

No Time For Assassins

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When Pele - the Goddess of the Hawaiian Islands and volcanoes deserted Oahu for Molokai she placed Malei - the Fish Goddess in charge of the seas around Oahu. Pearl Harbor is the home of the Shark God. The same Shark God who guided Moikeha - the Tahitian to Hawaii in the Thirteenth Century came under her control. The Shark God takes many forms. Its most common is - Tiger Shark.

Pacific Ocean - South of Hawaii

Pat Penny - dressed only in shorts climbed up from below decks of his catamaran, "Breeze feels good, but this damn sun sure is hot." He raised the convertible top over his cat's cockpit, but it was of little use. The late afternoon sun setting in the southwest still flooded his cockpit, "I'll fry like a lobster if I have to put up with any more of this." He dropped the side curtain to starboard, "That's better. Cuts the reflection down from the ocean - too. Wonder if my Tiger is still off the bow - leading me to where? A South Pacific island? Is he a reincarnation of the great white whale. The one who led Captain Ahab to a watery grave?" Pat walked forward on the port pontoon - shaded his eyes and

looked out over the bow. His own personal Moby Dick was not in sight. Hanging on the rigging he spun around one hundred and eighty degrees and returned to the helm. Pat looked down into the catamaran's shadow. There - forty feet below cruised the Tiger Shark - dark black eyes - forever open - looking upward.

Pat held onto the rigging, "Well my friend what are the fishermen of Oahu going to do without your protection now. If the legend is right - fish will not come to their nets and sailors will be lost at sea. Who sent you? Was it Malei or are you another friend of the horned disciple of my red dreams? Are you the Red Devil's personal emissary? I am sailing south to Palmyra where I will rest and you will have a cornucopia of reef fish to dine on."

As the shark rose toward the surface - Pat's fingers dug into rigging with a death's grip, "I can hear your thoughts. You want to know where will we stop after Palmyra? I'm not sure - Tahiti or Fiji - maybe. I'll know after we reach the Doldrums. If you are still leading my cat I promise I'll continue to follow." His shark rolled over and dove down forty feet below - rolled upright and again matched Pat Penny's catamaran's speed.

Pat returned to the helm smiling, "It could be worse. A slow death floating on these waters fighting sun and thirst before going under. With my friend below it will be quick - not painless." He checked his compass heading, "One hundred and eighty degrees" and then his watch "an hour before sunset. How am I going to handle sleep? Sudden storm could flip my catamaran over on it's back and pitch me out. I'll be chum for my friend below." He looked around, "Only one way to do it. Sleep on the bench behind the wheel - wear a life vest - with a line around my waist tied to the stern. Might have to stop at a few islands along the way to rest and

get some real sleep. A nap now and then won't hurt. I won't have trouble sleeping after a day in this salt air and sun." He grabbed the top of the hatch and swung below.

Pat checked the cat's coordinates on his GPS navigation system, "I'm making good time. Already a hundred nautical miles south of Oahu." He plotted this position on his map, "Nine hundred miles north of Palmyra. If the winds hold - I'll make landfall in a little over two days." He climbed back above decks.

Pat scanned the horizon, "What's that? Looks like I have company. Another ship on the horizon. If it is I can't outrun her. Better hope she turns back north. I'm out of the shipping lanes. Has to be a yacht. That's a good sign. If it was a Navy ship she would still be coming on - strong." He removed his binoculars from the case and focused, "Medium sized boat. Not fast enough to overtake a catamaran - not with an evening Trade coming up strong. If she's trailing me I won't see her again until late tomorrow afternoon when the winds die down. Sun's over the yardarm. It's time for a half and half Primo and Guinness Stout. If I mix it three to one my Guinness should last. Only way Primo's drinkable."

Pat placed his hands on the hatch - swung his feet over and dropped to the galley below. Wasn't hard. Catamaran's cabin was one large great-room. He opened the ice chest - extracted a Primo and popped open a recapped Guinness - poured half the remaining Guinness into a thermal mug - emptied a can of Primo on top of it - being careful to pour the liquid down the side of the mug. It still foamed, "Damn Primo is all bubbles and fizz. Must make it out of freeze dried hops. Now what's for dinner? Better make a salad. And after last night's nightmare - I'll need a double order of link sausage. Have to ration my sausage. Can't afford to run out. A link sausage a day keeps my Red Devils away. I wonder why the

Tiger's staying with me? I thought sharks were territorial. He has to be the one who took the front end off my surfboard. Not many in this ocean as large as he is - unless he has a brother. Am I his Ahab?"

Pat climbed the ladder above decks and sat at the helm sipping his half and half, "Wonder if I've lost my Russian lady hunter. She is a pretty one all right, but those eyes - like cold blue ball bearings." He opened the Honolulu Advertiser, "Last newspaper I'll see for quite awhile. On the front page in two inch headlines -

JCS Chairman Assassinated at Bellows Air Force Station

Pat read on -

Nothing remains of the Chairman. A projectile of unknown type vaporized him last night while he was on the lanai of the CINCPACAF Cottage. At the same time - the remains of a catamaran were discovered washed up on Waimanalo Beach. Naval Investigative Service is in charge. They refused to comment about a possible connection. A separate article about the catamaran is on page one of Section B.

Pat opened the paper to Section B and laughed - According to Kimo Aku - Pat Penny from San Francisco purchased the catamaran Nui Hulu Ulaula Mea the day it

disappeared. Mr. Penny was on a trial sail before sailing it to the mainland. Kimo knows of no connection between Mr. Penny and the assassination of the JCS Chairman.

Pat read several more articles and set the paper aside, "I'll need more than a little luck to be home free. How many have I eliminated? Thirteen - fourteen. I've been a busy little assassin. No frills - just do the job and move on. I'm more like my Tiger below than I like to admit. We're both scavengers. We keep our areas clean of the weak and unwanted. I wonder - is there more work for me to do before I can rest? Benny will know. When will he contact me? Has to be soon or I'll lose my edge. Only he understands my nightly torment with the Red Devils. I hope Benny's right about the Russian lady leaving me alone. I'd just as soon do the hunting than be the hunted. No fun being a target." Pat uncased his binoculars and scanned the horizon to the north, "Nothing. Either she has turned back or is running with her lights off. No need to worry now - later maybe. I'm hungry. Just the thought of rolls of link - curled link sausage is making me drool."

Pat dined on salad as his sausage cooked. He carried the platter to the helm, "Tempted to uncork a bottle of red, but I need my wits about me. Lost my weapon to that damn shark. Have to cut him open if I want to retrieve it. No chance of that. If I harpooned him he'd take me and this catamaran under with him." Pat speared a curved link and began to nibble on one of the ends. His eyes closed and a feeding frenzy began. When he awoke from his reverie - his plate was empty and his shirt covered with grease. He checked heading and looked north over his shoulder for lights of the trailing boat, but saw none. He placed his dishes in a bucket and dipped it in the ocean - one - two - three - four times - before going below to clean the galley.

Pat opened the wrong cabinet door for his dishes and discovered an unmarked sack. He looked inside and found an automatic pistol with a silencer and three clips, "A gift from Benny." He checked the galley again to see if Benny had left another surprise, "If he had time to do this - would he plant an explosive device?"

Pat scoured the cabin and engine compartment, "Nothing here - the pontoons?" In the port pontoon - Pat found the device, "Are we ever getting sophisticated. Damn thing is satellite controlled. Which means he hasn't made up his mind. Bet it has a feedback device." Pat found its twin in the starboard pontoon and took them below to the navigation table. He opened the first one up, "Not booby trapped - must think I'm distracted - or I'll only look for one. Trick is to disable the explosive charge - not the system." Pat checked the circuit, "They are getting sloppy." He wired around the charge and carefully - very carefully removed it. He carried the charge gingerly above decks and threw it over the stern and returned. He opened the second device, "Maybe they weren't dumb. Can't wire around this one. He traced the circuit, "Don't have to. It operates on a simple open circuit. All I have to do is cut the wire." He breathed a deep sigh as he carried the second charge above decks and tossed it over the stern. Pat replaced the devices back in their respective pontoons and went below.

With the galley clean - Pat returned to the helm - donned a life vest and tied a line to the stern. He leaned back and looked up at stars - so bright they lit up the night sky. Pat closed his eyes and wondered, "Benny gives me a weapon and ammunition to protect myself and then wires my catamaran with explosives. It's as conflicting as my execution order for the JCS Chairman. Russians program me to do it and CIA stands aside. I guess if anybody is going to finish me off - Benny wants to be the one. I wonder if he's

running a rogue operation. No time to worry now. Enough time to worry on my sail south. Lights are turned out and the wind generator is showing max charge to the batteries. I can top off with fresh water at Palmyra - maybe even catch a lobster or two. Chart shows an abandoned Navy runway built in World War II. Should be a jungle shower. Can't take anything for granted. Might not have fresh water. Better take salt water bucket baths on deck until I'm sure. This ocean is like a desert. Fresh water can't be wasted on frivolous things." Pat looked up again at a magnificent night sky and closed his eyes, "Benny - you'll have a lot of explaining to do - if and when we meet again."

As the sun rose above the swells its rays struck the cockpit above Pat's head and moved slowly downward into his eyes. He woke up with a start, "I've been on autopilot for" he looked at his watch, "My God! I've been asleep for over twelve hours." He sat up, "Sausage did the trick. Better drop the curtain on the port side before this sun cooks me to a well done." He untied the line and removed his life vest - tying it with the same line and placing it on the bench where he slept. He checked compass heading, "Steady at 180° and hull speed is at twenty-two knots. Moving right along. Wonder if my friends are about?" Pat opened the case and removed his binoculars - scanning the horizon - from ninety degrees to two-seventy. "Not a soul in sight." He stepped forward on the starboard pontoon, "Wonder - do I still have my traveling companion? There you are - out front. Last time I saw a dorsal fin that big was on an Orca in the Norwegian Sea. You are a big one my friend. Tell me - do you prefer Tahiti - Samoa - or Fiji? Where am I getting this notion to go to Fiji? Are you putting it in my head?"

Pat grabbed a handhold on the forward part of the hatch and swung below. He checked the satellite coordinates, "Four hundred nautical miles south of Hawaii - six hundred to go."

This Cat was a good choice." He looked up at the bookcase above the navigation table and found a pamphlet tucked in with the charts and navigation tables." He turned it over, "Fiji. Is my friend inside my head?" He opened it up, "Not your usual tourist guide. Need coffee and breakfast. I'll read this while I dine." Pat lit the burner and heated a pre made percolator pot of coffee. When its plop - plop - plop turned into a steady machine gun boil he set the pot aside and cooked two eggs - covering each one with a slice of cheddar cheese. When this melted he placed each egg between two slices of bread - poured coffee - sat down at the galley table and opened the pamphlet to the table of contents.

Pat saw the eagle insignia of CIA, "Benny put this here. How did he know I'd pull it out of the bookshelf?" He leafed through the first chapter, "Well it's not an estimate. Has to be a white paper. Those are generally pretty factual. Lets see what the salient points are." He read - 'Fiji is an independent nation, but has remained a member of the British Commonwealth. So its laws are based on British Common.'

"That's good - not certain I care for the Spanish or French systems. If I'm incarcerated - I'll get a fair hearing before they hang the guilty bastard - me. Not that I don't deserve a good hanging."

He finished his sandwich, "What's the problem? Ah - here it is. British brought in Indians from India to work the sugarcane plantations. When they gave Fiji independence the Indians outnumbered the Fijians and controlled all the elective offices. And the Indian Political Party was to the left of Lenin. Indians control government and commerce and Fijians own the land. The Indians moved to declare Fiji a nuclear free zone and attempted to align their government with the Russians. Fijians controlled police and military. With CIA's help they booted out the socialists." Pat laid the pamphlet down.

His coffee was now cool enough to drink. Pat sipped and continued reading, "Still don't know why Benny stuck this in the bookshelf. He skipped to the last page, "At last the punch line. New Zealand is the other country in the South Pacific with a nuclear free zone. The Kiwis are sticking their fingers into Fiji's pie. Suva is Fiji's capital and the Chief of Police's name is underlined - Bau - Chief Bau. Typical of Benny - he added a note" -

Fiji needs our continued support. Give Chief Bau all and any assistance he requires. The British aren't keen about the way the Fijians took their land back. They still get into a colonial mindset when dealing with vestiges of their empire. Tell Chief Bau I sent you. He's aware of your unique abilities. I'll contact you through one of our mutual friends. Oh - disarm the two devices I left on board. If you haven't read this - it won't matter. You will be better off going to the after life. The weapon in your cupboard - don't waste ammo - you'll need it in Fiji - - - - - Benny.

It was a simple code. The six dashes before Benny's signature authenticated the note and his command. Pat poured another cup of coffee - carried it and the pamphlet up to the helm. He shredded the pamphlet and let the pieces drop over the stern - one by one into the sea. He returned to the helm, "So that's it. Benny wanted to make sure I was on top of my game or there wouldn't be enough of me left to feed my shark. At least it's a comfort to know I'm still wanted. However - I don't care for the agency's retirement plan. I wonder what the Fijians need from me?"

Pat hopped forward on the port pontoon, "Fiji my giant dorsal friend. I got your message. We're going to Fiji. You better stoke up on reef fish at Palmyra. It's going to be a long voyage." The Tiger's giant dorsal fin cut through the ocean like a hot knife through butter - not wavering. As Pat laughed the Tiger's head cocked upward toward him - eyes burning bright. Pat continued, "Has Benny placed a computer chip inside your head where your brain is supposed to be?" The Tiger turned and swam toward the Cat - ducking under before colliding with the bow. Pat hurried to the stern and looked down into ball bearing eyes of sudden death, "I will not play with you again. I enjoy your company too much to become dinner. Truce?" The Tiger ducked under the boat.

Pat stared out over the bow past the giant dorsal fin's wake - knifing through the water on a straight line south toward Palmyra. The blue Pacific stretched out before him to eternity, "You are not like the North Sea - always boiling in turmoil. Pacific is an appropriate name. But - you too have a dark side. I admire your beauty and fear your wrath. Your freak storms strike unannounced - tsunamis when we are asleep and the typhoons when we're awake. My only companion on your tranquil waters is a giant Tiger Shark who'd as soon devour me as look at me."

Pat's mind was at rest - hypnotized by the vast waters of the Pacific. Nothing happened the rest of this morning and nothing happened that afternoon. Pat - eyes closed and slept through both. He did not notice or care that his Tiger had returned to rest in the shade of the cat's hull.

Pat woke a little after five - sat up and rubbed his eyes, "I'll not rest well tonight." He swung below and checked the GPS readout, "Six hundred miles south of Hawaii. If the wind holds I'll make Palmyra in twenty hours - two o'clock tomorrow afternoon." He opened another can of Primo

- mixing in a third of the bottle of Guinness Stout. He carried it along as he climbed back up through the hatch, "Better see if my friends are trailing. If they're after me they should have caught up by now." Pat removed the binoculars from their case and scanned the horizon, "Only me and my friend out front. Wonder where they went?"

He felt a vibration - a rumbling sound. Pat cupped his ear to the north, but could hear nothing. He moved his glasses up a notch - scanning the north sky and saw a metal glint reflecting from the rays of the setting sun, "Airplane is heading my way. Better check the chart." He took a sip of beer - swung below to the navigation table and unfolded his chart of Palmyra. Pat ran his forefinger over the island, "Runway is big enough to handle a small jet, but by the sound of the one coming my way it has to be a twin engine prop - like that rust bucket we flew to Norway."

He popped his head up out of the hatch and scanned the northern horizon, "Coming this way all right. Wonder who they are? Better stay below. My Cat will stick out like a turd in a punch bowl. No use letting them see who's on board." Pat returned to the galley and prepared his evening meal of link sausage and salad.

The twin engine prop passed by - five miles to starboard and disappeared on the southern horizon toward Palmyra. Pat checked its progress with his binoculars, "Nothing else out here. Has to be heading to Palmyra. Has two tip tanks - so it isn't a one way trip. Island is privately owned. It could be the overseer - or owners - CIA - or tagalongs. Have to consider a worst case scenario. Unless it returns - I'll have to take care of business before I continue on." He placed his dirty dishes and silverware into the wash bucket and dunked them in the ocean one - two - three - four - five - six times. Then took them below to dry and placed them

back in the cabinet. When Pat returned to the helm the Trade Wind had freshened. He checked hull speed, "Twenty-four knots - moving right along. Better go below and study Palmyra's charts. May want to stay offshore until nightfall and sneak in."

He swung below and studied the chart, "No way to sneak in - not after dark. Channel through the reef is too narrow. Best bet is to give the island a wide berth and sneak in from the south. As high as these sails are - they'd spot me for sure. If they're as dumb as the ones they sent after me before - they'll only look north. Lets see - the obvious way is sail to starboard and come around. So - I'll adjust my compass heading three degrees to port and pass the island on the east - swing around and come in from the south." Pat returned to the helm and adjusted compass heading - three degrees to port.

Palmyra

"I'll know soon enough if my ploy worked," Pat whispered to himself as he turned north "and if my GPS is accurate. They can't see me and I can't see Palmyra. I can smell her - though. Strange how the aroma of tropical flowers carries on the wind miles and miles offshore. Damn - my Tiger Shark has deserted me. Made a beeline for the reef before I was even close to abeam of the island. Must really be hungry. Wonder if he'll keep me company when I depart."

"Better take my sails down and come in under power. Northeast Trade Winds will carry the sound away from the harbor and with sails up she'll have too high a profile. Don't want to waste all this work trying to maintain the element of surprise and have a lapse of thinking." Pat edged forward on the port pontoon and lowered the mainsail - tying it to the boom. He secured the boom and returned to the

wheel, "Time to go below and load my weapon. Might have to sail in firing." He laughed, "From this bouncing Betty I'll be lucky if I can hit a coconut palm."

He aimed his Cat for the outer channel marker. Pat stayed in the channel as he passed through the reef into safe harbor. He counted, "One - two - three boats. All of them sail and expensive. Sailing to out of the way places must be getting popular. Suits me - there really can be safety in numbers." He scanned the tree line, "No one watching. Hello - there's a boat pulled up on the sand with a small outboard motor hooked to the stern. Pat uncased his binoculars and looked through the trees, "Almost like jungle. Undergrowth is too heavy. I'll have to stay close to the paths. Hello again. Must be the one who owns the boat walking this way toweling her hair. Good - there's fresh water for my tanks and for me to shower. Wonder if there's lobster for the taking. If I'm going ashore - I'll need my weapon. Can't strap it around my waist. I'll need a pouch or a pack to hide it in. Water vessels - that's the ticket."

Pat dropped a single anchor off the bow - allowing his Cat to weathervane away from shore. He secured all loose gear above decks - went below to the storage lockers and removed four - five-gallon plastic jugs. He tied them in a line - two feet apart, "I'll have to float them back to the Cat. Surfboard would capsize. Surfboard! Wonder if my Tiger is lying in wait for me to enter the water? I'm a good hundred yards off the beach. He'll have four or five minutes to mount an attack."

The outboard came close, "Ahoy *Happy Hour* - do you mind if I come aboard?" Pat looked out. The lady was young enough - tan and athletic looking, "Be my guest. Just got in. Wait till I put these vessels down and I'll secure your line."

He tied the line to the port pontoon and helped her board. As she straightened her shorts she introduced herself, "I'm Sushi Martin. We own the *Wanderlust* over there. Didn't hear you come in."

"Came in under power. Don't trust a strange channel. I'm Kimo Aku from the Big Island on my way home from Tahiti. Been stopping at every Island on the way."

"Your boat says Ventura California."

"Bought her in Tahiti. I'm sailing her back home. Flew down. Too good a deal to pass up. Great boat - really flies over the water. How long have you been here?"

"Five days. We sailed down from Maui to get away from the crowds. Do you need anything?"

"No. I've stopped at every island on the way. Been frugal. Never can tell when you might get stranded. Is your first name really Sushi?"

"Nickname for being raw and spicy."

"I was going ashore for water. Your hair is wet. Is there a jungle shower?"

"At the Naval Air Station or what's left of it. Be careful - we have two unknowns about. Landed in a twin engine airplane late yesterday afternoon."

"Where are they?"

"Last we saw of them they were walking to the north shore with high powered rifles. We're giving them a wide berth."

"Water down the path?"

"Almost to the Quonset hut. Follow your nose."

"Lobster near the reef?"

"We bagged a dozen this morning. Join us for dinner at six?"

"I'll bring the wine. White or red?"

"Both."

"Your name - Kimo. Is it Hawaiian?"

"Means Jim. Aku is tuna. Jim Tuna. Sounds much better in Hawaiian. My parents had a sense of humor."

"We have canned tuna?"

"Not with lobster about."

Pat untied her line and watched to see which boat Sushi sailed too before removing his surfboard from the bulkhead. He placed his weapon - silencer and two clips of ammo inside his shaving kit - wrapped it and his binoculars in waterproof plastic - tied it and his shoes around his neck and entered the water with his surfboard. Trailing four large plastic water vessels - he paddled his board toward the beach. Pat secured his board - propping it up on the nearest palm tree - donned his shoes and walked inland on the path.

Following his nose he found the well and jungle shower. He filled a bucket and tested it, "Cold! Cold enough to send a Red Devil away from his master. Better fill the shower tank and let the sun warm it up." He climbed the ladder to the tank on top of the shower platform and poured the bucket in, "Tight enough - no leaks." He made twenty more trips - stopping when the water tank was three-quarters full. He checked the sun, "Be an hour before it warms up."

Pat opened his toilet kit and removed Benny's weapon. He screwed on the silencer, "Benny said be frugal, but I better take along the second clip just in case." He followed the path to the runway on the old Naval Air Station, "Not much left - tower - some locked storage - fuel tanks and an old Quonset hut." Pat climbed the tower and scanned the tree line on the north side of the runway, "Two paths. Neither ones been used much. East one has fresh broken branches." He climbed down and walked to the airplane.

Pat looked it over, "A Fairchild Merlin 300 - old, but it looks reliable. He attempted to open the side hatch. It was locked, "Wasting my time here. If I could get them airborne and give them a dose of their own medicine - I'd get rid of the evidence. Don't have time to set up something as fancy as that. Have to do things the old fashioned way." Pat walked over to the eastern path and followed it into the

undergrowth. He walked twenty paces - stopped and repeated this careful approach until he reached the beach. He stopped inside the undergrowth - uncased his binoculars and scanned the beach, "No one around."

He looked up - into the tops of the palms - stopping when he saw movement, "Hello - looks like one of them has climbed up to get a better view. One tagalong is atop the tall palm on the edge of the beach. The other must be at the base." He scanned slowly down the tree, "There he is - half hidden by the trunk."

Pat crept silently to the base of the tree - placed the pistol to the back of the tagalong's head and fired. Blood and brains splattered on the sand. He looked down, "Wonder who he worked for? Benny gave me hollow points. Bit of an overkill if you ask me. Quiet enough - though. Don't care much for the sound of this silencer. A pouf doesn't do much for me. No closure. Better get on with it before the one in the tree discovers he has no friend."

Pat braced his pistol against the trunk of the palm and aimed at the head of the man in the top of the tree. He fired one shot. The rifle fell out first - followed by the second tagalong. Pat ambled over and checked for pulse, "If the bullet didn't kill him the fall did. Tide's going out. It's time to feed my Tiger Shark."

Pat stripped the clothes off the first kill - grabbed his feet and dragged him into the water - pulling him as far out as he could. Up to his neck - he swam side stroke until he was fifty yards off shore. Pat let loose and swam quickly back to the beach. He stopped at the edge and turned around, "Sharks sure are hungry around here. Blood in the water must have attracted them." He stripped the clothes from the second kill - dragged his body into the water - stopping when

the surf was up to his chest. He gave the body a push - turned and swam quickly to shore. He sat on the sand and watched the feeding frenzy, "Damn - that works better than acid. Must remind myself not to go swimming here."

Pat returned to the shade of the palm and searched their clothes for identification, "Not much to go on here - hard to tell who they work for. Could be CIA, but if I had to bet - I'd say Russia. Benny would have finished me off at sea and he almost did. Might be a contract. Can't be - they're not Hawaiian. It looks like I've depleted the local Russian Counsul's office of all of their thugs." Pat emptied the wallets paper and plastic identification. He counted out the money, "A little over ten thousand. Has to be Russian. CIA doesn't allow anyone to carry this much. Things are looking up. My trip may show a profit yet. I don't need the money, but it might come in handy."

Pat walked a half mile along the tree line and then fifty feet into the undergrowth. He buried their shoes and clothes in shallow sand, "Jungle will take care of the rest. Billfolds and identification - I'll take them with me and give them a burial at sea." Pat looked over at the palm tree, "What am I going to do with the rifles. Except for the JCS Chairman - long distance assassination is not my style. Well - I don't want them and I can't leave them lying about. I'll bury them off the path and let the jungle rust them into useless pieces." He hummed as he walked -

*"Quarry mine - blessed am I in the luck of the chase.
Comes the deer to my singing."*

Pat stopped halfway to the runway - walked twenty paces off the path - dug a shallow hole in the wet sand and buried both rifles - covering them with scattered palm fronds.

He returned to the path singing -

"Hi! ni! ya! Behold the man of flint - that's me!"

A chant that came to him uncontrolled and unquestioned. Pat stopped at the tree line on the edge of the runway. He laughed out loud, "Got rid of all the evidence but the plane." He removed the keys in his pocket and unlocked the side door hatch, "God is this plane hot." He opened the pilots side windows - looked over the dials and controls, "Might work - I'll need rope and some wire." He inserted the ignition key - turned it to battery, "Tanks are almost two thirds full" and turned the switch off. "If this works she'll be landing in the ocean a long way from here."

Pat wandered over to the Air Station Quonset hut. He scrounged around for rope and wire - finding both under a bench along the side, "Must have used this Quonset for maintenance." Pat entered the airplane - released the brakes and wired the yolk and rudders to neutral. Outside - he lifted the tail section and pulled the airplane backwards - to the end of the runway - tied one end of the rope to a sturdy palm - made a loop and passed it over the top of the vertical stabilizer. Pat dug in his feet - gave the rope a tug - testing it, "That'll do. Better make sure she's lined up into the wind - toward the end of the runway." He checked alignment, "Good as my eyeballs can do. Northeast Trade Wind - right on her nose."

He climbed inside and started engines, "Ropes holding good at idle. May not be able to untie it - though. Wonder if there's a machete or a knife about?" He looked around the aft section, "I'll say there is. Must have been planning to slice me into little pieces - sending the fingers back for identification."

Pat returned to the cockpit, but this time stayed behind the pilot's seat, "Flaps? Full - half or three quarters? She's light enough - half should do." He placed the flaps halfway down and brought both throttles up to full, "No time to waste." Pat grabbed the machete and scurried down the hatch steps - closed it - checked the airplane heading for alignment again and cut the rope. The Fairchild Merlin leapt forward - airborne within a hundred yards - dipped a few times and sailed above the tree tops.

Pat untied the rope from the palm and walked toward the Quonset, "Been so busy forgot that I came here for a shower and water to top off my tanks." He looked back over his shoulder, "Still climbing in a straight line toward Northern California - or maybe Oregon. Not enough gas to make it there - not with throttles wide open and flaps halfway down. Maybe a thousand miles." Pat laid his machete down, "What if she gets bumped off course by the wind? Could wind up on one of the Hawaiian Islands." Pat removed the silencer and placed it and the weapon in his toilet kit, "Benny would be proud - two rounds and two kills." He returned the rope to the Quonset hut, "I'll keep the machete - might come in handy. Hope the sun heated my water." He climbed up the ladder to the tank and stuck his hand inside, "Warm - not too hot - or cold - just right.

Pat climbed down - slipped out of his shirt and shorts - pulled on the rope and let the water fall. It cascaded down and around his hair and shoulders. Soaked - he released the rope and the flow stopped. Pat soaped his hair and face and pulled on the rope again - washing the soap from his eyes. He soaped his body - legs and feet, "Damn this feels good." He cocked his head to the sound of feet on the sandy pathway. A familiar voice said, "Hello Kimo. We heard the airplane fly away and were worried about you." Sushi popped into the open, "You need help soaping your back."

"There's two of you. I'm seeing double."

"Meet my twin sister - Tushi."

"As you can plainly see there's not much left of me to hide - least the back half of me. Might as well join the fun."

"Is there enough water?"

"I filled the tank three quarters full an hour ago."

Sushi and Tushi strolled into the clearing - removing shirts and shorts as they walked. By the time they reached Pat - they were as naked as he. Welded together like cheese in a deli case - Pat gave the rope a pull and released it. Water droplets glistening on naked bodies under a warm late afternoon sun. Giggles turned into laughter. In the time it takes for a jungle flower to open in the morning sun - this menage a' trois was covered with soap from hair to toes - slipping into a thrill of creative caresses - stolen kisses and lingering embraces. Pat reluctantly freed one hand - reached up and pulled on the shower rope - releasing a cascade of water. He smiled, "I'm ready for more, but I'm too old and too wise to roll around on this patch of earth. The jungle bugs can raise two inch welts. Why don't we adjourn to my boat or yours?"

Sushi asked, "Did you bring a towel?"

"Afraid not - we'll have to let the Northeast Trade work its magic."

Pat led the way carrying his clothes - Sushi in his footsteps and Tushi not far behind - all naked as jay birds except for deck shoes along the path to the beach. He turned around, "Better dress before we walk out on the sand. Don't want to embarrass the neighbors."

Tushi smiled, "Don't worry - no one is home."

"No one is on board either boat?"

"There were three. They anchored two here and went deep sea fishing to the east. Should be back anytime."

Sushi shook her head, "No - marlin are running two days to

the east. They won't return for another day - maybe two."

Pat pulled on his shorts and donned his shirt - tying his shoes around his neck, "We'll - I'm not getting splinters on my bottom riding a surfboard. Dinner on your boat?"

Sushi laughed, "I'll start the lobsters as soon as we return. You bring the wine - Tushi and I will need a glass of red in thirty minutes."

"How big are your lobsters?"

"Three to four pounds."

Pat swam the board back to his boat wondering, "Twins - all alone in this harbor - the other two boats empty? Not likely. I don't believe the story about marlin two days to the east. In this empty ocean - no one would know where the fish are from here. I sailed it. I can vouch for that. If these two have a contact on one of the Hawaiian Islands - they could make a tidy profit out of piracy. Who, but me would ever suspect them. Looks like I have three choices - pull up anchor and leave - eliminate them - or let it play out. Who knows? They may be on the up and up."

Pat lifted the water jugs over the stern and topped off his water tanks. He went below to change clothes and check his telltales, "They were here all right. Not KGB or agency or they would have picked up on my hidden traps. Didn't take anything. Better check my strong box in the bilge." Pat emptied his tagalong's identification and money out of his shaving kit and counted again, "Over ten thousand." He placed it in the strong box and locked it inside the bilge. Pat swung below into the galley and opened his wine storage, "A vintage red and two whites for my ladies. Now - how will they meet their hairy Red Devils. My pistol? Too messy - Benny said to conserve ammo. The syringe I inherited from the KGB. Can't take a chance. My Tiger will want to feed and the venom might affect him."

Pat swung below and poured another half and half, "Not proper to harm my shark - I may need him and I owe him that - out of professional courtesy. He didn't harm me and he had his opportunities. Machete? No - too messy. An ice pick is quick - clean and I can carry it in a leather case - inside my shorts."

Pat laid the wine on deck and followed - climbing up and out of the hatch. With the wine secured by line - Pat paddled up to the closest abandoned yacht - making sure it was between him and *Wanderlust*. He looked in through the porthole, "Two bodies wrapped in sheets. Ones a female. Recent - no odor yet. Must have met their maker last night - or early this morning. I interrupted my ladies work. Imagine it's the same on the other boat." He reached for his ice pick case and caressed it - out of habit.

Pat paddled up to the twin's boat, "Ahoy *Wanderlust* - may I come aboard?"

Sushi stuck her head through the hatch opening. Her body followed. She wore short shorts and a man's white silk shirt tied in a knot at the waist, "Hand up the wine. Can you navigate our rope ladder?"

"Only under duress and this qualifies." Pat hung onto the ladder with one hand and lifted his surfboard up with the other. He noticed an embroidered white scroll on her shirt collar, "What's that monogram on your shirt stand for?"

"T T - stands for Titanic Thompson. Tushi is wearing one - too. They belong to the owner of this boat. He's off fishing with his friends." Sushi nodded her head toward the other two boats, "We came along for the ride. We've never been to Palmyra. Excellent wine! You have expensive tastes. We'll have to sip it slow."

"Where's Tushi?"

"In the galley. She cooks - I serve and pour. Wait here."

Pat looked the boat over, "Sixty foot if she's an inch. Bet she has two master cabins - one forward and one aft. Three masts - not cheap - not cheap at all." He placed his ice pick between the cushions behind the helm. Sushi walked up the steps from below carrying three crystal wine glasses etched with the same monogram as the one on her collar. Pat had to ask, "Is everything monogrammed on this boat."

"All, but me and Tushi."

"Are you his mistresses?"

"Doesn't he wish. No - we're his crew for this sail. We sleep aft."

Pat held his glass while Sushi poured. She waited while he sipped, "Very good - a nutty taste. I'll have only one glass. Do you have beer?"

"Not as much Guinness as you, but I can make a Musty Ale for you - Guinness and a light ale."

"You were on board my boat?"

"Had to check you out. People have been known to disappear from this island. Is your name really King Kamehamea?"

"No and I'm not Kimo either. He's my yacht broker. It's our little joke."

"Then - who are you?"

"I'm from Hungary. A Hapsburg exile - Rudolph."

"Nobility?"

"Yes - a minor baron."

Tushi came up from below, "Dinner is almost ready." Sushi poured her sister a glass of red, "I'm going below to mix a musty ale for Rudolph."

"The one with the red nose?"

"No - the one who has a nose made out of pine that grows."

Tushi asked, "What does she mean?"

"My name is Rudolph - Rudolph Hapsburg - not Kimo. Can't be too careful out here."

Tushi sat on his lap and then straddled his legs, "I've never made love to a prince before. She moved her pelvis -

laughing and singing, "Someday my prince will come."
"And you still won't. I'm not a prince - only a Baron."
"That's close enough." She bent her head forward and kissed him.

Sushi came back on deck with his beer and tapped Tushi on the shoulder breaking their embrace, "Save some for me." Pat asked, "Don't you want to eat dinner first?" Tushi slowly unbuttoned her shirt - revealing two small taut breasts, "Life is short - eat desert first." Sushi set Pat's beer on the table and removed her silk shirt. Pat whistled under his breath, "Double my pleasure." Tushi removed his shirt - Sushi unzipped his shorts and Pat worried to himself, "Can I keep my passion under control? I can handle one, but two?" "Do you ladies want to take turns?" Sensing for the time being - he was safe - Pat took both into his arms. Out of breath he whispered, "Are you both older than twenty?" They smothered his lips with their breasts - answering, "Yes!" "Good - I'm not wired for two twenty." Sushi and Tushi stuck their tongues into his ears and said together, "You are now." They pushed him gently over on his back. Tushi sat on his chest - Sushi straddled his loins. Sushi whispered, "We'll lead - you follow."

Pat followed the twins into the galley, "If dinner is as good as desert - I'll die a happy man." Sushi placed her arm in his, "We're not finished. Have you ever dined with two naked ladies before?" "Naked yes - in Vienna, but not with two and certainly not with two as beautiful as you. I own a house in Hungary - one that is quite famous for the quality of its ladies." Tushi asked, "Are we as good?" Pat knew that the truth would not matter, "No one has your unique talents or breasts as exquisite as yours."

Sushi carried shelled lobster swimming in melted butter and surrounded by new potatoes to the galley table. Sitting on both sides - they hand fed Pat between caresses. The lobster was so delicious - Pat forgot the circumstances. He pushed his chair a way from the table and began to wipe his face - butter dripping from his chin. He looked over at the twins and laughed. They were covered in butter. Tushi dipped her hands into the serving dish and stroked her breasts. Sushi dipped her hand in and dripped butter down Pat's chest. He dipped his hands into the serving dish - covering Sushi's breasts as she spread melted butter on his loins. Tushi smiled and nodded aft. Three bodies covered in melted butter moved to the aft stateroom. Pat placed his arms around both - his fingers massaging buttery breasts. They collapsed into a king sized bed.

Pat - still awake watched moonlight drift into their cabin - thinking very quietly to himself, "They damn near killed me! Talk about sexual acrobats." Sushi and Tushi were curled up - sound asleep at his side. He sat up and began to move gently out of bed - silently rolling from its head to foot. He looked back, "Still asleep. My wine mixed with a little sleeping powder did the trick. Glad they talked me into a moonlight swim. Butter turns rancid quickly in the tropics. Time to get down to business."

He climbed the stairs - retrieved his ice pick and returned to the cabin. Pat looked down on the sleeping sisters, "It will be quick my loves" and thrust his ice pick twice - into each heart. Pat chanted as he lifted a silent Sushi -

"Comes the deer to my singing."

and carried her up to the stern. He returned for Tushi and she joined her sister. He looked down on their lifeless

bodies, "Hate to eat and run girls, but I have to feed a hungry friend outside the reef." Pat walked through the cabins - removing his fingerprints from all surfaces. Returning above decks he tied their feet with a ships rope and the other end to the stern of their Zodiac. He rolled their bodies overboard.

Pat returned to his Cat - trailing a surfboard and two bodies - a midnight snack for his Tiger. He tied the Zodiac's line to his Cat's stern - climbed aboard and sat down inside his cabin - a glass of brandy in hand. Pat sipped, "Titanic Thompson must have gone overboard on his way here. And there is probably more bodies on the other yacht I didn't inspect. Can't leave them here - they'll rot in the tropic sun. Better dispose of them tonight before heat and humidity do their work."

Sushi and Tushi looked up into the coal black eyes of the greatest of all hairy Red Devils. They said together, "What is your celebration about?" "It has been many years since we've been honored by two such as you. Not many lady pirates sailing the seven seas and twins - too. You are deliciously evil."

Sushi saw thousands of hairy Red Devils singing their praise. She asked, "How are we to be honored?"

"A barbecue."

He motioned for the throng to carry the twins along as honored celebrities. Ahead - Tushi screamed, "We are being served as the main course!"

A wooden spit was thrust through her intestines. The pointed end came out through her mouth.

Sushi squirmed - trying to get away and was tossed into the air - impaled on a wooden spit - a scream lost in gurgles.

The greatest of all hairy Red Devils chanted as he turned both spits -

"The ancient folk with evil spells - dashed to earth - plowed under!"

Pat Penny hauled in two empty lines which held twins - trailing behind the Zodiac. As he trolled outside the reef. A giant dorsal fin trailed after - rolling in victory, "You were hungry my friend. Be patient - wait here - I have two - maybe more for you. You may wish to call your friends to join you in a feeding frenzy. The next batch has been well aged in the sun." Pat completed his grisly task by the light of a Pacific outhouse moon. After the frenzy - sheets - all evidence of blood and crime were transported to the beach - burned on the sand and buried.

Pat returned to his Cat and poured four fingers of brandy into his glass. He sipped and stared and sipped and stared and shook his head, "Four adults, but not the child! And to murder for profit. I will not drink to your health my ladies. I drink to your reward - may a thousand Devils feast on your flesh tonight. That child - she was no more than eight or nine years old. Have you no decency?" Pat placed his head on the table and cried until tears would come no more. He walked over to the sink - washed the salt away from his eyes and sat down to sip the rest of his brandy.

Pat climbed up out of the hatch and looked out on the harbor, "Now what will I do with three yachts? Should I burn them - sink them - pull them out to sea and sink them there - or release them to the winds - sails full - or do nothing?" He returned to the galley and nibbled on link after link of freshly cooked sausage, "I will sleep on it. If this sausage allows me to escape from my own Red Devils. My mind is muddled. How many have I eliminated - is it seventeen - eighteen - or are there more? When will I find peace?" Pat cleaned up the galley and nibbled on crackers as he drank

another glass of brandy. He looked at his watch, "Midnight. Time really flies when you're having fun." He would not chant a Navajo song tonight. Only a low moan, "A child. How could they - why?"

As the sun streamed across his bunk - Pat rolled out of bed, "I feel like I've had my manhood torn out by the roots. I'll not forget Palmyra - the good and the bad. Got to wash myself clean before I sail out of here." On deck - Pat saw three boats sitting at anchor and remembered. He climbed into the Zodiac - started the outboard and landed on the beach. He scrubbed and scrubbed - the memory of last night lingering. As he washed off the soap - the answer came, "Three Flying Dutchmen it will be. I'll sail each one out of the harbor - raise sails and send these ladies on their way. It's best for all to think crew and passengers were lost at sea." Pat donned his deck shoes and returned to the Zodiac - heading directly toward *Wanderlust*.

Pat adjusted compass heading to 220° - Palmyra was a distant memory over the horizon. Fiji - his next landfall - lay twenty-four hundred nautical miles to the southwest. Out front was a giant dorsal fin leading him on. He checked the speed, "Not bad - twenty-two knots. I'm not looking forward to ten days of open ocean sailing my friend." Off to port he saw the sail of the last of his Flying Dutchmen, "Won't be long before I'll sail past all three ghost ships." He went below and prepared breakfast - a large mound of sausage - writhing like stuck banshees in his frying pan.

Waiting for it to cool - Pat checked his charts, "I might need a more southerly heading." He looked at the current listed on the chart, "Entering the Equatorial Counter Current - west to east. My current compass heading won't be enough to counter the drift. Better change it to 200° after I finish breakfast." Winds are holding - that's good. They

should diminish near the equator." Pat emptied the sausage out of the frying pan onto a serving platter.

He carried the platter to the helm and adjusted course to a new compass heading of 200°. He looked out over the ocean, "It is true - sailing is like watching grass grow." And it was - for the next day - and the next - and the next - and the next - and the next.

*"Consider your verdict" the King said
to the jury. "Not yet - not yet" the
[White] Rabbit hastily interrupted.
There's a great deal to come before that!"*

Moscow

Moscow's lights - twinkling on the horizon like fire flies on top of snow announced Russian civilization to Natasha. A welcome sight after flying over miles and miles of darkness. Natasha looked out through the window of her Aeroflot jet - wondering, "Will it really be good to be home? Or will I be dragged through another round of exhausting interrogations? Why else would I be called back before I was able to complete my mission? I wonder - will my superiors let me know if the two tagalongs I sent after Pat Penny were successful? I doubt it - chasing after him in a rented boat - how foolish! If Penny can slip through three layers of protection to eliminate the head of their military - he can certainly outwit two of our tagalongs." Natasha's rhetorical questions were unanswered as the seat belt sign came on. The Ilyushin II-96-300 - powered by four Pratt and Whitney PW2337 turbofan jet engines had turned on final - airbrakes up and flaps down - floating through a cold winter sky toward Moscow. Natasha closed her eyes - still worrying about what this day would bring.

The Aeroflot jet turned off the runway onto a taxiway - its wheels crunching through a skiff of soft new snow. On a special access ramp adjacent to the taxiway - waited a black VIP sedan. Natasha's airplane slowed to a stop - she was the only one disembarking. She exited interior warmth to be greeted by a sharp edged wind - cutting through her light western clothing like ice fired out of a scatter gun. Two thugs stood by her sedan - immobile and impervious to the

cold. The senior one opened the rear passenger door,
"Welcome home comrade Natasha. I hope your trip was
pleasant."

Natasha stared him down with ball bearing blue eyes - colder
than the wind blowing up her dress and around her thighs,

"Where are we going?"

"I was told you knew."

She did not know, but would not let on that she did not,

"Quickly then." She entered the back seat alone and he
opened the front door and sat next to the driver with no
desire to be close to his passenger - a human icicle.

On the opposite side of the terminal - away from prying
eyes - Natasha's black bullet sedan sped through a private
exit - turning on the highway at high speed toward the Gorod
Moskva and the notorious Pokroysko Stresnevo District.
Natasha breathed a sigh of relief, "Familiar territory -
We're going to The Central Committee's dacha. I've been
there too many times to count. I will live, but not after
they lower my threshold of pain and question my performance
as an assassin."

Her sedan turned off the highway into a tree lined lane
screening this high level dacha from unwanted surveillance.
It stopped underneath the portico. Natasha waited for her
escort to open the door - thinking, "At least I'm receiving
the same treatment as a privileged official, but I would not
care to vacation here." Her escort opened both doors -
treating her with the utmost respect. Natasha was relieved,
"I will live for another day. I should know. I've brought
my share of permanent guests to this dacha."

The interior door closed behind her. Natasha was in a
dim lit hall or room - empty except for a straight backed
wooden chair in the center facing a mirrored wall at the far
end. She sat down - back straight - eyes forward - lips

silent. She heard a click. The door was locked behind her. Natasha knew she was not alone. Others - from behind the mirror - watched her every move. Natasha did not move - or make a sound. She sat bolt upright - proud - silent and unafraid. She continued to sit quietly - not moving - for one minute - two - three - four - five - knowing she had performed her tasks to the best of her ability - confident that nothing had gone wrong.

Natasha heard a familiar click from behind - as the door was unlocked. She did not hear it open and knew better than to turn and look. She smiled - thinking, "It is one of our very best. His hand is on my shoulder and I heard only his last two footsteps."

A deep Russian voice came from behind her chair, "Natasha start from the beginning. Tell me about your mission - what your orders were and how you carried them out."

"No - I will reveal nothing. I am to report only to The Central Committee. My orders are to speak only to the Chairman - or the Secretary and only at their request. And they have not made that request."

Greeted by silence - her interrogator turned and walked out of the room. Natasha was familiar with this procedure. She would be left in silence - her statement weighed and confirmed.

Her interrogator returned, "Do you know why I asked you to tell me about your mission? Of course you do. When one of our very best agents fails - it is of great concern to The Central Committee. And you have failed!" Natasha's interrogator waited for this revelation to sink in and for her to respond. She remained sitting - in silence.

Her interrogator walked around the chair - stopped in front and slowly turned. Natasha held back a gasp - the deep voice belonged to a long skirt - a high booted woman carrying a riding crop. She touched Natasha lightly with the end of

the crop - on the tip of her nose. Natasha sat rigid - not moving. Her interrogator continued, "Natasha - shame on you - you failed to eliminate Bulgar as you were ordered. If it was not for our high level mole deep inside CIA - Bulgar would have defected and spilled all. And that would be unacceptable. If it was my choice - you would be undergoing an interrogation deep - deep underground inside our Lubyanka as my special guest." She snapped her riding crop in two and handed Natasha an envelope, "Open it and read." Natasha opened it from the side - with the nail of her forefinger. It was from the Secretary -

"Your orders are to cooperate with Comrade Vulga."

Natasha looked up, "May I have a match - Comrade Vulga?" She handed Natasha a cigarette lighter. Natasha opened the top and struck the flint - holding the paper to the fire - not letting go until the last shred had turned to charcoal, "Orders - Comrade Vulga. Now - what is it you would like to know?"

"Begin at the beginning and do not stop until you have told me everything."

"As you already know - I had orders to complete two wet procedures - Bulgar and Three Penny. The first was completed by use of a syringe while Bulgar was laid up at Georgetown Hospital in Washington DC. The second was interrupted by my recall."

"Is that all?"

"Do you truly desire to be bored by my routine - day by day existence. When I left the room - Bulgar was dead. No one - not even someone as evil as Bulgar can survive the venom of a Southeast Asian viper. Unless - someone replaced the venom with a placebo." For the first time - Natasha's shoulder's sagged, "Is there an antidote? Is Bulgar still alive?"

"You are twice fortunate - Comrade Natasha. He replaced the

venom with water on your flight to New York. So even though you failed - you were trying. We were fortunate to have a very high level mole inside CIA. He completed what you failed to do. And his agency did not suspect Bulgar was assassinated. He used the heart medicine. We checked the atomizer in your purse. It too had been tampered with."

"Then Bulgar is dead?"

"And buried in an anonymous grave in America."

Vulga tapped the palm of her hand with the remaining half of her riding crop, "The Central Committee is not pleased about Three Penny." Not only did we lose a valuable resource when he assassinated their JCS Chairman - we have lost three top level agents - a car and an airplane."

"They flew to Palmyra after Three Penny?"

"Yes - they are missing along with a very expensive rental plane. All are gone without a trace. Three Penny is a worthy prey."

"We programmed him."

"You have an unblemished record - until now - that alone has saved you. When someone of your stature fails - it is of great concern to The Central Committee."

"May I leave now?"

"No. Do you know where our VIP suite is?"

"Yes - may I contact my children?"

"No - in a day or two - maybe. Your interrogation is finished."

Natasha sat up straight in her chair - hearing no sound, but the interrogator's boots as she marched out of the room. Natasha smiled at Vulga's frustration - not being able to inflict pain. Not hearing the click of the lock - Natasha rose - walked quickly out of the room into the windowed well lit halls of the dacha. She walked directly to her quarters - undressed and drew a bath - knowing every word and move would be watched. Natasha checked her luggage. It was

unpacked and clothes in drawers, "Looks like my valet expects a long stay."

Her feelings toward Russia would never be the same. Patriotism had been replaced by doubt. Natasha had been trained to interrogate, but like her superiors was never prepared to be interrogated. And her doubts grew, "Bulgar was our number one and eliminated. I am now at the top. I must scratch - claw and fight to stay here. The only way out is - ." She tested the water - tainted a slight orange from rusty Russian plumbing. Natasha sighed, "It is tepid" and stepped in - immersing her body up to the neck. She closed her eyes and thought, "I am in danger, but The Central Committee will not strike. Not now - it is too early for that. And I am vulnerable, but of course this treatment is designed to make me so. I will soon be the prey - not a hunter." She soaped a wash cloth using it like a scrub brush - cleansing. Fear and guilt remained - deep inside.

Natasha was released early in the morning, but not until she devoured a breakfast plate stacked high with Russian sausage. Her sedan now had a driver trained only to drive - with no shotgun thug at his side. As it sped through the late morning winter twilight - Natasha looked out on Moscow's snow covered streets. Winter - as usual had arrived early and would stay late. Natasha sat up, "Wake up lady! This is your favorite time of the year. Winter and you are as one. A joyous celebration of death." She arched her back and stretched her body forward until her knees touched the back of the front seat - a latent ecstasy flowing through her veins - almost reaching orgasm. Natasha leaned back in pleasure - the back of her long neck and her cold pink cheeks luxuriating against the fur of her coat's collar. Natasha smiled, "At last - I am returning to my home." She looked out on snow covered streets - humming. A street sign caught her eye. She was alarmed.

Natasha tapped on the window separating her from the driver. He rolled it down part way, "What is it - Comrade?" "This is not the road to my apartment building." "My orders are to drive you to the Kremlin." He raised the window - mumbling, "She is colder than Moscow's driven winter snow." Natasha - resigned to her fate - closed her eyes and opened them only when her sedan came to a stop inside the Kremlin's inner courtyard.

She was met by a graying - apologetic bureaucrat who escorted her to The Central Committee's private chambers. A uniformed guard checked her credentials as another opened the large bronze door. She was greeted by the Chairman, "Sit down over here - Natasha. Would you care for something to drink?"

Natasha answered, "No" and bowed in recognition toward the Secretary. She saw her benevolent father in a different light this morning. Their smiles no longer reassured her. The feeling of warmth - generated in past meetings changed to Arctic cold - as cold as the wind blowing through the inner courtyard this morning. She borrowed a few seconds of time - adjusting to her hard bottom chair.

The Chairman continued to smile as the Secretary spoke, "We have sent our three best assassins after Three Penny. One attempted to defect and is no longer with us as is our East German friend. You too have failed. How can this happen? Between the three of you - over seventy have died. Do you have an explanation?"

"No and none is needed. It wasn't our failure. It was your success. Three Penny was programmed not to fail. He was programmed to survive."

The Chairman spoke, "And despite our best efforts - Pat Penny is still alive. And we lost three - four tagalongs who joined the hunt. I am at a loss - what do you recommend?"

"As much as I would like to wreck revenge on him - my advice is to cut our losses and leave him alone."

The Secretary - holding an opposite opinion - asked, "Why? Three Penny has cost us dearly."

Natasha smiled, "True, but he was our own. We made him what he is and reaped the wind. Any interest we show now will only lend to speculation that he was ours. Except for a few American Intelligence officers - he is known as theirs not as ours."

The Chairman stepped in, "I agree. We will leave him alone. You have given wise council and faithful service. It is time for you to go home to your children."

Natasha asked, "Am I to retire?"

The Secretary laughed, "No, but for now - we do not need your services. We will let you know when." They both rose - turned their backs and left the room. Natasha sat still. For the first time cold fear crept in and enveloped her body. She rose, "So this is how Bulgar felt when he knew his time had come."

Natasha could not get warm on the ride to her apartment. Even her hands were cold, "This has never happened to me before - I've never been dressed down by my superiors. I do not care for it." She looked out the window - snow began to fall again. She counted individual snowflakes. Each one had a short life span in early winter and fall - when they would melt and die. Not now - they were immortal. She began to relax. Each snowflake cleansed her primal fear. Before the sedan turned onto her apartment's street - Natasha opened the compartment in her mind holding memories of her children. This compartment had cracked a few times on her mission and opened on the plane ride from Honolulu, but not all the way. Now as memories flooded in - tears filled her eyes. Her sedan stopped inside her apartment's courtyard. Her escort hopped out - carrying luggage and opening doors. Natasha followed - impatient to be home.

As they walked down the stairs from her third floor apartment - the junior officer spoke, "She is a cold one. Did you notice the size of her apartment?"

"Yes - this one is of very high rank."

"Why have I not heard of her?"

"When you do it will be too late."

"The Black Widow?"

"Yes - did you not notice? All of her furniture is black leather?"

"No - I gave it no thought."

"Pay attention - or the next time it may be too late."

Natasha's children were away at school. Her Aunt left a note as she did every day when Natasha was away. She out shopping - standing in a queue in hopes the State Store had an item of food - or maybe shoes. Natasha smiled and lit the fire under her samovar, "My poor Aunt - I have all this food and she does not believe there is enough. I have been too long without a proper cup of Russian tea." She filled her tub with hot water as the tea water boiled, "Strong Russian tea and a soothing hot bath will cleanse away harsh treatment at the hands of my superiors. As Natasha sipped tea - she lowered her body slowly into the tub, "I will turn a nice cherry red for my own personal demon. Maybe that will calm my hairy Red Devils.

Natasha leaned back and closed her eyes. Memories of past assassinations flooded into her mind and soothed her bent spirit. She began to nod off - as she savored each death - and slipped into dreams - her mind filled with the song of the greatest of all Red Devils -

"The ancient folk with evil spells, dashed to earth, plowed under!"

When Natasha woke she walked to the living room wrapped

only in a towel and looked outside, "Snow - lovely snow - my winter of death - cold and white." Her towel dropped to the floor.

Honolulu

Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Ropp stepped out of the shower and checked the time, "I'm late. Bobbie Jean will rake me over the coals. He read her note, "She left early to see the Halekulani Sunset show." He dressed, "Honeymoon is over when your Bride goes on ahead without you. And she was the one who said I should sleep in." As Johnny combed his hair and tucked his Cook Aloha shirt into his OP shorts - the phone rang. He waited - picking it up on the sixth ring, "Hello?" "Colonel Ropp - it's Ching-Chang. Tupelo just phoned from the mainland."

"Does he want me to call?"

"You're to return to Washington."

"Commercial or military?"

"Military - priority."

"Benny?"

"Your guess is as good as mine - Tupelo didn't say and I didn't ask."

"Well - I've had ten wonderful days for a second honeymoon - can't ask for anything more. When do I fly out?"

"You're booked on a Tanker going to Omaha. Had to divert one - so they won't be happy - not being allowed to stay over."

"What time?"

"Turnaround on the tarmac at eleven tonight. Better get here by ten."

"Bobbie Jean was about to jump ship and build a grass shack for us on the beach. She's fallen in love with your island."

"All you Haoles say that. Tupelo has a jet waiting for you at Offutt."

"What's all the rush."

"Don't ask."

"Don't tell."

Johnny entered the Hau Tree Lanai - bent over and kissed Bobbie Jean on the cheek. She patted the chair beside her and motioned for him to sit down, "I smell the aroma of a change of plans."

"Can't get anything by you. The Pentagon is diverting an airplane to fly me back to old Virginia."

"What time?"

"Have to be at Base Ops by ten - taking off at eleven."

"Good - I'm ready to leave."

"Mission flight - no ladies. You really do miss the twins. I do too."

"And some."

"We're getting to be two old married fogies. Hungry?"

"Am I ever, but I need to make flight reservations. Drink your beer. I'll call the concierge at the Royal and have him make arrangements."

"Do you want to dine here?"

"No - we'll have our last meal here in a private alcove at the Royal. The concierge will make arrangements. If you will excuse me - I'll call him."

Bobbie Jean and Johnny walked arm-in-arm along the beach walk from the Halekulani to the Royal. He turned to her and they kissed. He said, "Don't you feel like we're frozen in time here?"

"Yes - and it reminds me of other walks - remember?"

"On the beach in front of your home in Biloxi?"

"And they say men aren't romantic."

"It seems like it was just yesterday."

"We were so young."

"And I was madly in love. Didn't you notice?"

"It was hard not too. You were tongue tied."

"Was it fate - or by chance?"

"I'm the one who knows the odds and they were stacked against you by me. You weren't the only one tongue tied."

"And all this time I thought it was fate."

Bobbie Jean smiled - brushed her thigh against his and squeezed his arm, "Don't ask."
"Don't tell."

The Royal Hawaiian rose before them like an oversized Alamo inside a small pink elephant - dwarfed by surrounding high rise hotels - a gentle pink cloud trapped in a cement canyon. They walked arm-in-arm skirting the outdoor pool bar - entering the Royal through spacious - plushly carpeted corridors. After the humid tropic night breeze - the Royal's air-conditioning was cold and dry to their skin.

Bobbie Jean stopped at the Concierge's desk. She whispered to Johnny, "Go on ahead and put on a decent sport coat. We have reservations in the gourmet dining room." Three minutes later she entered their room, "No suitable transportation - yet. He's working on it. But you'll have a limo waiting at nine-fifteen."

"Aren't you going with me?"

"Depends on when I have to leave. Our table is waiting. The maid will pack us up. Better leave your flight suit out."

They arrived a few minutes later - enchanted by Kahamanu Lake Trio's gentle Hawaiian music drifting through the main dining room into their private alcove. Their appetizer - smoked Atlantic salmon topped with crab meat. Dinner - mahimahi grilled in a lemon and ginger sauce. Johnny pushed away from the table, "It's just as well we fly away - or we'll grow too fond of this food and never leave paradise."

Bobbie Jean said, "Hush" as they listened to the Trios final dinner song - *Aloha Oe*. "Do you know what time you'll land in Maryland?"

"There's a six hour time difference - twelve hours of flying time - add an hour time delay going in and out of Omaha - I should be there by six p.m. tomorrow night."

"Can you pick me up at Dulles?"

"Thought you'd never ask."

Johnny rolled over on his stomach and leaned on his elbows as Bobbie Jean talked to the Conceriege on the telephone. She turned around, "Get your flight suit on. Our limo will be waiting by the time we get downstairs. You'll have to drop me off at the airport on your way to Base Ops. I have an 11:30 flight to San Francisco."

"First Class?"

"Of course. And a nonstop connection to Dulles. I should arrive three hours after you land."

"By the time I get home from Andrews - I'll have just enough time to pick up the twins and drive to the airport. We'll wait at the arrival gate. Call Nanny from San Francisco and I'll call from Omaha."

The tapping at their door announced the arrival of a bellboy for their luggage.

Ching-Chang helped Johnny unload his luggage, "A limo - no less. Where's Bobbie Jean?"

"At the terminal - checking in for a flight to San Francisco on an airplane with better service than the one I'm flying on. Ten at night is a bit late for a meeting. What's up?"

"From Benny to Tupelo to Chang."

"Sounds like a turn of the century double play combination for the San Francisco Seals."

"Benny wanted you to know what's happening with Pat Penny."

"Where is the elusive bastard?"

"Somewhere south of here - sailing to the South Pacific. Benny said he stopped at Palmyra for an overnight. Three yachts and an airplane are missing."

"Any Russians?"

"Two of them flew the missing plane to Palmyra."

"No trace of the folks on the boats?"

"No - or their boats."

"Does Benny think he is out of control?"

"I didn't ask."

"And he didn't tell."

"Your bird was on final when I came out to help you. Should be pulling up on the tarmac any minute. Will you be out this way again?"

"Not that I know of. Did Benny say something to Tupelo?"

"No, but there are signs. Fiji has asked us for help."

"Fiji?"

"Fiji."

Two Flew East

Bobbie Jean stood at the window overlooking the tarmac from the VIP lounge as Johnny's KC-10 tanker taxied by to the short runway on a rolling takeoff into an unusual wind - not Kona or northeast Trade - a wind from the southwest Pacific. She sipped on a glass of red wine - her favorite since beginning a new life with Johnny and watched as the KC-10 rolled down the runway and lifted off into the sky. She sat back in an easy chair wondering, "How many times has he flown away into the unknown and for what? It can't be money. Our government can never pay enough for our continual separation. And no one in their right mind would lay down a life for a State Department full of Ivy League suits with experimental whims. And our Intelligence agencies are populated by the same wool covered Ivy League minds found at State. The Cold War - now that was different. But it's over. How long are we going to play policeman? Duty - honor - country - yes, but to dance to the tune - the whims of our State Department - when they want to use military force as a cover for their inability to conduct a successful diplomacy. Wasn't it Bismarck who said military force is a failure of diplomacy? Whoever said it - failure is what we have. And I don't want to lose a good husband on foolish State Department errands. I think it's time for my Johnny to come marching home. He doesn't know it yet, but my wandering soldier has seen his last hurrah." Bobbie Jean looked up at the TV screen and stood up from her lounge chair. Her flight to San Francisco was boarding.

Bobbie Jean left the lounge smiling - knowing she would take control of their life as soon as she returned home. She boarded the 747 and climbed the circular staircase to a First Class seat on the second deck, "Not my first choice. However - not bad for a late reservation." She placed her purse under the seat and accepted a pillow and blanket from the flight attendant. She fastened her seat belt, "May I have a glass of wine - red Merlot if you have it - please."

"Would you care for smoked salmon and crackers?"

"Yes - of course. If I go to sleep - please don't wake me for the in-flight meal."

Bobbie Jean nibbled on smoked salmon with capers and sipped her wine - finishing both before takeoff. When the seat belt sign flicked off she adjusted her seat - leaned back and closed her eyes - thinking of home.

"Ma'am - wake up. Place your seat back upright - we're coming in for landing."

Bobbie Jean opened her eyes, "Did I sleep all the way from Honolulu?"

"Like a baby."

"What is the weather in San Francisco?"

"Winter is summer here - sixty-five degrees and almost no wind. Do you have a connecting flight?"

"To Dulles."

"Your in luck - your departure gate is next to the one we use for arrival. Your departure may be delayed due to runway construction."

"Still?"

"Always - they were built on fill."

Bobbie Jean looked out on broken bits and pieces of concrete - giant earth scrapers - earth movers and dump trucks as her plane touched down on a less than even - rolling runway.

The Flight Attendant stopped by, "Your flight to Dulles has been delayed."

"The end of an almost perfect evening."

Washington DC

Riding a late fall jet stream - Johnny's T-39 was not held up. He was ahead of schedule - on a fast bumpy flight to Andrews AFB outside of Washington DC in Maryland's overtaxed suburbs. Inflight service consisted of coffee or water - he had his choice, but chose neither. He slept till wheels touched smoothly down on the end of Andrews runway. An unmarked staff car - not of Air Force origin - stood waiting as his T-39 cut engines near the passenger terminal. The driver took Johnny's flight and hang-up bag, "Your farm in McLean?"

"Benny sent you?"

"Yes."

"Any message?"

"Call CIA Ops before you drive out to Dulles to pick up your wife."

His driver drove through the crossroads of Morningside on Suitland Road - turning west on Suitland Parkway to South Capital Street and the Frederick Douglas Bridge - to 395 and the 14th Street Bridge and turned north on George Washington Parkway toward McLean and finally Johnny's in-town farmhouse. Johnny almost rolled down the window to suck in the crystal clear - cool Indian summer evening air, but didn't. It was bullet proof - not meant to be rolled down. Traffic slowed almost to a stop as they climbed the hill along the Potomac adjacent Arlington. His driver shrugged, "Traffic during rush hour here - like other things - happens. I'll have you home in ten minutes. We'll turn in at the agency and go out the back way."

"Great weather."

"Right - fall doesn't receive the publicity of our cherry blossom spring, but it's cooler - drier and lasts three times as long."

He turned into the farmhouse lane and stopped. Johnny got out - shooed three sheep off the road and got back in.

The driver asked, "Are those yours?"

"Great little lawn mowers. If it wasn't for the farm subsidy - I'd trade them in for a cutter bar."

"Are you serious?"

"No - thanks for the lift."

"Don't forget to call Benny."

Northern Virginia

Johnny was greeted by two well scrubbed twins and Nanny, "Glad your back. I have a business to run in Mississippi."

"How many barbecue places do you own?"

"Two here - four there and that's all. Six is all I can control and keep the quality up. Before you ask - the boys were wonderful. Didn't have to take a switch to either one. Oh - Bobbie Jean called. She was delayed in San Francisco. Her plane won't land until nine and that's my taxi coming in the drive. I'll return in several weeks. Have business to attend to here - too - so if you need to take off again."

Johnny gave her a hug, "You just want to make sure your boys are staying on a straight and narrow path."

"That and someone is dipping into the till of my restaurant in DC."

"Do you want Bobbie Jean to look into it?"

"If she would. That friend of yours - Mr. Bidwell."

"I know what you mean - it takes one to catch one."

Nanny laughed - hugged the boys and entered her taxi, "Mind you - have Bobbie Jean give me a call tomorrow morning."

As Johnny followed the twins into the farmhouse - he asked, "Did you boys eat?"

They laughed as they answered in unison, "Nanny made sure. Yours is waiting in the icebox."

Johnny uncovered the plastic wrap from his plate and poked it into the microwave. As it cooked - he placed an encryption device over the mouthpiece of the kitchen phone and punched in Benny's special phone number at CIA Ops.

Benny picked up on the sixth ring, "That you - Johnny?"

"We've finally gotten past hello. What's up?"

"Did Tupelo get word to you about our elusive friend?"

"Yes - what's this about an airplane and three yachts missing on Palmyra?"

"According to Pat - seems the KGB sent two of their best after him and he took care of the problem. Don't know how he did it, but the airplane they rented crashed on the big island of Hawaii."

"And the three yachts?"

"He ran into two lady pirates who shanghaied three yachts - butchered five people and had an eye on his catamaran. So he fed both of them to the sharks and made Flying Dutchmen out of the yachts."

"Ching-Chang mentioned an island country in the South Pacific. Am I being sent there?"

"Maybe - not sure."

"What's up?"

"Began with Fiji's independence from the British. Indian Hindus took over and froze the local folks out and then got in bed with the Soviets. We gave the Fijians a leg up and they took their country back. Indians are a might upset."

"Where do you want me?"

"Report to the Pentagon Monday morning and call me after you arrive."

"Will do."

Johnny took his plate out of the microwave and sat down to a basic southern dinner of chicken - mashed potatoes and green beans. He toyed with his food - thinking about Pat Penny, "Three thugs - two pirates - the JCS Chairman - and no one is chasing after him except the Russians. And he's in contact with Benny." Johnny finished his plate - placed the dishes in the dishwasher and smiled, "Nanny has it ready to go." He closed the door - turned it on and walked out to the stables. The twins were at it again - playing an intense

game of one-on-one basketball with neither giving the other quarter. He reminded them, "Mother is landing at nine. We leave in fifteen minutes. Better wash up if you want to ride along and if you don't - I'll let you explain to Mother why you didn't."

As he closed the door to their station wagon - Johnny breathed a sigh of relief, "Almost a full tank of gas." JR laughed, "Nanny wouldn't drive in Washington DC traffic. She wore out the local taxi companies."

RL added, "JR and me almost learned to how to speak Farsi." "Farsi?"

"Persian. All the cab drivers are from Iran or Haiti and we already know a little French."

"If your Mother has her way you'll learn a lot more. Is soccer season over?"

JR laughed, "For almost three weeks. We're into basketball now."

Johnny grimaced and thought, "I've got to get a job where I can stay around home. My boys are growing up and I barely know them."

He turned onto the Dulles access road and accelerated to ten miles an hour over the speed limit. His twins were conversing in French and laughing at each other's mistakes. Johnny smiled - proud, but a stranger in his own land. The trip to Dulles was almost over before it began.

Johnny parked in short term parking and they walked into the lower level of the terminal - climbing to the upper level as Bobbie Jean walked out of the people mover. As the boys raced past Johnny to give their Mother a hug - he noticed, "My God - they're almost as tall as she is. I really haven't been home."

Bobbie Jean - now minus her carryon - gave Johnny a hug and a kiss, "When did you get in?"

"Four hours before you. Nanny wants you to call in the morning."

"Problems?"

"Not at home - at her restaurant in the District."

"How were the boys?"

"Great - as always. I didn't know they spoke conversational French."

"We need to talk about your job in the Air Force."

"Or lack of one. I agree - it's getting worse - not better. Are you hungry?"

"No - they feed well in First Class."

"Tired?"

"I slept all the way from Honolulu to San Francisco. I can use a long hot shower and a cold drink. Is the house well stocked with food? Don't answer - I forgot. With Nanny - it's probably overstocked."

Johnny learned more about his boys - listening in on the conversation with their Mother on the drive back from Dulles airport - than he ever knew. After they arrived - Johnny sat down at the kitchen counter. Bobbie Jean held his hand and looked into his eyes, "It's time."

"I must have my head up and locked. I've been away - so much of the time - I don't even know my own sons."

"When will you give notice?"

"After I finish the Pat Penny thing. They're going to send me out to the South Pacific."

"How soon?"

"Don't know, but it's not in my nature to leave a job undone. Don't worry I'll be home for good before next summer."

"Do you want to stay in the area?"

"Haven't thought about where - just when. How about Mississippi?"

"Not my cup of tea. No more than the Scioto River is yours."

"The great southwest and Las Vegas is out."

"How about school for our boys?"

"They like it here."

"So - we'll stay here through High School?"

"We have no other choice."

Johnny woke on the third ring. He reached over and shut the alarm clock off, but the ringing continued. He shook the clock and the ringing continued. He picked up the telephone receiver, "Ropp here - and it's dark outside. Who is it and what do you want?"

"Benny - you bastard. You must be on Hawaiian time."

"Are we at war?"

"No, but you may be. I don't want to hear any jet lag excuses from someone who has spent two weeks sunning in Hawaii. You had a full day's rest on your flight back. Welcome back to the real world."

"Thanks for arranging my flights and limo. What's up?"

"The island country we spoke of last night. Tupelo needs the pleasure of your company at nine-thirty this morning."

"It's Saturday!"

"You can wear civilian clothes. Dress warm it's nippy outside. Tupelo will fill you in."

Johnny glanced over at Bobbie Jean. Her response to the ringing phone was to roll over and curl into a tight ball. He pulled on a pair of corduroys and a wool sweater, "God - is it ever cold here. He turned on the TV and checked the weather, "Above freezing, but forty-five degrees cooler than Honolulu. Bobbie Jean?" He looked over, "Sound asleep. She could fall asleep in a belfry and not hear bells." Johnny tiptoed past the boys' rooms - went downstairs - plugged in the coffee pot and walked outside to retrieve the morning Post from its usual spot - in the ditch. He drank two cups of coffee while scanning the morning paper for an article on Fiji, but found none. Johnny walked back upstairs to the master bedroom - showered - shaved and dressed for a chilly Virginia morning. He decided not to wake Bobbie Jean.

Instead he wrote a short note -

Called into the office

Be back by noon

Love

Johnny

Pentagon

Johnny stepped out on his front porch and was greeted by a freshening cold northeast breeze, "Damn - feels like snow is on the way - unless the wind turns." He turned up his collar - sprinted quickly to the garage and backed his car out - averting two wandering sheep. He drove down his farm lane and turned onto the road leading to Chain Bridge Road. He was amazed, "Five years old and it still runs like a Swiss watch - doesn't pay to park anything new in the Pentagon parking lots." He checked the odometer, "A few more miles. Bet the boys snuck it out of the garage when Nanny wasn't looking."

Johnny turned off Chain Bridge Road and drove south on the Parkway almost alone - as always on a Saturday morning. He rolled the drivers side window part way down, "Shame to use an air-conditioner when the smog finally clears out. A little brisk after Honolulu, but Virginia's early morning autumn air is delicious - if I can remember to take it in bite sized chunks. He looked across the Potomac - down at the Georgetown Marina, "Empty this morning - must be too cold for racing shells." He turned off the Parkway onto Boundary Drive - driving into a mile long vacant lot on weekends - Pentagon's North Parking.

Johnny parked his car near the back entrance of the POAC and stepped out - turning his back to a stiff northeast wind

that stripped tan - gold and red leaves from bending trees. He turned up his collar and let the wind carry him along with the leaves to the Pentagon Parade Ground steps and turned west - quartering into the same cold breeze. He hurried to the River Entrance - climbed the steps and stopped as the GSA guard scanned his photo ID. Once cleared in - Johnny climbed the center staircase to the fourth floor - turned right and walked among a gallery of past four star generals and turned right again on Corridor Eight - through a gallery of early Air Force art and tone chimp astronaut - toward the magnolia tree outlined in the windows of 'A' Ring. Blossoms gone - its green leaves would remain until an ice age returned.

He stopped in front of the General's Office and looked at the list of current occupants on the menu board. His name was no longer there. He punched in a cipher code and nothing happened. Johnny took the entrance phone off its cradle and dialed Tupelo's inner vault number.

Tupelo picked up, "Hello?"

"Am I at Langley?"

"Welcome back Colonel. I'll let you in." Tupelo opened the vault door with a smile and a handshake, "Welcome back - Lucky. Benny's in the General's office waiting." Tupelo motioned toward the door with his head, "Does the condemned man desire a cup of coffee?"

"Black - are you in on this?"

"Does a duck have feathers?"

As Johnny opened the General's door - the General's high backed chair spun away - facing away from him toward a viewless window. A minute later it spun around again. Benny smiled, "You're early."

"So are you. Where's the General?"

"On assignment."

"Are you taking over?"

"And wear a uniform again? Never. His deputy is."

"And he is where?"

"On assignment."

Tupelo entered with cups - a carafe and a smile, "Coffee?"
He set the tray down and each filled their own cup.

Johnny took a sip, "What's up?"

Benny's grin grew until it almost touched the rim of his glasses, "As of now you are detached to me."

"And if you're not available?"

"Through Tupelo and as a last resort - CIA Ops. Now for the second shoe. As you may have surmised - I want you to go to Fiji. You can take your wife along."

"How soon?"

"Not for ten days - maybe a little longer. You'll have to stop in Honolulu. Ching-Chang will add to your knowledge."

"Any information will be more than I know now. Where do I hang my hat?"

"Office - down the hall. Keep the same cover. If it's compromised we'll devise a new one. As far as everyone is concerned - you are a special assistant to General Fallon. That will give you little a leverage."

"What about Pat Penny?"

"He'll be there when you arrive."

"What's his role?"

"Unattached cleanup crew."

"I'm a little confused - if he is the one who vaporized the JCS Chairman - why haven't you picked him up?"

Benny stood up and motioned for Tupelo to go, "Leave us alone for a few minutes?"

Tupelo picked up the coffee tray and disappeared through the door - closing it behind him. Benny sat down on the couch next to Johnny, "I had the room swept yesterday. There are no devices. Were you aware the JCS Chairman was one of theirs?"

Johnny nodded, "Yes - but it wasn't confirmed."

"Consider it confirmed. And the bad guys messed with Pat Penny's mind?"

"Yes."

"He was programmed by them to do the Chairman and they lost control."

"And it's against the law for us to assassinate anyone."

"Yes - and we know Pat Penny did the Chairman in. But there is no way anyone can prove it in a court of law. So - unless he really goes bonkers - Pat is home Scot free."

"You said Pat is an unattached cleanup crew."

"Without orders and on his own - he is doing what the powers that be consider necessary."

"And as long as he takes care of business - you'll not bother him?"

"Roger that - he is outside of our control and outside the law."

"How about the Russians?" "They have decided not to continue to hunt for the one they call Three Penny. It is too hard and for their purposes - too late."

"Will he turn on us?"

"I don't think so, but."

"But what?"

"Don't cross him or get in his way."

"What about Fiji?"

"The Fijians came to us for help. They're now free - in control of their land and we'd like for them to remain so. Tupelo will fill you in."

"Are you and me finished?"

"For now." Benny swung his chair around toward the window and looked out on another wall - with another window.

Tupelo met Johnny at the door, "You lucky dog you. A South Pacific Christmas vacation." He handed Johnny a sennit cord with a polished sperm whale tooth hanging from it, "This is a Tabua. It belongs to Benny. Don't lose it. The Tabua is a symbol of Fiji's good will. You'll be asked to show it

and Benny wants it back unharmed."

Johnny fingered the tooth, "Who do I show this Tabua too?" Chief Bau - Chief of the Royal Fijian Constabulary and a good friend of Benny's. Your cover story is - you're visiting to assist his force with a computer upgrade."

"What's the real story?"

"The upgrade is real. Get him up to speed on a computer aid to help him prevent a Kiwi-Indian plot to overthrow his country."

"You've got to be kidding me. I don't know a damn thing about Fiji - or a plot to overthrow it - other than what Benny told me."

"We'll bring you up to speed."

"Why me?"

"Can you think of anyone less suspicious and nonthreatening?"

"Or who knows so little?"

"As I said - the computer upgrade is real and with your wife along - you'll be considered a tourist. Oh - Benny said take the rest of today and tomorrow off."

"Thanks a lot. This is Saturday - tomorrow is Sunday and none of the Intelligence libraries are open until Monday."

Benny stuck his head out of The General's office door, "Finished?"

Tupelo answered, "For now."

"Come in. I need another cup of coffee. I planned to give you the rest of my information Monday, but I won't be here - my plans have changed." Benny waited until they were seated, "Quick and to the point. Chief Bau has uncovered a weapons cache. He thinks it belongs to the local Indian Hindu socialists - provided by New Zealand sponsors."

Johnny asked, "What type?"

"The usual assortment. Russian surplus AK-47s - machine pistols - stun grenades and enough ammunition to supply a brigade."

"You said New Zealand. I thought it was sheep and pasture."

"And a hot bed for radical socialists. Do you remember when they wouldn't allow our ships make port calls."

"Roger that - because we wouldn't tell them if we were carrying nuclear weapons."

"Kiwis have one to many active antinuclear crazies."

"Talking about crazy - how is our General?"

"He's ready for a loony bin or DIA."

Tupelo laughed, "and nothing could be done because he is the mayor's son. Our General is on his way to DIA."

Johnny asked, "A promotion?"

"Up and out of the way."

Benny added, "To the elephant's grave yard. You've got your marching orders. Any more questions?"

"Who is paying for my trip."

"CIA Ops." "Bobbie Jean only travels First Class."

"We'll make arrangements when we have the date set. All you have to do is show up. Take the rest of the day off."

"You are so kind."

Johnny stopped twenty feet past the entrance to Eighth Corridor and took a second look at the line drawing of Gus - the first chimpanzee to orbit the earth, "You look like an orangutan my friend. I notice someone has removed Bidwell's ID strip. You're no longer listed as a fighter pilot - Lieutenant General and former commander of Air Force Systems Command. Too bad - you could have made a change. Who knows - your portrait might have made the general's gallery on 'E' Ring." Johnny laughed as he walked - his footsteps echoing along an empty corridor. The walk across the parade ground to his car was a lot slower than coming - with the wind in his face and not at his back.

Bobbie Jean greeted Johnny on their front porch with a hug and a fresh cup of coffee. She linked her arm through his and walked to the kitchen, "Built a fire this morning. I could have used another hour of sleep, but the aroma of your

coffee and your door banging woke me up."

"I'm detached to Benny. Office remains the same."

"Will he be as demanding as your General?"

"Don't see any change. I had to go in on a Saturday and I won't be around long enough for him to make a habit out of it. I'm flying to Fiji in ten days. Might be there over the holiday. CIA is paying the way. Nothing dangerous. They want you to go along."

"Can we take the twins. It should be educational."

"It's supposed to be safe, but they may be in harms way."

"Will your friend - Mr. Penny - be in Fiji?"

"Yes."

"Then our boys will stay home or at their Grandparents."

"We could compromise. I have to stop over in Hawaii for a week of training. You could fly down over Christmas and bring the boys along."

"Let me sleep on it. You know they're on a basketball team."

"No I didn't. That's another reason for me to get out of this business."

"No time for family?"

"Or for me."

"Why don't you take me to lunch and we'll make plans for your future."

"Where?"

"Why Sam's - of course."

Arlington - Sam's

Bidwell greeted them at the door, "Did you two enjoy your second honeymoon in Hawaii?"

Bobbie Jean took Bidwell's arm in hers, "Not long enough. How is our restaurant doing?"

"We should be expanding."

"Your gaming activities must be doing well."

"I need to invest my winnings."

"You can go it alone."

"Not in this business. I need your support and expertise."

"Scout around for a location in the northern Maryland suburbs."

"Lease or purchase?"

"Purchase. Look for an upscale location - ground floor of an office building where parking space is available in the evening."

"We might have to build."

"Don't think so. Lots of office buildings going up. Someone has to be overextended."

"Might take a few years."

"Our Chef will know which one of his staff is ready to go it alone by then."

Johnny asked, "Do you know a Chief Master Sergeant Tupelo?"

"No - where does he work?"

"My General's office."

"Benny Barnes."

"How did you know?"

"If I don't know him - he works for Benny."

Johnny asked Bobbie Jean, "Why don't we call Tucker and have a meeting at Sam's tonight."

"As long as I don't have to cook."

She asked Bidwell, "Is our party room open on the top floor?"

"No - but our private dining room is. How many?"

"You and your wife - Tucker and his wife and us."

"What time?"

She looked over at Johnny and he answered, "Seven - add on Chief Master Sergeant Tupelo and his wife."

Bobbie Jean raised her eyebrows. Johnny added, "He replaced Benny in The General's office - he's my new boss."

Bidwell laughed, "Your question is answered - he works for Benny. Do you two want to lunch alone or would you like company?"

Bobbie Jean took Johnny's arm, "Alone - call Tucker. Johnny will call Tupelo and I'll order."

Bidwell escorted them to a private booth in the back - near

the kitchen, "Chef has a new crab sandwich he wants you to try."

"Chesapeake?"

"Water's cold - traps are out - more than likely. Coffee or wine?"

Bobbie Jean answered, "Red and black."

Bidwell motioned to a waiter.

Bobbie Jean sat quietly as Johnny drove her twenty year old Bentley south on the George Washington Parkway. She broke the silence, "Do you think its time to trade this one in?"

"Are you crazy? It runs like a top - rides like a floating sofa and quiet - I can hear your heart beat sitting next to you."

"How about a restoration?"

"Your mechanic in New Orleans passed away. Is there a new one you trust?"

"An expatriate from the Rolls factory in McLean."

"Whatever you decide. I like this car - it's a classic."

"Any second thoughts about leaving the Air Force next spring?"

"I have to finish my obligation first."

"A contractual one?"

"No - I gave my word and in my business - that's a binding contract. We may be in the deception business, but our word is our bond. Tupelo is bringing his wife along and Benny is coming - too."

"Did you invite him?"

"Had too - he and Tupelo made plans to go out tonight."

"And they changed their plans to be with us?"

"Not really - they all ready had reservations at Sam's. Our dinner invitation is free."

When they returned in the evening - Johnny pushed the remote and raised the garage door to Bobbie Jean's private

parking space. He drove her ancient Bentley inside, "Why did you insist on an enclosed space?"

"Old casino habits die hard. Just a deterrent to amateur car thieves."

They walked through the underground parking garage to Sam's private elevator. Johnny inserted the key - the doors opened to a choice of four buttons - ground floor - owner's office - penthouse - and parking garage. He pushed the penthouse button and the white light came on. They stepped out into Sam's private dining room. Their guests were waiting - warming themselves by the fireplace.

Benny walked over, "Pretty fancy place on an Air Force salary. The view up here is fantastic."

"Pays to marry a rich widow who owns a liquor store. Bobbie Jean - you remember Benny."

"We're getting to be old friends. Is this the famous Tupelo - another friend of Bennys?"

Tupelo introduced his wife and Benny's and Tucker walked over, "Johnny - I met your two friends in the Delta a war or two ago."

Benny stepped in, "Vietnam is in the past."

Tucker added, "Paraphrasing Mark Twain - a good war spoiled. Have you boys learned anything from failure?"

Benny smiled, "Be on the side of the people and stay out of jungles. We picked the wrong dictator and trained the other side - doesn't get any worse than that. Remember - we're an instrument of policy - State and the White House create it."

Tucker smiled, "And all along I thought it was created by a small group of intellectuals at Columbia."

Benny grew serious, "And we always try to prevent the last war - not the next one."

Bobbie Jean stepped in, "Has everyone met the Bidwells? He is part owner and manager of our restaurant - Sam's."

Benny smiled, "A legend in his own time. Johnny - how did

you get hooked up with the fastest set of card dealin' hands in the country?"

"We crewed together on B-52s."

Bidwell asked Benny, "Where are you working?"

"Here and there - around and about. Consult with a few foreign governments and corporations. Haven't seen you since we both retired out of the Pentagon."

"Tupelo took your place."

"Roger that."

"Are you both honorary members?"

"Of what?"

"The Sergeants Union."

"You might say so."

"Which one of you is sending my boy to Fiji over Christmas?"

Tupelo spoke up, "I am."

Tucker laughed, "Fiji? Johnny - you're being put out to pasture - unless the Fijians have returned to collecting heads."

Bobbie Jean took Johnny's arm, "We can continue this over dinner."

The King looked anxiously at the White Rabbit - who said in a low voice, "Your Majesty must cross-examine this witness."

"Well - if I must - I must" the King said with a melancholy air - and after folding his arms and frowning at the cook till his eyes were nearly out of sight - he said in a deep voice, "What are tarts made of?"

"Pepper - mostly" said the cook.

"Treacle" said a sleepy voice behind [Alice].

Pentagon

Bidwell's comment about Johnny being put out to pasture - in the cold morning light had an augur of truth. Johnny's second day at his new job - his status detached to CIA Operations didn't look glamorous. He was having second thoughts, "Feels more like I'm being hung out to dry on a very thin limb." Johnny turned up his collar to ward off the morning chill from a northwest wind. He checked his watch, "I'm late and I'm talking to myself. Better not jump to conclusions. Paranoia is for flag officers - politicians and toadies. And the only way I can make it to River Entrance from North Parking any faster is to run and that's not a good idea wearing leather soled shoes."

Tupelo's greeting confirmed his new status. No more, "Good morning Colonel Ropp. Would you care for a cup of coffee?" Today it was a grunt - a nod and, "Stop back in later. I'll have your tickets to Fiji a little after ten." "No more special flights?" "Not where you're going. I'm giving you a five day layover in Hawaii. Will that be long enough?" "I have no idea. Does the condemned man still get coffee?" "Only if you pour it yourself. Oh - I moved your things out of your old office into your new one. It's around the corner - across the hall from your buddy - Gus the chimp astronaut." "Who told you?" "Bidwell - we belong to the Sergeants Union." He tossed Johnny his new office key, "I've stored what little classified you have in my vault. The DIA analyst for the

South Pacific knows you're going to stop by today."

"How about their library."

"You're cleared."

"Do we have an expert?"

"On Fiji? You've got to be kidding."

"Do I still have my own coffee cup?"

"It's in your desk - top right hand drawer."

Johnny opened the door of The General's outer office - looked across the corridor and saw his name - next to a well worn wooden door, "I thought this was a broom closet."

"It was" Tupelo responded with a laugh "can't afford to waste space on a temporary occupant."

Johnny inserted the large metal key - one that must have been invented in the Middle Ages - unlocked his door - turned on the light and looked around. His room was long and narrow - not two feet wider than his desk at the far end and gave off the aroma of musty wet mops. He turned sideways to get behind his desk. On top was a phone and two empty wooden boxes - one said in and the other said out. He leaned back in his chair and smiled, "It certainly is a broom closet. Not a problem - a new broom sweeps clean. And this one won't be here long enough to get mad." He checked the drawers. All of his personal items were inside, but the move had scattered them about. Johnny straightened each drawer and checked the phone. The dial tone told him it was operating. He thought about phoning Benny at CIA Ops to complain, but decided not too, "I know he's waiting on my phone call. I won't give him an opening to needle me about my new office. This has to be his little joke. It's not all that bad. With no windows and a lock the door - I won't be disturbed when this kindergarten has its nap time. All in all - I'll be a happy man - after the moldy mop smell airs out." Johnny picked up his coffee cup, Better wash out the cockroach tracks. He turned sideways to slide past his desk - stepped outside and locked the door.

Johnny stopped by The Generals Office to pick up his airline tickets. Tupelo stuck his head out of the vault and smiled, "How do you like your new digs?"

"Not bad. Won't have visitors - ought to get some peace and quiet for a change. Do you have my tickets to the South Pacific?"

"Got waylaid. Pick them up on your way back from DIA. I'll have your wife's - too."

"What if she doesn't want to go?"

"I called - she already decided. Plans on arriving just before Christmas."

"First Class?"

"Only for her."

"I'm going to stop at the Army Library. Data on Fiji is mostly open source. Call the analyst in DIA and let him know I'll see him after lunch."

Johnny had a spring in his step - a new sense of freedom as he walked across North Parking in the afternoon sun and not one ounce of puritanical guilt in his soul. Coming early and leaving late is a Pentagon disease he was now free of. The DIA analyst hadn't been much help. Benny had provided more information Saturday morning. He drove north to his farm in McLean now away from the business of fulfilling other folks' dreams.

Bobbie Jean walked out onto the front porch as he drove up the lane, "You're home early from the Pentagon wars - soldier. Were you fired?"

"Don't I wish. More like being sent out to pasture. The Air Force is washing its hands of me before I get a chance to tell them I'm through."

"Did your office disappear like the one in Omaha?"

"Close I've been moved into a broom closet."

"You're kidding?"

"The odor of moldy mops is overwhelming, but it has its

advantages. I'm my own boss. For now - I can set my own agenda - stop working those twelve hour days and no longer do I have to repond to a General's beck and call. And as far as the world knows - I still work at the same job."

"With a broom closet for an office?"

"Didn't think of that. Not very good cover - is it?"

"Your peers will know you've suffered a loss of prestige. I shopped for resort clothes this afternoon. Carry in the packages from my Bently while I start dinner."

Johnny finished the last of five trips and returned to the kitchen, "Are there any summer clothes left in Virginia?" "Don't knock a professional shopper - soldier - this is late fall - I bought everything on sale. Open a bottle of red and we'll toast your new status."

Johnny poured two glasses and opened the door to the backyard lanai. He stepped outside - leaned against the rail and gazed west at his woods. His sheep were edging their way towards the stables - nibbling at tufts of grass along the way. Bobbie Jean came to his side and linked her arm in his, "Brr - it's cold out here. Come back inside and keep me company while I make our salads."

"Where are the boys?"

"At basketball practice."

"I have a better idea."

Nothing happened the next day - or the next - or the next - or the next - or the next - unless looking for information on Fiji is an earth shaking event. Johnny stopped by Tupelo's vault on his way out, "I've done all I can here. Fiji isn't a DOD area of concern."

"Make work for you - to get you out of my hair. Ching-Chang has all the details you'll need. Don't forget to give me a call when you arrive in paradise."

"Is there some harm in my way?"

"No - would we send you where there is?"

"Yes and Benny has. I'm leaving in the morning."

"Write if you get work."

One Flew West

Johnny looked up at the early morning sky, "Stars look like high intensity crime lights in DC - bright, but with a yellow cast." He retrieved his morning newspaper from the drainage ditch and returned to the kitchen. Bobbie Jean picked up the pot and poured coffee, "No breakfast for you this morning. I want you to eat on the plane. What does Tucker's Yellow Journalism paper have to say?"

"Post is busy shooting messengers instead of the message. I'll finish packing while you read your favorite part."

"The comics and the crossword can wait. You're packed. All you have to do is carry your suitcases to the car."

"Hate to leave at this time of year. Late fall means cozy fireplaces and walks with you in the crisp morning air."

"Remember those thoughts each time you think of going back on your word."

"Don't worry - my mind is made up. If it wasn't - the wet mop odor clinched it."

"Better hurry or you'll miss your plane."

As Johnny drove to Dulles Airport - Bobbie Jean poured Johnny a fresh cup of coffee from the carafe by her feet,

"How soon will you be in Fiji?"

"Within a week if all goes well in Hawaii."

"Stay away from the wahines on Waikiki."

"I've got my own wahine waiting for me here in McLean. Don't want to be cut out of the will."

"Fun-ny. I'm flying in a week before Christmas. Make sure we have a suite with a view."

"On Uncle Sam's nickel - I'll have a room overlooking the dumpster ."

"When I arrive - a suite at the Viti Levu."

"Viti Levu?"

"Fiji's best - I phoned last night."

"Hotel owner's Mafia?"

"Of course."

Johnny stopped in front of the airline departure area - opened the door on the drivers side and held it for Bobbie Jean. She gave him a hug - a kiss and then a passionate embrace before pushing him away, "Maybe we should come here in the evening."

"To get our hearts started?"

She hopped in - closed the door and popped open the trunk, "Have to get the boys off to school. Retrieve your luggage and - Johnny?"

"He kissed her lightly on the lips, "I know - I love you too."

He stood on the curb as the sky cap checked his bags through to Honolulu - staring at Bobbie Jean's tail lights - growing dimmer as they grew further apart.

By the time Johnny arrived at the mid field terminal - his flight to Chicago was boarding and the sensation of being alone was setting in. He was cut loose from his moorings at work and now he was separating again from his family. He had done so a hundred times, but this time - it was like being set adrift without steering or anchor. He picked up a copy of the Wall Street Journal on the way to his seat. After settling in - Johnny glanced at the lead story on the front page -

Corporate leaders promise to hire Americans

and laughed, "The last time they made that promise - they hired workers from Central America. That bit of humor broke my mental funk." He folded the paper and inserted it into the seat pocket in front of him, "I'll read it on the way," but he didn't. As soon as wheels were in the well - Johnny

was asleep. He woke when the flight attendant asked him to place his seat back in an upright position.

O'Hare Airport mimicked the city of Chicago - large - sprawling - with quick stepping throngs. Not spotless - or dirty - O'Hare is in a continual state of cleaning - not quite making it. Johnny laughed to himself, "A toddlin' town - now where are the toddlers? He walked past a satellite bar and noticed two in their cups waiting for passengers - or maybe a flight. He checked the departure TV screen. His flight to Honolulu had been dealayed for thirty minutes, "I won't have to run to check in. Napped through breakfast. Better find something hot to eat."

Johnny set his briefcase down by a lunch stand and ordered a hot dog and small beer. As he spread mustard and relish on the dog - still in shock over the price, "A five dollar dog and a three dollar beer. I'll not dine here again." He took a bite, "Excellent dog - though and the beer is cold. Been through here - how many times? Ten - twenty? Never seen the town. Maybe there is just this airport. Forgot about the ethnic neighborhoods. Has to be similar to Omaha. A toddlin' town - Bobbie Jean will want to see the toddlers. Wonder if the Palmer House is still here? She'll know."

Johnny found his assigned seat on the right side of the airplane. As he sat down he looked up - two very large people approached and thought, "Oh no - it's a twelve hour flight to Honolulu." He stood so they could sit - wondering, "How will they ever fit in these narrow airline seats?" His questioned was answered as each laid a roll of fat filled skin over the top of the arm rests. The Flight Attendant - noticing Johnny's lack of space - his arms penned in by two large mounds of flesh - moved him to an empty aisle seat immediately behind the First Class section. He returned her

smile, "You have my eternal thanks."

She answered, "That's what the two people you left behind said."

Johnny shook his head, "Without Bobbie Jean in charge - I'm in cattle class. I wonder - is Benny moving me away from the action because of my association with Three Penny? Why would he?" And then it hit home, "I know too much. We don't assassinate friends or enemies - or do we? He can't select me to join his CIA team on his own. I haven't been vetted - except for that session after Tucker and Paddy Black were caught in a Vietcong ambush." Nothing fits - I'm without answers. Maybe I should abort this mission and get out now. I'd rather move the pieces - not be a pawn."

Johnny leaned back and unbuckled his seat belt as the 747 leveled off at initial flight altitude. He waited for the drink cart to pass by before standing up - stretching - waiting outside the door for an unoccupied sign. He returned to his seat and checked his watch, "Should have stayed awake on the flight from Dulles to O'Hare - now I can't get to sleep and we have eleven hours to go." The movie brought some relief. Johnny took his earphones off and watched another Hollywood tribute to four letter words and Actors Studio art of shouting - in silence, "Maybe Hollywood should return to making silent movies. Not half bad without sound. Even the out of place sex scene comes off better - without all that heavy breathing - moaning and groaning. Johnny stayed awake through the second serving before finally falling asleep - waking as air brakes were extended - giving notice that his flight was beginning its descent toward Honolulu International runway. He sat up and looked out the window, "Koolau Mountains are covered by clouds - streaming to the southwest. Has to be a strong northeast Trade Wind. We'll land toward the terminal on the short runway." He was wrong - his 747 landed on the Reef Runway, "It'll be fifteen minutes of taxi time."

Honolulu

Johnny looked around for an escort, but there was none, "News travels fast. My fall from grace has reached all the way out here in the middle of the Pacific. Thought Ching-Chang would at least show up for old times sake." As he walked to the main terminal - a Trade Wind driven misty rain blew under the ramada. Getting a good soaking - Johnny rushed on, "At least the Hawaiian Gods are blessing my arrival." He stopped inside the terminal and called the VOQ. There was no room at the inn. A multination military training exercise as underway. He called the Army hotel on the beach, but the Hale Koa was full. However - they were able to reserve a room for him at the Hawaiian Village. Johnny requested the Rainbow Tower, "This pineapple shower is a blessing - I'm staying at a first class hotel."

Johnny went to the rental car counter before retrieving his luggage from the carousel. His luck was indeed improving - last on - first off worked and his rental car was in the covered parking garage - directly across the road from the terminal. He opened the trunk - the aroma of mildew greeted his nostrils, "Been around the island a few times." He closed it and placed his suitcases in the back seat, "Four door - cloth interior - hope the air-conditioning works." He drove down the access road to Nimitz Highway and turned right - Diamondhead toward Waikiki, "Even at night I can smell the aroma of tropical flowers. He closed his window, "And a pineapple shower mist. Has to be the cleanest air in the world." He continued Diamond Head on Nimitz toward Waikiki and turned Makai - toward the mountains on Ward Avenue - then Diamond Head on Ahuai Street and Mauka toward the ocean - into the Ward Warehouse parking garage. He had executed three points of the Hawaiian compass, but not the fourth - Ewa toward the Wainai Mountains. He parked on the third floor and walked out under partial cover. The rain blocked by the overhang on this side of the shopping center.

Passing the Old Spaghetti House - the Trade Wind mist caught him again. Johnny sought shelter under the awning of Horatios - a continental restaurant. Hunger coming on - he stepped inside and found a seat at the bar - avoiding the dark wood booths lovers use. He ordered a dark draft beer and turned around - looking out the second story window at Kewalo Basin - the old fishing boat wharf. Tour Buses were arriving in the parking lot for sunset sails. He didn't bother with a menu, "Beef Wellington - medium rare." The bartender motioned with his head toward a two-person booth, "We don't serve here. You'll be more comfortable in a booth." Johnny smiled and carried his beer to the booth, "Old world customs and old world atmosphere. Must be left over from the monarchy."

His salad arrived within minutes after he was seated, "Old world service - too." He looked at his watch, "Midnight in DC and six p.m. here. No wonder the service is fast." His Beef Wellington arrived as soon as he finished his salad. After dinner - he returned to the bar and ordered an Irish Coffee. He asked the bartender, "Notice the fishing fleet is in port. What's up?" "Our Shark God has gone on a trip and fishing has gone south with him." "Is that the same shark who ate half a surfboard in Waimanalo Bay?" "You must be local." "I was here on business when it happened." "We think he destroyed a large ocean going catamaran - too. This Tiger Shark is a friend - he fishes the same territory as our fishing fleet does. We treat him with respect." "When did he disappear?" "The day after the JCS Chairman was assassinated at Bellows Field." "Lets hope he and your fish return."

Johnny stopped under the overhang of the Hawaiian Village, but couldn't escape the wind and rain streaming from the Koolau Mountains. The hotel night clerk looked up, "May I help you?"

"I'm John Ropp. Called from the airport about a room at military rates?"

"Colonel Ropp - we've been waiting for you. I have your suite ready - Diamond Head corner - top floor of our Rainbow Tower."

"I can't afford a suite at military rates."

"Your wife is one of our major shareholders. You are our guest."

He motioned to a bellhop, "May I have your keys. We'll park your car. Do you have luggage?"

"In the back seat."

"Follow our bellhop." Johnny nodded, "If anyone calls or asks which room I'm in - don't give it out. And please - don't list my name or room in your computer."

"Is there a reason?"

"Six metal ones."

"We'll list it under your wife's maiden name - Mrs. Langtry."

Johnny rode to the Rainbow Tower in a covered electric cart and followed as the bellhop escorted him to a private elevator - opening only on the top floor. He tipped the bellboy generously and looked around, "Two bedrooms - a small kitchen with a fridge - bar - fruit basket - everything and what a view."

He picked up the phone and dialed his home number in McLean. Bobbie Jean answered, "I was waiting for your call. How do you like your room?"

"Owner's suite on the top floor. Are you an owner?"

"A small piece of this chain - don't you remember?"

"Why didn't we stay here instead of the Royal on our second honeymoon?"

"The Royal is a grand old lady with a honeymoon tradition. I wanted to stay there on our first visit together. Don't you remember our first time. We were at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans?" "

"Blueberry muffins and rich New Orleans coffee."

"Don't you like your new digs?"

"Love it, but can we afford it?"

"Hotel owners Mafia."

"I forgot. Is everything quiet on the home front?"

"We have a visitor."

"Parked down the road?"

"Yes, but not where I can observe him."

"Lock the doors and keep my shotgun at hand."

"I'm one step ahead of you. Who are they?"

"Don't know - could be the good guys."

"Why would CIA watch an empty nest?"

"Right hand doesn't let the left one know where the fox has gone to ground, but this time they must know where I am. Russians aren't interested. That leaves only one group."

"Pat Penny's Hungarians?"

"I'm not his daughter's favorite person."

"A woman scorned!"

"Is our phone tapped?"

"Yes, but we have nothing to hide."

"Watch your six - soldier."

"I will."

"And I will."

"Hedge your bet - call Benny."

Villa Penny - Hungary

Pretty Penelope Penny - Pat's daughter - was furious, "The Croats want Pat to provide more Cork weapons. We can't - not since O'Leary went south with the hairy Red Devils. And they don't have funds to pay for them. And Father has disappeared somewhere in the South Pacific. Damn him - where is he when I need him. He's the only one who knows how

to deal with those hotheads. We don't have weapons to lend - not for them - not out of our reserves. Mother warned him - Serbs and Croats have been at each others throats for centuries. No one - at least not in Hungary - would ever get involved in their tribal warfare. Each Balkan valley is like a jungle inhabited by different ethnic groups. And though the natives look alike - their only similarity is a hatred for each other." She shook her head, "Mother was right again - Europe is more tribal than Africa. Our boundaries don't match up with our inhabitants either. We should give each Balkan tribe weapons and ammunition - seal the borders and wait for a victor. I should phone Benny for help, but Father's the only one I'm allowed to contact. I'll make a note for us to set up an emergency procedure."

The phone rang. Penelope waited for the sixth ring before picking up a receiver hooked to their special line, "Hello."

"Colonel Ropp is not here."

"Did you tap his phone?"

"Yes - he is in Hawaii, but his family is here. Any instructions?"

"No - return to home plate - Three Penny is out of pocket. When he makes contact I'll ask for instructions. Are you satisfied with your surveillance?"

"We have everything mapped. There is a dog."

"You know how to take care of it."

"Now?"

"Of course not."

"Break off. Don't scare the fox - return home now."

She set the receiver back in its cradle, "God save me from incompetent help. I can only count on Franz. I'll send him when the time comes." Pretty Penny stood up - looked outdoors and stretched, "Winter is here. It's time to make our link sausage. I will add fennel and more peppers. Why

did Benny load a weapon and not allow me to pull the trigger? Where is Father when I need him. He must call soon."

South Pacific

The catamaran's mainsail flapped in the wind. Pat Penny sat up straight, "Wind! I'm out of the equatorial doldrums." He shut down the diesel - walked forward on the port boom and fully unfurled his main sail. He wet his hand in the ocean and held it high in the air, "No spinnaker - not yet - not enough wind. He looked at his watch, "I've been under power for - lets see - at least thirty-two hours." Pat placed his hands on the side of the hatch and swung below. He opened a can of Primo, "Time to celebrate my release from a windless sea. I've been sailing this watery desert much too long." He stepped back and looked at the beer can, "This Primo is beginning to taste like beer. Feels good to be back under sail. A fair wind is welcome relief from tropical heat." He checked his GPS readout and plotted his position on the chart, "I've passed Howland and Baker Islands. And with this wind - I should pass by Phoenix Islands today."

Pat opened another Primo, "Spoke too soon - better mix it with a bit of stout." He made a wry face, "This stuff is only good for cooking or disinfectant." He measured the distance to Fiji on his chart, "A little over thirteen hundred miles to go. If the wind holds - should be there in five days." Pat carried his thermal mug of mixed stout and Primo to the helm and unlocked the wheel, "Moving right along now."

He looked down - down into the depths, "I see you with your great big black eyes lookin' up at me - like I was a pupu. Stayin' in the shade of my Cat are you? If you were white and I was Captain Ahab - you'd be my obsession, but you're not and I'm not. I'm your obsession, but those eyes - they're never closed - always watching. You're beginning to

make me nervous and I'm beginning to have empathy with Captain Ahab. We've both been alone together - too long - you and me - out on this watery grave. Maybe that was Ahab's problem. I could use some human company. How about you? Are the only humans you desire is for your appetite? Am I company enough - or do you only speak with the other Hawaiian Gods? I'm beginning to believe you're a shark God. Why else would you be leading me on? If you wanted too - you could destroy me and my Cat in seconds. I'm talking to a shark. Heat must be frying my brain. Better cool down with a bucket bath. Time to wash up."

Pat dropped his shorts. Undressed - he dipped a canvas bucket into the ocean and splashed salt water over his head and shoulders. He soaped down and repeated his bucket bath ritual until soap was gone from his skin. As he air dried in the wind - Pat spoke to his friend below, "I'm tired of these salt water bucket baths my friend and as much as I'd love to take a dip in the ocean - I don't think were that friendly. If you'd swim away for just a few minutes? Not your style? I'm not only talking to myself - I'm answering. Better call Penelope and see how things are coming along at home. Maybe she can join Mother and me in Fiji. Might need a backup."

Pat dressed - checked the main - locked the wheel and swung below to the Navigation Station. He picked up his satellite phone, "Screw Benny - doesn't matter what he thinks - I'm going to use his fancy CIA satellite system for a personal phone call."

Pretty Penny picked up on the sixth ring, "Hello."

"How are things at the Villa?"

"Where are you?"

"Can't say - not over this line. Someone might be listening in. It's a dangerous world out here. Talk to your Mother. She'll let you know where I'll be. Maybe you'll join us at Christmas."

"Do you need help?"

"I need a backup."

"Where is our Colonel? Washington DC?"

"Not anymore. Has Benny talked with you about him?"

"Not on my agenda and shouldn't be on yours either."

"Benny had me do the preliminaries."

"That's out of line. We don't do friends. Just because you weren't able to snag him. Get over this woman scorned thing. We are not common killers and I don't intend to become one."

"It was just preliminary."

"It's illegal and I'll have no part of it. Have you ground the new sausage?"

"I have begun. Mother needs to know your estimated time of arrival."

"My ETA is five days. Can I expect to see you?"

"We'll see."

Pat placed the receiver back in its cradle, "This is unacceptable. Unless he has turned? I doubt that. Money is the mother's milk of entrapment and Colonel Ropp doesn't need it. He and his wife have more than we do. What's gotten into Benny? Maybe I should break silence and give him a call. No - I will be too inviting a target - for him." He climbed above decks, "At least me and my Tiger have made an accommodation." Pat looked down, "You rascal you - using my Cat's shadow to attract fish. You've got a moveable feast! You old codger you - you're large enough to be an Orca and smart enough to be a great white whale - stayin' deep in the daytime and risin' up at night to give me a little bump now and then to keep me on my toes."

Honolulu

The door opened and the Paddock Detachment Secretary looked up from her desk at the clock on the wall, "Mr. Ching-Chang - you're in late this morning. Traffic?"

"Accident on H2. Some one got blinded driving into the

rising sun. Morning Advertiser here?"

"On your desk. Tea or coffee?"

"Coffee" and he smiled. It was her little game to let him know he was Chinese American on an island dominated by her people - Japanese Americans. And his little game to answer with his usual response - coffee - making a statement that they were Americans first - race second and Hawaiian forever. He opened the paper to local news, "Did you see the Article about our fishing fleet?"

His Secretary carried his coffee in, "No - is there a problem?"

"They're in port. The day after the JCS Chairman was assassinated - fish disappeared."

"The Shark God has left our islands."

"You don't believe in those old Kahuna tales - do you?"

"No one is catching any fish."

"Touché! I apologize - I haven't been entirely truthful this morning. There was an accident on H2 and I was behind an elderly Japanese lady who had to look up through her steering wheel to drive. She was blinded by the sun. I'm really late because I procrastinated. I don't want to go to a briefing this morning at FICPAC."

"Why not?"

"The Fleet Intelligence Center's building is at Makalapa - on the Mauka edge of Pearl Harbor where there is no wind. It's crowded - windowless and has faulty air-conditioning."

Ching-Chang stopped by his Secretary's desk on the way out, "Should be back before noon. If Colonel Ropp calls - get his number and location. Tell him I'll call back."

"You're our Detachment Commander. Send someone else. You don't have to go if you don't want to."

"It's about Fiji."

"Send Kalani."

"Can't - FICPAC won't let a civilian consultant in without an escort."

"And you can't find him in time."

"And PACAF won't allow me to use him as their rep."

"I'm going to take an early lunch today."

"Anything special?"

"One of the secretaries at PACAF Intel is getting married. We're having a shower."

Ching-Chang nodded and walked to his staff car.

He drove the back way - around Pearl Harbor, "Kalani might be at his favorite fishing spot." Ching-Chang looked, but Kalani wasn't there. He smiled, Kalani has more Hawaiian in him than me. He believes in the Shark God."

When Ching-Chang returned - he had a note from his Secretary on his desk -

*Colonel Ropp called, but wouldn't
leave his number - or say at which
hotel he is staying. Said he'll stop
by after lunch - which is where I am.*

Ching-Chang unlocked his briefcase and placed his notes from the FICPAC briefing on his desk. This briefing had been a pleasant surprise. For a change he was able to stay awake - even in the sweltering heat of FICPAC's briefing room - instead of napping after the lights dimmed. Rumors were on the wind about a possible KIWI socialist backed coup in Fiji. Local Fijian Indian socialists were believed to be laying the groundwork to retake the islands by force. This briefer was well versed. He even provided a short history of modern Fiji - including the transition from British rule to independence. Ching-Chang smiled, "They're still members of the Commonwealth. When the British left - the plantation workers took over the government and left the native Fijians out in the cold. Just like we did to our Hawaiians. Except here -

if you peel the skin off a Hawaiian - you'll find a Chinese and if you peel the skin off a Chinese - there is part that is Hawaiian."

Ching-Chang wandered out to the coffee mess - poured another cup and looked at his watch, "Eleven-thirty - Ropp will be here in an hour. Better bone up." He resumed where he left off, "After taking control - Fiji's socialist government formed an alliance with New Zealand's antinuclear movement and the Soviet Union in an effort to establish a nuclear free zone. However - when Fiji began to move toward the Soviet Block - Fijians - who still controlled the land - police and military - revolted and kicked their socialist Indians out of office. Ching-Chang smiled, "My Fijian friends are more fortunate than we were - they didn't give up their land. And it looks like they want to keep it. The New Zealand government isn't supporting this - so it's Butch Cassidy - Sun Dance Kid time. Who are these guys and where did they come from? At least I was able to save some money. We were asked to support a fact finding mission and I don't have anyone to send. Not since Kalani retired. Neither does the Navy - or Army and Benny has Colonel Ropp on the way. I wonder how he knew?"

Johnny stuck his head in the door, "Are you plotting an overthrow of Mr. Dole's homeland." Ching-Chang laughed, "After this morning's briefing on Fiji - I was thinking about it. How did Benny know Fiji was exploding?"

"He told me it was going to be a peaceful vacation."

"To Benny - peace means no nuclear explosions. I'm glad your going down under because I don't have anyone to send. But - this exercise would better fit Da-Kine Local. Someone who blends in."

Johnny held his temper in check - though his cheeks were flushed, "Cut out the Kabuki dance. I understand your

concern. I know you'd rather send one of your people, but I didn't volunteer - I was drafted - so you can stop shooting the messenger - me. Aim at Benny."

"We'll just have to make the best of it. It just might work out. As a Haole - you can stumble into places like a tourist without raising too much suspicion. Peace? What can I do to help?"

"Didn't get any useful data in Washington. DIA has mostly open source stuff. They spend very little time on friendlies. I need the nitty-gritty stuff. Where do I begin my data search."

"FICPAC has a fair amount - mostly open. IPAC has an analyst who covers the whole South Pacific. I'd start there. Do you have transportation?"

"Rented a car. Why didn't you have someone meet me?"

"Didn't know you were coming in until after you arrived. Oh - Tupelo called. He's steaming. Why didn't you check in?"

"Tagalongs at my house. Don't know whether they're good guys - or bad guys."

Johnny scanned Ching-Chang's notes from the FICPAC briefing, "Same-ol' - same-ol' stuff Benny gave me."

"Damn that Benny. He knows more than he's letting on. I just found out about the problem in Fiji this morning at FICPAC."

"Do you have anything on Pat Penny?"

"He drowned at sea - didn't he?"

"Someone who looks a lot like him is sailing in the South Pacific. Any fallout on the assassination at Bellows?"

"Had to tear down what was left and rebuild the Commander's cottage. The JCS Chairman's remains were imbedded into every piece that remained."

"Is PACAF Intel still at odds with IPAC?"

"Still haven't forgiven them for taking PADAF away."

"PADAF?"

"Pacific Air Defense Analysis Facility."

"Do they have a legitimate beef?"

"Yes - wars over in Vietnam - so IPAC diverted the Defense Analysts to other work. Defense Analysis has gone the way of the cavalry."

"Until another war starts. I'll start at IPAC."

Driving up the ridge line road - high above Pearl Harbor to Camp H. M. Smith is a trip through four climatic zones. From coastal tropical - to desert tropical - to hill country temperate - to mountain rain forest. The visitor slot was filled - so Johnny parked in the adjacent PACOM staff parking lot - cooled his heels at the entrance desk as the Marine Guard waited on clearance from IPAC Security. The IPAC South Pacific Analyst met him at the door, "Our librarian has all we have on Fiji ready for you. Recommend you look through it and then we'll talk."

"If it's the same as DIA's - it won't take long."

"Did Ching-Chang bring you up to date on the briefing we received at FICPAC this morning?"

"Reviewed his notes - is it that serious?"

"That's why you're going out - to see if it is."

Johnny leafed through IPAC's information on Fiji and turned it back to the librarian, "Same as DIA and the Army Library at the Pentagon."

"After you speak with our analyst - why don't you stop at the Bishop Museum. Their Curator is an expert on Fiji. Will tomorrow at ten be okay?"

"Great - I can visit the museum at the same time."

IPAC's South Pacific analyst gave Johnny a few tidbits of data that helped fill in the gaps from his other sources. The discovery of a cache of Russian weapons in the country - outside of Suva was the augur generating his visit. The IPAC analyst asked, "Have you talked to Kalani?"

"Thought that was slang for Kalanianioli."

"He's Ching-Chang's expert on the South Pacific. Kalani knows more about Fiji than the Bishop Museum. Believe he still consults with your Detachment. Where are you going to next?"

"Your librarian set up an appointment with the Bishop Museum Curator tomorrow morning. So - I'm through for the day. I'm heading back to the hotel. "Which hotel are you staying at?"

"At the airport Ramada. Got in late. Sure not Waikiki."

"And not Waikiki prices either."

Johnny returned to the Hilton Hawaiian Village with his windows rolled down - enjoying the aroma of tropical flowers along the way. Before turning off at the H1 Punahou exit - he searched for and found the Bishop Museum - high above the roadbed - Mauka of the freeway, "Wonder how I can get to it? Must be isolated from the public by roads."

None of his traps were triggered - so he knew his room wasn't searched. When he telephoned Bobbie Jean - she was relieved, "My watchers down the lane are gone."

"If they weren't - I was heading home. They discovered a weapons cache outside of Suva."

"Doesn't sound like a vacation to me. That does it - our boys aren't coming along. Where are you going to dine tonight?"

"Don't you remember? Ching-Chang's Uncle is the Executive Chef at the Golden Dragon."

"His lobster sauce is wonderful. My-my - I've created a gourmet."

"No - just the standard husband who is wife trained. Are you still coming to Fiji?"

"Of course - have to protect my lifetime investment."

After so many briefings that glossed over facts - the Bishop Museum's Curator's was a breath of fresh air. "Like most of the South Pacific - Fiji consists of many islands -

spread out over a great expanse of ocean. But - they are continental - not volcanic. It's an independent dominion of the British Commonwealth. Fiji's population exceeds eight-hundred thousand. Ceded to the British by Sera Cakobau in 1874 - their most famous Chief - the British in turn granted independence after World War II. However - the Indians brought in by the British to work the sugar cane fields gained control of the Parliament and attempted to establish a socialist government. This was a subterfuge - an effort to gain control of land owned by native Fijians. Conflict was created at the birth of Fiji's independence. Unlike Hawaii - Fijians maintained control of the constabulary and military. They took their islands back."

Johnny asked "How would you classify the Fijians?"
"Their way of life is similar to our Samoans. The Village and family are anchors. Although they were at one time some of the most feared warriors in the South Pacific - Fijians are industrious - intelligent and friendly. Their way of life incorporates most of the utopian aspects of socialism, but one that is clan centered."

Johnny interrupted, "Which islands are prime?"
"The northern island - Vanua Levu has the colonial capitol - Lambia. Viti Levu - the southern island has Fiji's modern day capitol - Suva. However - the center of power is a little island off the coast of Viti levu. Bau - where Fiji's most fiercest warrior rulers live. You may notice that the last three letters of Cakobau's name are bau. You're free to look at all the information I have."

Johnny returned his material and telephoned Ching-Chang at his Hickam Air Force Base Office, "I'm swimmin' up to my ears in Fiji information. Meet me at the O' Club for a beer. We need to talk before I fly out of here."

"How did it go at the Bishop Museum?"

"Between the Curator and the analyst at IPAC - I'm almost up to speed. Can you arrange a meeting with Kalani?"

"How did you find out about him?"

"Everyone I talked too recommends him."

"Too late for today. How soon are you planning to fly out?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"I'll see what I can do. He makes himself scarce. I'll meet you at the Hickam Club in thirty minutes."

"Traffic?"

"Forty-five."

Johnny walked around the O' Club to the back Lanai overlooking the channel of Pearl Harbor's East Lock. The big E - aircraft carrier Enterprise - was entering the channel absolutely silent on nuclear power - until Victory at Sea came blasting out of its loudspeakers - as she came abreast of the Air Force O' Club lanai. Johnny sat down next to Ching-Chang - laughing, "Navy is making another political statement?"

"Not often we can watch a floating air base - as long as the Empire State building is tall."

"Why is she sailing in at dusk?"

"Coming in after retreat - so she won't have to give full honors to the Arizona."

"Understand - so her crew won't have to fall out in dress whites."

"I ordered a pitcher of beer."

"Anything wet. Did you find Kalani?"

"I left a message."

Johnny poured, "Your Uncle is quite a Chef."

"He goes to Hong Kong and Formosa each year to pick up the latest sauces."

"Is that where he found his lobster sauce?"

"No - that's his own creation. How did your day go?"

"I'm not an expert, but I'll pass for an informed visitor."

"Best to play dumb."

"That won't be hard."

Johnny took a sip and watched the Big E as it sailed up the channel and disappeared in the twilight. He refilled their glasses, "Does Fiji's colonial experience compare to Hawaii's?"

"Might - outsiders look at the beauty of our islands and see paradise. After you live here awhile - you notice our soft underbelly - one full of turmoil - friction and conflict."

"How so?"

"Topography is a contributor. We aren't in Kansas - Dorothy. Hawaii is mountainous - if it's flat we build on it - plant it - or pave it. Fiji is like Hawaii - except our islands our volcanic. I know it looks like we have a lot of space, but it's difficult to build on - or plant a cliff. So - we both have limited space and unlimited people. For instance - on my island - Oahu - highways were designed to accommodate a population of less than 300,000. Today - we're at 600,000 and growing."

"Can't you build your highways near the mountains?"

"Yes, but when it's proposed - special interest group from here to California oppose it."

Ching-Chang ordered pupus, "Put a ten dollar bill on the table."

Johnny asked, "Why?"

"Local custom. We eat and drink until my ten and your ten are gone."

"And then what?"

"We go home and get chewed out by our wives."

Johnny laughed, "We're more alike than we are different, but I can see the difference between Hawaii and Fiji. You don't have the same racial mix as Fiji. Your plantation owners brought in Chinese - Japanese - Filipinos and Mexicans to work the fields. The British brought in Indians from India."

Hawaii absorbed all racial groups - in Fiji the Indians remained separate."

"Almost like our Japanese."

"Are they separate?"

"They were for three generations. Now they're beginning to mix in. Hawaii is more similar to Fiji's previous socialist government than we like to think. We're a one party state. Our governor's party has been in power so long they want us to return to a monarchy with him as king. We built a welfare state and forgot that someone has to pay for it."

It was Johnny's turn to order pupus, "I won't have to buy dinner out tonight. Is there a solution to your traffic problem?"

"Only if the politics of a one party state don't throw sand into the gears of civilized planning and zoning. Otherwise our only solution is to follow Bermuda's example - limit automobiles to one per household and eliminate car rentals to tourists."

"I've been there - it works. They also limit the speed their autos can go by motor size and mechanical means."

"Right now - if we want to stay on here - everyone in the house has to work to pay the governor's taxes and the artificially high prices for food - housing - everything we buy."

"What causes that?"

"We tax goods when they arrive and each time they change hands."

"Isn't that called a tariff? I thought that was illegal."

"We disguise our tariff. We call it an excise tax."

"Isn't there a sales tax?"

"That comes when a product is sold to a consumer. We not only tax goods - we tax services - like real estate and consultant commissions."

"No wonder prices are so high. You guys make Massachusetts look conservative."

"Where do you think our missionaries came from?"

"Roger that - another round."

Ching-Chang ordered pupus and their ten dollar bills were gone.

Johnny shook his head, "Fiji threw out their socialists."
"Hawaii's the laughingstock of the west. At least Fijians saved their country. It's beginning to look like we can't even save our okoles. Have you seen our two representatives in Congress. They make Lenin look conservative. We have a transplanted Hippy' and a lady who's so red we call her - Pink. Our central problem is a state controled school system designed to provide political spoils - not to teach. The outer islands provide the party in power with its political base - so Oahu pays most of the taxes and the outer islands get money for roads and schools."

Johnny wondered, "Doesn't a central system provide a level playing field for all students?"

"Level is right - Hawaii's schools are so far below the national level - not one of our politicians send their children to public schools."

"Sounds like Washington DC."

"It's more like DC than we care to admit. I'm not one of them, but my children still attend private school - one of the best - Kamehameha."

"Isn't he your warrior king - the one who united all of the islands?"

"Yes he is. We have to have a percentage of Hawaiian blood to attend. Tuition is minimal. The Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate runs the school."

Ching-Chang refilled their glasses, "You're becoming Local. Our talk story has strayed a long way from Fiji."

"Not really. There is one universal constant. People will always be people and most politicians will always be whores."

"Or lawyers" Ching-Chang laughed.

"And no right minded person is able to tell the difference."

"Shuka brau!"

Johnny drove back to the hotel with his memory banks and stomach filled to capacity. As he drove by Ala Moana Park - past the late afternoon jogging wahines - and all of their parts were bouncing in rhythm - it jogged his mind back to their conversation, "Ching-Chang stripped the romance of Hawaii away. I'm not sure if I'm enlightened or robbed. I'll never again view Hawaii as a pristine paradise again." Johnny checked his watch, "I have three hours before I'm supposed to phone Bobbie Jean - time enough for a shower and a practice nap."

The ringing of the hotel room phone matched the sound in his ears - still ringing from the lecture he received from Bobbie Jean last night. Johnny picked up the receiver, "Sorry about the wake up call." "Ching-Chang - how did you find my number?" "My Uncle is the Executive Chef.

Meet me at the Detachment in an two hours - I have a surprise for you."

"Roger that. You were right about your local custom. I slept through and failed to phone Bobbie Jean. She called and read the riot act to me. What's the surprise?"

"You wanted to meet Kalani - Kalani Aku Kahiko. He was my expert on Fiji - before one of our Air Force Intelligence budget crunches forced Kalani into early retirement."

Johnny looked at his watch, "I slept in. Is it really eight a.m.?"

"Two p.m. Washington time."

As Ching-Chang set his parking brake and got out beside Kalani's truck he called out, "Hey Kalani - no can catch big fish in shallow water when sun is shining."

"Ono la Ching-Chang. Da kine line is just to keep Ku ula happy. No fish in these waters."

Johnny asked, "Is it because your Shark God left the islands?"

Kalani reeled in his line and smiled, "Who da kine aikane - Ching-Chang and how come he's so akamai about our Kahuna's Gods?"

"Colonel Ropp is from Washington - Kalani. He's been reading up on Fiji and wants to ask you some questions."

Kalani smiled, "Glad to meet you - Colonel. Its been a strange two weeks. Either our Shark God has gone away or Puu Loa is keeping the fish away from our hooks and nets. Even our fishing fleet is in harbor. Our Pearl Harbor waters are a breeding ground for sharks and there are none to be found. And this harbor is the ancestral home of our Shark God. When shark disappear - we are concerned. You want I should help this mainland Haole - Ching-Chang?"

"If you will. Put on your consultant hat and honor us with your presence in my office."

"Might as well. No fish in these waters and I can use the money. All my children are on the mainland and my wife wants to visit her Grandchildren."

Kalani walked into Ching-Chang's office ten minutes late - his hair wet, "Used the shower you put in for joggers. Is that still a fad?"

Ching-Chang nodded, "Going the way of the hula-hoop. Are you going to move to the mainland?"

"Wife wants too - to be near our children. We've been offered a lot of money for our land at Punaluu. That's on the North Shore - Colonel Ropp. I'm being taxed off my property. When are you going to pull the plug?"

Ching-Chang frowned, "Kids are still in school. No work here. Might just follow you. You ready to bring Johnny up to date?"

"Sure - you got a nice shower. No money for people, but plenty of money for things."

"Ching-Chang laughed, "Things don't retire - or get sick and cost Uncle Sugar money. And when we buy things - we pay off political debts."

Kalani looked over at Johnny, "Before you ask - I was in contact with Benny when he was out here. If he talked with you about Fiji - I gave him the information."

"Did Pat Penny talk to you?"

"He phoned. I've known Pat since our training days on the mainland. We didn't talk business. He's still retired - isn't he?"

"Only when he sleeps. Talk story about Fiji."

"Are you familiar with the Fijian Scouts during World War II?"

"No - are they famous?"

"Are they - really did a job for the Aussies during the war. The Chief of police is a Bau and his father was one of their bravest Scouts. A lot of honor and pride in that family. You'll be working with Chief Bau. Don't fudge anything with him. Be straight up."

Johnny asked, "How about the political situation?"

"Solved for now - since the Fijians took their country back. Funny thing about that situation - they tolerated the Indian socialists as long as they respected Fiji's customs - kept their hands off the land and didn't get too radical. You know the Fijians have control of their land - police and military and the Indians controlled commerce."

"Sounds a lot like Britain in 1577."

"Except Fiji doesn't have a house of Lords. Fiji socialists still want a nuclear free zone and control of the land. Have to remember da kine Fijians are family and village oriented. They're generous to a fault - willing to share, but not their land - their heritage."

Kalani stood up, "Got to see a man about a horse. Too much coffee this morning - I'll be right back."

Kalani returned and sat down, "Where was I? Oh - about Fiji being family oriented. Brits screwed things up. Imported Indians to work the cane fields. And as soon as they saved enough - the Indians opened stores and took over commerce. Then they sent for their relatives. By the time the Brits got around to giving Fiji independence - the Indians were in the majority and voted in a block."

Ching-Chang added, "Just like our Japanese."

Kalani smiled, "and our Californians - lucky we live Hawaii. Fijians are still upset because they had to throw out an elected government. British gave them a sense of fair play. But - the same Brits brought in the Indians and created the problem. When it came to independence - the Brits screwed over the Fijians. Not giving them a right to govern their own nation."

Johnny whistled, "Kalani - it never ceases to amaze me."

"What?"

"How you can go back and forth between local language and the King's English."

Kalani laughed, "Have to be bilingual to survive. I'm hungry. You buying lunch?"

Johnny nodded, "As long as it doesn't cost me an arm and a leg. Where too?"

Ching-Chang asked, "Dim sum?"

Johnny looked puzzled, "Dim sum?"

"Steamed dumplings with a variety of fillings. Bring baskets to the tables and you choose."

"Where to?"

"Where else - Hotel Street."

After lunch - Johnny asked, "Are the British supporting the Fijians - after they took control of their government?"

"Colonial mind set. The Indians had the constitutionally

elected government - so they supported them. That's why the Fijians have asked for our help."

Johnny smiled, "And that's where Benny comes in."

"And you. Indians never integrated into Fiji's culture. To Fijians - this was taking advantage of hospitality without honoring their customs. You picked up background data at the Bishop Museum?"

"Curator gave me access to all he had."

"The time has come the Walrus said - to bring you up to date on the Indian insurrection movement and who your contacts are in Fiji."

When Kalani finished - he checked his watch, "Got to get downtown in time for the fight."

Ching-Chang asked, "Which one?"

"The one between my wife and me. I was supposed to pick her up fifteen minutes ago."

Johnny stood up, "Thanks for your help. I'll go over what you told me on my flight to Fiji tomorrow. It's time for me to battle the late afternoon traffic into Waikiki. Ching-Chang - what's the quickest way?"

"Nimitz - to Ala Moana - to Kalakaua. H1 backs up at this hour. Give Pat Penny my best."

Johnny walked to his car wondering, "How did Ching-Chang know that Pat Penny is heading toward Fiji? Damn - it's Benny again!"

Johnny hung up the phone, "Can't get over it being six p.m. here and noon at home." He poured a glass of wine - walked out on the penthouse lanai and watched the setting sun's reflection off the surf. He leaned back.

When he awoke - a moon's reflection danced across the waves. He placed his feet up on the lanai table and sipped wine from a wine glass - still half full. The Village dinner

cruise catamaran was sailing out to sea toward a December Cold Moon - like a deer in a Pennsylvania hunter's spotlight. Johnny looked at his watch and couldn't read time. Night was caressing this one time swamp - fishpond - and now a sea of high rises. Night - when Hawaii returned to its rightful owners - the Menehunes - the little people - now only ghosts - whose tears fall with the Trade Wind's misty rain.

Johnny set his wine glass down and drifted off, "Is this mist - Menehune tears for the loss of their land to the Polynesians or the loss the Polynesians suffered to New England Missionaries?" He drifted deeper into dreams of Menehune ghosts - whispering in the Trade Wind mist -

*Our fishponds
No longer here -
Gone - are
The paths we trod
Strangers now trample
Hawaii Nei's sod -
Now at night
We collect our fee
Where we once danced
Proud - and free -*

When Johnny woke again - it was ten p.m., "Damn - all the restaurants are closed. What a strange dream. Little people - their chant is still ringing in my ears. Must have been a very fine vintage wine. Can't sleep on an empty stomach. The Wailana Coffee Shop is still open." Johnny stood on the lanai and took one last look out over the ocean, "This is an easy place to visit and a hard place to leave. I could stay here forever."

Outside at street level - the Trade Winds were gentle on his face. Johnny looked up at a moonlit sky. Misty rain fell from clouds - streaming toward the ocean - escaping the Koolau mountain peaks. Johnny whistled under his breath, "Menehunes will never rest tonight" as he strolled out of the Hawaiian Village grounds and turned Mauka into the Trade Wind mist. At the Kalakaua intersection he waited - and waited - and waited for the walk light to turn on and then had to run to make it across before the light turned against him.

The Wailana Coffee Shop - more like an old fashioned diner - was still open - a haven from a Trade Wind mist - turning to rain.

Well past eleven - Johnny returned to his room - poured the last of the bottle of wine and dialed Tupelo's number at the Pentagon. Tupelo picked up, "Hello - Benny gives you his regards."

"Ask him if he has my house under surveillance."

"Never know about Benny, but I doubt it. If it was - it was to protect your wife. What are your plans?"

"I'm finished here. I'll leave for my second destination in the morning."

"Counting spears for an order of battle?"

"Very funny. When is the elusive one docking."

"Don't know, but it has to be soon. You were supposed to call in as soon as you arrived."

"Thought I'd save the Company money."

"And watch your six."

"And watch my six."

"Stupid things!" Alice began in a loud indignant voice - but she stopped herself hastily - for the White Rabbit called out, "Silence in the court!"

4

South Pacific

Twenty-four hours away from safe harbor - Pat Penny was wide awake at the helm and in good spirits, "We're a day out of Fiji my dorsal finned one. A hot shower is ahead for me and reef fish for you. Our voyage is almost over. And this time the Pacific Ocean has lived up to its name. Its been all smooth seas and fair winds. My catamaran has cut through South Pacific swells like a hot knife through butter. Only one turd in our punchbowl - I'm out of Stout to mix with our Primo beer - so it's time for landfall." He locked the wheel and looked down forty below at his Tiger Shark, "Keep an eye out for passing ships - I'm going below and cook a little sausage for breakfast."

Pat placed his hands on the side of the hatch and swung below, "Feel spry - lighter. Must have lost twenty pounds on this voyage. And I'm browner than a berry. Time for link sausage - scrambled eggs mixed with sausage - cheese and garlic. And tomorrow morning I dine in a real restaurant. It's a damn good thing I'm near land. I've only enough sausage for two more meals."

Pat carried his breakfast above decks to the helm, "Put enough salsa and garlic on it and I can eat most anything." Pat nibbled at his sausage and looked down, "How are you getting along down there my fat fish friend? Tired of your fare? Sushi for breakfast - sushi for lunch - sushi for dinner and once in awhile - a bit of long pig." Pat finished

off the rest of his breakfast - stood up - rinsed his plate in the ocean - set it down - walked forward and checked the sails. He sniffed the air, "I can smell tropical flowers on the wind. We're close to land. I'm going below and get some shut eye. Might be a boat or two out here - so give me a bump on the bottom if you sense we're in trouble."

Pat's Tiger moved forward - out in front of the bow - then rose - swimming ten feet below the surface - eyes forward and forever open.

Pat woke up groggy - checked his clock and jumped to his feet, "Damn - I've slept over sixteen hours." He scrambled aft to the navigation station and checked the GPS counter, "Four hours out of Suva and it's almost dawn. I've changed heading and I'm on course. How could that be? Unless my dorsal finned friend nudged my Cat to starboard." Pat turned on his radio and tuned to the harbor HF frequency, "Hello Suva - this is *Happy Hour* out of American Samoa. I'll be docking in three - four hours. Do you have instructions."

"*Happy Hour* - this is Suva - you are cleared to dock. Please follow our instructions when you clear the outer marker. Do you have VHF?"

"Roger - I have VHF. Will you patch me to Chief Bau?"

"No - but we'll pass on your message."

"Advise Chief Bau that Pat Penny is inbound. Tell him I'll live on board - for now."

"Call at the outer marker. We'll advise you of the Chief's response."

Villa Penny - Hungary

Penelope placed Three Penny's telephone hand set on its cradle, "Two calls in less than a week. Father must be lonely or overly nervous. And he keeps talking about his dorsal finned friend. He needs help all right but it might

be medical. Fiji? What is our mission? Mother doesn't know and Benny won't talk - not to us. I'll have to pack clothing for the tropics. It's summer down there. And the flight will be a long one. I won't be able to carry weapons - not on a commercial flight and a leased plane will be searched." She walked next door to her Mother's house.

Suva - Fiji

Pat followed his Tiger Shark's wake into Suva Bay. At the outer marker - the dorsal fin swam a one-hundred and eighty degree half circle - parting water - and came on a direct line toward the catamaran. It dove under the bow - lifting it up. Pat looked down into two giant eyes, "Are you trying to tell me your leaving? But - to where?" Pat saw a small dot of an island in his mind, "Norfolk?" His Tiger rolled over on its back and swam away out to sea. "Norfolk - I wonder why? I thought you'd stay outside the reef to feed. I'll miss you my giant dorsal finned friend." Pat's mind was flooded with scenes of New Zealand, "Kiwi - you came along to guide me and to dine on Kiwi. I hope you have a taste for fermented mutton."

Pat furled the mainsail and started his diesel. He engaged the prop and locked the helm - going below to radio the Harbormaster. He tuned in the Harbor VHF frequency, "Hello Suva - *Happy Hour* has just passed the outer marker and is awaiting instructions."

"Welcome to Fiji - *Happy Hour*. Chief Bau sends his regards. Tie up next to my shack. Follow my dockhand's instructions." "Will do."

"I'll give you the Chief's message after yo dock."

Pat placed fenders on both sides of his cat to prepare for docking. As he approached the main dock - a Suva Harbor dockhand signaled for his Cat to dock at a visitors slip.

The Harbormaster came out of his shack, "Hello *Happy Hour* - I'll take care of your ship. Chief Seru Bau has a car waiting for you."

His driver appeared out of thin air at the dockside, "Bring along your luggage - Chief Bau has reserved a room for you at our best hotel. We will clear your boat through customs."

The Harbormaster asked, "Do you need assistance?"

"She needs a good cleaning and the pantry needs restocking. I'd like the mast - fittings - sails - diesel - batteries - the whole works checked. There are still six cases of beer on board that I didn't use. Tropical sun - it should be disposed of. Do you think your men can get rid of the evidence before Customs seizes it?"

The harbormaster smiled, "Aye - Aye Sir - it will be gone before nightfall. Do I have authority to replace worn or cracked fittings?"

"Fix anything up to five-thousand dollars. If it goes over that give me a call. Where am I staying?"

His driver beamed with pride, "The Viti Levu - south of Suva - our five star resort. Do you have any weapons?"

"Brought along a pistol. Should have carried a rifle - too. Shouldn't travel in these waters without one."

"Chief Bau requests that you leave it on board."

Pat packed what he could - put the rest of his clothes in a duffel and handed them up out of the hatch to his driver. He sat up front, "Did the Chief leave a message for me?"

"He'll contact you at your hotel. He said to let you know your family will be in tomorrow and that the government of Fiji will only pay for your room."

Tell him not to worry. My wife will want a suite and I imagine my daughter will - too.

We'll accept his hospitality and save his funds for better things. Understand you have a few problems."

"They are minor irritants. We are looking forward to your

ideas." As the driver pulled away from the dock he asked off-hand, "Do you know Lieutenant Colonel Ropp?"

"Not that I remember, but I've been away from the business for quite a spell. Is he here?"

"He is flying in tomorrow."

Pat whistled as he saw the cottages, "Just like the old Halekulani in Hawaii - with a better ocean view. I've decided to stay in the room you reserved tonight and arrange for suites tomorrow. When will Chief Bau contact me?"

"He did not say - soon I imagine. If you do not need me - I have another passenger."

"As soon as I can find a bellhop. Tell the Chief to call - soon. Thanks for the ride."

Pat checked in - made arrangements for tomorrow's arrivals and followed the bellhop - an Aussie beer in hand - room service on his mind and a hot shower ahead.

One Flew West

Johnny flew out of Honolulu as he arrived - no one met him and no one waved good-by. He had a restless night. His dreams began with Menahunes and ended with a giant Tiger Shark hungry for Kiwi. He tilted his seat back - back, but sleep did not come. Yesterday's discussion with Kalani was still bouncing around in the recesses of his mind like a musical ball for movie sing-alongs. He had asked Kalani,

"Why are we spending so much effort on Fiji?"

"State Department is still playing dominoes."

"Has to be more than that."

"Could be that the Filipinos want us out - so we'll lose Subic Bay Naval Base - Clark Air Force Base and Crow Valley - the low level flight area and bombing range. If we lose bases in the Philippines - we'll need friends in the South Pacific and Fiji has a deep harbor. Could be a possible naval base."

"Not enough room for a low level flight bombing range. The Aussie outback would be more suitable."

"Scare the hell out of a bunch of kangaroos and snakes."

"May even bother a few of the large Station owners. The next closest bombing range is in Alaska and that's too far. I can find no quid pro quid for helping Fiji except to be good neighbors. Regardless of our needs - we're assisting Fiji." Kalani nodded, "Aussies aren't fair weather friends like the Kiwis. They know an alliance is a two way street. They are as independent as we are. Kiwis and Filipinos? They've forgotten the last war. If we hadn't come along - they'd all be speaking Japanese and living in concentration camps."

Johnny knew, "I have my idea about who's behind it, but I want to hear yours first."

"Filipinos - to them we're a colonial power who's stayed too long at the fair. We've been asked to leave by their legislature and we should honor the request. Kiwis - they're a bit more complicated. An antinuclear stance - which makes about as much sense as their extinct national symbol - a wingless bird. Did I hit the mark?"

Johnny smiled, "Dead center and you blew the target away - too. New Zealand's insularism is more than geography - it's a state of mind. They have natural gas and volcanic steam to drive their machines and to hell with the rest of us."

"Our Pele isn't all that keen about us using her vapors to power generators."

"They've bought into the nuclear free zone. It's way beyond green. It's a political movement - equivalent to an ostrich with its head in the sand."

"If the Kiwis picked Fiji's Indian socialists to further their nuclear free schemes - they bet on the wrong horse. Fijians aren't the type to put up with a bunch of radicals quoting false science. Mind you - they aren't keen on

hunting whales or destroying the land. Nuclear power does the least amount of damage. Trying to harness Pele? Those Kiwis are plumb crazy - playing around with their Gods."

"New Zealand has denied our Navy port calls - so in practice we're no longer Allies."

"Good riddance if you ask me. Let those mutton eaters stew in their own socialist juice. When fuzzy headed radicals gain control - reason goes out the window."

"Is the New Zealand government behind the weapons cache found outside of Suva?"

"No - just a bunch of fuzzy headed Kiwi socialists."

Kalani asked, "Do you think nuclear power is the key to independence in the South Pacific nations."

"It's either nuclear or fossil fuel and we all know what fossil fuel can do to the environment. The Kiwis are opposed to it. They're sitting on top of all that natural gas - geothermal and hydroelectric power. The rest of the South Pacific isn't blessed with their natural resources."

"Ching-Chang said you were familiar with the new breeder reactors. Isn't that the answer to nuclear environmental problems?"

"Must be - the antinuclear fuzzies are screaming bloody murder. It uses low pressure - has a higher level of safety and doesn't produce nuclear waste. A logical replacement for the current high pressure fission reactors."

Kalani shook his head, "It's no wonder the fuzzy heads are opposed to it. They have a lifetime of overemotional opposition invested. Don't understand the Kiwis. Maybe our California vacuum heads have been migrating there. We have them here - comparing the disaster at Chernobyl to the minor accident we had at Three Mile Island. Those folks have a five watt bulb screwed into a two-twenty socket."

"We've lost a thousand times more people to fossil fuel accidents than we have to nuclear."

Johnny opened his eyes and moved his seat back to an upright position, "Kalani looks on the Kiwis as the scourge of the Pacific. They depend on trade to survive and don't want to pay the piper to defend it. Wonder how long we're going to put up with that kind of selfishness?" Johnny mulled over Kalani's comments, "Can't blame an entire nation for the shortsightedness of a few. But Kiwis? They are most certainly a niggardly group of parsimonious bastards. Can't stand holier than thou folks and they're a whole nation of thin lips.

Johnny set his briefcase on his lap and looked over his notes from the Bishop Museum -

Fiji's islands continental - like Solomons & New Caledonia..

An independent dominion of the British Commonwealth.

Population - like Hawaii - over one million.

Navigating open ocean when Europe knew world was flat.

Strong economic base - self sufficient in food and housing.

Dress similar - Samoa's lava-lava - Scottish kilt - Fiji's sulu.

Legal system - English common law.

The flight attendant placed an excellent hot lunch on Johnny's tray. He opened the plastic pouch covering his knife and fork with his teeth, "Never can open these damn things" and put parsimonious Kiwis out of his mind. After lunch he unbuckled his seat belt - stood to stretch his legs and walked the cabin. He looked out the windows at the vast Pacific - until bored returned to his seat - tilted his seat back and went to sleep dreaming of Menehunes.

Johnny felt a tap on his shoulder and opened his eyes - smelled a lovely perfume and looked up into the eyes of the Flight Attendant. "Sorry to wake you - Sir. We are landing

at Suva in twenty minutes. We're descending close to several thunder storms. Not supposed to be violent, but our pilot wants all seat backs up and seat belts fastened." Johnny was glad to be awakened. His dream began with Little People and progressed to a Tiger Shark with a Strine' accent. It liked Kiwis for breakfast - lunch and dinner. Johnny rubbed sleep from his eyes and looked out the window, "Pilot was right about thunder bumpers. Not very high - Trade Winds must keep them down to a proper size." As the clouds parted - a deep blue ocean - sprinkled with emerald isles came into view. A few turns - a bump or two near thunderstorm air pockets and the airplane tires screeched - meeting the concrete of Suva's runway.

Suva - Fiji

Johnny walked through afternoon tropical heat toward Suva's terminal carrying his briefcase - glad to be on the ground again. No matter how many times he flew - the most enjoyable flight segment was walking away. After clearing customs and reclosing his bags - a familiar person caught his eye. Across the terminal - walking quickly to the arrival gate - Pat Penny. Johnny thought to himself, "We'll meet sooner or later. Should it be sooner?" He turned away, "Never do today what can be put off until tomorrow. Think I'll check the lay of the land before I start up with the elusive one again." Johnny walked out the terminal door and hailed a cab, "Viti Levu Resort."

Pat waved to his wife and daughter as they appeared at the airplane exit door and descended the stairs - wilting in the tropical heat. He called out, "I'll meet you outside of customs." Both Mother and Daughter were riding on a second wind. Their flight had been longer than either one had ever experienced - halfway around the world with stops in India and Australia. Pat had two sky caps waiting to carry their

luggage from Customs. Patricia gave her husband a hug, "You look none the worse for wear from your ocean voyage."

"I lost a few pounds."

"And you're brown as a berry. If it wasn't for the worry lines - you would look like a young man again."

"You two look beat. Didn't you stop on the way?"

"Only to change planes. Did you make reservations?"

"Two suites at the Viti Levu - overlooking the ocean. It will be a great Christmas."

Penelope asked her Father, "Do we have a mission?"

"Benny was vague. I have a limo waiting."

Patricia rolled up the window separating the driver from them before she asked, "Tell us about your voyage."

"Uneventful - except for a minor skirmish on Palmyra."

Penelope's eyes lit up, "How many?"

"Two KGB and two pirates."

"Pirates?"

"Lady pirates - murdered a child and several adults. I was next on their list."

Penelope wondered, "You mentioned a Tiger Shark."

"Damnedest thing - same one who ate half my surfboard on Waimanalo Bay. Stayed with me the entire voyage - even dined on the evidence at Palmyra."

Patricia frowned, "I don't want to hear about it."

"He was a monster all right - led me across the Pacific - straight to Fiji. Didn't have to navigate - except to make sure I was on course. He stayed below in my catamaran's shadow in daytime. If I slept in - he bumped me back on course."

Penelope asked, "Where is your friend now?"

"He moved on to Norfolk Island - looking for Kiwis."

"New Zealand? How do you know that?"

"When he left as I entered the Bay - I had a mental image of Norfolk Island and Kiwis."

Pat looked at his Daughter and smiled a rye smile,
"Mother says we're remodeling our Budapest restaurant? How is it coming along?"
"Ahead of schedule. The Chef and maitre d' finally made up and believe it or not - they're working in harness."
"Now - that truly is a miracle. Who brought them together?"
"A son - a daughter and marriage."
"Will it last?"
"The marriage - yes. Their friendship? I hope until our remodeling is finished. By the way - this year's grape harvest is better than ever. With a little luck and cool storage - it will be a vintage one."
"We need more space to age our wines."
"I've taken care of that."
"Hillside cave?"
"Yes - Franz is in charge."
"We'll need a road to the entrance after he moves the earth out of that hole."
"We'll use stone first and see. Before I forget - your Croat friends asked for more weapons."
"Cork is out. From our reserves?"
"Your friends are without funds and your instructions were never sell weapons from our reserves."
"Don't give them any."
"I gave them that message."
"You don't need me - you're ready to fly solo. When this is over - I'll retire."
"Where?"
"To a place where I can age gracefully and ask forgiveness for my sins."
"Sounds like a Greek island monastery."
"Very funny. Look around - isn't this resort beautiful?"

Patricia - who had remained silent on the trip from the airport - smiled, "I am pleased. How are the rooms?"
"Clean - spacious and each of our suites has an ocean view."

Pat whistled as the bellboys unloaded the limo trunk, "Did you two buy out Paris?"

Patricia laughed, "And Vienna and Milan at out of season costs. Is this a working vacation - or can we resort it and enjoy our stay?"

"Resort it by all means. We are without guidance, but not without funds. I checked around - how about a Christmas sail on my catamaran to Fiji's old whaling capital on Ovalau Island and then off to the Yasawas?"

Penelope wrinkled her brow, "Yasawas?"

"North of here are islands strung across the Pacific like white sand pearls on a blue azure plate. We'll cook lobsters under the palms and sleep out under the Southern Cross."

Penelope pouted, "I need a companion to share this romantic adventure."

Her Mother laughed, "I doubt if there is a rent a boy friend service on Fiji. If you were at home - there would be many among our down and out nobility who would fill your dance card, but Fiji?"

Patricia - dressed in a white flowing gown - waited out on the verandah - standing by the porch rail. She looked out over the coral blue waters of the South Pacific. Penelope - dressed in a light blue gown joined her, "Incredible view - isn't it. Where's Father?"

"He went on ahead to the bar. Are you ready?"

"And starved."

They walked along stepping stones - bordered by tropical flowers from the verandah to the dining room. Pat was at the bar - deep in conversation with another guest.

Patricia tapped his shoulder and they both turned, "Look who I found wandering the halls - Colonel Ropp."

Johnny smiled and stood up with a look betraying how he felt - sheepish. He searched for words, but found none.

Patricia asked, "Will you join us for dinner?"

Johnny - not wanting too, but unable to escape, "If it isn't an inconvenience."

"Of course not. Penelope will enjoy your company."

While Pat ordered drinks - Penelope asked, "Why are you in Fiji - Colonel?"

"My General sent me here to help the Chief of Police with a computer buy."

"An American Air Force Intelligence Officer assisting a foreign police department on a computer purchase? Do you expect us to believe such a fairy tale?"

"It is a little far fetched isn't it. I didn't question it when I was told to fly out here and offer Fiji's Chief of Police our assistance." In an attempt to head off trouble - Johnny added, "My wife will be joining me in a few days. You do remember her - don't you?"

Johnny had lobbed the ball over Penelope's head and out of the court. She turned away so he wouldn't see her face flush red.

Pat asked, "Have you talked with Chief Bau?"

"Not yet - just got in. Before I forget - Kalani and Ching-Chang asked me to give you their regards."

"Am I an item of interest?" If Pat Penny was worried - he didn't show it.

Johnny assured him, "If you're worried about the JCS Chairman - not anymore, but they know where you are. Are we working together?"

"Only if Benny sent you."

"He did. It looks like were in it together."

With a gorgeous body - harder than any woman should be allowed to have - Johnny was unable to keep his eyes diverted from Penelope. His emotions raced, but he controlled his emotions by thinking of Bobbie Jean. He smiled. "She has a child like softness only Southern woman possess."

Pat Penny broke the spell, "Our table's ready. Lobster here is first rate."

Johnny followed the Penny family - noticing from the back that Penelope and her mother were shaped the same. He thought, "Must be a Hungarian thing - hot blooded - good looking women."

He held the chair for Patricia while Pat held one for his daughter.

The maitre d' approached offering menus, "Our Chef is Portuguese. His specials are highly peppered. Let your waiter know if you desire milder seasoning."

Pat looked over at Johnny, "I'm buying."

"No - we'll use Ten Cap rules."

"What's that?"

"Split the bill - we'll divide the cost between you and me. I'll have Steak au Poive."

Patricia added, "I'll try the Pacific lobster tails."

Penelope smiled, "Portuguese Sausage."

And Pat ordered, "A platter full. I almost ran out while I was sailing in."

Patricia gave them both a withering look - one that said without speaking, "Use your forks like civilized people - no grease dripping from your chins - not in front of company."

After dinner - Pat asked, "How about an after dinner drink on the verandah?"

Johnny begged off, "Long flight - I'm a victim of jet lag. I'll see you at breakfast. We need to talk."

"Is eight o'clock too soon?"

"Fine with me. What have you heard from Chief Bau?"

"Only that he'll contact me. How about you?"

"Not yet. I'm anxious to get started."

"Their computer buy is real?"

"If it isn't - Benny will make enemies and lose friends."

"Wouldn't be the first time."

Bobbie Jean asked, "What time is it in Fiji?"
"Lonely time - ten p.m. tomorrow here."
"Three p.m. yesterday in McLean."
"Ate dinner with Pat and Patricia Penny tonight."
"Is their daughter along."
"Yes - with a body harder than ever."
"Did you test it?"
"Of course not. You remember - a woman scorned?"
"I'll be out as soon as I can book a flight."
"How about the boys?"
"Nanny's here. When school is out she'll take them to Mother's place in Jackson."
"Mississippi instead of Bellpoint Ohio?"
"Your parents are in Florida."
"I really do need a day job."
"But - they're coming up to Jackson for Christmas."
"Will you be able to get a flight out of Dulles on such a short notice?"
"Don't worry your overtaxed hormones - Dear. I'll use one of our casino jets to the West Coast and Johnny?"
"Yes - Love?"
"Is Penelope Penny staying at our hotel?"
"Yes - Love."
"I have a four words for you."
"They are?"
"Lock your bedroom door."

Johnny walked out on the verandah - soaking in the warm tropical morning air, "Gorgeous view - Pat. How long have you been up?"
"Chief Bau called me at daybreak. He's going to join us for breakfast."
"That was quick. Did he leave instructions for me?"
"He wants you at headquarters this afternoon. You weren't feeding us a line about the computer buy. And he said to enjoy our view of the Kora Sea."

"Fishing fleet is on their way out - like a travel poster."
Hard to return to Washington DC after this. Did you order?"
"Just coffee and juice. Thought I'd wait for the Chief."
"Doesn't Benny ever give you any instructions?"
"Never does - I'm supposed to figure it out. I tell him what I'm going to do. If Benny remains silent - it means that he approves."
"That sounds familiar - non attribution and the plausible denial."
"Our Benny is qualified to be a politician."
"Is that how he handled your JCS Chairman wet procedure?"
"Sort of - I was programmed by the Russians. He didn't step in and stop it."
"He let them take out your friends and only your actions kept you alive."
"Benny is an opportunist. He figured if I didn't survive - I wasn't worth saving."

A handsome - dark complected man - dressed in a kilt like sulu and shirt with epaulets without rank strode out on the veranda. Four large bodyguards followed. Two sat at tables - providing a screen from the hotel. Two stood out on the lawn - providing a screen from the ocean approach. Chief Bau approached, "Colonel Ropp - Mr. Pat Penny?"
They both stood up and answered, "Yes - Sir."
"Good - I am Chief Seru Bau. I hope my guard doesn't disturb you. We can't be to careful as you well know." He sat down and smiled at Johnny, "Tabua?"
Johnny opened his shirt and displayed a sennet cord with a whale's tooth attached, "I am at your service."
"Do you mind?"
Johnny removed it and handed it to the Chief - who turned it over in his hand inspecting the sennet cord and polished Sperm Whale tooth.
He handed it back, "It is Benny's. No two are alike. The sennet cord is made from braided grass. We have lots of

grass, but Sperm Whales are in short supply. Colonel Ropp - if you were not in possession of Benny's Tabua - this would be our first and last meeting."

Pat asked Chief Bau, "Would you care to join us for breakfast?"

The Chief looked to the Maitre d' and nodded his head, "I have taken the liberty of ordering fresh fruit and my favorite - waffles. We live in perilous times - I need your assistance" he looked at Johnny " and your expertise. Come by my office this afternoon. I will introduce you to my assistant - the one in charge of our computer buy. Will your wife be joining you?"

Johnny nodded, "Yes - when she discovered that Pat's lovely daughter is here - Bobbie Jean made flight reservations on the first available flight. She'll be in tomorrow."

"Excellent - you and your families are my honored guests at our Christmas Meke on my ancestral island - Bau. But only the men will share a bowl of our Yaqona with my village. My Father wants to meet both of you. He is a Victoria Cross Fiji Scout - my mentor and advisor."

Three waiters carried breakfast trays stacked high with waffles and to Pat's delight - link sausage to their table. Conversation ceased while waffles and sausages were devoured as only hungry men can.

Chief Bau pushed his chair back and stared at Pat Penny in admiration, "I don't believe I have ever seen anyone who likes link sausage as much as you."

"Keeps my red devils away. I have not lead a saintly life."

"I want to hear about your sail from Hawaii. We had a giant *Tiger Shark* at the entrance to our Harbor when you arrived. Did he sail with you from Hawaii?"

"He kept me company the entire voyage."

"As do our Hawaiian brothers - we too have great respect for the power of these great sea creatures. The shark is one of

our favorites. Where is he."

"I don't know how I know, but he is visiting Norfolk Island - looking for Kiwis."

"A very wise and honorable Hawaiian visitor - your shark. I hope he finds his Kiwi and enjoys a very special dinner. Colonel Ropp - I will see you this afternoon. Mr. Penny - will you join me in a stroll? I want to hear more about your shark. We have important business to discuss."

Walking along the path near the ocean - where the sounds of surf covered their voices - Chief Bau whispered, "I would never request your assistance - it was offered."

"Benny?"

"Yes - a dear friend. His Company came to our assistance when others turned away."

"Who do you have in mind?"

"We have two Indian Socialist leaders, but do not bother them. Without under-bosses - they are helpless."

"You are interested in restructuring your socialist's middle management?"

Chief Bau did not answer Benny's question. Instead he returned to a previous conversation "I'll let you know when and where we will pick up your family and Colonel Ropp's for our Christmas Meke."

"Will I be provided with a list of your Indian Socialist under-bosses?"

Chief Bau nodded, "Colonel Ropp will insert many names into our police data base. You may wish a demonstration. A list of those who are to be restructured will be included."

Wellington - New Zealand

Ian's smile grew until it almost touched his neck, "Say - Max what are the odds for us to entice the Frenchies to sink another Green ship?"

"Have you gone bonkers? We don't need another incident like

the last one. We're doing fine as we are. Why take the chance of being discovered. Wouldn't look good to have our Press find out New Zealand's leading socialist is behind the sinking of two Green Ships."

"Max - Max - you know I'm only having a little fun with you. We could get a lot of mileage out of another Rainbow Warrior incident. We got rid of the American Navy with the last one. It would be great fun - agitating our Green friends into increasing there political activity. If they're tangling with Fiji or the Aussies - their eyes will be turned away from us until our last dam is up. And then it will be too late for them to stop us."

"I thought we were socialists?"

"We are - my friend - we are. I love socialism. Big central government means big business for concrete and steel. Socialism - got to love it - that's where the real money is."

Max remained silent as Ian continued his ideological onslaught. He'd been through one too many of these wild eyed lectures. When Ian Fleming began one his socialist sermons - it meant only one thing to Max - more work than he or anyone else could handle. Still - it was better to preempt than wait for unwanted guidance, "If it's alright with you - I'm going to fly down to South Island and check on our warehouse outside of Christchurch."

"Max - that's a good idea. We just received another weapons shipment from the Russians. Make sure they didn't stiff us on the order."

Max knew why these weapons were free. Ian had the Russians between the rock and the hard place. If he talked to the right people all hell would break loose. Fleming had become Russia's tar baby. They were joined to him at the hip and he wouldn't let go. Max stood up and made it halfway across the room - almost to the door when Ian's voice stopped him in his tracks, "Max - after you're finished at the

warehouse catch a flight to Fiji and find out what happened to our cache of weapons. We'll wind up arming the Fiji Army if we don't plug the leak."

"Over the weekend? I haven't had a weekend off in three months. Don't you think it's too soon? My visit might turn the bloodhounds loose on us."

"Time enough has passed. See if you can find out how Chief Bau discovered our weapons. Tell Jawa we'll replace, but I don't want anyone to know who's furnishing them. Last item on your plate is to give me a report on him and our Indian friends. Find out who's the weak link and eliminate him. Oh - make sure they secure our shipment and see if they still need weapons training."

Ian looked Max over. If he stared at him long enough - all he could see was the wart on the end of Max's nose. Max was frozen in place by Ian's eyes - until his mind finally clicked into gear, "When I land - I'll nose around a bit before I contact Jaws. If I discover what I think I will - I'd like your permission to eliminate the bastard on the spot. I know he's the weak link. If Chief Bau ever comes down hard on him - he'll sing like a bird." Ian shared Max's concern, but - "I thought about taking Jawa out - too. We can't. He's too well connected. Not only does he have close ties with our Russian friends - he's married to the sister who's brother will become Fiji's next Prime Minister - if our overthrow is successful. If he is a weak link - the one who tipped off Chief Bau - don't do him unless you contact me first. If he isn't - we'll talk over his disposition when you return. I have a piece of information I want you to keep under your hat. I'm working on a Chinese connection. If they're agreeable - it's a whole new cricket match."

"Ian - the Indians hate the Chinese."

"That's why I like the games we play. Get that wart cut off your nose. You're too easy to identify."

"I'll have it off before I fly south."

"Have our company doctor cut it off. Tell Jawa not to go lighting the fuse prematurely. And make sure his new storage place is safe from Chief Bau."

Max - relieved he was only required to do the impossible - not the ridiculous - nodded, "Yes."

Ian Fleming - humming the International under his breath turned to his seventh floor window - looked out over Cook Straight and watched clouds drift in - mesmerized. Max Lax - sensing more guidance might be on his way bolted for the door - quickly opened it and slipped away. He rode the elevator down to the underground parking garage - his thoughts not on Ian's guidance, but of trout fishing, "Next time I visit South Island I'll muck around - fishing the mountain streams south of Christchurch." He loved to fish fast moving streams fed by cold glacial waters. In his mind's eye - Max saw his cast strike true as a large brown rose to his fly. His mind was reeling it in - when a horrendous thought struck home, "Ian is going to dam up my favorite trout streams. Where will I fish?"

Max stopped by the company doctor's office on his way to the airport. When the doctor touched his wart with liquid nitrogen - Max's eyes crossed in pain. They watered so badly he had to sit in the waiting room for over an hour before he could see to go outside to his car. And the company pilot wasn't happy when Max arrived forty-five minutes late at the dock. Max's nose felt like a cricket ball wedged between two eyes on his seaplane ride to Akaroa Harbor near Christchurch. And when his pilot - irritated by the unexpected flight and long wait splashed down hard - the cricket ball on the end of Max's nose fell off - bleeding. Max was quite a sight - jumping from a bobbing airplane to the dock - handkerchief in one hand to stop a nose bleed and suitcase in the other. And - as the copilot threw his briefcase across the open space to him - it bounced on the dock - opened and papers scattered

about. Max barely got the case closed when the prop wash blew him against the outside wall of Fleming's warehouse. He shook his fist and shouted at the retreating seaplane, "You bloody bastard - you!" Max was drenched with salt water spray from the seaplane's props.

The warehouse manager rushed to Max's side, "Do you want me to report the pilot to Mr. Fleming?"

"Wouldn't do any good. That pommy bastard is married to Ian's sister. Can I use your office to clean up?"

"Better yet - Ian installed showers and lockers."

"What for?"

"Don't you remember the militia he was going to enlist for our revolt?"

"Right you are. Didn't need too - not after we took control of our government."

Max hung his outer clothing up to dry - showered the salt out of his hair and dressed in dry clothes. Upstairs out of the basement - Max looked around, "I didn't know Ian had installed a dehumidifier."

The manager smiled proudly, "Big one - isn't she? Ian put her in to keep our weapons and powder dry. She's a beaut all right. Are you ready to inventory?"

"Did we get new weapons?"

"Think most of these were used in Afghanistan. We spent a week cleanin' and oilin'. Test fired a few at random. Work alright. Russians build sturdy enough."

"And free - Ian can't argue about condition. How many did they drop off this time?"

"Ninety percent of what was promised - ten percent always disappears."

"I only need to check a few boxes."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"I fly out early this evening to Sydney. Damn - by the time I arrive all the restaurants will be closed."

Suva - Fiji

The burning hot tropical sun bounced off the tarmac into Max Lax's eyes. Without sunglasses he was almost blind. The sun did another number on nose - still sore from its frozen surgery. He shaded it and his eyes with one hand - carrying his briefcase in the other into Suva's Terminal. Inside - Max phoned Motila's General Store, "Is Mr. Motila available? I represent a new line of canned meat products from New Zealand. We make ours with mutton instead of pork products." "Mr. Motila is at Moris Hedstrom - a competitor - canvassing prices. You might try Hedstrom - we have no use for New Zealand meat products."

"Will Mr. Motila return today?"

"No! I said we have no use for your product."

Max now had all the information he needed. His first stop would be the docks - the second Motila's and third his hotel. He retrieved his luggage from the carousel and walked over to the rental car counter - sweating profusely. He asked for a car, "Something cool - can't take much of your heat."

The attendant looked up, "Welcome to winter in Fiji. You're from?"

"New Zealand."

"Ah - the cold pommy country. You're reservation listed a preference for a convertible. I have a Morgan."

"The car of my dreams, but air-conditioning?"

"In a Morgan?"

"I should know better. Can't pass up a chance to drive a classic. I'll take it."

Max carried his luggage outside the terminal and across the street to the rental car parking lot. He scanned the few cars parked there, "There she is - a lovely Morgan rag top roadster in British racing green. You've got those lovely high narrow wheels - too. This is going to be a fun visit!"

Max put the top down and covered it with the boot. He placed his gear in the passenger's seat - inserted the key and shoved in the clutch. He pushed down on the starter, "Started right up" and waited for gears to synchronize before placing the stick in reverse. He smiled, "A little grinding. Not too bad for a crash box. Bet first isn't synchronized." The high pitched grinding sound told him it wasn't. Max shifted gears ten times before he could shift without looking and after that - he was off on the road to Suva - happy as a school boy on vacation.

Max wandered in and out of several sailor bars near the docks. He knew from past experience that sailors liked to do two things when ashore - drink and talk. In less than two hours - Max discovered why Fleming's weapons were uncovered. He phoned Ian in Wellington, "Damn was Jaws stupid - stored our items near one of his primary targets. In the basement of a house near the airport and with all his warehouse space! Wasn't long before Chief Bau noticed activity where there shouldn't be any and investigated. With weapons in hand - he still has an eye out for the owners. He knows these guns belong to Indian Socialists - all of Fiji knows, but the Chief can't prove ownership. He is without conspirators and our Socialists are without weapons."

"Make sure our next shipment is kept in a safe place."

"If Jaws will listen - I will."

Max hung up - drove to Motila's General Store and parked in front in a loading - no parking zone.

Max entered - adjusting his vision from Fiji's bright tropical sun to the store's dark interior. Jaws was in his office located halfway up - above the floor and below the ceiling - where he could look down on employees and customers alike. Max's greeting was strictly business, "Greetings Jawa - Mr. Fleming sends you his regards."

"Good afternoon Mr. Lax - I am honored by your presence. We

are dreadfully sorry about the loss of Mr. Fleming's gifts. They were most graciously provided. We are most embarrassed by their loss. I've made elaborate plans to prevent another reoccurrence. We will not lose your gift to Chief Bau again. Next time when he next sees our weapons - we will be firing them at him."

Max said nothing - he watched Jaws squirm - enjoying the torture. Jaws and all of Fiji's Indians could hang together or separately as far as Max was concerned. He finally spoke - softly, "There'll be no tracing of this shipment to Mr. Fleming. I'm directed to use extraordinary measures if need be. I want to see where you're going to store our weapons and your plans to receive them - if we decide to provide them." Max enjoyed this more than driving a rag top Morgan - turning the screw into Jaws and watching him squirm, "What guarantee can you give Ian your Chief of Police will not discover your weapons a second time?"

"I think you will find our procedures to your satisfaction. When can we expect your shipment?"

"Not so fast - I need assurances before Mr. Fleming will set a date."

"You may inspect our storage when you are ready. I believe you will find it satisfactory."

"Are we conducting a Kabuki dance? I need to explore several areas before I set a delivery date. One - you must have secure storage. Two - will you need training? Three - when do you plan to execute your overthrow?"

Jawa hesitated - he did not care for Lax's imperial attitude. He had enough of pommy condescension to last him a lifetime. When the time came - Max would also be at the end of his gun sight, but for now, "In due course - Ides of March."

"Ides of March? Are you plotting an overthrow or putting on a Roman play?"

"An overthrow. We must strike soon. Our Fijians are not happy with my people. They are encouraging us to return to India and many of my people are. We must strike while we still have a majority. And the Americans are a problem."

"How so?"

"They provided our Fijians with weapons to overthrow our government. They may initiate a military arrangement."

"What in the world would they want with Fiji?"

"Their Kadena and Clark bases are on a closure course in Okinawa and the Philippines. And if they lose Subic Naval Base they will be looking for another deep water port. We must keep them out."

"Your Russian friends can no longer support you."

"We plan on carrying the socialist torch until they return to their senses. They still need our support for their ocean factory fishing fleet."

Max listened carefully - looking for a weakness that might doom Jawa's plans. He found it, "Don't let your emotion blind you. Can't mix socialistic idealism with profit and win."

"You forget - my Kiwi friend - Ian will lose if the Americans win. He can only win if we control the government. Ian lost all of his cement contracts when we were thrown out. If he wants to pour concrete in Fiji at his inflated prices he must support us."

Max's foot began to twitch - Jawa was gaining control. He moved quickly, "I stopped at our South Island warehouse on my way to Suva. Your shipment is ready. It will be sent to you only after I am certain you are. We have everything you requested - AK-47s - machine pistols - stun grenade - ammunition and explosives. If you need other weapons - you must explain your requirements."

"Training - we will need training."

"How many days?"

"Two maybe three days."

"Where?"

"At the weapon storage site."

Max checked his watch, "Getting late - I'll check into my hotel and have a bo-peep at your storage in the morning."

Jawa placed the palms of his hands together and bade farewell to Max, "Call me first. I will meet you at my warehouse on the docks."

"How will I find it?"

"It is the largest one. My name is on two sides - facing to and away from the docks."

Jawa watched with a scorn as Max walked out the front entrance. He motioned to a plain clothes guard, "One can not be too careful. Follow him. Make sure he goes to his hotel." Jawa closed his eyes, "My Kiwi friends hate me as much as I hate them. But - we Indians have an advantage - we will never die - we are reincarnated. When we take power - neither Max Lax or Ian Fleming will ever set foot on Fiji again. All competition will cease and all non Indian commerce will be confiscated. Fiji's society will be stratified like our homeland. Our untouchables will be the Fijians - their land and wealth confiscated. Fiji's gold will be sent to India - to provide gold leaf to gild our ancestor's tombs. Our elders will return to the Holy Ganges in style. Only an Asian mind understands - family! A family nation and a nation of families. Isolation from outsiders - that's the key. We must rid ourselves of pommy customs. Time is on the side of the cobra - patience is our tactic - reincarnation is our goal. And when we have the bomb - we will be fearless." Jawa penned the last entry in his journal - closed the cover and smiled - like a cobra does when eyeing a rat for dinner.

Four blocks, but a country away from Motila's General Store - Johnny had just completed a tour of Chief Bau's offices. His escort opened the door to the Chief's outer

office. Chief Bau's secretary looked up, "Colonel Ropp? Chief Bau is waiting. Would you care for tea?"

"Yes."

"Cream or sugar?"

"Neat."

She opened the door to the Chief's office, "Colonel Ropp to see you - Sir."

"Have a seat. I see Lucinda has tea for us." Chief Bau waited for Lucinda to pour and continued, "We can speak freely here."

"About Benny?"

"And other things. Is our tea to your liking?"

"Excellent" and Johnny took another sip."

Chief Bau began to pace as he talked, "Our Indian friends are becoming active again. I believe they will strike soon. I want to nip it in the bud."

"You have other plans for me?"

"We welcome your expertise on computers - however I do have a few additional tasks. Did Kalani bring you up to date on my Country and our problem?"

"Yes and so did the Curator at the Bishop Museum."

"We are certain the Kiwis will attempt to ship weapons to our Indian friends. When and where is the data I need."

"Not an easy task. Intentions are the most difficult items to collect."

"We know who will ship them and who will receive them. Starting with that knowledge - what should we look for?"

"You need to track ships departing from New Zealand. A computer data base can help, but until your system is up and running you can keep track with paper and pencil. Who do you think will run their guns?"

"Our Green friends."

"Are you certain?"

"They are very selective in their outrage. We agree with their fisheries stance, but not their political aims. They

are joined at the hip with our Indian Socialists in support of a nuclear free zone. We are interested in nuclear power. The Greens oppose it. We have made enemies."

Johnny sipped tea and thought out loud, "Now that's a tar baby I didn't expect."

"Tar baby?"

"Sticky wicket."

"Ah yes - our Green friends can raise a righteous fuss. They have friends in the media who can roast both our countries. They are pure socialists."

"Pure?"

"Our Green friends approach Fiji like a farmer with two cows. The Greens want to take the cows from us and mix them with all the other cows. But - we will be forced to take care of the cows and all milk will come from the government."

"How do they differ from your Socialists?"

"Our Indian friends are bureaucratic. We will be forced to care for the cows. They will establish regulations limiting the amount of milk we may keep. But - being Indian - cows are sacred and beef will be outlawed. Being commercial - all profit from our milk sales will return to their ancestors in Mother India."

"And yet you agree with their efforts to save creatures of the sea?"

"Conservation is not the property of the left. If the Greens believe that - they need to take a look at the environmental mess their socialist friends made in Russia"

"Instead of kissing up to them."

"We in Fiji are in agreement and support most of the Green's legitimate concerns. We do not support their antinuclear stance or non democratic politics. A well constructed and maintained nuclear power plant does not create acid rain - or fill the atmosphere with fossil fuel byproducts. We are our ancestors caretakers of Fiji's land and waters. We will not choose a fuel source that defiles it."

Johnny had to be honest, "I'm not aware of any Green folks - or their Kiwi supporters and I haven't the foggiest who your Indian Socialists are. Can you give me a place to begin?"

Chief Bau tapped a pencil on his desk, "I thought Kalani brought you up to date."

"Not on specifics. Hawaii is half an ocean away."

"You can start with Jawa Motila - a leading Socialist and owner of a major retail store in Suva. He has a warehouse on the docks. And we have a Kiwi visitor - Max Lax - who we believe is Jawa's weapons contact."

Johnny took another sip of tea, "It looks like you have the situation well in hand."

"We thought we did the last time. If it wasn't for fortune smiling on us - we would have never discovered their weapons at a house near our airport. If you stumble across anything - take notes and report to me, but do not interfere. I would like input from your people."

"Benny?"

"His people and Ching-Chang's. When you speak to them - ask about our Kiwi friend - Max Lax."

"That's an easy name to remember."

Lucinda opened the door, "More tea?" Chief Bau motioned toward their cups. Chief Bau sat down - leaned back - looked at Johnny - thinking, "He may accidentally stumble data we need, but his purpose is to draw our opponent's attention. While they are busy watching him - we will look for their storage site. And Pat Penny will thin out their ranks."

Johnny set his cup down, "Your computer buy. Where do you want me to start. I don't want to interfere needlessly."

"Your input will be just in time. Our contractor's study is due in" - he checked his calendar, "three or four days. I'm concerned. It may be too complicated for my work force."

"The size of a data system is not driven by requirements, but by the amount of money available - plus twenty percent."

"I was afraid of that. For now - check on our Indian and Kiwi friends. Give me a status report in a day or two - earlier if you stumble onto something." Chief Bau stood up - signaling their meeting was over. He handed Johnny an envelope, "This is a list of our Indian activists. Look it over as a data input to our new computer system and then give it to Mr. Penny. If you see Pat this afternoon - tell him I'll meet him at your hotel bar for sunset cocktails."

Johnny shook Chief Bau's extended hand and walked out to Lucinda's desk, "Where is Motila's General Store?" She took him over to the window and pointed toward Suva's tallest building, "You can't miss it - it's only three blocks away."

*Alice watched the White Rabbit
as he fumbled over the list - feeling
very curious to see what the next
witness would be like - "for they
haven't got much evidence yet" she
said to herself. Imagine her surprise
when the White Rabbit read out at
the top of his shrill little voice - the name
"Alice!"*

5

Suva - Fiji

Chief Bau and Pat Penny sat down at a Viti Levu table with their backs to the wall - out on the verandah of the bar. The Chief's guards were around, but unseen. The Chief asked, "Did you see the list?"

"I have it with me. That's more wet procedures than one mechanic can handle."

"I'm only interested in the ones at the top of each column."

"Good - that makes only six."

"Will you need assistance?"

"No - I have an assistant with me."

Chief Bau did not have to ask who - he knew it was Pat's daughter.

Pat asked, "When do you want me to go to work?"

"How much time will it take you to set up?"

"I know so little about your Country - at least two weeks."

"After you finish your preliminary study - have Colonel Ropp contact me. Timing is critical - I will let you know when."

"Do you want publicity?"

"No - it is best that we keep this effort under cover."

"Your ocean is very deep."

"And silent."

Chief Bau signaled to the bartender. In less than a minute a waiter appeared carrying a platter of link sausage for Pat and teriyaki beef and pork cubes for the Chief. He smiled at Pat, "The sausage will keep your devils at bay. You know you are a wanted man - don't you?"

"I was not aware - by who?"

"Your own government. Every Port in the South Pacific has been alerted to watch out for you and your catamaran. Our instructions are to report your whereabouts and monitor your activities."

"It's that damn Benny - he was concerned I might sail my product somewhere else."

"Our Indians have spies within my government. My talking to you will look to my Indian friends as a policeman checking up on a wanted outlaw. Benny has provided us with cover."

"Inadvertently - Benny's intent was to nail me if I didn't comply with his instructions."

Unable to wait longer - Pat began with one and then another - downing half-a platter of sausage. He wiped the grease from his chin, "Where did you meet Benny?"

"When we were about to gain control of our government from the Indian Socialists - the British refused to support our efforts. A word here - a word there and an enlightened Country provided all the weapons we required. Benny was the one who listened. And when we discovered our Socialists had stripped our treasury - Benny listened again. We are now solvent. When I asked Benny for assistance - he responded with you and Colonel Ropp. I need a brigand like you - someone who is not connected with my government or any government."

Benny asked, "Why do you need Colonel Ropp?"

"Primarily as a diversion - and he can help with our computer upgrade." Chief Bau handed Pat a business card, "I'm the only one who will pick up at this number. Call if you are going to be compromised - or when you complete your mission."

"If I need assistance?"

"Through Colonel Ropp."

"Your Christmas Meke - is there anything I can bring along?"

"This is the South Pacific. We can always use more beer, but

please - no more Primo."

"I should have warned your people. It's drinkable when it's mixed with Stout or Porter. Does Colonel Ropp know about my mission - or the content of the messages he's going to carry?"

"No - and if he asks?"

"Don't tell."

Pat Penny requested a table out on the verandah - away from other guests for breakfast. Penelope pulled up a chair, "Where is Mother?"

"Sleeping in." He waited until the waiter took their order - poured coffee and left, "I may need your help."

Penelope sipped her coffee, "How many?"

"Six."

"Who is our client?"

"Chief Seru Bau."

"Will he turn on us?"

"No - he won't."

"Public or neat?"

"It will be neat. There will be no evidence. Guess what - I am wanted."

"Who set you up?"

"Our friend in Washington. It will make our escape difficult, but doable."

"How about Colonel Ropp and his wife?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are they two of the six?"

"Of course not. Don't even think about it. We stay alive by keeping our emotions in check. Our business is business."

Pat handed Penny the list, "Only the ones at the top of the columns. How do you want to handle the preliminaries?"

"I'll do location and record patterns. Disposal?"

"Deep six in the ocean. I can move my Cat to a central location. It rides shallow enough to come in close. I'll

get bags - weights and weapons."

"Wait on weapons. If I can get in close - an ice pick may be the ticket."

"How much KGB serum do you have left."

"It goes a long way - I'm carrying enough to coat twenty needles. Are you thinking blowgun?"

"If we must - it eliminates the mess and if we have problems removing the evidence - the diagnosis will be cardiac arrest. Do you need a rental?"

"I'll purchase a second hand pickup today. It will blend in with the other vehicles."

"This is Fiji - your truck will, but you won't. We have a problem."

"Not at night."

Patricia arrived - fresh from a morning shower - her hair still wet, "Have you ordered?"

Pat answered, "Yes - English muffin and eggs for you. We have extra sausage."

"No thank you. The Harbormaster called about your catamaran. He said there were no problems. He cleaned it - installed new wiring and plugs?"

"Spark plugs. Did he stock it?"

"I gave him a list of supplies for our Christmas sail. We have to purchase our own beverages."

"I hope you didn't order any mutton - goat or pork."

"Only beef products and sausage. I want to do a little shopping today. Do you want to go with me?"

"I need to buy several kegs of beer to take to Bau Island for Chief Bau's Christmas Meke."

"Is that all he wants?"

"I asked. He told."

Penelope wondered, "Have either of you seen Colonel Ropp?"

Patricia answered, "I saw him at the front desk renting a bicycle to ride into Suva. He certainly has strange habits."

Pat nodded, "There may be method in his madness. He'll look

like a typical ecofreak tourist to the local Indians - so they'll give him a wide berth and little notice."

Johnny looked over his bicycle rental, "One speed - wide tires and wide seat - a beach bike. It'll have to do. He pushed it out to the access road and hopped on, "Tires are full - she rides good." After a wobbly start - he was on his way. With the wind at his back he made good time.

He saw what he was looking for - four blocks away. A garish sign proclaimed - Motila's General Store in secondary - bright colors, "Must have been mixed by another one-eared painter gone mad." He parked his bike under the front overhang - walked inside and strolled through the wine section. He selected two mid-priced bottles of Medoc that looked interesting and browsed among the groceries. He noticed, "Foodstuffs from India - Fiji - New Zealand - Japan and England, but not one American brand." And he noticed the attention he was getting from clerks and floor managers, "Motila's must not get many tourists. Floors look like they were made with wood planks from H.M.S. Bounty. Wide cracks full of dirt and sawdust. Reminds me of my Grandfather's General Store in Ohio. Even use a mixture of oil and sawdust for cleaning."

Johnny looked up into two dark black holes - the eyes of Jawa Motila - peering down from his elevated office in the back of the store. Johnny nodded his head - smiled - holding his gaze to Jawa's eyes. Jawa - startled - turned away - returning his eyes to his ledger. Johnny continued down the aisle - his mind conjuring Ebenezer Scrooge from Dickens' tale of Christmas. Elevated above the throng - keeping an eye on clerk and customer alike. A clerk appeared - walking briskly up the aisle. Johnny handed him the wine, "These will do fine. "Ring them up" before the clerk could say one word. He followed the clerk to the cash register and paid in

Fiji coin. Outside - Johnny tied down his purchase inside the bike's basket. He noticed a tagalong following as he peddled away.

Johnny was still smiling to himself as he came out of the third alley he ducked into - knowing his tagalong could not follow in his car. He rode to the docks - to Motila's warehouse and stopped across the street. The warehouse was surrounded on three sides by a large electric fence. Johnny surmised, "Bet it's open on the dockside." He looked up at the roof line -

Motila's General Store

was splashed across the top in garish secondary colors as Motila's store was and thought, "Must be an Indian thing." As Max Lax drove up in his Morgan - Johnny ducked inside the tea shop on the corner across the street. He recognized it as a rental, "Hello there - might have found our Kiwi. It's a two-bagger today. Motila has three - maybe four guards on a roving patrol and a gatekeeper to check people in and out. If I was hiding guns - I couldn't pick a better place. Best places to hide anything is in the open - or in a crowd."

Johnny ordered a cup of English breakfast tea - two triangular shaped scones and sat back in his chair and waited. Jawa Motila drove up in a Rolls Royce. The gate opened - then a front garage door opened and his Rolls disappeared inside. Johnny was on his second cup when Max walked out the front entrance and drove away in his Morgan. Jawa followed a few minutes later.

Johnny paid for his tea - left a generous tip and walked outside, "Lets see - if I ride down to the end of the block - I might have access to the dock. Short of breaking and entering - not much else I can do here." He rode to the corner and walked his bike on the side street to the dock,

"Talk about a soft underbelly. All that electric fence - roving guards and the back of his warehouse is open to a public dock." Johnny walked along the dock to the back of the warehouse, "Normal shipping and receiving." He looked - around - saw no one - climbed down the ladder and looked underneath, "Hello - a series of hinges above the waterline. Looks like it'll swing open. Have to be at low tide though - not enough clearance." Johnny rode off the dock and up the road to Police Headquarters.

As he entered - the desk sergeant waved him toward the elevator, "Chief Bau has been looking for you." Lucinda looked up as Johnny entered the Chief's outer office, "When you're done - stop by my desk. I'll take you to Lieutenant Matuku. He's in charge of our computer buy. Chief Bau will see you now." Johnny opened the door, "You wanted to see me?" "If you don't mind - I've assigned you to work with our Lieutenant Matuku. Do you mind taking instructions from one of lower rank?" "Not at all - I'm on his turf."

Chief Bau began to pace, "Matuku is in charge of my Operations Section. He's been with our constabulary since graduating from Southern California with a degree in Law Enforcement." "What's the Lieutenant's first name?" "Charles, but we are formal here. He will prefer that you use Lieutenant when you address him." "He can call me Johnny or Mister - if we want some semblance of cover. I stopped at Motila's General Store to take a look-see at your Indian friend." "Was his Kiwi contact there?" "Saw him park outside Motila's warehouse down by the dock. Driving a Morgan. Aren't many of those around. Motila followed in his Rolls."

The Chief returned to his desk, "Did you discover anything?"

"Not from those two, but out back - I noticed a hidden loading entrance underneath the dock. There are a series of hinges above the high water mark."

"What do you think?"

"If they're going to unload weapons - it will have to be done at low tide for clearance and even then they'll have to use dories or Zodiacs."

"I came to the same conclusion."

"Does Motila have an Indian crew?"

"No - he hires Fijians to do the heavy work. I have two trusted men inside."

"Why did you want me to take a look around."

"It pays to have a second opinion."

"I'll be on my way."

Lucinda knocked on the door and opened it, "Lieutenant Matuku? Colonel Ropp to see you."

"Come in - I've been expecting you."

Lucinda smiled and closed the door behind her.

"We're pretty far down the road with our planning. I received the final system proposal this morning. It will be difficult to change our requirements this far along. Our contractor will jack up the price if we do. Don't get me wrong, but I've had more help than any human ever needs or wants from contractors. Each one has the world's best and most complete computer system."

"I've been sent to assist - not interfere. I don't intend to tell you what you need, but I might be able to separate the facts from your contractor's gibberish. I've been in on a few system failures myself. If computer types spoke the King's English we'd know what we were getting. Most often a system grows at the same rate as funds become available. Can you bring me up to date on how you're outfit

is organized?"

"If I get an outfit - I'll be organized."

"You were in LA."

"How about coffee first. A bad habit I picked up in LA."

Matuku poured as he motioned for Johnny to sit down, "As you can see - my Operations office is quite compact - small is a more correct word. I have two sections aptly named - Internal and External. Chief Bau borrowed this concept from Scotland Yard. We run ours in the same manner as they manage their Investigation Division. Since we have more problems inside than outside Fiji - my Internal section is three times the size of External. When Chief Bau formed them - they were both of equal size with External organized along the lines of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service. I reorganized it to put my people where our problems are - our Socialists. Our problems with our Indian population have at times been overwhelming."

Johnny asked, "How many people do you have?"

"Five in External - with emphasis on South Pacific. Our intelligence requirements center on narcotics - contraband and smuggling."

"Then you must have fifteen officers in Internal."

"And their requirements are driven by the activities of our Indian Socialists. Ours are called Inspectors like their Scotland Yard counterparts. I'll let you guess how we weighted our data requirements."

"Toward External - so you can hook up with other data bases."

"You're ready to look at the system we've been offered."

Lucinda knocked on the door and opened it, "Colonel Ropp?"

"Yes - Ma'am."

"You may wish to go to the airport. Your wife is due in an hour."

"How did you" and Johnny stopped "of course - you have access to the manifest. I'll stop in tomorrow morning. Will that be too late?"

"We won't make our final decision until after the New Year. From our conversation. I think we'll be able to work together. I want the most bang for our buck" and Matuku smiled "slang - another bad habit from LA."

Johnny walked outside and looked at his bicycle, "Sure picked the wrong transportation to go to the airport and pick up Bobbie Jean. How did she get here so quickly? Don't ask. I'll ride out to the airport - rent a car and have the hotel pick up my bike."

Riding against the wind - Johnny walked into the terminal barely in time - just as Bobbie Jean walked through the entrance gate, "Didn't expect to see you here - soldier." They embraced and she pushed him gently away, "Did you run all the way? You're soaked with perspiration?" "Rode a bike into town downwind. Unfortunately - it was into the wind coming back."

"How did you know I was flying in?"

"Chief of Police's Secretary. They have a manifest on all arrivals. This is not O'Hare."

"Did you rent a car?"

"No - I wasn't expecting you this soon - or my bike ride to the airport to take so long. Haven't had time."

"Good - I have a limo waiting for us."

"I'll have the hotel gather up my bike."

"What in the world are you doing with a bicycle."

"Attempting to look like a tourist instead of a spy."

Johnny waited for Bobbie Jean to clear Customs and then carried her luggage outside to a waiting limo, "Only two bags - you're traveling light."

"A Casino plane stopped to pick me up at Dulles on a return

flight from New York. I didn't have time to do my usual packing. I made plane reservations to Fiji while we were in the air to LA. Did you reserve a suite?"

"No - didn't have time."

"I did. We'll find out how good your Viti Levu's concierge is. He is supposed to transfer your things while you were out. What were you doing in town."

"Had an appointment with the Chief of Police - Seru Bau. You'll like him. We're invited to his family's Christmas Meke on his home island - not far off the coast."

"What is it called?"

"Bau Island."

"He must be important. Did you see that roadster that just passed us. It's a Morgan - like one you've always wanted."

Johnny looked out the rear window at the tail end of Max Lax's Morgan, "I wonder where he is going?"

"Do you know him?"

"He's the one I checked on this morning for the Chief. A Kiwi."

"What's it all about - Alfie?"

"We'll talk at the hotel."

"If he's trying to stay incognito - he sure picked the wrong car."

"Like a limo?"

"Touché."

"Did you have trouble making a connection to Fiji?"

"No - there were First Class seats open to Sydney and from there to here. I was going to use a Casino bird, but your friend said no."

"If it's Benny - he's not my friend, but he's right."

Max sped on - turning away from the ocean - into the foothills of the coastal mountain range. Max slowed to a crawl - shifting down into second gear - looking for a coral gravel road. He found his marker and turned left - under

a canopy of Monkey Pod trees. Day turned to night as the tropical forest closed in above his Morgan. Interlocking branches blocked out all sunlight - as the path climbed upward. Night gradually turned into purple twilight - slowly brightening. As Max's Morgan came out of the darkness into blinding sunlight - he shaded his eyes and his roadster crawled atop a grassy knoll. As his eyes adjusted - Max slipped his gearshift into second gear and followed the white coral driveway. He wound around to the ocean overlook side of Diesel's plantation mansion. Max parked - opened the car door and looked out on a magnificent ocean view, "No one is going to sneak up on Diesel."

Diesel - Rajiv Desaij - earned his nickname leading the Socialist Union's recruiting drive of cane field workers. When one got in his way - Rajiv ran over him like an out of control diesel truck.

Max's feet crunched on Rajiv's white coral path as he approached the wraparound porch steps, "No way anyone can sneak up crunching on this damned coral. And then they would have to navigate Diesel's porch. Wide enough to give Diesel an easy field of fire." Max stopped halfway up the porch steps and looked over his shoulder - down on a panoramic view of the Kora Sea - dotted with emerald green islands - like moss on white rocks. He turned - climbed and sat down in the visitors chair - waiting. He closed his eyes - thinking, "In this British Raj mansion lives an Indian Hindu - one who has elevated himself up a caste or two. No longer is Diesel an untouchable. Rajiv is the real leader of Fiji's Socialist Party. Jawa Motila sits out front like a puppet and a some time target while Diesel pulls strings."

Ian Fleming and Diesel were reluctant comrades in their task to overthrow and rape the current Fijian government. Diesel took a page from Lenin's play book - organizing his

Socialists into six cells. When last in power - Fiji's treasury wound up in Diesel's pockets.

Diesel looked out from behind one way glass, "Max has his eyes closed. He has learned patience. I will let him stew awhile. Jawa was right about this one - he will be eliminated when we no longer need him. We will do Max when we throw out our Fijian landlords. This time it will be a blood bath. None of Fiji's Chiefs will be spared. We will not underestimate them again. When Chief Bau's discovered our weapon's cache it was a setback, but not a devastating one. Jawa has given excellent counsel again. Time is on our side. I have been away too long from the lessons of Mother India. My British training made me think in short a time spans. Our long range plan is to take from this land and give to the land of the only true Gods. The temple honoring my Father is only half done. Gilding the dome with gold foil is expensive, but the means are here in Fiji. I must be patient. There is no need to accelerate the rape of this land. What I cannot finish - my sons will. Money will flow again to the banks of Holy Ganges - to complete construction of all our ancestor's monolithic masterpieces."

"Max is snoring - patience has turned to sloth. He has waited long enough and I want to be rid of him."

"Max - wake up - it is me - Rajiv Desaij."

Max opened his eyes, "How long have I been asleep?"

"Not long. The view is mesmerizing - isn't it?"

"Put me to sleep. I can see why you picked this spot."

"It was not of my choosing. We squeezed it away from it's previous owner when we were in power - a British pom."

Max stood - bowed and placed the palms of his hands together in Indian fashion - greeting a superior. Rajiv returned his greeting, "What mission brings you to my house. Ian and I were in agreement - you were to only contact Jawa."

"I came to see you at Ian's direction - to find out how we lost our last shipment - to speak fully of our intentions and to fully understand yours. Neither Ian or I trust Jawa Motila."

"I am embarrassed by your distrust. The error was not intentional - it was only by an unusual bit of luck that Chief Bau discovered our cache. We have taken steps to insure it will not happen again. Now - tell me about our shipment. Is it coming soon?"

Max almost, but did not frown. Eliminating Jaws was going to be more of a problem than he anticipated. The flush of anger quelled - he spoke quietly, "You will see your weapons after the New Year."

"Where are they."

"In Ian's warehouse south of Christchurch. Our Russian friends provided used gear. We had to clean - repair and test each one. It is very time consuming. I'm afraid our price will be a little higher than quoted."

"How much?"

"The decision is between Ian and you. I am here to make sure you have a secure facility - if you have other requirements and report back to Ian. If all is in order - Ian will ship your weapons."

Rajiv steeled his emotions, "Is all in order?"

"It appears to be. Our meeting completes my investigation."

"How do you plan to ship our weapons?"

"Safely - we have made arrangements with the Greens. They will deliver them and provide training."

"You can't be serious about the Greens providing weapons training?"

"They have been well trained - first by Russians and later by Syrians at terrorist training centers. You will be quite pleased with their proficiency. A Green ship will be at anchor in Suva Bay for three days. Delivery of weapons will

begin the first night and training on the afternoon of the second day. Can you build an indoor range in Jawa's dockside warehouse?"

This time Rajiv had to bite his tongue to keep his temper under control, "Yes but I am concerned about the Greens. They are not like us. They are idealistic - pure socialists. I do not trust them."

Max laughed, "They are unaware of the profit motive behind our revolution."

Rajiv smiled back at Max, "Ah - I love the profits of a successful revolution. I'm beginning to see the cover Ian's scheme provides. After the ship episode in New Zealand - most of our South Pacific nations leave the Greens alone. They can move contraband about freely."

"And when their done here - they can return to harassing fishing fleets - a good deed by anyone's standards."

Rajiv picked up a small temple bell from the tea table between their chairs and rang it six times. A fawning servant appeared and poured tea. Rajiv asked, "Scone?"
"No thank you."

"I anticipated your visit - Ian called earlier. He asked for data on how our last shipment was discovered and confiscated. I assured him it was our fault. He said to tell you to confirm our shipment."

"I will, but I am still concerned about Jawa - he is your weak link."

"I will have a servant at his side with orders to kill him if he attempts to betray my trust."

It took all of Max's emotional control to hide his joy on receiving this good news, "Ian will be pleased. What are your disposition plans for the current Fiji officials?"

"I understand Ian's concern. He will see new resolve among my Socialist followers. This time we will follow Stalin's

example - we will copy his version of Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Our Dictators will act as Proconsuls - and I will watch over them as a Praetor - judge and jury from the shadows. My bidding will be done. It is time to feed our sharks in Suva Bay. You have my personal assurance that your shipment will stay in safe hands. Max stood - placed the palms of his hands together and bowed, "My report will be favorable."

Rajiv watched Max walk down the porch steps - thinking, "Max - you will be first among equals when our sharks have their feeding frenzy in Suva Bay."

Max drove his Morgan slowly around the plantation house on the coral path. He waved, but to no avail - Diesel had his back to him. He wound slowly down into the canopy of trees - reassured, "Ian will be pleased."

Rajiv Desaij closed the door, "The fool doesn't even know we provided the Morgan to insure we didn't lose track of him. When he is among the first to go - it will be a mercy killing."

Max exited the Monkey Pod canopy - remembering Ian's assessment of Diesel, "Our Indian partner is untouchable. Social climbing comes naturally to him. But if I was a betting man I'd say he has ancestors related to Alexander the Great. He has an empire conquering frenzy that comes from more than his Lenin books. Has to have some of the genes of that Macedonian traveler."

Wellington - New Zealand

Ian Fleming arrived at his office early - still worried about Max, "Diesel phoned right after Max left. He believes Max has gone bonkers. And Max phoned as soon as he arrived here. He thinks Diesel and Jaws have both gone bonkers -

too. Talked about renting a Morgan in Fiji and how much fun it was to drive. Might as well have put a bell around his neck. He had to have rented the only one there. Max had to stick out like a sore thumb." He looked up at the clock, "Quarter till eight. Secretary won't be in until nine. I'll have to brew my own pot of tea. Good thing she has it ready to go. All I have to do is light the fire."

Ian placed his leather flight jacket over the back of his chair - sat down and swiveled around toward the picture window - facing east - looking out over Palliser Bay. He gazed at twilight fighting its way upward on the horizon - through Wellington's rain and mist. He swiveled ninety degrees - looking out into the darkness where the Tasmanian Sea would - like Max - soon appear. Ian swiveled ninety degrees - facing his desk, "The view from the seventh floor is always cloudy. If I spent all of my time behind this desk - I'd have nothing, but a myopic view of my socialist Kiwi world."

Early morning clouds - packed full of moisture - were marching like puffy fat white soldiers toward old Wellington town. Rain - more like a mist, "What is it Hawaiians call it? I know - same as our Maoris - rain is a blessing on ocean trips or new ventures. Well - my efforts in Fiji can use all of the help our Polynesian Gods can give with Max and our accident prone Indians carrying my water."

Ian swiveled around and looked out toward the Tasmanian Sea. Darkness turned to gray and then - sunlight popped through - like a halo in the clouds. He swiveled a quarter turn and looked south across Cook Strait toward Cloudy Bay - South Island, "Sinking the *Rainbow Warrior* was a blessing from our Polynesian Gods. What a piece of luck! Frenchies took the blame and now - no one in the South Pacific will ever search another Green Ship for contraband."

Coded messages were seldom sent from the seventh floor, but Ian sent one today - to his warehouse agent in Blenheim town. It was cryptic -

"Drive north to Christchurch and speak with the Captain of the Rainbow Warrior Resurrection. Tell him to sail to Akorua after Christmas - load and be on his way. My agent - Max Lax will arrive before he weighs anchor. He's my representative with our Indian friends. He'll sail to Fiji. Make sure our Captain loads at night and is on his way before dawn.

Ian

Max knocked on the office door and looked inside, "Mind if I interrupt?"

"Not at all - Max - not at all. I arrived early - just to see you. Tea's ready - care for a cup-a?"

"I'll pour - double lemon?"

"Sour she is. How did you find our friends - Jaws and Diesel?"

"Defensive, but ready. If looks aren't deceiving - they're prepared for another go at it. Jawa's warehouse storage entrance is underneath the dock in Suva. We'll have to unload with dories at low tide."

"You're certain they can secure our weapons?"

"I'm never certain about our Indian friends."

"That's why I want you to sail on the Green ship."

Max's mouth popped open. He was looking forward to Christmas at home, "What's her name?"

"She's called the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection*. She'll be underway after Christmas. Fly down to Christchurch. Our Captain will be waiting for you. I've sent a message on ahead. He knows you're coming and that you're my personal representative."

"I'd rather drink at the local Public House with my mates. I

haven't had Christmas at home in years."

"You can fish the trout streams."

"I'll leave in the morning."

"Take care of your affairs at home - first. I'll let you know when our seaplane is ready."

Max flushed at the thought of another ride with Ian's son-in-law, "That pommy bastard."

"Relatives are the bane of profit - Max. But - with my wife insistence - a necessary evil."

"Am I sailing direct?" "No - roundabout for cover. You'll have a layover on Norfolk Island."

"With the lepers?"

"They have it cured."

"I was talking about those inbred exiles from Pitcairn."

Max edged toward the door - anxious to leave before Ian decided to take off on another philosophical journey that meant nothing to Max - as he understood none of it. Ian rose from his chair, "Another cup-a - Max? Oh - our Green friends won't be using dories. Remember? They used fast Zodiacs to harass the French Navy ships. They'll slip under the dock at mid tide. Depending on the height - might even be able to deliver at high tide." "Using Greens - looks like you have a foolproof plan."

Ian smiled as he thought, "Yes - if I can only control the fools I'm surrounded with." He sipped some of his tea, "Max?"

Max - edging toward the elevator stopped, "Yes?"

"When your ship sails into Suva Bay and after all of the weapons are safely ashore - inform Rajiv - if his revolution fails - I won't supply any more weapons for another go. It's too risky in today's world."

"It will be my pleasure. Can I eliminate Jaws?"

"No - not yet."

Ian turned away and stared out the window. Max edged toward the door. Ian turned - rose from his chair and steered Max toward the window overlooking Cook Straight, "Beautiful - isn't it. We're perched up here on the side of this hill - enjoying a view the Maoris used to dread." "Max was more practical, "It looks like rain. You won't be able to play golf today." "I need to work on my boat." Max edged away, but Ian steered him back, "Do you think our Indians on Fiji will cooperate with the Chinese?" "Have you made a deal with them?" "Our Russian sponsors have turned into robber barons. Rajiv is still worshipping a God that is dead - the Comintern." "The what?"

Ian decided it would be futile to educate Max - so he didn't, "Our Indian friends have not forgiven the Chinese for border clashes along Sikkim - Nepal - Bhutan - Assam and invading Tibet." "I know - they don't like the Chinese." "I have decided. We are changing our allegiance from the Russians to the Chinese." "Have you informed Rajiv?" "In due course Max - in due course."

Max was curious, "What is a Comintern." "It's the international organization the Russians created to export their brand of socialism." "And it's no longer alive?" "It died when the Berlin Wall came down." "If you're sending me to sea with a group of wild eyed radicals - I'll need time to get my affairs in order." Ian nodded, "Yes" to his longtime friend. He had not chosen Max for his intellectual curiosity. Max was a practical plodder, "Get your affairs in order - Max. I'll phone when it's time to go."

Honolulu - Hawaii

Ching Chang nodded to his Secretary and picked up his telephone, "You got me just in time - Johnny - I was about to cross the street and brief the DI. How are things in the South Pacific?"

"Great - Chief Bau is a great host. Gets any better and I might abandon ship and stay down here in paradise. Do you have guidance from above for me?"

"Do the right thing."

"Where have I heard that before. Did you fly the line?"

"Still do with the Hawaii National Guard."

"I didn't know you were a fighter jock."

"Am a fighter jock - no past tense in our language."

"Bet you fighter jocks have a secret handshake."

"Don't ask."

"Don't tell."

Preliminaries over - Johnny got down to business, "I need information on a computer system."

"Which one?"

"The one our analysts use at the Pentagon. Not certain that the PACAF DI has one yet."

"They do."

"Find out what a six terminal mini system similar to ours - costs and see if we can export it to the Fiji Constabulary. One with all of the programs, but none of the data."

"I'll start here and then talk to Tupelo. Kalani wants to know if you need anything?"

"No - tell Kalani - I'll bring him up-to-date on my way back through. Oh - ask Kalani if anyone back there holds data on two Fiji Indians - Jawa Motila and Rajiv Desaij and a Kiwi named Max Lax."

"Max Lax?"

"I can hear you chuckling through the SATCOM. Have Tupelo phone Tucker Tubbs to make sure my sheep are surviving."

"Sheep?"

"They're all black sheep."

"Don't ask?"

"Don't tell."

Ching Chang hung up and punched in the CIA Ops number for Benny.

Suva - Fiji

Johnny's call to PACAF took more time than he planned. Bobbie Jean was pacing out on the lanai, "I thought you'd never get off the phone. And they say women talk too long. Are you ready?"

"As soon as I tie my shoes and pull on a shirt."

"Hope they make a mild Bloody Mary at the bar. My stomach is still in LA. It will be at least a day before it arrives here."

Johnny took Bobbie Jean's arm, "Are you ready to do battle with Penelope Penny?"

"Now I remember why I flew out here in such a hurry. Why didn't you buy a sulu to wear to the Chief's Meke?"

"Not sure I'd look good in a kilt and I didn't want to insult the Chief and his family."

"You're right - it would look patronizing. Order me a mild Bloody Mary - without salt and the local pepper sauce. I'm going out on the verandah and take in this lovely ocean sunset."

Bobbie Jean walked outside - leaving Johnny at the bar - wondering, "Sure is edgy. Never saw her so nervous. This competition with Penelope Penny must be affecting her more than she is letting on." He ordered a Double Brown Dominion Bitters beer and took a sip while the bartender mixed Bobbie Jean's Bloody Mary. He turned the bottle over in his hands, "No truth in advertising. It's Kiwi - not British - more like a watered down Porter." He carried their drinks out on

the verandah - set them on the rail and took Bobbie Jean's hands. She melted into his arms, "What is this all about?"

"Don't you like it?"

"More than you'll ever know."

"I thought you needed a hug. You've been edgy - since you've arrived here."

"I know - I'd just as soon sock Penelope in the jaw as look at her. Do we have to sail with them?"

"Chief Bau invited us to sail on his boat. It would not be proper hospitality to refuse. A car will pick us up in thirty minutes."

"Will we have to ride to the harbor with the Penny family?"

"No - they're all ready there on his catamaran."

"That's a relief. I'll be able to avoid her on the boat and we can sit with our hosts away from your friends."

"Do you really want to make her feel uncomfortable?"

"If I can't sock her - yes."

"Go on the attack. Use your best Southern charms - get up close and personal. Be overly friendly. You won't have to avoid her - she'll avoid you."

"I'll put that thought into my Southern Lady data bank."

"Car's waiting - are you ready?"

Bobbie Jean set her drink down on the railing and walked along, "You might be right - I'm reacting when I should be in control. I'll think it over."

"If not - lets have fun together."

"Shouldn't we bring a present for our hosts?"

"I purchased two full kegs of beer. Sent them on the supply boat this morning."

"We're in the tropics - how about ice and tubs?"

"Came with the kegs."

Johnny held the car door open, "All items going to Bau Island receive first class treatment."

"Us or the beer - soldier?"

"Both."

Bau Island - Fiji

Johnny opened the car door and Bobbie Jean slid out of the back seat, "Pretty fancy - being delivered in a police limo. Is that our transportation?"

A large Police Patrol boat stood waiting - decked out with Christmas bunting and colors. Lieutenant Matuku - dressed in formal Police sulu - saluted as they climbed the gangplank, "Chief Bau sends his welcome. His brother will be our Captain for this sail." He grinned at Johnny, "Two full kegs of beer - you and Pat Penny are already legends on our isle. Mr. Penny sent over two - also. Our village will have enough beer to last through New Years. Mr. Penny and his family are below. If you are ready - we will cast off."

Johnny braced himself on the rail, "Sail away. Do you mind if we sight see from the bow. My wife and I have never sailed these waters before."

"After we clear the harbor - you will see the splendor of our magic islands - so green above the emerald Pacific blue. Do you care for a drink?"

Bobbie Jean answered, "White wine for me and Johnny?"

"The same."

Matuku nodded to a steward and two glasses appeared in less than a minute, "We have a spread below - if you are hungry."

Bobbie Jean said, "Later - maybe - I don't want to miss seeing the beauty of your land from the sea."

After they cleared the harbor - Chief Bau's brother introduced himself, "I am Koro Bau - your Captain for this voyage. My Father named me after our sea - hoping I would be a sailor one day. My Father is your host at our Christmas Meke is being held. You will be guests of our village. We have food and drink for all and community singing. It will be an honor for us to provide our hospitality to such very special guests."

Johnny mentioned, "Hawaiians call their songfest Mele and

yours is Meke - are they the same - connected?"

"Both words are derived from a common Polynesian background. Our Hawaiian brothers concentrate more on chants and dances. Our Meke is more melodious. Like our Samoan brothers - we love to sing - to harmonize. I'm pleased that you did not choose to wear sulu. Our Father believes Englishmen look silly in kilts and out of place in sulus. We'll arrive in Bau at sunset. Make yourself comfortable and enjoy the twilight view of our emerald sea."

Two hours later - Koro guided the Patrol Boat along an extended dock - jutting a hundred yards out into the sea. He docked in as close in as possible - making sure his craft would not be grounded at ebb tide. Johnny helped Bobbie Jean down the gangplank - ahead of Pat Penny and his family. An hour into their trip - Bobbie Jean had befriended Penelope - smothering her with syrupy Southern charm. As they walked along the dock - she whispered to Johnny, "Your suggestion worked - Penelope will stay far away from me for the rest of our stay."

"Thought you were going to run out of southern kindness - my Pretty."

"I know you - you're not my husband - you're the wicked witch of the west?"

"I'll have to stay out of water."

"What do you call that contraption?"

"That's a jitney - a cross between a Jeep and a ten passenger van - a Fijian RV."

They arrived at Chief Bau's village - a short fifteen minute jitney ride from the dock - where they were greeted warmly with flowers and drink. Straw mats placed under the palms at the edge of the beach - provided an outdoor banquet table. A large wood fire burned on the beach - sparks flying upward and village children dancing - more for fun than warmth. Several pits of white hot coals were in evidence -

working ovens for this evening's meal. Chief Bau came forward and introduced his Father and Mother and motioned for them to sit nearby on straw mats. The Meke began as soon as Chief Bau's Father raised his hand. Drinks were served - formal introductions of guests to the village made - before a sumptuous meal of roast pig - baked fish and yams was spread out on the mats.

When the Christmas feast was consumed - Chief Bau's Father escorted Johnny and Pat to the Village Longhouse. He motioned for them to sit on straw mats - woven by the Village women. Tonight - women were not invited. Women's liberation - not an arrival in the South Pacific. The Chief's Father spoke, "Colonel Ropp - we are honored to have you as our guest. As an appreciation of our respect you are to be honored with our Village Tabua. Come forward."

Johnny stood and approached the Chief's Father. He bent down on his knees and extended his neck. The Chief's Father placed the sennit cord with its amulet - a polished tooth of a Sperm Whale around Johnny's neck, "It is a symbol of our goodwill and friendship. My son told of your willingness to assist us in securing our homeland from those who live among us. Those who desire to take our land from us and turn us into slaves. Those who mistake our hospitality for weakness. He stood up and shouted, "Tabua!" The Village men responded, "Tabua!"

He whispered to Johnny, "It wasn't long ago - when a European extended his neck - we had a new head to join others on our village fence." The Chief's Father laughed and the elders joined in - all knowing his little joke about a time before the Great Seru Bau - had a serious ending. Johnny returned to his place on the mat as the Chief called for Pat Penny to come forward. He repeated the ceremony. As Pat turned to return to his place on the mat - the Chief's Father

placed his hand on Pat's arm, "You have used a war club many times. How many have you sent to the hairy red devils?" Pat smiled, "A dozen or two - maybe more. I don't keep score."

Chief Bau motioned for the men to remain quiet as he passed a wooden bowl of milky liquid to Johnny, "We will drink Yaqona together and cement our friendship. We call this Grog, but it is not a mixture of rum like British Navy Grog. Theirs is rum - water - lemon juice and sugar. Ours is made from the root of the Pepper plant. We drink it from a wooden bowl. Colonel Ropp - it is your turn - drink!" Johnny tilted the bowl toward his mouth and sipped two ounces before handing the bowl to Pat. His grin was brave, but the water in his eyes gave away his feelings. After the pepper taste passed - he noticed an immediate numbing of his tongue and throat.

After all had partaken the Chief stood and all stood with him, "It is Christmas. A time to be with our families. We usually talk story when we gather here in Our Long House. Tonight we will return to the Meke and join in the singing. Colonel Ropp and Mr. Penny have provided enough beer to last through the holidays. We must now honor their gift."

Johnny returned to Bobbie Jean's side. She asked, "How did it go?" He pointed to his throat and downed a pint of Swan's Premium Export Lager from the newly tapped keg, "We were treated to a drink made from the Pepper plant." "I read about it, Yaqona isn't it?" "Yes and very hot." He showed her the Tabua, "We were honored tonight." "Do you like Yaqona?" "Chief Bau was right when he said it is an acquired taste. All things considered - I'd rather have a glass of Port, but

I'm pleased to be honored. My throat is still numb. The Chief's Father didn't water it down for his Haole guests."
"Haole?"

"It means stranger in Hawaiian."

Johnny - Bobbie Jean and Patricia joined in with the Village as they sang familiar songs and Christmas Carols. Pat and his daughter cooked sausages over the fire - away from the singing. At exactly eleven p.m. - the Chief's Father stood up and raised his hands, My son's guests must now return to Suva. We have been honored by their gifts and their company. Around their necks is our Tabua." He clapped his hands and the Village rose as one, "It is time to honor Fiji with *Isa Lei*."

Johnny and Bobbie Jean held each other - listening to magical harmony -

*Isa - Isa you are my only treasure
Must you leave me so lonely and forsaken
Oh - forget now -
When you are far away -
Precious moments -
Beside dear Suva Bay.*

The melody of *Isa Lei* whispered like chimes through the palms like the smiling sound of laughing - lyrical children. Johnny whispered to Bobbie Jean, "It's like a stadium full of barbershop choruses - all singing acapela without an E flat section." Johnny and Bobbie Jean walked arm-in-arm to the jitney - trailing after the Penny family.

When the Chief's Father nodded to Seru Bau - the Chief excused himself and followed his Father to the edge of the

surf. They waded out until the gentle surf covered their ankles, "Have you made arrangements?"

"Yes - the sullen ones have agreed to do our bidding."

"Do you have confidence in them?"

"Benny sent them."

"Then it will be done. Why do you not take away the leaders?"

"They are not like us. The ones in the middle run the movement. Those at the top will be sharks who have lost their sense of smell."

"Where is the giant Tiger Shark who led the leader of the sullen ones here?"

"Penny says he traveled to Norfolk Island in search of Kiwi."

"How would he know?"

"He said the shark spoke to him - in his thoughts."

"When the sullen ones are finished with their tasks - let them go."

"Are you certain?"

"They have been touched by one of our Gods of the sea and are pursued by foreign devils. I don't want his Red Devils on our sacred soil. We have Indian devils and it took over a century for us to be rid of ours."

Suva - Fiji

Johnny arrived at Police Headquarters as the sun cleared the sea. His computer system survey was completed before the sun crossed midday. He stopped by Lieutenant Matuku's office, "I won't waste your time or mine with a drawn out report."

"A verbal is good enough for me. What do you think of our setup?"

"Well - a data automation system is only as good as data you have in it and is only of value if you can get it out in a usable format."

"How about our other country access?"

"Looks good to me. Your cooperation with Australia is just

what the doctor ordered."

"What do you think of my organization?"

"Your External Section is first rank - your people know their business. I won't judge your Internal Section. Not my area of expertise and I wasn't given access to sensitive data. From what I've seen - all you need is a good data storage and retrieval system. A simple mini - rapid access system should do the trick."

Matuka stood up, "You're ready to review the system proposals from our contractors."

"After lunch - I'm buying if you care to join me?"

"Where would you like to go?"

"You lead the way - I'm a stranger in these parts."

"Smile when you say that - stranger."

"You and I are beginning to sound like dialogue from a John Wayne cowboy movie."

"We show all of his movies."

After lunch - Johnny leafed through page after page of data automation system contractor proposals. Boiler plate and gibberish made them all look alike. By four p.m. he had seen enough. He checked in with Lieutenant Mantuku, "My eyes are crossed."

"What do you think?"

"They gave you standard government contract proposals - enigmas wrapped in enigmas."

"You read the boiler plate. Will they do the job and which one do you recommend?"

"All respond to your requirements and to those of a dozen other countries - too. And they're all expensive - loaded with lots of overkill. Two propose mainframes and one has a series of minis tied together with an elaborate Rube Goldberg communication network. They'll all work, but are more suited to a larger operation - one requiring fifty terminals or more. If you decide to purchase any one of them - you'll

need on site contractor support and double your current manpower."

"We're in agreement. I came to the same conclusion. We need support - soon. Should I ask for more proposals?"

"Take too long. Tell you what - we have a system all ready designed that might fit your needs. We use it at all our offices and better yet - it's turn key. All you have to do is plug it in and enter your data. I'm not certain how many terminals it can handle."

Matuku smiled - relieved, "We don't need an elaborate system to do simple tasks. Maintenance can create down time and we're a long way from contractor support."

"How many terminals do you need?"

"With simultaneous access of data - a minimum of six and a maximum of ten. As you are aware - our storage requirements are not complicated. We track a few ships and lots of people - not orders of battle."

Johnny leafed through his notes, "That pretty well sizes it up. How do you plan to load data?"

"My men will learn the system as they load - we'll work overtime if we have too. I have only two questions. How much will your system cost and how soon can it be installed?"

"I laid that question on Ching-Chang back in Hawaii - several days ago. If one is available - in less than two weeks.

Cost? Systems design and integration are paid for. Should be half of what your proposals call for. Might even get my government to pay for it - if you'll agree to share data."

"I'm in agreement. We better talk to Chief Bau. We are into decisions neither one of us can make. I'll call and see if he is in."

Chief Bau listened to Johnny's proposal without comment. He got up from behind his desk and strolled to the window - looking out over Motila's General Store and the Kora Sea. He

turned toward Lieutenant Matuku, "What do you think?"

"I'll have to see documentation. If it's as good as Colonel Ropp says it is and less than half the cost of our contractor proposals - I say we accept his offer." He turned toward Johnny, "You said two weeks for delivery - if your system is available. Knowing your government - I find that hard to believe."

"Not if we make arrangements through CIA."

Chief Bau interrupted, "I'm not sure I want CIA involvement. To be controlled by friends is not my cup of tea. When we are in agreement - it is alright, but what happens when we have conflicting interests? Who will be our contact?"

"Benny."

"Then again - the price is right. Can you make all of the necessary arrangements?"

"Give me three days. I need a few answers and some help in Washington. I'll have to cut through quite a bit of red tape."

Chief Bau looked over at Lieutenant Matuku, "How long will it take for your contractors to provide a working system?" "Six months."

He looked back at Johnny, "You have your three days. I must have a guarantee that you can provide a system that meets our requirements and rapid delivery."

"Benny's word?"

"As good as gold."

The Chief's Secretary - Lucinda opened the door, "Chief - you have a meeting with the Prime Minister in ten minutes." "Tell him I'm in negotiations with the US Government on a computer buy and I will be a few minutes late." He turned toward Johnny, "Tell me what will happen if we are searching for an unknown - an item that isn't in our data base?"

"If it isn't in your data base - you won't find it. What our system will do is point your people in the right direction -

where to find the information about your unknown. Are you talking about the Kiwi - the brains behind your Socialist's overthrow plans?"

"Yes. How does it point?"

"The system I offer is identical to the one we use at our offices - a thing called relational search. It points toward confirming or like items. Through relational search your analysts can pull up connecting data - like known associates - companies - shipments and phone numbers and hopefully point toward your unknown."

"It sounds too good to be true, but then - so do all data automation systems. I better go to my meeting. You have three days. Give Benny and his associates my regards and the best of the Christmas Season."

*The rabbit-hole went straight
on like a tunnel for some way
and then dipped suddenly down
- so suddenly that Alice had not
a moment to think about stopping
herself before she found herself
falling down what seemed to be
a very deep well.*

6

Suva - Fiji

It took Johnny two marathon phone calls to Ching-Chang before Fiji's Constabulary data automation buy was agreed on. And the last confirmation call was troublesome. Ching-Chang was adamant, "Langley insists on funding it all with no strings attached - a symbol of their goodwill."

"Who did you talk too?"

"Tupelo."

"Did he get his communication from a mutual friend?"

"A mutual friend of yours - too. He cleared it through Tupelo. An instructor-installer will be sent with the system."

"Will you give me a heads up when it's on the way?"

"I'll try too. If I slip up - Chief Bau will let you know."

"One last favor."

"Go ahead."

"Tell Tupelo I'll have to stop his shipment if Chief Bau doesn't agree."

"Are you kidding - the wheels are all ready in motion."

"Chief Bau is concerned about your nonexistent strings."

"I don't know. If it has to be done - I'll try to stop it. Kalani insists that we not press the Chief for a decision."

"Chief Bau is his own man. I'll pass your info on about it being cost free to Lieutenant Matuku. If I don't call by this time tomorrow afternoon - it's a done deal."

Bobbie Jean was not pleased, "If they ask you again - I will not go on a Christmas sail with Penelope Penny. We are staying in a world class resort with a four star Chef and you

want me to leave modern conveniences for bucket showers and sailboat toilets?"

"Pat didn't ask me straight out - he was fishing. I'll tell him my work with Chief Bau is keeping me busy."

"Is it?"

"No - as soon as his system arrives - is installed and checked out - we're out of here."

"Then can we resort it?"

"As soon as I receive the Chief's approval to ship the system."

"What's the hang-up?"

"CIA is giving it to Fiji. Chief Bau is concerned there will be strings attached."

"Are there?"

"Not supposed to be, but Benny is in on it."

"Chief Bau has a right to be concerned. Can I ride along with you."

"Don't know how long I'll be - do you want to wait?"

"Heavens no. I'm going shopping at one of Fiji's quaint general stores."

"Go to Moris Hedstrom's. Stay out of Motila's."

"Why?"

"The owner is one of the reasons I'm here."

"In harms way?"

"Yes."

Johnny cooled his heels outside the Chief's office while the Chief held a private discussion with Lieutenant Mantuku. After two cups of tea and a bathroom break - the door opened. Lieutenant Mantuku beckoned for Johnny to come in, "We're ready for you now."

Chief Bau motioned for Johnny to sit down, "Tell Ching-Chang we accept - be it reluctantly."

"My arrangement was to call if you didn't. It's on the way. Do you mind if I ask what made you change your mind."

"I don't believe there are no strings attached to your gift,

but we're willing to accept the risk because Benny is on the other end. He has always been fair and most important - he has respected our right to not always agree. Enjoy your vacation on Bligh Waters."

"We're going to celebrate at your finest hotel."

Chief Bau glanced at Lieutenant Matuku and back to Johnny,

"You're not sailing with Pat Penny?"

"No - my wife believes roughing it is staying in a hotel without a bar and restaurant. And we decided to share this magical time together - alone."

Johnny caught up with Bobbie Jean outside of Moris Hedstrom's, "What did you buy?"

"A new swim suit for you - clothing for me and wine for our room. Did the Chief agree to take your system?"

"He did. As soon as it arrives - we can make plans to return home."

"You can stop worrying about a revolution."

"Do you know something we don't?"

"Of course. Fiji's Indian Merchants are too busy making a profit off the Christmas Season to stage a revolt."

Penelope sat down next to her Father at *Happy Hour's* galley table. She asked, "Does it suit you?"

"Won't be easy - four in one night."

"Are you familiar enough with these waters to sail in close?"

"Won't have too - have a Zodiac from Palmyra repaired. It'll be delivered this afternoon. You bring them to the shore and I'll motor in. Who's first?"

"The One From Column 'A'."

"He's in town. Don't bring him to the docks."

"Of course not. Meet me at the beach west of here."

Penelope placed her finger on the map. Pat shook his head,

"You might get your pickup stuck in the sand."

"I've checked it out - sand is firm."

"How did you arrange it?"

"The One From Column 'A' is meeting me on the beach for an evening swim. He'll be in the water - all we need is a rope to drag him out to sea."

"And the other three?"

"They don't celebrate Christian holidays and they don't swim. I've arranged business meetings. Timing will be critical."

Pat nodded in agreement and asked, "How about the last two - from Column 'E' and Column 'F' on Ovalau Island?"

"We'll sail there after we finish the One From Column D. I only need to work out geography and timing. The One From Column E lives in Levuka and the One From Column F lives in the country."

"How about evidence?"

"There will be none - they will all just disappear."

"Excellent - Chief Bau will not have to explain and if he must - they returned to India - or he may wish to have an unsolved mystery."

"And our cover will be we are tourists on a Christmas sail to the Yasawa Islands."

"How about your pickup?"

"I sold it to one who lives near the One From Column D. I've agreed to leave it at a prearranged location on the north shore after we are finished."

"Keys under the drivers side mat?"

"This is a very trusting land."

Bobbie Jean woke Johnny from his afternoon nap, "Guess what?"

Johnny opened one eye and then the other, "I missed an evening meal?"

"No - it's too soon for that. The Penny family has checked out of our hotel."

Johnny sat up in bed and threw his legs over the edge, "Are they flying back to Hungary?"

"No - his wife said they're going on a Christmas sail. Where

are Bligh Waters?"

"North of here. Captain Bligh and part of his crew sailed by Fiji on longboats after the Bounty mutiny. Don't think they were able to land - Fiji had headhunters in those days.

Where did you see Patricia?"

"Had my hair done at the beauty shop."

"Are they going to return?"

"She wasn't sure - they might sail on to Australia. It's only three in the afternoon. You can go back to sleep - or join me by the pool. Have to get a little tan before we return or it won't be a vacation."

Bligh Waters

Patricia checked the cold locker, "Lobsters and large ones." She noticed package after package of link sausage, "Did you stock up with enough food for a trip to Australia?" Pat stuck his head down through the hatch, "No - only enough for a few days sail. We'll decide where we want to go after Christmas."

"Where is Penny?"

"We'll pick her up on our way by the north shore. She sold her pickup to someone up there. And I have to make a few stops along the way for Chief Bau."

"Where are we sailing to?"

"Eventually the Yasawa Islands. After we pick up Penny - we'll sail to the northern island - Ovalau. Levuka - the old Capitol is there - then across Bligh Waters."

"Sounds to me like you're working - not on vacation."

"Have a few items for the Chief and we'll be on the way.

Great looking lobsters - aren't they?"

"One would be a meal for all three of us."

"Are you ready to sail? I want to be underway as soon as the beer arrives."

"There is a truck outside from Moris Hedstrom. What did you order?"

"Five cases of an Australian beer - Toohey's Lager."

"Are we going on a sail or to a party?"

"Both."

"I don't know if we'll have room in the cold locker for greens - your steaks - sausage and beer."

"Look behind the table - there's two more coolers for the beer. Did they deliver the wine?"

"Yes - a case of red and one of white Bordeaux."

Pat started the diesel and untied the lines as soon as the Moris Hedstrom delivery truck pulled away from the dock. He was underway - out in the channel soon after. Patricia came up to the helm, "Are you going to raise the sails?" "Might as well. We have a bit of time to kill before I make my first stop. Take the helm - channel markers are universal - same as they were in Cork Ireland." Pat raised the main and his Cat responded - flying over the bay at fifteen knots. He looked up at the sun, "At least an hour before sunset. Hope the beach Penny picked isn't used much. He returned to the helm, "You want me to cook dinner?" "No - I don't care for sausage. Are you very hungry?" "Not really." "I'll prepare sandwiches." "I'll have two - make them with link sausage."

Pat anchored half-a-mile off the beach. He looked through his binoculars and found Penny's pickup, but no sign of her, "Must be in the water. How am I going to dispose of him? I wonder - is my Tiger Shark still around? If he is - disposal will be no problem." Pat scanned the surface of the Koro Sea, "I know he's on his way - I can feel it in my bones." He called down to Patricia, "Taking the Zodiac for a little spin. Be back in less than an hour." Pat untied the boat - slid it into the water and followed. He started the outboard before untying the line and picked up the coil of line from the bottom of the Zodiac. He tied one end securely to an aft fitting and eased his Zodiac away - traveling

toward shore at a speed - just above idle. He scanned the sea, "Still no Tger. Maybe that feeling was just my imagination working overtime."

Penelope waved and shouted above the waves, "You're just in time. Help me hold him under. He's putting up more of a fight than I expected."

Pat jumped in - grabbed an arm and helped Penny hold the One From Column 'A' underwater, "You should have put your knee in his back."

"I did, but this one is overly agile."

"He's stopped struggling."

"Give him a minute or two to make sure."

Pat let loose of the One From Column A's arm and grabbed his line from the bottom of the Zodiac, "I'll come in earlier at the next spot - in case you need help."

"How do you plan on disposing?"

"I'll cut him a bit - let him bleed for chum and create a feeding frenzy off shore. Hold him down while I tie his feet with my line from the Zodiac."

"Don't cut him until I'm out of the water. Is your line secure?"

Pat tugged on it, "Yes - ready to push off. Hold the boat while I roll in over the side." Pat sat up - started the outboard and pulled in the line, "Hefty one - isn't he. I'll wait for your signal."

Penny swam to shore and turned - blinking her flashlight from around her waist - dot - dot - dot - dash. Pat leaned over - slashed the One From Column A's wrists and began trolling offshore. A giant dorsal fin appeared - cutting through water off the stern. Pat laughed, "I knew you were around - hope you like your meat marinated in Curry sauce." The bite was clean - it cut through the line just inches away from the One From Column 'A's feet. Pat increased power - pulling out of the way of the feeding frenzy.

He reeled in the line - now empty of its cargo and coiled it on the bottom of his Zodiac. Ten minutes later he was alongside *Happy Hour*, "I'm back."

Patricia answered, "That was quick. You're wet."

"Fell in."

"Where too - now?"

"East side of the island - to a private dock. Another stop after that and then we'll pick up Pretty Penny. Any sausage left? Two sandwiches won't be enough."

"I cooked extra."

Pat acknowledged Penny's signals with his flashlight and drove the Zodiac alongside the dock, "Any problems?"

"No, but I can't carry him alone."

"Where did you leave him?"

"In the front seat of my pickup."

"Is he dead?"

"No - I put this one to sleep."

"Good - my Tiger Shark and his friends are here to take care of our disposal problems. I don't want to destroy a good friend with Russian poison."

Pat carried the One From Column 'B' over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. He laid him on the dock - climbed down the ladder and untied his Zodiac. Then he threw a line up to Penelope, "We'll do him the same way we did the last one - tie the line around his ankles and roll him into the water. Careful - hold on we don't want a splash."

"I may have to use an ice pick on the next one."

"Keep the bleeding internal - don't want clues laying around. How are we doing - time wise?"

"Ahead of schedule." She rolled the One From Column 'B' off the dock and into the water.

Pat reached down with his knife and sliced both wrists, "See you off the next beach" and opened up his outboard to trolling speed.

A-hundred yards off the dock - a familiar dorsal fin appeared, "You're getting a taste for Curry my sharp toothed friend." In seconds the rope was cut away from the One From Column 'B's feet.

Patricia was waiting as Pat pulled alongside, "What are you doing for the Chief? You're not carrying anything to shore - or bringing anything back."

"He asked that I check on a few folks living along the ocean to see if they're preparing for a shipment. Just one more stop and then we'll pick up Penelope."

"Have you seen the giant shark circling our boat?"

"Yes - he means no harm. Besides - our Cat is too large for him to swallow."

Pat tied the Zodiac to the stern - started the diesel and raised anchor - keeping the sails furled for a low profile. Pat looked at his watch, "Have an hour to make it to the next beach."

Pat blinked his recognition signal and Penny returned it with her flashlight. He drove the Zodiac up on the beach and hopped out, "Any problems?"

"I need your help on this one. Can't get him out of his office."

"Who am I?"

"A Kiwi with business connections in Hong Kong."

"What's the con?"

"Silk and gold - all stolen of course. He has a guard."

"How do you want to handle it."

"Inside job?"

"Don't think so - not unless we have too."

"It could get messy."

"Can you divert the guard?"

"He'll pat me down for weapons. How about you?"

"I'll use what's available."

"There's a Fiji war club leaning against the wall in the

corner of his office."

"Too messy. You drive - let me think on it."

Penelope pulled up in front of a store front office. Pat could see inside, "There it is - a paper weight with a spike to hold papers. Haven't seen one of those in years. Make it quick." Penelope knocked on the door and the guard opened it. She entered first and Pat followed - sprinting out from behind her on a dead run toward the desk. The one from Column 'C' looked up as the paper weight spike entered his temple. Penelope - ice pick in hand - dispatched the guard as he turned to run after Pat. Pat lifted the One From Column C out of his chair - pulled him across the floor and laid him next to his guard.

Penelope - already outside - turned her pickup around - backing to the door. They lifted the guard in first and the One From Column 'C' followed after. Pat latched the tail gate and pulled the pickup over to the side of the parking lot out of the light. When she returned - Pat had completed the cleanup with a wad of papers - crumpled in his hand, "Need to dispose of these. They were on the spike. Do you notice any blood on the floor?"

Penelope checked the desk area and the floor near the front door, "No - a neat job. Do we leave his car here or drive it to the beach?"

"We'll leave it at the beach."

Pat looked inside the top desk drawer and found the keys, "I'll follow you."

Pat parked the One From Column 'C's car off the beach - inside a turnaround gap in the brush and walked over to help Penny. She had the tailgate down and was shaking her head, "The guard bled a bit. Should have put a cover down." "After we have them floating to the sharks - I'll wash it down with salt water."

"Do you have a bucket?"

"Always carry one to bail."

Pat lifted the One From Column 'C' to his shoulder and carried him out into the water. He tied a line around both feet and returned, "I'll take the head - you take the feet." "Might have to drag him."

"It's low tide - tracks will be covered up by morning."

The guard was too heavy for more than a few steps, "Put his feet down. We'll each take an arm and drag him."

Knee deep in the surf - Pat untied the line and ran it through the aft fitting - freeing up the other end. He tied the guards feet and grabbed the bucket.

Three trips later - the bed of the pickup was clean. Pat asked, "How are we doing on time."

"Better move out - we're thirty minutes behind schedule."

"Help me push the Zodiac out into the surf. Hope I have enough power - my cargo is floating toward shore." Pat started the outboard and eased the Zodiac away. When the line pulled tight - the stern began to sink. He let up on the power and eased slowly away from shore. Free and clear he set the outboard motor to idle - pulled the bodies alongside - leaned over and slit their wrists.

Pat sailed the Zodiac alongside his Cat and tied it to the stern. He brought in the empty line, "Clean cut on both ends. My friend must like the taste of Curry." He rolled up the line and climbed on board his Cat. He let Patricia know he was back - she was in their stateroom - reading. Pat poured a beer and carried it above decks, "Have to put up the main up or I'll never make it to the pickup point in time." He hauled in the anchor - unfurled the main - unlocked the helm and set course for the north shore.

Patricia called up, "Are we underway?"

"Last stop - to pick up Penelope."

When Pat pulled up to the dock - Penelope was pacing,
"You're twenty minutes late."
"Not enough wind. Problems?"
"Only with you. The One from Column 'D' is in the back of my pickup."
"How did you get it done?"
"He was too large for me to handle - so I had him sit on the tailgate and gave him papers to read. While his hands were busy - he expired."
"Where are you going to leave the truck?"
"My buyer is coming here" she looked at her watch "In less than ten minutes."
"Lets roll him out of the back of your pickup onto the dock. I'll tie a line on him before we roll him into the water."
I'm famished. Is there any sausage."

Pat called up, "Is the Zodiac tied down?"
"Almost - is the sausage ready?"
"Will be as soon as you get down here."
"Penelope sat across from her Father at the galley table. In front of her was a large platter of Portuguese link sausage. Pat speared another link off the top, "You don't look tired - not at all. Damn! Five in one night - only two in the same place - spread out across a strange land. That's quite a feat."
"Not if you plan ahead - which we did. Our next two will not be as easy."
"I don't see why not. We'll strike in two days - before the disappearance becomes an item of interest."

Penelope asked, "Who will the ones that work for our four departed friends go too?"
"To the Chief? I don't think so - not if they operate in secret - as I believe they do. It will be a a week before anyone notices four Indians and a guard are missing."
"The Constabulary?"

"Our sponsors. No - we have at least two - maybe five days to complete our mission. Did you leave a paper trail on the last one?"

"I destroyed every piece of evidence."

"Then it's time to set sail to Ovalu Island. Do you want to stand the first or second watch?"

"Second - do you think our dream will come again tonight."

"I hope not, but it may take more than Portuguese link sausage to keep The hairy Red Devils at bay after our work tonight. Lets sail away. I don't want to be caught out here before sunrise - when the fishing fleet sails. Relieve me at three bells."

"Three what?"

"Nautical talk - three in the morning."

"You've been at sea too long."

Wellington - New Zealand

Ian Fleming held his nose, "Max - you've been back for half-a week and your clothes still smell of Curry. You need to air them out."

"I had 'em dry-cleaned. Curry smoke is the devil to get out of woolen clothes. But - it's better than the odor of a New Zealand mutton mouth."

"Your Christmas preparations will have to go on hold."

"Is it time to go?"

"I want you to fly to Christchurch in the morning."

"Are you having difficulty with your Green friends?"

"The Captain is making noises about waiting until February to sail. I can't abide with that. I want no further delays."

"Do you want me to ride herd on the operation?"

"That's why I hired you. Our Green folks lack discipline - they tend to run off on the spur of the moment."

"Now is a fine time to tell me I'm sailing into troubled waters with a bunch of amateurs."

"On land - yes. Once you're away from the dock - you'll be fine. Your ship's Captain is George Potz. Might be too much

of a liberal for you, but he sails a tight ship."

"Another one of those liberal nuts who's willing to murder the innocent for peace?"

"That's what makes him an ideal candidate for our purposes."

"I hope so. I'm not all that keen about sailing on a ship full of fools. Call it premonition."

Max headed to the teapot, "Care for a cup-a?"

"With lemon."

"The usual coming up." Max carried a pot of tea and two cups to Ian's desk. Ian sipped a little - stood up and walked to the window overlooking Cook Straight, "And I'm having second thoughts about the ability of our friends to carry out a successful revolution. What do you think?"

"I'm not fully convinced Diesel and Jaws can pull it off. They don't appear to have the stomach to stay the course for a long drawn out fight. Can't they achieve their goals through the ballot box?"

"Fijians made that mistake once - they're not going to let it happen again."

"Well - from what I've seen - I'd rather be on their side than your Indian friends."

Ian turned away - so Max wouldn't see him attempting to control laughter. "Max - the secret to killing a snake is to cut off its head. If they do that we win. If the revolution is prolonged - we lose."

Max asked - with a glimmer of hope, "Are we in or out."

"I'm an optimist - so we're in. Go to the docks at eight. My seaplane pilot will fly you to Christchurch."

"Do you mind if I still take time off for a bit of trout fishing in the mountains."

"As long as you keep Potz on schedule." Ian turned away and returned to his view of Cook Straight, "You can go. Keep me posted - daily."

"Aye -aye Captain."

Max muttered to himself as he walked to the elevator, "Just being on the seventh floor creates a distorted view of the world. Altitude joins the optical nerve with the lower intestines. Ian is allowing his political philosophy to override his common sense. Oh well - it's a job when others are on the dole."

The elevator arrived and Max rode silently - down to the garage. He hopped into his MG Midget and roared out onto the street, "Hope Ian remembers to have my MG picked up at the docks. I better make a note to remind him. Have to get my gear together early - might decide to hang one on at the Yellow Stripe. Potz? Never heard of him. Won't take long to check out his nest of Greens. They're like magpies - always chatterin'. I'll have time to go fishing. Hope the water is still up in the trout streams. Been wet here, but it might be a dry winter on South Island. White Christmas? Not here - it's midsummer down under."

Max pulled into his garage and closed the door, "Got a few chores to do and then I'm off to the good Ol' Yellow Stripe. Might be my last chance to drink a beer with my mates. Yellow Stripe - what a name. We Kiwis know when to cut and run with the best of them. Why - we only have one Frigate. There is no way we'll fight to defend this land. Don't have the equipment or the backbone. A Kiwi bird has only one white feather and it's on his arse."

Max selected enough clothes for a week, "I'll have a bit of laundry to do on the ship, but I have to fly back from Suva. Can't take a steamer trunk." He packed his MG Midget - closed the garage door and walked to the Yellow Stripe Pub. At one time it was the Lion and Unicorn - quite proud of its fighting British ancestry. But - when the socialists took control of New Zealand and began to disarm and anti-nuke - the publicans painted a yellow stripe down the front in

disgust. Yellow Stripe it was and would remain so - until the Kiwi government stood for something other than the dole. Max opened the door to laughter and then a greeting, "Hello Max."

"Hello mates. I need a beer. I'm off to Christchurch tomorrow." Max had a that premonition again - this time it came with a vision of a Tiger Shark. Deep down he had that sinking feeling, "I'll not be drinking Dominion Bitters with my mates here again."

South Island - New Zealand

Max almost up-chucked on taxi out as Fleming's seaplane rolled in the swells. Ian's son-in-law pilot noticed his chalk white face when Max boarded, "Hung one on did you - Max?"

Max didn't answer - he only grunted. The pilot smiled as he thought to himself, "Max - you're going to have a rough flight. I'll make sure you lose whatever breakfast you've had this morning. Have to admit - you don't look half bad - with that wart off your nose, but you still smell like a publican's arse!"

Max strapped in, "God did I let it all hang out last night. My head feels like the inside of a bass drum - being struck on both sides - vibrated by the sounds of wailing bagpipes."

It was a rocky flight even though the air was smooth. Max knew this pilot was trying his best to turn him green, but steeled his will against the results of a bumpy ride. Splash down was more like crash down. Max disembarked on wobbly legs with the contents of his stomach in place. He threw his suitcase to the dock and followed after it - being forced to jump a growing distance to escape falling in the bay. He turned and shouted at the pilot, "You son-of-a, "but his anger emphasized by the last word - bitch was lost in the engine's roar - as the seaplane turned to taxi away. Max jumped up three steps to avoid the spray.

Captain Potz stood waiting at the top of the gangplank, "Ian's pilot must not care for you. You're carrying too much baggage for a short visit. Are you sailing with us?"

"I'm Ian's insurance policy."

"That's a polite way of saying spy - isn't it?"

"It is, but it's also with great reluctance."

"I understand. Ian was upset with my recommendation that we delay until February. It couldn't be helped. We needed a new part for the engine room. Didn't think it would come in time, but it arrived yesterday and is all ready installed."

"When do you plan to get underway?"

"Twenty-seventh - two days after Christmas. We sail to Akora Harbor from here at twelve noon. Do you have any plans for Christmas? One of our local benefactors is putting on an affair for us. We'd like to have you along."

"Appreciate the invitation, but I've a little trout fishing to do. And if I'm as lucky as I was the last time - we'll have fresh fish for dinner when I return. I'd like to leave most of my luggage on board while I'm away."

"You have a stateroom. Where will you fish?"

"I'll be staying at the cabin of a friend on Ashley River. No phone there - so don't sail without me."

"Be here on time - I won't delay past noon."

Max set his luggage down and stood beside Captain Potz - at the rail, "City sure is decked out today." He looked out on Christchurch - South Island's largest city spruced up in Christmas reds and greens. It wasn't Max's season and the Greens were not his kind of people, "Captain - I have two complaints about your operation. One - it's hard to take you folks seriously. You spend most of your time in the South Pacific. You'd have a lot more credibility if you spent more time near the Arctic where the fish harvest is raping the sea. Two - I support your efforts to save the fish, but don't understand your antinuclear power stance. Doesn't pollute like fossil fuel. You folks are irrational."

Potz counted to twenty before answering, "My politics are none of your damn business. What does matter is how fast your Indian friends can off-load your weapons when we arrive in Fiji. Only two reasons I'm helping Mr. Fleming out - I'm being paid a bundle to haul your guns and I'm a militant socialist - an advocate of achieving my ends with the barrel of a gun. Stick with your trout - Max and leave the fate of the world to the socialist dream."

"What you really mean is - power to the people means power to the people's leaders."

"You're catching on - Max - there's gold in those socialist hills. But - I am a bit nervous about your cargo. Not the first time we've hauled weapons, but it may be the last. I'll show you to your cabin."

Max picked up his suitcase and followed, "What are your plans for the three Zodiacs you have strapped to your decks?"

"They have a dual purpose. We use them to harass warships and whalers. And we'll load them with your weapons and haul them to the dock. They are fast and have a low profile. We can't take my ship into the dock."

"Why not?"

"Have to pay port and dockage fees. Can you see us hauling weapons crates down the gangplank?"

"No - your plan is sound."

"What do you think of the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection*?"

"Does open ocean rust bucket ring a bell. Don't you fellows believe in scrapping and painting?"

"Part of our disguise. You'll find inside accommodations are first class. When you're unpacked - meet me in the Ward Room for lunch. We serve in half-an-hour. After lunch - I'll give you a short ship's tour and you can be on your way."

"I forgot to bring along aspirin. Does your cook have any? I really hung one on at the Yellow Stripe last night?"

"We have a bowl of aspirin in the Ward Room."

"You saved my life."

As rusty as the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection* was on the outside - inside the cabins would be the envy of the Queen Elizabeth. Max unpacked all, but those items he would use at his mountain cabin and walked to the Ward Room. He sat with Captain Potz and stared at the other passengers, "You've a boat full of the great unwashed. None of them look like they're familiar with an honest day's work. Thought most of these folks disappeared when Jack Kerouac died and the Beat movement turned commercial."

"Don't knock it. They pay my way - or their parents do. These are the idle sons and daughters of the nouveau riche."

"Your crew looks like sailors."

"Except for a few of the deckies - the rest of them are hardened Merchies."

Max heaved a sigh of relief, "Maybe your ship won't sink in the first storm she encounters."

Captain Potz laughed, "We've been at it quite awhile. If you've finished your lunch - we'll take a tour."

Didn't take long. Max looked the hold over, "Dry and clean - it's ready for weapon crates. How will we load?" Can be topside, but if the Koro Sea is calm - we'll load her from the side. Look to port - your left - see the hinges. It folds down."

"How do you keep the water out?"

"Like an airplane door - it's self sealing."

"Carried contraband before - hasn't she?"

"That - Max is why socialism is so profitable."

"Looks to me like your *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection* is open and ready to do the red devils business."

"Have you seen those hairy red things in your dreams - too?"

"Just a glimpse. Lately I'm seeing a giant Tiger Shark with a large toothy grin."

"Are you going to call Ian and tell him it's a go?"

"Yes - on my way out - have a rental car arriving in ten

minutes. I'll call him from the pay phone on the dock - in case anyone is trying to listen in."

"Give Fleming my regards."

Ian was relieved, "Great - were back on schedule. What do you think of the passengers?"

"They could all use a good scrubbing. Wish I had brought a camera along so you could see what a motley crew looks like."

"Don't worry about them. They're all true believers. Every single one is a killer for peace. No port authority in the South Pacific will tangle with your group of radicals. We couldn't purchase a better cover."

"Did you retrieve my MG Midget?"

"Had my Secretary pick it up two hours after you left. It's downstairs in my office garage. She says you have a cylinder that's leaking - needs an engine overhaul."

"She's right - I plan to take care of it when I return."

"She'll take it in for you - so it'll be ready when your voyage is over. Talked to our friends in the South Pacific. They're ready for you."

"I'm off to the mountains. Can't call from there."

"No need too. Good luck on your fishing trip. If you run across a likely dam site - mark it down and I'll have my engineers take a look-see."

Max hung the receiver up, "In a pigs eye - I will. Dam up my favorite trout streams - never!"

Levuka - Fiji

Patricia helped Penelope bring *Happy Hour* in to Levuka Harbor's dock. Penelope tied the lines as Patricia held the helm - holding their Cat against the dock. Penelope returned to the helm, "Is Father still asleep?"

"Out like a lamb, but he seems to be tossing more than normal. Would you care for breakfast?"

"Just sausage and eggs - no bread."

"How long do we plan to stay?"

"Not too long - maybe two - three days. Father mentioned a Christmas sail to a deserted island in the Yasawas. I'd just as soon stay here and dine at a good restaurant."

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

Pat was the second one up. He looked at his watch, "Twelve-thirty - I've slept nine hours. He rinsed his face and opened the stateroom door to the main cabin. Penelope sat at the galley table - pouring over a street map. Pat asked, "Where's your Mother?"

"At the shower locker - cleaning up. I've located the One from Column 'E' and the One from Column 'F's homes."

"Where are they?"

"Right here in town. We may have to leave evidence."

"How so?"

"We don't have time to develop an elaborate con to make them come to us."

Pat asked, "What do you recommend?"

"I'll be too obvious - why don't you do the leg work on this one. Once we see where they are and record their habits - we'll decide."

"Disposal?"

"I'll leave that up to you. It might be too hard. Heart attack might do for one, but not both. Too much of a coincidence."

"Traffic accident?"

"Too little time for a set up."

"Murder and self defense?"

"None of it strikes me. How about a trip on the Zodiac and we'll feed your Tiger Shark?"

"That's the ticket. All we have to do is find a quiet spot in the harbor and entice them there. Our shark will do the rest - no evidence - no crime."

"I'll scout around after I fix you breakfast."

"Is there any sausage?"

"I have a fresh platter warming. Did you have a rough night?"

"The Hairy ones were tossing me about with pitchforks. And you?"

"On a spit again - over an open fire. I woke up covered with perspiration."

Pat returned from his scouting trip a little after dark, "We're in luck. I made contact. We're dining together at the best restaurant in Levuka."

"How do you know that?"

"I asked them. They think I'm a high roller with contraband to sell. I used the One from Column 'C' as my contact. They want a piece of the action."

"What if they call to verify?"

"Who's going to answer? They won't call the authorities."

"What's the con?"

"We have a small freighter at anchor offshore. Have the Zodiac ready at eight-thirty. I'll bring them to the far end of the dock."

"The dark area - good idea."

"Have a bottle of Champagne and three glasses waiting."

"What costume shall I wear?"

"Wear something brief and nautical."

"Short shorts - a middy blouse and no bra?"

"Great. What method do you recommend?"

"Ice pick - less chance of blowing a hole in your Zodiac."

"Wait until we're out of the harbor - as they toast our illicit venture - we'll send them to their reward."

"I'm going below to change clothes. You should wear your white deck shoes - scarf - Rolex Submariner and blazer."

Pat brought the One from Column E and the One from Column F to the deserted - far end of the dock. Penelope sailed in with their Zodiac - decked out in blue short-shorts

and a middy blouse split open to her waist - showing an ample amount of breast. Pat's two victims stumbled down the ladder with their mouths open. He introduced his daughter as, "My First Mistress" instead of First Mate - to the laughter of their passengers.

"I'm shoving off, "Penelope called out, "I want to return your passengers before eleven tonight."
The One from Column 'E' asked, "What is the name of your ship and how long will it take to sail out to her."
Penelope answered, "Not long she's only three miles out. Her name is *Red Rover*. Hold on to the sides - I'm going to open her up. It'll be a fast trip."
The One from Column 'F' asked, "What did she say?"
Pat smiled and answered, "It won't take long."

After clearing the last channel marker - Penelope crooked her finger and motioned to The One from Column 'E' to come closer. With a grin as wide as a Cheshire Cat's - he scooted aft. As he stroked her leg - she looked over at her Father and nodded. Two ice picks found two hearts in an instant. On cue - a giant dorsal fin appeared - trailing aft of their Zodiac. Pat rolled The One from Column 'E' over the side. He disappeared in a foam of red blood. Penelope turned the Zodiac around toward port as Pat rolled The One from Column F overboard - close, but not too close to the feeding frenzy. Within minutes - all that was left of their passengers was in a sea of red and soon - inside a churning mass of tiger sharks.

Pat shined his flashlight into the bottom of the Zodiac, "Only a few drips. What was that *Red Rover* bit all about?"
"You are getting forgetful. Don't you remember the Party Game - *Red Rover - Red Rover - Come Over.*"
Pat laughed, "Both of our Socialist friends came over."

"And it's all over for them.

"If his six Indian friends hadn't been so secretive - they might have been harder to dispose of."

"How long do you think we have before one of their associates misses them?"

"Since they won't let the right hand know what the left is doing - might be as long as two weeks. With all six missing - whoever is keeping track of them might believe they're away at an off-site meeting."

"And they are - so to speak. Are we going to sail away tonight?"

"No need too. We'll leave after we wake up in the morning?"

"How much gas is left in the outboard tank?"

"Half full."

"We'll fill up the cans when we return to Suva Bay. Don't want to raise suspicions."

"We're still sailing to the Yasawas - aren't we?"

"Of course - we need cover."

"Unless you spend twenty-four hours pleasure cruising - we have more than enough gas."

Pat slowly folded over the sheet on his side of the bed and made an attempt to silently slip in. Patricia turned over, "What time is it?"

"One a.m. - what woke you up?"

"Garlic breath from the sausage you and Penny had tonight. Where have you been?"

"On an errand for Chief Bau."

"I hope it was legal."

"Nothing of importance. He requested our assistance to solve a small political problem he has with Indian constituents."

"Did you resolve it for him?"

"We did - it was more of a cleanup thing. Are you ready to sail away on our Christmas voyage?"

"Are we still on vacation?"

"Of course. I know - you want to sleep in."

Penelope Penny stumbled out of her cabin, "What time is it?" Her Father answered, "Late - you slept in - it's nine in the morning."

"I would still be asleep if it wasn't for the wonderful aroma of your Portuguese sausages. I'm glad you woke me up. I was being roasted on a spit - again. Will we ever be rid of our dreams of the hairy Red Devils?"

"I'm afraid they'll only leave our dreams after we've been given the sacrament of penance."

"Not until then?"

"Only if we're willing to confess our sins to our family Priest."

"He would die of a heart attack."

Penelope wondered, "Weren't you visited in your dreams?"

"Yes, but my friend - the Tiger Shark chased them away."

"I'm not certain I want to sail on these waters with him around. He might turn on you and us."

"That's why I've decided not to sail to Australia. Don't worry - we're safe for now. He has gone away. In my dreams he returned to Norfolk Island - to be with his friends and wait."

"Wait for who - for what?"

"A Kiwi and fermented mutton was the only glimpse he gave me. But - your premonition is well taken. In my dream last night he smiled at me and he had that look - like he was very hungry - the one we get when we look at link sausage. Talk about sausage - ours are ready. Do you want eggs - too?" "I should - woman can't live by sausage alone."

"Very funny my wandering Daughter. Just for that you will be our egg Chef."

"How about a soufflé?"

"I was thinking of a sausage omelet."

"A sausage omelet with cheese coming up."

"You know - from the back you look just like your Mother."

"I came from her egg."

Patricia opened her stateroom door, "I smell a sausage and cheese omelet. Is there enough for me?"

Penelope smiled, "Yes - I made enough for three servings."

"Where is Pat?"

"Above decks casting off. Get dressed - we'll dine at the helm."

The harbormaster untied the lines, "Where are you sailing too today?"

"Yasawas - going to anchor out under the stars and enjoy a quiet Christmas."

"Be careful on Bligh Waters - lots of hidden shoals and there's been some unusual shark sightings offshore."

"Not unusual for here is it?"

"No, but this one is a real giant Tiger Shark."

"We'll keep an eye out and stay clear." Pat cranked up the diesel and backed away from the dock.

Penelope and Patricia began by carrying a carafe of coffee to the helm and finished with platters and plates of food. Between bites - Pat asked, "What do you think of my catamaran?" Patricia was pleased, "Fast and stable. How soon can we raise the sail?"

"Won't be long - as soon as we clear a couple more channel markers. Can't raise it here - we'll go to fast for harbor speed."

Penelope asked, "Which Yasawa island are we sailing too?"

"Don't know if they have a name. It's in the channel between Nathula and Navita. We can raise the main - now. Take the helm and I'll go forward."

"Aye aye my capitan!"

Pat unfurled the main and instantly - *Happy Hour* sprang forward as if she had been freed from chains. He returned to the helm, "Stay with it - while I finish brunch. Great omelet."

Penelope said, "We're clear of the harbor. What is this

channel called?"

"Vatu Ira - we're almost in Bligh Water."

"The Harbormaster warned me that Bligh Water can be shallow. Said to stay several leagues south of Yandua Island. That'll keep us clear of hidden coral heads."

"Coral heads?"

"Tips of underwater reefs."

Yasawa Islands

Penelope called out, "We're as close in as I want to take her."

Pat came jumped over the bow and walked toward shore, "Bring her on in - we can beach her - it's all sand on the bottom. How do you like our little deserted island?"

"It's beautiful - almost beyond description. Are you sure no one lives on it?"

"Chief said there wasn't a well. Clean up the boat."

"What! I'm not a chambermaid."

"I mean - stow the lines and drop anchor off the stern - so she doesn't float away. I'm going to scout around for firewood. We're going to cook lobsters out on the beach."

Patricia had the fire started and rig fashioned over the blaze by the time Pat returned with another arm load of driftwood, "We can hang a pot from the spit to cook the lobsters."

"If the flames don't burn it away."

Penelope wrapped large baking potatoes in wet green leaves, "We'll lay these on the coals when the time comes."

Penelope smiled as her shorts and halter slid to the sand, "I'm going for a swim. Why don't you join me?" Pat walked toward the Cat, "Go ahead - I'm going to open a couple of bottles of wine and let them breath a bit. Might even sample a little. Sunset is in and hour. Is everything ready for the fire?"

Patricia answered - as she stripped down to the buff, "All but the sausage. If you and Penny want to add it to the lobster - you'll need to thaw some out." She ran into the water - dove and swam to Penelope, "Come in - water's warm - it must be eighty-six degrees."

Pat added driftwood to the fire - opened a bottle of wine and leaned back against the base of a palm tree, "So far a great vacation. My immediate family is skinny dipping in the green-blue waters off of a deserted Pacific island and I am sipping a glass of aged Bordeaux Red." He watched as they swam, "God they are drop dead gorgeous" with visual pleasure as his wife and stepdaughter walked out of the ocean toward him - salt water droplets dripping from glistening naked bodies. He placed his hand against the palm and stood up - offering each a towel. Too late - each took an arm and dragged a not too reluctant Pat Penny toward the ocean - scattering his clothes along the strand as they ran into the gentle surf.

*"There's more evidence to come yet -
please your Majesty" said the White
Rabbit - jumping up in a great hurry
- "this paper has just been picked up."
"What's in it?" said the Queen.
"I haven't opened it yet" said the
White Rabbit -*

7

Moscow

Natasha heard the ringing and was relieved - the spit on which she was being skewered was to close to the fire and turning much to slow. She could feel the hair beginning to singe on folded arms - her skin was blistering. And the cruelest blow of all - leading a throng of hairy Red Devils was Bulgar. She protested, "But he is dead - isn't he?" The third and fourth rings awakened Natasha from another night of restless sleep. She rubbed her eyes - reached out for her Western alarm clock and pushed the plunger down - the ringing continued.

She sat up on the edge of her bed - looked over at her alarm clock, "Seven in the morning" and glanced at her phone. It was still ringing. She waited - counting, "Nine - ten - eleven - twelve" and picked up the receiver, "Mechanics - may I help you?"

"Mechanics auto repair?"

"Yes, but we repair only Western cars."

"I have an American auto that needs a major overhaul. Can I bring it in this morning for an estimate?"

"Let me check my schedule." Natasha waited for ten seconds,

"I may be able to fit you in this morning. When can I expect you?"

"Is ten o'clock too early?"

"Ten is agreeable."

"Will you be wearing a uniform?"

"Is it required?"

"Yes."

"I'll wear Mercedes brown."

"Good - ten then?"

"Yes - of course."

Natasha replaced the telephone's undertaker black hand set into its ornate French - cradle and frowned, "My lovely vacation is soon to end. She looked out her bedroom window onto street lamps lighting a dark Moscow dawn - snow falling in thick - dry clumps, "The streets will be deserted. Only fools and the KGB will venture out today. Why do they want me to wear my uniform? I will be too easy to identify."

She telephoned her Mother, "I might be away on business. The children are away at boarding school. I have not changed the lock. If I do not call tonight - "

"I understand - I will come over tomorrow."

"Mother?"

"Yes?"

"I have food enough for three months. Use it before it goes bad - promise?"

"This time I will. Our State store shelves have been empty for over a month."

"You may use my special card anytime you want too."

Natasha's Mother didn't answer.

Natasha knew, "Of the old school - too much pride."

Natasha stood up - her nightgown slipped from shoulders to the floor. She did a ballet turn in front of her bedroom mirror, "You still have it! I've worked hard to maintain this body - still soft - without the hard edges of a body builder. Time is running against me. I need to attract a new husband. No! I will not look. I am done with that part of my life. Pleasure is always available. None of my coworkers interest me. If I do - I must find an equal." She held her breasts high in her hands, "Still - a little tuck

here and there wouldn't hurt." Natasha released her breasts, "Good - they barely moved" and walked to the bathing room. She filled her tub with hot water, "I will take the time - to soak in a long hot bath. I must be in tune with my body. She entered - sliding slowly from the back - stroking her nipples gently with the tips of her fingers.

Natasha opened her eyes - her water was now tepid. She climbed out - reached for a towel and patted her hair to a damp dry, "The natural curl will take over. The air is so dry - it will not take long." She lifted her right leg - pulled on new French underwear and looked in the mirror - like a moth attracted to a flame, "No bra - not yet. In a year or two maybe." She pulled on a French silk shirt - buttoned it and tied her tie. Natasha slipped into a uniform skirt and then her jacket - turning from side to side - looking into a full length closet mirror, "A fraction too tight - like it always is. Any advantage - or diversion can be to my advantage. I wonder if the Chairman of The Central Committee is waiting for me? Will I have a new assignment? Or will I meet the same fate as Bulgar?"

Natasha stepped out of her apartment's elevator. A long black government limousine waited outside her door. Her escort rushed to open the door as the driver opened the passenger door. She settled into the back seat and asked her escort, "Where is our destination?"

"A dachi outside of Kalingrad - Comrade. We'll send someone to your apartment for warm weather clothing. Will there be someone who can assist?"

"My Mother will arrive tomorrow."

"You will be out of country for up to sixty days. Do you want me to inform your Mother?"

"Yes - call her tomorrow - she will let my children know. They are away at boarding school. Mother will be staying in my apartment until I return."

"Quite a midwinter storm."

"It will keep Moscow's streets clear of those who should not be driving."

Natasha looked out of her passenger window at the snow - cold and foreboding - she felt warm. They passed the obelisk honoring Russian achievements in Space - she wondered, "Will I ever find another suitable mate. There is a Ship's Captain in the Black Sea Fleet. No - not yet, but maybe - it is worth exploring."

Her escort asked, "Did you say something - Comrade?"

"With this new snow - I feel like an Arctic explorer."

Their limousine stopped in front of the Foreign Ministry dachi. Natasha was escorted inside by her fellow passenger. They stopped outside the parlor on the first floor and The Central Committee Secretary stepped outside to greet her, "Welcome Colonel Natasha."

"Have I been promoted - jumped two ranks?"

"Of course and you deserve it. You have served the State well. How many enemies have you sent on their way? I know - don't ask - don't tell."

He pinned on her new rank and kissed both cheeks.

She gave a slight bow, "Thank you - I'm almost speechless. With the cutback in personnel - I did not expect this honor."

"You deserve this modest symbol of our recognition. The Chairman insisted on it. Your duties will expand with your promotion."

"Will I keep my - secondary mission?"

"No - not secondary - prime. You most certainly are not relieved of your prime mission. We have important work for you. You have replaced Bulgar Spion. You are now our number one. The Chairman has asked that you keep a low profile. You are not to discuss your promotion with anyone. He may even ask that you use your talents as a decoy."

Natasha asked, "Am I being given a new assignment?"
"You are - as our Englisher friends say - going down under."
"To Australia?"
"And New Zealand. You leave in three days. Good hunting.
We know you will bag a fox or two."

Natasha was in shock. Her promotion date was still five years away - and to skip a rank. Still she wondered, "Why didn't The Chairman present me with my rank. The Secretary - not unusual, but - unless they have decided to place me at a distance. That makes sense - I would do the same if I were in their shoes." Her thoughts were spinning out of control. Natasha activated her internal gyroscope and the spinning stopped. As her escort led her away she reestablished her guard - her emotions were now in check - under complete control.

Her escort stopped at a door on the first floor, "This is your suite - Comrade. Wait inside. You will be contacted later - for your first class."
Natasha nodded and went inside, "I must keep my guard up. My superiors may be preparing the same gift I gave to Bulgar for me. If I was going to do it - is this the path I would choose? Would I promote my agent and send her away to an area she is not familiar with? The South Pacific is far far away from my normal hunting grounds. No - that is impossible - I would not eliminate my agent there. She would be on her toes. No - the time to do it is when she is relaxed - with someone she knows. And that's where we made our mistake with Bulgar. I was an unknown. Natasha! You are over reacting. Your mind is racing. It might be true. My promotion is a reward and this a real assignment."

Natasha soon learned - her special assignment was to be a standard wet procedure - eliminating three socialist problem children. Her cover - a KGB inspector - checking

Security. This too was covered. Her overt mission was to discover ways to impede relocation of American forces in the South Pacific. To look for and identify new or existing training areas that might be used for joint training. And her final cover - to assist the Cultural attaché in a future Bolshoi visit. All of these missions were real - as good covers should be, but it made Natasha smile, "I have never been this deep - under cover. This wet procedure must very sensitive." She closed her notebook after her last class - Natasha knew, "I need not worry. I will not be assassinated down under."

One Flew East

After suffering through four days of intensive cultural and local language idiomatic training - Natasha was ready to board an airplane for friendly India. On her layover in New Delhi - she would be informed of the identity of her targets and given final instructions. As Natasha settled into her First Class seat - she continued to review notes made on Australian idioms and thought, "English is difficult enough, but this is ridiculous. G'day - bewdie - fair go - she'll be apple? Why - the only word I know is tucker. Someone must speak English in Australia."

Natasha continued her review until she was satisfied that she would never understand Strine. She accepted a pillow from the Steward and leaned back. It was time to isolate and lock away all thoughts of children in a separate mental compartment not to be opened until she landed back in Moscow. As her lock snapped in place - Natasha leaned back and closed her eyes. She slept until her Aeroflot aircraft touched down on the runway outside of New Delhi.

The India Customs Official waved Natasha through without a glance at her luggage - a common courtesy - exchanged among dear friends. Natasha stepped outside the terminal and

almost fainted in the stifling heat. She wiped her brow with a handkerchief and turned to her KGB escort, "Is it always this hot?"

"No - it is winter here - too. This is our cool spell. You forgot to complain about our pollution."

"Is that what I smell - it is awful."

"It gets worse in summer."

She nodded toward the passenger door of her waiting embassy sedan, "Is it air-conditioned?"

"We could not survive without it." He opened the door and she waited inside in the air-conditioned limo as the Porter loaded her luggage into the trunk.

As they traveled through New Delhi to the embassy - the stench of animal and human waste was so overpowering it filtered through the sedan's air-conditioning vents into the back seat. She covered her nostrils with her handkerchief, "The stench is awful - how can you stand a daily dose of this?"

"Have you ever been to Karachi?"

"No - this is my first time in your part of the world."

"There is a place in Karachi - on the road between the docks and downtown - called Breathless Corner. It makes New Delhi's stench the odor of flowers and perfume."

Days later - an impatient Natasha paced inside her embassy room, "Three days and all I have learned is how much the Station Chief wants to return to Russia. I am becoming increasingly irritated by this heat and humidity and the incompetence of our embassy personnel. No one knows the name of my contacts down under - or the location and names of my targets. Why am I here?"

That evening - as she was handed an envelope - Natasha knew. On one page were the names of her targets and her contact, "New Zealand! I would not have guessed. Ian

Fleming? Where have I heard that name before." Natasha realized that this stopover was a ruse - a necessary part of her cover. The Black Widow was once again in the center of a web of intrigue.

She returned to her room and glanced at the calendar, "How could I forget. It is the day after Western Christmas. Orthodox Christmas is on the seventh - after the New Year. I wish The Central Committee Secretary had not insisted I leave before the holiday. I have not shopped for my family. Grandfather Frost will not visit - unless - the peddler stands at the airport."

She picked up the phone and called the Cultural Attaché, "I need tickets for an immediate flight to Australia." He moved heaven and earth to get her a flight through Singapore in the morning. Not out of duty, but to be rid of her, "There is something about that one that makes my skin crawl." He returned her call, "I have a flight through Singapore to Sydney. Does that meet with your approval?" "Only if it is First Class." "Yes on Singapore Airlines. Your departure is at eight a.m. tomorrow morning."

Natasha left the embassy an hour earlier than she needed too - to escape the morning sun's heat and New Delhi's stench and humidity. She did not wait for her KGB escort to open her passenger door, "I can't wait to get out of here. The odor and heat are unbearable. Don't waste my time - I want to be on my way."

Natasha browsed through the peddler stands inside the terminal until it was time to board. She looked, but could not find a thing suitable for Christmas. She checked her watch - "Maybe." She requested and was allowed to board Singapore Airlines - early. As the First Class service began

- Natasha knew - she would never fly Aeroflot again without remembering today's service. She began a movable feast with prawns in oyster sauce and treat after treat until she was pleasantly sated.

Natasha's flight to Singapore was over much too soon for her liking, "This is a first. I stayed awake the whole way. Any flight after this will be a letdown. And if I wasn't sailing in two days - I would find a way to stay over here - in Singapore. I have never seen a city - so clean." She searched through the shops at the airport while waiting to board her flight to Sydney. She looked, but could not find Christmas presents suitable for her family in Moscow.

The local embassy asked if she wanted an escort, but Natasha declined, "Make arrangements for me to stay in the airline VIP lounge. I will rest until it is time for my flight to depart."

If Natasha's flight to Singapore was magical - her flight to Sydney was rustic. A planeload of vacationing Aussies filled the cabin with down under Cockney accents. Natasha checked her notes - comparing their words with what she had written down. She almost understood, but not quite, "I have an idea what they mean, but I'll never be able to speak Strine."

The Consulate Chief waited outside of Customs for Natasha, "Welcome to Sydney. How long do you plan to stay?" "I have had enough of planes. Can you arrange for a sedan to drive me to the Capitol in the morning? What is its name?" "Canberra." He looked Natasha over - out of the side of his right eye - not wanting to confront her head on. He made an instant decision to be rid of her, "My consulate car will be waiting for you. Let me know the time you desire." "Have you made reservations for me?"

"At the Park Royal."

"A hotel?"

"Yes on Darling Harbor."

"That's a strange name for a harbor."

"This is a new country - very informal. Aussies work hard - play hard and some of them even know how to cook. Will you require an escort this evening?"

"No - at least I can drink the water here without fear of being poisoned."

"You must have been in India."

"Regrettably so. Have your sedan waiting for me at seven tomorrow morning. I will need it for only a short time to complete my work."

How long?"

"Two - three days at the most."

As soon as Natasha's luggage was inside the hotel - the Consulate Chief walked away.

Natasha turned to say thank you, but stopped short when she saw his back walking through the revolving door. She turned and asked, "Are your shops open this evening. I have Christmas shopping to do."

"Yes - until ten. Christmas was two days back."

"Yours - my Orthodox is in two weeks."

Natasha waited until the bellhop opened the drapes before tipping him. As he closed the door - she began to undress - peeling away the stench of the Far East away as she shed her clothes. She entered the bathroom, "A shower! I am back in civilization." She turned the water temperature to tepid warm and stepped in, "Free shampoo! I never want to leave this modern miracle," but she did. Natasha dressed in summer slacks and a white silk blouse - both of which were very revealing. She locked the door to her room - rode the elevator to the ground floor and strode outside into a warm Sydney summer evening.

Natasha looked at the time through a shop window, "Eight p.m. - I have two hours before the shops close." She walked along harbor streets - looking into shop windows until she found the right ones. A Koala Teddy Bear for her son - an Italian designer purse for her Mother and a set of hunting boomerangs for her daughter. She smiled, "Like mother - like daughter. She is my huntress. My son? More of a student or a bureaucrat. The embassy will have these presents in Moscow before Christmas - or heads will roll. I am hungry. Where is the restaurant the Desk Clerk recommended. I remember - on the harbor."

When she read the sign - *Tucker & Prawn* - Natasha knew she had found dinner. She was escorted to a table near the kitchen. She faced the Maitre d' and smiled. He reacted like a sea bass as it looked into a shark's open jaws. Less than a minute later - he held her chair as she sat down at a table overlooking Darling Harbor. She had an unobstructed view of Sydney's famous Opera House. Natasha decided to order link sausage on the barbie. She whispered to her waiter, "Link sausage - at least two pounds. Is it pork or mutton?"

"We have both."

"Pork - with Italian seasoning if you have it."

"It is very spicy and quite hot. More Portuguese than Italian. We have a milder smoked sausage."

"The spicy sausage will be fair dinkum. And a bottle of red wine. Do you have a Merlot?"

"I'll fetch it right away - it's a bewdie. I won't come the raw prawn with you - Miss."

As he walked away - Natasha opened her purse and checked her notes, "He said it is a good wine and he won't try to fool me. I'm glad I took notes."

He returned with her Merlot - opened it and poured a small amount into her wine glass.

She swirled and tasted, "Excellent - you may pour."

Her waiter left - shaking his head, "This Shela has a European accent with an Aussie tongue. Oz is indeed a strange place." Natasha raised her glass, "Za Vacha Zdorovye to you Bulgar - you bastard - wherever you are."

Natasha wolfed down link sausage after link sausage and looked around the room to see if anyone was watching. She took in the Aussie restaurant scene, "Rough and rustic. It reminds me of the American western movies I watched in KGB training. The men here are very independent. They drink beer like my Tovarishch drink vodka. I could settle here. It is - how do the Americans say? A rough around the edges style of living." She stopped toying with her last link of sausage and devoured it. She left a sizable tip - wiped the grease from her chin and left.

Her waiter removed the dishes and watched as Natsha walked away, "Bewdie butt, but that Shela would rather drink with the flies."

Natasha walked along the harbor - window shopping - relishing the cool air of an Australian midsummer evening. She observed and absorbed all the Strine idiom she cared for - or needed, "They do speak English - if it is with a strange accent. I won't be around long enough to become an expert. But - natives always appreciate an effort to learn a few words and that is all I will do. I would like to spend an extra day here and in Singapore, but my work waits. The pace here is much slower than Washington DC and the people are certainly harder to read." She checked her bearings, "I better return. I must have walked two kilometers away from my hotel." She turned and looked in both directions, "Good - an illuminated sign." She looked at the stars, "And north."

Twenty minutes later - Natasha walked into the front door of her hotel. Natasha stopped at the desk and checked for messages. There was one, "My sedan will be waiting

outside at seven in the morning." She asked the desk clerk, "Where is all the singing coming from?"

"Inside our Pub. An Australian rules football team from Perth is celebrating a victory over the local lads." He added with pride, "If you want a drink - we're allowed to stay open until one."

"I might peek in - I have to be on my way at seven. When does your dining room open for breakfast?"

"Six - we're early risers."

Natasha walked to the door of the pub and looked in. The smell of wool jerseys and testosterone was overpowering. The singing stopped - the football players turned and stared at Natasha. Natasha smiled, "Now I know how the lamb feels when it stares up into the jaws of a wolf." She turned away - walked to the elevator and returned to her floor - alone, "I am so tired, but from what? Natasha opened the door - the aroma of football jerseys still filling her nostrils. Her mind was clouded, "They are exciting, but jet lag calls. I wonder?" She looked at her clock, "No - it is almost eleven. But - I must try that shower again. Natasha began to undress - folding her clothes on the chair. She grabbed her toilet kit and walked into the bathroom. She turned the shower handle from tepid to cold. Natasha stepped in and shivered, "Snow Shark indeed!"

Natasha awoke - refreshed and dressed by six-thirty, "I was not visited in my dreams by red demons, but by a Tiger Shark. One who honors me by calling me the Snow Shark. A most unusual dream." She closed her suitcases and left them in the middle of her room, "The bellboy will take care of these. I have thirty minutes before my car arrives. I will have a light breakfast."

Heads turned as she entered the dining room. Natasha smiled inwardly, "I still have it." This morning she was

escorted to a window table - a waiter waiting, "Coffee or tea?"

"Your tea?"

"A strong English breakfast."

"I'll have a pot with bangers and scrambled eggs. Make that a double order of bangers. Will you please expedite - I have a car coming for me at seven."

Natasha looked out the window - at Darling Harbor and the rising sun's reflection on the Opera House, "What a gorgeous view."

Her waiter returned with a pot of tea and her order, "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

She tasted her tea, "Yes - a plastic cup for my tea. I will take the rest with me. Oh - the bill, too - please. I must depart in ten minutes."

As Natasha paid for her room - the consulate sedan rolled to a stop at the hotel entrance. She exited the front door like a European Princess - bellboys carrying bags in her wake. She stood by - sipping tea from a plastic cup as her luggage was loaded into the trunk. Her driver opened the rear passenger door and held it - waiting. She asked, "How long will it take?"

"The better part of a day - Comrade."

"Move out!"

"We have prepared tea and sandwiches - located in the console against the wall. Let me know if you need to stop."

"Is there anything of interest along the way?"

"Kangaroos and wallabies - kangaroos and wallabies and little else. A lot like our steppes." He closed the door and entered the driver's side.

Sydney - like Washington DC was designed like half of a giant wheel - with it's spokes traveling outward for roads. Their trip outward from the hub was fast - traveling in

reverse traffic flow. Natasha enjoyed the drive to the outskirts of Sydney. Houses decked out in green - white and brown dotted the hill sides. She poured a cup from the thermos, "Sweet Russian tea - it is a treat." As they drove through the foothills of the Great Dividing Range - Natasha thought, "Like our steppes - indeed. We don't have trees and marsupials bounding across the road. Why - we almost hit that last one. Huge - he seemed unafraid of cars." The further away from Sydney - the more barren the landscape. The only two highlights on were the rest stops at Picton and Goulburn. As they drove along the road - curving around Lake George - Natasha leaned back and catnapped.

Natasha sat up - half awake as they arrived on the outskirts of Canberra. Not far from the modest Russian Embassy - in the suburbs of Canberra. Unlike her lodging in Washington DC - the Canberra compound was small in size and staff. She was greeted by a harried Cultural Attaché, "My staff is quite limited and very busy with the draw down of US Forces in the South Pacific. And now you arrive to check our security. We are overloaded."

Natasha stared at him until she saw his body visibly shrink before her eyes. She commanded, "Have someone take my luggage to my room. I do not have time to listen to your problems. Assemble your staff and meet me in the conference room in thirty minutes. You will receive your guidance - then." As he stood with his mouth open. Natasha shouted, "Move - you insolent bastard!"

As Natasha entered the small conference room - the Cultural Attaché and his staff edged away from her without moving their chairs. She waited for the rustling of papers to cease, "I will address your security when I return from New Zealand."

The Station Chief asked, "And when well that be?"

She stared at him until he cringed, "When I have finished my

mission. You are under orders not - I repeat not to advise our New Zealand Embassy or anyone else here that I will be there. Any violation of this order will result in extreme action. Am I understood?"

It appeared that Natasha's reputation had preceded her. The only response was red faces and nodding heads. Natasha looked around the room - her glance pausing on each member of the Cultural Attaché's staff. Their blank stares confirmed her belief that all KGB Foreign Ministry types were barely one notch above an analog tape recorder, "I am interested in discovering where the new joint training range will be." The Station Attaché answered, "We know nothing of a new joint training range."

Natasha waited until his staff stopped squirming in their chairs before responding. She snapped, "If one knows about military installations - do they not require a railhead - highway and buildings for support? Will not the aviation notes spell out restricted areas - Tovarishch!" She spit out her words like a Prussian military instructor to a squad of slow learning soldiers, "Australians and Americans will have to sign an agreement for use of Australian territory for a joint training range."

The Station Chief again demonstrated his ignorance - stating the obvious, "The Australian Outback is of enormous size - Comrade. An aerial training range could be established anywhere."

Natasha decided not to rub his face in his own stupidity, "Very good - Tovarishch - I agree with you. The Australian Outback is an immense desert. That is why it is a good location for a training range. You know of the installation at Alice Springs?"

His staff nodded, "Yes."

"Find the Air Station - the support buildings - the closest town and transportation network and you will find where a

range is being constructed. Your task is not as difficult as you believe it is. Any joint use facility requires the cooperation of politicians. There is no sieve that leaks better than a politician. Question your contacts and you'll know status - schedule and location. I must leave for New Zealand. When I return I expect to hear your answers and well thought out recommendations."

Natasha turned and walked out of the briefing room - leaving her audience in stunned silence. She climbed the stairs to her room thinking, "This cover makes little sense. In our long list of priorities - what America does in the South Pacific is of little consequence - as long as they don't interfere with our friends in India and New Zealand. Southeast Asia? Even we don't want to be stuck in that quagmire again. I have sown the seeds of discontent. Now is the time to leave - my work here is finished. I will need airline reservations for tomorrow morning and I am quite hungry. I hope the embassy kitchen has sausage."

The embassy driver dropped Natasha off at the departure gate - helped unload her luggage and drove away like a scared rabbit. She was pleased, "I have their attention. When I return all my work will be done for me. Yesterday - a day full of sausage and contentment - I gained another nights rest - except for the Tiger Shark. Am I really a Snow Shark?" The boarding call for her airplane to New Zealand interrupted her mental regurgitation. Natasha knew better than to ask for tea, "I'll have what do you call it - without vodka?" "A Virgin Mary." "Yes and did you get my request for a special meal?" "You're the one who requested a triple order of bangers. Are you sure you don't want eggs with them?" "Of course I do. It is a new diet fad. My Secretary must have forgotten to advise you." "I'll serve you when we level off."

After devouring the last link of sausage and sip of her second Virgin Mary - Natasha leaned back - closed her eyes and began another round of mental gymnastics. Her concerns were flooding out of a dozen mental compartments, "Always - in the past - only The Central Committee Chairman was allowed to issue my orders. The Secretary gave me my promotion and this assignment. Either The Chairman is ill - or I will soon be out of favor. Only a fool would pick the first choice. I must assume the second if I am to survive. Now is not the time to worry. Later when I return - then it is time for my concern. For now - I must have positive images." Natasha called up - from the dark part of her mind - the image of each victim - beginning with number one. She was asleep as she counted sixteen - not making it to twenty-six.

South Island - New Zealand

Max Lax's legs were cramping as he climbed the gangplank to board the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection*. He paused halfway up - resting his cooler full of fresh trout on top of the rail. Captain Potz looked down from above, "Need a hand - Max?" "If you'll have one of your deck hands take this cooler to your Cook - I'll return to the dock and pick up my gear." Captain Potz motioned to two of his men to assist. Max completed his climb.

Potz clapped Max on the shoulder, "Welcome back - Max. Looks like you had a successful fishing trip."

"True Captain - true. Hard to return to your rust bucket when I've been enjoying the beauty and solitude of a white water trout stream."

"How many did you bring us?"

"A little over three dozen - scaled - gutted - cut and ready for your grill. Hope you and your Green friends aren't opposed to a fish dinner."

"We're opposed to nuclear power, but we're not anti fish."

We'll dine on trout tonight. I speak only for my crew. I'm not certain of our passengers. Might want to get them out of the way."

Max asked, "How much dead weight are you carrying on this trip?"

"They may be dead weight, but their liberal support is essential to our survival. Counting you - six."

"Not certain Ian would approve."

"They'll provide additional cover for your cargo. All of them represent major contributors. We take a few along each time we sail. We let them participate and pretend they're a great help. They feel good about being here and we get paid handsomely. But - you're right - we do spend a bit of time keeping them from killing themselves. I'll have them occupied when we're doing Fleming's work. A fair trade - don't you think?"

Max did not respond.

Captain Potz took Max's arm, "Your gear is stowed - fish are in the galley and you look like you've hit the wall. And you smell like a bear that has just come out of hibernation. Now is as good a-time as any for you to shower - shave and change clothes before we get underway. We're still taking on fresh water. And Max? Send those fishing clothes of yours to my ship's laundry."

Max knew when to keep a conversation short, "Now that you mention it - I can't stand the smell of myself. I do need a hot bath. Any change in plans?"

"We won't spend as much time as planned in Akaroa Harbor. We'll dock - load weapons after nightfall and sail away early next morning. Your crates are ready to go - aren't they? Did you pack them in unmarked crates?"

Max turned away so Potz wouldn't see that his face had turned red, but the back of his neck gave his emotions away.

He entered his stateroom mumbling, "Of course we have our senses about us. I won't listen to anymore claptrap from an anti nuke gadfly. Our weapons are marked all right - in farm machinery crates - coded so we know what's in each one. An A-50 means fifty AK-47s. Only Ian and me know the code. If I get a chance - I'll push that idiot Potz overboard. This has to be my punishment tour. Ian knows I can't stand the sight of those arrogant Green bastards."

Max stripped out of his clothes and turned on the shower. He stepped in - still fuming, "Got to remember to retaliate when he tries to humble me. Should have asked if his crew was inflicted with the dropsies. Might drop one of our crates and have it break open - compromise our shipment. Got to cool down - get my wits about me. Shouldn't let him get under my skin."

Max pitched his leather jacket on top of his bunk, "At least he has clean modern cabins. Can't see how a rusting hulk can be so poorly maintained on the outside and look so good on the inside. Max peeled off his fishing clothes - throwing them in a pile on the floor, "Potz was right about my clothes smellin'. God - they smell like the floor of a sheep barn." He stretched and looked around, "Got-a plush cabin here - desk - wall bunk - couch - chair and even a private shower." He placed the contents of his pocket and his wallet on the desk and turned on the water in his shower. He stepped in holding his breath, "Inside this shower - my skin smells like smoke from my cabin mixed in with dead fish." Ten minutes later - Max stepped out and toweled off - feeling like a new born. His dirty clothing caught his eye, "Someone was rummaging through them while I showered." He looked over at the desk, "And through my wallet - too." He checked it over, "Nothing taken - so it isn't a crooked crew member." Max pulled on clean clothes, "Who could it be? French secret service? CIA? New Zealand Police? His Green

friends - most likely. Captain Potz has a nosy one on board. He won't find anything in my gear. They must think I'm a bloody pom."

Max checked his storage locker, "Whoever it was - was in here - too. Has to be someone on board. Probably one of Potz's crew. A professional wouldn't have left things scattered about. Better not mention it to Potz - he might be the one behind it. Ian wants a status report on this rust bucket. Lets see - he wants to know how the loading went - crew performance - passengers and unusual occurrences. I'll give him an earful tonight." Max sorted and folded his clothes and stuffed them in his laundry bag, "Hope the ship's laundry doesn't shred my gear. These are my lucky fishing clothes."

He walked aft toward the wardroom - dropping his laundry bag off at the ship's laundry on the way. He whistled under his breath, "That's a relief that is ." One of the Captain's passengers - a Green lady was doing the ship's laundry. Max smiled, "Should be something left of my gear." He looked around the deck, "Every fool on this ship is above decks - waiting for departure."

Max opened the door to the wardroom and made a beeline for the coffee pot. He poured a mug of coffee to the top - until it spilled over - on his fingers. He stuck his head through the gallet door and shouted over the clatter of pans, "Are my trout iced down?"

"So - you're our fisherman. Their safe as babes in a mother's arms. I'll seve half tonight and half in a day or two. Mighty fine catch.

"How are you going to cook 'em."

"Blackened - New Orleans style."

"I like mine broiled with lemon and salt."

The cook muttered to himself, "A bloody pom."

Max smiled and gave the Cook a thumbs up. He added sugar to his coffee - stirred it and wandered outside to observe departure.

Max selected a spot on the rail - far away from the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection's* crew and passengers. He leaned forward to watch as lines were untied. He had to choke back his laughter to keep from rolling on the deck. Potz's crew brought new meaning to a derisive term - Fire Drill. Untying and pulling lines on board were an operation impossible for those not capable of handling a wedge. They elevated getting underway to a comic art form. One tumbled backwards into the bulkhead while the other slid overboard into the water.

Captain Potz turned away from Max - feigning disgust, but looked upward to the wheel house and smiled at his First Mate at the helm who was slowly edging his ship away from the dock. Max siezed on the opening, "Won't you need a tug to and some help from the dock to get this rust bucket out to the channel?"

"I know Max - getting underway is a new experience for some of my crew."

Max didn't let up, "Are these the old salts you were bragging on?"

"Some of them are. These will learn - or they'll soon be tossed ashore."

Max whispered, "Are you going to trust Ian's weapon crates with Keystone Cops?"

Color began to rise on Potz's neck, "No - only a trusted few - my Mate and his assistant. My core deck hands and my engineers know their jobs."

Max was still smiling as the Captain strode away. He sipped coffee and had a look-see at his fellow passengers, "Not a sailor in the group. Designer clothes and jewelry. Man and woman alike will sink to the bottom if they ever fall

overboard. They reek of money. Ian was right - liberal causes - that's where the coin of the realm is. There is big money in building socialism. It's a whole lot easier to spend the taxpayer's money than to use your own. Must be how the rich stay rich - take from the poor and give it to each other. Potz's Mate is doing a seaman's job all right - sailing this rust bucket out into the channel - at least he knows what a sail is about."

Max stayed at the rail - long after several of Potz's passengers returned to their staterooms and the others to the wardroom for a game of backgammon. As the houses of Christchurch faded into the surrounding hills - Max lit his pipe and mumbled to himself, "Sure gives me a lot of confidence when this boat carrying a load of fools and a crew of clowns handling it. Well - here's hoping our sail around Bank's Peninsula is long enough for a shakedown cruise. Lucky for them we're sailing in calm waters. We're in for another scorcher down under summer. Sailing north to Norfolk Island if the seas are rough like they usually are - won't be easy like today. Not a whitecap on Pegasus Bay. Swells are long - slow and smooth. Even I could steer this rust bucket through calm waters."

Max climbed the stairs to the wheel house and opened the door, "How long till do you plan to stay in Akaroa?" Captain Potz looked up from his navigation charts, "We're scheduled to dock at Fleming's warehouse just before nightfall. How are you getting along with the other passengers?"

"I'm not - haven't had time to meet them. What do you plan on doing with that baggage while we load?"

"I'll have our passengers off the ship after we dock. Third Mate is going to escort them to a local seafood restaurant. Do you want to join them?"

"You've got to be kidding - Ian would have my head on a

platter. I'll supervise loading. How many men will you need to assist?"

"As I said before - my Mate and his second. The rest will be on shore leave."

"We were going to have the fish I caught for dinner."

"Don't want to waste a good catch. I'll call the cook. We'll have them tomorrow night."

"How about the authorities?"

"I radioed ahead to the Harbormaster. Your boss greased the way. We'll have no trouble with the authorities."

As Max began to back out the door - Potz said, "Take a look at my chart - I'll show you our route."

"Wherever it is - I hope it's calm waters so you can train your crew."

"We'll train them on our way to Norfolk Island."

"Are we going directly to Fiji from there?"

"We could, but I'd prefer to stop at Tonga - Western Samoa and then Fiji. I've got things to do and a roundabout trip should provide good cover."

Max looked over the chart, "I notice we're not sailing to the Society Islands."

"Papeete?"

"Are you afraid of the Frenchies?"

"Pays to be prudent where they're concerned. We can sail direct to Suva from Norfolk Island if you insist."

"The sooner the better. I plan to leave your rust bucket after we unload weapons at Suva. I'll call Ian when we dock at the warehouse and confirm our route and departure date."

"I'd rather you not do that - except for the date we leave Akaroa."

"Have to let our Indian friends know when we're arriving."

"I don't want them to know we're coming until we're there."

"You worried about a leak?"

"Yes."

"I still have to call Ian after weapons are loaded."

"You can communicate anything except destinations - departure and arrival dates. It's my job to see your cargo arrives safely."

"And to protect your Green friends. Can't have their ship caught hauling guns."

Max turned to leave and stopped, "You Greens look like you're all connected at the hip."

"Funny - Max - funny."

"Sorry - can't get used to this world we're living in today. Men wearing long hair and bloomers and women wearing jockstraps and tattoos."

"Do you know anyone on Norfolk Island?"

"As long as we're stopping - I have some business to take care of. How long do you plan on staying?" "Two - three days at the most."

North Island - New Zealand

Ian Fleming's mouth fell open - his eyes like a deer caught in a hunter's headlights. He attempted to cover his surprise by turning away so Natasha wouldn't see, but was too late. She smiled at him - enjoying his uncomfortable look, "You were expecting a man?"

He did not answer - not right away. Ian smiled - thinking, "My new contact is not only a lady, but a drop dead gorgeous blonde beauty" and stuttered out, "The western wind will always blow."

And Natasha responded, "And the sea is always calm."

They matched halves of a letter - Ian's half was sent from Moscow two weeks earlier. He apologized, "I didn't expect a lady and certainly not one of your great beauty." Natasha turned the compliment away, "Good day Mr. Fleming. My name is Natasha - Natasha Noscent. Before you ask - my trip from Moscow was a pleasant one. I highly recommend

First Class on Singapore Airlines. We know why I'm here. I am only interested in accommodations and locations. Other than that - we will not discuss my work. Did you bring a sedan - or will we hire a taxi?"

"Do you have luggage?"

"A sky cap is retrieving it from the carousel."

"My auto is double parked in front of the terminal."

"Just like a diplomat."

"How so?"

"Ours always park where they are not allowed."

"We'll stop at my office - first. We can speak openly - there. How did you like Australia?"

"I loved it. It reminds me of western movies without cowboys. But - I prefer New Zealand. I am more comfortable under the umbrella of socialism."

Ian held the right side passenger door open for Natasha, but she would not enter until her luggage was safely in the trunk. He stood by - thinking, "She is attempting to gain control over me. Should I let her - or should I assert myself?"

Natasha tipped the sky cap and entered, "Sorry - I have had luggage damaged."

Ian entered the drivers side - started his sedan - pulled away from the terminal and drove swiftly onto streets slick from late morning rains. Wellington's clouds were battling with the sun - playing peek-a-boo through a lingering mist and occasional rainbow. Ian turned sharply from the street into his office driveway - causing his car to slide before regaining traction.

He entered the underground parking garage and pulled into his private spot. Natasha couldn't resist a sarcastic comment, "Our your streets always this slick?"

Ian was just as sarcastic, "Only when it rains." He hooked up the natural gas line to the sedan's tank.

Natasha asked, "What are you doing - Comrade?"

"Natural gas hose. We use it instead of petrol. I'm replenishing my tank. It's a wonderful fuel. Has a few drawbacks."

"And they are?"

"Short range and limited refueling points."

"How do we get to your office?"

"Follow me - I have a private elevator."

They rode in silence on Ian's elevator to his seventh floor office. Natasha used this time to size Ian up, "Not as tall as I expected. Has the beginnings of a Capitalist pouch above his belt. Smells of cigars and mutton, but so did most of the New Zealanders on the airplane. He is a bit flighty. Seems to be on edge. I'll have to relax him - before ... seventh floor? Where are the others? Now I remember - from my KGB training. There are two seventh floors outside of Washington DC. My favorite is the one in Maryland. We have friends there."

The light came on for the seventh floor and the elevator doors opened to Ian's office suite. Natasha followed him into his office, "What a magnificent view! What do you call this body of water?"

"My office overlooks Cook Straight - it separates North Island from South Island. Would you care for a cup-a tea?"

"Yes - with sugar."

Fleming poured from behind his desk - sensing he needed separation from this visitor. He waited until she prepared her tea. Natasha - sensing a void - stepped in, "How will I get to Fiji?"

"I have a ship waiting for you in Akaroa Harbor - at my warehouse. I'll fly you there in my seaplane this afternoon."

"How will I get to shore in Fiji?" I'm using the Rainbow

Warrior Resurrection - a Green ship. They carry Zodiacs to harass Western fishing vessels. My Captain will instruct you on their use. You can access your targets from the sea."

Ian opened his desk drawer - took out a chart of Fiji and a plain manila folder. He pushed them across the desk, "You will find all the information you need about Fiji on the chart and in the folder."

"Besides locations - does it provide access and habits?"

"A complete dossier."

"How do I get around on land."

"Bicycle. Your contact is listed in the folder."

Natasha glanced inside, "Will we sail straight to Fiji?"

"No - you have an interim stop - Norfolk Island."

"Is that all you have for me?"

"Yes - when you return home - inform your superiors that we had to clean and repair most of the weapons in they sent in the last shipment."

"I will - you are aware that our continued support is now based on simple economics and not politics?"

"No - I was not."

"We need ports and fisheries for fishing fleets and markets for commercial and military exports. We will accept an American presence in the South Pacific, but we prefer it not to be overwhelming. We will supply all the weapons you need for your clients. But there will be one small difference - you must pay cash - as the Americans say - on the barrel head."

"As long as you ship weapons that are clean and operational - I can live with that."

Natasha wondered "Do you have management replacements?"

"In Fiji?"

"Yes."

"We have excellent middle managers."

"I am ready to leave. Is your seaplane available?"

"It is waiting."

"Show me to your elevator."

Ian accelerated his sedan - speeding out of his driveway and turning the corner on two wheels. Natasha held onto the sissy bar, "There is no need to hurry. Your ship will not sail without me."

Ian slowed down, "Sorry - my mind was elsewhere. I was thinking about Western access to your agency files."

"You need not worry - all data on our New Zealand operations are secure."

"KGB files?"

"No - we have removed all sensitive data from them - including data on your operation."

"But - I have seen news reports."

"They are like baby birds - your Western reporters. They swallow each and every worm we feed them."

"And all of the worms are false?"

"Enough of our worms are true - or we would not be able to deceive."

Natasha stared out the window. The mist had stopped, "Is your ship seaworthy?"

"It may look like a rust bucket on the outside, but it's a solid ship."

"Good - I will look upon this voyage as a vacation." Natasha turned away - to look out the passenger side window at the town and to end a conversation she no longer was interested in. Her mind was elsewhere, "I miss the snow - the cold deathlike comfort of snow - white snow."

"Did you say something - Comrade?"

"Your New Zealand mist reminds me of Moscow's snow. I want to be left alone on my voyage to Fiji. Instruct your crew. Where is this harbor called Akaroa?"

"On the south side of Banks Peninsula. Christchurch is on the north side. That's why I'm flying you there in my

seaplane. The one over there - tied to a platform by the dock. My pilot is waiting." He coasted to a stop by the ramp leading down to the seaplane platform.

Ian leaned against his sedan watching as Natasha was assisted on board by his seaplane crew, "What a cold piece of work that Russian lady is. She - like other beautiful women seems totally unaware of her own beauty. She reminds me of someone. Who can it be? Now I remember - she bears a striking resemblance to Grace Kelly."

He reached into the front seat of his sedan - picked up his car-phone and dialed. "Russian Embassy. Who do you wish to speak too?"

"It's about a ballet performance in February."

"Wait a second while I transfer your call to our Cultural Attaché."

"Hello, who is calling?"

"Bond - James Bond. Is this the Cultural Attaché?"

"Do you have a message for me?"

"Our ballerina arrived this morning and is on her way to South Island."

Ian hung up and dialed the ship's telephone, "You will have no difficulty recognizing your new passenger. She is a knockout - looks just like Grace Kelly?"

"Who?"

"The actress who married a Prince."

"What color is her hair and what is she wearing?"

"Her hair is blonde and she is wearing a white turtleneck sweater and light blue denim trousers. She will greet you with Brave New and you will respond?"

"World Order. Can you give me a better description?"

"Best looking woman you've ever seen."

"Is she friendly?"

"Colder than a well digger's arse."

Natasha waited outside the seaplane hatch as the crew handed down her luggage. She pretended to be interested in her possessions, but watched as Ian made his phone call. She saw his lips form Cultural Attaché and knew, "The Embassy is tracking me. It is either worse than I thought - or routine procedure. Either way - I must be on my toes."

She entered the plane and took the aft seat - away from the pilot's compartment. She accepted the tea offered by the steward and nodded - she was ready to get underway. When she was alone, Natasha opened the manila envelope and extracted the papers. At the top of the first sheet were listed her contacts. She read -

Your Captain is George Potz - your contact in Fiji is Krishna Minon - code name Minnow and Ian's man is Max Lax. Your KGB illegal is the ship's Captain.

Natasha was surprised, "Very - very unusual. It is usually one of the crew." She read her list of targets -

You have three procedures. They must be done in one evening. The dossiers are attached.

Natasha shook her head, "And on a land that I'm not familiar with. I must read and reread their dossiers. I can only hope my map reading will suffice."

She read and memorized, but in the recesses of her mind a compartment opened. One that had been closed since her husband was murdered. Self doubt now flooded her thoughts, "Am I the hunted - or am I the hunter? Will these be my last wet procedures?" Natasha was not afraid of dying. She feared only the unknown.

Natasha looked up from her papers. Fleming's pilot had reduced power. He was in final preparations for a landing on Akaroa Harbor. He called back, "Splash down in ten minutes." Natasha placed the papers back inside the envelope and looked out the window. She saw the *Rainbow Warrior Resurrection* for the first time, "My God what a rust bucket!"

That's the most important piece of evidence we've heard yet" said the king - rubbing his hands - so now let the jury - " "If anyone can explain it," said Alice -