



The Road to Gandolfo

Robert Ludlum

THE ROAD TO GANDOLFO

A cast of outrageous characters in even
more outrageous situations.

THE ROAD TO GANDOLFO

Will rivet you to the edge of your chair—
when you're not falling off laughing.

THE ROAD TO GANDOLFO

It is Robert Ludlum writing maniacally in a labyrinth of suspense and hilarity.

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Robert Ludlum



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A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

The Road to Gandolfo is one of those rare if insane accidents that can happen to a writer perhaps once or twice in his lifetime. Through divine or demonic providence a concept is presented that fuels the fires of his imagination. He is convinced it is truly a *staggering* premise which will serve as the spine of a truly *staggering* tale. Visions of one powerful scene after another parade across his inner screen, each exploding with drama and meaning and ... well, damn it, they're just plain *staggering*!

Out come reams of paper. The typewriter is dusted and pencils are sharpened; doors are closed and heady music is played to drown out the sounds of man and nature beyond the ceiling of staggering creation. Fury takes over. The premise which will be the spinal thunderbolt of an incredible tale begins to take on substance as characters emerge with faces and bodies, personalities and conflicts. The plot surges forward, complex gears mesh and strip and make a hell of a lot of noise—drowning out the work of true masters like that Mozart fellow and what's-his-name Handel.

But suddenly something is wrong. I mean *wrong*!

The author is giggling. He can't *stop* giggling.

That's horrible! Staggering premises should be accorded awed respect ... heaven knows not chuckles!

But try as he may the poor fool telling the tale is trapped, bombarded by a fugue of voices all repeating an old *ars antiqua* phrase: *You've-got-to-be-kidding*.

Poor fool looks to his muses. Why are they winking? Is that *The Messiah* he's hearing or is it *Mairzy-Dotes*? What happened to the staggering thunderbolt? Why is it spiraling out of what was in a clear blue sky, hiccuping its way to a diminished ... *giggle*?

Poor fool is bewildered; he gives up. Or rather, he gives in because by now he's having a lot of fun. After all, it was the time of Watergate, and nobody could invent *that* scenario! It simply wouldn't play in Peoria. At that point-in-time, that is.

So poor fool plunges along, enjoying himself immensely, vaguely wondering who will sign the commitment papers, figuring his wife will stop them because the oaf does the dishes now and then and makes a damn good martini.

The *oeuvre* is finally presented and, most gratefully for poor fool, the closeted sound of laughter is heard. Followed by screams of revolt and threats of beyond-salvage termination with extreme-prejudice.

"Not under *your* name!"

Time mandates change, and change is cleansing.

Now it's under my name, and I hope you enjoy. I *did* have a lot of fun.

Robert Ludlum

Connecticut Shore, 1982

A LARGE PART OF THIS STORY TOOK

PLACE A WHILE BACK. AND QUITE A BIT OF IT TOMORROW.

SUCH IS THE POETIC LICENSE OF

LITURGICAL DRAMA.

Part

I

Behind each corporation must be the singular force, or motive, that sets it apart from any other corporate structure and gives it its particular identity.

Shepherd's Laws of Economics:

Book XXXII, Chapter 12

PROLOGUE

The crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square. Thousands upon thousands of the faithful waited in hushed anticipation for the pontiff to emerge on the balcony and raise his hands in benediction. The fasting and the prayers were over; the Feast of San Genarro would be ushered in with the pealing of the twilight Angelus echoing throughout the Vatican. And the bells would be heard throughout all Rome, heralding merriment and good feeling. The blessing of Pope Francesco the First would be the signal to begin.

There would be dancing in the streets, and torches and candlelight and music and wine. In the Piazza Navonna, the Trevi, even sections of the Palatine, long tables were heaped with pasta and fruit and all manner of home-produced pastries. For had not this pontiff, the beloved Francesco, given the lesson? Open your hearts and your cupboards to your neighbor. And his to you. Let all men high and low understand that we are one family. In these times of hardship and chaos and high prices, what better way to overcome but to enter into the spirit of the Lord and truly show love for thy neighbor?

For a few days let rancors subside and divisions be healed. Let the word go forth that all men are brothers, all women sisters; and all together brothers and sisters and very much each others' keepers. For but a few days let charity and grace and concern rule the hearts of everyone, sharing the sweet and the sad, for there is no evil that can withstand the force of good.

Embrace, raise the wine; show laughter and tears and accept one another in expressions of love. Let the world see there is no shame in the exultation of the spirit. And once having been touched, having heard the voices of brother and sister, carry forth the sweet memories beyond the Feast of San Genarro, and let life be guided by the principles of Christian benevolence. The earth can be a better place; it is up to the living to make it so. That was the lesson of Francesco I.

A hush fell over the tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square. Any second now the figure of the beloved *Il Papa* would walk with strength and dignity and great love onto the balcony and raise his hands in benediction. And for the Angelus to begin.

Within the high-ceilinged Vatican chambers above the square, cardinals, monsignors, and priests talked among themselves in groups, their eyes continuously straying to the figure of the pontiff seated in the corner. The room was resplendent with vivid colors: scarlet and purples, immaculate whites. Robes and cassocks and head pieces—symbols of the highest offices in the Church—swayed and were turned, giving the illusion of a constantly moving fresco.

And in the corner, seated in a wing chair of ivory and blue velvet, was the Vicar of Christ, Pope Francesco I. He was a plain man of wide girth, and the strong yet gentle features of a *campagnuolo*, a man of the earth. Standing beside him was his personal secretary, a young Black priest from America, from the archdiocese of New York. It was like Francesco to have such a papal aide.

The two were talking quietly, the pontiff turning his enormous head, his huge, soft brown eyes looking up at the young priest in serene composure.

“*Mannaggi!*” whispered Francesco, his large peasant hand covering his lips. “This is crazy! The entire city will be drunk for a week! Everyone will be making love in the streets. Are you sure we have it right?”

“I double-checked. Do you want to argue with him?” replied the Black, bending down in a tranquil solicitousness.

“My God, no! He was always the smartest one in the villages!”

A cardinal approached the pontiff’s chair and leaned forward. “Holy Father, it is time. The multitudes await you,” he said softly.

“Who—? Yes, of course. In a minute, my good friend.”

The cardinal smiled under his enormous hat; his eyes were filled with adoration. Francesco always called him his good friend. “Thank you, Your Holiness.” The cardinal backed away.

The Vicar of Christ began humming. Then words emerged. “*Che gelida ... manina ... a rigido esanime ... ah, la, la-laa—tra-la, la, la-laaa....*”

“What are you *doing*?” The young papal aide from the archdiocese of New York, Harlem district, was visibly upset.

“Rodolfo’s aria. Ah, that Puccini! It helps me to sing when I am nervous.”

“Well, cut it out, man! Or pick a Gregorian chant. At least a litany.”

“I don’t know any. Your Italian’s getting better, but it’s still not so good.”

“I’m trying, brother. You’re not the easiest to learn with. Come on, now. Let’s go. Out on the balcony.”

“Don’t push! I go. Let’s see, I raise the hand, then up and down and right to left—”

“*Left to right!*” whispered the priest harshly. “Don’t you listen? If we’re going on with this honkey charade, for God’s sake learn the fundamentals!”

“I thought if I was standing, giving—not taking—I should reverse it.”

“Don’t mess. Just do what’s natural.”

“Then I sing.”

“Not that natural! Come on.”

“All right, all *right*.” The pontiff rose from his chair and smiled benignly at all in the room. He turned once again to his aide and spoke softly so that none could hear. “In case anyone should ask, which one is San Genarro?”

“Nobody will ask. If someone does, use your standard reply.”

“Ah, yes. ‘Study the scriptures, my son.’ You know, this is all crazy!”

“Walk slowly and stand up straight. And smile, for God’s sake! You’re *happy*.”

“I’m *miserable*, you African!”

Pope Francesco I, Vicar of Christ, walked through the enormous doors out onto the balcony to be greeted by a thunderous roar that shook the very foundations of St. Peter’s. Thousands upon thousands of the faithful raised their voices in exultation of the spirit.

“*Il Papa! Il Papa! Il Papa!*”

And as the Holy Father walked out into the myriad reflections of the orange sun setting in the west, there were many in the chambers who heard the muted strains of the chant emerging from the holy lips. Each believed it had to be some obscure early musical work unknown to all but the most scholarly. For such was the knowledge of the *erudito*, Pope Francesco.

“*Che ... gelida ... manina ... a rigido esanimeeee ... ah, la, la-laaa ... tra-la, la, la ... la-l*”

laaa ...

CHAPTER ONE

“That son of a bitch!” Brigadier General Arnold Symington brought the paperweight down on the thick layer of glass on his Pentagon desk. The glass shattered; fragments shot through the air in all directions. “*He couldn’t!*”

“He did, sir,” replied the frightened lieutenant, shielding his eyes from the office shrapnel. “The Chinese are very upset. The premier himself dictated the complaint to the diplomat at the mission. They’re running editorials in the *Red Star* and broadcasting them over Radio Peking.”

“How the hell *can* they?” Symington removed a piece of glass from his little finger. “What the hell are they saying? ‘We interrupt this program to announce that the American military representative, General MacKenzie Hawkins, *shot the balls* off a ten-foot jade statue in Son T Square’?—Bullshit! Peking wouldn’t allow that; it’s too goddamned undignified.”

“They’re phrasing it a bit differently, sir. They say he destroyed an historic monument of precious stone in the Forbidden City. They say it’s as though someone blew up the Lincoln Memorial.”

“It’s a different kind of statue! Lincoln’s got clothes on; his balls don’t show! It’s not the same!”

“Nevertheless, the White House thinks the parallel is justified, sir. The President wants Hawkins removed. More than removed, actually; he wants him cashiered. Court-martial and all. Publicly.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, that’s out of the question.” Symington leaned back in his chair and breathed deeply, trying to control himself. He reached out for the report on his desk. “We’ll transfer him. With a reprimand. We’ll send transcripts of the—censure, we’ll call it a censure—to Peking.”

“That’s not strong enough, sir. The State Department made it clear. The President concurs. We have trade agreements pending—”

“For Christ’s sake, Lieutenant!” interrupted the brigadier. “Will someone tell that spinning top in the Oval Office that he can’t have it on all points of the compass! Mac Hawkins was *selected*. From twenty-seven candidates. I remember exactly what the President said. Exactly. ‘That mother’s *perfect!*’ That’s what he said.”

“That’s inoperative now, sir. He feels the trade agreements take precedent over prior considerations.” The lieutenant was beginning to perspire.

“You bastards kill me,” said Symington, lowering his voice ominously. “You really frost my apricots. How do you figure to do that? Make it ‘inoperative,’ I mean. Hawkins may be in sharp pain in your diplomatic ass right now, but that doesn’t wash away what *was operative*. He was a fucking teen-age hero at the Battle of the Bulge *and* West Point football; *and* if they gave medals for what he did in Southeast Asia, even Mac Hawkins isn’t strong enough to wear all that hardware! He makes John Wayne look like a pansy! He’s *real*; that’s why the Oval Yo-yo picked him!”

“I really think the office of the presidency—regardless of what you may think of the man—as commander in chief he—”

“*Horse—shit!*” The brigadier general roared again, separating the words in equal emphasis, giving the crudity of his oath the sound of a military cadence. “I’m simply explaining to you—in the strongest terms I know—that you don’t publicly court-martial a MacKenzie Hawkins.”

to satisfy a Peking complaint, no matter how many goddamned trade agreements are floating round. Do you know *why*, Lieutenant?"

The young officer replied softly, sure of his accuracy. "Because he would make an issue of it. Publicly."

"*Bing-go.*" Symington's comment sprang out in a high-pitched monotone. "The Hawkinses of this country have a constituency, Lieutenant. That's precisely *why* our commander in chief picked him! He's a political palliative. And if you don't think Mac Hawkins knows it, well—you didn't have to recruit him. I did."

"We are prepared for that reaction, General." The lieutenant's words were barely audible. The brigadier leaned forward, careful not to put his elbows in the shattered glass. "I didn't get that."

"The State Department anticipated a hard-line counter-thrust. Therefore we must institute an aggressive counterraction *to* that thrust. The White House regrets the necessity but at this point in time recognizes the crisis quotient."

"That's what I thought I was going to get." Symington's words were less audible than the lieutenant's. "Spell it out. How are you going to ream him?"

The lieutenant hesitated. "Forgive me, sir, but the object is not to—ream General Hawkins. We are in a provocatively delicate position. The People's Republic demands satisfaction. Rightly so; it was a crude, vulgar act on General Hawkins's part. Yet he refuses to make a public apology."

Symington looked at the report still in his right hand. "Does it say why in here?"

"General Hawkins claims it was a trap. His statement's on page three."

The brigadier flipped to the page and read. The lieutenant drew out a handkerchief and blotted his chin. Symington put down the report carefully on the shattered glass and looked up.

"If what Mac says is true, it *was* a trap. Broadcast *his* side of the story."

"He has no side, General. He was drunk."

"Mac says *drugged*. Not drunk, Lieutenant."

"They were drinking, sir."

"And he was drugged. I'd guess Hawkins would know the difference. I've seen him sweat sour mash."

"He does not deny the charge, however."

"He denies the responsibility of his actions. Hawkins was the finest intelligence strategist in Indochina. He's drugged couriers and pouch men in Cambodia, Laos, both Vietnams, and probably across the Manchurian borders. He knows the goddamned difference."

"I'm afraid his knowing it doesn't *make* any difference, sir. The crisis quotient demands our acceding to Peking's wishes. The trade agreements are paramount. Frankly, sir, we need gas."

"Jesus! I figured that was one thing you *had*."

The lieutenant replaced the handkerchief in his pocket and smiled wanly. "The levity called for, I realize that. However, we have just ten days to bring everything into focus; make our inputs and come up with a positive print."

Symington stared at the young officer; his expression that of a grown man about to cry. "What does that mean?"

"It's a harsh thing to say, but General Hawkins has placed his own interests above those of

his duty. We'll have to make an example. For everybody's sake."

"An example? For wanting the truth out?"

"There's a higher duty, General."

"I know," said the brigadier wearily. "To the—trade agreements. To the gas."

"Quite frankly, yes. There are times when symbols have to be traded off for pragmatic objectives. Team players understand."

"All right. But Mac won't lie down and play busted symbol for you. So what's the—*input*?"

"The inspector general," said the lieutenant, as an obnoxious student might, holding up a severed tapeworm in Biology I. "We're running an in-depth data trace on him. We know he was involved in questionable activities in Indochina. We have reason to believe he violated international codes of conduct."

"You bet your ass he did! He was one of the best!"

"There's no statute on those codes. The IG specialists have caseloads going back much further than General Hawkins's *ex-officio* activities." The lieutenant smiled. It was a genuine smile; he was a happy person.

"So you're going to hang him with clandestine operations that half the joint chiefs and most of the CIA know would bring him a truckload of citations—if they could talk about them. You bastards kill me." Symington nodded his head, agreeing with himself.

"Perhaps you could save us time, General. Can you provide us with some specifics?"

"Oh, no! You want to crucify the son of a bitch, you build your own cross!"

"You do understand the situation, don't you, sir?"

The brigadier moved his chair back and kicked fragments of glass from under his feet. "I tell you something," he said. "I haven't understood anything since nineteen forty-five." He glared at the young officer. "I know you're with Sixteen-hundred, but are you regular army?"

"No, sir. Reserve status, temporary assignment. I'm on a leave of absence from Y, J and B. To put out fires before they burn up the flagpoles, as it were."

"Y, J and B. I don't know that division."

"Not a division, sir. Youngblood, Jakel, and Blowe, in Los Angeles. We're the top ad agency on the Coast."

General Arnold Symington's face slowly took on the expression of a distressed bass hound. "The uniform looks real nice, Lieutenant." The brigadier paused, then shook his head. "Nineteen forty-five," he said.

Major Sam Devereaux, field investigator for the Office of the Inspector General, looked across the room at the calendar on his wall. He got up from the chair behind his desk, walked over to it, and Xed the day's date. One month and three days and he would be a civilian again.

Not that he was ever a soldier. Not really; certainly not spiritually. He was a military accident. A fracture compounded by a huge mistake that resulted in an extension of his tour of service. It had been a simple choice of alternatives: Reenlistment or Leavenworth.

Sam was a lawyer, a damn fine attorney specializing in criminal law. Years ago he had had a series of Selective Service deferments through Harvard College and Harvard Law School, then two years of postgraduate specialization and clerking; finally into the fourteenth month of practice with the prestigious Boston law firm of Aaron Pinkus Associates.

The army had faded into a vaguely disagreeable shadow across his life; he had forgotten about the long series of deferments.

The United States Army, however, did not forget.

During one of those logistic crunches that episodically grip the military, the Pentagon discovered it had a sudden dearth of lawyers. The Department of Military Justice was in bind—hundreds of courts-martial on bases all over the globe were suspended for lack of judges, advocates and defense attorneys. The stockades were crowded. So the Pentagon scoured the long-forgotten series of deferments and scores of young unattached, childless lawyers—obtainable meat—were sent unrefusable invitations in which was explained the meaning of the word “deferment” as opposed to the word “annulment.”

That was the accident. Devereaux’s mistake came later. Much later. Seven thousand miles away on the converging borders of Laos, Burma, and Thailand.

The Golden Triangle.

Devereaux—for reasons known only to God and military logistics—never saw a court-martial, much less tried one. He was assigned to the Legal Investigations Division of the Office of the Inspector General and sent to Saigon to see what laws were being violated.

There were so many there was no way to count. And since drugs took precedence over the black market—there were simply too many American entrepreneurs in the latter—his inquiries took him to the Golden Triangle where one-fifth of the world’s narcotics were being funneled out, courtesy of powerful men in Saigon, Washington, Vientiane, and Hong Kong.

Sam was conscientious. He didn’t like drug peddlers and he threw the investigatory books at them, careful to make sure his briefs to Saigon were transmitted operationally within the confused chain of command.

No report signatures. Just names and violations. After all, he could get shot or knifed—the least, ostracized for such behavior. It was an education in covert activities.

His trophies included seven ARVN generals, thirty-one representatives in Thieu’s congress, twelve U.S. Army colonels—light and full—three brigadiers, and fifty-eight assorted major captains, lieutenants, and master sergeants. Added to these were five congressmen, four senators, a member of the President’s cabinet, eleven corporation executives with American companies overseas—six of which already had enough trouble in the area of campaign contributions—and a square-jawed Baptist minister with a large national following.

To the best of Sam’s knowledge, one second lieutenant and two master sergeants were indicted. The rest were—“pending.”

So Sam Devereaux committed his mistake. He was so incensed that the wheels of Southeast Asian justice spun off the tracks at the first hint of influence that he decided to trap a very big fish in the corruption net and make an example. He chose a major general in Bangkok. A major named Heseltine Brokemichael. Major General Heseltine Brokemichael, West Point ’43.

Sam had the evidence, mounds of it. Through a series of elaborate entrapments in which he himself acted as the “connection,” a participant who could swear under oath to the general’s malfeasance, he built his case thoroughly. There could not possibly be two General Brokemichaels, and Sam was an avenging angel of a prosecutor, circling in for his kill.

But there were. Two. Two major generals named Brokemichael—one Heseltine, one Ethelred! Apparently cousins. And the one in Bangkok—Heseltine—was not the one in Vientiane—Ethelred. The Vientiane Brokemichael was the felon. Not his cousin. Further, the

Brokemichael in Bangkok was more an avenger than Sam. He believed *he* was gathering evidence on a corrupt IG investigator. And he was. Devereaux had violated most of the international contraband laws and *all* of the United States government's.

Sam was arrested by the MPs, thrown into a maximum security cell, and told he could look forward to the better part of his lifetime in Leavenworth.

Fortunately, a superior officer in the inspector general's command, who did not really understand a sense of justice that made Sam commit so many crimes, but did understand Sam's legal and investigatory contributions to the cause of the inspector general, came to Sam's aid. Devereaux had actually filed more evidentiary material than any other legal officer in Southeast Asia; his work in the field made up for a great deal of inactivity in Washington.

So the superior officer allowed a little unofficial plea bargaining in Sam's case. If Sam would accept disciplinary action at the hands of a furious Major General Heseltine, Brokemichael in Bangkok, constituting a six-month loss of pay—no criminal charges would be brought. There was just one more condition: to continue his work for the inspector general's office for an additional two years beyond the expiration of his army commitment. By that time, reasoned the superior officer, the mess in Indochina would be turned over to those doing the messing, and the IG caseloads reduced or conveniently buried.

Reenlistment or Leavenworth.

So Major Sam Devereaux, patriotic citizen-soldier, extended his tour of duty. And the mess in Indochina was in no way lessened, but indeed turned over to the participants, and Devereaux was transferred back to Washington, D.C.

One month and three days to go, he mused, as he looked out his office window and watched the MPs at the guardhouse check the automobiles driving out. It was after five; he had to catch a plane at Dulles in two hours. He had packed that morning and brought his suitcase to the office.

The four years were coming to an end. Two plus two. The time spent, he reflected, might be resented, but it had not been wasted. The abyss of corruption that was Southeast Asia reached into the hierarchical corridors of Washington. The inhabitants of these corridors knew who he was; he had more offers from prestigious law firms than he could reply to, much less consider. And he did not want to consider them; he disapproved of them. Just as he disapproved of the current investigation on his desk.

The manipulators were at it again. This time it was the thorough discrediting of a career officer named Hawkins. Lieutenant General MacKenzie Hawkins.

At first Sam had been stunned. MacKenzie Hawkins was an original. A legend. The stuff of which cults were born. Cults slightly to the political right of Attila the Hun.

Hawkins's place in the military firmament was secure. Bantam Books published his biography—serialization and *Reader's Digest* rights had been sold before a word was on paper. Hollywood gave obscene amounts of money to film his life story. And the antimilitarism made him an object of fascist-hatred.

The biography was not overly successful because the subject was not overly cooperative. Apparently there were certain personal idiosyncrasies that did not enhance the image, for wives paramount among them. The motion picture was less than triumphant insofar as it comprised endless battle scenes with little or no hint of the man other than an actor squinting through the battle dust, yelling to his men in a peculiar lisp to "get those Godless ... [Roar ...

cannon] ... who would tear down Old Glory! At 'em, boys!"

Hollywood, too, had discovered the four wives and certain other peculiarities of the studio's on-the-set technical adviser. MacKenzie Hawkins went through starlets three at a time and had intercourse with the producer's wife in the swimming pool while the producer watched in fury from the living room window.

He did not stop the picture, however. For Christ's sake, it was costing damn near *six mill!*

These misfired endeavors might have caused another man to fade, if only from embarrassment, but not so Mac Hawkins. In private, among his peers, he ridiculed those responsible and regaled his associates with stories of Manhattan and Hollywood.

He was sent to the war college with a new specialization: intelligence, clandestine operations. His peers felt a little more secure with the charismatic Hawkins consigned to covert activities. And the colonel became a brigadier and absorbed all there was to learn of his new specialty. He spent two years grinding away, studying every phase of intelligence work until the instructors had no more to instruct him.

So he was sent to Saigon where the escalating hostilities had blossomed into a full-scale war. And in Vietnam—both Vietnams, and Laos, and Cambodia, and Thailand, and Burma—Hawkins corrupted the corruptors and the ideologues alike. Reports of his behind-the-line and across-the-neutral-borders activities made “protective reaction” seem like a logical strategy. So unorthodox, so blatantly criminal were his methods of operation that G-2, Saigon, found itself denying his existence. After all, there were limits. Even for clandestine activities.

If *America First* was a maxim—and it was—Hawkins saw no reason why it should not apply to the filthy world of covert operations.

And for Hawkins, *America was first*. Ir-re-fucking-gardless!

So Sam Devereaux thought it was all a little sad that such a man was about to be knocked out of the box by the manipulators who got to where they were by draping the flag so gloriously and generously around themselves. Hawkins was now an offending lion in the diplomatic arena and had to be eliminated in the cause of double-think. The men who should have been upholding the general's point of honor were doing their best to sink him fast—ten days, to be precise.

Normally Sam would have taken pleasure out of building a case against a messianic ass like Hawkins; and regardless of his feelings to the contrary, he would build a case against him. This was his last file for the inspector general's office, and he was not going to risk another two-year alternative. But he was still sad. The Hawk, as he was known—misguided fanatic as he might be—deserved better than what he was getting.

Perhaps, thought Sam, his depression was brought about by the last “operative” instruction from the White House: find something in the morals area Hawkins can't deny. Check to see if he was ever in the care of a psychiatrist.

A psychiatrist! Jesus! They *never* learned.

In the meantime, Sam had dispatched a team of IG investigators to Saigon to see if they could dig up a few negative specifics. And he was off to Dulles airport to catch a plane to Los Angeles.

All of Hawkins's ex-wives lived within a radius of thirty miles of each other, from Malibu to Beverly Hills. They'd be better than any psychiatrist. Christ! A psychiatrist!

At 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., they were all novocained above the shoulders.

CHAPTER TWO

“My name is Lin Shoo,” said the uniformed Communist softly, slant-eyeing the large disheveled American soldier who sat in a leather chair, holding a glass of whiskey in one hand and a well-chewed cigar in the other. “I am commander of the People’s Police, Peking. And you are under house arrest at this moment. There is no point in being abusive, these are merely formalities.”

“Formalities for what?” MacKenzie Hawkins shouted from his armchair—the only occidental piece of furniture in the oriental house. He put his heavy boot on a black lacquered table and flung his hand over the leather back, the lighted cigar dangerously close to a silk screen room divider. “There aren’t any goddamned formalities except through the diplomatic mission. Go down there and make your complaints. You’ll probably have to get in line.”

Hawkins chuckled and drank from his glass.

“You have chosen to reside outside the mission,” continued the Chinese named Lin Shoo, his eyes darting between the cigar and the screen. “Therefore you are not technically within United States territory. So you are subject to the disciplines of the People’s Police. However, we know you will not go anywhere, General. That is why I say it is a formality.”

“What have you got out there?” Hawkins waved his cigar toward the thin, rectangular windows.

“There are two patrols on each side of your residence. Eight in all.”

“That’s a big fucking guard detail for someone who’s not going anywhere.”

“Small liberties. Photographically, two is more desirable than one and three is menacing.”

“You taking liberties?” Hawkins drew on his cigar and again rested his hand over the back of the leather chair. The lighted butt was no more than an inch from the silk.

“The Ministry of Education has done so, yes. You will admit, General, your place of isolation is most pleasant, is it not? This is a lovely house on a lovely hill. So very peaceful and with a fine view.” Lin Shoo walked around the chair and unobtrusively moved the panel of the silk screen away from Hawkins’s cigar. It was too late; the heat of the butt had caused a small circular burn in the fabric.

“It’s a high-rent district,” replied Hawkins. “Somebody in this people’s paradise, where nobody owns anything but everyone owns everything, is making a fast buck. Four hundred dollars ’em every month.”

“You were fortunate to find it. Property can be purchased by collectives. A collective is not private ownership.” The police officer walked to the narrow opening that led to the single sleeping room of the house. It was dark; where sunlight should have been streaming through the wide window there was a blanket nailed across the frame into the thin surrounding wall. On the floor a number of mats had been piled one on top of another; wrappings from American candy bars were scattered about and there was a distinct odor of whiskey.

“Why the photographs?”

The Chinese turned from the unpleasant sight. “To show the world that we are treating you better than you treated us. This house is not a tiger cage in Saigon, nor is it a dungeon in the shark-infested waters of Holcotaz.”

“Alcatraz. The Indians got it.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing. You’re making a big splash with this thing, aren’t you?”

Lin Shoo was silent for a moment; it was the pause before profundity. “Should someone—who has for years publicly denounced the deeply felt objectives of your beloved motherland—dynamite your Lin-Kolon Memorial inside your Washington Square within your state of Columbia, the robed barbarians on your Court of Supreme Justice would, no doubt, have executed him by now.” The Chinese smiled and smoothed the tunic of his Mao uniform. “We do not behave in such primitive ways. All life is precious. Even a diseased dog, such as you.”

“And you gooks never denounced anybody, is that it?”

“Our leaders reveal only truth. That is common knowledge throughout the world; the lessons of the infallible chairman. Truth is not denunciation, General. It is merely truth. A knowing.”

“like my state of Columbia,” muttered Hawkins, removing his foot from the lacquered table. “Why the hell did you pick me out? A lot of people have done a lot of goddamned denouncing. Why am I so special?”

“Because they are not so famous. Or infamous, if you will—. Although I did enjoy the film of your life. Very artistic; a poem of violence.”

“You saw that, huh?”

“Privately. Certain portions were extracted. Those showing the actor portraying you murdering our heroic youth. Very savage, General.” The Communist circled the black lacquered table and smiled again. “Yes, you are an infamous man. And now you have insulted us by destroying a revered monument—”

“Come off it. I don’t even know what happened. I was drugged and you goddamned we know it. I was with your General Lu Sin. With *his* broads, in *his* house.”

“You must give us our honor back again, General Hawkins. Can’t you see that?” Lin Shoo spoke quietly, as though Hawkins had not interrupted. “It would be a simple matter for you to render an apology. A ceremony has been planned. With a small contingent of the press in attendance. We have written out the words for you.”

“*Oh, boy!*” Hawkins sprang out of the chair, towering over the policeman. “We’re back to that again! How many times do I have to tell you bastards? *Americans don’t crawl!* In another goddamned ceremony, with or without the goddamned press! Read that straight, you puked-skinned dwarf!”

“Do not upset yourself. You place far too much emphasis on a mere ceremonial function. You place everyone—*all of us*—in most difficult positions. A small ceremony; so little, so simple—”

“Not to me it isn’t! I represent the armed forces of the United States and nothing’s little or simple to us! We don’t trip easy, buddy boy; we march straight to the drums!”

“I beg your pardon?”

Hawkins shrugged, a touch bewildered by his own words. “Never mind. The answer’s no. You may scare the lace-pants boys down at the mission, but you don’t shake me.”

“*They* appealed to you because they were instructed to do so. Certainly that must have occurred to you.”

“Double bullshit!” Hawkins walked around to the fireplace, drank from his glass and placed it on the mantel next to a brightly colored box. “Those fags were cooking up something with

that group of queens at State. Wait'll the White House—wait'll the *Pentagon* reads *my* report. Oh, boy! You bowlegged runts will hightail it to the mountains and then we'll blow *them* up. Hawkins grinned, his eyes bright.

“You are so abusive,” said Lin Shoo quietly, shaking his head sadly. He picked up the brightly colored box next to the general's glass. “Tsing Taow firecrackers. The finest made in the world. So loud, so bright with white light when they go *bang, bang, bang*. Very lovely to watch and to hear.”

“Yeah,” agreed Hawkins, slightly confused by the change of subject. “Lu Sin gave 'em to me. We shot off a motherload the other night. Before the fucker drugged me.”

“Very beautiful, General Hawkins. They are a fine gift.”

“Christ knows he owed me *something*.”

“But do you not see?” continued the police officer. “They sound like—explosives. Look like—detonating ammunition, but they are neither. They are only show. Semblances of something else. Real in themselves but only an *illusion* of *another* reality. Not dangerous at all.”

“So?”

“That is precisely what you are being asked to give. The semblance, not the reality. You have only to *pretend*. In a short, simple ceremony with but a few words that *you* know are only an illusion. Not dangerous at all. And very polite.”

“Wrong-o!” roared Hawkins. “Everybody knows what a firecracker is; *nobody*'ll know I'm pretending.”

“Between the two of us, I must differ. It is nothing more than a diplomatic ritual. Everyone will understand, take my word for it.”

“Yeah? How the hell do you know that? You're a Peking cop, not a Kissing-ass.”

The Communist fingered the box of firecrackers and sighed audibly. “I apologize for the minor deception, General. I am not with the People's Police. I am second vice-prefect for the Ministry of Education. I am here to make an appeal to you. An appeal to your reason. However, the rest is quite true. You *are* under house arrest, and the patrols outside are policemen.”

“I'll be goddamned! They sent me a lace-pants.” Hawkins grinned again. “You boys are worried, real worried, aren't you?”

The Communist sighed once more. “Yes. The idiots who started this thing have been shipped to mining collectives in Outer Mongolia. It was lunacy; although I'll grant them you were a temptation, General Hawkins. Have you any *idea* the volumes of scurrilous attacks you've made on every Marxist, Socialist, and, forgive me, even vaguely democratical oriented nation on the face of this earth? The worst examples—I should say *best* examples of demagoguery!”

“A lot of that crap was written by the people who paid me to speak,” said Hawkins, a bit reflectively. And then he quickly added, “Not that I didn't believe it! Goddamn, I *believe*!”

“You're impossible!” Lin Shoo stamped his foot as a child might. “You're as insane as Lu Sin and his band of growling paper lions! May they all crack many rocks and fornicate with Mongolian sheep! You are simply impossible!”

Hawkins stared at the Communist—both at the furious expression on his face and the brightly colored box of firecrackers in his hand. He had made a decision and both of the

knew it.

“I’m also something else, slant eyes,” said the lieutenant general, approaching Lin Shoo.

“No! No! No *violence*, you idiot—” It was too late for the Communist to scream. Hawkins had grabbed the cloth of his tunic, pulled him swiftly off his feet and chopped Lin Shoo beneath the mandible.

The vice-prefect of the Ministry of Education slumped instantly into unconsciousness.

Hawkins grabbed the box of firecrackers out of Lin Shoo’s hand and raced around the lacquered table into the sleeping quarters. He grabbed the blanket nailed across the window, folded back a tiny section on the edge and looked outside at the rear of the house. There were the two policemen chatting calmly, their rifles at their sides. Beyond them was the sloping hill that led down to the village.

Hawkins released the blanket and ran back into the main room, dropping immediately to his hands and knees and scrambling obstacle-style toward the front door. He stood up and silently opened it a crack. The two flanking policemen were about forty feet away and were as relaxed as the troops in the rear. What’s more, they were looking down the descending road, their attention *not* on the house.

MacKenzie took the brightly colored box of firecrackers from under his arm, ripped off the lightweight paper and shook out the connecting strings of cylinders. He wound two separate strands together, twisted both fuses into one, and removed his World War II Zippo from his pocket.

He stopped; he sucked his breath, angry with himself. Then, holding the strands of firecrackers at his side, he walked casually past the windows into the bedroom and removed his holster and cartridge belt from another nail in the thin wall. He strapped the apparatus around his waist, removed the Colt .45 and checked the magazine. Satisfied, he shoved the weapon into its leather casing as he walked out of the bedroom. He circled the armchair in front of the Han Shu mantel, stepped over the immobile Lin Shoo, and returned to the front door.

He ignited the Zippo, and held the flame beneath the twisted fuse, then opened the door and threw the entwined strands onto the grass beyond the porch.

Closing and bolting the door softly and swiftly, Hawkins dragged a small red lacquered chest from the foyer and forced it against the thick, carved panel. Then he raced into the sleeping quarters and pulled back a small section of the window blanket and waited.

The explosions were even louder than he remembered; made so, he guessed, from the combined strands bursting against one another.

The guards at the rear of the house were jolted out of their lethargy; their weapons collided in midair as each whipped his off the ground. Rifles in waist-firing position, the two men raced toward the front of the house.

The moment they were out of sight, Hawkins yanked down the blanket, crashed his foot into the thin strips of wood and thinner panes of glass, shattering the entire window. He leaped through onto the grass and started running toward the fields and the sloping hill.

CHAPTER THREE

At the base of the hill was the main dirt road that circled the village. Like spokes from a wheel, numerous offshoots headed directly into the small marketplace, in the center of the town. A semipaved thoroughfare branched outward tangentially from the circling road and connected with a paved highway about four miles to the east. The American diplomatic mission was twelve miles down that highway within Peking proper.

What he needed was a vehicle, preferably an automobile, but automobiles were practically nonexistent outside the highest official circles. The People's Police had automobiles, of course; it had crossed his mind to double back around the hill to find Lin Shoo's, but that was too risky. Even if he found it and stole it, it would be a marked vehicle.

Hawkins circled the village, keeping to the high ground above the road. They would be coming after him. He could stay in the hills indefinitely; that didn't bother him. He had bivouacked underground in the mountains of Cong-Sol and Lai Tai in Cambodia for months at a time; he could live in the forests better than most animals. Goddamn, he was a *pro*!

But it was also pointless. He had to get to the mission and let the Free World know what kind of enemy it was sucking up to. Enough was enough, goddamn it! They could send out radio messages, barricade the whole complex, and fight it out until the offshore carriers sent in air strikes to pinpoint and pulverize, even if it meant blowing up half of Peking. Then the helicopters could come in and get them out.

Of course, the civilians would shit in their pants, but he would control them. Teach the fancy pants how to fight. *Fight! Not talk!*

MacKenzie stopped his fantasizing. Below to the right, coming around the bend in the road about a quarter of a mile away was a lone motorcycle. On it was a *shee-san* police official, a kind of Chinese state trooper. The answer to a prayer!

Hawkins rose from the tall grass and started scrambling down the hill. In less than a minute he was at the edge of the dirt border. The bike was still around the curve out of sight, but he heard it coming closer. He threw himself down on the dirt in the middle of the road, drawing his legs up to appear smaller than he was, and lay perfectly still.

The motorcycle's engine roared as the driver came around the curve, then sputtered as he skidded to a stop. The *shee-san* got off the bike and whipped out the kickstand. Hawkins could hear and feel the quick footsteps as the trooper approached.

The *shee-san* bent over him and touched his shoulder, recoiling at the recognition of the American uniform. Mac moved. The *shee-san* shrieked.

Five minutes later Hawkins had stretched the *shee-san*'s tunic and pants over his rolled-up trousers and shirt. He slipped the trooper's goggles over his eyes and put on the ludicrous tiny visor hat, using the chin strap to hold it in place, a cloth pimple sitting on the crew-cut grayish black hair. Fortunately for his sense of well-being, he had a cigar. He chewed the end to its desired juiciness and lighted up.

He was ready to ride.

The diplomatic attaché ran into the director's office without saying a word to the secretary or even knocking at the door. The director was threading his teeth with dental floss.

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