

Missoula

For...

My wife Kathy, who probably made a terrible mistake marrying me, but stayed by my side for so many years regardless.

My daughter Lauren, a source of eternal delight. Becoming her father was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

My mother, whose enduring gentleness and sense of humor is a model for many.

My father, an imperfect, tormented man who I only understood completely after he died.

My friend Dave Patterson, who I disliked when we met in the second grade. He soon became more of a brother than a friend.

Chapter 1

Welcome to Canaan

Epiphany can occur with a vision, or with the lack thereof (think of Saul on the road to Damascus). The soul can be liberated with a sound. The promise of a new future can be communicated in a single touch.

But for Jeff Louden, epiphany arrived with an aroma—the fragrance of hot roofing tar. He savored the pungent vapor as he stood on the campus of the University of Montana on a crisp September morning in 1973. Just 100 feet away an asphalt kettle boiled and sputtered as grim men in denim jackets ascended their ladders. To Jeff their stoic expressions only served to mask the depths of their despair.

“Poor exploited bastards,” he whispered.

The object of their labor was the blistered rooftop of a dormitory known as Duniway Hall, an architecturally nondescript rectangle of bricks and windows that linked stately Elrod Hall to the south with Craig Hall to the east.

As Jeff paused on the concrete portico that formed Duniway’s north entrance, he turned slowly and took in the vista of the campus, the city and the mountains beyond. He was slightly disappointed with the mountains; they didn’t sport the jagged alpine peaks he had expected. Magnificent as they were, the summits that ringed the city of Missoula were rounded with pine trees and yellowish grass. In the far distance, Jeff saw at least one peak crowned with bare, gray rock, but it was the exception.

No matter. Until he and Paul Jepson had reached Wyoming on their westward journey, neither had seen mountains in the flesh. Now Jeff found himself in the bosom of the Rockies, preparing to embark on what he felt would be the greatest adventure of his life. It was his childhood dream come true—best friends together at the threshold of adulthood, far away from home and free from parents at last.

“Ow da way,” Paul Jepson mumbled as he labored up the short flight of steps. He carried a load of record albums beneath one arm and a small loudspeaker under the other. His bearded face was almost completely hidden by a sheet of paper clenched between his teeth.

“Ofen da door,” was the nearest thing to speech that Paul could manage. Jeff dutifully pulled open one of the heavy steel doors.

“So what are our room assignments?” Jeff asked.

Paul jerked his chin up sharply. “Tay it. Tay it and read.”

Jeff gingerly plucked the form from Paul’s mouth. He grimaced as he wiped the saliva from the University of Montana letterhead.

“Hey!” Jeff cried as he quickly scanned the paper. “We’re not in the same room. Hell, we’re not even in the same hall! You’re in Craig.”

“Yep. That’s a drag, but it’s the hand we’ve been dealt,” Paul replied as he stepped aside to let another student pass. “Look on the bright side—they didn’t assign roommates. We’ll have our rooms to ourselves. Besides, Craig is attached to Duniway; I’ll be just down the hallway.”

Paul disappeared into the shadows, the sounds of his hiking boots echoing in the stairwell. “Better get your stuff out of the car,” he said. “The campus cops might give us a ticket for parking here.”

“But what about the rooms?” Jeff called out. “This isn’t what we planned. Are we going to try to change the assignments?” There was no response.

Jeff grabbed his suitcase and started up the stairs. He found his room about 15 feet down a narrow corridor made institutionally ugly through the flagrant use of brown outdoor carpeting. Dusty yellow ceiling lamps drew a dotted line of light on the fading carpet, creating an airport runway effect that stretched the entire length of the hallway.

Although it lacked visual grace, the first floor of Duniway Hall radiated warmth and welcome. All the room doors were standing open; rock music blared from dozens of stereo systems and radios. Students brushed by with their possessions piled in their arms. Everyone exchanged glances, usually followed with smiles.

A student wearing a knit wool cap atop a chaotic riot of chestnut hair squeezed past Jeff, flattening himself in exaggerated fashion against the wall.

“Excuse me,” the student said with a toothy grin. He disappeared into a room immediately adjacent to the one that the U of M Resident Hall Assignment form had decreed for Jeff.

Jeff stepped into the doorway of his new home and shook his head. Room 149 was roughly twice the size of a walk-in closet at his parent’s house. At the moment, it was furnished in a decor that might be charitably described as unpretentious. A fitful breeze stirred a set of gauzy white curtains that fluttered over a bare wooden desk and bookshelves. A single bed—little more than a mattress on a steel frame--was nestled against yellow plaster walls in the shadow of a towering pine cabinet.

Again, Jeff relished the scent of roofing tar. It was carried on the same wind that swept music and voices through the windows.

“Here I am,” he sighed. Jeff threw his suitcase on the bed and popped the latches.

“Your clothes go in the cabinet, my man,” a voice said from the behind. The knit cap student walked rapidly into Jeff’s room and peered out the windows.

“Who--”

“Rich Runyon, your new best friend. You’re lucky, man. You have a set of windows that actually work. Mine are painted shut. We share a delightful

view of Miller Hall, though. That's the hideous block building across the courtyard. I've been told it's mostly a home for homos, but you know how rumors go."

"Ah...hello. I'm Jeff Loudon, from Indiana."

"Damn glad to meet you Jeff Loudon from Indiana," Rich said as he pumped Jeff's hand. His smile was dazzling—a salesman's smile. "We're going to have great times together."

"Okay. Whatever you say."

"I'm here all the way from Florida, Mr Loudon. Can you believe it? I wasn't very keen on going to college in the first place. I just needed to get away from home. My step dad was so pissed with me, he was happy to foot the bill. Strong incentive to do my best, huh?"

"Ah, sure," Jeff stammered. "I...drove here...with my friend."

Rich's eyes widened. "Do tell! That would be wicked far. Thanks to my asshole step dad, I was able to fly to Missoula. I'd go nuts crawling across the continent in a car."

"It isn't that bad. You see, my friend...well...we've known each other since childhood. His name is Paul Jepson and his room is somewhere in Craig Hall. I'm a journalism major and Paul is into forestry. We were supposed to be--"

Rich suddenly placed his hand on Jeff's shoulder. "You're babbling, son. You must be tired and tense. Drag all your crap into the room and I'll finish setting up my little corner of the universe. Then we'll talk."

Jeff spent the next hour rescuing his stereo system and other treasures from the trunk of Paul Jepson's car, a rusting Ford Mustang that had ferried them safely across 1700 miles. He removed each loudspeaker with great care so as not to scratch the wood finish. Jeff carried the speakers to his room, wrapped in blankets like sleeping children, and placed them on the highest planks of his bookshelves.

Next came the stereo receiver and turntable, the heart and soul of his system. They too occupied places of honor on his bookshelves. Only after the stereo system was wired and checked could Jeff concern himself with less critical items such as his books, clothing and an aging Selectric typewriter.

By noon, Jeff had completely settled in. Now he could relax, sitting by the open window, listening to the Moody Blues on his stereo and watching students in the courtyard below. His door remained open so that he could also enjoy the ever-present buzz of activity in the hallway.

When his door suddenly slammed shut, Jeff leaped from his chair and bumped the turntable, sending the needle skating across the record grooves with a hideous screech. Rich Runyon was standing in the middle of the room, scowling.

"Never leave a door open when you're about to consume illegal substances," he said, and then smiled.

“Illegal substances?”

“Hash oil,” Rich replied as he pulled up a chair. “Ever try it?”

Jeff shook his head.

“You need to have your horizons expanded,” Rich said as he fumbled in the pocket of his leather jacket. He soon produced a tiny spoon, the melted stub of a candle and a vial containing a thick black fluid. He placed the candle on the desk and struck a match.

“Do you think this is a good idea?” Jeff asked.

Rich froze in mid-motion with the lighted match hovering above the candlewick. “It is your room, Jeff. You call the shots. Hurry before this match burns down to my fingers.”

Before Jeff could reply, there was a knock at the door. Rich blew out the match and closed his fist around the vial.

“Come in!” Jeff said.

To Jeff’s relief, Paul Jepson strolled into the room. Rich rose quickly and grabbed his hand. “You must be the childhood buddy of my friend Jeff,” he said.

“If you say so,” Paul replied with a grin.

“I do indeed! Do you smoke hash oil?” Rich asked.

“Sure,” Paul said. “But I don’t have any.”

Rich produced the vial and wiggled it in the air between his thumb and forefinger. Paul’s eyes widened.

“Close that door, Mr Jepson, and join us.”

Soon the candle was burning and the tiny spoon was floating in the flame. The black liquid it held began to boil.

“Take your places on the bed, otherwise known as Jeff’s couch,” Rich said as he resumed his seat at the desk. “It’s show time.”

The liquid suddenly erupted in flame. Rich raised the spoon to his lips and blew out the fire with a practiced puff. Smoke billowed from the spoon.

“Hurry!” he said as he inhaled the gray smoke. Paul leaned in and eagerly drew the fumes into his nostrils. Jeff approached slowly. Rich nodded his encouragement as Jeff inhaled through his mouth.

They sat silently, holding their breaths for as long as possible. Jeff was the first to begin coughing, bending forward with a choked spasm that almost sent him to the floor. Paul slapped him on the back and laughed.

“Good man,” Rich said between coughs. “Hold that precious smoke. It’ll do you good.” He waved the spoon under their noses and again they filled their lungs and sinuses.

As the new round of coughs subsided, Jeff noticed that the omnipresent odor of roofing tar had been replaced by the sweet smell of burning hashish. He settled into the mattress with his back to the wall and watched a white haze descend from the ceiling, slowly filling his entire field of vision.

Rich and Paul were chatting, but Jeff didn't follow their conversation. He simply watched Paul's shoulder-length hair bouncing with every gesture. When he turned to Rich, it seemed as though his knit cap was floating on his hair, not quite touching his scalp. His deep brown eyes flashed and his teeth—his perfect teeth—seemed to gleam.

From somewhere in the distance, the Moody Blues were singing in perfect harmony. Jeff closed his eyes and found himself standing on a concert stage in a vast arena. There were spotlights in his eyes and a guitar slung low across his waist. Jeff grabbed the guitar and began ripping into "I'm Just a Singer in a Rock 'n Roll Band," shooting sly glances to Justin Hayward and John Lodge as he strutted about the stage. He was hot. They were hot. It was the greatest performance the Moody Blues had ever delivered.

Their time in the lights complete (to the roar of the crowd begging for more), the Moody Blues made their exit and Jeff stayed behind to jam with Johnny Winter. Before Jeff knew it, Johnny had departed as well, to be replaced by Eric Clapton, who warmly shook his hand and invited him to launch into a powerful rendition of "Layla."

Rich Runyon slapped Jeff hard across the knee. The music abruptly stopped and the arena disappeared. Jeff sat blinking in astonishment; two hours had passed.

"Get up, Jeff," Rich said. "We're hungry. Aren't you?"

"Sure," Jeff replied. He could feel himself smiling too widely. Rich returned the smile just as broadly.

"Up," Paul said as he gently nudged Jeff's elbow.

"I'm moving," Jeff answered quietly. As they entered the hallway, Rich shot past them with wide strides.

"Hang on, guys. Let me get Grady." Paul and Jeff exchanged bemused glances. A moment later, Rich reappeared with a gaunt figure wearing what appeared to be an ankle-length gray trench coat.

"Grady Wallace, meet the gang from Indiana. These two upstanding gentlemen are Jeff and Paul." Grady smiled with closed lips and merely nodded. Jeff thought he heard something that sounded like a grunt, but couldn't be sure.

"Grady is a math major," Rich continued. "Go figure!" They all laughed, except for Grady who emitted more grunts.

By the time they reached the cafeteria, it was brimming with students, hundreds of conversations taking place at once amid the sounds of colliding tableware. Paul ushered Jeff through the food line like a caretaker leading a blind man. He gestured to various types of food and Jeff obediently piled them onto his tray, smiling all the while.

They found a table and, for several minutes, fed furiously in silence. Jeff was fascinated by Grady's mechanical eating style. He would place a forkful

in his mouth, sit upright and chew, glance at his plate, then repeat the actions precisely.

“So Grady,” Jeff began, “are you from around here?”

Grady’s head pivoted in a disturbingly mechanical fashion. Jeff thought he could hear servomotors. “Yes,” he replied quietly. “My parents live about 20 miles from here in Frenchtown.”

“I see. But if your parents are in Frenchtown,” Jeff asked, “why do you live on campus? Couldn’t you just drive back and forth?”

Grady seemed to hesitate as he processed the question. “I like the campus atmosphere. I like people.”

Jeff shrugged. “Okay.”

Rich Runyon leaned across the table. “He wants to be with the cool people, the people who are going to make a difference in the world.”

Paul tossed a tuna sandwich onto his plate with a frown. “The first thing we need to do when we improve the world is improve the food in this cafeteria,” he said.

“Damn right,” Rich replied. “It’ll take time, but be patient. Over the next couple of decades, we’ll worm our way into power and shape the country to our liking—cafeterias included. Look at what’s happening in Vietnam. We took to the streets and spoke our minds. Now the war is winding down.”

“There is still Nixon and Agnew,” Paul said.

“Bumps in the road,” Rich replied through a mouthful of salad. “Nothing more.”

Jeff arranged pats of butter wrapped in paper as he listened. “I’m tired of waiting. I’m here to make a difference now, not years later,” he said at last.

Rich and Paul stopped in mid chew.

“Bullshit. You’re here for the same reason I am,” Paul said with a chuckle. “You don’t want to end up digging ditches for a living.”

“Not true,” Jeff replied without taking his eyes off his butter pats. “I’m here to make changes. That’s what the revolution is all about.”

Rich raised his eyebrows. “Whoa! Revolution? That sounds like way too much trouble and angst for me. Sorry, man, but I’m gonna play the cards I’m holding in my hands right now. That means enjoying life as it is and working to change the system from the inside, more or less.”

“And you’ll lose,” Jeff murmured. “The deck is already stacked against you.”

Grady had stopped eating and was observing the conversation with clinical fascination. “Jeff, are you a hippy?” he asked.

Everyone seemed surprised to hear Grady speak. “You didn’t notice?” Jeff answered, pointing at the hair that fell behind his shoulders.

“Hair don’t make the hippy,” Paul sneered. “And trust me, Grady. We’re no hippies—at least not the political variety.”

Jeff glanced at Paul and blushed. “That sure sounds like a departure from what we talked about on the way to Missoula. Remember?”

Paul shook his head. “I don’t recall doing that much talking myself, but I clearly remember *you* talking. Mile after mile you bored me to tears going on and on about how we’d join the protests, about how uplifting it would be. Well, I don’t see much protesting on this campus. Be sure to give me a heads up when it starts, though.”

Rich and Paul laughed. Grady grunted. Jeff could only shrug before returning to his butter pats.

Across the cafeteria, a glass tumbler flew off a table and struck the ceramic tile floor. It bounced once, twice then shattered. There was a round of applause.

“How idiotic,” Jeff said.

“No, no,” Rich replied. “I’ll show you idiotic.” He snatched Jeff’s butter pats and proceeded to roll them in a paper table napkin.

“What are you doing?” Jeff asked.

“Rolling a joint, a doobie, a marijuana cigarette, as they say.”

Rich displayed his cigar-like creation and Paul produced a cigarette lighter. Within seconds, the end of the napkin was aflame.

“Oh, man,” Jeff exclaimed. “You’re going to get us thrown out of here.” The orange flame began to dance in the lenses of Grady’s wire-frame glasses.

“Don’t worry, Jeff. This is what you came for,” Paul laughed. “Hail the revolution! Burn baby burn!”

Grady leapt to his feet, clutching his tray. “I gotta go,” he announced. Rich began beating the flaming end of the butter-pat joint on the edge of the table. Burning bits of paper took to the air and floated to the floor.

By now, they had an audience and several began to applaud. Rich extinguished the napkin in the remnants of Grady’s Coke. That was Grady’s cue to exit as rapidly as possible.

Rich bowed deeply to his fans and nodded. Paul clapped enthusiastically. “Long live the revolution,” Rich shouted. “Power to the people, and various animals.”

Jeff sat back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest. “That’s pretty cute,” he muttered as the applause died and everyone returned to their meals.

“Jeff, my man, we *really* have to work on you,” Rich said with frown. He turned to Paul and jerked a thumb at Jeff. “How long have you known this guy?”

“Too long,” Paul said, then looked hard at Jeff. “I’m *joking*, man.”

Jeff nodded, but didn’t smile. “About 13 years,” he said to Rich. “We met in kindergarten.”

“Cool,” Rich replied. “It’s great to have a friend that you’ve known most of your life. Me, I go from one friend and one place to the next. Everything is temporary in life, after all. Nothing lasts.”

Rich and Paul began another animated conversation while Jeff stared into the distance. Beyond the cafeteria windows, the sun was settling into the mountains. Long shadows were already stretching into the city.

“I’m done,” Jeff said as he stood with his tray. Rich nodded and Paul stabbed an errant french fry with his fork

“What are you guys doing next?” Jeff asked.

“More drugs,” Rich replied, rolling his eyes. “Always more drugs.”

“We’ll stop by your room later,” Paul said with a dismissive wave.

With that, Jeff weaved through the gauntlet of students and made his way out of the cafeteria. He walked aimlessly through the parking lot, then eventually found himself in the green, leaf-littered expanse of the Oval commons.

The Oval was aptly named for it was literally a large oval of grass encircled and bisected by concrete sidewalks. The western end of the Oval met a stylized sculpture of a grizzly bear, the University of Montana mascot, which stood on a circular dais, glowering at passing students with its forepaws raised in angry challenge. At the eastern end stood the imposing redbrick University Hall with its bells and clock.

Revolution was supposed to be about throwing off hoary traditions, but Jeff couldn’t help but appreciate this faux Ivy League tableau. This wasn’t a truly ancient campus like Yale or Harvard, but the University of Montana still managed to project a kind of elder stateliness that Jeff found captivating.

He stood beneath a spreading maple tree and watched a pair of hang gliders as they soared from the top of Sentinel, a 2000-foot mountain that stood guard at the eastern edge of the campus. Behind towering Aber Hall, a hiking trail zigzagged its way up the side of Sentinel, ending halfway to the summit at the base of a white concrete “M” cast into the very soil of the mountain.

The sudden appearance of a woman with straight, waist-length hair interrupted Jeff’s meditation. She walked slowly past him and smiled. Jeff nodded in return. He opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing. Jeff stared with his mouth ajar and simply watched her disappear into the dusky shadows.

Jeff wandered back to his room and put the Moody Blues’ *A Question of Balance* on the turntable. He stretched out on his narrow unmade bed as the music merged with the oncoming night. It was only 7 o’clock, but Jeff would soon be asleep. Rich and Paul never arrived.

Chapter 2

Scott Davies

Jeff sat just beyond the edge of the Oval, trying desperately to look nonchalant. His back was supported by the rough trunk of a maple tree and its bark pressed painfully through his fatigue jacket. Jeff would shift position, wait for the pain to return, then shift again. He was highly uncomfortable, but he looked good.

Jeff was particularly proud of his fatigue jacket, with its faded sergeant chevrons on the shoulders and **LOUDEN** sewn above the right breast pocket. (His mother had lovingly placed the letters there for him, a fact he never disclosed.) Jeff had stumbled across his army prize at a military surplus store when he was a junior in high school. He wore it every day he could, delighting in the disapproving frowns from his teachers and the glares from the handsome jocks in their lettered athletic jackets.

Jeff was quickly discovering, however, that being a revolutionary iconoclast in college presented a different challenge. In this place, he feared that he might become just one ordinary rebellious student among many. Who was authentic? Who wasn't? As he communed with his fellow students, he was haunted by the thought that his revolutionary credentials weren't entirely sufficient, or worse, that no one cared.

All the students he could see—revolutionary and otherwise—were scattered about the commons, mostly sitting in groups with their books and backpacks. Some were deep in quiet concentration while others talked and laughed. No one looked his way. If Jeff was waiting for an outbreak of spontaneous protest that afternoon, he would be sorely disappointed.

He picked up his dog-eared copy of the *Communist Manifesto* and began idly turning the pages. It was a thin book as books go—a pamphlet, really. Still, Jeff had never been able to finish it. He struggled through one page, then decided that he wasn't in the mood to read it (again).

He glanced up as a large shadow suddenly swept across the lawn. The triangle silhouette belonged to a hang glider with enormous canary yellow wings. The pilot banked sharply just above the trees that ringed the Oval. As the glider turned, the wing fabric rippled in the slipstream. All conversations died instantly as everyone beheld the aerial spectacle.

"He's going to land in the Oval," a voice said behind him. "He really doesn't have a choice at this point." Jeff turned to see a student dressed in jeans, a T-shirt and a blue down-filled vest. He was watching impassively with his hands stuffed deep into his pockets.

"Do they do this often?" Jeff asked.

"No. It isn't safe."

“Then why is he doing it?”

“Beats me,” the student said with a shrug.

The pilot glided gracefully above the maples. Jeff could see the blissful smile on this face. One particularly tall maple loomed in his path and the pilot pulled his glider skyward. The fabric flapped madly.

“He’s stalling it,” the student said quietly. “Not good.”

Sure enough, the left wing abruptly ceased flying. The glider dipped and began a corkscrew dive.

“Fuck me!” the pilot cried as grasping branches reduced his wings to a mass of yellow rags. The pilot plunged headlong through the tree, but he was ultimately saved by the remnants of his harness. The trailing straps snagged the lower branches and brought him to an abrupt stop, leaving him dangling upside down about 10 feet from the grass.

Jeff jumped to his feet. A mass of students and campus security surged to the tree.

“He’s okay,” the student said. “A few scratches, maybe. The worst injury is to his dignity.”

“Thank God,” Jeff replied.

The student grinned and extended his hand. “Hi. I’m Scott. Scott Davies from Little Rock. Geology major.”

Jeff shook his hand quickly. The grip was surprisingly warm and firm.

“I’m Jeff Louden from Indianapolis. I’m in Duniway Hall. A good friend of mine lives in Craig.”

“Which floor in Craig?”

“First.”

“Cool. That’s where I am. I’ve probably seen your friend already. What’s his name?”

“Paul Jepson. He is about my height and has a beard. He isn’t nearly as pudgy as I am, though.”

Scott chuckled. “Oh, yeah. I’ve met Paul. I was on my way to his room just now.”

“Really?” Jeff said with a frown. “I thought he had a late-afternoon class.”

“Maybe it was cancelled. I saw him in the University Center about 30 minutes ago.”

“Whatever. I’m still trying to figure out the schedules. If you’re going to see Paul, mind if I tag along?”

“Works for me,” Scott grinned.

They found Paul in his room, his face buried in the pages of a textbook. His feet were propped on his desk.

“Hey, Scott!” he said when he heard them enter the room. “I see you ran into my buddy Jeff.”

“Yep,” Scott replied as he slid onto a chair. Jeff took his place on the bed.

“Going to the Beach Boys concert Saturday?” Paul asked.

“I think so,” Scott answered. “I’m waiting on some cash from home. Are you going, Jeff?”

Jeff shook his head. “Not my kind of music.”

“Of course not. It isn’t revolutionary enough,” Paul said as he glanced out the window.

“To each his own,” Scott said with a smile. “By the way, there was an item in Kaimin about a Grateful Dead show coming in the spring.”

“Now *that* would be cool,” Jeff replied.

Paul shrugged. “Three hours of self-indulgent musical noodling. I’ll pass.”

“I thought you liked the Dead,” Jeff said.

“Things change.”

“They do indeed,” Scott chirped. “When we’re middle-aged men, our petty concerns about music and politics will seem very silly. We’ll have other things to worry about.”

Before Jeff could respond, Rich Runyon came bouncing into the room with Grady Wallace in tow. “Gentlemen, gentlemen. I have a new invention. Jeff, jump up and close the door, please.”

As Jeff eased the door shut, Rich pulled an ancient military surplus gas mask from a drawstring bag.

“Wow!” Scott said.

“Expecting teargas?” Jeff asked. He reached for the mask, but Rich drew away.

“No, no, no. Not gas.” He held up the end of the hose, which had been fitted with a brass bowl.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Paul said with a laugh.

“Grady, take a seat.” Grady obeyed without comment. Rich pulled the mask down over the top of Grady’s head squeezed it onto his face. Grady appeared to be smiling, but it was difficult to tell.

“Comfy?” Rich asked. Grady nodded.

Rich produced a thick cellophane bag filled with marijuana. He pinched some of the dried leaves between his fingers and began stuffing them vigorously into the bowl. He struck a match and held the flame next to the leaves.

“Breathe!” Rich coaxed. “Deep breaths!”

Scott and Paul watched in wide-eyed fascination. Jeff hovered near the end of the bed, glancing out the window and expecting to see a campus security car at any moment.

The fragrance of burning leaves rapidly overwhelmed the room as smoke rose from the bowl. Soon Grady’s eyes vanished behind the mask lenses, lost in swirling gray clouds.

Grady struggled and coughed.

“Isn’t this great?” Rich shouted. Paul laughed uncontrollably while Scott simply gaped.

Tendrils of smoke leaked from the edges of the mask, curling up from Grady’s head. He looked like a heaving medusa.

Within a minute, a fist began pounding on the door. “No one’s home,” Rich called out.

“Tell me you locked the door, Jeff,” Rich whispered. “Right?”

Just as Jeff was answering in the negative, the door flew open. Steve Grindel, the Craig Hall resident advisor, stood at the threshold, his eyes wide. Grady turned, gasped and waved.

“What the hell is going on here?” Steve shouted.

Paul had gone beet red with laughter. He could barely catch his breath and speech was impossible. Scott gazed up with a placid smile, palms skyward in puzzled innocence. Jeff quickly pulled the mask from Grady’s head and shook the glowing embers out the window.

“Don’t get your underwear in a bunch,” Rich cooed as he stepped toward Steve.

“That’s pot!” Steve shouted.

“I certainly hope so,” Grady croaked.

Jeff began waving his arms in the air, trying in vain to clear the smoke.

“You’re all doing drugs!” Steve shouted again. “You know the rules.”

“Yes,” Rich said as he gently took Steve by the arm. “But you know what they say about rules.”

“Stop that!” Steve barked.

“Now you’ll have to file a report, I suppose,” Rich began with feigned dismay. “Imagine all the paperwork. The meetings. And it is so early in the school year, after all.”

“He’s right, you know,” Scott said.

Paul had finally stopped laughing. He was wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

Steve looked around room in silence. “I… I don’t ever want to smell pot in this room again,” he said at last.

Rich began to guide Steve to the door.

“You know the rules,” Steve whined.

“We do now, sir” Rich said softly.

“Not one joint in this room! Not one puff!”

“Not one,” Rich replied. Jeff stepped aside and flattened himself against the nearest wall. Rich shot him a glance and winked.

“I can’t believe you guys did this,” Steve said.

“Shocking, isn’t it?” Rich replied. Steve didn’t seem to hear him. He stepped into the hallway as if in a daze.

“The smell of the asphalt is bad enough. And now you do this.”

“Next time we’ll use air freshener,” Rich said as he began to close the door behind Steve.

“What?”

The door closed softly with a click of the latch. There was a microsecond of silence, and then everyone was convulsed with laughter, including Grady. Especially Grady.

“Oh my god,” Paul said.

Grady began bouncing on the mattress. He seemed to be gazing into the distance.

“Jeff, we need music,” Rich said.

Jeff knelt and thumbed through the peach crates that held Paul’s album collection. He found Led Zeppelin’s third album and queued it up on the turntable.

Rich eased Grady down until he was prone on the mattress. He nestled Paul’s headphones over Grady’s ears and patted his forehead. “Sweet dreams.”

He turned to Jeff and smiled. “You may fire when ready, Gridley.”

Jeff set needle to vinyl. The speakers rumbled, then exploded with “The Immigrant Song.”

“We come from the land of the ice and snow!” Grady cried hoarsely. Rich placed his forefinger on Grady’s lips. Grady smiled and nodded.

“Here,” Paul said as he shoved a tube into Grady’s hands.

“What is it?” Rich asked.

“A kaleidoscope,” Paul answered as he positioned Grady’s hands to hold the tube over Grady’s left eye. Paul twisted the end of the tube and Grady grinned. Grady soon took over and began twisting furiously.

“Huh. Huh,” he grunted.

Paul returned to his seat and lit a cigarette. “That’ll keep him out of trouble for a while.”

Rich examined the gas mask and frowned. “Grindel is right about one thing. I don’t know what the hell we were thinking. This thing is useless.”

“What do you mean ‘we’?” Scott asked.

“My partners in crime, of course! You can’t say you weren’t enjoying the show.”

“The show could have gotten us kicked out of the dorm,” Jeff said.

Paul chuckled. “Didn’t I hear you bring up the prospect of us being teargassed, Jeff? That seems a step or two above the threat of being kicked out of a dorm.”

“I was talking about possibilities. You never know when the cops will decide to use stronger stuff to keep the students quiet.”

“Sheesh,” Paul replied. “I don’t think campus security even has teargas.”

“Nonetheless,” Rich interrupted with a wave of his arm, “this antique is surplus to our needs.” He tossed the mask out the window. It landed on the sidewalk with *plop*.

Jeff turned to Scott. “Have you been to any of the dorm parties?”

“There was an serious party in Knowles Hall last night. I think they had about 200 people crammed onto the second floor.”

“You were there?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Paul and I were there too. How did we miss you?”

Scott folded his hands in his lap and smiled. “I’m not obnoxious when I socialize. I find the beer, draw a healthy glassful, then slink into a corner to watch the action.”

“You party incognito,” Rich said.

“That’s right,” Scott chuckled. “I’m always incognito. In fact, I conduct my life incognito.”

Paul drew on the cigarette and attempted to blow a smoke ring. “I like the way Scott thinks. He is a very smooth operator; you can tell that already.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Scott said and rose from the chair.

“Guys, I need to head over to the University Center and grab a snack. Maybe shoot some pool, too. Anyone want to come with me?”

Paul shook his head and picked up his book.

“I’d better stay with Grady,” Rich replied.

“Come on, Jeff,” Scott said as he pinched the sleeve of his jacket. “You aren’t doing anything.”

Jeff glanced at Paul. “Paul, what do you think about--?”

Paul shook his head without looking up from the pages.

Jeff and Scott shared the remains of a small joint as they crossed the Oval in twilight. If Jeff had been uncomfortable with smoking marijuana in Paul’s room, he was downright paranoid in the middle of the Oval. His eyes darted to every movement, looking for the telltale silhouette of a campus security cop.

For his part, Scott seemed totally at ease. Jeff tried to walk faster, hoping that Scott would quicken his pace as well, but Scott refused. He would slow to a shuffle, take a drag on the loosely rolled joint, then pass it to Jeff as he smiled and strained to hold his breath.

To Jeff’s dismay, Scott stopped suddenly at the center of the commons where four sidewalks joined. There was a raised medallion cast in concrete with a hand holding a flaming torch. It gleamed dully in the reflected lights.

“*Lux et veritas*,” Scott said as he pointed to the inscription. “Do you know what that means?”

Jeff shook his head.

“Light and truth. I like the sentiment, don’t you?”

Jeff shrugged. “I never thought about it.”

“Well you should,” Scott replied. The clock bells in the University Hall began to toll.

Jeff nodded quickly. The bells added to his growing agitation. Scott stared at him for a moment, seeming to sense that Jeff was nearing panic—which he was. To Jeff’s relief, Scott turned and continued their journey.

“Why are you here, Jeff?” Scott asked as they slipped into a small grove of trees that separated the Oval from the University Center.

“To eventually become a journalist.”

“Really? Good for you. What made you pick the University of Montana, of all places?”

Jeff was silent for a moment. “They have a respected journalism school.”

“True, but there are others. Probably closer to Indiana, too. Why here?”

“It seemed--”

“Exotic? Compared to Indiana this must be like another planet.”

“Well, no. I mean, my friend Paul--”

“Your childhood friend.”

“Yeah, he wanted to come here to study forestry.”

Scott nodded silently as they stepped into the glow of the floodlights at the University Center. “So you came because Paul came,” he said.

“That’s not the only reason. This is a wonderful place.”

“Oh, I agree,” Scott said with a grin. “Just take a stroll down to the Clark Fork River some day and park yourself on the old pedestrian bridge. Where else could you walk to the edge of a college campus and revel in the pleasures of a mountain stream? It’s easy to get lost in your thoughts down there, let me tell you.

“And the women at U of M are fabulous, of course. Some of them have that cooing little accent that sounds vaguely Canadian. My sincerest dream is that I’ll soon have one of those delightful Montana ladies whispering into my ear in the private darkness of my dorm room.”

Jeff didn’t respond.

“Are you in a relationship yet?” Scott asked.

“Why do you ask? Is there some kind of deadline?”

“Not at all, but the pairing will soon begin, you know. I think that’s what the parties are really about. I mean, have you been chatting up any women at the beer-infused gatherings?”

“No. I usually prefer conversations that are more serious. I like talking politics.”

“I see. Do you know the Beatles tune ‘Revolution’?”

“Of course.”

“Remember the line, ‘But if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain’t going to make it with anyone anyhow’?”

“Yes,” Jeff replied flatly. “What are you getting at? Are you saying I drive women away?”

Scott clutched Jeff's shoulder in mock surprise. "Easy boy! No offense meant. I just mean that there should be moderation in all things. It's a philosophy that might serve you well, especially at those parties."

They paused just outside the Center entrance. A steady rock 'n roll backbeat was throbbing through the glass. "You know," Scott said, "you should only do things because *you* want to do them. Trust your gut. Don't try to be something you're not."

Jeff stiffened. "I don't know what you mean."

"Are you sure? Maybe you should think about it over a cheeseburger."

"It's getting chilly," Jeff replied as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"True. Open the door."

Jeff reached for the metal handle, but Scott slapped his arm away.

"What were we just talking about, man? What if I had told you to pick your nose? Would you do it?"

Jeff smiled and nodded. "Thank you, Scott."

Chapter 3

C'est Vrai

Jeff awoke to the sound of sleet pecking at his window. It wasn't even Halloween, but that fact didn't prevent an early arrival of winter.

Pulling the comforter to his chin, he turned away from the clock radio as Elton John's "Elderberry Wine" blasted from its tinny speaker. Jeff loved the song at any other time, but not now.

He really didn't enjoy alcohol and would never drink it on a weekday night. Last night was an exception, though. Rich Runyon had burst into his room while he was studying, demanding that Jeff accompany him to the Cavern, a seedy bar and ersatz music venue in downtown Missoula. Jeff had agreed just to shut him up.

It was a long, chilly walk to the Cavern. Rich had assured him that the Missoula busses were still running between campus and downtown that evening, but, of course, he had been overly optimistic. With every step they took, Jeff prayed to see a bus looming suddenly of the darkness. When he expressed this hope to Rich, he responded by bursting into a highly irritating rendition of the Who's song "Magic Bus." He sang it like a marching chant as they trudged through the campus neighborhoods. No busses appeared, magical or otherwise.

Despite the rundown appearance of the Cavern, Jeff was relieved to finally step through the door and into its warmth, saturated as it was with the stench of cigarettes and beer. As they strolled past the bar, Rich shouted and waved to several people. Whether they really knew him was unclear. Some returned smiles while others frowned. Rich stopped long enough to swap small talk with the bartender and grab a couple of beers.

The tables surrounding the stage were surprisingly full, which Jeff did not expect. He had assumed the Cavern was a watering hole and little else. Rich pointed to a table immediately front of a stack of loudspeakers. The lone occupant was an elderly Blackfoot Indian. As they approached, Rich clapped the old man on the shoulder and loudly introduced himself. If the man responded, Jeff didn't hear it.

Rich was undeterred. He sent Jeff to the bar to fetch a shot of tequila for their new companion. The old man sat bewildered at Jeff's side, nursing the tequila unenthusiastically.

"How is it?" Jeff ventured.

"Tastes like cat piss," the man growled.

A jazz trio calling themselves the Phourx began playing an improvisation of "Days of Wine and Roses." This, as it turned out, was Rich's reason for

trekking to the Cavern in the first place. The Phourx were comprised of students Rich had met at a dorm party the weekend before. He clapped wildly at the end of their first number, and the Indian used the opportunity to escape to the bar.

The trio began an original piece they called “You Could Have Been Scriabin” and dedicated it to Rich Runyon. When the Phourx bassist launched into a vigorous solo, a young woman jumped from her seat and ran to the edge of the stage. She began gyrating and thrusting her hips at the band, oblivious to everyone else.

“Good god,” Jeff muttered as he reached for another drink.

“Enjoy the show!” Rich shouted above the music. “That’s Madame Bump and Grind. She is here almost every night. I thought the girl was an epileptic at first. Turns out she’s just a lunatic!”

Jeff decided to seek refuge from the deafening music and disturbing visuals in a long string of rum and Cokes. An hour later, the room was spinning and he was under the table—literally. He recalled seeing a strange pair of legs just inches from his face. They disappeared, only to be followed by another pair. The frantic music never stopped. To Jeff, every song sounded the same.

Eventually, Rich guided Jeff out of the Cavern and shoved him into a waiting cab. Jeff remembered seeing Rich’s smile fading into the night like a Cheshire Cat as the reeking taxi lurched away from the curb. Madame Bump and Grind was at Rich’s side, clutching his arm and staring vacantly at the sky.

The driver woke him when they reached campus. Jeff couldn’t operate the door handle, so the cabbie glumly pulled him from the car and left him lying on the sidewalk. Jeff couldn’t remember how long he had lain on the concrete. When the cold finally seeped through his clothes, he arose, muttered several curses and staggered into Duniway Hall.

Now, as Jeff lay sorting through scattered memories of the night’s events, his temples pounded and his stomach churned. He seriously considered blowing off his first class of the day, but decided against it. Instead, he slapped the **OFF** button on the top of the radio and struggled to a sitting position with a groan. The soles of his feet stung when they met the chill of the tile floor.

“Lord have mercy,” he said aloud.

The bathroom and showers were just 20 feet away, but to Jeff it was a journey of a thousand steps. He walked as quickly as possible under the circumstances and was relieved to see that he was alone when he opened the door to the shower room. Even after two months on campus, he was still uncomfortable with the idea of communal bathing. There was something about appearing nude in front of other people that set his teeth on edge.

Jeff grimaced as he stood in the shower stall. The Duniway showers weren't blessed with the round shower heads Jeff had known at home, the kind that spewed placid streams of soothing water. No, these were strictly functional nozzles that shot high-pressure spray with all the grace and gentleness of a fire hose. Jeff opened the valves and stifled a scream as the water tore at his tingling flesh.

At the end of the torture session, Jeff opened the shower curtain and gasped at the sight of a stark-raving naked Grady Wallace. Grady was standing in front of Jeff's stall like a bizarre version of Michelangelo's David. His straw-colored hair was pointing in every direction.

"Rough night?" Grady asked.

Jeff snatched up a towel and quickly wrapped it around his waist. "Yeah. You?"

"Nope. Playing my bongos."

Jeff forced a small laugh. "Don't play them this morning or I'm liable to wrap them around your head."

"Huh huh," Grady grunted. Jeff turned away and began combing his hair, but Grady seemed frozen in place.

"Showers are all yours," Jeff said. "Pick any one."

"Are they warm?"

Jeff glanced at Grady's reflection in the mirror. "Warm enough," he replied with a frown. "Aren't they always?"

"I guess so."

"Well, you'd better get moving. People see you just standing around like that and they'll think you're a homo."

"Huh," Grady replied with a grin.

At last, Grady chose his shower and stepped into the stall. Jeff made quick work of brushing his teeth and bolted through the door.

Jeff's duty on Wednesday mornings was to make sure that Paul was awake and ready for Introduction to Anthropology. As always, when he reached Paul's room, Jeff didn't bother to knock. Instead, he threw open the door with as much malice as he could muster, deliberately allowing it to smash into the opposite wall.

"Aw, man," Paul moaned.

Jeff tore apart the curtains, allowing the gray morning light to stream into the room. Paul lay in his bed like a vampire in a casket, shielding his eyes from even the slightest reminder that a sun existed somewhere above Missoula's clouds.

"Go to hell," he said.

"Already there," Jeff replied with the sound of the door still ringing painfully in his ears. Paul tried to roll into his sheets, but Jeff ripped them away. He pulled Paul to his feet with surprising ease and noticed that he was still wearing his jeans and T-shirt from the night before.

“I love you,” Paul said with a smile, just inches from Jeff’s face. The odor of pot and stale tobacco scalded his nostrils.

“I love you too, man. We gotta go.”

Paul stretched and vigorously scratched his ass. “Not enough sleep,” he muttered.

“Too bad. This is the course you thought would be so fascinating to attend at 8 AM.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Paul said. He clumsily searched the room and eventually located his notepad, coat and a pack of cigarettes. With coats zipped and ready, they stood together before the window in silence, watching the sleet turn to snow.

“Fuck this,” Paul said with a sigh. “You shouldn’t have followed me to Missoula, my friend.”

“I don’t suppose there is a college in Florida we could have attended?”

“Nah. I wanted to go after a degree in forestry,” Jeff replied as he waved his hand at the trees. “Lots of that kind of thing here.”

They leaned into the bitter wind and slowly made their way across campus. As they neared their destination, another pair of figures emerged from the swirling snow and joined them. A sideways glance told Jeff that they were women—one tall with short, black hair, the other small and somewhat stocky with wisps of long blonde hair flying in the breeze. Wool mufflers obscured both faces.

Under the shelter of the lecture hall entrance, they all stamped their feet and brushed the snow from their clothes. The muffler fell away from the face of the diminutive blonde, revealing large blue eyes set in a creamy complexion. Jeff couldn’t help but stare.

Paul took a stack of books from the brunette as she struggled with her oversized coat. “Don’t you hate this?” he asked.

“Not really,” the brunette replied. “I was born and raised in Montana. This is nothing.”

“*C’est vrai*,” the blonde said with a shrug.

“Say what?” Jeff asked.

The blonde regarded him with a smirk that was either bemusement or contempt. Jeff hoped for the former.

“It’s French, meaning ‘it is true.’ *C’est vrai*.”

“Oh. I see. Do you live on campus?” Jeff asked. He knew he had just uttered something close to a *non sequitur*, but he wanted to stoke the conversation and didn’t know what else to say.

The blonde frowned slightly. “Of course. Knowles Hall. You?”

“I’m in Duniway. My friend Paul hangs out in Craig.”

“Paul,” the brunette said. “I’ve seen you somewhere.”

“Probably at a party,” Paul replied. “I went to one in Knowles last weekend.”

The brunette rolled her eyes. “That was hideous. Too many people and too much beer. Some guy fell down a flight of stairs and broke his jaw.”

“Wasn’t me,” Paul said with a grin. “By the way, I’m Paul Jepson, from Indiana. That’s Jeff Loudon, also late of the Hoosier State.”

“Fine,” the brunette nodded. “I’m Leigh Simmons and this is Audrey Harris.”

“I’m from Detroit,” Audrey added. “If it matters.”

A bell chimed in the hallway. Jeff winced against the sudden pain.

“Time to go,” Paul announced.

They shuffled into the cavernous auditorium along with a few dozen sleepy students. Jeff did his best to stay beside Audrey as they made their way to their seats. The girls liked to sit closer to the front than he preferred (you were more easily noticed by the professor if you fell asleep), but Jeff decided that he wouldn’t mind this time.

The professor in charge of Introduction to Anthropology paced back and forth behind the podium. He was an emaciated, elderly man wearing black-frame eyeglasses with unbelievably thick lenses. Jeff had heard that the sun had damaged the professor’s eyesight while he was fleeing the Communist Chinese through the Gobi desert. Or was he running from the Nazis in the Alps?

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,” the professor began. “It’s time to get down to business. I want to continue our discussion of human evolution with a sidetrack into the mysterious and steamy jungle of human sexuality. It is a brief sojourn that I’m sure you’ll all enjoy.” Staccato laughs echoed through the room.

“NSR,” the professor said, his voice rising, “sets us apart from the rest of the primate family. NSR is...what? Anyone?”

Audrey waved her hand.

“You!” he stabbed a gnarled finger at Audrey.

“Noncyclical Sexual Receptivity,” she called out.

The professor nodded. “Very good. The ability of the female to have sex whenever she desires. No estrus. No ‘heat.’ An alternative way to state this unusual condition would be to say that the human female does not experience a distinct period of estrus because she is in a state of *constant* estrus. Precious few other species’ females could hold a candle to the human female in this department. No other species has so definitively uncoupled sex and reproduction as the human line.”

“That’s impressive,” Jeff whispered.

Audrey shrugged. “It’s right in the assignment, if you read it.”

“NSR,” the professor continued, “coupled with face-to-face intercourse, another trick almost unknown to other primates, may have created the social glue that started us down the path to the pyramids and the Parthenon.”

“Face-to-face intercourse is a fine trick when you can get it,” Jeff muttered, then instantly regretted it. Audrey shot a withering glance, but then smiled. Jeff returned the smile with a blush.

Jeff was quietly thrilled when Leigh and Audrey accepted Paul’s invitation to breakfast at the end of the lecture. At the cafeteria, Paul dominated the conversations while Jeff tried to chew through a stack of pancakes with feigned pleasure. His stomach was still painfully uncooperative.

He sat opposite Audrey, who seemed to spend considerable time staring at the crowds of students. She barely touched her ham and eggs.

“There is a meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society in the University Center this evening,” Jeff said. “Will you be there?”

Audrey frowned. “I don’t have time for that stuff.”

“Oh,” Jeff replied as he put down his fork. Paul and Leigh seemed to be engaged in a rapid-fire discussion about the music of Ten Years After. Jeff decided to try Audrey again.

“How do you feel about the Vietnam war?”

“It sucks. I hope it ends soon.”

“Well...thank god we’re here rather than wading through some leech-infested swamp, eh?”

Audrey smiled thinly and tilted her increasingly gorgeous head to one side. “*C’est vrai.*”

“So, what is your major?” Jeff asked.

“Sociology,” Audrey replied as she poked distractedly at her eggs.

“Cool. Mine is journalism.”

“Great.”

“Do you...have any favorite classes?” Jeff stammered.

“Only the ones that don’t meet so early in the morning,” Audrey said without looking up. She peered at her wristwatch and sighed.

“Leigh,” she said. “We have to beat feet. Spanish in 15 minutes.”

“Will I see you again?” Jeff asked as Audrey stood and pulled on her coat.

“I don’t know. Will you?” she said at last.

“I hope so. Maybe I’ll stop by Knowles Hall.”

“Okay,” Audrey said with a shrug. They quickly melted into the breakfast crowd and were gone.

Paul stabbed his fork at the space Leigh had formerly occupied. “I could do something with that lady.”

“Do something?”

“Yeah. We could spend a lot of time joined at the hip. I like her.”

“Audrey is cool, too.”

“Yeah. A bit of a fireplug, though. She could shed a few pounds.”

Jeff frowned. “Bullshit. She’s fine the way she is.”

“Whatever works, Jeff. You think she’s hot for you?”

“Not sure,” Jeff grinned. “I hope so.”

“Jeff’s in love!” Rich Runyon shouted as he clapped Jeff on the back. Jeff jumped from his chair, sending it skittering across the floor.

“God, I wish you wouldn’t do that!” he snapped. “How long have you been standing there?”

“Long enough to hear. Your secret is safe with me.”

Paul laughed as Jeff retrieved the chair and returned to his breakfast.

“Make it home okay last night?” Rich asked as he tossed his books on the table.

“Yeah,” Jeff replied as he chewed halfheartedly. “Thanks.”

Paul looked at Jeff with raised eyebrows. “You guys went out?”

“Did we ever!” Rich answered before Jeff could reply. “My friend Jeff and I stormed the Cavern to take in the Phourx. Great jazz from some guys who live in Aber Hall. We had a fine time, but I think Jeff had a bit too much fire water.”

Paul laughed. “Jeff? Drunk? It’s a sign of the apocalypse.”

“Poor guy spent a lot of time checking out the dry chewing gum under our table.”

“You should know better,” Paul said as he shook his head. “You and mind-altering substances never get along.”

“Enough!” Jeff said as he held up his hand. “Let’s talk about something else.”

“Well,” Rich began as he picked up a nearby sugar dispenser, “I have something interesting to show you.”

“Not another butter joint,” Paul said.

“No. Watch.”

Rich waved the dispenser in the air like a wand. “What you see here is an ordinary jar of sugar, the type found in almost any diner. Note the fine cylindrical shape. That’s important.”

“Why?” Jeff sighed.

“Well, with a basic cylinder like this, the top looks much like the bottom when you remove the cap.” Rich unscrewed the stainless-steel lid and set it aside. He plucked a napkin from the table, draped it over the top of the jar and held it tightly.

“Follow closely,” he said with a wide grin. In a single quick motion, Rich flipped the jar and placed it upside down on the table. He withdrew the napkin carefully, then blew away any sugar granules that remained. With a triumphant flourish, he propped the cap on what was now the top of the sugar jar.

“Oh man!” Paul giggled.

Jeff shook his head. “Rich, when someone picks up the sugar, it will all spill out the bot--”

“Yes indeed! They’ll have an instant avalanche of sweetness!”

“But why?”

“I don’t know,” Rich answered as he bounced out of his chair. “Because something compels me.”

Paul lowered his head and spoke in a stage whisper. “People are coming this way and I see coffee or tea on at least one tray. This would be a good time to leave.”

“Adios!” Rich called out as he skipped toward the door. Jeff and Paul hastily grabbed their books and followed.

“Slow down,” Paul whispered. “Just a moment.”

Jeff opened his anthropology textbook and pretended to search through the pages. “Find what you’re looking for?” Paul asked with mock concern.

Jeff glanced back at the table. “Not quite yet.”

“Start heading for the exit,” Paul said.

The steel doors opened with a blast of cold air and stinging snow. “Shit!” someone yelled. “Who fucked with the sugar? God damn it!”

The doors closed on a roar of applause.

Chapter 4

KRAP

At first, there was a rumble like distant thunder in the dormitory hallways. Then came the shouts.

“Streaking women!”

Paul threw down his book and leaped for the door. Jeff was close behind. Paul took one step into the hallway, then stumbled backward just in time. A stream of humanity, filling the entire width of the hall and extending out of sight around the corner into Duniway, shot past their door at breakneck speed.

“Jesus!” Paul cried.

They waited for the mob to pass, then joined it at the tail end, running as fast as possible to keep up. The screaming testosterone-fueled multitude burst through the lobby doors and fanned out across the field between Craig Hall and the distant journalism building.

Jeff and Paul tried an end-run around the crowd to get a glimpse, but were rewarded with only the dwindling bare backsides of three fleeing women.

“Shit,” Paul spat.

Jeff bent over with his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Grady Wallace approaching in his trademark trench coat.

“I missed everything,” Grady said.

“You missed a nice trio of butts,” Jeff sighed. “Nothing more.”

“When you have naked women on campus, Grady, you can’t waste time buttoning your coat,” Paul added.

“But it’s cold,” Grady replied softly.

Paul laughed and pointed in the direction the women had gone. “Not cold enough, apparently!”

An orange Frisbee sailed over Grady’s head and he caught it in a surprisingly graceful movement. “Who does this belong to?” Grady called.

“Here!” Rich Runyon shouted. “All the way, Grady!”

Grady dropped to a half crouch and let the Frisbee fly. Rich was at least 50 yards away, but the Frisbee flew directly into his outstretched arms.

“Wow, Grady,” Jeff said. “Where’d you ever learn to throw a Frisbee like that?” Grady only shrugged and smiled.

“Well, hells bells,” Paul spat. “I can’t believe we missed the show. I’m sure they aren’t going to make another pass.”

“Not likely,” Jeff replied.

The rest of the crowd was giving up hope of a repeat performance as well. They began filing back into Craig Hall, disappointment written on many faces.

"I'm not going to stand out here playing Frisbee," Paul said. "I have a riveting textbook to read."

Paul returned sullenly to his room, Rich disappeared with his Frisbee, but Jeff and Grady chose to linger in the Craig Hall lounge. They shared a couch that faced floor-to-ceiling windows and Mount Sentinel beyond.

"Have you ever streaked?" Grady asked.

"No. And never will. You?"

Grady smiled. "No, but I'm thinking about it."

"Are you serious?"

"Huh," Grady grunted. "It would be cool. You should do it, too. Women love it."

"I'm not sure about that," Jeff replied. "When guys streak around campus, I don't usually see stampeding women at their heels."

"Hey," Scott Davies said as he strolled into view. "This looks like a couple of sexually frustrated gents trying to cool their ardor."

"Huh," Grady grunted again.

"I hear that I missed something important," Scott said.

"Oh, highly important," Jeff replied with a grin.

Scott nodded and sat cross-legged on the floor in front of them. He gathered his hair into a ponytail and secured it with a rubber band in one smooth motion. "While you guys are floating back down to reality, I want to share something with you."

"A joint?" Grady asked.

"Not hardly," Scott chuckled. "It's something I picked up in Philosophy 101 this afternoon. First, some questions. What time is it?"

Jeff glanced at his wristwatch. "Five minutes past three."

"Okay. Is this the past, present or future?"

"Present," Grady replied.

"What is the present, Grady? Define it."

Grady frowned. "The present is now."

Scott nodded. "What is 'now'?"

"Now is..." Grady paused to look at the wall clock behind them, "six minutes after three."

Scott turned to Grady. "How long do you think it took for the light to reflect off the hands of the clock, reach your eyes and be recognized as an image in your brain?"

"I don't know."

"Let's say it's a delay of a millionth of a second," Scott offered. "So I ask again, what is 'now'?"

Grady ran his hands through his matted hair and sighed. "Now is when I told you the time."

"But that was a minute ago," Jeff said, smiling.

"No, I mean at the instant I told Scott what time it was."

“But Grady,” Scott began, “what about the time it took your brain to process what the clock was showing you, and the time necessary for you to speak your words to me? What about the time it took for the sound of your voice to reach my ears? Among all those different spans of time, where is now?”

Grady’s normally pale cheeks seemed to redden. “Are you trying to say that there is no such thing as ‘now’?”

Scott nodded. “It’s even more profound than that. I’m trying to tell you that you can never step in the same river twice. The idea of a ‘present’ is an illusion. Reality is continually in flux. You’re not even the same person you were a second ago. All the electrons in all the atoms in your body have changed position since then. Incredible, isn’t it? The question of who we really are at any given moment is always up for grabs!”

“Bullshit!” Grady snapped as he bolted to his feet.

“What’s wrong?” Jeff asked.

“This is stupid bullshit,” Grady repeated.

“You’re right,” Scott said. “It really is just bullshit. Why don’t you sit down and--”

“Fuck you,” Grady barked and quickly walked away.

“Wow,” Jeff said with a whistle. “What was that about?”

Scott frowned and stared as Grady disappeared up the stairs. “I don’t know. I didn’t mean to piss the guy off. Something about the discussion really got to Grady. God only knows.”

Jeff shook his head. “Grady is weird.”

“Oh, he may be hauling some unusual mental baggage, but Grady is basically a good guy. I just need to remember never to discuss philosophy around him!”

“Hey,” Jeff said, “Wanna see something cool?”

“Why not?” Scott answered with a shrug.

Jeff led Scott to his room and proudly unveiled his latest creation. To Scott it was little more than a tangle of wire nesting atop Jeff’s stereo receiver. Another wire arced upward from the electronic clutter and crossed the curtain rods above the windows.

Scott chuckled. “I have no idea--”

“You are gazing upon K-R-A-P.”

“Crap?”

Jeff laughed. “KRAP—the Duniway Hall FM alternative.”

“I don’t understand.”

“This,” Jeff pointed at the wires and hardware, “is what is known as an FM wireless microphone. I picked it up at Radio Shack, chopped off the microphone part and wired the transmitter directly into an audio output on the back of my stereo amplifier. The wireless mike is wireless because it creates a radio signal on the FM band.”

Jeff pointed to a black case the size of a small book. “This little gem takes the tiny FM radio signal from the microphone and kicks it up quite a few notches, about 10 watts, in fact. So, all the sound that goes through my stereo also goes out over the airwaves on 88.5 on your FM dial.”

Scott gaped. “You mean it’s a pirate radio station?”

“Yep. The people’s radio.”

“How cool! Is it on?”

Jeff grabbed a small square battery and snapped it into a dangling clip. A tiny red light on the transmitter began to glow. “It is now. Pick an album.”

Scott rummaged through Jeff’s meager collection and found T-Rex *Electric Warrior*. Jeff threw it on the turntable, switched on the stereo and picked up another small microphone that had once belonged to a cassette tape recorder.

“Students of the world unite!” Jeff shouted. “This is KRAP radio, the FM alternative for Duniway Hall. Music for the proletariat!” He lowered the needle to the record and toggled. Marc Bolan’s wispy voice filled the room.

Scott clapped his hands and cackled. “Oh, that’s wonderful!”

“But what do you *really* think?”

“I’m serious. FM radio in Missoula is essentially awful. This will help mucho grande.”

Jeff parted the curtains and peered out the window. “I don’t know how far the signal goes. It probably covers most of the campus. The only problem is that it’s mono.”

“That’s okay, my man. Most students have their speakers crammed so close together, they can’t tell if they are listening to stereo or mono anyway. Believe me, this is far better than nothing.”

Later that evening, Jeff discovered that less talk and more music was the best approach. He had begun KRAP’s broadcast schedule by reading the *Communist Manifesto* aloud, but the *Manifesto* turned out to be even more boring spoken than it was read. Jeff made it as far as the second page this time, but he found himself desperately seeking a reason to stop. When Marx or Engels (who was it, anyway?) stopped ranting long enough to require a paragraph break, Jeff delicately lowered the needle to the first groove of Emerson, Lake and Palmer’s *Trilogy*.

“Whew!” he sighed as he switched off the microphone.

It was obvious to Jeff that he wouldn’t be able to find enough inspiring revolutionary reading material to fill the gaps between records. So, when side one of *Trilogy* ran its course, Jeff simply shared his opinions on the news of the day while he flipped the record and queued it up again. Short and sweet.

KRAP wasn’t Radio Moscow, but Jeff had a feeling that his little radio station was a rising star. With so little to hear in the way of rock ‘n roll FM radio in Missoula, Jeff thought KRAP might serve as a peanut-whistle beacon in the darkness, even without dual-channel stereo audio. Students would

return from dinner, switch on their radios, scan the FM band as they always did and—surprise!—find KRAP. As it turned out, Jeff was right.

At Scott's suggestion, Jeff began announcing his telephone number during the album-changing sessions. Thirty minutes later, the telephone rang with a song request. Another followed within 10 minutes.

The rapidly expanding listening audience turned into a mixed blessing, though. If studying was difficult before, it was impossible now. Jeff was juggling albums, answering the telephone and trying desperately to finish his reading assignment.

When the phone rang for the fifteenth time, Jeff cursed. "Hello?"

"KRAP?"

"Yes."

"I have an announcement I'd like to put on the air."

Jeff reached for his pen and paper. "Okay. What is it?"

"There is going to be a party this evening."

"Where?" Jeff's pen was poised.

"In your pants, fool!"

"Wha--"

"Jeff, it's Rich Runyon. Don't you recognize me?"

Jeff groaned. "Now I do."

"I'm serious. There is a party on this very floor tonight. You're the minister of party propaganda. Open your door, put out the word on KRAP and crank it up! Gotta go see a man about a record. Love ya madly! Bye!"

Jeff stared at the handset, then hung it up. For a moment, he seemed lost. "This is not what KRAP was supposed to be about," he said aloud.

He reluctantly picked up the microphone and interrupted the record. "Okay. The soundtrack of the revolution is suspended for the evening. This is an important announcement. A party is starting on the first floor of Duniway Hall, right outside KRAP studios at room 149. Everyone is invited."

Jeff gripped the microphone and sighed. "Aw, hell," he said at last. "Fuck the revolution for now. Let's party."

Rich Runyon's scream reverberated through the hallway. "Crank! It! Up!"

Jeff set the needle down at the beginning of the Rolling Stone's "Sympathy for the Devil" and turned up the speakers until the walls began to tremble. Mick Jagger was still ramping up when Paul and Grady rolled a keg of beer into Rich's room. The sweet fragrance of burning marijuana began creeping down the corridor.

"Hoo hoo!" Grady sang in chorus with the Stones. "Tell me baby! What's my name?"

Arriving students quickly formed a conga line, snaking through the rooms and screaming "hoo hoo" while splashing beer from overfilled plastic cups. Friday night was officially underway.

Song requests were still coming in by telephone and now they were also arriving in the form of shouts and screams from the hallway. Jeff juggled albums as best he could while Rich kept him well supplied with beer and the occasional joint. Neither of these helped Jeff keep the flood of requests straight in his memory, but his on-air patter improved remarkably.

An hour later, Paul tapped him on the shoulder. Jeff turned and found himself facing Audrey Harris and Leigh Simmons.

“Whoa! Hi!” he said.

“Evening,” Leigh replied. Audrey just smiled.

“I found these two wondering around lost,” Paul said. “I think they need beers.”

“*C’est vrai*,” Audrey chirped.

Jeff handed them cups overflowing with white, foaming heads. Audrey held her cup at arms length and waited for the bubbles to subside.

“How long has this been going on?” Leigh shouted over a blast of music.

“Not long enough,” Jeff shouted in reply. “Let’s go somewhere else.”

They navigated a maze of students by Jeff’s door, deftly dodging spilled beer and lighted cigarettes, before ducking into the relative peace of Rich Runyon’s room. They found Rich frantically searching a chest of drawers while Scott paged through a book of Renaissance poetry.

“Rich,” Paul called, “meet Audrey Harris and Leigh Simmons from Knowles Hall.”

Rich looked up and grinned. “Excuse me, ladies. I’m on a mission.”

“From God,” Scott added. “By the way, I’m Scott Davies. As usual, I’m partying incognito.”

“Incognito?” Audrey asked.

“Of course. No one knows who I really am, or where I am.”

“Okay,” Audrey said with a laugh.

“Success!” Rich cried as he held up a fistful of small plastic condiment bags filled with ketchup and mustard.

“What are you doing with those?” Scott asked.

Rich simply grinned and dashed into the hallway.

“Shall we follow?” Paul asked.

They found Rich kneeling in front of the closed door at Grady Wallace’s room. Rich was ripping small holes in each bag, then lining them up in single file on the floor with the torn ends jutting under the door and into the room. When Rich was finished, he stood and knocked.

“Go away,” Grady moaned. “I’m sick.”

“Come on, Grady,” Rich shouted. “The party is just getting started. What you need is *more* drugs and beer, not less.”

“Go away,” Grady repeated.

“We can’t have a party without you. This is your last warning.”

“No.”

“Grady, you’re a w-i-l-d fucker!” Rich giggled as he slammed his foot on each bag in rapid succession. “Bombs away!”

Everyone erupted in laughter. Somewhere beneath the chorus, Grady moaned again.

“What just happened?” Leigh asked.

Scott shook his head. “Grady’s floor now resembles a Jackson Pollack painting.”

“That’s cruel,” Leigh protested.

“I think it is hilarious,” Audrey said.

“Now, now,” Rich replied as they made their way back up the hallway. “Grady loves the attention. He expects this. Hell, he’d feel left out otherwise.”

By 2 AM the music finally ceased, the beer supply was exhausted and the party disbanded. The last of the students staggered away, leaving the carpets littered with vomit, cigarette butts and empty cups. Even Paul had called it quits after squandering the night in a futile attempt to lure Leigh back to his lair.

Rich and Scott were carrying on an animated debate in Rich’s room. Jeff had tried to turn the topic of conversation to Nixon and Watergate, but Rich insisted on needling Scott about his love of bluegrass music. Scott was mounting a half-hearted defense that was seriously hampered by the fact that he and Rich had just consumed a bowlful of potent pot.

“My god, how do you stand the nasal whining?” Rich asked, holding his hands to the side of his head. “And what is with the clod dancing, or whatever the hell they call it?”

“*Clog* dancing,” Scott corrected. “And what you’re calling a ‘nasal whine’ is just a different kind of harmony. You have to develop a taste for it, I admit, but I can just as easily say the same thing about the vocals of Rod Stewart. How can anyone stand *that*?”

Through all this, Audrey was silent, slipping in and out of a drunken stupor as she sat on Rich’s bed and leaned against Jeff’s shoulder. Jeff was not intoxicated in the least. He had sobered up completely around midnight and was now thoroughly enjoying the sensation of Audrey’s body against his.

Audrey suddenly moaned and sat bolt upright. “I need to get to a bathroom.”

“Aw, man!” Rich exclaimed. “Get her off my bed. Quick!”

Jeff took Audrey’s hands and jerked her to her feet. With considerable difficulty, he guided her down the hall to the nearest bathroom. Since it was the men’s bathroom—Duniway Hall was an all-male dorm—Jeff elected to accompany Audrey and wait outside the toilet stalls.

Audrey slammed the steel door behind her and began vomiting like a creature possessed. She was on her knees before the porcelain god, disgorging every ounce of beer and snacks she had consumed. Jeff paced the tiles, grimacing with every choked spasm and splash.

Rich skipped into the bathroom and Jeff tried to shoo him away, to no effect. Rich silently gestured to Audrey's stall and tilted his head as if to say, "Is she in there?"

Jeff nodded, but then shook his head emphatically. Rich ignored him, entering the stall adjacent to Audrey's. He flushed the toilet, then began grunting and groaning loudly.

"Oh, god," Rich moaned. "I'll never have eggplant for dinner again! If I was a math major, I'd work it out with a slide rule. Where's my laxative? Arrggh!"

Audrey responded by sending forth another prodigious stream of puke. "Hey, who's doing Technicolor yawns?" Rich cried. "I'm practically dying in here! Have a little courtesy."

Rich kicked open the stall leaped out with his arms flying forward like a ballet dancer. "My work here is done," he laughed, snapping a quick salute. Jeff chuckled in spite of himself.

"Take care of her," Rich added softly, before slipping out the door.

Over the next few minutes, Audrey made the transition from wet vomiting, to dry heaves, to silence. "Are you okay?" Jeff asked.

"No," she said faintly. "But I'm done."

Audrey lurched out of the stall and Jeff handed her a wad of paper towels. Even with drool dripping off her pale chin, Jeff still thought she was lovely. Audrey gazed at him with watery eyes and mustered a thin smile.

Jeff guided her arms into the sleeves of her jacket. "I think I need to go back to my room," she muttered.

"Do you want company along the way?" Jeff asked hopefully.

"Sure," she replied.

Jeff eased into the hallway, taking Audrey by the hand.

"Run!" someone screamed. Jeff spun to the source of the warning and saw Scott and Rich half-stumbling, half-running toward him. They were not smiling. In fact, their faces were contorted by pure panic.

Audrey yelped as Jeff shoved her back into the restroom. Rich and Scott jostled around him in desperate flight.

"What the hell?" Jeff cried, but as they passed, he immediately saw the cause of their fear. An ashen Grady Wallace, wearing only a vomit-stained T-shirt, was plodding up the hallway gripping his erect penis in his right hand. Grady wore a feral smile that Dr Sardonicus would have admired, and with every step he sprayed a stream of clear urine.

Jeff slammed the bathroom door and put his full weight behind it. Grady began pounding furiously.

"I have to pee!" he shouted.

"Go somewhere else," Jeff answered.

"Where?" Grady wailed.

“I don’t know, Grady. How about your room? Use your dick to hose all the crap off your floor.”

“Oh god,” Audrey moaned.

“Fuckin’ Rich,” Grady slurred.

Jeff heard him staggering away. He hoped Grady hadn’t taken him seriously.

“Let’s go,” Audrey said, and they made a rapid exit into the cold November night. The brisk air seemed to sober Audrey somewhat, but she remained quiet all the way to Knowles Hall. When they finally reached her room, Audrey creaked open the door and paused.

“Are you--”

“Shhh!” she answered with her forefinger on her lips. “My roommate is asleep.”

Jeff lowered his voice to a whisper. “Are you okay?”

“Sure,” Audrey said with a shrug.

In his imagination Jeff replied, “Great! Would you like to stay up until dawn having sex like two rabid animals?”

But what came out of his mouth was, “Okay. Guess I’ll see you later.”

Audrey turned without another word and closed the door. For a moment, Jeff stood in the hallway and stared at the carpet. Finally, he made his way to the lobby and back out into the frozen, starry night. It was a long walk home.

Jeff stepped into Duniway and found it quiet as a tomb. He plodded up the short flight of stairs, catching the faint hints of roofing tar still lingering in the air. He turned into the hallway and saw Rich seated on the floor with his back resting against the wall. Rich’s head was bowed almost to his knees and he didn’t look up as Jeff approached.

“You okay, Rich?” he asked softly.

Rich shook his head. “I’m horny.”

“What?”

“I’m *horny*,” Rich said with a sob. “The bars are closed, everyone’s gone home and I’m horny.” As Rich looked up, Jeff saw tears streaking down his pale cheeks.

“Can’t help you, man,” Jeff replied.

He squatted in front of Rich and repositioned the knit cap that was now wildly askew on his head. Rich only nodded.

“You need to go to bed,” Jeff sighed. “Alone. Just like me.”

Jeff pulled Rich upright and put an arm around his shoulder. With his free hand, he opened Rich’s door and steered him to the bed. Rich fell solidly onto the mattress and didn’t stir. His knit cap lay on the floor beside him.

“Yet another casualty of the evening,” Jeff said. Rich responded with a long snore. “Goodnight sweet prince,” Jeff whispered as he switched off the light. “And flights of horny angels sing thee to thy rest.”

Chapter 5

Let Us Give Thanks

Jeff and Paul sat huddled on a white concrete slab, their coat collars turned up against the chilling breeze. The slab upon which they sat comprised the right descending leg of the famous “M,” high on the flank of Mount Sentinel. Far beneath their feet—miles beneath, it seemed to Jeff—the University of Montana campus spread from the base of the mountain. Beyond the borders of the campus, the lights of the city of Missoula filled the remainder of the valley, stretching west and disappearing into the evening haze.

They had started up the switchback trail to the M more than 30 minutes ago. Like most bad ideas, hiking to the M seemed like good one at the time. But Jeff and Paul had grossly underestimated the steepness of the trail. What they assumed would be a quick jaunt up the side of the grassy mountain turned out to be a grueling struggle that rendered their legs to gelatin by the time they had completed only half the journey. The remaining climb was slow, painful and silent—except for groans and occasional obscenities.

Now that they had achieved their goal, they were reluctant to give it up, even in the face of freezing cold and deepening twilight. Paul squinted into the wind, eagerly sucking down his cigarette, its tip flaring bright orange. He released the smoke and it was instantly torn away from his lips.

“I never did ask you how things went with Leigh last Friday,” Jeff said.

Paul chuckled. “Things went nowhere.”

“Have you called her since?”

“Yeah. We’ve talked a little.”

Jeff nodded and shivered.

“I heard you took Audrey back to her room,” Paul said as he took another deep drag.

“And that’s all I did,” Jeff replied.

“God, I wish I had been there to see Grady pissing his way up the hallway. That must have been amazing.”

Jeff smiled. “Amazing is the word for it. Now it’s probably going to cost us.”

“What do you mean?”

“I awoke Saturday morning around 9 o’clock to the sound of Grindel screaming. He was walking up and down the hallway, scooping up trash and pounding on doors. Even in my room, I could smell Grady’s stale piss. Grindel was raving that we’d all have to pay to have the carpets cleaned.”

Paul laughed. “Grindel’s precious dogshit-brown carpets.” He drew the burning tobacco down to his fingers, then crushed the butt beneath his boots.

“I need to take a break from this place,” Paul sighed as the smoke streamed out of his nostrils. “Thanksgiving vacation is coming up and I need to go somewhere.”

“Back to Indiana?” Jeff asked.

“No. I’m driving to Seattle.”

“Well, we drove this far, Paul. What’s a little farther for us to go Seattle, eh?”

“Are you coming along?” Paul asked, staring straight ahead.

“Well...I just assumed...you know.”

“I thought you had a huge paper to write.”

“Yeah, but I’m about three-quarters done.”

Paul nodded. “I guess you might be able to squeeze into the back seat with Audrey and Rich. Leigh is sitting up front with me.”

Jeff frowned. “So...everyone’s already set to go?”

“Sure.”

“I see. Well, let me look at...my schedule. Maybe you’re right about getting my paper done. I’ll let you know.”

“Okay.”

Jeff bowed his head and gazed through his knees. “Paul,” he said last, “why--”

“The world is moving on,” Paul interrupted.

“Huh?”

“Things are changing really fast, Jeff. I just had that thought come to me.”

“Oh.”

“Think about it. The war will probably be over soon, one way or the other. Janis and Jimi are dead. Woodstock was eclipsed by the Altamont debacle. Need I say more?”

“But the revolution continues,” Jeff mumbled.

“Oh please,” Paul laughed. “The revolution is dying in front of your eyes. You arrived way too late to the party, Jeff.”

Jeff stared at the side of Paul’s face. “If you really believe that, Paul, what are you doing here?”

“Jeff, I’m not here to fight a war against the establishment. I never said that. I’m here to get a degree so that I can snag a decent job. And have as much fun along the way as possible. I’ve told you this.”

“But when we were in high school, you were--”

“Stupid. Young and stupid. High school is a million light years away. Maybe if we had been born about 6 years earlier, things would have been different. As it is, we’re too late, Jeff. The world is moving on. I don’t want to live in the past.”

Paul fumbled for his cigarettes, then changed his mind. “Let’s get off this mountain. I’m cold enough.”

Twenty minutes later, they stumbled off the end of the path, exhausted. The descent had been easier than the ascent, but only by degrees. Legs still weak from the climb had to step carefully to avoid tumbling down the steep paths. More than once they stumbled into each other, only to recover just in time.

Scott Davies met them as they dragged themselves across the Oval.

“Hey dudes!”

“Hi Scott,” Paul said wearily.

“You two look like you’ve been rode hard and put away wet.”

“That’s an apt metaphor,” Jeff replied.

Paul jerked his thumb back at Mount Sentinel. “We just came down from the M.”

“Wow!” Scott said. “Whatever possessed you guys to do that?”

“It was Jeff’s idiotic idea. He sees people on the track team actually *sprinting* up the trail. He figured it would be a leisurely stroll in the park.”

Jeff looked as though he had been slapped. “But you--”

“Yeah, yeah,” Paul interrupted. “I was an equal idiot for following him.”

Scott looked from one to the other, then shrugged. “Think of it as exercise—physical and spiritual.”

Paul grunted.

“Hey,” Scott said. “The SDS is having a poster sale. Kind of a fundraiser, I guess. I was just headed over to the UC now and--”

“I’ll pass,” Paul said flatly.

Scott held his smile and turned to Jeff. “You?”

“Sure, Scott.”

Paul departed with a desultory wave, leaving Scott and Jeff standing in the lengthening shadows.

“Paul looks like he’s beat to hell,” Scott said. “He needs to rest. Are you sure you really want to go to the sale, Jeff?”

Jeff stared after Paul and didn’t speak for several seconds. “That’s fine,” he said quietly. “I’ve nothing else to do.”

The SDS poster sale was taking place in a small room at the far northern end of the University Center. Jeff had been in love with the UC since first setting foot in it. Multiple floors with balconies ringed its interior courtyard. You could climb the broad staircase to reach them, or ride the glass-enclosed elevator (Jeff’s favorite). Large ferns and other tropical plants were growing in great planters throughout the ground-floor level, creating a kind of jungle Eden where students sat and studied. The vegetation grew prodigiously, thanks to skylights that allowed the sun to penetrate every level.

The University Center was the focal point for special events, entertainment, recreation and various student groups—including the radical Students for a Democratic Society. Truth to tell, Jeff Loudon had still not joined the University of Montana chapter of the SDS. Even he wasn’t sure

why that was so. Jeff only knew that he liked the *idea* of the SDS; becoming part of it was a step he wasn't yet prepared to take.

"Not a huge turnout," Scott commented as they walked into the room. He was right. There were a few tables tended by bored-looking students. Several other students browsed listlessly. Bob Dylan's plaintive wail issued from a tiny stereo system.

Jeff flipped through reproductions of Soviet posters from World War II—each filled with clenched fists, earnest faces and the delightfully incomprehensible Cyrillic alphabet. Then there were the obligatory Nixon posters—Nixon as Hitler, Nixon as Satan and so on.

Scott seemed to be concentrating on one poster in particular. He unrolled it slowly, revealing a striking photograph of astronaut Buzz Aldrin standing on the lunar surface. As Scott reached the bottom of the poster, large bold letters appeared.

SO WHAT?

Scott jerked back as if he'd been struck. "So what?" he murmured.

"Do you like that one?" an SDS student asked. Scott looked around the edge of the poster and saw a student who was clearly auditioning for the role of the next Che Guevara, right down to the signature black beret.

"I don't understand it," Scott replied. He turned to Jeff. "Did you see this?"

Jeff gazed at the poster and frowned. "I don't get it, either."

"It is a statement about the screwed up priorities in our nation," Che said cheerfully. "Billions were spent sending a few white men to the Moon while millions of human beings starved on our own planet."

Scott scratched his head. "Yeah, but the poster screams 'So What.'"

"Right," Che continued with a smile. "So what if a couple of bourgeois stand around on the Moon?"

Scott released the bottom of the poster and it rolled up like a window shade.

"Life on Earth spent four billion years raising itself from the slime," Scott began. "In just the last few years, we finally reached the point in our evolution where we could create the technology necessary to leave our planet and stand with our feet planted firmly on another world. I don't care whose feet were involved—white, black, yellow. It was an incredible achievement for all humanity. You can't dismiss it with a simple 'So What.'"

"It's just a political statement, man." Che had suddenly misplaced his cheerfulness.

"It's anti-intellectual obscenity, man," Scott replied.

Jeff moved closer and tried to intervene. "Colliding opinions," he said with a forced smile. "That's what I like about campus life."

Che made a kind of short hiss between his teeth. "I've seen you at some SDS meetings," he said, pointing his chin at Jeff.

"Yeah, a few."

"Are you a member?"

"Not yet."

"Don't wait too long. Your brothers need you." Che said firmly.

"To sell more absurd posters?" Scott quipped.

"You don't get it," Che said with a snarl. "You're like the rest of the sheep that follow wherever the Man and his pigs want to lead you."

"Baaaa," Scott replied with a grin.

Jeff grabbed Scott above the elbow and guided him back into the courtyard. "I was just getting started," Scott said at last.

"Don't get me frozen out of the SDS, Scott."

"Jeff, listen to your heart. Is it telling you that you *really* have anything in common with someone like him?"

"No," Jeff said with a sigh. "But I want to be part of the revolution—before its too late."

"You already are," Scott grinned. "Man, you're living it every day. Look at KRAP."

Jeff chuckled. "Good old KRAP, radio for the masses."

"There you go."

"Yeah, but I want to--"

"Be with them? Be *like* them? Remember that talk we had, Jeff?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Are you hungry?"

"Sure, Jeff. I'll be happy to abruptly change the subject to food."

Jeff sighed. "Let's grab cheeseburgers upstairs."

Scott gave him a thumbs up.

Jeff awoke on Thanksgiving to find that the University of Montana had been nearly abandoned. Duniway Hall was eerily quiet. Every so often, he would hear the distant thump of a door, or the soft ticking of the radiators beneath his window.

He had met Paul Jepson and Rich Runyon the night before. They all shared a joint in Paul's room and soon the conversation drifted to a discussion of their plans for the Seattle trip. Jeff had listened quietly while he paged through the latest issue of the *National Lampoon*. In truth, he had finished his political philosophy paper days before and was very much available for the journey, but that was a revelation he had decided to keep to himself.

While his companions made their way to Seattle that morning, Jeff sat alone at his window. He was finishing a letter to mother with Jethro Tull's *Aqualung* providing the bitter soundtrack. It seemed oddly appropriate.

I can't blame Paul, he thought. Even good friends need to take occasional breaks from each other.

A sharp knock at the door jarred Jeff from his reflections and nearly caused him to fall backward in his chair. He pulled on his jeans and sealed the envelope to his mother, carefully inserting a Polaroid photo taken a week before.

He opened the door expecting to see Steve Grindel demanding payment for the ruinous party several weeks ago. Instead, Jeff was face to face with Grady Wallace.

"Hi," Grady grunted.

"Oh. Hi. You want to come in?"

"Sure."

Grady sat on the edge of the bed, eyeing Jeff's record collection and the KRAP equipment. Jeff resumed his seat by the window.

"I didn't expect to see you," Jeff began.

"Huh. No, I guess not. I didn't have anywhere to go. You?"

Jeff shook his head. "Me neither."

"Paul and Rich gone to Seattle?"

"Yep. Scott went back to Little Rock."

"Too bad."

"But Grady, you said you lived in Frenchtown. Couldn't you just go there?"

"No," he replied with a slight smile. "Well, I could. I just don't want to."

"Oh," Jeff replied.

The turntable reached the end of *Aqualung*, the needle lifted automatically from the album and the arm returned to its resting point. The room was plunged into awkward silence.

"So," Jeff almost shouted, rubbing his hands together, "do you have a car handy?"

"Yep. A 1972 Camaro."

"Cool. Want to go somewhere? Maybe to Pauline's Lounge downtown?"

"If its open, sure."

Jeff summoned as much enthusiasm as was possible under the circumstances and slapped Grady on the knee. "Let's go. You drive, I'll buy."

In contrast to the Cavern, which was a large dump, Pauline's was a small dump. It was your basic neighborhood bar with the requisite TVs and pool tables. To Jeff's astonishment, Pauline's was open, although he and Grady were the only customers in the place. Pauline, the grandmotherly owner, seemed genuinely glad to see them.

"By god, look what has washed up here. Two UM brats alone on Thanksgiving!"

"Got any turkey?" Jeff asked.

“Shots of Wild Turkey, yes. Otherwise you’re gonna have to be satisfied with buffalo wings and fries.”

The menu sounded just fine to Jeff and Grady. They grabbed a table within sight of a TV that was displaying a college football game. It hardly mattered that they couldn’t hear the audio over the blaring country western music.

After gorging themselves on greasy wings and fries, they retired to the pool tables. Grady racked the balls and Jeff fired the breaking shot to the accompaniment of Loretta Lynn.

“Don’t play much pool,” Grady mumbled.

“Me neither. It beats sitting around the dorm, though.”

Grady nodded.

Jeff tried to put a solid red ball into a corner pocket. He missed and sent the cue ball into the pocket instead. Grady laughed and retrieved the ball.

“Grady, what do you hope to get out of college?”

“A good job,” he replied quietly as he studied his shot.

“That’s what I hear from a lot of students these days.”

“It’s the truth,” Grady said, and shot a yellow-striped ball neatly into a side pocket. “Well, I suppose there is the knowledge, too.”

“Oh, yes, that too” Jeff grinned.

Grady stepped to the other side of the table, considering his next shot. “You know, Jeff, you think too much.”

Jeff raised his eyebrows. An assessment of anyone’s personality by Grady Wallace was a rare thing indeed.

“How so?”

“You just think too much about too many things. Thinking too much can lead you to dark places.”

“Dark places?” Jeff said with a frown.

Grady lined up another shot and drove a red-striped ball the length of the table and into a corner pocket. “Uh-huh. The world is full of dark places, mostly things better left unknown or unsaid. Secrets people keep to themselves, and are better off kept.”

Hank Williams poured from the overhead speakers as Grady surveyed the table.

“We all have secrets,” Jeff said.

“True,” Grady said as he chalked his cue. “And too much talking and thinking tends to turn them loose. People get hurt.”

“Perhaps,” Jeff replied. Grady only nodded.

After drubbing Jeff twice at pool, Grady suggested that it was time to find a new venue. They made their goodbyes to Pauline, climbed back into Grady’s Camaro and meandered slowly through the city. They hoped that one of their favorite hangouts, the Heidlehaus, would still open on the 93 Strip, but it was not to be. There was nothing else to do but return to campus.

The TV lounge in Craig Hall was dark and empty. Even the ashtrays were clean, which was highly unusual at any other time. Jeff turned on the big TV and flipped through the channels until he found the ideal Thanksgiving Day entertainment: a badly dubbed Chinese martial arts movie. Grady grabbed a couple of Cokes and they both settled into one of the overstuffed couches.

"You know, I don't think these were intended to be comedies," Grady said.

"I doubt it. In China, this is probably serious melodrama. There might be people in Shanghai crying over this movie."

Grady mumbled something during the opening fight scene. Jeff really didn't understand, but shrugged his shoulders anyway. A couple of minutes passed and suddenly Jeff felt pressure on his groin. He looked in his lap and saw Grady's hand.

"Uh, Grady..." he said. Grady was staring at him in the darkness, smiling broadly.

"You're a good friend to me, Jeff," Grady whispered.

The tips of his fingers began to search, caressing Jeff's penis and testicles. To Jeff's increasing horror, he realized that he was beginning to have an erection.

"No, Grady."

"Why not? Aren't we friends?"

"We're friends, Grady, but not those kinds of friends."

"Friends share secrets, Jeff. We can have a secret together."

Jeff firmly gripped Grady's hand and lifted it away. "No, *we can't*." He stood quickly and gathered his coat. Grady was staring with wide eyes.

"Jeff, I--"

"Don't worry about it."

"Just stay and watch the rest of the movie," Grady said. "I'll be okay. I promise."

Jeff pressed his lips together and flashed his best rendition of a smile.

"No, I'm tired anyway. It's getting late."

"Jeff," Grady began in a choked voice, "you won't say--"

"Not a word, Grady," Jeff replied, moving out into the light of the lobby.

"Trust me, it's our secret. Okay?"

"Sure."

When Jeff reached the top of the lobby stairs, he looked back into the flickering blue light of the TV lounge. The silhouette of Grady's head was tilted to one side and laying on the top of the couch cushion.

Chapter 6

Bow Wow

Jeff spent the rest of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend shuttling between his room and the vending machines. The cafeteria was closed, so he had to chase down his own meals. He ordered a few Sharif's delivery pizzas, which he despised, but otherwise dined on Doritos corn chips and Cokes.

Sometimes Jeff would roam the deserted campus, following sidewalks he had never traveled before. Saturday afternoon found him on the pedestrian bridge over the Clark Fork River, hypnotized by the gurgling, ice-cold water below.

A few snowflakes drifted out of the winter overcast as Jeff lingered on the bridge. Common sense told him that it was probably snowing heavily at higher elevations and he was momentarily grateful to be at the bottom of the Missoula Valley. As if to illustrate the point, an armada of clouds scuttled over Mount Sentinel. They obscured the summit temporarily, then cleared to reveal a white crown of newly fallen snow.

As Jeff made his way back to Duniway, he belted out the chorus of the Rolling Stones' "Time is On My Side" over and over. A professor (or so Jeff assumed) passed him outside the Adams field house. Jeff didn't stop singing, but waved instead. His erstwhile audience merely frowned and walked swiftly by.

He considered looking up Grady Wallace, just to reassure him, if nothing else. But Jeff hadn't seen a peep of Grady since that awkward Thanksgiving evening. Grady's room was utterly silent, so Jeff assumed that he had fled for the remainder of the holiday.

There'll be time enough for reassurance after everyone returns, Jeff thought.

Life began flowing back into the campus on Sunday. What was a trickle of returning students in the morning became a torrent by late afternoon. By evening Duniway was alive once again with the sounds of music, shouts and laughter.

Rich, Paul, Audrey and Leigh didn't drift in until late. Jeff heard Leigh giggling in the hallway and opened his door to find them all huddled around the top of the stairs. Paul seemed slightly startled to see him.

"Hey, Jeff," he said. The others smiled and nodded.

"So how was it?"

"Once we got through the passes and the blizzards, it was fine," Paul laughed.

“At least we didn’t get stuck and resort to cannibalism,” Leigh added. “Too bad you couldn’t come with us.”

“Yeah,” Jeff said. “Too bad.” His gaze shifted to Rich and Audrey. They were standing together; Rich had his arm around her waist.

Why am I not surprised? Jeff thought.

They immediately resumed their cheerful, animated discussion. Jeff watched for a while, then slipped quietly back into his room. He dug out his copy of the Moody Blue’s *To Our Children’s Children’s Children*, turned out the lights, lit a single candle and stretched out on the bed.

Hours later, the record long since finished and the candle burned to a stub, Jeff awoke to the sound of moaning. It was the backing vocal to the rhythmic squeak and thump of Rich’s bed frame on the other side of the wall.

“Bow wow! Bow wow!” a female voice called out. He was sure the voice belonged to Audrey.

“What the fuck?” Jeff snapped. He grabbed an extra pillow and held it tightly over his head. In time, the bed frame backbeat ceased, followed by soft laughter, and then silence.

The lovers are likely asleep—and in each other’s arms, no doubt, Jeff thought.

Jeff, however, was wide-awake. He slipped on his headphones, switched the stereo receiver to AM and tuned through the static hiss, listening to one distant radio station after another. He was astonished to finally pick up WIBC (“1070 on your dial!”) in Indianapolis. The signal wasn’t strong and it faded up and down like a sailboat bobbing on a rolling sea. Still, it was a soothing voice from home on a lonely night. Rocked in his cradle of sound, Jeff Loudon finally escaped into the relief of sleep.

The next morning Jeff shuffled through his routine, which included, again, the irritating task of rousing Paul for breakfast. They joined a long line of students in the cafeteria, moving past the cheerless servers in single file and accepting their rations of eggs and sausage. They found Rich at a table by the coffee urns, hanging his head over a steaming bowl of oatmeal.

“You look like you still haven’t recovered from the road,” Paul said.

Rich shook his head and grinned. “I tell you, Audrey needs to leave me alone for a while. That girl damn near drained me dry last night. I only managed three hours of sleep and I have a geography paper to turn in this afternoon.”

“I can imagine how you feel,” Jeff said flatly. “You guys kept me up quite a bit, too.”

“Oh,” Rich replied with a sheepish smile. “I’m really sorry, man. If I had known Audrey was going to be a screamer--”

“A screamer?” Paul asked. “Really?”

“More of a loud moaner,” Rich replied through a mouthful of oatmeal. “You give her a little pot and her motor really gets going. Audrey has some kinky baggage, too.”

“How so?”

Jeff grabbed a handful of saltine crackers and began crunching loudly. He didn’t want to hear this, but...

Rich leaned in closer and lowered his voice to a fierce whisper. “At one point, I can’t remember if it was our first fuck or second, she starts telling me that she wants me to be her master. I have no idea what the hell she is talking about. It struck me so strange, I nearly wilted inside her.

“So I’m pounding away, trying to ignore her babble. She keeps moaning for me to ‘command’ her. Finally, I asked what the fuck she wanted me to do. She says, ‘Give me orders. Command me as your slave.’”

Paul was staring with wide eyes. Jeff stopped in mid chew.

“My mind was a total blank,” Rich continued. “I was wilting big time, so I just told her to bark like a dog. She starts yelling, ‘Bow wow.’”

Jeff instantly spewed a shower of cracker crumbs across the table. Paul was braying with laughter.

“What else did she say?” Paul asked between gasps.

“Thankfully, nothing! When we were finished, I went right to sleep.”

“See, Jeff? Aren’t you glad you didn’t keep going after Audrey?” Paul asked.

Jeff winced as he wiped up the cracker crumbs. The smile suddenly ran away from Rich’s face. “Oh, I didn’t know, Jeff.”

“There’s nothing to know,” Jeff said with a shrug.

“Jeff’s cool with all that,” Paul said. “Free love, stop the war, you know.”

Jeff grabbed his tray and stepped away from the table. His appetite had suddenly vanished.

“Jeff,” Rich called, “Audrey and Leigh said that there are plans for a monster party in Jesse Hall sometime in the next couple of weeks. Keep your ear to the ground. We shouldn’t miss this one.”

“Thanks” Jeff replied as he walked away.

On his way out of the cafeteria, he ran into Grady Wallace. Grady stared warily and didn’t speak.

“Hey, Grady!” Jeff said, perhaps a little too enthusiastically. “Where the hell have you been?”

“Just around.”

“Man, last weekend was deadly dull without you. At least you could have taken me out to eat.”

Grady finally allowed himself to smile. “Yeah, I wasn’t doing that much better myself, really.”

“Well, you should know that Rich Runyon just told me about a big-ass party that’s supposed to go down in Jesse Hall. Maybe this weekend; maybe the next. It’s still up in the air.”

“Which floor?”

“I don’t know yet, Grady. I’m sure we’ll hear more about it.”

“Are you going?”

“I think so. If you see Scott, be sure to tell him, too.”

Grady had brightened considerably. His blue eyes were almost glowing behind his glasses. “Yes. Yes, I will.”

“*Bon appetite*,” Jeff said as he stepped through the doorway. Jeff could feel Grady staring after him like a grateful puppy.

“Just like it never happened, Grady,” he muttered under his breath. “Just like it never happened at all.”

The days crept by as autumn slouched into winter. It was early December and they found themselves on the downhill run to the end of the quarter. Many students had suddenly discovered that poor grades, or even failure, had become distinct possibilities. Among the freshmen in Duniway and Craig Halls, the angst was particularly acute. Most of them were at U of M on Mom and Dad’s nickels, so Fs in the first quarters of their college careers were not options.

Smoking and drinking buddies were otherwise occupied, either slumped over books in their rooms, or slumped over even more books in the library. Grady and Paul haunted the study lounges while Scott spent evenings in his room with the door locked. As for Rich Runyon, he seemed unconcerned. Jeff could hear him listening to music or calling friends on the telephone, making plans for weekend debauchery. Audrey showed up occasionally for more “obedience training,” as Rich called it.

Jeff kept an open-door policy—the door to his room was almost always open. That way, Jeff could always be on top of the action. The hallway was like a artery and information was the lifeblood that flowed within it. By keeping his door wide open, Jeff could tap that information at a moment’s notice.

The downside to Jeff’s open-door policy was that he neglected to *close* the door when he left the room, usually to grab a snack from the vending machines or use the bathroom. Jeff believed that his Duniway brethren were trustworthy, and for the most part, he was correct. But Rich Runyon would never allow trust to stand in the way of a delicious practical joke.

Rich unleashed his Jeff Loudon *magnum opus* on Thursday evening. It wasn’t even one of his best pranks as pranks go, but the planets were no doubt in spectacular alignment. Coincidence was in play and the results would be remembered for decades to come.

Rich had been studying in his room all evening and was in need of nonintellectual stimulation. He'd kept one ear on the sounds outside, hoping to hear something, anything, that would offer a distraction. When he heard Jeff leave his room for the toilets, he knew his opportunity had arrived.

He jumped from his bed and grabbed a can of shaving cream. As the restroom door swung shut, Rich bolted through Jeff's doorway.

All the rooms in Duniway Hall were blessed with generic black telephones that hung on the walls beside the doors. Rich gingerly, but quickly, lifted the handset of Jeff's phone and blasted a generous pile of Gillette Foamy shaving cream into the earpiece. He replaced the handset and carefully wiped away any obvious signs of cream.

Rich was back in his room and seated nonchalantly at his desk when Jeff exited the restroom.

"Have a nice piss?" Rich asked as Jeff walked by.

Jeff shook his head and said nothing.

Rich waited for the screech of wooden chair legs on vinyl tile, the telltale signal that Jeff had arrived at his desk. Rich crammed his fist into this mouth to block the rising laughter. It was almost time to spring the trap.

Jeff's "human geography" textbook had to be the most boring tome he had ever read in his life—even worse than the *Communist Manifesto*, if such a thing were possible. He would struggle through a couple of paragraphs, then feel his eyelids start to descend. So, when the telephone rang, he welcomed the interruption. He tossed his book on the desk and hurried to door, lifting the handset while clearing his throat.

"Hel--" he began, but then abruptly pulled away. Most of the hearing in his right ear had vanished, replaced with a horrible wet sensation and a fizzing, popping sound. Jeff stared at the handset in disbelief. A dollop of shaving cream fell to the floor and landed with a moist *pop*.

"Fuck!" he shouted as he wiped the cream from his ear and the earpiece. Someone was still on the line and Jeff thought he knew exactly who it was.

"You son of a bitch!" he yelled into the handset. "This isn't funny. You're lucky I don't take this telephone and ram it sideways up your ass!"

Jeff slammed the handset down and marched into Rich's room. He found Rich standing in the middle of the floor with a thunderstruck look on his face.

"Asshole!" Jeff shouted.

"It wasn't me. Well, it was kind of me."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I...I put the shaving cream on your phone," Rich half-stammered and giggled. "But it wasn't me who called. I was still dialing when your phone rang."

"Then who the fuck called? Was it Paul?"

Rich held out his hands. "I honestly don't know."

Jeff turned on one heel and marched back into his room, still fuming. The telephone rang again. This time Jeff lifted the handset, examined it for yet another application of Gillette Foamy (the question of how Rich might have repeated his prank in such a short time—and with Rich never leaving Jeff’s sight—was irrelevant to Jeff at that moment), then cautiously raised the handset to his ear.

“Hello?”

“Hello honey,” his mother cooed. “Is everything okay? I tried calling a moment ago, but I dialed the wrong number. You know, there are some awfully angry people living in Montana...”

Friday couldn’t come fast enough. Jeff felt mentally drained and badly in need of a party. Fortunately, the Jesse Hall confab had finally become a reality. It was scheduled to erupt that very evening. Leigh Simmons had called and suggested frequent announcements on KRAP throughout the afternoon. Jeff was happy to oblige.

KRAP could hardly claim the credit, but an impressive gala had taken shape on the sixth floor of Jesse Hall by 9 PM that night. When the elevator doors opened, the gang of Jeff, Paul, Rich, Scott, Grady, Leigh and Audrey had to practically shove their way through the crowd. Black Sabbath was blaring at deafening volume, but students still seemed to be carrying on conversations.

Scott was the first to grab a beer and vanish into the sea of humanity. It would be hours before Jeff would see him again. Rich and Audrey strolled into another section of the dorm, hand in hand. Jeff followed the bounce of Audrey’s beautiful hair until it was lost among all the other heads.

Leigh pulled Paul into a nearby room where several people sat on the floor playing with a Ouija board. She beckoned for Jeff and Grady to follow, but it was soon obvious that the tiny room was filled beyond capacity.

“Well Grady,” Jeff shouted above the scream of Ozzie Osbourne. “Looks like we’re on our own.” Grady smiled and nodded.

Together they explored the entire floor, finally ending up in a room where the cacophony wasn’t quite so painful. Jeff fell into a beanbag chair next to an overweight girl with glasses and long, red hair. Grady sat beside him on the floor and began rolling a joint.

“Hi!” Jeff said.

“Hello,” she slurred. It was still early and yet the beer and drugs had already taken their first victim.

“I’m Jeff Loudon and this is my buddy Grady Wallace.”

“Glad to meet you,” she replied. “I’m Sue.”

Grady was an amazing roller of joints, one of the few people Jeff knew who could roll a tight joint with just one hand. As if to demonstrate, Grady

twirled an immaculately finished joint between his fingers and presented it to their newfound friend.

“Oh! Thank you!” she said.

“Grady is a master,” Jeff replied as Sue passed the lighted joint to him. Jeff drew deeply and held the smoke.

“Give it time to work,” Grady said as he patted Jeff’s knee. Jeff shuddered slightly and Grady snatched his hand away. As they finished one joint, Grady would roll another. Jeff had no idea how Grady could afford to be so generous with his pot. As minutes turned into hours, Jeff ceased to care.

Students drifted in and out of the room all night, their conversations lost as buzzing sounds within the flood of music. Jeff was content to sit and discuss the state of the world with Sue. He waxed poetic about the shortcomings of capitalism while Sue gazed with watery eyes. It was difficult to tell whether she fully comprehended Jeff’s endless, impassioned diatribe. She did little but nod and smile. Sue wasn’t a beautiful woman by any measure, but to Jeff her looks were magically improving by the minute.

Jeff wasn’t sure what time it was when he noticed that Grady was gone. His gut told him it was late. He stopped speaking in mid sentence and decided to change the subject.

“So,” Jeff began, “would you like to go somewhere more private and quiet?” His ability to think coherently was sorely compromised, and this was the best pick-up line he could manage.

“No,” Sue replied without breaking her stare. “We don’t really have enough in common.”

“Okay, but--”

“No buts, Jeff. Just no. Okay?” She said the last word with a strange, chirpy cheerfulness.

Sue stood uncertainly and wobbled in place for a few seconds. With a broad smile still plastered on her face, she staggered through the doorway and out of Jeff’s life forever.

Quoting T.S. Elliot to no one in particular, Jeff muttered, “I should have been a pair of ragged claws, scuttling across the floors of silent seas.” It was at that moment he decided to go for maximum intoxication.

He roamed the floor for the next two hours, sharing joints and gulping beers. Sometime after 3AM, someone shoved Jeff into an open elevator, muttered a curse and punched the button for the ground floor.

By the time the elevator stopped, Jeff was on his hands and knees, painting the elevator floor with puke. As the doors hissed open, Jeff’s only thought was to crawl. He felt the cool metal of the plate that separated the elevator cab from the ground-floor linoleum, struggled forward a few inches and then, with only mild surprise, saw the floor rushing up to meet his face.

Someone was kicking him. In fact, two people were kicking him. Their blows landed repeatedly on his ribs, making Jeff groan with pain. He tried to turn away and shield himself, but he was helpless.

Suddenly the kicking stopped and the blurred face of Scott Davies swam into his field of vision.

“Oh, Jeff. What have you done?”

“Scott. Thank god. They’ve been kicking the shit out of me.”

“Get up,” Scott said as he wrestled Jeff to his feet. Scott was substantially smaller than Jeff, so the effort was almost beyond his strength. “You’re gonna have to help me, man.”

“Be careful, they may come back,” Jeff warned.

“No one is coming back, Jeff. The elevator was beating you.”

“Huh?”

“You’ve spent the last hour or so—God only knows how long, really—laying across the gap between the elevator and the lobby. The automatic doors kept closing on you.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Scott. I mean it.”

“I know,” Scott replied as he guided him through the lobby door. The crisp pre-dawn air worked its magic and Jeff began ascending toward a semblance of sobriety.

“Scott, I almost had a girl.”

“I saw. What happened?”

“I don’t know. I thought we were getting along, but she suddenly went contrary on me. Kicked me right between the eyes.”

“Human beings are highly unpredictable creatures, Jeff.”

Scott led Jeff across the parking lot, weaving carefully between the cars. He found that the best way to steer Jeff was to simply tug on his coat sleeves.

“I should have been with Audrey,” Jeff whimpered. “God damn Runyon.”

“No one owns another person’s affections, Jeff. People direct them to whomever they will. If it isn’t meant to be, it isn’t meant to be. Some day you might look back on this and be *grateful* that you didn’t wind up with Audrey.”

“She barks, you know.”

“Beg pardon?” Scott asked as they climbed the steps to Duniway.

“I could hear them screwing each other through the wall on the night they came back from Seattle. Rich told her to bark like a dog and she barked. I couldn’t believe it.”

“And you would have improved on Rich’s performance...how?”

Jeff stood swaying in the doorway with the pink glow of dawn creeping above the mountains. “Why, I...I would have told her to fetch!”

Scott unleashed a long howl of laughter and Jeff joined him.

Chapter 7

Happy Holidays

Jeff had fiercely resisted Paul's plan to fly back to Indianapolis for Christmas. Jeff was eager to see his home and family, but traveling by air wasn't what he had in mind.

Just as he was a sexual virgin, Jeff was also an aviation virgin. He was terrified by the thought of hurtling across the sky in an aluminum tube at more than 500 miles per hour, so much so that he had tried to persuade Paul to drive to Indianapolis instead. But Jeff lost the argument on two purely logical points: it would take too long and, with the horrible weather forecast for the Rockies and Plains, it would be too difficult.

So, to his utter dismay, Jeff found himself in the front seat of Paul's Mustang with the low block buildings of the airport drawing ever closer in the sharp morning light. Paul was jovial, to Jeff's extreme irritation. Worse yet, Paul seemed to take pleasure in needling Jeff along the way.

"Remember, Jeff--if an engine explodes press the call button and tell the stewardess. No big deal."

"Bite me," Jeff snapped.

"Cheer up, man. Look at it this way. When we slam into the mountain, you'll be dead before the pain sensations can even reach your brain. Hell, there won't even be a brain there to receive the messages."

"Please, Paul. You know how I feel about this."

Paul laughed. "Just trying to lighten the mood, man. Relax. Being tense about this just makes it worse."

They left the car in the long-term parking lot and made their way into the terminal. Johnson-Bell Field, as it was known in those days, was a small facility with a couple of gates and few amenities. Jeff noticed immediately that there were no jetways. Aircraft simply parked on the concrete to load and unload their human cargo.

"Delightful," Jeff muttered as they strolled across the lobby.

With duffle bags in hand, they joined a crowd of students in the cramped gate area. Muzak Christmas carols oozed from overhead speakers, sporadically interrupted by announcements for standby passengers to "please come to the Northwest desk." Jeff stood on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of the waiting Northwest Orient 727. He saw only its crimson tail.

"She's a beauty, isn't she?" Paul said.

"If you say so."

Fifteen minutes later, a sleepy gate agent unlocked the doors and allowed the crowd to stream onto the tarmac. Jeff hesitated, but Paul shoved him forward.

“Let’s move,” Paul said softly. “Everything will be fine. Trust me.”

As they made their way to the rear of the aircraft, they passed almost directly beneath one of the idling engines. Curtains of heat rose from the turbine, causing the air to shimmer like flowing water. Jeff’s gaze followed the rows of rivets in the soot-encrusted metal.

“Good lord,” he whispered, but didn’t slow his pace.

The narrow rear stairway was part of the aircraft itself, and now it stood open like the maw of a hungry beast. Jeff swallowed hard and followed Paul, who seemed to bounce up the steps. As they ducked inside the airliner, the continuous rumble and the odor of jet fuel was replaced by the sounds of animated conversations and the fragrance of brewing coffee. Gazing down the length of the cabin, Jeff saw fluttering newspapers and gesturing hands. It was like walking into a party.

Jeff asked to sit at the window, and Paul obliged. “Want to be the first person to notice that we’re going down?” Paul asked. Jeff fastened his seatbelt and didn’t reply.

Cabin lights flickered, the turbines whined and Northwest Orient flight 580 began to taxi for the runway. To Jeff’s amazement, the general buzz of conversation didn’t abate. Paul was chatting cheerfully with a cute coed on the opposite side of the aisle. The person in the seat behind him was laughing loudly. Jeff’s response to such a seemingly incongruous display was to press his face against the window and watch the wing flaps curling downward. They seemed so horribly fragile.

The 727 turned onto the active runway and paused. Paul grabbed Jeff’s arm and Jeff nearly screamed.

“Here we go, buddy!” Paul exclaimed with a grin.

The turbines spun up again, but this time the whine climbed the musical scales and quickly became a deep roar. At first, nothing happened, but then the airliner crept forward and proceeded to pile on speed at an astonishing rate.

“Yee haw!” Paul cried as his hand shoved an invisible set of cockpit throttles to their limits.

Jeff looked up and was alarmed to see the overhead luggage bins shaking. The heads and shoulders of his fellow passengers jostled with every bounce and shimmy. Even the wing was shuddering madly, not unlike a great bird flapping its way airborne.

Then, abruptly, the frantic bouncing stopped and the concrete outside Jeff’s window fell away. A second later Jeff saw the end of the runway pass far beneath them, followed by a fence and even a highway with tiny vehicles.

“Oh my god, we’re--”

“Flying!” Paul laughed.

The 727 banked majestically over Missoula, tucking in its wing flaps as it went. Jeff’s fright grudgingly yielded to rapt fascination. The thunder of the

engines increased and they sliced upward through a collection of popcorn-like clouds.

"It's... beautiful," he whispered. Paul touched his shoulder and held out a deck of cards.

"Poker?"

Jeff glanced out the window at the snow-covered mountains. "So, we're on our way?"

"Better believe it. Next stop Billings, then Chicago, then home."

"I'm sorry, Paul."

Paul frowned. "About what?"

"Being a coward."

Paul's face softened into a smile. "Jeff, you've been afraid of so many things, but sometimes you just have to make a leap of faith. Remember when we were in fifth grade at the Glen Helen camp and you refused to cross the swinging bridge over that little creek?"

"Yes," Jeff nodded. "You told everyone to go on, then you grabbed my arms and dragged me to the other side. I hated you for that."

"I'm sure, but it wasn't as bad as you thought, was it?"

"No," Jeff smiled.

"You even went back the next day and crossed again by yourself, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"So was this another swinging bridge, Jeff?"

Before he could answer, the airliner bucked and swayed. Jeff instantly clutched his armrests.

"A little rough air, Jeff. Nothing more. It comes with the territory. By the time we reach Indianapolis, you won't even notice bumps like that one."

Paul thumbed the latch and lowered his seat tray.

"Okay," he began and he knocked the edge of the deck on the plastic tray top. "Five card stud. Threes are wild."

Jeff was quietly pleased when he arrived home and realized that his mother had left his bedroom exactly as it was when he departed for Montana three months ago. To him, it felt like a shrine to a long-vanished life. His high school graduation photo and mortarboard tassel were still propped on the dresser. His yearbook still sat atop the desk.

Jeff tossed his duffle bag onto the bed and stood gazing out the window. He was also pleased to see that his father had left Jeff's old Chevy in the same spot where he had parked it in September. Jeff could see the brown remnants of autumn leaves trapped beneath the windshield wipers. He hadn't been around to clean them out this year.

"How does it feel to be home?" his mother asked.

“Strange,” Jeff replied. “I don’t know why.”

“You feel like a guest, don’t you?”

Jeff grinned. “That’s it, Mom. I feel like a guest in my own home, or at least in what used to be my home.”

His mother reached out and massaged his shoulder. “This will always be your home.”

“Yeah,” Jeff sighed, “but it will never be the same. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes, I do.”

Jeff felt a sudden need to change the subject. “Has anyone called for me?”

“No. Were you expecting to hear from someone?”

Jeff shrugged. “Some of my old classmates, maybe.”

“No, honey. I haven’t heard from a soul. Ginny told me that Jim Blankenship was married and had a child on the way.”

“Really?” Jeff replied with a chuckle. “An accidental family, eh?”

His mother blushed slightly. “I suppose so. Wait—there *was* one call. Just this morning, in fact.”

“Oh? Who?”

“I think it was an Army recruiter. Remember when they kept calling last spring?”

“Very well.”

Jeff shuddered at the memory. Both he and Paul had drawn high draft lottery numbers and were safe from the clutches of Vietnam. Still, the Army was hungry for fresh flesh.

“Did the caller say who he was?”

“Grady was all I understood. He spoke strangely.”

“Grady?” Jeff replied with widening eyes. “Not Grady Wallace.”

His mother nodded. “That’s the one.”

“Grady Wallace lives on my floor in Duniway Hall. Why in the world would he call here?”

“Just a moment,” his mother said as she left the room. She returned with a slip of crumpled paper. “I almost threw this away. He left a telephone number. I just assumed it was an Army recruiting office.”

Jeff glanced at the number and saw immediately that it didn’t begin with Montana’s 406 area code. Instead, to Jeff’s astonishment, the number began with *his* area code.

As if by divine intervention, the telephone began to ring. His mother rushed to pick it up in the study.

“Jeff!” she called. “It’s for you. It’s the Wallace fellow.”

“Of course it is,” Jeff muttered. He took the telephone from his mother and forced a smile. “Hello Grady!”

“Hi,” came the grunt. “Merry Christmas. I’m in Indianapolis.”

“Naturally. Where else would you be?” Jeff replied, rolling his eyes.

“Just thought I’d stop by and see you this Christmas.”

Jeff’s mother was still standing at his side, smiling curiously. Jeff felt the need to sit. He began rubbing his forehead.

“Stop by? Aren’t you in Frenchtown? Or at least supposed to be in Frenchtown?”

“Nah. My parents are away. Nothing to do.”

“But...wouldn’t they normally...take you along?”

“Not this time.”

“Obviously not.” Jeff drew a deep breath. “So where are you now?”

“At the airport Holiday Inn. I arrived last night.” Jeff wanted to ask how Grady could possibly afford to jump on a plane and fly almost all the way across the continent on a whim. He decided against it for the moment.

“Well, do you want me to come get you?” Jeff asked. He felt as though he had suddenly fallen through the looking glass and into Wonderland.

“No. I have a car.”

Of course, you do, Jeff thought.

“Just a moment, Grady.” Jeff cupped his hand over the mouthpiece. It was time once again to cross the swinging bridge.

“How do you feel about another guest at Christmas dinner tomorrow?” he asked his mother.

“Your friend Grady?”

“Yes.”

“That’s perfectly fine,” she replied. “He can even stay here with us during Christmas. It would be better than a Holiday Inn.”

“Nice thought, Mom, but no.” Jeff returned to the telephone. “Stop by tomorrow afternoon around 2 o’clock.”

“Great,” Grady replied, then more softly added, “Thanks, Jeff.”

The next day found Grady Wallace at the Loudon Christmas table. He arrived looking much the same as always, complete with trench coat. To Jeff’s surprise, Grady was a gracious guest. He helped Jeff’s mother set the table and even chopped the lettuce, onions and carrots for the salad.

“Grady,” Jeff’s father began over a cup of post-feast coffee, “your family name is familiar to me from the business news, but I can’t quite place it.”

“We are an old Montana business family,” Grady answered with a new articulate air that Jeff found creepy. He wasn’t altogether sure that this was the same Grady he had known from Missoula.

His father tapped the side of his head. “Something to do with metals. Am I right?”

“Metals?” Jeff asked as he mopped up a bit of gravy with his biscuit.

A tense look passed over Grady’s face, then disappeared. “My family owns Wallace Copper.”

“Omigosh!” his father blurted. “Are you the son of Michael Wallace?”

“Yes,” Grady replied with a tight smile.

Jeff shook his head. “Who--”

“Michael Wallace is the CEO of Wallace Copper,” his father answered without looking away from Grady. “I saw a photo of him in last night’s paper. He is about to purchase controlling shares in Northwest Power, isn’t he?”

“That’s the one,” Grady replied as he glanced at Jeff.

“Well, we’re honored to have you--”

Jeff jumped up from the table and sprinted for his coat. “Oh! I just remembered. Grady and I were supposed to be over at Paul Jepson’s house by now.”

His father’s face was frozen in a flabbergasted expression as Jeff and Grady quickly gathered their coats and bolted through the door, shouting “Merry Christmas” all the way. As soon as they were safely in Grady’s car, Jeff punched him hard on the shoulder.

“You’re the son of a billionaire! Why didn’t you say something before?”

Grady looked downcast. “I didn’t think it mattered.”

“It doesn’t,” Jeff shouted. “That’s the point! You’ve been living a lie.”

Grady’s head jerked up suddenly. Jeff began waving his hands. “That’s not what I meant. Look, can we talk straight and cut through the bullshit?”

Grady shrugged.

“Are you a homosexual?”

“Yes,” Grady replied softly.

“Okay. And I am one of the straightest people you’re likely to meet, but what you do with your sex life doesn’t matter to me. Understand?”

Grady nodded.

“Now, why aren’t you with your family for Christmas?”

“My mother and father went to the Cayman Islands for the holidays. They have a very private home on Seven Mile Beach.”

“Sounds beautiful.”

“It is, ‘cept I wasn’t invited.”

“Oh,” Jeff said. “Does your dad know about how you...are?”

“He does now. I spilled it all in a telephone call just before final exams.”

“How did he take it?” Jeff asked, although he already guessed at the answer.

“He hung up on me,” Grady replied as his eyes glistened. “Next day I got a telegram—a *telegram*—telling me that they were leaving for the islands. No ‘Merry Christmas,’ no nothing.”

“Oh man,” Jeff groaned. “I’m so sorry. Why don’t you stay with us until we all have to fly back?”

“No, Jeff. I wouldn’t be comfortable.”

“Yeah. My father would be greasing you up for money the whole time.”

Grady wiped his eyes and laughed softly. “I probably won’t be seeing too much of that stuff in the future either.”

“That being the case,” Jeff said as he put his Chevy in gear, “let’s hit the streets. Even on Christmas Day there has to be an open bar somewhere.”

Jeff and Grady settled into a comfortable routine of touring and barhopping. One day they drove to Cincinnati and saw Emerson, Lake and Palmer in concert at Riverfront Coliseum. On another day, they journeyed to visit a friend of Jeff’s at Purdue University. New Year’s Eve was spent at a downtown Indianapolis bar with a dozen of Jeff and Paul’s high school classmates. Paul, oddly enough, was absent.

The sexual awkwardness between Jeff and Grady was gone; everything was out in the open, which was an immense relief to them both. Although Jeff still wasn’t quite sure about Grady’s overall strangeness, he was learning to tolerate it. Jeff was beginning to suspect that the soup-bowl haircut and thick glasses could be hiding a genuinely fascinating individual.

More than a week had passed since Jeff had parted company with Paul at the Indianapolis airport and the time to return to Missoula was almost at hand. Jeff hadn’t heard a word from Paul, so he decided it was time to call his parent’s house.

Paul’s mother answered the telephone and seemed happy to hear from him. Mrs Jepson had always been like a second mother, often watching over them when his own mother was arriving late from work. She made the best grilled-cheese sandwiches and, at that moment, Jeff found himself craving one in the worst way.

“Merry Christmas, Mrs Jepson,” he said.

“Oh my! This is a surprise. How are you?”

“Fine,” Jeff replied. “And you?”

“We had quite a full house, but I loved every minute.”

“Is Paul available? Can I speak to him?”

There was a moment of strained silence that was very unlike Mrs Jepson.

“Didn’t you know he left, Jeff?”

“Left?” Jeff felt a sudden sinking sensation.

“Why, yes. Paul went to Michigan the day after Christmas to do some ice fishing with one of his cousins. He didn’t tell you?”

“Uh...no, Mrs Jepson. Did Paul say when he was returning to Missoula?”

“Well, I don’t know. I don’t think he purchased his ticket yet.”

Jeff nearly dropped the telephone. His head was spinning. “You mean he didn’t buy a roundtrip ticket?”

“No, honey. Paul wasn’t sure when he was going to go back and just couldn’t seem to make up his mind. Isn’t that funny? You how my boy is!”

Jeff wanted to scream. *Funny? It’s fucking hilarious! My supposed best friend just takes his leave without so much as a “kiss my ass?” What the hell am I supposed to do now?*

But instead, Jeff said, “If Paul should call in the next day or two, Mrs Jepson, please ask him to give me a ring at my parent’s home. You might want to remind him that classes begin again this Wednesday.”

“Certainly, Jeff. I’m sorry about all the confusion.”

“It’s okay Mrs Jepson. These things happen.”

“I’ll be thinking of you.”

“Thanks, Mrs Jepson. Good-bye.”

Jeff suppressed the urge to slam the handset into the receiver cradle. He turned to Grady, who was watching television in his parent’s living room.

“You don’t look happy, Jeff.”

“I’m not.”

“What’s wrong?” Grady grunted.

Jeff sat in his father’s favorite recliner and muttered a curse. “Tell me, Grady, what are your plans for winter quarter?”

Grady shrugged. “Going back to U of M and picking up where I left off, I guess.”

“Got your return flight booked?”

“Of course. Why?”

“Good man. Planning ahead and making firm decisions is a fine thing, right? Especially where other people are affected, right?”

“Sure.”

“Well, Grady, right now Paul is freezing his ass on a lake somewhere in Michigan without a return ticket or, apparently, without concern about *when* he’ll be returning.”

“I don’t understand,” Grady said with a frown. “I thought you two were traveling together. Besides, It’s a lot less expensive to book a round trip than a one way. Paul should know that.”

“Well,” Jeff replied with a bitter laugh, “I guess Paul had other ideas.”

Grady’s range of facial expression was limited, but this time he clearly registered surprise. “Why wouldn’t Paul tell you of his plans? I thought you guys were friends from way back?”

“We are good friends, but even the best relationships can unravel. Maybe that’s part of what is going on here. I don’t know.”

Grady nodded.

“Scott told me something once,” Jeff continued, “about not always following the lead of others. Maybe this is one of those times.”

“Sounds like you’ll be going back to campus without Paul.”

“Yep. But I tell you, Grady, I feel adrift. Really adrift.”

Grady reached into his coat pocket and produced a Western Airlines ticket envelope. “I could use some company on my flight,” he said.

Jeff shook his head. “I can’t afford to change my ticket. My parents paid for it. The penalty charges would eat them alive.”

“I think I can take care of that,” Grady said with a grin.

Chapter 8

Winter

Paul finally returned to campus nearly a week after the winter quarter was underway. Jeff didn't ask for an explanation, and none was offered.

The first weeks of January were solemn. The sun rarely showed itself and snow blanketed the city. The very air had become stagnant in the Missoula Valley, trapping fumes from the great pulp mills. Cones of light from the street lamps outlined the noxious fog at night. The result was an omnipresent stench that Grady Wallace had described as "God's fart."

Jeff had just settled down for an evening of scintillating study when Rich Runyon bounced into his room. Before Jeff could protest, Rich closed the door and put his forefinger to his lips.

"Shhh! Top secret."

Rich removed his knit cap—which had acquired more holes and hanging threads since September—and produced a sandwich bag bulging with marijuana.

"Look closely, Jeff. You've never seen weed like this."

Jeff marked the page in his textbook, then took the bag from Rich's outstretched hands. Rich was right. Rather than the usual brownish-green color, this pot was almost canary yellow.

"What is this stuff?"

Rich grinned. "Acapulco gold. The real deal."

"Holy shit! Where did you get it?"

"From this old coot I met in the Cavern last weekend."

Jeff frowned. "Are you sure it is okay?"

"Okay?" Rich said as he rolled his eyes. "Are you serious? This shit is much more than okay. This pot is a total mind fuck. Try some and find out."

Jeff stared at the golden leaves, then glanced at the textbook laying on his bed.

"Tick tock tick tock," Rich said with a grin. "Decisions, decisions."

"Oh hell," Jeff said. "My reporting class is still two days away. Do you think my brain cells will regenerate by then?"

"Most definitely," Rich replied as he spilled his joint-rolling tools on Jeff's desk. Jeff opened the window as much as he dared and flicked the thermostat up several notches. As soon as he had the joint finished, Rich lit a candle and extinguished the desk lamp.

"Is KRAP on the air?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm playing side one of the Steely Dan *Countdown to Ecstasy* album."

“Excellent! Turn it up!”

A snare drum set the beat for “Bodhisattva” as Rich eased the tip of the golden joint into the candle flame. He blew out the small fire that had taken root where the paper twisted to a point, then drew the first hit.

“Ohhhh,” he sighed as he exhaled the smoke toward the open window. He handed the smoldering joint to Jeff, who drew the smoke as deeply into his lungs as possible. He held it for a moment, savoring the sweet aroma, then coughed the excess out the window.

“Isn’t this stuff fabulous?” Rich asked.

Jeff nodded. “I can already feel it going to my head.”

Rich took another drag, then waved the joint at the speakers. “That’s the music of the future, man. Jazzy, sophisticated rock.”

Jeff plucked the joint from Rich’s fingers and inhaled eagerly. “I wouldn’t bet on it. There is other stuff coming along. Not sure I like what I’m hearing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Repetitive tracks with constant backbeats. Music for dancing, not thinking.”

Rich shrugged. “Music is music.”

At that instant, something flew past the window. Jeff saw only a white blur with a long, shimmering tail (thanks to the Acapulco Gold).

“I think I’m hallucinating,” Jeff said.

“How so?”

“I just saw—there goes another one!”

Rich followed his stare and scowled. “Hell, it’s a snowball. There’s another.”

While the needle tracked *Countdown to Ecstasy* on the turntable, a snowball battle was taking shape in the canyon between Duniway and Miller halls. Rich and Jeff sucked down the remains of the joint and watched as more students joined the melee.

“This is cool,” Rich said with a giggle. “Shall we take our places on the firing line?”

Minutes later, they stumbled outside, their feet scrambling for purchase on the snow-covered sidewalk. When they made it to the relative stability of the softer snow, they found that they could do little more than gape at the spectacle.

It looked like a wintry re-enactment of a Civil War battle. As many as 100 Duniway denizens formed a ragged line that extended almost the entire length of the building. The Millerites (“Not to be confused with the founders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church,” Rich was quick to caution) were fewer in number and had sought the shelter of the Miller Hall main entrance. They were in the process of being driven into the snow under a continuous hail of Duniway artillery.

“Destroy them! Destroy them all!” Rich shouted.

An enormous cheer went up when the last of the Millerites gave up the fight, crawling and staggering to reach the safety of the hall's steel doors. Suddenly, Rich ran into the middle of the courtyard.

"Hile, snow slingers!" he shouted. "To me! To me!"

Jeff, along with the rest of the Duniway contingent, watched in rapt fascination as a longhaired lunatic without a coat screamed for their attention.

"Follow me!" Rich cried. "To Knowles!"

Rich began sprinting toward Knowles Hall without looking back. The crowd, including Jeff, was frozen in place for about two seconds and then, with a roar, they swarmed after him. Jeff found himself screaming as well, although later he couldn't remember what he was shouting.

The students of Knowles Hall couldn't have guessed what was coming their way. Had they been listening, however, they would likely have heard it. The Duniway army was on the march, and Rich Runyon was leading them in song.

"I don't know, but I've been told"

(I don't know, but I've been told)

"Eskimo ass is mighty cold"

(Eskimo ass is mighty cold)

"Count off!"

(One, two)

"Count off!"

(Three, four)

Their first victims were two students in a third-floor room who had the temerity to tell them to "shut the fuck up." Rich pointed to their window and an artillery barrage commenced. The window screen buckled and flew backward into the room.

Another student made the terrible mistake of leaving Knowles via the front entrance, destination unknown. He was carrying a briefcase in one hand and a notebook in the other.

"It's a twerp! Tear him up!" Rich cried.

Their target had just enough time to turn slightly and utter, "Huh?"

The snowballs flew in the next heartbeat, blasting the notebook from his hand and sending him sprawling to the salt-encrusted concrete. He tried to get to his knees, but Jeff—who had finally gathered his wits sufficiently to pack a dense snowball—threw a bomb that exploded on the back of the hapless student's skull and drove him down again.

"Fuck!" the victim yelled as he scrambled back into the dorm.

Rich waved his arms above his head. "We have them on the run, boys! Fire as your guns bear!"

Snowballs by the dozens thudded against windows, and more than a couple shattered. Shouts and screams echoed from Knowles in response, but no one dared to challenge them outside.

Then the sirens began wailing.

A Missoula police cruiser and a campus security truck, red lights whirling, crashed over the parking lot curb and careened through a stand of pine trees. Headlights and flashlights swept across the crowd.

An amplified voice boomed, "This is the police! Stop immediately!"

"Run!" Rich yelled, but it really wasn't necessary. What was once an unstoppable advance instantly turned into panicked retreat. Jeff stood transfixed with an idiotic grin on his face as students stampeded around him. He saw Rich flying toward him and laughed.

"Go, go, go!" Rich shouted as he snagged Jeff by the crook of his elbow. Jeff spun in place, but Rich retained his grip, jerking Jeff off his feet and dragging him several yards.

As Jeff recovered his footing, they both broke into a run, giggling uncontrollably. When they reached the shadows behind the Alumni Center, they stopped, shivering and laughing, in the middle of a snowdrift.

By the time they felt it was safe to emerge from hiding, Jeff's feet were nearly frostbitten and Rich's skin had turned a disturbing shade of blue. Police were still talking and gesturing in front of Knowles Hall, but the Duniway Army had vanished completely and they didn't seem eager to pursue.

Rich led Jeff to the south side of the journalism building where there they stood under a towering pine while Rich prepared another joint. Jeff stamped his feet and rubbed his hands above the flame provided by Rich's cigarette lighter.

"War is hell," Rich said, "but I love it so."

"I can't believe what just happened," Jeff replied. "I felt so strange."

"Give thanks to Acapulco Gold."

"No," Jeff said, "it wasn't just that. I felt like I was part of something bigger than myself. It was the most exhilarating sensation."

"You've never had sex, have you?" Rich said as he squinted against the smoke.

"I--"

"Don't answer that," Rich interrupted as he took a long hit from the joint. He held the smoke for a few seconds, then launched it upward through the overhanging branches.

"Let me tell you, Jeff, sex is *much* better. Trust me."

"With Audrey, I imagine it would be," Jeff replied softly, taking the joint from Rich's trembling hands.

Rich only nodded and stared into the distance. Before he could speak again, there was a shout from somewhere above their heads, followed by the sound of frozen branches snapping away from the tree. The cascading destruction began somewhere near the top, but moved downward with astonishing speed. Jeff looked up just in time to see a large, dark object

twisting and crashing through the branches. In his befuddled state, Jeff could only manage a few steps backward.

The object emerged from the lowest branches in the shape of a man with his arms flailing. The man fell through seven feet of open air and landed face down in the snow. A miniature snow shower followed close behind.

“Jesus Christ! We’re busted!” Rich shrieked and broke into a stumbling run.

“Wait,” the prone figure gasped. “It’s me.”

Rich was already well beyond hearing and nearly out of sight. Jeff couldn’t will his legs to move. Instead, he stood in place and screamed incoherently.

“Jeff!” the figure shouted. “For god’s sake shut up! It’s me.”

Jeff fell silent, but continued to hyperventilate.

“It’s me. It’s Scott, you stoned fool.”

Scott Davies groaned and rolled onto his back.

“What... what the hell were you doing up there?” Jeff stammered.

“I climbed into the tree to meditate,” Scott said as he stood and slapped the snow from his clothes. “I dozed off instead and slipped. It was a rude awakening to say the least.”

“Are you okay?” Jeff asked.

“I’ll be sore tomorrow, but I’m alright.” He gazed at Jeff and shook his head. “Why are you out here without a coat?”

“Rich has this most amazing pot and we--”

Scott held up his hand. “That answers my question. Come on.”

He walked Jeff back to the dorm and picked up two cups of hot coffee in the lounge, plus a large bag of Doritos. Jeff was particularly grateful for the Doritos.

“Sometimes Rich can be an asshole,” Scott said as they warmed themselves on the couch. “He should know better than to smoke weed on a weekday night. It never goes well.”

Jeff nodded. “I don’t know what I was thinking. That stuff kicked my ass. I’m still pretty buzzed.”

“I know,” Scott said with a smile. “Were you and Rich involved in that riot I saw going on at Knowles Hall? Should I even ask?”

Jeff grinned and reached for another handful of Doritos. “Yep. Rich was leading it.”

“Of course. Do you think any of the cops identified you or Rich? That could be very bad.”

“No,” Jeff replied. “It was too dark.”

“You’re lucky. You guys could have been expelled.”

Jeff wolfed down another handful of chips. “You know what I really don’t understand?” he said, dribbling orange crumbs from his lips.

“Hmmm...quantum mechanics?”

“Well, yes, now that you mention it.”

Jeff hesitated and looked as though he really expected Scott to offer an impromptu physics lecture. Scott shook his head and made a twirling motion with his right hand.

“Go on, Jeff.”

“I don’t understand how Audrey can be in a relationship with Rich Runyon.”

“Now there is a true scientific mystery,” Scott laughed.

“No, really. Rich is one of the least sincere people I’ve ever met. What can someone like Audrey possibly see in him?”

“Maybe insincerity is the attraction, Jeff. A good-time guy, you know?”

Jeff looked hurt. “I can be a good-time guy,” he said petulantly.

Scott turned to face Jeff directly. “I think you need to give up on Audrey,” he said. “If it is meant to happen, it will. Otherwise, you’re just setting yourself up for grief. This campus is filled to the gills with fascinating women. Go find another.”

“Easy for you to say.”

Scott’s eyebrows arched suddenly. “What do you mean? I’m not involved with anyone. What makes you think I am?”

“I just assumed,” Jeff shrugged. “You’re the mysterious Scott. Women are attracted to mystery.”

Scott wagged his finger. “Only certain women, Jeff. Special, mysterious wo--”

“Oh my god!” Jeff shouted.

“Now what?” Scott snapped as he followed Jeff’s wide-eyed stare. He was rewarded with the sight of Rich Runyon pressed against the one of the enormous of floor-to-ceiling glass panels adjacent to the lobby doorway. As they watched, Rich slid across the glass in slow, liquid fashion, eyes agog and lips puckered. His palms were spread upon the glass as well, fingers open wide.

“You are an idiot,” Scott shouted. Rich slipped his hands above his head and seemed to stumble slightly. Silvery cracks suddenly appeared beneath his fingers and ran to the far edges of the glass before Jeff could even blink.

From Jeff’s perspective, time slowed to a crawl. More cracks shot across the glass while Rich still held his clownish grin. The reflections of the lobby lamps shuddered, then fractured into distorted shards. Scott was on his feet in a split second, but he was too late. The glass seemed to fold in the middle, then collapse onto the granite floor with a thunderous crash.

Rich’s luck was still with him. As the glass panel fell inward, he continued to stumble backward, falling into a row of dwarf shrubbery.

Scott jumped and skipped over shards of glass that careered across the lobby. “Are you okay, Rich?” he cried. Rich’s giggle supplied the answer. He turned back to Jeff, who was in a state of apparent shock.

“Follow me, Jeff. Run!” Scott shouted.

“Where are we going?” Jeff gasped as he sprinted through the hallway behind Scott.

“To your room, fool!”

Shouts echoed behind them, along with the sounds of doors opening violently. Jeff recognized one of the voices as belonging to Steve Grindel.

They turned the first-floor corner and skidded to a halt in front of Jeff’s room. Jeff fumbled with the lock, then threw the door wide. Scott slammed it behind them and fell to his knees.

“Oh, man! This is bad,” he groaned.

“You think Rich got away?” Jeff asked.

“I hope to hell so.”

Scott sat on the floor with his head in his hands. “Poor Rich. Proceed directly to jail. Do not pass GO, do not collect \$200.”

Jeff noticed that the KRAP transmitter was still on the air. He flipped *Countdown to Ecstasy* to side two and didn’t care where he dropped the needle.

Scott tilted his head back and sighed. “I swear, Jeff. We’re never gonna survive to be sophomores at this rate.”

Jeff fell heavily onto the bed and his textbook bounced to the floor. “You have my word, Scott. No more pot on weekday nights.”

“Bingo” Scott replied.

Chapter 9

Audrey

Rich Runyon's luck was indeed extraordinary. Not only did he avoid being collared by the police in the aftermath of the Battle of Knowles Hall, he survived the Great Window Implosion of 1974 without so much as a scratch. Paul and Jeff found him at his usual table in the cafeteria the next morning, making quick work of a stack of buttermilk pancakes.

"I churned up the snow like you wouldn't believe," he said as he described his escape. "I was like a cartoon character, you know how their legs spin madly, but they don't get anywhere?"

Paul and Jeff nodded.

"I think my feet were throwing up rooster tails of snow—that's how fast I was scrambling. It was total panic. I just screamed across the Oval and ducked into the University Center. God, if I hadn't froze to death, I believe I would have had a heart attack. I shot a few games of pool with a couple of Indian students. That kept me out of harms way for about two hours."

"Grindel and the other resident advisors put up a big sheet of plywood," Jeff said. "Police were there until after midnight."

Rich shrugged and stuffed a forkful of pancakes into his mouth. "It was an accident. You and Scott saw it."

"Maybe you should just fess up, then," Jeff replied.

Rich held his fork in mid-air and glared. "Are you out of your fucking mind?"

"Good god, Jeff," Paul said with a laugh. "They'd expel Rich in a heartbeat. What are you thinking? Besides, what's one window?"

"Several hundred dollars, maybe more," Jeff said.

"Shit," Rich grumbled. "I'll write them a check next chance I get."

Rich and Paul laughed, but Jeff remained silent. "Let's change the subject," Rich said.

"Good idea," Jeff muttered.

"Lighten up, Jeff. I have great news for you," Rich grinned. "You can have Audrey."

"Say what?"

"You can have her. She's gone around the bend. Too crazy and clingy for me." Rich wiggled his fingers in the air.

"I didn't know she was yours to give," Jeff replied.

"Oh, Jeff," Rich chuckled, "you know exactly what I mean. There comes a point in every relationship where the woman goes insane. That's the time to move on. Audrey has clearly arrived at that point."

“Rich’s telling you the truth,” Paul interrupted. “One day it’s all fun and the next day they’re shrieking and flapping their wings like huge crows. Criticism. Demands. All that bullshit. I saw it coming with Leigh and cut her off at the pass.”

“I see,” Jeff replied.

“Well, you won’t see her around my room anymore,” Rich announced as he drained a glass of orange juice. “Life is heavy enough as it is. There is always something just under the surface, ready to drag you down. The only solution is to walk on water, my friend. That’s what I’m doing.”

Paul nodded slowly, as if receiving sage wisdom. Jeff just stared.

“And leaving you with that little nugget, I must run,” Rich said as he hopped to his feet. “By the way, Jeff, I still have plenty of that Acapulco Gold.”

Jeff smiled weakly. “Maybe this weekend.”

“Suit yourself,” Rich replied with a wave. He swept up his books and disappeared into the crowd.

“Better find Audrey and strike while the iron is hot,” Paul said as he buttered a piece of toast.

“Or what, Paul? Another man ‘gets’ her? You make Audrey sound like a piece of merchandise that has just gone on sale.”

“Whatever,” he replied as he glanced at his watch. “Time is short. I need to concentrate on knocking off breakfast.”

They both returned to their plates and finished their meals in silence.

Two weeks passed and Jeff still hadn’t gathered enough courage to make the journey to Knowles Hall and knock on Audrey’s door. It was Valentine’s Day, oddly enough, when he saw Leigh in the first-floor hallway of the liberal arts building between classes. He took a deep breath and tapped her on the shoulder.

Leigh turned and frowned. “Hello Jeff.”

“Haven’t seen you in a long time,” Jeff said with a smile.

“Yeah, well, you know how it goes.”

He did, at least as far as she was concerned, but wasn’t really eager to discuss it. “How’s Audrey?”

Leigh shrugged. “Hanging in there, I guess. No thanks to Rich.”

Jeff sighed. “Um...look, Leigh, just because I associate with those guys, it doesn’t mean that I always share their opinions. It doesn’t mean I behave like they do. You understand?”

Her face softened slightly. “Yes, but you really do a piss poor job of picking your friends.”

The bell clanged just above their heads.

“I have to get to my next class, Jeff.”

“Leigh,” Jeff said as he touched her arm, “I’m really sorry, for all the good it does.”

“I know.”

“Do you think there is there any chance Audrey and I could...get together sometime?”

Leigh smiled at last. “You should just ask her, but I think I know where you’re coming from. Let me talk to her.”

“Just a cheeseburger in the UC. That’s all.”

That afternoon Jeff’s telephone rang while he was queuing up another album for KRAP.

“Hello?”

“Jeff? It’s Audrey.”

“Hi!” replied, groping for just the right warm, but casual, tone of voice. “I guess you spoke to Leigh.”

“Yes. She said you wanted to take me out on a date?”

“Well,” Jeff chuckled, “I just thought we’d meet at the UC for a burger, or something.”

There was a long pause, and Jeff thought he heard a sigh. “Sure, Jeff. When?”

“Tonight? How about 6 o’clock?”

Another long pause. “Okay. I’ll meet you in the UC.”

“Great!” He hopped Audrey could hear the smile in his voice. “I’ll see you then.”

Jeff hung up the telephone and snapped his fingers. “Yes!”

He spent the next two hours rehearsing what he was going to say. Jeff planned to apologize for Rich’s boorishness, swear that at least *he* wasn’t a cretin, demonstrate his kindness and overall trustworthiness—and not bring up politics.

At fifteen minutes to the fateful hour, Jeff brushed out his hair as best he could. He considered tying it back into a ponytail, but then decided against it. He popped a stick of spearmint gum into his mouth, signed KRAP off the airwaves and began his pilgrimage to the University Center.

Audrey was waiting at the entrance to the second-floor restaurant, dressed in faded jeans and a bulky University of Montana sweatshirt under a light parka. Her platinum-blond hair was flowing over her shoulders like water cascading over a fall. Jeff caught her attention with a wave; Audrey smiled.

“Hungry?” he asked.

“A little,” she replied as they took their places in line.

“I missed seeing you. It has been a long time.”

“I guess I don’t get over to Duniway all that much these days. Do you still have your little radio station?”

“KRAP, yes. Do you listen?”

“No. Sorry.”

“Well, you’re probably not missing anything,” Jeff laughed.

They chose a small table away from the other students. Jeff began eagerly tearing into his cheeseburger, but then noticed that Audrey had barely touched hers.

“I guess you really were only a ‘little’ hungry,” he said.

“*C’est vrai*,” Audrey replied with only the hint of a smile.

Jeff put his sandwich on his plate and gazed at Audrey, adoring how she seemed to glow in the pool of light cast by the ceiling lamps. He resisted the urge to take her hand.

“Is everything okay, Audrey?”

“Why do you ask? Do I look ‘not okay’?”

“I know that you and Rich--”

Audrey silenced him with a sudden wave of her hand. “Jeff, I don’t...”

“What?”

She quickly blushed and covered her eyes. Through her fingers, Jeff saw a glint of tears.

“I don’t want to talk about Rich,” she choked as she shook her head, her hand never leaving her eyes.

“He can be a complete jerk, I know. Do you want me to speak with him? Maybe--”

“No!” she snapped.

“Okay,” Jeff said with growing alarm. “I’m confused now. I think this goes a lot deeper than being pissed over a breakup, doesn’t it?”

Audrey lowered her hand and tears trickled down her cheeks. Her eyes were swollen and bloodshot. “Jeff,” she lowered her voice to a whisper, “I’m pregnant.”

Jeff sat upright in his chair and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

“Wow!” he said. “Why are you telling *me* this?”

Audrey dropped her gaze to the tabletop.

“Wait,” Jeff said quickly. “I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. I’m trying to ask if I’m the only person who knows. Did you tell Rich?”

Audrey shook her head. “Hell, no. He wouldn’t care anyway.”

Probably right about that, Jeff thought.

“What about Leigh?” he asked.

“No. No one but you—and just now. Isn’t that bizarre?”

“Well, yes. I guess I am an odd choice.”

Audrey wiped her cheeks and then touched his hand. Jeff almost gasped.

“I didn’t mean *that* the way it sounded,” she said.

“I understand,” Jeff replied. He placed his hand atop hers. “What are you going to do?”

"I'm going to Spokane this weekend," she said. The choked sound was returning to her voice.

"Spokane? Why?"

Audrey looked around quickly. "It's not easy here in Montana, Jeff. It's better in Washington state."

Jeff felt a chill rising up his spine. "What is better, Audrey?"

"Don't you understand? I'm...having an..."

"Abortion?" Jeff whispered.

Audrey swallowed hard and nodded.

"Good God," Jeff sighed. He held her hand and slowly caressed her fingers. Almost a minute passed in silence.

"How are you getting there?" he asked.

"I'm taking a bus."

"Is Leigh going with you?"

"No," she replied softly. "I don't want anyone to know. If I hadn't been so weak minded right now, you wouldn't have known, either."

"But since you had to tell someone, I'm glad it was me," Jeff replied with a slight grin. "I'm honored."

"Thank you," Audrey replied.

"Look," Jeff said as he cleared his throat, "why don't you let me take you?"

"I can't ask you to do that."

"You didn't. I did."

Audrey drew a deep breath and seemed to shudder. "This won't be pretty, Jeff."

"I understand. When do you have to be there?"

"Nine o'clock Saturday morning. But you don't have a car."

Jeff shrugged. "I can borrow Paul's car. He won't mind."

"You won't tell--"

"A single soul," Jeff said. "Not Paul, not Rich. I'll tell Paul we're going on a date."

Audrey tried to laugh, but it died in her throat. "Boy, won't they be surprised."

"*C'est vrai*," Jeff replied.

Jeff and Audrey left the University Center and strolled slowly around the Oval, moving from one lamppost to another in the gathering darkness. They talked little, and when they did it was meaningless babble about music and current events. All the most important things had already been said.

They parted at the entrance to Knowles Hall, Jeff taking her hand in his.

"I'll be ready Saturday," he said. "I'll call your room at five."

"That's awfully early for you to wake up," she replied.

"I'm a morning person. Don't worry."

Audrey nodded. "Meet me on Arthur Avenue at five, okay? Don't come to my room. I want to leave quietly."

"I understand."

They hugged tightly, then Jeff watched her walk through the doors and into the warm light of the Knowles Hall lobby. As Jeff returned to his room, he noticed that Rich's door was standing open.

"Jeff my man!" Rich called out. "What's happening?"

"Nothing. I'm going to bed."

"Goodni--"

Jeff's door slammed shut.

The sky above the eastern mountaintops was stained pink as Audrey climbed into the Paul's Mustang on Arthur Avenue. "I brought you some coffee," Jeff said, handing her a steaming paper cup.

"I appreciate that," she replied.

When they had merged onto westbound I-90, Jeff slipped in an eight-track tape of the Moody Blues *Question of Balance*. He assumed that Audrey wouldn't be in a mood for conversation, and he was right. As they climbed Lolo Pass and onward into Idaho, the music seemed like a soundtrack selected for the moment. He thought sure Audrey would ask him to turn it off, but she didn't.

It was a painfully long drive to Spokane, the hours spent mostly in silence. Jeff would comment on the scenic beauty, but Audrey responded in monosyllables, if she responded at all. When they finally reached the outskirts of the city, Jeff saw that Audrey had begun to cry.

"I wish to God there was something I could do," he said softly.

"You're doing it," she whispered.

Audrey gripped his arm as they stepped through the doors of the clinic. The tiny waiting room was furnished with a few scattered chairs, a battered television and a fern badly in need of sunlight and water. The fact that the room was empty was a small consolation.

They sat together for several minutes until a door opened and a smiling nurse with a clipboard asked Audrey to step forward.

Audrey stood, then hesitated. The nurse asked Audrey if she wanted Jeff to accompany her.

"No. That won't be necessary," Audrey replied softly.

Jeff felt a stab of pain at this, but merely nodded.

"I'll be right here. Waiting. If you need me."

"I know," Audrey replied before the nurse closed the door.

Jeff read every magazine in the waiting room and watched Saturday morning cartoons until he thought his eyes would bleed. He listened for any

sound that might pass through the walls, but heard nothing except clicking typewriters and ringing telephones.

Two hours later, Audrey emerged. She was pale and trembling. In one hand, she carried a paper bag containing a generous supply of Kotex pads and Tylenol.

“Let’s go,” she said. “Right now.”

“Was it bad?” Jeff asked as they drove out of the parking lot.

“Very bad,” Audrey replied, then began to cry. “I will never do something like this again. *Never.*”

“Can you eat? Do you want to get lunch?” Jeff asked, and immediately felt ridiculous.

“No, Jeff. Let’s just go home. I have really bad cramps. I need to rest.”

Audrey eventually fell asleep with her head resting in Jeff’s lap. It was another long, quiet drive back to campus, but it gave Jeff time to shuffle through his thoughts. September 15 and the glorious aroma of roofing tar seemed like a childhood dream. Only five months had passed, but it felt like five years. Jeff could sense his life changing in ways he could have never anticipated, and he knew it wasn’t over yet.

For now at least, Jeff was happy just to feel Audrey’s body against his, even if she was merely sleeping. He felt responsible and mature, but most of all—and best of all—he felt *needed*.

Audrey awakened as they slowed for the exit off the interstate in Missoula, and by the time they reached the campus, her glow was returning. They hugged in the parking lot, and this time she blessed him with a kiss on his cheek.

“Thank you so much, Jeff. You really are a good friend.”

“Do you think we--”

“Remember,” she said as she squeezed his hand. “Not a soul.”

“Of course.”

Audrey smiled and waved. “See you later!”

“I hope so,” Jeff answered, but she didn’t hear him. Audrey was already on the sidewalk and walking away with quick strides, the paper bag bouncing off her thigh with each step.

Chapter 10

A Friend of the Devil is a Friend of Mine

Jeff was tacking a new poster to his wall when Rich Runyon burst through the door. A tack slipped from Jeff's hand and rolled beneath the bed.

"Don't you ever knock?"

"Not if I can help it," Rich replied. He eyed the poster and cocked his head to one side. "More Soviet wallpaper, eh? Who is the old lady waving her arms? What does it say?"

Jeff sighed. "The 'old lady' is supposed to represent Mother Russia. She's saying 'Mother Russian demands your help.' It's a World War II recruiting poster."

"But why is it on your wall?"

Jeff jumped to the floor to retrieve his thumbtack. He had to fish among the dust bunnies beneath his bed for the prize. When his fingers closed around it, the tack sank deep into his flesh.

"Ow! God damn it!" Jeff pulled the tack free and stared at his bleeding forefinger.

"Here," Rich said as he handed a tissue to Jeff. "Looks like you've shed blood for Mother Russia."

"If you hadn't come in my room unannounced, I probably wouldn't have dropped the tack in the first place."

"I'm sorry, Jeff," Rich replied softly. "I was just coming to chat."

"I'm sure," Jeff shrugged as he used the bloodied tack to pin down the last corner of the poster.

"Do you want me to leave?"

Jeff considered saying "yes," but what actually crossed his lips was, "No. I guess not. Have a seat."

Rich pulled out Jeff's desk chair and sat backward with his forearms resting on the top. Jeff stepped back to the center of the room with his hands on his hips, admiring his new poster.

"It does look good," Rich said. "Full of revolutionary fervor, of course."

Jeff nodded, then turned to Rich. "So, what did you need to talk about?"

"Girl trouble."

"Oh?" Jeff's stomach clenched slightly.

"It's Madame Bump and Grind. Remember her?"

"Vividly."

"Well," Rich said as he lowered his voice to a whisper. "She gave me the clap!"

Jeff sat down hard on the bed. "Oh shit."

“I’m sure of it,” Rich continued to whisper. “It burns like hell when I pee and there’s...a discharge, as they say.”

Jeff’s thoughts went instantly to Audrey, and his anger flared. “What the hell were you thinking, Rich?”

Rich shook his head. “What do you mean?”

“Did it ever occur to you that a woman like Madame Bump and Grind might have been just a *little* promiscuous? And it isn’t like she’s out there screwing only squeaky-clean college boys. You saw who she hangs out with.”

“I know, I know,” Rich said as he hung his head. When he looked up, his eyes were shiny with tears. “What’s gonna happen to me?”

“To *you*?” Jeff almost shouted. “This has gone well beyond *you* now. Didn’t they ever teach you about syphilis in your high school health classes? Or were you too busy goofing off?”

Rich glanced at the hallway and waved his hands at the floor. “Keep it down, *please*.”

Jeff walked to the door and closed it quietly. “You need to go to the university health service and get on antibiotics.”

“I can do that.”

“Yeah, but here comes the hard part: they’re going to make you name everyone you’ve had sex with in this town—*everyone*. They all have to start taking antibiotics.”

Rich’s face went pale. “You’re shitting me!”

“Nope.”

“Oh, man. I don’t even know Madame Bump and Grind’s real name!”

“What about Audrey?” Jeff asked.

“What about her?”

Jeff had to bite the side of his tongue to stop himself from screaming. His next impulse was to yank Rich out of the chair by his grimy shirt collar and throw him through the window.

“You had sex with her after Madame Bump and Grind,” Jeff spat through his teeth. “Remember?”

“Yeah,” Rich grinned sheepishly. “Bow wow.”

Jeff took a step forward and stopped. Rich smiled at him stupidly, oblivious to how close he was to having a fist rammed through his teeth. Jeff drew a deep breath and clenched his hands behind his back. “Audrey has the clap now, too. *Comprende?* You’re going to have to name her as one of your ‘partners.’”

“Oooh!” Rich winced. “That won’t be good.”

“Damn right. Within a couple of days after you visit the health center, she’ll be getting a bad-news telephone call.”

“Jeff,” Rich began softly, “I need a favor. I don’t want Audrey to get the word that way.”

Am I hearing compassion for the woman who, until three weeks ago, was carrying your unborn child? Jeff thought. *Remarkable.* “What is it that you want me to do?” he said aloud.

“Audrey isn’t talking to me...”

No shit.

“...so could you possibly let her know? And tell her I’m sorry?”

Tell her yourself, you irresponsible asshole.

“Oh, why not?” Jeff sighed. “I’m a friend of the devil and everybody’s caretaker these days anyway.”

“What do you mean?”

“Never mind.”

Rich stood suddenly and hugged Jeff so tightly Jeff could barely breathe. Jeff resisted for a couple of seconds, then slowly patted Rich on the back.

“I really appreciate this, man,” Rich whispered.

Good God help me, Jeff thought. *Why do I end up in the middle of everything?*

“It’s okay,” he said. “Just get the meds and try to keep better control over your penis. Practicing celibacy for the rest of the school year might not be a bad idea.”

Rich pulled back and nodded. He stepped around Jeff and opened the door. “I owe you, man!” he called as he vanished into the hallway.

“You have no idea,” Jeff replied.

It was a sunny, early spring day when Jeff arrived at Audrey’s room on the second floor of Knowles Hall. Audrey had the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* playing on her stereo and she was puttering about the room with paper towels and a bottle of Windex. She turned to see Jeff standing in the doorway and seemed startled.

“Oh! Hi, Jeff!” she said.

“What are you up to?” Jeff replied as he surveyed the room.

“Spring cleaning. Isn’t it a gorgeous day?”

“You bet,” Jeff replied.

But it’s about to take a different turn, he thought.

The Beach Boys had just started singing “God Only Knows.” Audrey turned it down to a whisper. “So what brings you here?” she asked.

“We need to talk privately,” Jeff replied as he stepped into the room and closed the door. Audrey frowned and sat on the edge of her bed.

“What’s this about?” she asked flatly.

“Rich. It’s about Rich.”

Audrey shook her head. “Oh, Jeff. What did you do?”

“Nothing,” Jeff said as he sat beside her. “But I was talking to Rich yesterday and he told me something that you need to hear.”

“*C’est vrai!*” Audrey said with a bitter laugh. “He can’t live without me, right? Poor, sad Rich. He--”

“No!” Jeff snapped. Audrey stared with wide eyes. Before she could speak again, Jeff blurted, “Rich has syphilis.”

Audrey dropped the Windex bottle. Tears welled in her eyes. “You’ve got to be kidding.”

“I wouldn’t make a joke about something like that and you know it.”

Audrey grabbed a pillow, put it to her face and screamed. Jeff put his hand on her shoulder, but she shook it away. “That bastard!” she screamed again.

When Audrey finally removed the pillow, it was stained with tears. Her cheeks were wet and flushed. “I should have known. I’ve been having...symptoms. Now I’m going to have to see a doctor.”

Jeff nodded.

“Shit,” she shouted as she threw the wad of paper towels toward the door. “Now he has fucked me over twice.”

More times than that, to hear him tell it, Jeff thought.

“Do you want me to come with you to the health service?” he asked.

“I’m a big girl, Jeff,” she sneered. “I can take care of this.”

“Of course,” Jeff replied quietly. He could feel the tips of his ears burning.

Audrey retrieved her Windex and tore off another towel from the roll. “I have work to do,” she said.

In other words, get the fuck out.

Jeff opened the door, then looked back. Audrey was dabbing away tears. “If you need me--”

“Yep. I know,” she said, and then turned up the Beach Boys.

“Later,” Jeff replied, knowing that the odds of a “later” with Audrey were slim indeed.

The weather changed abruptly, as weather in Montana often does. The early spring heat wave vanished and in its place a snowstorm buried the campus in mountains of white. By now even the freshmen had become hardened winter veterans, so they simply reverted to their routines of moving from class to class by navigating networks of ice trenches.

Paul and Rich had cut their own trench from the front of Craig Hall to the tall pines on the north side of the Alumni Center. They borrowed shovels on the pretense of digging out Paul’s car (which really *was* buried in snow). Once they had carved the trench to the base of the trees, they widened it into a circular platform on which they could stand and smoke pot unmolested.

All this work had been necessary because Steve Grindel had finally brought the hammer down. The defining moment was the debut of Rich

Runyon's multi-chambered water-filled pot pipe, better known as the "Mega Bong."

The Mega Bong was designed to solve a particular set of problems: sore throats and coughing. Too much coughing was especially awkward after Grindel became savvy enough to realize that coughing fits behind closed doors often signaled pot use. Sore throats were an annoyance of smoking, but one that Rich was determined to solve as well.

He began by pilfering two large glass bottles from the chemistry lab. Both were conveniently outfitted with black rubber stoppers, each featuring two smooth holes. To his collection, Rich added a supply of plastic tubing and glass pipe. He installed a bowl at one end of a glass pipe, which was no small effort considering the fact that Rich broke several lengths of the stuff trying to adapt the brass fitting. With the bowl and its attendant pipe in place on the stopper, and the stopper secured in the first bottle, Rich inserted a plastic tube into the adjacent hole and snaked it over to the second bottle. From the second bottle stopper ran the four-foot hose that would carry the "processed" smoke to the smoker's lips.

Rich decided to test-drive his creation in Paul's room one snowy Friday evening. He filled both bottles with ice-cold water from the drinking fountain, then used food coloring to stain the water red in each bottle, just for dramatic effect.

Scott, Jeff, Grady and Paul were in attendance for the performance and everyone marveled at the sight of the Mega Bong. Rich had assembled the hookah on Paul's desk, in plain sight of the window. This lack of discretion didn't seem to concern him. Jeff was beyond mentioning such things and no one else appeared to notice.

Rich stuffed the bowl from his latest bag of pot and held a match over the mounded leaves. He put the long tube in his mouth and began drawing air with puckered lips. Other than the flush that appeared on his cheeks, nothing happened. But then, suddenly, the water in both bottles began to bubble. The match flame dipped and began to caress the marijuana. Two seconds later, the first bottle filled with smoke, which quickly shot through the connecting tube into the second bottle and then directly into Rich's lungs. He released the hose and sighed.

"Oh, man! It's beyond my wildest dreams!"

"Let me try," Paul said. Rich handed the tube to Paul, who immediately drew a huge volume of smoke into his lungs. His eyes opened wide and he smiled.

"Smooth as silk," Paul announced as he removed the tube.

Each of them took their turns at the Mega Bong. As the last bit of pot turned to ash, absolute silence descended upon the room. For the moment, everyone had lost the capacity for speech.

Jeff was groping blindly for an album, any album, to put on Paul's turntable, when the door flew open and crashed into the opposite wall. Such an entrance would send most reasonable people into a panic, but the students gathered in Paul's room that evening only turned their heads to the sound, and rather slowly at that.

"I've been watching you!" Steve Grindel shrieked.

"Really?" Rich replied languidly. "From where?"

"Outside, asshole!"

"In the snow?" Scott asked.

"Damn straight!" Grindel barked.

"Oh, wow," Grady said. "That would be...cold."

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing," Grindel continued. "You guys have some nerve."

"Some bones, skin and blood vessels, too. Not to mention balls," Scott added.

Grindel strode to the table and gathered up the bottle and tubes. Water and pot ash splattered across the desk.

"This has to be your work, Runyon."

"Yeah, well--"

"Good. I needed to know whose name to put in my report. The rest of you are culpable just for participating." He stormed to the door and slammed it behind him.

"Far out," Grady murmured.

"Well, that was a hell of a thing," Rich said with a shrug.

Jeff noticed that his wrist was aching and discovered that his hand was immobilized in mid-air over Paul's peach-crate record rack. In the fascination of watching Grindel's tirade, Jeff had simply neglected to move. He had frozen in place like a dime-store mannequin.

Jeff grinned and plucked Pink Floyd's *Meddle* from the crate. As "One of These Days" throbbed in Paul's speakers, the snow continued to fall and Steve Grindel began filling out triplicate forms in the silence of his room.

After one of their evening pine-tree therapy sessions (as Paul liked to call them), they emerged from the hiding place to find Scott busily piling mounds of snow on a wood bench in front of Craig Hall.

"What the hell are you doing, Scott?" Rich asked.

"Art!" Scott answered. "And you can help."

"Are you building a snow man?" Grady asked as they approached the bench.

"Yes and no," Scott replied with a grin. "This is going to be a snow *woman*."

Scott picked up a basketball-sized snowball and packed it into one of the bench armrests. "This will be her head. She's reclined. Do you all get it?"

"I do," Rich said and began to lovingly pile and sculpt the snow. Scott continued work on the torso and arms while Grady, Paul and Jeff fashioned the pelvis and legs. Each person was working in silent concentration, creating their own individual masterpieces. A small crowd began to gather, some calling out suggestions.

After an hour, the cold had finally worked its way beneath their coats and their breaths hung in frosty clouds in the sidewalk lamps. Scott was the first to step back and admire his work. "She's a beauty," he said.

Grady had been on his knees much of the time, and now he stood and laughed triumphantly. "She's finished."

Rich added a curl to the hair that fell in the center of her forehead. Paul smoothed in a belly button and Jeff deepened the spaces between her toes. Some in the crowd began to applaud.

"She needs one more thing," Scott said as he ran to a nearby juniper bush. He cut a small sprig from the bush, then carried it back to the sculpture, placing it gently in the snow woman's crotch.

"I am insulted and appalled," a woman shouted. The indignant voice belonged to a student Jeff recognized from the SDS poster sale. She was a severe-looking woman with her black hair held captive in a bun. "You should all be ashamed of yourselves. This is horrible and sexist."

"No," Scott replied, "it is not. This is an artistic appreciation of the female form."

"It's obscene," the woman said. "It's typical of male, capitalist exploitation."

"Capitalist?" Rich asked with a grin. "We're not charging you anything to gaze upon her beauty, although that isn't a bad idea."

The woman looked at the crowd as if searching for support, but no one spoke. With a disgusted grimace, she kicked the snow woman in the midsection, sending snow cascading to the sidewalk.

"Hey!" Grady yelled.

Jeff gripped him above the elbow and whispered, "It isn't worth it, Grady."

The woman kicked again, shattering the snow woman's head. "Why are you doing this?" Scott asked. "We did no harm to you."

"You're doing harm to all women," she shouted as she swept the voluminous breasts to the ground.

"Speak for yourself, bitch," a female voice said from the crowd. Jeff turned and saw Leigh Simmons stepping into light. "Why don't you just get the fuck out of here?"

The SDS woman looked like she had been punched in the stomach. Her gaze swept crowd again, a expression of unease replacing her anger.

“You’re a traitor to sisterhood,” she said to Leigh at last.

Leigh scooped up a snowball and hurled it at the woman’s head. She tried to turn away, but the icy missile struck her ear. She cried out in pain, then received another snowball, this one from Grady, on her cheek.

“Fuck!” she screamed as she staggered backward.

“Not even with Grady’s dick, sweetheart” Rich said.

Jeff began laughing loudly and others joined him as the woman fled down the sidewalk, slipping and sliding comically as she went.

“Aren’t you going to rush to the defense of your revolutionary comrade?” Scott asked Jeff with a smile.

“Hell no,” Jeff replied.

Chapter 11

Grady

Jeff despised his early morning Introduction to Sociology course. Dr Jackson was young and earnest, but he couldn't communicate enthusiasm in his lectures. The endless droning overcame even two cups of cafeteria coffee and Jeff often found himself slipping into a boredom-induced coma. As a result, he often skipped the 8AM class, attending only when he knew the professor would be showing movies of scientists torturing monkeys, or unfortunate human subjects.

As luck would have it, Jeff *did* choose to attend the class session when Dr Jackson gleefully announced that his charges would have to submit lengthy essays on the founding principals of sociology. That was the bad news, the professor had said. The good news was this was his last class at the University of Montana and, feeling magnanimous, he was willing to let the essay grade stand as the grade for the entire quarter. Students would be free to accept their essay grades as their course grades (it was understood that further attendance was optional), or if the grades weren't to their liking, remain with the class and spend the rest the quarter working to improve their standings. This sounded like a good deal to Jeff, so he jotted down the deadline in his notebook and promptly erased it from his memory.

Two weeks later, Jeff bumped into the professor between morning classes at the University Center. After the exchange of pleasantries, Dr Jackson smiled and said, "I'll be looking forward to your essay, Mr Louden!"

Jeff's mind went instantly blank and he felt a chill race down his spine. "You bet, doctor. And when is that deadline again?"

"Tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock," Dr Jackson said.

"Ah, hah! Great. I'll be there," Jeff replied with a brittle smile.

"Oh shit," Jeff muttered as he walked away. He glanced at his watch and realized that he had only 22 hours to complete an essay he hadn't even started.

He skipped his afternoon classes and sequestered himself in the library until dark, leafing through stacks of references for hours and taking copious notes. Jeff finally returned to his room by way of the Craig Hall lobby, grabbing three bags of Doritos and a can of Coke on the way.

Grady hailed him just as Jeff arrived at his door and placed his key in the lock.

"Jeff!"

"Yes, Grady?"

"There's gonna be a party in Aber Hall tomorrow night. You going?"

Jeff sighed. “That’s the most distant thing from my mind at the moment, man. I have to bang out a 6000-word essay between now and tomorrow morning. Ask me again tomorrow afternoon.” He turned the key, stepped into the room and quickly shut the door, leaving Grady still standing in the hallway.

Twelve hours later, Jeff typed the final lines and pulled the last page from his old Selectric. To him, it was 6000 words of bullshit interspersed with quotes and references, but at least he had finished.

Jeff tried to read it through from the beginning, but he found that he couldn’t concentrate long enough to make sense of the sentences. Even the lettering seemed blurred. The essay would have to stand as he wrote it, without revision. He simply didn’t have the willpower to retrace his rhetorical steps.

Jeff trudged through the snow in the gray dawn, ignoring the wind and the cold. He had even neglected to wear his coat, a fact that drew long stares from passing students. Jeff didn’t notice the stares, or the students, for that matter.

Dr Jackson’s office was closed, so he slipped his precious treasure gently underneath the door. By the time he returned to Duniway, Jeff’s head was ringing. Scott Davies caught his arm as he shuffled through the hall.

“Hello? You okay, Jeff?”

“I’ve been up all night working on an essay.”

“Oh, you poor son of bitch. Let me guess, you forgot a deadline.”

Jeff nodded.

“Any classes this morning?”

“Just the sociology class.”

“Which you are blowing off, of course.”

“Of course,” Jeff sighed, then turned to continue his exhausted journey.

“Grady tells me that there is going to be a party in Aber this evening,”

Scott called after him.

“Uh-huh. He told me, too.”

“He said you were going with him.”

Jeff hesitated, but even this odd revelation was well beyond his intellectual capacity at that moment. He merely waved to Scott, stumbled through his door and fell into bed.

Jeff awoke to the sound of music echoing in the hallway. Although it was still light outside, he had no idea of the time. With a bleary glance at his clock radio, Jeff learned that it was 2 PM.

One of Jeff’s truisms was that your body odor reached critical mass when you could smell it yourself. At this point Jeff believed that he would likely burst into malodorous flames at any second. It had been more than 30 hours since his skin had been subjected to sandblasting by the Duniway showers. That was far too long.

Jeff peeked out the door to make sure no one was coming, then sprinted to the bathroom wearing only his underwear. When he emerged from the shower, Jeff was annoyed to find Grady brushing his teeth before a nearby row of sinks. Jeff fumbled with his towel while struggling to wrap it around his waist as rapidly as possible. He felt a twinge of shame for his nervous reaction. After all, he and Grady had an understanding, didn't they? Still, the awkwardness hung thick and silent in the room.

"Hey!" Grady said, sputtering toothpaste on the mirror.

"Hi, Grady," Jeff replied with as much casualness as he could summon.

Grady rinsed his mouth and spat the water into the sink. "The Aber Hall party starts around 8 o'clock," he said as he dried his face.

"Well, I guess we'll be there, huh?" Jeff replied. He was still a little toasty around the edges from having his sleep schedule thrown askew, but after the events of the last day or so, he thought that a party might not be a bad idea.

Grady grinned. "You bet! I'll stop by your room around that time and we can go together."

"Sounds like you had this planned all along," Jeff said as he peeked into the hallway once more.

"Well, I'm always up for a party and I know how much you enjoy them."

"True," Jeff said with a chuckle. "See you later, Grady."

He made a mad dash back to his room, this time clasping his towel with one hand and holding his dirty underwear with the other. To his horror, Jeff discovered that his door was inexplicably shut and locked. He heard a whispered giggle from behind the door and recognized the voice immediately.

"Runyon!" he howled.

Grady appeared in Jeff's room at the stroke of eight, wearing his trench coat over a bulky sweater. "Don't you have a heavier coat, Grady? Maybe a parka? It's cold out there and we're supposed to get a shitload of snow later tonight."

"No," Grady said with smile. "I like this coat. Worn it since I started high school."

Jeff shrugged and shook his head. "Suit yourself, man."

By the time they reached the fourth floor of Aber Hall, the party was in high gear, such as it was. Unlike most parties they had attended throughout the year, this one could almost be called sedate. Instead of stereo systems pounding out Led Zeppelin or Jimi Hendrix, this gathering was graced with jazz, mostly the fusion variety from the likes of Weather Report and other bands.

They eventually located Scott, sitting in a quiet corner, of course. Jeff refilled Scott's beer and they all sat listening to a group of girls excitedly discussing female orgasm.

“See what I mean?” Scott whispered. “If you just sit back and listen, you discover all sorts of wondrous things at these parties. And besides, a closed mouth gathers no feet.”

Scott and Jeff found the conversation riveting, especially after a hash pipe made the rounds, but Grady demurred and eventually drifted away.

Their highs wore off around midnight and even Scott admitted that the party, like the beer, had gone stale. When the conversation among the women suddenly turned to Jesus, they knew it was time to leave.

After a fruitless search for Grady, they took the elevator to the ground floor and made the long journey back to their dorms. The promised storm had arrived at last and snow was already swirling in the streetlamps.

“Gonna be a bad one,” Scott observed as they walked. “The consolation is that this will probably be the last blast of the winter season.”

“God, I hope so. I should never have let Paul talk me into coming out here.”

“Really?” Scott replied as they followed a snow trench across the Oval. “Did Paul talk you into it, or did you talk yourself into it?”

“Oh, not again,” Jeff groaned.

“Bear with me. I’m curious. Who came up with the idea to apply to U of M? Tell the truth.”

“It was Paul,” Jeff sighed.

“Uh-huh. Then you looked through the university catalog and found a reason why you should be here, too. Correct?”

“Yes, I confess. What do you want from me?”

“Just the truth,” Scott laughed and pointed to a street lamp. “*Lux et veritas*, and there is the light to go with it. Remember?”

“Good lord,” Jeff replied. “You should have been a psych major, Scott. You’ve missed your calling.”

They met Rich Runyon and Paul Jepson in the Craig Hall lobby. The dynamic duo had just returned from a sorority party and they were disappointingly sober as well.

“Shitty night for parties,” Scott said.

“No kidding,” Paul replied. “We spent the whole damn evening with a bunch of pudgy girls at Rho Theta god-damn Kappa, or something like that.”

“Gamma Gamma Moo from the look of them,” Rich added. “Was Grady with you guys?”

“Yes,” Jeff said. “But we lost track of him. Maybe he got lucky.”

“Let’s see if he’s in his room,” Rich replied. “We can roust him and share a joint at my place.”

When they reached Grady’s room, they heard music behind the door. Rich lifted his fist to knock, but then Grady moaned softly. Rich stepped back from the door with his hand on his lips.

“Is he sick again?” Paul asked.

“Not likely,” Rich whispered with a grin. “I think our man Grady has a conquest in there!”

“You can’t be serious,” Paul replied.

Jeff took a deep breath and began to turn away. Scott leaned toward Jeff’s ear and whispered, “What’s wrong?”

Before Jeff could answer, Rich opened a small access door in the opposite wall and removed a fire extinguisher. He quickly pulled the hose free and flipped the brass tank upside down.

“No!” Jeff shouted, but it was too late. Flipping the old soda-acid extinguisher started a chemical reaction that could not be stopped. The tank filled with carbon dioxide gas and sent water rushing through the hose, precisely as it was designed to do. Rich kicked open Grady’s door and tossed the tank inside. The hose began flailing wildly, spraying water into the darkness.

Two voices, one clearly belonging to Grady, screamed. Rich Runyon howled with laughter, but it was abruptly cut short. The only sound remaining was the hiss of the extinguisher.

Rich backed slowly out of the room, shaking his head in stunned disbelief. His face had gone ashen. Other students had emerged from their rooms at the sound of the commotion and now they crowded behind Rich to catch a glimpse of whatever it was he had discovered.

“Jesus Christ,” Rich shouted, a hand flying to mouth. “They’re ass fucking! Grady is letting some dude fuck him up the ass!”

“Oh, man,” Paul said in slack-jawed amazement.

“Can you believe it?” Rich shouted again. The other students backed away hurriedly. “Grady is queer!”

Jeff lunged forward and grabbed Rich by the back of his collar. Rich was off balance and fell backward, but Jeff hauled him upright and twisted his arm behind his back. “Not another word,” Jeff snarled. “Not one more fucking word.”

“Ow! Jesus!” Rich cried.

Grady’s door slammed shut with such force that the walls trembled. Jeff released Rich and he staggered into Paul, almost knocking him down. Rich looked back with wide eyes, grimacing and rubbing his arm.

“I’m sorry, Jeff” he muttered. “I didn’t know.”

“Everyone needs to go back to their rooms,” Scott announced. “Unless you want Grindel down here in a hurry, we all need to go to our rooms. *Lei capisce?*”

They understood Scott very well indeed. The small crowd melted back to their respective rooms, including Paul who shook his head sadly and vanished down the hallway without further comment.

“I really *am* sorry,” Rich said as Jeff returned to his room and began to close the door.

“I know,” Jeff sighed. “We’ll talk later.”

“You did well, Jeff,” Scott said as he walked away.

Jeff lit a candle and doused the lights. The KRAP transmitter was still active, broadcasting dead air to the masses at 88.5 on your FM dial, so Jeff queued up Van Morrison’s *Astral Weeks*. He sat by the window and watched the snowstorm, which had by now whipped itself into a bona-fide blizzard. He waited more than an hour for Grady’s knock on his door, but it never came.

Early the following morning, Jeff walked to Grady’s room and knocked lightly. There was no response.

“Grady?” Jeff whispered. Nothing.

He turned the knob and discovered that the door wasn’t locked—it wasn’t even latched. Jeff stepped into the room to find that it was empty. This didn’t come as a surprise. What *did* concern him was the sight of Grady’s beloved trench coat folded neatly on his bed.

Jeff searched the bathrooms, the lounges and everywhere in between. When he returned to his room, he found Scott Davies waiting for him.

“Where’s Grady?” Scott asked.

“I don’t know. I’ve been looking for him everywhere throughout Craig and Duniway. I’m hoping he went to breakfast.”

Scott frowned. “I don’t think he would have gone to the cafeteria. There’s four feet of drifting snow between here and there.”

“Especially not without his trench coat,” Jeff added. “It’s still in his room.”

“Really?” Scott said as he glanced down the hall. “Tell you what, I’m gonna get my parka and go see if his Camaro is still in the parking lot. I hope he wasn’t foolish enough to try driving in this weather.”

Jeff nodded. “I’ll grab my coat and meet you at the north doors.”

Minutes later they stood together with the wind-driven snow stinging their faces. The space beside the basketball court where Grady always parked his Camaro was empty. From the amount of snow that had covered the asphalt, Scott guessed that the car had been gone for some time.

“He said his parents lived in Frenchtown,” Jeff said over the howl of the storm.

Scott shrugged and shook his head. “I can only hope he’s with them.”

They walked to the Craig Hall lounge and warmed themselves over cups of hot coffee while they watched the snow pile into mammoth drifts outside the windows. By evening, the storm had blown itself out, but Grady didn’t return.

Late Sunday afternoon, Steve Grindel knocked on Jeff’s door and asked if he had seen Grady. A man Jeff recognized as the UM chief of campus

security accompanied him. The cop explained that Grady's mother had called after Grady had missed their usual Sunday lunch together.

Jeff told them story of what had happened Friday night and the security chief listened intently. He asked for the names of everyone involved, along with their room numbers.

Grindel stood frowning and shaking his head. "And where is the fire extinguisher?" he asked. "Should I assume it is still in Wallace's room?"

"You won't have to worry, Grindel," Jeff almost spat the RA's last name. "Grady cleaned up the mess."

The cop glanced at Grindel and sighed. "You may have more to worry about here than a fire extinguisher, Steve. Come back to the office with me and I'll fill you in on Grady Wallace's parents."

"Of course," Grindel replied, blushing slightly.

Two days came and went. Still there was no sign of Grady Wallace. Jeff had also seen little of Rich, Paul or Scott. The mood throughout second-floor Duniway and Craig was dark. Even the music had ceased. The gossip grapevine was flourishing, of course, but no one dared to speak openly about what had happened.

By mid-week, Missoula police had visited the dorm, combing through Grady's room and interviewing everyone on the floor.

"Grady hasn't been to his parent's home," a detective told them. "He hasn't telephoned, either. If any of you hear from him, call us immediately."

But they wouldn't hear from Grady again. His Camaro was found a week later at the end of an old logging road in Rattlesnake Canyon. There was no body, and no sign of blood or violence. Grady had simply walked into the storm and disappeared.

Chapter 12

Rich Runyon

The mood on the first floor of Duniway Hall never recovered from the emotional maelstrom surrounding Grady Wallace's disappearance. Spring—real spring, not a faux spring—had arrived at last, and yet the spirits of the Duniway denizens remained muted. Students now chose to mingle quietly with small groups of friends. When they weren't haunting Missoula bars (now that walking and driving around town had become pleasant again), their doors were closed and the privacy of headphones replaced blasting speakers.

Paul arrived at Jeff's room one Friday afternoon to find him sitting on his windowsill, enjoying the novelty of the fresh warm breezes.

"No music?" Paul asked as he stood in the doorway.

Jeff shook his head. "No. I'm just relaxing in the silence of the moment. What brings you here? Usually I'm the one going to your room, not vice versa."

"I was wondering what Rich was up to. I haven't seen him much lately."

"And since I was just across the hall, it must have been a challenge for you to figure out a way to slink back to your room without me seeing you."

Paul frowned. "What's wrong with you, Jeff?"

"The same thing that's been wrong with me since we got here," Jeff said with a shrug.

"Oh. Now I'm sorry I asked."

Jeff shook his head. "You really don't get it, do you?"

"I get...I get that you're having a hissy fit like some premenstrual woman. And just like with a woman, I have no idea what you are being so pissy about."

Jeff couldn't stop a grin from spreading across his lips. Paul responded in kind.

"Jeff, are you trying to fuck with me?"

"You just don't love me like you used to," Jeff replied with a chuckle.

Paul walked up to Jeff and patted him on the head. "I will always love you, man," he said with a laugh. "You just need to stop thinking so much. That's been your problem for as long as I've known you. Besides, relationships change. People change. Chances are, we'll always be friends but the distance may vary. Do you understand what I mean?"

Before Jeff could answer, Rich Runyon strolled into the room. He was carrying a manila folder stuffed with paper.

"Hey, Rich!" Paul said.

Rich nodded, but didn't smile. "Guys, I have some bad news." He tossed his folder on the bed. "Those are my walking papers."

Jeff shook his head. "Say what?"

"I'm out of here," Rich replied. "I'm dropping out."

"Why?" Paul asked.

Rich sat on the bed with his hands clasped between his knees. He stared at the floor for at least 30 seconds before answering.

"I had no business being in college," Rich began. "Like I told Jeff once, coming here was just a way to get out of a bad situation at home. My grades suck. I hardly go to class. Grindel has me up on a formal complaint about the Mega Bong incident and then...that thing with Grady. I've had enough."

"You're going back to Florida?" Jeff asked.

"No. I know a guy in New Orleans who can get me a job with a big oil company. I'll probably be working on an off-shore rig in the Gulf of Mexico by summer."

"When...when are you leaving?" Paul stammered.

"I have a flight tomorrow morning."

To Jeff it seemed as though the spring breeze had taken on a sudden chill. He turned and closed the window. Rich stood, clutched his folder and forced a smile.

"Look at it this way, guys. It was meant to happen. This really isn't about Grindel or Grady, when push comes to shove. I was the man who pulled the ultimate fuck up. I ruined myself...and I ruined Grady."

"Whoa. Wait a minute," Paul said.

Rich shook his head. "There's nothing you can say, Paul. I know what the truth is. Don't try to sugarcoat it for me."

With that, Rich slipped into the hallway and unlocked the door to his room. "Come here, guys," he called out.

Jeff and Paul walked slowly into Rich's room. "All this crap," Rich began as he waved his arms, "is the flotsam and jetsam of my brief career here at U of M. I'm only packing one small suitcase, so most this stuff has to remain behind."

"What are you going to do with it?" Jeff asked. "You bought a nice stereo system. Lots of records, too."

Rich placed his hand on Jeff's shoulder. "That's why I need your help, man. I need you to make some appeals on KRAP for me. Tell your listeners that everything is free—first come, first served."

"Oh, man," Paul said. "You should at least get some cash for--"

"No. I just want all of this gone as soon as possible. I need these albatrosses plucked from my neck today," Rich said with a smile, but it faded quickly. "This ancient mariner already has enough albatrosses to last a lifetime."

"This sucks," Jeff spat.

“Indeed it does,” Rich replied, holding up a forefinger. “But life is filled with sucky moments and this is just one of them. There will be better times for all of us.”

“Okay,” Jeff said. “I’ll get on the air and start making announcements. If I announce a party for tonight, that’ll bring even more people.”

“No thanks, Jeff. No parties. I’m done with all that.”

For the rest of the afternoon, Jeff played his albums on KRAP and announced the “Rich Runyon Going Out of Business Sale,” as they called it. Scott Davies was among the first to drift by. He claimed Rich’s new, unopened copy of Steely Dan’s *Pretzel Logic* album and offered Rich cash in return. Rich refused, so Scott handed the LP to Jeff, who ripped off the cellophane wrapper and queued it up on the KRAP turntable.

“I’m going on a errand,” Scott said as Donald Fagan crooned. “I’ll be back after dinner.” He turned and watched as a smiling student walked away with an armful of records.

“Picking the bones clean,” Scott muttered.

By 6 o’clock, Rich’s room was mostly bare. The stereo disappeared a half-hour before, thanks to a couple of girls from Jesse Hall. Even the porn posters on Rich’s wall had vanished, leaving faint shadows of their former selves on the plaster.

“Well, Jeff,” Rich called out. “I began like this and I end like this—standing here with nothing but a bare, boxy room.”

“I remember,” Jeff replied with a nod. He turned down the KRAP audio and strolled into Rich’s room. “This was also the way my hovel looked on that first day in September.”

“A thousand years ago,” Rich said with a slight laugh. “It’s already fading into dreamland.”

Paul appeared in the doorway. “You guys up for something to eat?”

“Why not?” Rich replied. “I wouldn’t mind dining in the cafeteria one last time.”

The cafeteria was packed with students. It was as though everyone on campus had decided to eat dinner at the same moment. The food lines snaked along the walls at both ends of the dining room and the kitchen staff was darting among the hungry students, gathering dishes and wiping down tables.

They took their places in line and began inching toward the buffet.

“Oh, I’m gonna miss this,” Rich shouted above the din.

When they finally reached the buffet, Rich reached over the salad and shook hands with a startled woman. “I hope you don’t mind, ma’am. This is my last meal, so I want to do it right.”

He filled a large bowl with lettuce, then drenched it with ranch dressing. As Rich moved down the line, he grabbed two cheeseburgers and a plate overflowing with onion rings. He also took two slices of chocolate cream pie.

When the University of Montana cafeteria was teeming with students, “situational awareness,” as pilots called it, was essential. Jeff was well aware of the hazards and had his head on a swivel as they left the buffet and weaved their way to a half-empty table. More than once he narrowly avoided bumping into students and furniture. He was grateful to see their “landing strip” only 10 feet away.

A cafeteria busboy with an armload of dirty dishes emerged from behind the milk dispensers. The plates were piled so high, his chin was resting on the topmost plate just to keep the stack stable. Jeff saw him coming and stopped, but Rich was oblivious to the approaching disaster. Instead, he was staring intently at a lithe blonde sophomore wearing a revealing halter-top.

The busboy veered at the last moment, but in doing so, he disrupted the delicate balance and started his plates on an inexorable slide to the floor. Jeff could see the hopeless horror dawning in the busboy’s eyes as he crouched in a futile attempt to forestall the spill. Rich must have detected motion out of the corner of his eye because he suddenly began to turn away from the falling stack.

It was all too late. The plates tumbled to the tiles and shattered with an explosive crash. Rich danced sideways, tried to regain his footing, then completely upended his tray, sending pies, cheeseburgers, onion rings and salad to the floor with yet another peal of ceramic thunder.

For about two seconds everyone fell silent, then the cafeteria erupted in a crescendo of applause. The students at a nearby table stood, then more students joined them. The standing ovation spread through the room until every soul in the place, even the workers, were applauding and whistling.

Rich bowed deeply. The busboy hesitated, then bowed as well. A grim matronly woman in a white uniform approached with a two sets of brooms and dustpans. Rich and the busboy nodded, then went to work cleaning up the disaster.

Jeff and Paul stooped to help, but Rich waved them off. “This is my mess,” he said with a smile. “Let me enjoy it.”

Scott was waiting in Rich’s room when they finally returned. He was lying on the bed, reading from Jeff’s copy of the *Communist Manifesto*.

“How do you manage to wade through this dreck?” he asked.

“I don’t,” Jeff grinned.

“Are you taking over my room, Scott?” Rich asked.

“Hardly. I wouldn’t willingly live across the hall from KRAP,” Scott said with a wink. “No, I’ve been out shopping and I was waiting for the rest of you to get back from dinner.”

Scott tossed the *Communist Manifesto* into a nearby wastebasket. “You don’t mind, do you, Jeff?”

“Nope,” Jeff chuckled.

Scott reached into his coat pocket and produced a small package wrapped in aluminum foil. They all huddled around as Scott carefully peeled back the foil layers, revealing a beige cube about one inch on each side.

“Wow,” Paul said. “Hash!”

“Pure Lebanese,” Scott replied with a smile.

Rich closed the door and began sorting through his open suitcase. “I’m glad I didn’t toss this,” he said as pulled out his signature corncob pipe.

Scott used his pocketknife to shave a tiny piece of hash from the cube, then placed it into the bowl of the pipe and handed it to Rich. “First honors,” he said.

“Allow me,” Paul said as he leaned in with his cigarette lighter. The hash was soon glowing in the bowl and sending forth a thin stream of white smoke. To Jeff it smelled like sweet incense and he inhaled eagerly when the pipe was passed to him.

After the hash had been thoroughly consumed, they all dragged themselves into Jeff’s room. Scott planted himself cross-legged on the floor beneath the window while Paul and Rich sat on the bed. Jeff flipped on the KRAP transmitter and dug out Janis Joplin’s *Pearl*.

“Thanks, Scott. I really appreciated that,” Rich said.

“You want to take it with you?” Scott asked.

“Nah. It would be my luck that someone in the airport would find it in my suitcase.”

“Man, I tell you,” Paul began with a sigh. “This has been a strange seven months.”

Rich nodded. “Tell me about it. Just look at us. We’re four lost souls at the edge of the world. Who in their right mind chooses to go to college in Montana?”

“Fuckin’ eh,” Paul mumbled.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Scott said. “Sometimes this campus seems almost magical to me. Missoula is in a different world, but it is a good world.”

Rich grunted, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

When side two of *Pearl* came to an end, Rich stood and stretched. “Gents, I have some people to see yet this evening, then I kind of need to turn in early.”

“How are you getting to the airport?” Jeff asked.

“I have a cab picking me up at 6 AM.”

“Get me up before you go,” Jeff said.

“Me, too” Paul added. Scott put up his hand and smiled.

“So the three musketeers are going to see me off, eh?” Rich grinned. They all nodded.

“Good enough,” Rich replied as he opened the door. He hesitated and looked around. “You always had a nice room, Jeff. Kick ass stereo, too.”

Jeff smiled weakly. "Thanks, Rich."
"See you all tomorrow," Rich waved, then was gone.

The sun had yet to climb over the mountains when they gathered in the Duniway parking lot. A slight breeze carried the aroma of brewing coffee from the cafeteria. Beyond their own conversation and the songs of awakening birds, however, the campus was silent.

Rich stood beside his suitcase, shuffling his feet and clearly eager to be on his way. "Once I'm resigned to action," he said as they had stepped outside the dorm, "there's nothing to do but move. I've got a new life down the road and I need to get there."

"How long does it take to reach New Orleans?" Scott asked.

"Well, the flight from Missoula goes to Bozeman, then on to Salt Lake City. From there I catch a plane that will take me the rest of the way."

"You'll be flying all day, I bet," Paul said.

"Pretty much so, but that's okay. I don't mind flying, unlike some people." He grinned and winked at Jeff.

"Hey," Jeff protested. "I'm much better than I used to be. Before it was sheer terror, but now I just feel mild panic. That's all thanks to Paul."

Rich thought he heard the sound of an approaching car and glanced out to the street. The noise died away and the taxi didn't appear.

"Jeff, just so you know, I didn't tell Audrey or Leigh that I was leaving," Rich said.

Jeff hadn't seen either of them for at least a month, but he smiled and said, "I know they'll be depressed at the news, but they'll get over it."

"Would you make me a promise, Jeff?"

"Sure, Rich. What is it?"

"Speak with Audrey. Tell her again that I'm sorry. If she had expected me to give her some money for...you know...the antibiotics, tell her I apologize for that, too. I could barely afford my own, you know?"

This was one promise that Jeff had no intention of keeping. So he put on his most cheerful grin and said, "I'll tell her. She'll be fine, I'm sure."

"Hey, man," Paul called out. "Here comes your cab."

A yellow Chevy Impala glided to the curb and the driver popped open the trunk. Rich handed him the suitcase, then turned to embrace Jeff. "I really appreciate everything you've done, man. You've been a real friend through all this."

"Same here, Rich."

Rich hugged Paul and Scott in turn, then shook hands with everyone. "Well," he sighed, "one chapter closes and another opens. If I never see you guys again, I wish you peace. Be happy and stay out of trouble."

Rich slipped into the taxi, the driver closed his door and they circled the parking lot (with Rich waving furiously) before disappearing into the street.

Jeff, Paul and Scott stood listening to the fading sound of the engine.

"I'm gonna grab some breakfast, as long as I'm up," Paul said at last.

"I'll pass," Scott replied, and began to walk away.

"I'll pass, too," Jeff said and climbed the stairs to the dorm.

He found Rich's door standing open and walked inside the empty room. The sheets were wadded into a ball where Rich had left them at the foot of the bed. On the desk, Jeff saw Rich's prized pipe and a slip of paper.

I KNEW YOU'D STOP BY MY ROOM, JEFF, SO I LEFT THIS FOR YOU. KEEP IT SAFE AND USE IT WELL. FUCK STEVE GRINDEL!—
RICH

Jeff pocketed the pipe and laughed to himself, recalling Rich's improvised gas mask and the infamous Mega Bong.

He returned to his room and put the Rolling Stone's *Beggar's Banquet* on the turntable. "Good morning, Missoula," Jeff began. "This is KRAP, the voice of the revolution coming to you from the campus of the University of Montana. Our first song of the day is played in honor of Rich Runyon, late of Duniway Hall and now on his way to New Orleans."

Jeff lowered the needle to the record and turned up his speakers. He hoped Rich was listening, but doubted it highly. Jeff stood before the speakers and remembered when Grady Wallace gleefully sang as "Sympathy for the Devil" boomed through the hallway. Rich had joined Grady that night, playing air guitar with a broom.

Jeff smiled at the memory and he was sure that he would never meet anyone quite like either of them again.

Chapter 13

You Say You Want a Revolution

On the evening of April 15, 1974, the network news broadcast a photograph of Patty Hearst holding an automatic weapon in front of a Symbionese Liberation Army flag. Seeing the publishing heiress in such a revolutionary pose was strange enough, but...

"...wasn't the SLA the group that kidnapped her to begin with?" Paul asked.

"Yeah. Back in February," Jeff replied, still staring at the television. Paul and Jeff had shared an after-dinner hit of hash with Scott Davies and, as always, immediately discovered an intense need to relax. The plush couches of the Craig Hall TV lounge seemed like excellent destinations.

"Is Patty your idea of a revolutionary?" Paul asked.

"I don't think so. I have no idea what the Symbionese Liberation Army is, or what they are rebelling against. I don't believe Patty Hearst does, either."

"Speaking of revolution," Scott began, "I presume you heard about the Nixon impeachment rally coming up."

"Yep," Jeff replied. "The SDS is sponsoring it Friday afternoon on the Oval. It's not just a babblefest. I understand there is going to be music."

"Well, that might make it worthwhile," Paul said.

"Maybe," Jeff replied. "If it weren't for the music, I would definitely blow it off."

Paul turned and stared. "Would you repeat what you just said?"

Jeff shrugged. "You heard me."

Scott leaned forward and watched the exchange with bemused interest.

"Our own answer to Vladimir Illyich Lenin would blow off an SDS rally? Say it ain't so!" Paul crowed.

"I just said I probably wouldn't go except for the music," Jeff replied. "Look, I don't march in lockstep with those people. Hell, I'm beginning to think they're kind of silly most of the time."

Paul gaped. "Wow! What the hell has happened to you? On the way to Missoula last September, you talked about--"

"So you *do* remember that conversation!" Jeff interjected.

"—wanting to overthrow the government. Now you're not sure if you want to attend a little pep rally."

"Protest rally," Jeff corrected. "You said it yourself, Paul. Things change. Maybe I'm changing. I don't know."

"I suspect you are," Scott said at last. "I suspect we all are. Haven't you guys noticed how much more seriously we take our classes and grades these days?"

“Yeah,” Paul replied sullenly. “I’m down to two months and I need to do something to pull a B out of my resource management course.”

“Too bad you don’t have a prof like Dr Jackson,” Jeff chuckled. “Did I tell you guys about that?”

“You said something about an essay grade being accepted as your Sociology 101 grade for the entire quarter,” Scott said.

“That’s right. And didn’t you notice that I was sleeping late every morning through the end of winter quarter?”

“You’re shitting me!” Paul shouted. “You pulled an all nighter and nearly blew the deadline. You said your essay was pure crap.”

“That’s what I thought, too, but Dr Jackson disagreed and handed me an A.”

“Fuck you,” Paul spat, shaking his head.

“Jeff has the gift of Blarney,” Scott laughed. “Take it from me. I’ve seen him in action at dorm parties.”

“Speaking of parties,” Jeff interrupted, suddenly eager to change the subject, “I was told that some girls on the first floor of Corbin Hall are going to be doing something this evening.”

“*Something?*” Paul asked. “Man, that has lame written all over it.”

“Suit yourself,” Jeff shrugged. “I’m not going to spend the night with my ass planted on this couch.” He stood and gathered his fatigue jacket.

“Jeff has a point,” Scott said as he joined Jeff at the door. “Are you coming, Paul?”

Paul leaned forward, but then fell back into the cushions with a laugh. “No, I really *do* want to spend the night with my fat white ass planted firmly on this couch. Thanks anyway.”

As it turned out, Paul’s prediction concerning the Corbin party was largely on target. At first, Jeff and Scott couldn’t even find the party. When they tracked down the source of the Peter, Paul and Mary music wafting through the hallway, they discovered about a dozen senior girls in a large dorm room sitting around a junky stereo. The walls of the room were adorned with posters of actor Robert Redford, and a curly haired fellow with a guitar who Jeff didn’t recognize.

“Who the hell is that?” Jeff whispered.

“Terry Jacks. ‘Seasons in the Sun,’” Scott mumbled. “Do you remember that hideous song?”

“Good god,” Jeff replied.

“Hi,” Jeff said as they entered the room. The girls stared as if Jeff had just introduced himself as the Boston Strangler.

A shockingly thin girl wearing green granny glasses and Kalso Earth Shoes (one of the great abominations of the ‘70s) regarded them with a smirk.

“Who *are* you guys?”

“I’m Jeff Loudon. This is Scott Davies.”

A few of the girls nodded, but most just continued to stare.

“Are you here for the feminine consciousness session?” the Kalso girl asked.

Scott and Jeff exchanged glances. “No,” Scott replied. “I don’t think so. Our consciousnesses are decidedly male—at least for the moment. We’re obviously in the wrong place. Excuse us.”

Jeff waved at the incredulous faces before following Scott down the hallway as quickly as possible. When they bolted through the doors and back into the cool night air, their lungs seemed to explode with pent-up laughter.

“That was *really* awkward!” Scott howled.

Jeff was laughing so hard he had difficulty catching his breath. “I had a zero percent probability of getting lucky in that room,” he gasped.

“Well I’ll be damned. A couple of hyenas lurking outside Corbin Hall,” Leigh Simmons said as she stepped out of the shadows. “Don’t tell me you guys were in there looking for a party?”

“Hey, Leigh!” Scott said.

“As I live and breathe,” Jeff added.

Leigh smiled and shook her head. “You two are pathetic.”

“It’s a pathetic night,” Scott replied. “How are you?”

“I’m fine. Haven’t seen you two around much. Paul, either.”

“How is Audrey?” Jeff asked. He thought he saw a bit of sadness creep into Leigh’s smile at the mention of her name.

“She’s doing alright, I suppose. We don’t hang out that much these days. We’re both too busy with our classes.”

“I know where you’re coming from,” Jeff replied. “It has been pretty intense for us, too. And strange.”

“Yeah, I heard about Grady, of course, then Rich leaving. You guys must be bummed.”

Jeff and Scott nodded at the same time. Leigh glanced at her wristwatch. “I was just on my way to the Wilma theater to see *Heavy Traffic*.”

“By yourself?” Scott asked.

“Yeah. There was nothing else going on. Why don’t you fellows come with me—unless you have studying to do?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Scott began. “We just left what’s likely to turn into a very hot little party in Corbin Hall.”

“Once they elevate their consciousnesses,” Jeff added.

“Bullshit,” Leigh said, and suddenly linked arms with Jeff. Their eyes locked and she grinned “I could use a couple of handsome escorts to the movie.”

Scott winked at Jeff and nodded.

“Works for me,” Jeff replied.

“Quite right,” Scott said cheerily as he fell in behind them.

Friday afternoon was glorious with abundant sunshine and the warm promise of the summer to come. Students were passing Frisbees in the Oval while the SDS Impeach Nixon rally occupied the area immediately in front of University Hall. Jeff had found a comfortable spot to sit in the grass near the stage, not terribly concerned about how authentic he did or didn't appear this time. The music was passable (except for the guy who desperately wanted to be the next Woody Guthrie) and although Jeff found himself in agreement with most of the Nixon tirades, his attention kept wandering.

The afternoon is too beautiful to be angry, he thought.

He noticed Scott Davies standing by the edge of the Oval and waved until he caught his attention. Scott returned the wave and smiled.

"What's happening, man?" Scott shouted as he strolled through the crowd, eventually taking a seat on the grass beside him.

"Just enjoying the day. You?"

"I was on my way to the geology lab. I set up an erosion project and I wanted to add a few finishing touches. With luck I'll snag an A for the quarter."

"Really? That sounds very cool. You'll have to show me."

The protest speeches were apparently intended as inspirational filler to occupy the audience between music sets. Jeff and Scott passed the news of the day as the speaker chastised the crowd for its lack of revolutionary fervor. As the rant sputtered to a stop, a couple took the stage, both carrying acoustic guitars. Without a word of introduction, they began a tender rendition of "500 Miles."

"They aren't Peter, Paul and Mary," Jeff said, "but they're not bad."

"It's kind of a lonely song, don't you think?" Scott asked.

"Yes, it is."

Scott nodded grimly. After the couple sang a handful of similarly morose songs, a student Jeff recognized as "Che" from the infamous poster sale took the microphone.

"Brothers and sisters, we're gathered not just for music on this fantastic afternoon, but to consider the war crimes of a demon named Richard Nixon."

Che hesitated and there was scattered applause.

"Nixon's minions are still in southeast Asia, burning villages and bayoneting babies as I speak."

"I have a brother in Saigon," Scott whispered. "He's too busy trying to stay alive to bayonet a baby. This guy is full of shit."

"We need to get our killing machines out of Vietnam!" Che shouted before being overwhelmed by a blast of feedback.

"We need to get our troops home so that that more won't be killed in that god forsaken place," Scott grumbled.

Jeff found himself nodding in agreement. “And the asshole doesn’t even know how to handle a microphone.”

“This is so much bullshit,” Scott sighed.

“Hey, let’s bug out and take a look at your project,” Jeff suggested. “This is getting very old very quickly.”

Jeff and Scott took their time getting to the geology lab. They joined a Frisbee football game in front of the journalism building, then flirted with a couple of girls who had been watching from the sidelines. (“There is always time to stop and talk to pretty women,” Scott had observed.) By the time they reached the lab, it was deserted.

Scott fished out a key and held it up for Jeff to see. “This is what you get when you’re a trusted student,” he said with a smile.

“Then your professor is a fool,” Jeff smirked as Scott unlocked the door.

They entered the lab, walking between long black islands graced with faucets and sinks. At the back of the room stood a wide aluminum pan filled with earth. A stack of bricks elevated one end; the other end rested on the floor and featured a screened drain with a hose. A similar hose hung on the wall.

“This is my ticket to an ace in Geology 103,” Scott announced.

Jeff rubbed the stubble on his chin and frowned. “I don’t get it.”

“Okay, imagine that this tilting pan of dirt is a piece of flat, ordinary land.”

“I’m with you so far.”

Scott plucked the hose from the wall and turned a valve handle slightly. He held the hose at the elevated edge of the pan and a small stream of water began running across the soil.

“Now we’ve introduced a river. Watch what happens.”

“But where would the river come from?” Jeff asked. “You mean it just magically appears?”

“Sure. Why not?”

“But how is that realistic? I mean, rivers don’t just magically appear.”

Scott rolled his eyes. “I’ll say it is coming from a melting glacier.”

“A present-day glacier, or at the end of the last Ice Age?”

“I think you’re missing the point, Jeff.”

“Not so. Your demo has a huge logical gap. You can’t explain the appearance of your river.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!”

“There’s your answer,” Jeff grinned. “It’s a biblical miracle.”

“Stop trying to play with my head and watch the god damn river!”

As Jeff watched, the imaginary river began to carve a long valley in the pan. At the bottom of the pan, the river spread into a delta and pooled, presumably as a sea.

“This sho ‘nuff is a powerful miracle,” Jeff said.

“Fuck you.”

“All kidding aside, Scott, it is quite cool. I understand what you’re doing here. This is supposed to be a few thousand of years of geology evolving before my eyes, right?”

“Bingo,” Scott smiled.

Suddenly they heard a loud crash from another room. “What the hell was that?” Scott asked as he turned off the hose.

“Whatever it is, we’ll probably catch the blame,” Jeff replied. They made a hurried exit from the lab and heard another crash, this one louder than the first.

“What the fuck?” Scott muttered as they followed the noise. It led them to another research lab used by graduate students and professors. The door was standing open and they walked into the room to find five hooded figures hurling bottles of lab chemicals against the walls.

“What the fuck are you people doing?” Scott shouted as he ran to close the chemical cabinets. A tall student wearing a red T-shirt emblazoned with a yellow hammer and sickle stepped into Scott’s path.

“Stay back, brother,” the student growled.

“I’m not your brother.”

“We are all brothers in the cause,” a girl shouted as she scattered a sheath of research papers. “The people who work in this room are destroying our environment. They’ll use these tools to figure out new ways to despoil the land, tearing it to pieces in search of copper, just like they did in Butte.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Jeff said.

“I’m *talking* about the wholesale rape of Mother Nature,” the girl replied with an exasperated stare.

“So you’re gonna rape our labs instead?” Scott shouted.

Scott tried to step around the burly activist, but he planted both hands on Scott’s chest and pushed him back. Another hooded figure suddenly picked up a chair and sent it flying across the room, striking Scott on the back of his head and sending him sprawling across a lab table.

The thug with the hammer and sickle T-shirt stepped back in shocked surprise. Jeff rushed forward and no one tried to stop him.

“Shit!” the girl cried. “Get out. We need to get out of here.” They scrambled out the door in a panic, knocking over chairs and tables as they went.

Jeff reached Scott just as he slumped to the floor. He grabbed Scott underneath his arms and lowered him slowly. Scott’s hair was matted and

dark with blood. The blood had also soaked into the back of his red flannel shirt.

“Oh, shit,” Jeff moaned as he leaned Scott’s back against a cabinet door. Scott sighed loudly and his eyes fluttered open. “Bastards,” he mumbled.

“I need to call security, Scott. Will you just sit here until I get back?”

“I don’t feel like going anywhere at the moment.”

Jeff returned minutes later with a roll of paper towels.

“They’re on their way,” Jeff said as he tore off a sheet and used it to staunch the blood that was still trickling from the back of Scott’s head.

“Ouch!” Scott winced. “Careful back there.”

“Did you recognize any of those assholes?” Jeff asked.

“Nope. I don’t think they were students.”

“Do you want to try to stand?”

“Sure.”

Jeff took both of Scott’s hands and pulled him to his feet.

“Whoa!” Scott said as he braced himself on the edge of a table.

“Dizzy?”

“You betcha.”

They heard sirens in the parking lot and soon a campus cop and two emergency medical technicians came jogging into the lab. The EMTs bandaged Scott’s head and, with more than a little persuasion, managed to get him to lay on their stretcher. They checked Scott’s vital signs and gave him a couple of Tylenol tablets with a glass of water. In the meantime, the cop took statements from Scott and Jeff, then called on his radio for Missoula police.

“We need to take you the hospital,” one of the EMTs said.

“Sorry, no can do,” Scott answered as he swung his feet over the edge of the stretcher.

“But you probably have a concussion,” the EMT protested.

“It’s my life. And it isn’t illegal to be foolish with it, last time I checked,” Scott said.

He stood slowly, reaching to Jeff for support. The EMT glanced at the cop, who merely shrugged.

“So you’re refusing treatment?” the EMT asked, although it sounded more like a statement.

“I am indeed.”

“Not a wise choice,” Jeff whispered.

“I know what I’m doing,” Scott replied. “Does that mean we’re free to go?”

“I guess so,” the EMT replied with a disgusted shake of his head.

The Missoula police came screeching up to the lab just as Jeff and Scott stepped back into the afternoon sunshine. By now a small crowd had formed and they gaped at Scott’s bloodied shirt and bandaged head. Paul intercepted them as they crossed the lawn on their way to Craig Hall.

“What the fuck happened to you?” he cried.

“I had a disagreement with a group of environmentalists. You’ll probably read about it in the newspapers tomorrow morning.”

“They were trashing the graduate lab,” Jeff said. “We surprised them and one of the assholes brained Scott with a chair.”

“Good lord,” Paul grimaced. “How do you feel?”

“Like I’ve been smacked with a chair,” Scott smiled.

“Why aren’t you in a hospital?” Paul asked.

“I hate hospitals,” Scott replied. “Besides, the ambulance guys told me that they didn’t think my skull was fractured. I just need to take it easy.”

When they reached the Craig Hall entrance, Scott waved them back.

“Stay here and enjoy the rest of the day, guys. I need to go to my room and take a nap. Okay?”

Scott left them sitting glumly on the cool granite steps. Yet another angry speech from the SDS rally echoed between the buildings as Jeff glanced at the sleeves of his fatigue jacket and saw that they were stained with Scott’s blood. Paul noticed the stains too.

“That was your favorite jacket,” Paul said quietly.

“It doesn’t matter,” Jeff replied. “I think I’m done with it anyway.”

Chapter 14

A Night at the Movies

“Yes siree!” Scott laughed. “I want to ride in the back of a B17 bomber and get my ass shot away!”

A very young Burgess Meredith grinned and saluted an equally young Ronald Regan.

“And then I’ll reincarnate as The Joker!” another voice called out. The crowd laughed.

About 50 feet from where Paul, Jeff and Scott were sitting in the cool grass of the Oval on a late April evening, the Student Activities group had erected a screen and a large set of loudspeakers for “Movies Al Fresco.” How they had managed to dig up the World War II recruiting film *The Rear Gunner*, Jeff had no idea. Moreover, *why* they had decided to show it to the students was an unfathomable mystery. No matter. The movie was only 20 minutes long, a prelude to what they had really come to see: Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Dragon*.

“This is a hoot,” Paul said. “I didn’t know The Joker had ever made a recruiting film.”

“And it is so unquestioning, if you know I mean,” Jeff replied. “They look downright happy to be risking their lives.”

Scott nodded. “Hard to imagine believing in something so strongly that you’d be willing to put your life on the line for it.”

Paul laughed. “Damn right. I don’t believe in *anything* that strongly! I’m sure those poor saps sitting in Vietnam right now don’t either.”

Jeff turned to face him, but said nothing.

“So?” Paul shrugged. “That’s how I feel.”

“Did you know that Scott’s brother is one of those *saps*?” Jeff snapped. He felt Scott discretely pinch his elbow.

“Let’s not argue about it,” Scott said. “Bruce Lee starts soon and we’d better get our preparations underway.”

Scott still had at least half of his cube of blonde Lebanese hash (he’d been jealously concealing his treasure from everyone for weeks) and Jeff had the foresight to bring along Rich’s old pipe. Now, with the darkness closing in quickly, they shaved off another piece from the cube soon were quietly savoring the sweet smoke.

There was no threat from campus security; even Jeff wasn’t overly concerned. The few campus cops that were present when the movies started had now disappeared. Several plumes of hash and marijuana smoke were rising above the crowd with impunity.

Jeff searched the audience as the opening credits of *Enter the Dragon* scrolled across the screen. He saw a number of faces he knew, but he was looking for one face in particular. Seconds later he found her—Audrey was sitting just 20 feet away. She was wearing the same sweatshirt she wore during their tearful meal in the University Center. Her silvery blonde hair was tied back into a ponytail, but this time the tail was braided.

“Audrey is right over there,” Jeff said as he pointed. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

Jeff attempted to stand, but his right leg had gone numb from sitting. The best he could manage was an awkward crouch.

“What’s wrong?” Scott whispered.

“Pins and needles,” Jeff said through clenched teeth. The sensation was excruciating, and made all the worse by Scott’s hash.

With one hand balanced precariously on Paul’s shoulder—Paul frowned and tried to turn away—Jeff stood and hobbled through the crowd. When he reached Audrey, he almost stumbled into her.

“Hey! Audrey!”

Audrey had been smiling as she turned to look back, but the smile vanished almost before Jeff could see it.

“Hello Jeff.”

“Good to see you, Audrey. It’s been a while.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m sitting just over there with Scott and Paul.”

“Good. I hope you guys enjoy the movie.”

“I was wondering if you’d want to come and sit with us. Scott has some outrageous hash.”

“I don’t think so,” she smirked. “I’m here with friends.”

“Oh. Okay. Would you like to get together for a snack afterward?”

“I can’t. I have a party I’m supposed to go to.”

“Where?”

Audrey sighed. “It’s just a party, Jeff.”

“Right, but I thought maybe--”

“I’m sorry, Jeff, but I really want to watch this movie right now, okay?”

“Sure, Audrey. Have a good time.”

Audrey nodded and resumed her position facing the screen. Jeff slowly made his way back to Scott and Paul.

“How was Audrey?” Paul asked.

“She’s fine,” Jeff sighed.

Scott leaned in and whispered, “Even from here I could see that your little chat was on the frosty side.”

“Yeah. I’d better check to make sure my balls are still in place.”

Scott chuckled. “At least you’ve still got your sense of humor.”

“I just thought, you know, maybe we could still get something going,” Jeff shrugged.

“Not fucking likely, Jeff. Too much bad water has passed under that bridge. Not that it’s your fault, but she associates you with some unpleasant events.”

Jeff nodded and tried to return his gaze to the screen, but his eyes kept wandering to Audrey.

Maybe she’ll have second thoughts and look my way longingly, Jeff thought.

But of course, she didn’t. Audrey laughed along with everyone else at the terribly dubbed dialog, but otherwise she seemed bored. When Jeff glanced back later, Audrey was gone.

After the movie, Paul suggested that they pile into his car and cruise the Front Street bars. Scott agreed immediately, but Jeff was reluctant. After some gentle cajoling from Scott, he eventually relented.

To Jeff’s disappointment, they wound up at the Cavern. The bar was packed with a mixture of students and regular drunks. They squeezed around a tiny table in the back, about 30 feet from the stage. A country western band and just struck up a Hank Williams tune and audience clapped in appreciation, including Scott.

Jeff sat with his chair tilting against the wall, nursing a tall glass of Coke. As the band worked itself into a respectable version of “Foggy Mountain Breakdown,” Jeff wasn’t at all surprised to see Madame Bump and Grind leap into the spotlight. The audience roared its approval as she thrust her hips at the banjo player.

“Wow!” Paul exclaimed, “She’s outrageous.”

“Don’t even *think* about fucking her,” Jeff shouted above the music.

An hour later, Scott and Paul were feeling the effects of their beers while Jeff continued to work on the same Coke. A fight broke out by the back door between two sloppy drunks. Neither landed punches, but the general pandemonium was enough to disrupt the band’s set. Two bouncers shoved patrons out of the way as they rushed across the dance floor and unceremoniously tossed the battling drunks into the alley.

“Jesus!” Scott said.

“Let’s blow this joint,” Jeff suggested, but Paul smiled and shook his head.

“I’m way too fucked up to drive,” he slurred.

“Me, too,” Scott said.

Jeff reached into Paul’s coat and grabbed his keys. “I’ll drive. Let’s go.”

“Aw, shit, man,” Paul bawled. “You’re always the wet blanket. You don’t know how to enjoy yourself. Never have.”

“Yeah, that’s me,” Jeff replied as he jerked Paul out of the chair. Scott stood unsteadily and sighed.

“So, tell me--when are you ever going to extract that bug from your ass?” Paul said.

“Be cool, Paul. I thought you two were best friends,” Scott said.

Paul shrugged. “I don’t know. Sometimes it’s hard, man. It’s hard.”

Jeff could feel the hot blush on his cheeks. Scott stood swaying slightly in place, shaking his head.

“Let’s just leave,” Jeff said. They followed him out of the bar like little children and crawled into the back seat of Paul’s car.

“How about something to eat?” Scott asked.

“Okay,” Jeff replied as he started the engine. He took them back across the river and eventually tracked down a Denny’s Restaurant, the only eatery still open at 1AM.

Jeff guided them to a table in an unoccupied corner of the mostly empty restaurant. Under a ceiling speaker that broadcast middle-of-the-road music and news from KGVO, Jeff did his best to keep Scott and Paul quiet. He hoped the music would mask their outbursts of laughter and obscenities, but from the sour look on the face of the waitress who approached their table, it wasn’t entirely effective.

Paul tried to flirt with the waitress, but failed miserably. With an I’d-rather-be-in-hell-than-here look on her face, the young brunette scribbled down their orders. After acknowledging Jeff’s request for coffee and a cinnamon roll, she hurried back to the kitchen.

“Paul, can you try being just a little less obnoxious?” Jeff asked.

“I don’t know. Can you try being less of a prick?” Paul grinned.

“Now, now,” Scott said, raising his hands. “We’re all friends, remember?”

Paul grunted and was about to speak when the waitress returned with their coffees. She put the mugs down brusquely, then left as quickly as possible.

“So, Jeff,” Scott began, “how’s freshman journalism these days?”

“I’m actually enjoying my classes, believe it or not. Especially broadcast journalism.”

“Then how come I don’t hear newscasts on KRAP?” Paul mumbled as he tried to spoon some honey into his coffee.

Scott rolled his eyes and turned back to Jeff, ignoring the question. “So you’re thinking about getting into radio or TV news?”

“Yep,” Jeff replied as he sipped carefully. “I’m in one of Dr Reneau’s classes on radio and TV journalism. Pretty interesting stuff. Just last week he-”

“Hold it!” Paul shouted and pointed to the ceiling. “Listen!” They all stared at the ceiling speaker.

“The badly decomposed remains were discovered yesterday by a hiker in the Rattlesnake Canyon area. According to the medical examiner, a wallet found with the body carried the driver’s license of Grady Wallace and his identity was confirmed through dental records this afternoon. Wallace was the son of well-known industrialist Michael Wallace. He disappeared during the March 30th blizzard in a suspected suicide. Missoula police confirmed to KGVO that there was no indication of foul play. In other news,…”

Jeff could feel his skin breaking out in gooseflesh. “God damn,” he said aloud.

“Fuckin’ eh,” Paul slurred.

“Well, we all knew this would happen eventually,” Scott said quietly. “At least now he can have a proper burial.”

“Poor bastard,” Jeff said. “Dying alone in the snow.”

“There are worse ways,” Paul muttered. “I wouldn’t want to burn, for instance.”

Scott touched Jeff’s arm. “You know, man, Paul is right. I once talked to a mountain climber who nearly died on Mt Hood in a snowstorm. He told me that once the hypothermia began to set in, the sensation of being cold disappeared and he actually felt warm and comfortable. When the rescuers found him, he was just starting to drift into a pleasant sleep. They said later that if he had fallen asleep, he would’ve never awakened.”

Jeff nodded. “I hope you’re right.”

Their food arrived soon afterward and they ate in silence.

The next morning Jeff was up early, reading a journalism assignment and spinning records on KRAP. Jeff had heard that nearly 40% of the freshman class had dropped out and he wasn’t surprised. Duniway Hall had become increasingly quiet and empty. The party activity that had nosedived after Grady’s death never really recovered. Even the number of Frisbee players in the courtyard between Duniway and Miller Halls had dwindled to a handful.

Low clouds and light rain had arrived with the dawn, and the damp chill finally compelled Jeff to close his windows and turn up the heat. As he rummaged through the dresser for a sweatshirt, Scott Davies knocked on the side of his door.

“Hey Jeff,” Scott said.

Jeff looked up and saw that he wasn’t smiling. Worse yet, Scott’s face seemed pale and drawn.

“You okay, Scott?”

Scott walked into the room with his hands in his pockets. He stopped in the middle of the room and stared at the floor.

“I have bad news, man, and a favor to ask on top of it.”

“What’s wrong?”

Scott sighed and swallowed. "I got a call this morning, Jeff. My mother..."

"What?"

Scott swallowed again and waved his hand. "My mother...is gone. Dead."

"Oh my god, Scott. I'm sorry."

Scott slowly shook his head, his eyes still fixed on the floor. "My dad said she went to bed with a stomach ache last night. She never woke up. It was a heart attack."

Scott finally looked up and Jeff could see that his eyes were bloodshot and glistening.

"I don't know what to say."

Scott shrugged. "Nothing you can say, man. God takes everyone, but I always thought he might make an exception for my mother, you know? She was so proud of me going to college and..." He couldn't finish the sentence.

Jeff felt as though he was cemented to the floor. After what seemed like an eternity, he summoned the will to break free and put his arm around Scott's shoulder.

"You going home, Scott?"

Scott nodded.

"Do you have a flight booked?"

Another nod.

"You'll need a ride to the airport."

"Yes," Scott whispered. "That was the favor I needed to ask."

"Paul is still sleeping off his hangover. I tried to wake him for breakfast and he was dead to the world. He won't mind if I borrow his car."

"Thanks, Jeff. I'll go pack."

When Scott left the room, Jeff sat on the bed with his head in his hands.

These were supposed to be the best times of our lives.

There was a soft buzz and a click as the tone arm lifted from the center of the record and then lowered itself to the resting post. Beside the turntable was an Earl Scruggs album that Scott had left nearly a month ago. Jeff had always promised to give the LP a spin on the air, but could never bring himself to do it.

Now's the time.

He stood and grasped the KRAP microphone in one hand while he removed the Jethro Tull album and replaced it with Earl Scruggs's *I Saw the Light*.

"What you are about to hear is a departure from our normal music programming. It's an album by Earl Scruggs, a famous name in bluegrass that some of you might recognize. This is a special dedication to Scott Davies of Craig Hall."

Jeff cringed at the sound of banjos pouring from his speakers. Scott laughed softly from behind. He was standing in the doorway with a small duffle bag slung over his shoulder.

"Not so bad, is it?" he said.

"If you say so, Scott."

Scott smiled and nodded. "This will get everyone's attention."

"No doubt. And while they are distracted, let's go steal Paul's keys and hijack his car," Jeff replied as he pulled on his coat.

Paul didn't even stir when Jeff crept into his room and plucked the set of keys from his jacket. He would likely awaken in a foul mood, and receiving the news about Scott wouldn't improve things. Jeff decided to put that moment off for as long as possible.

When they got in the car, Jeff tuned the radio to KRAP so that Scott could at least have something enjoyable to hear on their way out of town. As they crossed the Clark Fork on the Madison Street bridge, however, the signal faded to noise.

"Thanks for trying, Jeff. I appreciated it."

"Well, you'll be back within the KRAP community soon enough."

"I'm not altogether sure about that," Scott replied as he gazed out the window. "My dad isn't doing well, mentally or physically. He had a stroke a couple of years back and my mom was really the one running the household. My dad is going to need my help now."

"You're going to have to take care of your mother's funeral yourself?"

"Most of it. They'll give my brother emergency leave as soon as the news gets to his battalion commander, but he'll be lucky to make it back in time for the burial."

"Oh." Jeff could see where this was leading and felt another wave of sadness wash over him.

Scott was silent as they weaved through the streets and eventually climbed the ramp onto Interstate 90.

"So," Jeff said as the car accelerated, "you won't be coming back, will you?"

Scott shook his head. "No. By the time I make some arrangements for my dad, it will be too late. Maybe I can get partial credit for what I've done so far this quarter, I don't know."

"That's a shame. And only five weeks left in the school year."

"But," Scott said, holding up his finger, "I *will* be back in the fall. Doing anything less would dishonor my mom's memory. I'll find a job around town over the summer and get the necessary money together for another year's worth of books and meals. I *will* be back."

When they arrived at Johnson-Bell, the airport seemed as deserted as Duniway Hall. Only a few passengers milled about the gate area, waiting to board a lonely Northwest jet that sat nearby on the wet tarmac.

The boarding call crackled over the public address system and Scott shook Jeff's hand. They stood staring at each other for a moment, then Scott threw his arms around Jeff's shoulders.

"Take care of yourself," he said.

"You, too," Jeff replied as he slapped Scott's back.

"Remember, Jeff, follow what seems right for *you*. Don't just run with your old habits."

"I know, Scott. Thanks for everything."

Scott stepped back and smiled sadly before turning and walking quickly through the gate. Jeff watched him jog through the rain and climb the rear staircase of the airliner.

As Jeff reached the parking lot and unlocked the car, he heard a deep, distant roar that grew quickly in intensity. He turned to see a silver and blue Northwest Orient 727 soaring above the terminal and climbing rapidly into the mist, drawing up its landing gear as it went. Within seconds, Jeff could only see its flashing lights. A minute later even the thunder of its engines had faded to silence.

Chapter 15

Let's Dance

Jeff awoke to a scream. He sat bolt upright in his bed, his heart pounding in his throat. Somewhere outside a voice was chanting, "Jungle boogie!" to a throbbing mixture of bass and brass.

He stumbled to the window and saw two students in the courtyard below. They were gyrating around a portable cassette player with oversized speakers.

"My god. Disco at nine o'clock on a fucking Saturday morning."

Bleary, bewildered faces appeared in several Miller Hall windows as well. As Jeff watched, one of the students jabbed a button on the cassette player and the music suddenly jumped to "Dancing Machine" by the Jackson Five.

Jeff slammed the window shut and considered putting on his own music at earsplitting volume, but he knew it wouldn't do any good.

I would be pissing into the wind, he thought.

And the wind he would be pissing into was one that he had heard blowing for months, gathering strength like an approaching storm. Request calls to KRAP for the likes of Traffic and Pink Floyd were trickling down, only to be replaced by demands for Kool and the Gang and Barry White.

Empty, repetitive dance music. That's what we're coming to.

Jeff threw on some clothes, brushed his hair and strolled through the hallways to Paul's room. He found Paul awake and at his desk, rolling a thin doobie.

"Would you like a little marijuana to start your morning?" Paul asked as Jeff entered the room. To Jeff's dismay, the music could be heard even here.

"Why not? Hell, I was asleep until they fired up that bullshit."

"Don't get your underwear in a knot," Paul smiled as he lit the joint. He inhaled deeply and held his breath while passing it to Jeff. "Fuck the revolution. Let's dance," he croaked.

"I hope you're being sarcastic."

"Yes and no. The whole revolution thing is over, Jeff. We've had this discussion before."

Jeff pulled a chair up to the windows and sat wearily. "I know. It's just hard to give it up."

"Poor Jeff. I could see this coming before we even left Indianapolis. You set yourself up for disappointment from the get go."

"That's not entirely true. When it's all said and done, I'm still glad we came here. We've just had a run of bad luck."

"What you're calling a run of bad luck is otherwise known as *life*," Paul replied with a laugh. "We aren't magically insulated from it just because we're on a university campus."

“Maybe so, but this place is special. This *time* is special. Haven’t you ever felt that?”

Paul sat back in his chair and smirked. “Special how? Supernaturally special?”

“Special because this situation is unique. We’ll never live through an experience quite like this again.”

“We’ll never live *any* experience again, Jeff. I remember you telling me that Scott once said that we can never step in the same river twice.”

Jeff sighed. “Scott was talking about a philosophy of time. I’m talking about life-changing experiences that span months and years.”

“Ah, that’s where we part company,” Paul said as he drew again from the joint. “To me, this isn’t a life-changing experience. My time here is just one diversion among many while I hurtle headlong into an uncertain future. I don’t see any special significance in it. Maybe years later, when I look back, I will. Not now, though.”

Jeff nodded and gazed out the window to the parking lot below. “We’ll have to agree to disagree, Paul. I’ll admit that my idea of a campus revolution turned out to be pretty hollow. The people I’ve met who call themselves revolutionaries are just flaming assholes for the most part. And the students who didn’t buy into all the Marxist claptrap were some of the best people I’ve ever known.”

“There you go,” Paul replied as he extended the joint to Jeff. “The truth will out.”

“But none of that changes the fact that this place is special—at least to me.”

Jeff waved the joint away. He was already buzzed sufficiently and didn’t want to cruise at higher altitudes so early in the day.

“Suit yourself, Jeff.”

“Speaking of the future, have you pre-registered for your classes next fall?”

Jeff shook his head.

“Why not? It’ll save you a lot of the hassle next September.”

“I don’t know if I’m coming back yet.”

Jeff felt his stomach clench and tried to ignore it. “I don’t understand.”

“I’m just not sure yet,” Paul replied as he tapped a long ash out the window.

“You mean you’re not sure what classes you need to take?”

“No. I’m not sure I want to come back at all.”

Jeff grimaced and shook his head. “This is making me dizzy. I still don’t get it.”

“What’s to get?” Paul chuckled. “Maybe I want to go off in a different direction. Maybe I don’t want to get a college degree.”

“What’s going on here? Are you trying to fuck with me?”

“Why does it all have to be about *you*, Jeff? I simply said that I am thinking about not coming back to school here. I’m looking at all my options.”

“But throughout high school we talked about going through college together. This was supposed to be--”

“What?” Paul interrupted as he leaned across the table. “Special? You haven’t understood a thing I’ve said.”

“I thought we had kind of a, you know, a partnership.”

“A *partnership*? I never agreed to such a thing. I told you that I was going to go to U of M for my freshman year, nothing more. *You* ginned up this partnership idea in your own mind and decided to come along.”

“So,” Jeff laughed, waving his arms in the air, “I’ve been living a lie. You didn’t even want me to come with you.”

“Nooo,” Jeff said, drawing out the word as if talking to a child, “I didn’t care either way. You could have stayed in Indianapolis and my feelings wouldn’t have been hurt. I would have just figured that you were doing what you felt you needed to do, just like I was.”

Jeff’s arms fell to his sides. “I see.”

“Do you really?”

“Yes, I do,” Jeff replied as he stood slowly. “Thanks for making that clear.”

“I’m sorry if the truth hurts,” Paul said. “This is the way it is, the way it has always been. You just couldn’t see it.”

“Well, I shouldn’t really care if you’re coming back in the fall, right?”

“I can’t tell you how to feel, man. Either way, it doesn’t mean that I don’t care about you.”

Jeff walked to the door. “Want to grab breakfast?” Paul called after him.

“No. I’m not hungry. You go ahead,” Jeff replied.

He walked unhurriedly back to his room, grateful at least for the fact that the disco barrage had ceased. Jeff switched on the KRAP transmitter and pulled the Moody Blue’s *In Search of the Lost Chord* from his pile of albums.

“Good morning, students” Jeff began. “This is KRAP, the pirate voice of the rev--”

Jeff stopped cold and thumbed the **OFF** switch on the microphone. He stared at the needle, posed just over the edge of the record.

“This is KRAP,” he began again, switching on the microphone, “the voice of Duniway Hall. For your morning pleasure, we have the Moody Blues.”

Jeff flipped the turntable cueing lever and watched the needle glide down to the album grooves. As the music began, he went to the wall and carefully removed the thumbtacks that held his collection of Soviet posters. He rolled up each poster and slipped rubber bands over the tubes to keep them in place.

An hour later, Jeff Loudon walked across the Oval with the warm May sunshine in his eyes and a load of posters under his arm. In his other hand he

held the crumpled remains of his beloved fatigue jacket, the one still stained with Scott Davies' blood.

Jeff smiled and waved to one of his professors as he strolled through the lush ground-floor square of the University Center. Sunlight was streaming from the skylights and the fragrance of breakfast was everywhere. When he reached the SDS office, the door was closed and locked, as he assumed it would be. Jeff simply dumped the posters and his jacket on the floor.

"Long live the revolution," Jeff whispered as he stepped into the glass-enclosed elevator. He rode to the second floor and joined the line of hungry students at the Center cafeteria.

"There's a face I haven't seen in ages."

Jeff looked up from his books and saw Leigh standing at the end of the table.

"And why not?" he asked with a smile. "You should know that you'd always find me in the library."

"Oh, of course—scholar that you are."

"Sit down. Tell me about your life so far."

Leigh tossed her books on the table and pulled up a chair. "I don't have a life. I probably spend more time in this library than you do."

"No movies? No parties?"

"As many as I can manage, but the number is declining. It's way past time to get academically serious."

"I know what you mean."

"Have you heard anything from Scott?" Leigh asked.

"No. I should give him a call. I think I have his number in Little Rock stashed away somewhere."

"How's Paul?"

Jeff shrugged. "He's okay, I suppose. I haven't seen him all that much lately. We have dinner together sometimes."

Leigh nodded and Jeff watched her jet-black hair fall across her face. She brushed it back with a wave of her hand.

"You know, Leigh, until now I never noticed what pretty hair you have."

"It must be the lights," Leigh said with a laugh.

"No, really."

Leigh closed her eyes briefly and smiled. "Thank you, Jeff. Coming from you, that's a wonderful compliment."

They locked eyes for what seemed like several minutes, then Leigh abruptly slapped her hand on top of her books.

"Hey, I'm on my way to Freddy's Feed and Read to grab a book and a snack. Wanna come with me?"

"Sure," Jeff replied and quickly gathered his papers.

Freddy's was a bookstore and grocery run by a commune of hippies just a few blocks from campus. Students could always buy their books in the on-campus UC bookstore, but Freddy's had a strange *panache* that many, including Jeff, enjoyed. Besides, when the UC ran out of a particular title, it was often possible to find it at Freddy's.

Leigh browsed the tall bookshelves, searching for Melville's *Moby Dick*, while Jeff grabbed bags of chips and various other snacks. An overly cheerful girl at the checkout took their cash and placed their treasures in a brown paper bag emblazoned with a bust of Karl Marx. With snacks and book in hand, they headed back to the Oval and found a shady spot near the liberal arts building.

"So, what did you buy us to eat?" Leigh asked. "I wasn't paying attention at the checkout."

"Well, you should have," Jeff replied as he reached in the Marxist bag and produced a two turkey sandwiches wrapped in cellophane.

"Good choice, Jeff. Anything to drink?"

Jeff pulled out two cans of Coke.

"Works for me," Leigh said with a grin.

"Don't forget to ask about dessert," Jeff said.

"What dessert?"

Jeff peered into the bag, then looked back at Leigh with a mischievous smirk.

"What have you done, Jeff?"

Jeff reached in slowly and his hand emerged with a coconut.

"What the hell are we supposed to do with *that*?" Leigh laughed.

"Eat it, of course."

"Have you ever eaten a coconut?"

"No, but it looked strange and delicious."

Leigh hung her head and laughed again. "But they're almost impossible to open without some kind of tool."

Jeff studied the coconut and frowned. He found a rock protruding from the grass and began to tentatively knock the coconut against it.

"Much harder," Leigh said.

Jeff brought the coconut down as hard as he could and the husk shattered, sending coconut milk spraying over the legs of his jeans.

"God damn it!" he shouted, bushing furiously at his pants.

Leigh let out a shriek of laughter and suddenly fell into Jeff, hugging him tightly. Jeff wrapped his arms across her back and closed his eyes. Her warmth, and the light fragrance of her hair, completely obliterated the clammy dampness of his pants.

Leigh pulled away slowly, her hands falling into his. "Damn it, Jeff. You're so delightfully clumsy."

"I know."

“With coconuts in particular and life in general.”

“I know that, too.”

“What you saw in Audrey, I’ll never understand,” she said, shaking her head.

Jeff only sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Well,” Leigh blurted. “let’s eat. I’d love nothing more than to spend the afternoon sitting right here, but I have a 2 o’clock class.”

They ate their lunch as slowly as they could manage, although neither would admit to deliberately doing so. It was Jeff who began glancing at his watch with growing concern.

“It’s two minutes until two, Leigh.”

“Yeah, I’d better get going,” she replied as she scrambled to her feet.

“Wednesday is the Aber Day kegger. Are you going?”

“Of course. Paul and I plan to head out there in the morning.”

“Good. I’ll be going with some girls from Knowles. I hope we’ll run into each other.”

“Yes,” Jeff smiled. “Me, too.”

The bell sounded and everyone rose from their desks. “I need all your essays on Friday,” Dr Reneau called out. “Aber Day, or no Aber Day.”

Jeff scooped up his books and walked toward the door.

“Mr Louden! A moment, please,” Reneau said.

Dr Reneau, a lanky professor with snow-white hair tied back in a ponytail, strode quickly up to Jeff.

“I happened to catch you on the air yesterday evening,” Reneau said with a grin. “You’re very good.”

Jeff blushed. “Oh. You were listening to KRAP.”

“Yes, I was grading papers in my office when I decided to tune around the FM dial. I usually listen to the university station, KUFM, but I was just curious.”

“Well,” Jeff replied with a laugh. “I hope your curiosity was rewarded.”

“Indeed,” Reneau said as he leaned casually against one of the desks. “My hope is that you’ll put your talent to better use.”

“That’s one of the reasons I’m in this class.”

Reneau laughed. “Good answer, Jeff.”

“No, I mean it. I really enjoy your class.”

“You know,” Reneau began as he stroked his chin, “I see strong potential in you. I believe you’d make an excellent broadcast journalist once you’re sufficiently polished. That takes time, of course.”

Jeff nodded.

“What I want to propose is that you join the KUFM staff next fall as one of our regular news editors.”

Jeff shuddered and nearly dropped his books. “Me?”

“Of course. It’s time for you to graduate from 10 watts to 10,000 watts, don’t you think?”

“Wow,” Jeff replied, rubbing his forehead. “I didn’t expect this.”

“You *will* be coming back to U of M for your sophomore year, won’t you?”

“I...don’t know, doctor. I’m still considering it.”

“Well, I don’t need an answer today. Think it over carefully and let me know before finals. I’d be proud to have you become part of our team.”

Jeff nodded. “I’m flattered that you asked, if nothing else.”

Reneau clapped Jeff on the shoulder as they walked to the door. “By the way, Jeff, I have a friend who works over at KYLT-FM. He told me that his program director has also heard about KRAP. Stickler that he is about Federal Communication Commission rules, the program director isn’t too thrilled about your presence on the airwaves and plans to file a complaint with the FCC office in Helena.”

Jeff felt the hair standing on the back of his neck. “Uh-oh.”

“Uh-oh indeed. The last thing you want to do is run afoul of the Feds. Personally, I’d suggest a siesta for KRAP—perhaps a permanent one.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Besides, with finals coming soon, I don’t really have the time to keep it on the air anyway.”

“A wise choice,” Reneau replied. “I’ll be sure to pass the word along.”

Jeff cleared his throat and drew a deep breath.

“Ladies and gentlemen, what you are hearing is the last transmission from KRAP, the voice of Duniway Hall. We came on the air more than seven months ago, and it has been a good run. I want to thank everyone for their support. I hope you’ve enjoyed the music as much as I’ve enjoyed playing it. We’ve had a lot of good times together and I have to honestly say that it has been fun. I want to dedicate this last song to all of you, but particularly to Grady Wallace, Rich Runyon and Scott Davies—wherever you all may be. Goodbye, good luck and peace to you all.”

Jeff smiled as he lowered the needle to the song he had selected for his sign-off: Frank Zappa’s “Montana” from *Overnight Sensation*. As the song played, he removed the microphone from the stereo and pitched it into the wastebasket.

His telephone rang several times with students wishing him well, or protesting the loss. Jeff finally had to take the phone off the hook and let it dangle on the wall.

As the song faded and the needle wobbled into the inner grooves of the album, Jeff unplugged the audio line that snaked between his stereo amplifier and the KRAP transmitter.

“KRAP is now leaving the airwaves—forever,” he whispered as he switched off the power supply. The red glow of the transmitter’s “on air” lamp dimmed, then winked out.

Chapter 16

Aber Day and Beyond

Aber Day is a University of Montana tradition that dates back to at least 1915. In honor of William Aber, U of M professor and early environmentalist, classes were canceled on a chosen day in May and students spent the time cleaning the campus.

Jeff recalled reading these historic tidbits somewhere, but on Aber Day 1974, thoughts of tidying the campus were remote at best. The day was already hot by 10 AM and the line of traffic into Miller Creek was more than a mile long. Paul and Jeff were part of that line, creeping forward in the bed of a pickup truck along with six other students from Craig and Duniway halls. While they baked slowly under the Montana sun, they all sampled the new pot Paul had just purchased. Deep Purple's *Machine Head* was pounding in the truck's rear-deck speakers.

Even from this distance, they could easily see the mammoth concert stage with its scaffolding and loudspeakers. Even more impressive were the lines of 18-wheel beer trucks with "Coors" and "Lucky" in massive lettering on the sides of their trailers. Over it all hung a pall of yellow dust as 11,000 people danced, loved and consumed copious amounts of intoxicants.

Jeff and Paul jumped from the pickup as soon as it crossed the fence gate. They paid their admission and were rewarded with orange plastic pitchers—the better to drink beer from. As they stood in the Coors beer line, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band was just taking the stage. Speakers boomed as the band members tuned their instruments and tested the microphones. By the time they launched into "Mr Bojangles," Jeff was holding his pitcher under the dual spigots, watching the flow of delightful, golden liquid.

"Where to?" he shouted to Paul.

Paul pointed to an area near the front of the stage. "Let's try there," he shouted in reply.

They spent several minutes weaving through the crowd, gingerly stepping over those who had already succumbed to drugs, alcohol or both. At the end of their quest, they found themselves standing in what Paul assumed was a relatively clear spot, only to discover that it was clear because some poor wretch was vomiting violently in the middle of it. Paul shrugged, set his pitcher on the ground temporarily and lit the largest doobie Jeff had ever seen in his life. It looked more like a premium Dutch Masters cigar than a marijuana cigarette.

Jeff and Paul took several hits from the pot cigar before Paul decided to pass it to girl standing next to him. She passed it to someone else and before long the mega-joint had vanished from sight, never to return.

By noon, they had drained their pitchers and Elvin Bishop's roadies were rearranging the stage. Jeff was unsteady, but still feeling good despite the grit that had seemingly worked its way into every pore.

"Man, I gotta pee," Paul announced.

They navigated through the crowd once more, this time moving in the general direction of the men's latrine. When they arrived, Jeff was quietly aghast. Behind a wall of hastily erected canvas, a line of students stood at the edge of a rank ditch and relieved themselves. The canvas only covered their midsections, leaving their lower legs exposed. Through that portion of the wall Jeff could see countless arcs of streaming piss.

"I'll pass for now," Jeff said. "I'm going to get back into the beer line."

"Okay. I'll probably join up with you there."

When Jeff left the beer line with a fresh pitcher of Coors, Paul was nowhere to be seen. Jeff waited several minutes, then walked the periphery of the crowd, thinking he might catch sight of Paul among the masses.

After almost 30 minutes of fruitless searching, Jeff gave up and found a comfortable place to sit and listen to Elvin and his band. Even though sweat was pouring across his face, the icy beer was keeping Jeff cool and happy.

This is just as well, he thought. Besides, I have some thinking to do.

It was mid-May and he still hadn't given Dr Reneau his answer. On the surface, it should have been easy. An opportunity to work at KUFM was priceless; it could be the first step in a broadcast journalism career. Who knew where it might lead?

All Jeff had to do was say "yes" and return to Missoula in the fall. But Paul might not come back for his sophomore year. He was still waffling, refusing to give Jeff a decision. God only knew when Paul would finally make up his mind.

But why should my decision depend in any way upon Paul?

"If Scott Davies were here, he'd slap me silly," Jeff mumbled.

Early noon melted into late afternoon and Jeff was still looking for Paul. The bands were winding down and many students were beginning to leave. Now Jeff's concern included not only finding his friend for the simple sake of doing so, but also because Paul had arranged their transportation. The pickup driver was a stranger to Jeff. Moreover, Jeff had no idea where the truck was parked.

He decided to wait in the billowing dust at the side of the dirt road that lead to the main highway. Every vehicle had to pass that point to get home and Jeff would surely see the truck coming his way.

Jeff saw a girl that he thought sure was Audrey. She sped by at the wheel of a Ford Pinto with two other girls in the back seat. He waved, but she didn't appear to notice.

"So it goes," Jeff muttered as he drained the warm dregs of beer from his pitcher.

Twenty minutes later, to his immense relief, Jeff saw a familiar brown Chevy pickup lumbering up the road. And there was Paul, sitting at the rear of the pickup bed with his pitcher clenched tightly to his chest.

"Hey!" Jeff waved. "Paul!"

Paul saw him and smiled. "Sorry," he shouted as the truck drew even with Jeff. "There isn't enough room for you."

"Come on, man. Tell him to stop!"

The truck didn't even slow and Paul merely held out his hands, palms up, in the classic there's-nothing-I-can-do gesture.

"Say something to him!" Jeff cried, but Paul and the pickup were speeding away.

Jeff dropped to his knees in the dust, his head hanging down. "Son of a bitch," he muttered.

Suddenly he was jerked upright by the blast of a car horn.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Jeff looked around and saw Leigh Simmons leaning out of the window of a Volkswagen Beetle. "What's wrong?" she shouted again.

"I don't have a ride back to campus."

"You do now. Get in."

"What happened to the girls you came with?" Jeff asked as he closed the door.

Leigh wrestled the car into gear with a curse, then steered back to the middle of the badly rutted road. "They found other ways home, with guys mostly. Where was your ride? Where was Paul?"

"I lost track of him about halfway through the party, then he went cruising by in the back of the truck that brought us here."

"Why didn't he pick you up?"

"He said the truck was full."

"Was it?" Leigh asked as she turned onto the highway.

"Yes, I suppose so. I shouldn't blame him."

"Bullshit," she replied. "Even if people were hanging off the hood and roof, being full isn't the issue. If you weren't allowed on, Paul should have jumped off at that instant and stayed with you."

"Yeah, but he--"

"He is supposed to be your *friend*. That's what friends do. It's a matter of principle, Jeff."

Leigh switched on the radio and tuned it to a Top-40 AM station. "It isn't KRAP," she said with a grin, "but it will have to do."

They gossiped and laughed all the way back to campus. After Leigh jerked the Beetle into the parking space and killed the engine, they sat quietly and stared at each other.

"Would you like to come up to my room?" Leigh asked at last.

"What about your roommate?"

“She dropped out last month.”

Jeff gestured to this shirt and pants. “I’m not very presentable. In fact, I’m probably downright filthy.”

“I don’t care. So am I. Any other objections?”

“I guess not,” Jeff said with a sheepish smile.

Neither spoke as they walked into Knowles Hall and climbed the stairs to the second floor. Leigh’s room was at the far end of the east wing. She took Jeff by the hand and led him to the door, opening it quietly and closing it behind them.

As soon as the lock latched, Leigh threw her arms around his shoulders and kissed him deeply. With no real experience to guide him, Jeff responded as best he could. After another one of those eternal minutes, Leigh pulled back, her arms still clasped around his shoulders.

“Sorry,” Jeff whispered.

“For what?”

“I’m kind of new at this.”

Leigh bit her lower lip and grinned. “Oh. You could have fooled me.”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll need further instruction.”

“I’ll be happy to be your tutor for the evening.”

“Sounds fine to me, Leigh.”

Jeff removed his dusty boots while Leigh put the Moody Blues’ *Days of Future Passed* on her stereo.

“Is that for me?” Jeff asked.

“Do you like the Moody Blues, too?” Leigh replied as she stretched out on the bed.

“Yes. I have all their albums.”

Leigh patted the mattress beside her. “Come here. Class is in session.”

Jeff found Leigh’s instruction very much to his liking. It began with more passionate kisses, then rapidly progressed to frenzied removal of clothing. Any fear that Jeff may have harbored about his own sexuality vanished when he felt the heat of Leigh’s nude body against his. With Leigh’s quiet guidance, their lovemaking was glorious.

An hour later Jeff lay on his back with Leigh cradled in his arms. She had lit a candle on her nightstand and now its orange light flickered and danced over their naked bodies. Jeff ran his finger across Leigh’s shoulder, then down across her chest and around her breast. She shivered slightly.

“That tickles,” Leigh whispered.

“I can’t get over my amazement. You’re just so beautiful.”

“You’re basking in the afterglow, Jeff, when everything is beautiful—even me.”

Jeff kissed her forehead. “You were beautiful way before this. I was too ignorant to see it.”

“Okay. I’ll buy that.”

Leigh stroked the hair on Jeff's chest. "So, what will you be doing at the end of school year?"

"I'll need to go back to Indianapolis and get a job over the summer."

"Will you be coming back here in the fall?"

Jeff took a deep breath and didn't answer for almost a minute. "Yes," he replied at last.

"That's going to be a very long three months for me."

"I know. Me, too."

Jeff held Leigh even tighter, savoring the fragrance of her breath. Somewhere in the dorm, Maria Muldaur was crooning "Midnight at the Oasis" on the tinny speaker of someone's radio. Jeff couldn't remember a time when he had felt so much at peace and he wondered if he'd ever feel quite this way again.

In the weeks that followed, Jeff spent most of his free hours with Leigh. Spring-quarter final exams were looming and they often studied together in her room, or in the library. On a balmy June afternoon, Jeff was sitting by himself in the Oval, scratching out an essay on the First Amendment, when he heard Paul's voice behind him.

"Jeff, my man. Long time, no see."

Paul squatted down on his haunches. He was holding a bright red Frisbee.

"You, too," Jeff replied.

"I hear that you and Leigh Simmons are an 'item'. I even saw you together at the Grateful Dead concert. Quite a loving couple!"

"Yeah," Jeff said with a smile. "Leigh is a fine lady."

Jeff briefly considered bringing up the episode at the Aber Day kegger, but then discarded the thought. As Scott might have said, that water had passed under the bridge a long time ago.

"How are your finals?" Paul asked.

"Difficult, but I'm hanging in there. I have three this week, then that's it."

Paul nodded.

"So," Jeff began, "what did you ever decide to do about your sophomore year? Are you coming back?"

"Nah. I gave it a lot of thought, but I'm just not college material. My grades are okay, but I can't see doing this for three more years. I want to get moving with the rest of my life."

Jeff shrugged. "Whatever you do, I'm sure it will work out."

"What are your plans?"

"Well, I'm definitely coming back. Dr Reneau offered me a position on the KUFM staff starting September 20 and I took it. I've already pre-registered for all my fall classes."

"Good for you," Paul said with a smile.

“Yeah. I’m excited. If this plays out like I hope it will, I’ll have three years of serious broadcast experience under my belt when I graduate.”

“Excellent. When is your last final this week?”

“Early Friday morning.”

“That’s perfect. I’ll be ready to leave by noon. We might make it to Billings by nightfall.”

Jeff shook his head. “I have a job waiting for me in Indianapolis bright and early Monday. My dad arranged a position for me on a Chessie System track crew. Working on the railroad during a humid Indianapolis summer is brutal, but the pay is fantastic.”

A shadow seemed to cross Paul’s face. “I wasn’t planning to drive back to Indianapolis that quickly.”

“I know,” Jeff replied. “That’s why I booked a flight back on Northwest. It leaves Saturday morning.”

“Oh. Okay,” Paul frowned. “Looks like I’ll be driving back alone.”

“Yes, I’m sorry about that. I thought it all over carefully, but then I remembered what you said about having to do what you think is right. I think this is the right choice for me.”

Paul stood and nodded. “Okay, man. Well...good luck with your finals and that railroad job. Maybe we’ll have some time to get together over the summer.”

“Let’s hope so,” Jeff replied.

Paul waved, and then turned and walked slowly toward Craig Hall, swinging the Frisbee as he went.

Saturday morning, June 8, 1974, dawned hot and clear. Jeff showered and shaved, then began packing his suitcase. The room was already barren; he and Leigh had packaged his stereo equipment and dropped it off at a storage locker the evening before.

Students had been evacuating all week, so there was barely a trickle of traffic in the hallways now. Cleaning crews were already moving on every floor. Jeff could hear their voices and the roars of their vacuum sweepers.

Leigh appeared in the doorway just as Jeff was folding his last pair of pants into the suitcase. She took his hand and turned him slowly, kissing him warmly on the lips.

“It’s almost time,” she whispered.

“I know.”

“I parked just outside the door. There is a campus cop giving me the hairy eyeball, but I think he is okay.”

Jeff set the latches on the suitcase and pulled it off the bed. Leigh stepped into the hallway and waited as he gazed at his room for the last time. He could feel his throat tighten.

“So much happened here,” he said.

“It was a magical year, wasn’t it?”

“Yep. It was a very a strange journey.”

“And it is really just getting started,” Leigh said as she slipped her arm around his waist.

“Yes,” Jeff chuckled. “As they say at the end of series episodes on TV, ‘to be continued’.”

“Did you peek into Paul’s room?” she asked.

“Yes. It’s empty. He left yesterday. I hope he has a safe trip.”

“Come on,” Leigh said as he tugged gently on his shirt. “Time to go.”

They squeezed the suitcase into the back of Leigh’s Beetle and Jeff gave Duniway Hall one last look before climbing into the passenger seat. All the rows of windows were wide open and many sets of curtains fluttered in the hot breeze.

It’s as though nothing happened, Jeff thought. It is as though the last nine months were nothing more than the stuff of dreams. Three months from now the cycle will begin again.

During their drive to the airport, Leigh made a concerted effort to keep the conversation as light as possible. They talked about how much they despised disco music, and whether Nixon would really resign the Presidency.

She didn’t steer for the parking lot when they entered the airport grounds. Instead, she drove directly to the main entrance.

“I’m really bad with goodbyes,” Leigh said as she brought the car to a stop. “I’d wait at the gate with you, but...I hope you understand.” At that instant, a tear broke free and fell across her cheek.

Jeff drew her into his arms and kissed away the tear. “I understand very well,” he whispered. “I promise to call you each weekend.”

“I’d like that,” she sniffed.

Jeff hugged her tightly. “Thank you so much.”

“Why, you’re most welcome,” she giggled through her tears.

“I’m serious. You made a huge change in my life, more than you probably realize.”

“You made a pretty big impression on me, too.”

Jeff nodded and ran his fingers gently across her face.

“Well,” Leigh began with a sigh, “let’s get this over with.”

Jeff opened the rear door and dragged his suitcase to the pavement. He walked over to the driver’s side window and kissed Leigh one last time. She lingered as their lips parted, moving forward to steal one last peck.

“Call me when you get to Indianapolis,” she said. “Let me know you’re safe.”

“You know that I will.”

Leigh threw the Beetle into gear and coaxed it away from the curb. She glanced at Jeff one last time, then sped away.

“Good, old, reliable Northwest,” Jeff muttered as he stood in the gate area, watching the 727 roll to a stop. The rear stairway lowered slowly from the tail and the arriving passengers began streaming into the terminal.

Soon the Northwest agent unlocked the glass doors on the departure side of the gate and announced the flight to Billings. Jeff pulled out his ticket envelope, flashed it at the agent, then followed his fellow travelers onto the shimmering tarmac.

When Jeff made it to his seat row, he found an elderly woman peering out the window, intently watching as a man in blue overalls pumped fresh fuel into the 727’s wing tank. Jeff settled into his aisle seat and buckled the seatbelt.

“This is my first flight,” she said softly.

“Really?”

“Yes. And I’m a little nervous, I must say” she laughed.

“Nothing to be concerned about,” Jeff replied. “I used to feel the same way, but not any more. Flying really is very safe.”

“I certainly hope so.”

They continued to chat as the ground crew finished loading the baggage, closing the cargo door with a loud thud. Seconds later, the turbines began to whine and the rear stairway was raised.

Jeff kept talking as they taxied to the runway, trying to distract the woman from the sight of the rocking wings and the jiggling overhead luggage bins. When the aircraft turned onto the runway threshold, the woman suddenly grasped his hand.

“I hope you don’t mind,” she said with a weak smile.

“Not at all,” Jeff replied as the engines spooled up to their usual roar.

“Oh my,” she exclaimed as the jet surged forward.

Soon Jeff heard the thump of the nose gear lifting off the concrete.

“Here we go,” he said. “See how smooth it is?”

The woman nodded quickly as Jeff leaned forward to get a glimpse out the window. The airliner turned slowly over Missoula and he could see Mt Sentinel standing watch over it all. Its white M was blazing in the summer sun.

The 727 returned to level flight, its engines roaring again as the pilot applied climbing power. Within seconds, Missoula disappeared from view and Jeff settled back into his seat.

“Not so bad, is it?” he asked as he patted the woman’s hand.

She released her grip with a giggle. “You’re right, young man. It wasn’t bad at all.”

Jeff reached into his pocket and his fingers closed over a deck of cards.

“I don’t suppose you play poker?” he asked. “It helps pass the time.”

“Certainly, and better than you might imagine!”

“Let’s find out,” Jeff grinned. “Five card stud. Threes are wild.”

Epilogue

“So,” Joe Wilson said as he drained the last of his coffee, “is that where the story ends?”

“The rest, as they say, is history,” Jeff replied with a smile. “How’s that for a fine way to kill a couple of hours?”

Joe glanced at his watch and nodded. “Since we still haven’t heard from London, it’s safe to assume that the World Cup hook-up went off without a hitch.”

“Yep. I think we can finally call it a day.”

“By the way, did you manage to stay in touch with the gang over the years?” Joe asked. “I’m just curious.”

“Well, I lost track of Paul not long after I got home. He never went back to Missoula, of course, and when I returned at the end of my sophomore year, I learned he had left town for a job on the East Coast.

“Rich Runyon finally wound up in Los Angeles doing stand-up comedy. He bought a comedy club a few years ago and I understand that he’s doing well.”

“He never went back to college?”

“Nope. Scott Davies did, though. The man was good to his word and I saw him on campus every year. Scott Davies eventually became *Doctor* Scott Davies and he is a department chair now at Stanford University. We still communicate by e-mail at least once a week. He became one of my closest friends.”

“And Audrey?”

“Ah, Audrey. That’s a sad tale. She finished college and married. Moved to Memphis, Tennessee and had two children. One day she was driving by herself on the freeway and suddenly veered into the concrete median barrier. She climbed out of the wreckage and, for reasons know one will ever know, walked directly into the path of an oncoming truck. She was killed instantly.”

“Geez!”

“Yeah, I spent the day in a serious funk when I heard the news. After all these years she still had an effect on me.”

“So,” Joe said as he set his cup on a nearby table, “have you ever considered turning your experiences into a book?”

“Oh, hell no,” Jeff laughed. “I don’t think that would go over well with the stockholders.”

“You’re probably right. Couldn’t you just see the headlines?” Joe said.
“Capital Network CEO Pens Lurid Tell-All Book.”
Jeff’s speakerphone crackled. “Mr Louden, I have your wife on line one.”
“Just a moment, Joe. I need to take this call.”
“Of course,” he replied with a grin.
“Hi honey,” Jeff said as he picked up the phone.
“Happy birthday,” Leigh replied.
“Not all that happy,” Jeff said. “I’m 50 years old. I’ve officially crossed the line into geezerhood.”
“Bull. Your hair is merely a nice shade of silver and I think it enhances your looks. You’re as young as ever to me.”
“I’m glad you think so. How’s Christine?”
“She is upstairs meticulously packing. You’d have to see it to believe it.”
“But she understands that we’re not hauling all her worldly possessions, right?”
“I think so. She is just nervous about forgetting something important. When will you be leaving?”
“Shortly. In fact, Joe Wilson and I were just wrapping up.”
“Okay. Drive carefully. Love you.”
“Love you, too.”
Joe and Jeff passed through the security checkpoint in the Capitol Network lobby, then began their walk to the parking garage. The sun was settling into the Chicago skyline, orange beams slicing through the spaces between the skyscrapers.
“Busy weekend for you,” Joe said as they crossed Michigan Avenue.
“Yeah. Leigh and I are driving Christine down to Purdue University.”
“Hard to believe that she is going to be a freshman in college.”
Jeff shook his head. “Incredible how time passes, isn’t it?”
Joe suddenly grimaced and waved his hand in front of his face. “Good god, when will they ever finish that job? I can’t stand the odor.”
Jeff glanced at the squat brownstone building adjacent to the parking garage. The roofers had left for the evening, but their asphalt kettle still steamed on the sidewalk below.
“I know what you mean,” Jeff replied softly. “Roofing tar is an acquired taste.”

END