, and we've had to pull them back. Our current contingent of agents in Chicago and Detroit are either well known to these insurgents or too old to credibly pose as students."

He folded his arms across his chest to wait for this information to sink in before he continued. "Jamie Breedlove is exactly the kind of fighter the Weathermen are looking to

recruit, and he's exactly the kind of asset we need to infiltrate their organization. He's the right age. He has an extensive background in intelligence gathering. He's field tested and has demonstrated his ability to work under pressure. His skills with weapons of war and knowledge of explosives and other methods of terror would make him an attractive recruit for the Weathermen."

I didn't realize my job in the army had been viewed by those back home as acts of terror—we used the tools of war, which were terrifying enough but were designed to win the war, not terrorize the citizenry.

"We've arranged for Jamie to be enrolling next week as a student under the GI Bill, something that shouldn't set off any alarms. There, he'll assume the persona of a disillusioned, disgruntled Vietnam vet who wants to join this Weathermen group to take revenge on the military and corrupt politicians. His job will be to bring us timely information about their leaders, their plans, the names of their members, the location and types of weaponry they possess, and anything else we can use to take them down. We're particularly interested in any plans for violence. For example, we've learned they plan to disrupt the Chicago Eight conspiracy trial that starts here sometime next month.

"So, Mr. Breedlove"—Housner was looking directly at me now—"any thoughts?"

It must have been my expression that made Housner chuckle.

"I realize this is a lot to digest, Jamie. That's why we're going to keep you here for a few more days. We have a couple file drawers' worth of background materials that we'd like you to study. Don't worry. We're not going to send you in there unprepared, so you can get rid of that deer-in-the-headlights look."

The room chortled good-naturedly.

Damn. Here I thought I was going to go to class and take notes at some SDS meetings, when they actually were proposing for me to go undercover to infiltrate some crazed paramilitary group. It was a little out of my comfort zone. No, it was a lot out of my comfort zone. The intelligence gathering I did in the army employed a team of highly trained professionals with plenty of air support with lots of firepower. I'd carried a gun, actually more than one. With this . . . I would be on my own, weaponless, acting in a role I was ill prepared for.

My heart pounded in my chest. If I turned them down, their operation would fail and I'd look like a coward and a fool, not to mention the likelihood that people would be hurt by WUO's actions if I didn't help stop them. But if I signed on . . . shit, I could blow the whole operation by not knowing what I was doing. I knew that the country was under threat, but this was asking a hell of a lot. I'd already served. I'd known these FBI people,

what, a total of two days? My training here would consist of listening to a lecture and reading through some files. That wasn't how I liked to work.

Wingate came over to me as the others filed out of the room. "Buddy, you look like you're in shock."

"Yes, sir. I am."

"Don't worry. I'm going to be your handler, and I won't let you fail. I'll be going to Ann Arbor with you to set things up and establish our communications. The Bureau's already rented a furnished apartment for you, and I can requisition anything else you need. You'll just have to go to class and do the minimum, just enough so you don't flunk out. You'll be spending most of your time working behind the lines. I envy you, Breedlove. If I were a little younger, it might be me going in there." He punched my shoulder like we were friends. "Besides, those hippie college chicks believe in free love. That has to count for something."

I blew out my breath. Satisfying my libido was the farthest thing from my mind right now.

After a three-minute meeting with the special agent in charge of the Chicago Division, but without actually acquiescing to this assignment, I was ushered into a small office to begin reviewing files.

As it turned out, the FBI's recruitment of student informants was not as unusual as I first thought, although there was nothing in the files about students going undercover. Over the last few years, a formalized program of informants provided the Bureau and the Justice Department with critical intelligence, although more often than not, it was the local police who served as recruiters and handlers. I was told that, just this month, the restrictions on the recruitment of new campus informants had finally been relaxed, although it was still illegal to recruit assets younger than twenty-one. Procedures had been put in place for tight controls on the process. Even though these regulations didn't exactly apply to my situation, I would still have to sign the standard written statement to the effect that I would voluntarily furnish information to the FBI concerning individuals who might be acting against the interests of our government and that I acknowledged that the FBI was not interested in the legitimate activities of the educational institution itself. Leafing through a stack of papers, I didn't see any form that specified where my remains were to be sent.

"This is going to be great," Wingate said, sounding more like he was about to start summer camp than risk my life in this crazy scheme. "You'll be fine. You know, this is very high profile. You could help put me on the map." He looked at his watch. "Say, why don't I take you out for dinner before I drop you at your hotel? I can answer any questions you have. We should be able to wrap things up in a few days so you can get

back home to pack. The fall semester starts in less than a week.” He smiled and slapped me on the back again. “Besides, you look as though you could use a stiff drink.”

After dinner, Wingate dropped me at a nearby hotel, respectable but not fancy. The sounds of the city floated in through my open window as I lay in bed and watched the curtains flutter in the warm breeze that blew in from across the lake. While staring at a crack in the ceiling, I rehashed the day’s events. The idea of a free college education was mildly enticing because if I ever decided to reenlist, it would set me up to be an officer, but I still couldn’t dispel the feeling that this was not going to work. Wingate had seemed entirely confident in the ultimate success of Operation Hidden Storm. Me, not so much.

I hope you enjoyed the first three chapters. If you would like to finish the story, please visit my website, www.kmakeig.com to purchase either of my novels in paperback or as ebooks.

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