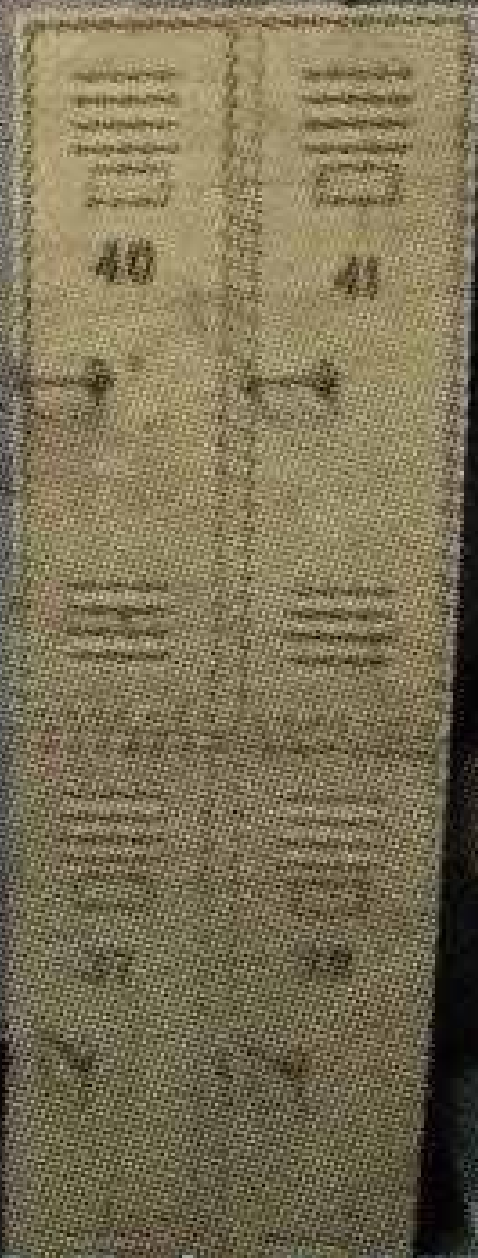


# ANDRE DUBUS



# THE LIEUTENANT



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# The Lieutenant

Andre Dubus



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**FOR PAT**  
*she steered well*

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My thanks to the Writers' Workshop  
at the State University of Iowa,  
and to Florence Unash.

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An if we live, we live to tread on kings;  
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!

KING HENRY IV, PART 1

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EVEN AFTER HE had been aboard for nearly six months Dan Tierney did not feel that he was part of the ship: an aircraft carrier, the USS *Vanguard*, which weighed seventy thousand tons and had a flight deck a thousand feet long. He viewed it with awe at times, but more often with scorn. He was a first lieutenant, executive officer of the Marine Detachment, and in his fourth year of service; he had come to the *Vanguard* from land, after a year's tour he would return to land, and one of the only pleasures he drew from sea duty was the honor, the prestige, of being chosen to represent the Marine Corps aboard the largest ship in the Pacific. It was an enviable tour of duty for a young officer. Senior officers had assured him, again and again, that this tour would advance his career: he would profit, they told him each time a promotion board studied his record, that chronological list of functions assigned him during his professional years.

Dan believed this was true, because seagoing Marines are considered elite: traditionally they are at least six feet tall, firm-muscled and sunburned, the kind who stare at you like your manhood on a conscience from recruiting posters. In the *Vanguard* Detachment there were short ones, and some who only needed to shave three or four times a week, and one or two with acne. And Dan himself was by no means six feet tall; he was three inches under that and slender (*lean but hard*, he thought, and it was true: he exercised daily); he had dark bright eyes, sometimes appearing black, and black hair which the officers' barber cut very short each week.

If upon first reporting aboard he was somewhat disillusioned by several beardless or acned or pudgy Marines, he was soon cheered by what he recognized as the essence of his profession: their spirit. They reminded him of his college baseball team and, with a couple of exceptions, he loved them all. So besides the honor attached to his duty, he had that too: serving with troops he admired more than any he had ever known. He was proud of them, and loyal—the pride and loyalty becoming steadily more intense, sustaining him in loneliness and the frustration of sea duty spent largely below deck among seemingly labyrinthine passageways where strange levers and pipes and switches confronted him daily with his own alienation—and once in a bar at Yokosuka a plump ensign had sung the “Marines’ Hymn” to the tune of “Clementine” and Dan had knocked him off his bar stool. The ensign rose quickly, angered even more by the cause of the blow than by the blow itself, but other officers had moved between them.

Midway through the *Vanguard's* seven-month cruise in the Western Pacific, she pulled out of Yokosuka on a bright November day, leaving Dan's commanding officer in the Naval hospital ashore. He was Captain Raymond Schneider, who had joined the Marines in 1947 when he was eighteen, and had gone into the Korean War as a corporal, a squad leader in an infantry platoon. He was commissioned during the war and now, in 1956, was in his tenth year of duty. Since he had led a squad and then a platoon in combat, he gave Dan the experience which he himself no longer needed: Dan stayed in the background and let Dan run the Detachment. Dan kept him informed daily, asked for advice and sometimes gave it, and after serving with Captain Schneider for only a month Dan looked on him as a father. He could never forget that while he had been a sophomore, breaking up with his first college girl friend, Captain Schneider had been a corporal in the Chosin Reservoir. Dan had missed the war: on the day it ended he had been a second lieutenant, firing on the rifle range at Quantico, Virginia.

On that first day at sea out of Yokosuka, Dan wrote to his girl in California. Sitting at the desk in his stateroom, he could hardly feel the motion of the sea, for the *Vanguard* was, to him, more like a hotel than a ship: air-conditioned, and it rarely dipped except those times when they had left the

breakwater at San Francisco and once when they pulled out of Kobe to run from a typhoon. It had dipped a little then. And sometimes, making a sharp turn into the wind for planes, it shuddered a bit.

He told Khristy that Captain Schneider had a serious ear infection, was in the Naval hospital at Yokosuka where a specialist could treat him, and he would join the ship when it reached Iwakura. This, Dan wrote her, meant that he would have command of the troops for the next two weeks at sea for the first time in his career, all the responsibility would be his.

When eight bells sounded next morning, Dan was on his way to the Marine barracks (the Navy referred to their own living quarters as spaces, but the Marines stubbornly called theirs a barracks). The troops were finishing the morning clean-up, and as Dan went down the ladder someone called them to attention. He moved through them, toward his office, and told them to carry on.

The barracks was two large rooms: a long one which they used for a classroom, containing the Corporal of the Guard's desk, rifles stored in racks along two bulkheads and, in stands centered at one side of the room, American and Marine Corps flags. The other room was the berthing area; it was separated from the classroom by a bulkhead with a doorless curtained entrance. Dan's office was on one side of the classroom and, adjacent to the office, was the First Sergeant's stateroom. The office was small, had three desks, and four standing people would crowd it. First Sergeant Tolleson was drinking coffee at his desk; he rose—a man of Dan's height, slender and paunchless after nineteen and a half years of service—and told Dan good morning, then said:

“Unit punishment sheet's on the Lieutenant's desk.”

Dan picked it up: in a short paragraph written in language taken from an example in the *Manual for Courts-Martial* it told that Private First Class Theodore C. Freeman had been disrespectful to a corporal during the morning cleanup: . . . *on or about 14 November 1956 use disrespectful language to Corporal Bradley R. McKITTRICK 1464203*

USMC, to wit, “*Fuck you and the horse you rode in on, Mac*” or words to that effect.

“What the hell got into Freeman?” Dan said.

“Well, sir, I guess he figures the Captain's orderly don't have to buff the decks.”

“Maybe. Was McKittrick harassing him?”

“No sir, I don't think so. McKittrick's a corporal irregardless, sir.”

Dan nodded and read the unit punishment sheet again. Pfc Freeman was one of those who had to shave only every other day and he could use an electric razor for that. He was very slender, had an almost girlishly pretty face, and the troops often teased him, calling him Teddy-Baby; but he was a conscientious sentry, he wore the uniform well and, Dan recalled, he was an expert rifleman. Above all, he had spirit and pride and he had told Dan in a counseling interview that he wasn't sure whether he was a career Marine or not—sometimes he thought he'd like to be—but before he made up his mind he wanted to become a corporal and see what sort of NCO he would be. Because of that, Dan had made him an orderly for the *Vanguard's* Captain. The duty was considered an honor. Dan knew that Freeman was a parade field Marine, and could probably be a competent seagoing NCO; but it was doubtful that Freeman would ever have the drive required of an infantry leader. Still, Dan hoped that by assuming shipboard responsibilities, Freeman could gain some of those tougher qualities he lacked.

This was Freeman's first official offense and Dan was disappointed; but he was also relieved because the case was a simple one, and he repeated the old joke:

“Let the wheels of justice begin to spin; bring the guilty bastard in.”

Tolleson grinned.

“Aye aye, sir,” he said, and went out.

Dan sat at his desk and opened the *Manual for Courts-Martial* to Article Thirty-one; Freeman marched in and reported in a high, tense voice and stood at attention; First Sergeant Tolleson stood at ease behind him, and the office door was closed. Dan knew the troops would be listening from the



classroom benches on the other side of the door. This was his first office hours in three and a half years of service and he didn't know if the troops were aware of that, but he thought they probably were, and he was nervous.

It was the performance that bothered him. There were several ways to handle office hours: you could try to be understanding and therapeutic; or you could be as detached as a civil judge; or you could try to scare them. Dan preferred the last; he thought that a man sent to his commanding officer should go through an experience which would send him fearfully and rapidly back to an obedient way of life. And the Marines sitting in guard school should resolve never to do anything that would bring them before Lieutenant Tierney's desk.

So he was preparing himself for the performance, not the sentence. There were only four sentences he could give at office hours: two weeks' restriction to the barracks (a meaningless punishment on the sea); two weeks of extra duty; seven days of confinement in the brig; or, because they were on a ship—the only place in the armed forces where this punishment was still used, three days in the brig on bread and water. That was the sentence he had chosen when he first read the unit punishment sheet. Bread-and-water had an aura of the old and traditional. He had heard about it from Staff NCO's who they spoke of the days before military justice had been revised (and ruined, they believed), the days when any company commander, on land or sea, could put a man on bread and water:—*had a CO once in any time a shadow passed his door he locked him up—those days, you went to see the Old Man, you brought your shaving gear with you 'cause you knew you wasn't coming back*—Hearing these stories he had always thought of the Old Corps when officers wore Sam Browne belts and riding boots and carried swagger sticks. Only the swagger sticks had remained and now the new Commandant had publicly belittled them and you didn't see them anymore; Dan carried his, though. He was afraid the Old Corps might evolve into something totally different from his concept of it: already it had jet planes (he didn't mind propeller planes; he recalled that Lieutenant Cunningham was the first Marine pilot that Marines had first used dive-bombing in the Banana Wars) and missiles and technicians and administrators who hadn't worn a haversack in years; in the face of this, no tradition should be allowed to die—if the swagger stick went, the blue uniform might go next and Lord knew what would follow.

Now, looking up at Freeman, he had already forgotten the insult to Corporal McKittrick and was ready to avenge those honored and colorful dead of past wars and skirmishes and musketry from wooden ships.

He read Article Thirty-one aloud.

"That means you don't have to say anything that might incriminate you. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Initial here."

Dan turned the unit punishment sheet toward him and started to give him a ballpoint pen but stopped, for it was a blue one and official documents had to be signed in black ink. He opened his drawer, got a black one, and handed it to Freeman, the pen for an instant joining their hands. Leaning over, Freeman slowly wrote his initials in the place Dan had shown him; then he stood at attention again and Dan read the charge aloud.

"Is it true?" Dan said.

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Sir?"

"Why is it true? What gave you the idea you could talk back to one of my corporals?"

"No excuse, sir."

Dan paused, looking at him: Freeman's fists were clenched at his sides, his jaws pressed together

and his eyes stared blinking at the bulkhead. Dan watched his eyes: sometimes you raised your voice at a Marine and his eyes were suddenly angry or sullen or hating, but Freeman's eyes—seemingly younger than ever now—were as fearful as a child's, and the anger which Dan had so recently generated began to fade. He quickly reminded himself that the Marine Detachment was the only truly disciplined unit on the ship.

"Is that all you've got to say? No excuse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well you're Goddamn right about that, lad. You're a United States Marine. You know what that means? It means discipline, it means devotion to duty, it means you do as you're Goddamn told. Do you know that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then *act* like it, Goddammit. You told me you wanted to be a corporal, *didn't* you! Well how the hell are you going to be a corporal if you can't be a Pfc! Can you answer me that?"

"No, sir."

"You can't. Well neither can I, Freeman. *You* figure that one out. You go down to that brig for three days and eat bread and water and you think about it. You think about what made you join the only military organization in the United States. You figure out why you wanted to be with the best. And you better come out of there squared away."

"Yes, sir."

"One other thing, Freeman. I made you the Captain's orderly, *didn't* I. And there's maybe twenty Marines out there who want that job. No night watches. Prestige. Helps you get promoted around here. You want to keep that job?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then *don't let me down again*, Freeman. Now get out of here."

For an instant Freeman stood stiffly; then he about-faced and marched toward the door; Tolleson opened it for him and followed him out. Dan went to the door.

The troops were crowded onto benches in the classroom, pretending to listen to a corporal who was explaining the special orders for each post. Some looked furtively at Dan or turned to glance at Freeman standing at the Corporal of the Guard's desk at the rear of the classroom: he stood at parade rest, staring at the bulkhead inches from his face. Tolleson was talking to the Corporal of the Guard who nodded and rose and went through the curtains into the berthing area. He came back with a Marine wearing a duty belt and carrying a nightstick. He was a prisoner chaser and he would take Freeman to the brig.

Dan smoked a cigarette, giving the chaser time to get Freeman out of the barracks, then he went through the classroom, into the berthing area, and inspected the bunks and deck. He stopped at Freeman's bunk. It was an upper bunk and on a shelf at its foot was an eight-by-ten photograph of his girl. Her hair was long and a wave fell over her forehead above her right eye; it was red hair, though it looked brown in the picture. Dan knew this because Tolleson had told him; Tolleson had also told him that she had a job in Oakland and Freeman was sleeping with her. Ever since learning that, Dan had always stopped to look at her picture.

She knew how to pose. At the instant the picture was taken, she must have been thinking of Freeman—or whomever she originally took the picture for—and you could not look at her face without believing in her fidelity and promise, and when Dan turned from the picture he desperately wanted that woman to look at him that way, to speak to him, and he hoped the mail plane would come soon and there would be a long letter from Khristy; he would not even open it until he was in his stateroom where he would be alone. For three and a half months now, he had been faithful to Khristy.

He finished inspecting the berthing area and the head, then went back through the classroom to his

office. Pfc Burns, the clerk, was there now; Tolleson was helping him with the morning report.

~~“I’m going to see the Captain,” Dan said, “and tell him about Freeman.”~~

“Aye sir. Did the Lieutenant have a good time on the beach?”

“Fair.”

Tolleson grinned.

“I believe I saw the Lieutenant walking down Thieves Alley with what appeared to be one of the little Jo-sans. Maybe a week ago, sir.”

“Me?”

Dan blushed and Burns grinned at him, then went back to his typing.

“Yes, sir. I believe she’s employed at the Bar Montana.”

“Oh: *that* girl. She was helping me buy a kimono. For my Stateside girl, First Sergeant.”

“I see, sir.” He grinned and sipped his coffee. “I’m glad to see the Lieutenant buying presents for the ladies back home.”

“You should try it, First Sergeant. It’s good for the soul.”

“Yessir, I guess it is. My old lady thinks so anyway.”

Dan was still smiling as he climbed the ladder. Tolleson was the only Staff NCO he had ever been successfully friendly with. As a platoon commander at Camp Pendleton he had, on long field problems or landing exercises, given in to the need for companionship. He had done this with two different platoon sergeants and each time he had regretted it. For he found that when he lowered the barriers of his rank, he let in subtle but definite problems: it became harder for him to give orders—especially the distasteful ones, the ones which came from his superiors and which he had to relay as his own—and his orders were sometimes questioned. Then he would become uncertain and on some days he would feel that everything he did was wrong, that he was a totally incompetent misfit. By nature he was not a man who exuded strength and dignity (as Captain Schneider was, drunk or sober, laughing or angry) and he knew that. He often cursed himself, told himself that he was nothing but a frisky puppy in a world of serious men and he would never be a general or a colonel if he didn’t learn to maintain the position of his rank and exercise his authority from that fragile height. He supposed many officers were like that, and it was one of the reasons they said a commander was the loneliest man in the world. He was prepared to believe that.

But First Sergeant Tolleson was different. Dan was able to talk with him, had even drunk with him a few times, and their professional relationship remained unharmed. It was not Dan, though, but Tolleson who protected that relationship. On the nights when they got tight in Japanese bars, Tolleson always managed to make Dan feel that he was an intelligent and respected officer. Dan remembered one night when they had sat in a bar for hours, drinking Japanese beer and talking about the Detachment; when they left they were drunk, walking stiffly down the sidewalk, Tolleson on Dan’s left. They got a taxi to the *Vanguard* and Tolleson still addressed him in the third person and saluted him good night as Dan turned to the officers’ brow and Tolleson went aft to board the ship at the enlisted brow.

Now, swagger stick in hand, he climbed the Captain’s ladder; the Marine Detachment waxed its green decks and polished its brass handrails daily: that was supposed to be an honorable duty, but Dan resented using Marines to please a Navy captain’s eye. At the Captain’s cabin the Marine orderly saluted Dan, then announced him and held the door open as he went in. Captain Howard sat behind a large polished wooden desk; he had a pen in his hand and there was a stack of papers before him. He told Dan to have a seat and Dan sat in a leather armchair.

“Sir, I came to tell you why Freeman’s not on duty today.”

“I was wondering about that.”

Captain Howard was a tall man with a lean face which perhaps several times had been deep

tanned; now, after nearly a year aboard the *Vanguard*, whose crew rarely went above decks, he st  
wasn't pale. His face appeared rather young, but not as young as the eight-by-ten photograph of him:  
had been taken by the ship's Photo Officer, then touched up to remove the wrinkles, making him loo  
thirty years old, and distributed about the ship to be hung on bulkheads.

"I locked him up this morning," Dan said. Captain Howard screwed the pen into its desk stan  
"What for?"

He seemed to frown as he screwed in the pen, but Dan couldn't be sure; like the silver eagles on th  
khaki lapels beneath it, his face usually showed inscrutable authority, and nothing more.

"He talked back to a corporal during morning clean-up."

"So you locked him up."

"Yes, sir. Three days bread and water."

Captain Howard slowly turned his swivel chair until he was profiled to Dan and staring at th  
bulkhead. Then he said quietly:

"Don't you think that's a stiff punishment for talking back to a petty officer?"

"An NCO, sir."

Captain Howard did not seem to hear the correction.

"I have never put a man on bread and water," he said. "The book gives us other ways to deal wi  
our men. An effective commander can do much with calm admonishment."

The Captain was still turned away from him and Dan was looking at his parted dark brown hair, h  
left ear, his face with its tan left over from earlier days.

"Well, sir, we've found that bread-and-water squares a man away."

Again the Captain did not seem to hear.

"It took me a long time to learn judgment," he said. "Because, as you know, most junior officers  
the Navy are not given the responsibility of handing out official punishment. Maybe as a young offic  
I might have let my emotions override my judgment and I might have gone around putting men o  
bread and water for minor offenses."

"Sir," Dan said too loudly, and the Captain looked at him, so he lowered his voice before going o  
"I don't consider Freeman's offense minor. I don't think *any* Marine officer does. I'll give a man  
second chance on almost any other offense—but not insubordination or disobedience. The corpor  
that Freeman sounded off to would lead a fire team or even a squad in combat and *all* those troop  
have to learn to respect chevrons."

The Captain was watching him calmly, even a little distracted. Now he looked at the bulkhea  
again.

"Mister Tierney, I'm aware of all that; I've served with Marines before. But you don't seem to b  
reading my message. So far, I've allowed the Marine Detachment on this ship to handle its ow  
disciplinary cases. That is a privilege which I don't have to grant, and I can take it away at any tim  
Now, if you don't want your Marines to come to me for punishment, I suggest you exercise mo  
mature judgment and make your punishments more in accordance with my own feelings."

"Aye aye, sir."

Dan stood up, and Captain Howard swung the chair around and looked at him.

"And next time you want to lock up one of my orderlies, I would appreciate being inform  
beforehand. I might just know more about my orderlies than you do. Freeman, for instance, is a fir  
boy and I should think a pat on the wrist would have been sufficient."

"I'm sorry, sir, but not for that offense."

"Mister Tierney, that will be all."

Dan came to attention, clicking his heels, said "Aye aye, sir," and about-faced and strode out.

He went quickly down the Captain's ladder, slapping his thigh with his swagger stick, remembering

affronts and conflicts from the past three and a half months: there was the time Commander Craig, the Gunnery Officer, had decided to assign Captain Schneider and Dan as boat officers: the officer in charge of a liberty launch which took the crew to and from the beach when the *Vanguard* was anchored in port. It was a duty which usually fell to junior pilots, because pilots did not stand bridge watches at sea and this in-port duty was a settling of accounts. And it was bad duty: responsibility during a half-hour boat trip for eighty or so sailors, drunk, sleeping, or fighting, as they returned from liberty. So Captain Schneider had gone to see Commander Craig and had read him the passage in Navy Regulations which states that no Marine officer shall have command of a vessel at sea. *If that liberty boat sinks*, Captain Schneider had said, *and I'm in charge of it, I wonder who an investigation would find responsible*. Commander Craig had scowled, then grinned, and said: *All right, Marine, no boat duty*.

There were other incidents like that, but the one Dan thought of now as he descended the ladder was the honors ceremony of only three days ago, the last day the *Vanguard* was moored at Yokosuka. Captain Schneider had already gone to the hospital, so Dan had been in charge of the Marine honor guard: the troops dressed in blues, chrome-plated bayonets fixed to their rifles; Dan wore his sword. The Admiral's Band was to the right of the Marines. The *Vanguard* was a flagship and had an admiral aboard, but he did not concern himself with the affairs of the ship, and Dan rarely saw him.

At nine o'clock in the morning the Japanese government officials had arrived and Captain Howard had led one of them to the Marines on the hangar deck; Dan presented the guard, then led the Japanese official and the Captain through the ranks while the band played the "Marines' Hymn." Then Captain Howard took all the Japanese up to his cabin. That afternoon Dan had coffee in the wardroom with Alex Price, who had smiled and asked him how his Fascists had performed at the honors ceremony.

"With their usual beauty and precision," Dan had said.

Alex was a lieutenant junior grade, one of those rare young officers who, having no commitment to the service—in fact detesting much of it—perform as conscientiously as the most fervent career officer. His face was nearly always calm, as were his voice and manner (Dan once accused him of total lack of passion); he had a crew cut which showed the top of his scalp and he had recently grown a wide moustache which had a reddish hue, though his hair was brown.

"Question is," Alex said, "can there be any beauty—"

The bosun's pipe sounded over the loudspeaker system and Dan turned to the speaker on the bulkhead; the piping ended, there was a pause which seemed to Dan somehow dramatic, as if with over three thousand men staring at speakers all over the ship, a voice was about to announce: "A fifteen hundred today Russian bombers—" but instead came the quiet voice of Captain Howard who had disappointed Dan when he first joined the *Vanguard* and, by now, annoyed him; for he thought the ship's captain should growl, or at least be hoarse from dissipation ashore and bellowing commands at sea:

"This is the Captain. As you know, our chief concern today has been with the visit by Japanese dignitaries. That visit was a success, and I want to personally express my gratitude to all the officers and men of *Vanguard* for their outstanding cooperation and performance throughout the day. And for the honors ceremony, I want to particularly give my personal thanks to the Gunnery Department and the men of the Admiral's Band."

Then he said that tomorrow *Vanguard* would go to sea for day and night air operations and, after two weeks, they would go to Iwakuni. Dan struck the table with his palm.

"Goddammit, I'm going to see him," he said.

"What for?"

"Ask him if it'd break his jaw to compliment my troops sometime."

"Maybe he thinks you should feel included when he says Gunnery Department."

"I don't care *what* he thinks. If he's that stupid, why doesn't he at least say the *Marines* of Gunner Department. When he knows Goddamn well there wasn't one Gunnery sailor on that hangar deck. Hell with it: I'm going to see him."

He stood up.

"You can't," Alex said.

"Why not? I've got legs, don't I? I've got a tongue, don't I? So I'll go ask him what's wrong with *his* tongue."

"Did you ever walk in on a Marine colonel and chew him out?"

Dan hesitated. He noticed three lieutenants looking at him from across the wardroom. Then he sat down.

"Maybe I should write him a letter."

"Make it original and three. Via the Gunnery Officer, via the XO—copy to each of them. Original to the Captain, and the other copy for you."

"So I'll remember what I said."

"Now you're learning."

That had been three days ago. Now, leaving the Captain's ladder, he crossed the hangar deck: large space directly below the flight deck, crowded with jet bombers and fighters and the small propeller-driven A4D's which, in Korea, the Marine infantry had loved; for it was said that they came slow and close over those ridges and could drop a bomb on a poncho. The wings of all the planes were folded upward and they sat quiet and unmoving, ominous as perched death.

Across the hangar deck he went down another ladder and turned aft, heading toward the barracks. In the passageway Hahn and Jensen were coming toward him. He stood waiting. They stopped talking when they saw him and he watched them coming, Hahn over six feet tall, the biggest man in the Detachment, and he used his size there as he must have used it all his life: the corporals were afraid to give him an order and he was never seen with a mop or rag in his hand unless Tolleson went and found him and gave the order himself. Jensen was shorter, but he fought often, anywhere, with anyone, and the troops—except Hahn—were afraid of him too. Or they would be, if Jensen had wanted that. But as far as Dan knew, Jensen wasn't the bully that Hahn was, and Dan felt if it weren't for Hahn, he might be a good Marine.

Now they reached him and saluted and, since Dan stood in their way, they stopped. He returned their salute, then spread his legs and folded his arms on his chest, looking at their faces which showed not guilt but concealment.

"Where are you two going?" he said, sending out his voice the way he used to make the throw from deep in the hole at shortstop: as the ball left his hand he would watch it with anticipation, hoping he had put enough behind it to get there chest-high and straight. Now his voice failed him; it wasn't harshly ironic like Tolleson's or paternally angry like Captain Schneider's: it was soft, almost querulous, and he thought he sounded like a timid high school teacher trying to scold a sullen football player.

"To chow, sir," Hahn said. He stood loosely, comfortably, at attention, and looked calmly down at Dan, whose eyes shifted to Jensen, then back to Hahn—or to the mole on his cheek—and said:

"You're in the off-duty section, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there's a class going on for that section, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir," Hahn said, with that secrecy in his eyes again.

"Then I suggest you two go back to class."

"Aye-aye, sir," Hahn said.

His voice and face were calm and courteous and false, showing no more concern than if Dan had

merely stopped him to ask how he liked the chow aboard ship; and Dan knew that only the certainty a court-martial kept Hahn from pushing him aside and going on to eat a late breakfast. He also suspected that Hahn and Jensen had missed the regular breakfast because they had stayed in the bunks while the other troops got up and cleaned the barracks and went to chow. He was thinking about this and hoping his face did not show it, when they saluted. He returned the salutes and they about faced and walked back down the passageway, talking.

He would tell Tolleson he had caught them going to chow during the map-reading class, and Tolleson would probably give them some extra work to do, but that wouldn't bother them. Maybe he should have done something, reprimanded them loudly and profanely on the spot, though he knew that was useless, for they didn't care whether or not he admired them, and they were not concerned with promotions. He could have charged them with being absent from their place of duty and locked them up; but last summer, for beating up two sailors, they had gone to the brig for thirty days and it hadn't changed them. Hahn had probably done well in the brig: assigned to the lightest work details, given cigarettes by the Marine turnkeys who would be afraid to enforce the regulation allowing only one cigarette after each meal—or, worse, who would not enforce it because they wanted Hahn to like and tolerate them. They were all too young for the job, especially the corporals, who did most of the direct troop handling. They had been promoted quickly and, because they had been in high school only two years ago, too many of them still believed that big men rule.

He walked aft, through the mess deck and up a ladder, then another, and out a hatch onto the sponson deck. He blinked at the sunlight. The ocean was calm and dark blue, the sky lighter, the destroyer tiny and grey against it on the horizon. He went to the guardrail and looked down at the ocean, holding his swagger stick before him in both hands.

The ship began a slow turn to starboard, into the wind. The sponson deck where he was standing jutted out from the side of the ship and, looking up, Dan could see part of the flight deck. Sailors in yellow sweatshirts and pilots in orange flight suits were moving around, then he saw the nose of a jet fighter coming slowly toward the edge of the deck above him; it turned and he saw the cockpit and silver wing and fuselage as it moved onto the catapult. He looked away, at the destroyer on the horizon.

If he were an enlisted man, he thought, it would be different. The first time Hahn pushed him, he would go after him with a nightstick. And that was it: nonphysical as it was, their relationship still had the elements of a fight or a Western movie showdown. Someday he and Hahn would probably have to face each other in his office and one man was supposed to emerge the winner. The silver bars on his collar wouldn't do it for him, and words wouldn't either: Hahn seemed invulnerable to both.

The jet engine started above him, roaring, and he turned quickly and left the sponson deck, pausing at the hatch for a last look at the sea and sky, but they were altered by that incredible roaring; he went inside and down the ladder. He was going to the brig to see Freeman.

It was his duty to inspect the brig daily and check the prisoners, and that was one reason for his going now. But he had two other motives and he wished he were not aware of them: he had never confined a man before and he wanted to look at Freeman, with that possessive curiosity of a hunter picking up a fallen bird; he also wanted to reassert himself, to regain his dignity. With Freeman he could do that.

LIKE ALL Marine officers, Dan Tierney had spent his first eight months of duty as a second lieutenant at the Basic School in Quantico, Virginia. Toward the end of that eight months there was a mess night—a formal stag dinner, the second lieutenants wearing blues and senior officers wearing evening dress—short jackets and cummerbunds and boat cloaks. The evening had begun with martinis and manhattans, then during the meal there was wine with each course, and by the time the guest speaker—a lieutenant-general from Headquarters Marine Corps—made his speech, Dan was drunk. He stood stiffly, his tight blouse and high collar adding to his nausea, and stared at the general. He heard only one line of the speech, and he remembered it: during the rest of the night while they drank beer from silver mugs, and while he leaned over a toilet and vomited without unclasping his collar or soiling his uniform, and he still remembered it when he got to his room at five in the morning. *You hear what that general said?* he told his roommate. *He said—he said: The career of a Marine officer is living the lie and making the lie come true.*

He never forgot that.

He remembered it when he left the sponson deck and went to see Freeman in the brig, and he recognized the lie in his own manner: stern yet paternal, when he felt neither. He also recognized the lie of Freeman's punishment: knew that Freeman did not deserve bread-and-water and no cigarettes and isolation in a cell for three days. But he knew Freeman had expected it; because on the *Vanguard* sailors were never put on bread and water, while Marines often were. And the Detachment as a whole—if not the particular Marine who was locked up—prided itself on this severe discipline. Beyond that, Dan recognized the essential lie: as he and Freeman faced each other in the cell, Dan saying that as far as he was concerned Freeman would start over with a clean slate and Freeman assuring him that he would be a squared-away Marine in the future, each of them believed they were somehow better men than any sailor or Naval officer on the ship. They both felt that moments like these, spent in a cell below decks, prepared them for that time when they might be called upon to continue the brave traditions of the Chosin Reservoir, of Tarawa, of Belleau Wood.

On his way to the barracks he stopped at the dispensary to see Doc Butler, who was a lieutenant commander and the senior medical officer on the *Vanguard*. Since early in the cruise, Dan had called him *Major* because he looked like one: he was in his mid-thirties, rather well-built though inactive, and he kept his hair as short as Dan's. When he was a lieutenant, he had served as a regimental surgeon with Marine infantry, and he liked to talk with Dan and Captain Schneider about those days. Doc Butler would know about Freeman, because all prisoners went to the dispensary for preconfinement physicals.

In the passageway outside the dispensary there was a long line of sailors dressed in dungarees. On the first couple of days after an in-port period there was always a crowd: men who woke in the morning and noticed an ailment they had had for days. Dan opened the Medical Officer's door and looked in at Doc Butler sitting at his desk.

"Morning, Major. You've got all the sick bay commandos here, so who's making the ship go?"

"Just you and me, Dan. I see you've already locked one up."

"Right, Major. Iron hand."

"Good: they know you're the Skipper now."

"Captain Howard recommended a pat on the wrist."

Doc Butler smiled.

"A pilot, Dan. They don't worry about discipline and such."



He nodded toward the percolator.

“It’s fresh,” he said.

“No thanks, Major. I just dropped in to make sure you didn’t stay on the beach.”

“They wouldn’t leave without me, Skipper.”

“Semper Fi,” Dan said, and left. He walked briskly now, and when he reached the barracks he was whistling “Scotland the Brave.”

That night after dinner he was in Alex Price’s room when the bosun’s pipe sounded over the loudspeaker and the bosun’s mate announced mail call; Dan got up and said “About time” and hurried from the room, leaving Alex grinning and stroking his moustache. It had been ten days since he had heard from Khristy and he went quickly down the passageway, trying to recall if he had ever gone longer without a letter and it seemed that he had but he couldn’t be sure and he wanted to believe he hadn’t, that somehow numbers were important and if there had never been ten days without a letter then surely there would never be eleven. He wrote to her every night at sea because he was lonely and there was nothing to do at night except watch a movie in the wardroom or write to Khristy. His letters were usually four or five pages long. Sometimes he wrote about marriage, although when they had made love for the first and last time, he had immediately asked her to marry him and she had said with a rational voice that—coming from her naked body next to his—had chilled him: *Let’s don’t even talk about it till you get back from sea duty. I want time to check out my psyche.*

The word *psyche* had also disturbed him.

When the *Vanguard* was in port he wrote to her every third day, on his duty day when he had to stay aboard ship. On the other two days liberty call was at noon and he left the ship then, often choosing his companions married men who wanted to remain faithful to their wives. They went to bars where the Japanese hostesses did not sit with customers until they were asked, and Dan and his friends rarely asked; when they did, it was because they wanted something soft and responsive and perfume-scented in their booth. They would buy her drinks and tell her in pidgin English that her kimono was very pretty, her face beautiful. By late evening they would have eaten sukiyaki or teriyaki steak or fried rice or sopa, they would be happily drunk, and they would sing; the young officers from eastern schools led them in ribald limericks or sentimental college songs; Dan taught them “Waltz in Mathilda” and usually sang solos of “Danny Boy” and “Irish Soldier Boy.” They would return late to the *Vanguard*, oblivious long before they slept.

When Dan wrote to Khristy on those hungover in-port days, he told where he had gone the past two nights and always ended by assuring her that he had only been out with the boys and had slept aboard ship. Khristy had never—either in California or her letters—asked him to be faithful; he respected her strength, and gave her the continual assurance she had not asked for but certainly needed.

Khristy wrote only once a week, but Dan knew the reason: as a senior at UCLA she had little time. But that wasn’t exactly right. She had time, but didn’t know it, because she was one of those women who have no concept of time, who apparently believe it is to be recorded by facial wrinkles and increasing dress sizes but not by a clock, so she was harassed by its sudden passing in the course of mere day. Her letters were written on that day which gratuitously stopped and gave her several hours of what she often called *another vacuous Sunday afternoon*. In her letters (which spoke of love but never marriage) she wondered where her time had gone, then she answered her question by telling him of classes and nights of studying during the week and dates on Friday and Saturday. Before leaving Camp Pendleton to report to the *Vanguard*, Dan had said he expected her to date. He had assumed that checking out her psyche involved being with other men. He was rarely jealous. She wrote of several different escorts (naming them, saying briefly where they had taken her) and Dan considered them as boys who lacked the maturity he had earned by being a man among men, boys who bought her drinks and took her to football games and parties but who shared neither her background nor her body.

Her background was the Marine Corps. Her father was a colonel at Camp Pendleton. When Dan first met Colonel Vandenberg, the Colonel had said: *How old are you, Lieutenant?* Dan had told him he was twenty-four and the Colonel had chuckled and said: *I've been in the Marine Corps all your life.* Dan had smiled, blushing; but he was realizing that Khristy had been in the Marine Corps all her life to she had already—though secondhand—experienced most of his future. If she married him, she would leave a colonel's house to live in a lieutenant's.

He felt that her father's profession and her mother's commitment to it were the causes of Khristy's subtle abeyance, her resistance which was more than physical, and their differences which they rarely quarreled about but usually touched on, even on their last night together before Dan drove north to join the *Vanguard*. They had begun that evening at a restaurant in Oceanside (she did not like the officers' clubs on the base); Khristy was drinking martinis, saying she was determined to get happy and fuzzy like a child falling asleep. He drank them too. After his second, he was telling her of almost getting lost in the field with his entire platoon because he had been in new terrain and for some reason he could find none of its contours on the map. So he had marched the platoon up a hill and given an impromptu lecture, showing them how you could find your position by doing a two-point resection with a map and compass, and they sat on the ground watching him, the platoon sergeant standing behind them looking interested too, and then Dan had known the sergeant was also lost. He had squatted on the ground and done the resection and it had worked: he had been able to stand up and say, *So you see we're on this hill, right here*—Then Khristy had said:

“You should get out of the Marine Corps.”

His first thought was that she was disgusted by his incompetence, and looking at her with his mouth open but quiet, he thought her father—whom he only saw at his quarters—had somehow judged him and told Khristy he didn't pack the gear. She reached a hand across the table and laid it on his.

“I hate to see you get old,” she said. “They get so old. They go to a couple of wars and after twenty or twenty-five years, they retire and they're lost. Did you ever notice how many of them simply fall apart when they retire? Old wounds start bothering them and they look restless or confused or even scared of some of them. My God, how many times have I heard my father say: ‘When I go I want to catch on right between the horns—’”

She withdrew her hand and touched her forehead.

“And you,” she said. “You're on fire with it: you'll be yelling gung-ho on beaches and someday when you're still around you'll retire and they'll give you a regimental parade and you'll cry when they march past playing the Hymn—unless you've changed a lot.”

Then she looked away from him, toward the piano bar, and said:

“And for what.”

He started to reach for her hand again but, pretending not to notice, she moved the hand away, to her cigarettes. When he gave her a light she settled back in her chair, out of his reach, and said:

“I'm fuzzy but that's all. Let's have another.”

Her voice then had been sad, resigned, and her letters which began the following week, shortly after he had reported to the *Vanguard*, had the same tone. That tone had never changed. He grew accustomed to it and the weekly letter, accepting his allotted time in the flow of her life. Still, every day when mail call was announced, he faced the distribution of letters with the anxiety of a waiting lover.

When he reached the barracks, mail had been passed out; there were six letters stacked on his desk. He spread them out like a hand of cards and in one glance saw that each was addressed by a feminine hand and each was for a prisoner in the brig. There was no letter for him.

Though he was alone in the office, he assumed a calm expression, then sat at his desk and slowly looked at each letter. One of his functions as the man in charge of the ship's brig was to read a

outgoing and incoming mail. At times it was boring, but often he enjoyed it. In September there had been witty letters from a girl in Alameda and, for her sailor's two weeks of confinement, Dan had looked forward to reading them. Last month a Negro sailor had served thirty days in the brig and his mistress in Oakland had written him daily: her love passages sounded like a combination of popular songs and romance magazines, but Dan believed her anyway; what he liked most was her anecdotes of Oakland night life which, she wrote, she enjoyed with a girl friend. She told him of a world of music and gin and violence which he had never known.

Tonight there was a letter from Freeman's girl and Dan saved it for last.

When he pulled out the four sheets of thin folded stationery, a small colored photograph fell on his desk: the girl, standing on a blanket in a small lawn with a low green fence behind her and, beyond that, tall apartment buildings. She wore a two-piece aqua bathing suit and stood profiled to the camera, and her hair was indeed bright red, as Tolleson had told her. Her belly was flat and white against her face, turned to the camera, was smiling. She held a can of beer. On the back of the photograph was written:

*All my love,*

*Jan*

*(I don't remember the date.*

*Do you?)*

Then he studied her face, as if to intercept that look in her eyes before Freeman saw it. And he was thinking they were not at a beach and apparently there was no one else there, they were sunbathing together on a bright California day and they would leave the blanket and go into her apartment—wherever that was, probably behind the camera—and they would make love and lie in bed drinking beer, maybe three dollars worth of beer, three dollars and a sunny afternoon and a young red-haired girl, and then they would—*oh Khristy oh Goddammit*—

Then he read the letter.

*Ted Baby,*

*I finally used up the rest of that roll. The others didn't come out so good but I'm glad this one did. I wanted you to have it so you could remember what I looked like. Believe me, next time you see me you'll notice the difference! But don't worry, next summer I'll get in that same bathing suit. I wonder if that was the day it happened. I hope it was, because it was such a good day.*

Dan read faster, sensing—as if she sat talking in his office—her voice changing from nostalgia and love to desperate practicality:

*—have to go by the regulations but Baby I'm going on four months and I can't cover it up much longer. If we wait til the ship comes home in March I'll be seven months! Please Baby can you talk to your Captain, you told me he was a good man—*

Dan got up and opened the door. Across the room, the Corporal of the Guard was sitting at his desk reading a letter. Dan told him to have Freeman sent up from the brig and he waited at the door until the corporal was dialing the number. Then he finished reading the letter.

While he waited for Freeman he looked up the order that had been issued by the Commander of the

Seventh Fleet before the *Vanguard* had left the States. He did not really have to see it again, for he knew what it said: that during the Western Pacific deployment, members of the Seventh Fleet would be granted emergency leave only under the following circumstances: father or mother dying, wife dead or dying, child dead or dying, or father or mother dead provided the serviceman was necessary for settling the estate.

Then he left his office and knocked on the door of Tolleson's stateroom and went in. Tolleson rose from the leather chair where he had been reading a letter. He wore khaki tropical trousers, a T-shirt, and shower shoes. On his left bicep, above the dark hair, was a tattoo of a Marine emblem. Dan sat down, then Tolleson did.

"Freeman's girl is knocked up."

"Well, sir," Tolleson said after a moment, "it's kinda tough when these little girls take serious when you poke at 'em in fun."

"She'll be seven months when we get back to the States."

"Goddamn, sir, you know what I think? The Commandant of this man's Marine Corps ought to issue a general order that *all* Marines will be schooled in the function of the birds and the bees. I swear to God, sir, half of 'em don't know how they got here."

Dan was looking at the bulkhead and scratching his jaw, waiting for Tolleson to subside, and he was thinking that for four or five years now he had needed to shave again in the evening, with a blade, if he were going out; Freeman would be married soon and his electric razor would disturb the apartment morning quiet only three or four times a week.

"How well do you know that chief in charge of passenger lists?"

"Sir, I hope the Lieutenant's not thinking about sending Freeman home, because if I remember correctly—"

"I know. I just read the order again."

"From ComSeventhFleet, I believe, sir."

"It is. But it occurs to me that this is an aircraft carrier and it has a mail plane that takes people to Japan and if Freeman can get to Japan he can catch a hop to California."

"Yes, sir. However—"

"And I know this, First Sergeant, and you know it too: a lot of things get done, whether admirals authorize them or not."

"Yessir, that's true."

"So why don't you give that chief a call. We'll just look into it and see what it'd take to get Freeman home."

"Aye sir, I'll give it a try."

Dan went back to his office where Freeman was waiting, just outside the door, standing at parade rest with a prisoner chaser behind him. Dan told him to come in and shut the door and stand at ease.

"Why didn't you tell me your girl was pregnant?"

"Sir, Prisoner Freeman didn't think it'd do any good, sir."

This time Freeman was not afraid; he stood at rigid parade rest and stared with pain and defiance at the bulkhead behind Dan, who felt that defiance, retreated from it and all it represented—his past and his future days of working with men whose enslavement to his rank enslaved them even further, so that they were not free to look at him as a man, stripped of his uniform and its accouterments of rank which were, to them, his name: The Lieutenant. As gently as he could, he said:

"Look—we've got a lot of talking to do, and it'll save time if you knock off that prisoner talk."

Freeman's face did not change.

"Aye aye, sir," he said.

"Now: maybe there *is* something we can do. You can't tell until you ask."

Looking at Freeman's face, he was imagining it suddenly changing: saw the jaws and lips softening, the eyes focusing gratefully downward toward his own. He saw Jan in the apartment doorway, her hair somehow brilliant even without sunlight, and Freeman, uniformed, dropping his seabag to the corridor floor: *Lieutenant Tierney sent me home!*—clasping her—*he took care of EVERYthing.*

"Do you love this girl, Freeman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you plan to marry her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pregnant or not? You're sure?"

"Yes, sir: we were getting married after the cruise."

"Where do her parents live?"

"In Stockton, sir."

"Do they know she's pregnant?"

"No, sir."

"But they see her often enough so they'll find out?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose they will."

"What about your folks? Do they know?"

"No, sir."

"They're in California too, aren't they?"

"No, sir. Bellingham, Washington, sir."

*Know your men*, he had been told at Basic School, *keep a platoon commander's notebook*; and he had faithfully had: a small pocket notebook with a red leather cover that bore the Marine emblem. Inside there was a page for each man with blanks for essential information; the process of knowing a man began with your filling these blanks. As you copied the information from his service record book, you felt that you were taking possession of a part of him: as if you were watching him sleep, and sharing the privacy of his slack jaws, his snores, his mutterings. Then you memorized the information and the process was complete. If your commanding officer asked, you could tell him where a man was from, his age, his approximate height and weight, whether he was married or single, and whether he was a marksman, sharpshooter, or expert with the rifle. And now Dan had blundered: had forgotten and then let Freeman know it. He would study his notebook before going to bed tonight.

"Well, Freeman, there's a chance—just a chance, understand—that we can get you off this bird farm and fly you back to the States. If the First Sergeant can—" he paused "—swing something."

Now Freeman was looking down at him, not grateful yet but anxious, dependent—and surprised.

"Tell me, Freeman: what made you say that to Corporal McKittrick this morning?"

"Personal reasons, sir."

It was what they always said when they wanted to see the chaplain or the company commander, battalion commander or the inspector general, and you were not supposed to pry; you had to let them go, and you did—with the sense of alienation of a man watching his wife enter a confessional.

"I'm sure that's true, because I don't think you'd be insubordinate without some reason. Now don't mean to pry, but maybe if you could tell me it would help you with this other thing."

He held up the letter from Jan. Freeman looked at it, then looked at the bulkhead and said:

"He was harassing me, sir. About my girl being pregnant."

"What did he say?"

"Sir, he said the Detachment was going to have another Teddy-Baby."

"He said that in front of other troops? While he was supervising clean-up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he say anything else?"

“Yes, sir, but I’d rather not repeat it, sir.”

“All right,” Dan said.

He stood up.

“Tell you what: you stay here and read your letter and I’ll step out for a while.”

Freeman came to attention, clicking his heels.

“Aye-aye, sir. Thank you, sir.”

Dan went out and shut the door, then knocked on Tolleson’s door.

“Sir,” the Corporal of the Guard said, “First Sergeant said to tell the Lieutenant he’s gone to the chief’s mess.”

“All right. How ’bout getting hold of Burns for me.”

Dan waited in Tolleson’s stateroom for Burns, a tall lean boy with dark hair whose cutting at Bow Camp he probably still regretted; he was a saxophone player. Or he had been before joining the Marine Corps, and he meant to play again, professionally, when he got out. He had the qualities of a good clerk: he was smart enough to work in the small office with Dan and Tolleson every day, to join in their small talk when he was invited or allowed, while never making Dan or Tolleson feel that he was trying to have anything more than a professional relationship with them. When he came to Tolleson’s door, Dan told him to prepare a release order for Freeman.

“And Burns—”

“Yes, sir?”

“When you go in there to type it, don’t tell Freeman what it is.”

Burns smiled, like a friend planning a surprise party.

“Aye aye, sir,” he said.

Then Dan was alone. He closed the door and sat smoking because things were happening fast now and he had to think. First he would release Freeman, telling him that he could understand the causes of his insubordination (he would not say that Corporal McKittrick had been wrong, had used his rank for bullying, because he did not want to undermine that rank); he would say that, considering the circumstances, he felt one day in the brig was sufficient punishment, and that he expected Freeman to control himself in the future and to come see him or the First Sergeant if he had any more personal conflicts with NCO’s. Then, with Tolleson, he would arrange to fly Freeman home. And last, before leaving the barracks that night, he would reprimand Corporal McKittrick. Then he would go to his stateroom and study his platoon commander’s notebook, and write to Khristy.

He would reprimand her too.

He went into his office and told Burns to step outside. He signed the release order, leaning over the desk, then slowly straightened and turned to Freeman who stood at parade rest. He told Freeman he was released from confinement, and he told him why, watching the fading defiance in his face. Then he told him to stand by for word on a flight off the ship.

“I don’t know if it can be done,” he said. Then he smiled. “But after all, Freeman, it occurs to me that this is an aircraft carrier and there’s a mail plane that takes people to Japan.”

Freeman smiled and said: “Yes, sir.” Dan told him he could go and, still grinning, Freeman clicked his heels, smartly about-faced, and walked out.

Dan sat in the office waiting for Tolleson, sipping a cup of coffee which he got from the percolator near the Corporal of the Guard’s desk, having crossed the classroom where several troops were shining shoes, having felt so completely in control of the Detachment and himself that he had been unaware of those troops and—for once—had not bothered to fix on his face the public expression of an officer: a look of serene confidence, as if he had transcended all the problems of the enlisted world and was now preoccupied with the logistics of an amphibious landing on the shores of China. He had merely crossed the room, watched by the troops, thinking of Freeman and Jan starting a baby on

sunny afternoon in Oakland, and as he recrossed the classroom to enter his office, he was smiling warmly to himself.

He leaned back in the swivel chair, looking at the overhead and thinking of Khristy, having forgotten the time difference and wondering what day and what hour of that day it was in California perhaps morning and she was walking to some place on the campus for breakfast, her long brown hair curling upward at her shoulders, her lips freshly and lightly reddened, the scent of toothpaste still on her breath, and her greyish-blue eyes as calm and alert as her father's might be while he read a operations order from higher command. Her eyes were not always that way. When she and Dan laughed together they would brighten, looking at him with a sudden intimacy that made him feel he had known her all his life.

On that last night with Khristy, after she had told him he should get out of the Marine Corps, they had with their usual facility changed their conversation and their moods. They had been in one of the two restaurants in Oceanside which provided left-over atmosphere: a dark place, behind whose bar was a large stuffed martin flanked by sections of a fishnet arranged as neatly as bunting; on another wall a black low-crowned flat-brimmed hat was suspended as if a Flamenco dancer had come through head first and lodged there, his bent-over body trapped outside in the moving fog—and Dan thought of Winnie-the-Pooh caught in Rabbit's hole, and told Khristy; and squeezing his hands on the table she laughed until tears sparkled her eyes. Beneath the hat was a red poncho. Farther left there was a sombrero, a white one, with a green serape below it; directly between the two hats a coiled bullwhip hung over two crossed banderillas.

"That's the wetback wall," Dan said over the organ music, loudly enough so that he quickly looked around to be sure his next statement was true: "Only thing is, they can't afford to come see it."

"Si," Khristy said, and lifted her martini in a toast, whether to his sense of justice or to the huts and dirt floors of fruit pickers, he didn't know.

The organ music came from what the management called a piano bar. On the wall above the organist's head was a photograph of the restaurant-owner shaking hands with a steady-working mediocre Hollywood actor who, Dan recalled aloud, had been twice nominated for Oscars but had never won.

"So they'll give him one someday," he said. "They'll say he's been a fixture in the industry."

Then he picked up the menu and asked if she would like to start with a shrimp cocktail, for he was sorry he had mentioned movies. Some time ago she had accused him of having seen more movies than any person his age in the United States. *They're not real*, she had told him and he replied that he was well aware of that but he didn't care; besides, he had said, sometimes they're more real than they seem to be. Once he had told her that Gary Cooper had been his hero since he was a boy, that he had seen *The Pride of the Yankees* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* several times when he was very young and he had cried each time. So she had given him a large paperback edition of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* inscribing it: *To a good trooper from a rather uncertain Maria*. Taking the book from her he remembered Gary Cooper lying on his belly, aiming what Dan believed was a Lewis gun at the audience, firing, as two guerillas rode away holding Ingrid Bergman on a horse between them.

He had felt like crying at the end of the book too, then told her that Hemingway should have known better, that when you cross a road or trail in daylight you make everyone cross at once before they can zero in on you, because if you cross one at a time it'll be just like the book, they'll get the gun around and the people at the end of your column will have had the course. Just as she was beginning to scold he said: *Wait*, and told her he was glad it worked out that way because otherwise Robert Jordan wouldn't have had to stay behind, which was the best by God thing he could have done.

*I thought you'd like that*, she had said.

So in the restaurant he ordered two shrimp cocktails and lobster and more martinis, having a quiet

fantasy of being unable to buy gasoline for his trip north tomorrow, and Khristy said with more irritation than music alone could have caused:

“Why should a town in Southern California, of all places, have nothing but organ music?”

She was looking at the piano bar whose stools were all occupied by middle-aged couples; even when she looked they began to sing “Heart of My Heart.” The organist was about fifty, a lean almost boyish man, having slicked long hair without a visible touch of grey. He was smiling, with lips closed, at the singers. Khristy said he looked like he had slept with every peroxidized girl and woman from San Diego to Santa Barbara and was playing his own funeral music while he waited to die.

After the martinis and shrimp cocktails and lobster, the sweetness of chocolate-covered mint patties—one apiece—which Dan bought at the candy counter in front of the cashier, the hot bitterness of coffee that sweetened their cigarettes, they sat quietly, full and rather tight, smiling oddly at each other, and Khristy said:

“Well, we might as well.”

“Might as well what?”

“Dance to this stuff. Come on.”

They danced among couples who were, in a last-lap sort of way, attractive: women whose lined faces suggested boats and beaches rather than age, and whose hair refused to be grey; men whose hair either silvered or did not change at all, though some had owned faithless hair which had left them to live the rest of their lives under a series of seasonal hats. Dan assumed these people inhabited the town of Oceanside, a town he referred to as a service town: a main street of barbers, tailors, dry cleaners, laundromats, and bars without even facades: mere four-walled structures where young enlisted Marines could continue their baptism into the world of men by drinking and talking as they pleased. He did not know what these dancing men did for a living. He had never been in the pastel residential section on the hill overlooking the main street. He figured of course that Oceanside had its mayor, its judge and lawyers and doctors; there must be teachers and men who erected buildings and houses; certainly there were managers of supermarkets, owners of service stations, pharmacists; there would be the ubiquitous insurance men, and someone owned the women’s clothing store which seemed to display always a brightly colored bathing suit in its window. But he could account for no one else. Then Khristy said:

“My God—let’s get out of here.”

He left a good tip, his fantasy of being utterly broke by morning now washed away by gin, and his vestiges tamped firmly beneath consciousness by lobster and potatoes; he paid the bill with the same insouciant grace; and with his arm lightly encircling her ribs, they stepped into the fog. She took his hand and led him away from the parking lot, toward the beach: she descended steep wooden steps to the pier and he thought she was going to the end of it where they would kiss swaying over the dark white-capped tide smacking against the pilings. But a third of the way down the pier, as he was reaching for her waist again, she turned in front of him and stepped rather than jumped to the sand three feet below. So he jumped after her.

“Let’s go to that place at the south end of the beach,” she said.

He had just straightened from his jump, standing close to her, her grey-blue eyes looking dark not just below his, and he was about to tell her the bar at the south end was off-limits, but instead he kissed her; taking her by surprise so that her teeth clicked against his for an instant, then she was returning the kiss and he was seeing her prone on the sand, wondering if she would ever be prone for him—although he wasn’t sure that he would, on the sand; for just as he could not look at any landscape without a tactical eye which sought out critical high ground and draws and treelines that would serve as avenues of approach, he could not see or feel sand under his feet without being reminded of amphibious landings and the difficulty of running on it wearing boots and a haversack.



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